

Ark Collection

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Prologue

‘Is this where the reception room is?’

Kim Hyun Woo raised his old glasses.

The building was only a 5 minute walk from the South Seoul station.

The front of the building, the sunlight reflected the words “Global Exos Korea” on a black marble.

Knowing the sign represented a once in a lifetime opportunity; it intimidated him.

He did not have the courage to go in, but he lacked nearly as much courage to turn back.

He took a deep breath and walked into the building.

“I’m here for an interview.”

“Go on up to the third floor.”

The Model-like receptionist motioned him towards the elevator.

“Ah, yes. Thank you.”

While nodding, he stepped back, bowed and walked away. As he heard a stifled laughter from behind him, he began to blush.

He roughly understood why she was laughing.

After abruptly receiving news of the interview he was forced to come for an interview in an oversized borrowed suit.

He became flustered realizing how foolish and ugly he looked wearing the oversized suit.

Of course there were plenty of different contacts but it wouldn’t come close in comparison...

He had arrived on the third floor, and the lounge was filled to capacity.

People in fancy suits were out and about.

Surprisingly some of the people were wearing blue jeans and t-shirts, their faces were filled with confidence showing their work experience.

His eyes became clouded as he thought about going for the interview with these people.

No, he was not sure he could really go to the interview in his current state.

‘Should I not have come? At this rate will I be able to get an opportunity better than this?’

Hyun Woo let out a sigh with an uneasy look on his face.

Hyun Woo was an ordinary youth. At least until 5 years ago.

He was an average high school student who liked brand-name items, bought the newest cell phone whilst his parents nagged at him, and played games the entire day on the weekends. Up until then, he would often watch the stories of the boys on the T.V., and empathized with them on one hand, while thinking he could never live like the boy in the T.V. That is, until it became reality.

He received an urgent call at school.

He was told his parents had been in a car accident.

With one simple call, Hyun Woo’s life was changed.

His father had died, while his mother surviving after numerous operations, but complications still remained.

The cause of the accident was his father’s drowsiness while driving. The victims still had to be compensated. Nevertheless their insurance had expired without renewal so the insurance company claimed it wasn’t their responsibility.

The police and victims attorney had dropped by a few times.

While Hyun Woo had been trying to understand the situation and complicated conversations that had taken place, their house was sold, and they terminated various savings and insurance plans.

To fix that problem, they rented a small apartment. However, his mother still needed to be treated urgently.

Their private medical insurance was bought 10 years ago.

Nevertheless, every time his mother went to the hospital because of a cold, stomach ache, or miscellaneous, she required more treatment than an average person. Together with intensive care she needed, the insurance company's attitude began to change. They gave him pamphlets written in English and Chinese, while prattling on about changing compensation limit. Because of this, they had to pay 3 to 4 million won in dues every month.

- It may be tough, but hang in there for your mother. Use this to pay for the hospital fees.

Five uncles from both of the mother's and father's side stuck an envelope inside an absent-minded Hyun Woo's pocket. But they did not show themselves again.

He felt horrible. The money in his pockets only amounted to 3,000,000 won. It was not enough to even cover a month's hospital bill.

In order to cover living expenses and hospital bills, the debt steadily increased. Hyun Woo realized it for the first time. The little boy who earned a living was shown on T.V, was not mature. He was facing a situation where he had no choice other than to grow up and be mature. The situation makes a person.

He knew very well the meaning of those words. Hyun Woo's life had changed. Waking up at dawn to do newspaper and milk deliveries then working at a part-time job from evening to dawn in order to gain money. In the past it was inconceivable to wash one's body while working part-time at a construction site.

His body ached all over but he continued working rather than relaxing.

It was not because he was exceptionally earnest. He had no other choice but to do it. However, his earnings could barely cover the cost of living and hospital expenses.

‘With relatives coming for a visit, I won’t be able to relax because of the noise!’

Every time they arrived, all he could do was clench his fist.

He heard his father had a good personality. There was not a single friend’s family gathering he missed, and he would withdraw from his savings without hesitation whenever a relative got in some big trouble. However, the reward he received from the heavens was almost as if it came out of a novel.

After his father died, and as his mother accrued hospital bills, no one leaped in to help them. Worse, they did not even loan them some money. It was because they did not think they would be able to get the money back. Their relationship was weak because they were made when his family’s situation was still good.

Hyun Woo also became keenly aware of the cold endless reality before he graduated from high school.

No matter how special a person is, in the end they are just like any other person.

‘I exist only to take care of my mother and myself!’

His mind was set on dropping out of high school, but his mother, on her sickbed, would not hear anything about the matter. He had no choice but to deal with it for one more year.

However, after he graduated from high school, it did not improve the situation they were in.

After he graduated High School Hyun Woo set out to look for a job. Although his work hours had increased, other things remained the same. As usual, he worked all day, and his days became filled with

anxiety trying to meet the hospital bills and the ever growing debts payments at the end of every month.

He gradually began to envy his peer who carried the latest mobile or wore the latest fashions.

He had also envied those who could have money to spare. It was one thing Hyun Woo could not stop himself from envying. Hyun Woo since an early age had dreamt of being an employee at a video game production company. Before the accident had occurred, he often stayed up all night playing games. If not, perhaps another career related to computers.

Although he abandoned the idea of going to a university he did not abandon his dream.

It was the reason why every month he would pay 300,000 won to attend a private institution.

One day an instructor came up to Hyun Woo and asked.

“Hyun Woo, have you thought of seeking employment at a gaming company?”

“A gaming company?”

“Hmm, a sunbae told me he knows a video game company who are currently recruiting new employees. I was asked to recommend some excellent students, and I was thinking about recommending you. How about it? Would you like to be employed by a gaming company?”

“Would a non-university graduate be acceptable?”

“20 years of age or older is preferable. There’s no gender and educational requirement.”

“Where is it?”

“Have you heard of Global Exos?”

“Yes?”

Hyun Woo froze in place.

It's expected for education to not be regarded for a small gaming company.

However, not from a company as big as Global Exos! The company was the zenith of all companies in the gaming industry.

They were the first to implement the concept of virtual reality into game, and they've also released 2 epic games in which accumulated annual sales of 1 Trillion won.

"What would Global Exos be lacking in order for them to employ people such as myself?"

"I don't know the details either. According to my sunbae, employee recruitment process is done in various ways, it is very unique. Screening of documents for educational background or work experience is not a priority. And the things were being tested is entirely different and so the way they pay their employees. However with many applicants, it will not be easy... Since I don't know what interpersonal work is, I'll try to put the files in."

A world where one's educational background was not prioritized. These were the words once said a long time ago.

However Hyun Woo was not naive enough to instantly believe those words.

Without educational background, it limits the employee a chances for a position in such a large business, and is normally limited to things such as an external position. Even more so with Global Exos, and if he wasn't accepted he would feel really bad about it.

"Applying with my high school diploma won't get me accepted accepted. So I'd rather..."

Name: Kim Hyun Woo
Gender: Male Age:22
Educations: S Electronic Engineering 2nd Year, Dropout.

Top seat of the class, without having missed any class.

Although unknown to the Media Network, hacked through their firewall during their conference for testing a mock game system, and became a large issue, which eventually led to voluntary withdrawal.

Global Exos was such a large company. Surely they would not examine the authenticity of each application. When he thought about it, it was impossible for them to do so.

Perhaps, but trying wouldn't hurt, besides, he's got nothing to lose..

All this time he had forgotten about the application when unexpected news came.

"The other day when I told you about Global Exos? Your application has passed the screening, and they've contacted us."

Hyun Woo's instructor was just as surprised as he was.

While he was daydreaming, the interviewer had already arrived here. In any case, he was given a chance to meet the interviewer.

Perhaps this could be a golden opportunity. Which why he thought he had to make most of it, even if he had to resort to clinging to the interviewer's pant legs.

'Have I gone crazy? Whose idea was it to come to this place? Having applied with a fabricated diploma was the least of my problems... At this rate who knows what kind of random things will appear on the news? No, surely Global Exos being a large enterprise, will be liable for having caused an incident of forged documents, with one of their applicants, will cause quite a stir and won't be profitable to them... Oh, but wouldn't turning back right now be equally insane crazy?'

He casually imagined the scene of himself being handcuffed and bombarded with questions from reporters.

“Oh, will you be staying here?”

Suddenly, he heard a woman’s voice beside him.

Since he was already surprised, he lifted his head and saw the receptionist whom he met in the hallway standing there in a formal suit.

“This seat is empty. Would you like to sit here?”

She nodded and sat down next to him.

“I’m sorry for laughing earlier. Did I offend you?”

“It’s alright. It must’ve been hard not to laugh. I look really funny, don’t I?”

“Yes?”

After seeing the strange glance the receptionist gave as a response to his question, he made a puzzled face.

“Ah.....It looks like there’s a misunderstanding. I wasn’t laughing because of your clothes. There really isn’t anybody who would bow deeply to a receptionist. I was laughing because I thought you were a slightly eccentric person. Also, your clothes suit you quite nicely”

Hyun Woo’s face became red. Could this mean he had an inferiority complex?

“I’m sorry for misunderstanding”

“No I’m sorry for causing the misunderstanding.”

“By the way, why are you here?”

“To be honest, I’ve also submitted an application. My name is Kang Misu”

“Oh, My name is Kim Hyun Woo.”

Kang Misu extended her hand. Meanwhile, Hyun Woo wiped his hands on his pants and was about to shake her hand...

“All the candidates please head over to the auditorium.”

‘Damn. Whatever. I’ll probably die or faint anyway. Wait, I wouldn’t die from this, would I?’

Unable to break away from crowd, Hyun Woo was swept away into the auditorium.

Approximately 2000 people were packed tightly inside the auditorium.

Since only about 10 people would be chosen, The ratio of being chosen was 1 to 200. Everyone’s attention was on the stage where a man in his late 20’s stood.

“Nice to meet you, everyone. I am the Planning Director, Ha Myung Woo. On behalf of Global Exos I would like to thank all of you for gathering here today.”

His speech was follow by loud applause.

Ha Myung Woo nodded gently and said.

“Then let’s go straight to point of what everybody has been wondering about. Those of you here who are aware of Global Exos’ announcement last month regarding a new virtual reality game called New World, could please raise your hand?”

Most of the people raised their hands. However, Hyun Woo didn’t raise his.

Virtual reality games were not available for regular computers.

If one wanted to play it, they had to buy a commercial network unit, which cost a considerable amount of money.

Although there was also virtual reality gaming centers.

Because the cost of a unit is expensive, the charged a high service fee.

Ha Myung Woo nodded his head.

“I see most of you have heard of it. However, because limited

information was released, we will explain it briefly. Global Exos created the world's first ever Virtual Reality game which changed the gaming industry. Soon after, one after another, gaming companies have started to make virtual reality games, and eventually led to the popularity of Virtual Reality. But the game we announced to be released is original and a whole new innovation."

Some people who had experience with those games nodded their heads.

During the following discussion, Hyun Woo's mouth was wide open in awe.

Up until now, virtual reality games have amounted to a visual image has been implanted directly into the retinas in order to perceive the virtual world.

The game New World was going to be different than any other games. Information received from the retina will be directly delivered to the brain, which allows the game to be perceived as a real-world experience.

Thanks to that, it's no longer just seeing, but experiencing another world with all five senses.

For the last 3 years, Hyun Woo lived without playing games, and the advancement in technology was amazement to him.

"It's true the expense will reach four times as much as an existing unit. However, New World is not a simple game. We are heading towards a new age. I am confident we will be able to create a new culture and will last 10 to 20 years into the future. The recruitment test this time was to pick a capable people who will be managing New World, as well as making history."

"What are the requirements to pass the screening?"

Right then, someone asked.

"Everyone is probable wondering about the passing requirements. Among those of you who are present, you might identify yourself as inexperienced or uneducated, but as of this moment, I want

everyone to forget about those labels. We have decided not to take those matters into account. New World is a project that will last for dozens of years, and we are recruiting people based on their talented to be able to manage a long-term project. In simpler terms, we will be judging based on your passion for this game as well as the possibility of future growth.”

Physicist, Chemist, Astronomers, medical experts, and even experts in Nanoscience. Dozens of experts will spend years studying the virtual reality game, The New World.

However, Global Exos was not looking for an employee with knowledge in those subjects. But rather, an employee who knew how to start a fire. Global Exos was looking for one who could manipulate the fire, was what Ha Myung Woo explained.

“How will you determine those who are qualified?”

“The method we’ll be using is quite simple.”

Ha Myung Woo parted his lips slightly and replied.

“Tomorrow afternoon, everyone will receive access to their own gaming unit with New World installed on it. With this unit, you are to create a new account for New World. Inside the game, if you accomplish a particular condition, a event will occur and you can think of as a formal certificate of employment. Furthermore, while the test is in progress, Global Exos will be paying you a minimum of 1.5 million Won every month. This is the company’s policy is to ensure everyone will be able to completely concentrate on the game and play with similar conditions.”

It was an unprecedented way obtaining employment caused a disturbance in the auditorium.

As the unrest settled down and questions started to be asked.

“What conditions must be achieved?”

“Are you talking about a quest?”

“Or is it about obtaining some rare items?”

“I’ve predicted you would have a lot of questions. However, I can’t

tell you specific information. What I can tell you is there are many ways you can achieve your goal, and also, there is no set path towards the goal.”

“Are you saying the goal of this test is to obtain something inside the game?”

“You are correct. However, we will not give you any clues. Isn’t that the most fun part of a game?”

Ha Myung Woo said in joyful voice. However, there was no one who shared his happiness.

“You have freedom to do what you wish inside the game. Although you are given your freedom, it is your responsibility to follow the rules. It is also up to you to choose your own goals. Depending on your situation, you will be judged as we see fit.”

“How long will the testing period be?”

“How many people will you be recruiting?”

“We will be recruiting only 10 people.”

“The testing period will end when we have chosen 10 people.”

Ha Myung Woo added with a smile.

“Perhaps this might be the longest testing period of employee recruitment in history. However, the game New World is worth investing your time and effort in. Without a doubt.”

“I hope this would motivate people to combine their strength and work together. Fighting~”

Kang Misu said with a beautiful smile as she came out to talk to the people in the auditorium.

There was definitely nothing he looked forward to more than working with this beauty in an office of the large conglomerate.

Hyun Woo stood idly at the convenience store counter eyeing a Global Exos’ brochure.

He knew it was one of the world's largest corporations but he did not expect it to be at this level.

On the pamphlet were the written details of the employees who passed the special test.

It was rumored New World's exclusive Planning Department receives an assigned annual salary of approximately 100 million won.

Considering the starting salary of a large enterprise was 40 million, this was exceptional.

In addition, there was a full page article of the company's guaranteed benefits.

'It seems like only 2000 people were qualified. If they give everyone 1.5 million won, that's 30 billion a month! Even if the test runs for only three to four months, they will be spending over 100 billion! Since they're spending so much money on just the recruitment exam...'

Literally a dream Job!

It was a job that could resolve all of Hyun Woo's problems in one go.

More than anything, Hyun Woo was captivated by the unique recruitment test.

They didn't want a close to perfect score on the TOEIC evaluation, nor did they want someone with an amazing work experience.

If they were looking for those kinds of things, he would not have applied for the job.

However, they proposed a method of achieving something inside the game as a test to get employed. Therefore, the only condition was to be good at games.

'Did they really not investigate my education?'

If the falsification of his educational background were to come out of the light, it might become a big issue.

No, it might not even get detected. As he thought about it, his hope

swelled up.

‘This way, there might be some hope for me.’

Since his younger years, Hyun Woo had always loved to play games.

Although he spent a lot of time playing amazing games, they weren’t memorable.

Furthermore once he had completed the game, all items obtained could be sold for money.

Even so, he didn’t think getting employed would be easy.

Ratio of 200 to 1. The other candidates would also rush forward with their lives on the line.

However, since they are all starting with same conditions, he was confident he wouldn’t become left behind.

‘It’s a once in a lifetime chance. I can’t miss this!’

That same day, Hyun Woo quit his part-time job at the convenience store, and stopped his milk and newspaper deliveries.

However, because of the cost of living, and hospital bills, he cannot overindulge himself by quitting two of his other part time jobs.

With the 1.5 million won Global Exos promised as a salary, he still could not even afford the hospital bills.

He did not blindly believe his debt was resolved by itself. He understood tomorrow his debt would still increase.

Therefore, he needed a little more like to save up.

‘Since I have less time than the others, I have to do this as if it was life-and-death situation.’

As soon as he finished work, he immediately headed for home.

‘I should try looking for information about the game...’

However, Hyun Woo started to shake his head.

'It's just information. Experiencing it first-hand will allow me to understand the game faster.'

Hyun Woo immediately went to the unit. After he turned on the power, he heard a low whirring sound and suddenly, everything went dark.

Suddenly, a piercing light, along with a new world, unfolded before him.

New World

– Starting initial operations. Scanning for necessary personal data.
Unregistered user detected. Please register a new account.

Someone spoke from within a space enclosed in light.

Following the guide, as soon as he gave his personal information, a red light scanned his body.

Soon after, a character dressed in leather bearing a similar appearance to Hyun-Woo appeared in front of him.

– The state of the appearance shown is scanned from the user. If you wish, you may change your appearance, sex, or race. However be warned, each account is limited to one character. Once the character has been created, you may not alter or delete your character. Please think carefully before deciding.

A limit of one character per account. This was not a rare restriction for a virtual reality game.

Being able to change character appearance in game lessens the sense of physical immersion.

Having always worn glasses he thought his face looked a little strange.

Hyun-Woo contemplated and then adjusted his face structure a little.

He chose the Human race. This was typically a very average choice in most games.

Since he had not selected a profession and did not choose any skills, he would become a human aptitude for all professions.

– Please select your character's name.

“Ark.”

It was the name that came to him when he received his unit.

He was using it in a biblical sense. Not because the cocoon round-like appearance reminded him of the Ark, but rather the fact Hyun-Woo's future depended on this Unit. Even if it was tedious, there was no helping it.

– Users of the Human race may choose from four starting locations. Harun, the frontier town of Schudenberg Kingdom, Bristania Kingdom's Changing Lot, and the small Kutran Castle in the Principality of Sinius. No matter which place you select, all the choices were similar. The townspeople are kind to strangers...

“Schudenberg Kingdom's frontier town, Harun.”

Schudenberg Kingdom was the closest to the middle of the continent.

– If you would like a more detailed explanation about the New World....

“Skip.”

All game have similar introduction such as this.

In the beginning stages actual knowledge about the game doesn't help much.

Above all, experience was the best type of knowledge. After canceling the tutorial, Hyun-Woo was enveloped in a bright light.

At the same time his characters eyes moved and he was absorbed within it.

The novice adventurer, Ark was born.

“What the heck?”

Ark had a bewildered look on his face.

He was surrounded by mountains and mountain villages.

In the village there were around 100 houses surrounded by high barriers.

This must be the beginning town Harun.

However Ark still could not believe his eyes.

‘Is this really part of a game?’

He could not believe it. The surrounding mountains. The fences and buildings, even the people who were wandering around...

This was completely different from Computer Graphics. It wasn't something you can see visually.

He could feel his leather shoes, the wind whooshing by his ears, and even smell food being prepared somewhere from a distance.

It felt like reality, but wasn't reality which made the situation all the more difficult to believe.

‘I know this is a virtual reality, but I can't believe it's a game.’

The virtual reality gaming experience used to be solely based on retina graphics.

This was as of 3 years ago. To this day most virtual reality games had still not escaped the dimension of having retina graphic based game.

‘Now I understand why Director Ha Myung Woo spoke with prideful words.’

Just one month ago Global Exos had announced New World, which resulted in it becoming the hot topic of gossip in many other games. Now he understood why this was happening.

If his situation had been more favourable, he would have stopped at nothing to play this game.

The technology developed by Global Exos was incredible.

‘Ah, now is not the time to be doing this.’

Ark, who had his mouth wide open, wiped his drool.

Several people around him look at him with dull look on their faces.

They were going through the same process of adaptation as Ark.

Blushing from embarrassment Ark moved to a more adequate place.

‘Where should I head off now?’

Ark saw the way other people moved their bodies and copied them.

Although he was actually connected to the unit lying down. He felt like he was actually moving.

Although moving little parts of his body was rough, it process was similar to moving in real life.

‘Ok, movements don’t seem to require any special procedures’

Ark then investigated the system window.

“Menu.”

A translucent circle appeared in front of him listed various items. Character info, bags, community, et cetera, you could either talk directly to the menu or tap the icon. Ark pressed the icon which looked like a face.

Character Name		Ark	
Race	Human	Affiliation	None
Profession	None		
Level	1	Fame	0
Title	None		

Health	100	Mana	100
Strength	15	Agility	15
Stamina	15	Intelligence	15
Wisdom	15	Luck	15

The pair of Character Information Windows that appeared were not simplistic in design. Afterwards he confirmed his skill window was completely empty. The contents of his bag were; 10 units of water, 10 pieces of wheat bread, and a dagger.

He was excited, and felt as if a new life was just beginning.

‘Well, what should I do now.’

Ark closed the information window and looked around.

Everything was so much like reality it was hard to distinguish NPCs from normal users

But both users and NPCs showed no interest in Ark since he began.

Everyone was running around like crazy.

In most games, there would be a kind NPC who would teach you when you first start out.

Looking around for a bit, he spotted an old man who kept his eyes on him from a distance.

Ark walked over to him.

“Ex..... Excuse me.”

“You must be new here.”

Without having to say anything, the old man spoke as if he understood the entire situation.

“What is your name?”

“My name is Ark.”

“My name is Hansen. I’m just an old guy whose purpose in life is to teach young guys, such as yourself, how to live in this place. As expected, you probably want to ask about what to do in this place?”

“Yes.”

“Most people who are like you commonly work one of two jobs here. One is wild dog and wolf hunting outside of this village, and another one finding work in the village. If you’re just playing casually, it’s better to choose the latter option. Since this is a backwater village, we’re always short-handed.”

“Yes, I like to be provided a job.”

Ark replied without hesitation.

However, the greatest danger in a game is not learning how to hunt carefully and embarking without reason or under bad influence.

Therefore doing a simple quest would be good idea to adapt to the game.

Early beginnings of a game consisted of mostly of doing quests to adapt to the flow of the game and earn equipment. Hence, was more profitable than aimlessly hunting.

“I’m thankful you took time to listen to me. As it so happens, there’s a job I’d like to entrust to you. Recently I’ve heard the tavern owner was complaining about the amount of mice in his cellar. I think you would be able to solve the problem. How about it? Will you help?”

Du-du-dung. An information window came up along with a strange sound.

Kraydon, who owns the tavern in the gloomy backwater village of Harun, has gotten headaches over the growing mouse problem in recent years. Meet Kraydon, listen to his problem, and then deal with it. It’s a job that should be easy even for a beginner. Difficulty: Not Applicable

Ark accepted the quest and headed towards the tavern.

Finding the tavern was quite easy. It was the only building overflowing with customers, in the town square.

As he entered the tavern a messy haired boy wearing an apron could be heard yelling.

“You came with a recommendation from the Old Man Hansen?”

With a relieved look on his face, Ark began to speak to Kraydon.

“Nice to meet you. Can you do me a little favour and kill the mice inside the warehouse down the street. Lately, I think if I hear them one more time, I’ll lose my mind!”

“Yes. I will do it. But what will the compensation be?”

Ark indirectly asked. Whether in it is reality or inside a game, no one believed in working free of charge.

Work should be compensated. It’s only natural right?

Kraydon started beating on his chest and replied.

“Of course, I, Kraydon, am not of the cheap nature to swindle a stranger who has no home or belongings after he has eaten his fill. I have prepared a reward essential for someone like you.”

“I look forward to it.”

Ark entered the warehouse with a daring smile.

The warehouse had been congested with many swarms of mice.

Both sides officially recognized the other as an easy target as they faced one another.

‘My first test subjects will be you guys! Now, shall we begin?’

Ark drew his dagger, charged and swung his dagger, and attacked one of the mice.

However, he got a result he did not expect. Embarrassingly, the mouse lightly sidestepped the moving dagger. Also, as if mocking his sloppy display of skill, they ran between the boxes, knocking them

over.

Similar occurrence kept repeating. Ark was growing angry at the loitering mice who light dodged as often as he swung his dagger at them.

‘Huh? There’s no way this should be happening?’

How could he be unable to even kill one mouse? Ark grew puzzled.

In all of the games he’s played until now, mice were mobs who died out even if they saw a sword. However, these mice were different.

As if they were actual copies, the mice moved as they would in reality. Their speed was no joke.

While he was flustered, a bright light suddenly flashed in his eyes.

– You have been attacked by a Mouse. You have received 1 damage.

Far from killing them, he was hurt instead.

Just because it was only 1 damage, it did not mean he could ignore it. The mice, seeing Ark getting flustered, seemed to judge him as an easy opponent. In an instant, enough had gathered to block the view of the ground and started biting him. In the blink of an eye, his health had dropped down to 20.

Ark, who became frightened, quickly backed away.

‘These little... If I’m not careful, I might die from being attacked by mice.’

Nobody, in the entire world, gets bitten by mice and then dies from it.

Ark calmed his emotions. He could not afford to get hit anymore.

Ark carefully marked the assaulting mouse, and struck the moment they ran forward to bite him.

The mouse screeched with pain and split into two halves.

– You have killed a Mouse. You have earned 1 EXP.

At last, he heard the welcoming sound accompanied a message window popped up.

When Ark started to properly counterattack, the mice were eliminated at lightning speed.

Meanwhile, Ark killed several more mice. He also drove them back to their holes one by one as he swung his dagger. The mice did not take it lying down.

Several of them began to cooperate with one another, and started to leap at him after hiding in boxes and counterattacked. The fierce fighting between the human and the mice lasted 30 minutes.

At the end of the battle, he only had 3 loaves of wheat bread left. In order to recover his lowered health, he had consumed 7 loaves. The durability of his 2 attack point dagger and his 2 defence point leather armour also dropped significantly. It was an empty victory.

‘Phew, whatever happened, I killed them all. While it was difficult, my experience should’ve risen substantially, right?’

Ark opened up his character window in order to inspect the good results and promptly had an unhappy expression.

One mouse gave 1 EXP. However, even though he killed over 30, he only received 30 EXP.

He thought because he was just starting out, it was not a small amount.

However, after looking at his experience bar, it had not even risen one percent.

No matter the extreme difficulty in fighting them, mice were mice.

His disappointment was unrivalled. However, Ark reined in his emotions.

Because no matter what, a quest was still a quest, there would still be some reward later.

“All the mice have been wiped out.”

“Oh, yes? Very good. I have a little something for you.”

Kraydon laughed broadly as he took out 10 wheat bread.

“ ... ”

Ark who had been eagerly looking forward to his reward, stare at Kraydon in horror.

There could be no way he would spend more than 30 minutes in a life or death struggle, all he would receive was some wheat bread.

However, Kraydon, if anything, looked blankly at Ark as if there was something wrong with him.

“No way, is there some kind of mistake?”

“What do you mean? Isn't it most important you are still alive?”

“But.....”

“You expect to receive better rewards for killing some mice?”

Ark had fevotion so he kept his mouth shut suffering in silence.

He spent 30 minutes and cleaned up 7 loaves of wheat bread to hunt the mice.

His dagger and his leather armour were in disrepair. And the reward was a mere 10 loaves of wheat bread? Was it a joke? But what use was there in arguing with an NPC for an opponent?

Furthermore, wheat bread was cheap but inconvenient.

However, Ark accepted and took the 10 pieces of bread and left the tavern.

He returned to Hansen with a dissatisfied expression and asked him.

“Aren't there any more decent jobs?”

“Hehe, this guy. You're being too greedy from the very start. You're a newcomer to this place. Who would entrust an important task to a newcomer? If you want a job with large rewards, you need to build more trust.”

‘It appears the game is affected by the level of intimacy’

Many games before virtual reality games emphasised on relationship between NPCs.

It was a feature of the game that one’s intimacy with an NPC determined which quests, information, and skills you would be exposed to.

This kind of system played the role of an imaginary space where one could experience significance of reality.

Therefore there was no way a high-tech company like New World would not implement a system such as this.

‘In other words, newbies had to grind the low-reward quests in order to get better rewards.’

Ark was about to ask another question after understanding the basic concept.

Someone struck up a conversation from behind him.

“Are you a newbie?”

He turned around and saw a cute girl coming closer.

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Are you trying to get a quest from the elder by any chance?”

Ark nodded his head as a smirk rose on her face.

However, as soon as Ark made an unpleasant expression, she quickly smiled.

“Oh, sorry. However, trying to get a quest from the elder isn’t exactly the best idea.”

“Why?”

“The quests this elder provides are all low-reward and low-experience. Although I did a few of his quests just in case, he kept giving me similar quests. There are people who have also tried over fifty times. However, the only things they’ve received in increase

were the repair costs.”

“Then what should I be doing in the beginning?”

“The best thing to do is to hunt Wild Dogs in the outskirts of the village. While the normal thing is hunt rabbits or raccoons at level 1, the EXP you receive is only a little bit higher than mice... The reason why there is hardly anyone in the village is because everyone is out hunting wild dogs.”

“Wild dogs?”

Ark bore an anxious expression as he repeated the question.

Just killing a few mice was an arduous task. Would not hunting wild dogs be more difficult?

However, the girl opened her mouth as if she had read his mind.

“It’s hard to kill them alone. That’s why everyone forms a party to hunt them. As it so happens, a person whom I was hunting with and I, were having a bit of trouble, so would you like to hunt with us?”

“Yeah? Are you sure it’s alright? I’m only at level 1?”

“It’s okay. I also started today, so I’ve only reached level 2. And the other person is level 3.”

“Yes, then please let me join.”

“Please follow me. The other member is outside.”

Her party mate was a large man who was eating wheat bread at the village gates.

It was a rare sight for someone in the starting village to be equipped with a longsword.

As she introduced herself, Ark quickly examined her from top to bottom and nodded his head.

“Well, at least a level three would be better than a level one and two.”

The man was Andel, and the woman was called Bulma.

Both Andel and Bulma were also beginning New World but were more well-informed than Ark.

Although he started around the same time as Ark, he was able to level up by forming a party and hunting wild dogs.

“Well then, we have no time to be playing around”

As they walked a bit, they came across a field where Wild Dogs were meandering in.

Bulma said in a nervous tone.

“You can’t stop being vigilant everyday just because it’s close to the village. They’re stronger than they appear, so you have to kill them by luring them one at a time.”

As Andel silently drew closer to a Wild Dog, he hit it and escaped behind it. He was far enough so other Wild Dogs would not jump in, and swung his long sword.

The wild dog howled in pain as it took the piercing attack.

Meanwhile, Ark and Bulma sprang at it. However, the battle was not as simple as they thought. Their fear clouded their judgement.

While one may say what kind of fear is there in a game, the Wild Dog, which was exquisitely detailed down to each individual hair, appeared no different from reality.

In reality, he had never even fought a cat before. He had not even imagined fighting a Wild Dog, let alone actually fights one. Seeing those Wild Dogs bare their teeth at him chilled him down to his bones. Their movements were also alarming. They were so fast Ark, who was wielding a dagger, could not hit them even once.

“Jeez, Ark. What are you doing?”

“Uhm uhm, thi-this...”

Ark suffered a bite to his thigh as a result of the Wild Dog’s attack.

Immediately, he lost 30 HP. As he became frightened and started retreating, Andel and Bulma struck the Wild Dog from behind, barely

managing to kill it. When the Wild dog fell, it dropped leather and meat.

Andel naturally picked up everything then looked disapprovingly at Ark.

“Is this your first time playing a Virtual Reality game?”

“Not really...”

It was his first time playing the real thing.

Andel glared at Bulma with eyes full of reproach.

Why did you bring back a guy like this?

Bulma looked at Ark with a resentful expression.

Ark’s face became flushed as he suddenly became marked as a dead man.

It was not always good to have a game be able to express every single expression.

They had killed more Wild Dogs, but the results always turned out the same.

“Ark, I can’t attack if you suddenly come to my side!”

“Oh, are you really going to stab me?”

“You want me to retreat back there? How am I supposed to attack?”

“Ah, but you’re terrible.”

Andel had an annoyed expression as he complained.

Ark got flustered and was chased by the wild dogs, and as a result, Andel and Bulma killed everything.

Since he wasn’t even able to properly stab anything with his dagger, he did not receive any experience. Even the leather and meat that dropped were monopolized by Andel, of course. While Bulma did not say anything, Ark, who was only causing trouble, could not even complain.

No, it was not an issue of complaining.

“Please take a moment to look at what we’re doing from behind us.”

‘Damn, won’t I get kicked at this rate?’

Ark grew restless at Andel’s brusque tone.

There are only 4 loaves left. His equipment was frayed as if it would fall apart at any moment.

No party would pick up a player who got kicked out with Ark’s appearance.

His days of desperately fighting mice for 10 loaves of wheat bread and 1 EXP would continue.

Furthermore, connections were important in games.

If any person played a game, then they understand how important it is to have even one more person on their side.

‘Fine. This time, I want to get a hit in and die with no regrets.’

Ark had a firm resolve.

Suddenly, another Wild Dog lured by Andel had arrived.

Ark did not listen to Andel’s advice at all, and, after taking the vanguard, swung at a Wild Dog with his dagger. As he fought it as if his life depended on it, the dog flattered and shrank back.

For the first time, Ark was able to hit the wild dog with his dagger.

At the same time, the wild dog’s attack struck Ark.

– You have received a fatal blow from a Wild Dog. You have taken 50 damage.

Ark felt a dizzy sensation and staggered around before collapsing on his back.

“Not that way!”

Bulma shouted not because she was worried about Ark but because she was surprised. The Wild Dogs took a step forward towards where Ark had collapsed and began to gather.

Bulma and Andel's faces were white with terror. Even with their level, the Wild Dogs were an overwhelming opponent. Even more so when there was 5 of them!

"Damn, it's all over."

"That's why you should stay at the back!"

Ark overflowing with dissatisfaction.

'Damn, how about I quit the party.'

Ark clenched his fists tightly until they bit into his hands and got up.

"I'll block them while you run away."

"Yes? Ha, but then..."

Bulma was baffled as Andel pulled on her with a jerk.

Without looking back, Ark drew out his dagger and swung it in random directions.

Two of the Wild Dog who gathered around Ark, chased him. Simultaneously, he saw flashing red lights coming from all directions. When he heard three or four system messages saying he has received some damages, the vision from both his eyes started to turn dark. Not long after, Ark collapsed and the Wild Dogs retreated to their original position.

His very first death.

As he opened his eyes he saw some supplies near the castle gate.

– You have suffered critical injuries. Fortunately, you were saved quickly and received treatment at the Quartermaster's Station. Life will recover. However, due to the risky operation a penalty will be imposed.

Please confirm the details in the character information window.

"Are you alright?"

The system messages overlapped with Bulma's voice.

Ark was embarrassed and started scratching his head.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Did you almost die because of me?”

“No, it was thanks to you I’m alive. But Ark.....”

“It’s no problem. After all, I didn’t even have 1% experience.”

Ark had never thought of his death was of any importance.

It was common sense in the case of death in a game, experience would be reduced. In some cases, lose their items. This was the reason why people struggled to not be killed.

However Ark was different. He did not care to lose experience since he had just started.

Neither did he drop any of his items. The only players who did not fear death were level 1 players.

Therefore Ark tilted his head since he was unable to understand Bulma’s reaction.

“Yes? What experience? I’m just saying...”

Andel, as if became aware of something, suddenly blocked Bulma’s path.

“Ah yes, I hadn’t thought Ark-nim had just recently started the game.”

Andel’s eyes sparkled as he proposed an idea.

“Then how about we do this? Let’s hunt something a little stronger than Wild Dogs, something like Wolves. If it’s Wolves, I’m sure we’ll be able to take them down. I’ve heard there were some cases where a party was killing a Wolf and various other Wolves would come and gather around them making it almost impossible to hunt. But if Ark-nim were to tank them for us and die in our place, Wolves are worth challenging. Although Ark-nim will not receive any experience, we’ll divide any items dropped from killing Wolves. The beginners’ items they drop can be sold for a considerable amount of money.”

“But Andel-nim.”

Bulma looked at Andel with a surprised expression. Her eyes told him he asked for too much.

Nevertheless Ark nodded his head without a second thought.

“If you’re sure, why not.”

He thought Andel’s proposition wasn’t a bad one.

Even if he refused and left the party, there was nothing else he could do.

It would be more useful if he was able to face a superior Wolf and adapt.

He currently did not stand a chance; death was inevitable.

For a good reason, he also wouldn’t be distributed any items nor receive any loot unless Wolves appeared.

“It’s beneficial to have Ark-nim.”

Andel lead the party to the fields in high spirits.

Andel’s attitude towards Ark did a complete 180. In order to repair his equipment, he would have to pay 30 copper. And whenever situations get dangerous, he was grateful for reducing the chances of death. After the party finished their item repairs, they walked passed the pack of Wild Dogs towards the place where Wolves gather.

Wolves, undoubtedly are several times stronger than stray dogs. It was an opponent you can barely win against yourself.

Aooo!

As several Wolves were caught and on death’s door, they howled towards the sky.

There is a reason for this. The distant Wolves would surge in to the support of their comrades.

On all occasions it was the level 1, Ark, who bravely intercepted them.

“These bastards. All of you come at me!”

Naturally they would frantically claw and bite as they lay down on the floor.

But Ark refused to bat an eye.

‘Huhuhu. Slaughtering as I please. After all I am a pitiful creature with nothing to lose.’

Ark arose up like a zombie once more from the Quartermaster’s Station and set out to hunt Wolves once more.

After he died about ten times, an information window popped up along with a sound effects and shining lights.

– You have learned a new skill. Indomitable Will (Beginner, Passive): You have undergone countless lives and deaths; your mind is uncrushable and abundant with courage.

While under critical conditions, piercing the enemy’s weak point will break their concentration and allows you to heal faster than others.

During times of crisis:

+30% Critical Rate.

+5% Recovery Rate.

‘Aha, is this a gift from the heavens?’

Would this lead to destitute? Though he had died several times, he never imagined of receiving a new skill.

The quicker Ark separated the pack of Wolves, the faster they died.

The people who watched Ark hunted started making comments.

“Wahhh. That person never seem to get tired.”

“It’s a brave warrior. A soldier. A level 1 veteran.”

“Is he out of his mind? Maybe doesn’t know how to play this game?”

Sarcasm could be heard one time or another, and sometimes a

voice of concern.

‘Hmph. Those people do not know anything...’

However, Ark did not mind their words. Ark opened his bag and took a peek. Inside were filled with Wolf leather and meat. Seeing this reassured his mind.

At level 1, he was adapting to Wild Dogs and Wolves while obtaining item drops from them. What problems can there be? Despite Andel and Bulma’s higher level, Ark was not at a disadvantage.

In others perspective, Ark might certainly seemed he was recklessly hunting, however, Ark was also gaining a lot of information.

Andel and Bulma had never experienced playing a virtual reality game like this.

The two current level 3 players originally thought Wolves were overwhelming opponents.

However, the two players were expertly dealing critical blows. Following Ark’s lead, they did not hesitate to swing their weapons and attack. Thanks to the level 1 player, they were able to hunt Wolves continuously for about two hours.

‘Huh, what’s going on?’

Ark had experienced something strange.

Somehow, he started moving slower and slower over time, and felt out of breath. Although he wield his dagger, he lacked strength.

It was as if he had several lead weights on his arms and legs.

Bulma, who noticed Ark’s movement slowing down over time down, had a sorry expression on her face.

However, Andel who was still at a distance, said.

“Perhaps he is unable to continue since he is not familiar with virtual reality games. We should call it a day. Hunting grounds are dangerous when a party member is unable to move.”

“Yes, I guessed so.”

“It was all thanks to you, hunting was easier. I will see you later.”

“Can I... Register you as a friend?”

“We’ll call you next time.”

In the end, Andel had left before he could say anything else.

Bulma hesitantly approached him, took out a sword from her bag, and held it out to him.

“Take this. It’s not a bad weapon to use, especially at the start of the game.”

“Ah. Thank you.”

Ark received the weapon and checked the information window.

Rusty Iron Sword			
Weapon Type	One-Handed Sword		
Attack Damage	5~8	Durability	30/30
Weight	15	Restriction	None
This weapon has low durability and the rust made its damage weak. Relying on this sword to fight in a battlefield will lead to death.			

Ark was currently using a dagger with a damage of 1~3. Although it was an unnamed, lousy-beyond-compare, level 1 dagger, Ark was thankful for it. In addition, his bag was full to bursting with wolf leather and meat. On top of that, he had become more proficient with his skills. While his level stayed the same, his progress for the first day was pretty good. However, Bulma had a rather sorry

expression on her face.

“I’m sorry. Even though you suffered so much, I don’t have anything I can give you, except this”

“No, I’m truly grateful.”

There was definitely nothing wrong with looking good in front of other users.

If anything, it was good to slightly flatter users who were at a higher level than you. There was no other way to get an item at such a bargain otherwise. With those joyful feelings in his heart, Ark finished the first day of gaming.

Mouse Hunter

“Whew, it’s a lot easier now that I’ve actually tried it.”

Hyun Woo let out a sigh of relief as he got out of the unit.

Once again, technological advances were to be admired. The scenery, the people, and monsters in the game looked very realistic. The battles were overflowing with a sense of realism.

Although he had started playing the game for the sake of the recruitment test, he thought he might get deeply immersed and beyond. However, Hyun Woo could not afford to get blindly obsessed with the game.

The game was great, but for him, it was more important to get by. He was in a different situation compared to the other applicants. It was a given he wouldn’t be able to feed himself and pay for his mother’s hospital fees if he didn’t work. He couldn’t just give up everything and enter this 1 in 200 war with his life on the line.

‘However, the game is just as important. I can’t quit work, but, I can put the private academy on hold for the moment. Then, I suppose I can play more if I sleep less.’

The clock indicated it was already 2 in the morning.

The Hyun Woo who skipped lunch in order to set up the unit, fetched himself a carton of milk and sat in front of the computer.

He had underestimated New World.

After he had actually tried the game, he realised it was quite different from any other games. As a result, he felt the need to look up more information during his spare time.

Sure enough, within a span of a month, the game was the top topic that came up and dozens of related sites had formed.

There were sites that shared information with users; while the information was insufficient, it was good to thoroughly look over them just in case.

Hyun Woo went onto the sites and looked through the information.

However, information could only be understood if one had some background knowledge. Since he didn't know much, they were all Greek to him. At that moment, after clicking through the forums without much thought, the milk carton fell from Hyun Woo's hand.

"W-What's this?"

Hyun Woo moved his face right up to the monitor and read through the forum.

'Whoa, n-no way... Is this for real?'

Hyun Woo forgot about his fatigue and immediately entered the unit.

* * *

Ark entered Harun together with a hazy light.

"Stat Window."

When Ark hastily looked at the opened Stat Window, all colour drained from his face.

"My god! I-I was done in!"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Fame	0	Level	1
Profession	None		
Title	None		

Health	100	Mana	100
Strength	1 (-14)	Agility	1 (-14)
Stamina	1 (-14)	Wisdom	1 (-14)
Intelligence	1 (-14)	Luck	1 (-14)

All the stats turned red and had dropped down to 1.

The information Ark saw online turned out to be true.

On the forum, there was a tale of a newbie user who died without knowing much. According to it, his stats was deducted by 1 each time he died. And like Ark, he didn't check the deducted stat and leveled up; permanently losing the stats in process. The figures inside the bracket indicated the deducted stat, and if one leveled up without recovering them, those stats could never be returned.

Ark was able to understand everything that had happened until now.

'So this was why the people around me showed extreme reactions.'

They must have thought of me as someone who had given up on the game since I kept going at it like a nutcase and everytime I died, my stats got hacked away.

Damn it, so that's why Bulma said she was so sorry.

He felt like an erupting volcano about to explode.

Ark having experience playing many games, he knew firsthand the importance of stats.

Everytime you level up in New World you are given 10 points.

This means at level 10 you should have 100 points. However Ark had already lost 84. In other words, this means at level 10 he would essentially be lower than a level 2. This was a huge difference.

No, the bad side aside, he wouldn't be able to do anything at this rate.

Before logging off, Ark was panting while holding a dagger, but he wasn't tired. He had 1 strength so the dagger was heavy, and also one agility, so his movement were sluggish.

'From the beginning that bastard Andel knew all about it. Bulma knew too. They took advantage of me in order to hunt safely. All this for a handful of crappy items.'

For 84 stat points, he got a bunch of wolf leather, meat, and a rusty sword.

Ark clenched and grinded his teeth while searching for them. However, they must've fled the village, or cut off all means of communication as he wasn't able to find them anywhere. Then again, there wasn't anything that he could do even if he caught them.

With these stats, he could not exact revenge, and they could not return his lost stats anyway. In the end, Ark sank down to the ground with a hollow expression.

Everything in front of his eyes became dark.

'Damn it, to think that such a system would exist.'

The stat couldn't fall below 1, so he really had a body that had nothing to lose now.

His anger subsided a little and his guilt rose. No matter how hurried he'd felt, he should have looked through the information first. Even 1 hour, no, 30 minutes of skimming through a forum would have prevented such a mistake. It was his fault for thinking that this game would be no different from other games.

Ark realized how much of a difference one small piece of information could make. No, but before that, the disappointment on himself surfaced.

'What a stupid bastard I was! Why didn't I notice the reason Bulma was being so kind? It may just be a game, but in the end those guys

are only human. There's no reason for them to be so nice to a useless guy like me!

If this was reality, he definitely would never have made that mistake.

'Andel and Bulma! You bastards picked on the wrong person. I'll make you regret it someday!'

Life is unfair beyond imagination. Survival would be impossible if one underestimated it.

If there was one thing Ark had learned while working hard in real life, that would be it.

Sometimes, after working a part-time job for over a month, he didn't receive his pay.

The manager had taken Ark for an easy mark because he was just a student. So Ark didn't go to school for a week and clung to the manager until he finally got his money. He couldn't give up because his life was on the line.

Ark had suffered similar situations for the past few years. He couldn't fall apart here.

He had to get stronger somehow and get his revenge on those bastards! But for now there were more urgent matters.

One hour later, Ark went and found Hansen again.

"Give me a job."

"Hmm? If it isn't the customer who came in a while ago. Didn't you say you were going outside to hunt?"

"I'm about to cry, okay? Don't ask and please give me a job."

Ark said as he let out a deep sigh.

He had spent an hour digging through the Internet after what had happened.

Perhaps because there were almost no idiots who had made the same mistake as Ark, there was barely any information. Still, Ark determinedly searched through the Internet.

He thought there might be a way to restore his stats if the system deduct stats with each death.

If it was impossible to restore the stats, then there'd be no reason to put the lost stat numbers in parentheses.

Thankfully, he'd was able to find information about that part a little while ago.

The way was rather simple. If you hunted a lot, the lost stats would be naturally restored. But there was also a problem here. If the lost stats were not completely restored and the user leveled up in that state, then those stats would be gone forever. Hence, he had to recover all of his 84 stat points before leveling up to level 2.

Mice naturally came to Ark's mind.

Each mouse gave 1 EXP. However, leveling up by hunting mice alone would be an impossible feat. Since many mice had to be killed in order to level up, it might be possible for him to restore many stats.

'Although I would much rather make a new character...'

In New World, only one character was allowed per account.

Sink or swim—he had to suck it up and continue playing with his current character.. Although he was already way behind the other applicants even at the start, there was no other way.

"Okay, there aren't a lot of people who are willing to work in this village, so there's plenty of work I can give you. Go right now to the smithy. The number of mice these days has increased there as well."

Ark ran right to the smithy. Then, before the blacksmith could even open his mouth, he jumped into the cellar. The situation was no better than before. At least all of his stats had been at 15 before. Now they were at a measly 1. He'd be no better than a ninety year old grandpa holding a dagger. If his Health Points had been reduced too, he'd probably have gone mad.

'It's fine. Let's not think about it anymore. It's no use coming this far and regretting it. Like when I was up against wolves, the only way is

to carefully take the mice one by one...'

His attitude was different than before.

There was nowhere to run. If he couldn't even kill a mouse, then he should give up on the game. Ark gave it everything that he had as he battled a single mouse. In other words, he had to give it his all to kill a single mouse. As a result, he had to investigate into a more efficient way to hunt.

While doing this, he realised he could perceive many points.

'The speed and strength with which I can swing the dagger has definitely decreased. But the fighting experience I gained while hunting wild dogs and wolves is there to some degree. Even though it takes longer to hunt, it actually feels easier than before. That means...'

It meant combat wasn't based on the attack and defense stats.

Similar to reality, by utilizing fighting experience, the situation could be changed at any time. It was difficult for a level one user to defeat a player who is level ten, but with a level 4 or 5, by following fighting experience, it was possible.

From then on, Ark observed the movements of the mice. He fought while learning how to move in each situation and when to hit the mouse to deal a little more damage. He went through similar battles such as this several times and grasp the techniques of the mice.

'Okay, it's not going to work if I just randomly swing the dagger. The mouse is using its head to move. So, I should learn its movements as if I'm facing a real mouse.'

Ark dealt with all of the mice in the smithy's cellar.

Even so, there weren't any changes to his stats yet.

"Even though I've killed thirty of them.... Is it truly possible to recover my lost stats like this?"

Although he had his worries, he had no other choice.

Even if he were to go outside the village, it would be difficult to deal with one rabbit. There was likely no one who would allow him to squeeze into a party.

If he wasn't able to restore his stats with the mice, the game would end then and there.

'I gotta believe they'll be restored. They'll be recovered for sure.'

Ark received his ten pieces of wheat bread from the smith and received another request. This time, it was a request about the mice in the cellar of the fancy goods shop. In an hour and a half, he was able to finish three requests.

Thanks to a lot of experience, the Strength and Agility that was lost to a huge blow has been found again. Strength up by 1. Agility has been restored by 1.
--

The message that he longed for finally appeared. He felt happiness, but at the same time, he felt at a loss as to what he should do.

An hour and a half. He was only able to recover 2 points after an hour and a half of nonstop mice hunting. How many mice did he have to kill to recover the remaining 82 points?

'But I'll get them back no matter what it takes. I can't just start like this, with these stupid penalties.'

Ark clenched his teeth.

* * *

Hyun Woo rubbed his bloodshot eyes and headed to work.

He had been able to regain only 6 points from staying up the entire night.

While he was lucky there was a way to restore his stats, thinking about the remaining 78 points he started to feel faint.

'Should I just give up on my stats and raise my level instead?'

It would cross his mind from time to time, but Hyun Woo would

immediately shake his head.

Every time you increased by one level 10 stats would be granted. That fact didn't change whether he was a level 50 or a 100. Essentially, that meant that the value of stats rose with each level.

Leveling up from 1 to 10 to get the stats would probably be faster than hunting mice, but going from level 100 to 110 would take so much more effort than right now. When he took that point into account, he had no other choice but to go through this grueling process.

'Yeah, killing mice is the only way to restore my stats with the minimal risk. There are other things I can learn while killing mice.'

Hyun Woo has always lived with a positive attitude.

The reason why he didn't quit computer prep school, even though he didn't have the money to buy a single bowl of black bean noodles (jjajangmyun), was thanks to his positive mindset. He also had a great amount of patience.

[T/N: A bowl of black bean noodles costs around 5 dollars.]

Truthfully, the harsh training in reality helped him to learn a lot.

In other games, victory was split into the attack and defense stats. There was no room for any other elements. However, in New World, a real sense of fighting and experience played a major role.

The user's real strength and agility were not applied, but experience and reflex speed counted for a lot.

That is, if someone was attacked ten times with 10 points of agility, they could generally evade once. On the other hand, if they handled the situation with quick judgement, they'd be able to evade two or three out of ten times.

'This is the same concept for when I'm attacking.'

By following the enemy's movements, he maintained an advantageous distance.

It was a concept drilled into him over and over again when he

learned Taekwondo a long time ago.

Of course, with an advantageous position, it was easier to avoid or counter-attack your opponent.

In New World, the rules of reality were directly applied.

It wasn't a game where you could just recklessly strike once and get hit once.

It was a big enough benefit to know that.

Hyun Woo began to exercise in his spare time from that day on.

Exercise was the best way to hone his reflexes.

The only exercise Hyun Woo could accomplish without spending any money was the Taekwondo he learned in elementary and middle school.

When he went into high school, he stopped because of examinations, but he still had the skills of a third-dan. He didn't remember everything he had learned, but it was still enough to work out by himself.

As he was cleaning out the mart cellar, he moved his body in the spare moments.

Afterward, he loosened his stiff body, stretched his legs, and did image training of fighting a bloody struggle with the mice. If he had a new thought, he adapted it in-game against the mice.

The days passed like this and he regained 30 stat points.

Even though he still had 50 points less than he'd had from the beginning, now he could fight the mice with his eyes closed.

There were approximately twenty to thirty mice to face with each quest he received, and now it didn't even take him 10 minutes to clean them up. Of course, the speed at which he received the quests increased as well.

'My thought was right after all. Ark gets stronger the more I exercise.'

Afterwards, Hyun Woo tried using his Taekwondo techniques in New World.

At first, there were a lot of awkward moments, but as he fought the mice he became more accustomed to them. And after a week, he could face two or three mice at once without the use of the dagger.

Thanks to that, he was able to save on the dagger's repair costs.

What a truly deep and complex game!

He was in the worst situation, but Hyun Woo was getting more and more fascinated with New World.

* * *

'Damn it, to think that I would actually die on purpose.'

Ark grumbled to himself in his faraway mind.

A swarm of mice was pounding on him like crazy.

On the tenth day after starting to hunt mice, Ark discovered yet another problem.

Mice only gave 1 EXP. However, those points accumulated and reached 99%. Had the situation been different, he would be grinning from ear to ear, but Ark's expression was grim.

There was no way to find the stats he hadn't regained yet if he leveled up like this.

Ark was agonized about it, but he decided to pull the trigger.

It was a way in which he would die on purpose and cut his experience. Every time he died, his experience was cut by 30% and his stats by 6 points. And by killing mice he gained 3% experience per 1 stat point. Overall, by dying once and killing mice to restore his stats, he was able to earn an extra 4 points.

'I won't lose out on a single point like this!'

He already invested 10 days into regaining his stats. Thus, it was ridiculous for him to start from a state of disadvantage after all that

work. No, he couldn't accept that to happen. Ark steeled his resolve and let the mice hit him to death.

Through repetitive mice hunting, he was finally able to regain 70 points in ten days.

Even so, he wasn't even a little happy.

'Even if I regain all of my points, I'll just end up where I started from. Damn it, just you wait and see! I will never forgive those bastards Andel and Bulma, who are caused all this suffering!'

Ark, who was grinding his teeth, started to show a mad glint in his eyes.

Thanks to his wish for vengeance against Andel and Bulma, he was able to stick to the arduous work of restoring his stats.

Around that time, he was able to obtain new knowledge from the game.

You have obtained a New Skill. Combat Skill (Beginner, Passive):
Art of fighting utilising your fists and feet.

Fighting without equipping a weapon will not demonstrate your strength, but your evasion and accuracy will become higher. These additional benefits can be had even when using weapons.

Bare-handed striking power increased by 10%, accuracy up 3%, evasion up 3%.

'Just like 'Indomitable Will', I see that if you do one thing for long enough, the skills you need will naturally be made.'

Though they called themselves information sites, they didn't even have simple information like this. If anything, rather than proper information, there were baseless rumors that just caused confusion among the inexperienced players. Half of it was done as a joke, and the other half was meant to protect their advantageous positions. Those rumours fanned the distrust in Ark's human form.

'You never know, this could be a scheme unfolded by the other

applicants. Those cheap bastards, it's no good to believe the information sites too much anyways. No, you can't even trust the other users. You have to find and learn everything by yourself.'

After the appearance of the skill, he was able to evade the mice's attacks more when he fought with his bare hands, and it became much more comfortable to move his body. Since he gained the bonuses even when using weapons, it was an absolutely necessary skill.

Ark was becoming a famous specialty in Harun.

It was a given that people would be interested in the Ark who started killing only mice like crazy as soon as he entered the game. Furthermore, sometimes he would even let himself die on purpose. Because there was no way they could understand his actions, people started thinking that he had gone slightly bad in the head.

They must've been really curious, but none of them mustered up the courage to approach Ark to ask him. They just mumbled amongst themselves.

"Just what is he trying to do by killing mice which doesn't give much experience or money?"

"There's no way he's trying to level up by catching mice, right?"

"Sure enough, if he's killed many, he should have already gone up at least 3 levels."

"But sometimes he dies, too."

"It's probably that he didn't know better in the beginning and died and is doing this to regain his stats."

Somebody's words caught people's attention.

"There's a way to restore lost stats?"

There were still more people who didn't know than those who did.

"Yes, in the case of high levels, it takes such a long time to level up so most people regain their stats by the time they level up. But at

low levels, leveling up is fast so if you hunt outside, it's easy to pass to the next level without regaining the stats. That's why he's only catching mice."

"But that person has already been catching them for more than ten days. Just how many did he lose...."

"You're right. Usually after that much one would just give up. He's awfully determined."

However, their talk did not reach Ark's ears.

There was no reason to listen to other people because he had a definite goal. And now simply clearing the mice had another meaning other than regaining stats. The fighting senses he had familiarized his body with so far was invaluable if only for the experience.

"Ah ah, how long has it been since I received such warm help, now I can die without regrets."

"Do not say such weak things. You have to live long and healthy."

As Ark held the grandma's hand tightly and said that, the information window appeared.

You have learned a new skill. Nursing (Beginner, Active): You can give patients hope by restoring their vigor and courage.

You give the patient an increase of 20% in vigor and courage by using this.

Mana use: 10

When Ark had completed the mouse-catching quest hundreds of times. Hansen sometimes gave him other quests, but they weren't impressive enough to make his ears perk up.

"You know granny Johansson, right? That granny might die soon. They say they need to find someone to take care of her for a day. If it's you, I can trust and leave her to you."

"The restaurant is crowded these days, so they need some helping

hand. If it's you, then I can entrust you with the job."

For the most part the jobs were small like this. Honestly, he wanted to pass on them, but Hansen only gave quests one at a time.

Whether he liked it or not, in order to receive the mouse catching quests, he had to complete those job quests as well. However, it was not always a bad thing.

For one, these quests had better pay. The pay was as much as one silver.

The repair cost for the rusted sword and leather clothes was 30 copper, and wheat bread cost 5 copper.

To Ark, 1 silver was not a small sum.

On top of that, he learned skills as well.

Well, they were insignificant skills he may or may not have a use for, but there was nothing wrong about expanding his skills. He was at the level where he could catch mice while taking breaks.

Thanks to the quests, his intimacy with the NPCs of Harun rose a lot.

Whenever he crossed the streets, NPCs started conversations with him, and the price of wheat bread and repair fees dropped by an enormous amount.

"S-Sorry to trouble you, but could you buy 100 pieces of wheat bread from me?"

"I am looking to repair a weapon..."

In the case of long swords, the repair cost exceeded a silver piece.

But when Ark gave them his sword, he only paid 70 copper pieces to get it repaired.

In this valley of beginners, 30 copper was a big sum. So quick, observant users did business with the merchants through Ark. Of course, Ark didn't offer this service for free.

The price was 20% of the trade. This was Ark's proposal.

“Instead of one silver, you know that there is a 20 copper service fee?”

“Can’t I give it to you next time? I only have 10 coppers.”

“No. Come next time.”

“You’re too much. It’s only 10 coppers.”

“If it’s stingy, then sir, raise your reputation in Harun village. If you do about one hundred mice-catching quests, then the price should go down some. Well, your level won’t rise though.”

“I’ll definitely pay you back next time.”

“I only believe in money.”

“... Here’s the money.”

At the sight of the offered 10 coppers, whose existence had been denied again and again, Ark snorted.

For the second time, he decided not to trust users.

On the day when Ark first came into New World and acted thoughtlessly, two thousand other applicants started the game at around the same time.

They were all his rivals. There was no doubt that there had been competitors in Harun.

‘There’s a chance Andel and Bulma were candidates. No, I don’t know about Bulma, but Andel definitely is one.’

Andel had gotten Ark into this mess. If Andel had figured out that Ark was an applicant, then that was the definite choice. The decisive and easiest way to stand on top of all the competition is to push off your opponents.

And most applicants probably had the same thoughts.

‘I, too, will now do the same without hesitation if given the chance.’

In the end, the game was like reality, a struggle for existence. He’d paid a price to realise his ignorance, but it was a relief that he’d come to know it sooner than later.

Because he wouldn't make the same mistake again.

He'd rather believe the NPCs than the competing users.

There wasn't even a need to look at the situation.

After having saved money fiercely, somewhere along the line, he had saved up a large sum of 5 gold in his bag.

There wasn't a user who had spent half a month in the village of Harun. It was the first time a user in Harun had saved 5 gold pieces. Because he'd defeated mice with constant perseverance, he had only 1 point left to restore. The problem was that his experience was at 99%...

'Do I have to die one more time?'

Now, dying wasn't even a big deal.

Ark had no intention of giving up on even one point.

In order to die yet another time, he went looking for Hansen to receive a quest

"I've completed the previous quest you gave me. Please give me another job."

But Hansen's response was strange.

Hansen looked over Ark with a peculiarly warm light in his eyes and said the following words.

"There is no longer any work to give you in this town."

"What?"

Ark was shocked.

There were no commissions? Doesn't this mean there wasn't a way to restore the remaining stat?

Just like in the past, he was still level 1. But because of his excessive fighting experience, he was confident he could knock out a Wild Dog.

But one death meant experience was cut by 30%. Because Wild Dogs gave a lot of experience, 30% exp would fill up before he could earn 6 points. In the end, it meant that even if he died fighting the Wild Dogs, he'd still lose out on points.

'I never thought these quests had a limit line.'

Even if you looked in the forums, there wasn't anything about the limit of requests in beginning villages. Although he hadn't counted, Ark had done over three hundred quests so far. Ark had also thought there were unlimited quests. To suddenly say there were no quests...

'Do I have to end it here and start with 1 point missing?'

It was similar to having something stick out like a sore thumb. If there were a lot of points missing, then he would simply overlook and ignore it. However, giving up with a single point missing didn't sit right with him.

At that moment, Hansen suddenly grasped Ark's hand and opened his mouth.

"Until now, I have seen a great amount of people in this place, but there has never been anyone who gave as much as you have for the village. I am touched."

'Well, that's pretty obvious. Are you nuts? Who would repeat these types of quests over 300 times?'

Ark was enraged but put a tight clamp on his anger and awkwardly tried to laugh.

"This place is like my home. If it's something I can do, of course I have to help out. It hurts my heart that there isn't anything else I can help with."

His intimacy with Hansen was already at its maximum. Though there wasn't anything that would come of it, there was no need to cut down the intimacy he'd raised.

This was something he'd felt so far while playing New World. The

NPCs talked and acted like real people. It was rumoured, each and every one of the NPCs globally could think independently like real people.

It was a given that they worked in the day and slept at night. There were even times when they caught sick and didn't open shop.

There were cases of them interacting with users and deciding the user needed to learn to speak more politely, which caused the intimacy to drop and their prices to rise.

"Don't you think there might be some other kind of job? I want to help so badly I'm going crazy."

"No, this is plenty now. You didn't look over anyone with contempt and worked without rest for this frontier village. You even went as far as to have several near-death experiences. I know it all. You are already a hero in this village. And I, with the feeling that I have nurtured you, venture to call you this. You are a Mouse Hunter!"

Suddenly, as cheerful music flowed forth, the information window appeared.

You have received Harun Village's Elder Hansen's title of Mouse Hunter. You are recognized as a specialist at dealing with mice.

When facing mice your attack power increases by 30%. When facing mice the chance of critical hits rises by 20%. The chance of evading mouse attacks rises by 20%.

*The received title increases all stats by a bonus of 1.

*Fame increases by 50.

You have learned a new skill. Spirit of the Cat (Beginner, Active): A cat's roar which, in the eyes of mice, will cause them to tremble in terror.

30 second paralysis. Attack and defense (Fighting Morale) decreases by 20% (Only applies to mice).

Mana consumption: 80

In a moment Ark's downcast face immediately brightened.

The ability to deal harder blows to mice made him happy, if nothing else. The important thing was the all stats +1! He had received an unimagined bonus. At the same time, he must have received a few experience points because the accumulated 99% experience had disappeared and gained a level.

Ark hastily opened his status window and confirmed it. Every stat was fixed at 16, and only his intelligence stayed at 15. In the corner, he saw the sparkling 10 points he'd won through leveling up.

'This kind of windfall...!'

Ark was smiling from ear to ear.

Now, Ark was no longer behind a stat point, and he was 5 points ahead of other people. This was an enormously difficult achievement.

Until now, there were almost no known ways to raise stats besides leveling up.

There were rumours which said if you did some layered quests or were bestowed with a title, stats would increase. However, there was no detailed information available, but Ark, who was still level 1 and in the beginner town, had gained a bonus of 6 points.

'Repeating the mice hunting quests 300 times paid off!'

He felt a tingly sense of delight. At the same time his hardships immediately melted away. Ark left the information window up for the moment and wondered.

He was worried about where to distribute the newly attained stats. Because he didn't yet know what his profession was going to be, he had to be careful with the distribution. In the end, Ark invested all the points in agility, as he'd previously planned.

Agility was, for the most part, a stat most professions needed. As it

was a good thing that beginners invest all their points in agility, Ark came to a conclusion.

‘There, now I should be able to leisurely start hunting Wild Dogs.’

Ark was just about to turn his body away, while wearing a satisfied smile.

“But hey, don’t you perhaps have any thoughts of trying a new job?”

“What? Didn’t you say there wasn’t any work?”

“No, well, it’s not village work, but there’s a job that bothers me a little...”

Ark turned around with an interested expression.

Until now, he hadn’t heard about anyone receiving a quest from Hansen besides the village ones. Nonetheless, after completing over three hundred mice assassination quests, Ark had also received only village quests. However, for the first time, he had received a different commission from Hansen.

‘Is it a quest available only after you’ve received the Mouse Hunter title?’

So to speak, it was the first. It was a given he was interested. Having already received a title and bonus stats, he was so happy he could hardly contain it. Ark quickly replied to Hansen.

“If it’s Grandpa’s request, I’ll do any work no matter what it is.”

“Thank you. But to be honest, even I can’t make a judgement on what this opportunity is. I’m not sure how dangerous it will be either. This was the reason why I couldn’t bring it up until now. Anyway, if you are willing to do it, look for the bar owner, Kraydon, and ask for the details.”

The Bar Owner Kraydon’s WorriesThe bar owner Kraydon has been agonizing over a new worry for several days.

Meet him and listen to his situation.

Level of Difficulty: —

“I will go look for him right away.”

Ark bowed and set off for the bar.

“Oh, Ark. As expected, it’s you who came.”

Kraydon greeted him with a welcoming voice.

Ark was probably the first user he’d called by name.

“Yes. Hi, how are you? So, I heard there’s some kind of problem?”

“Indeed. No, no there isn’t. To be honest, it’s not enough to call it a problem... Over the past few days I’ve been hearing some strange talk.”

“Strange talk?”

“As you know, mice have continued to appear no matter how many you’ve killed recently. You should know how much I suffered because of that, right?”

‘I’m the one who suffered. While receiving just 10 pieces of bread.’

Ark had a fit of anger, but on the surface he laughed naively and nodded his head.

“I know. But isn’t it okay these days?”

“It’s a little quieter. However, only a few days ago, I heard some strange talk from some guests. You know the Harilal mountain in this area, right? While crossing that mountain, they discovered a strange cave. Do you know what they said was inside the cave? The vile mice. They said a really unbelievable number of mice were living there.”

“Then has that swarm of mice been coming to the village from that cave?”

“There’s a high possibility that’s the case. But if tourists’ words were true, we should take action.”

Kraydon scratched his beard and gave Ark a look.

It was a look that hoped Ark would look into the details.

“Is it fine if I investigate that cave?”

“That’s right. If it’s the one who received the title of Mouse Hunter, I can entrust it to you.”

This guy can spread rumours throughout town quickly.

“Ok, I’ll take a look at once.”

Ark accepted without much thought. Then, his request window changed to ‘Unknown Cave Exploration.’ The difficulty level rose from ‘—’ to ‘G’ but he didn’t pay much attention to it. In the information he’d looked up, G difficulty quests were about the level of catching Wild Dogs.

“I’m thankful. Since I’ve found out the approximate area, I’ll mark it on your map.”

After Kraydon had finished what he was saying, the map window spread out.

The enormously large map was mostly black, and only the areas surrounding Harun were lit up. In the inner part of the Harilal mountain chain surrounding the village, there was a blinking light. As expected, it was an area that he’d never seen even once in the information sites.

So to speak, it was a hidden dungeon!

It was common knowledge that dungeons were treasure houses for items.

Although because it was a G difficulty quest in a beginning village he could not hope for an impressive item, for Ark who was equipping a rusted sword, even a single broken shield would be a big treasure.

Above all, discovering a dungeon no one else knew about held an impressive sense of achievement.

Ark then left the bar in a hurry to prepare for his journey.

‘I guess I should organize these now.’

There were a lot of odds and ends filling up his bag.

The 3 leathers and meat he'd gained while catching wolves and the 10 wheat breads he'd gained each time he completed one of three hundred mice-killing quests.

At first, he had eaten them as he'd received them, but after he started killing mice with ease the wheat breads accumulated. It was to the point that he would eat 1~2 of them when his satiety dropped all the way to the bottom.

And so after a while he had accumulated over 1000 wheat breads.

Even though they were stored by 100 pieces each, there wasn't any room for other items.

'I'll leave 100 pieces securely in my bag and let's sell the rest.'

Ark went to the General Merchandise store and sold his wheat bread. Originally the wheat bread was a product that couldn't be sold once it was bought.

But thanks to his maximum intimacy, there was no impossibility for Ark. Each wheat bread was worth 1 copper piece.

Of course, if he'd sold them to users, he'd receive 2 copper pieces, but he couldn't not afford to waste time for just a copper piece difference. For Ark, who only had a limited time to play the game, time was of the essence.

Selling 2000 wheat breads yielded 20 silvers.

Ark used that money to repair his equipment and left for the Harilal mountains.

First Dungeon

Yowwwl!

With a yelp, the Wolf's body was split in half.

The bodies of the Wolves slowly turned into fragments, dropping leather and meat.

Ark gathered the spoils and opened his Status Window.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Fame	50	Level	5
Profession	None		
Title	Mouse Hunter		
Health	155	Mana	100
Strength	26	Agilitiy	36
Stamina	26	Wisdom	16
Intelligence	16	Luck	16

“Looks like I can deal with a Wolf without too much of a problem.”

Even after receiving the request, Ark didn't immediately head off to the cave.

Although the dungeon was supposedly in the area around the starting village, a level two player couldn't be conceited enough to stroll up and down wherever he wanted. There was no knowing what dangers there might be.

The bitter experience of death penalties was a mistake Ark did not want to repeat. Therefore, he could only be at ease by gaining some levels before reaching the cave.

On the second day of dedicating himself to hard-core hunting, Ark finally reached level 5.

He invested all of the stat points from level 3 into Agility, and then raised his strength to increase his attack power. Lastly, he put 10 points into Stamina to increase his Health. Since every point of Stamina raised his Health by 5, it was now at 155.

This may be obvious, but Ark had become much stronger.

At first, his life had gone down by 30 when he was scratched by a Wolf, but now it was down to about 20. Besides, he had gained exceptional fighting experience from defeating at least ten thousand Mice!

If he was lucky, he could kill one Wolf after losing only 70 Health. It was something normal users at level five couldn't even be able to imagine.

As he hunted the way he wanted without a hitch, his confidence also rose.

'Should I slowly head over to the cave now?'

Ark rose from his seat. Only 30 wheat breads were left out of the 100 he had prepared.

He drank water whenever needed, but he had been hard-pressed to do so with the wheat breads.

If his satiety dropped to below 50, his stats temporarily fell.

‘There are good points to learning how to cook...’

In New World, the art of cooking was its own skill.

If the Cooking skill rose, it wasn't just the decreased fullness and Stamina that could be restored, but Strength and Stamina could also be temporarily raised. Additionally, a realistic taste could be savored. That's why everyone wanted to learn the Cooking skill.

Nevertheless, Ark still had no thoughts of learning to cook.

To learn a manufacturing skill, you have to meet the Master Artisan NPC, and the Cooking Master was in a faraway place. There would probably be an opportunity to learn it someday, so there was no reason invest the time to travel all the way there. Just learning the cooking skill didn't mean he'd be able to immediately make luxurious dishes. He wouldn't even be able to afford the ingredients to cook the luxury food.

There was also the inconvenience of having to carry the necessary ingredients. The bag Ark had gotten when he'd started was all he had, so he didn't have much storage space. He couldn't afford to carry cooking ingredients.

It was definitely a vital skill, but there was no need for him to go through hell just to learn it early game.

‘In any case, wheat bread is good enough for now. Since I have 30 wheat breads left, it should be enough for a round trip to the cave.’

Ark checked his map and began aggressively looking for the cave. He had already ventured deep into Harilal Mountain while hunting Wild Dogs and Wolves. The entrance to the cave was not far.

He followed the mountain slope, and after 30 minutes of walking, a copse of old oaks emerged. His eyes picked up the cleverly hidden cave entrance within the copse.

As soon as Ark put one foot into the cave, a sound effect similar to a sonorous shout rang out as the information window surfaced.

You have discovered a suspicious cave with an acrid smell and

eerie chills flowing out of the deep and dark cave in the Harilal mountain range.

You can feel that old secrets are being treasured here.

– You have discovered a dungeon no one has found until now.

Because you are a new explorer, if you register yourself in the Hall of Fame you will gain 500 experience and 50 fame.

Will you like to register?

“I refuse.” Ark replied without hesitation.

He had to hunt at least ten Wolves to get 500 experience. If he registered the cave in the Hall of Fame, a lot of people would find out about it.

For an undiscovered cave like this, there was no knowing what secrets or items might be waiting.

The greatest advantage of a newly discovered dungeon was that he could monopolise it. He hadn't scouted it yet, and there was a high chance that a higher level user might beat him to the punch.

On the New World home page, there were simple-minded users who uploaded dungeon item lists and many others who laid in wait while biding their time.

‘I'd rather kill ten Wolves than to register this cave in the Hall of Fame.’

Once again, he was glad that he had done a lot of research.

If he'd come here without knowing anything like the first time, he would've thoughtlessly registered it in the Hall of Fame.

However, Ark was not the insipid person he used to be. It was common sense for him to be more cautious and alert than monsters, NPCs or even other users.

‘Now, what exactly is in here.’

Ark controlled his trembling excitement and stepped into the dungeon.

The smell of something rotting was overflowing with realism and stimulated his senses. It was so strong and terrible that he wondered if there really was a need to make even smells so *real*.

It happened when Ark had walked 100 meters into the cave.

Suddenly, his foot sank into something squishy. Startled, he jumped and felt the ground wriggle and climb up. In another moment, the image of the blackness swallowing him flashed into his mind and he lashed out.

“Wha-What’s all this? Don’t tell me they’re all Mice?”

Ark turned pale with fright. The things that were crawling up from the ground were all Mice. That was not all. He hadn’t noticed it until now, but the pitch black Mouse swarm was covering the entire cave.

Every time the Mice moved, it was like a wriggling wave over the whole cave.

The Mice emitted a terrible bloodthirst that made his spine go cold. The courage he had dedicated himself to raising was no use. Ark urgently flailed in the darkness. With one blow, a number of Mice went flying away and rolled onto the ground. That was thanks to the Mouse Hunter title he’d received, which raised his attack power and chance of critical hits.

‘Hmph, do you know how many Mice I’ve killed until now?’

Once he saw how big of an effect his one blow had, his fear dissipated.

No matter how many there were, in the end they were just Mice. With the attack bonus, even if he didn’t land a critical hit, there was no need for a second blow.

Without rest, Ark mowed down the Mice that were coming at him from all sides.

However, the number of Mice did not seem to decline.

‘Damn, if it goes on like this there’ll be no end. I have to run away.’

“The Spirit of the Cat!”

Nyaaaaaaaaaaaaa-!

Although he had learned it, he hadn’t actually thought that he’d be able to use it. Anyway, the Spirit of the Cat demonstrated an absolute effect on the Mice.

As soon as Ark used the skill, a splitingly searing cat’s cry pierced the air and the shape of a black cat appeared above his head. Upon seeing the cat’s flashing eyes, the Mice were paralyzed with fear.

In that space of time, Ark cut down the Mice in his path and escaped to the outside of the cave.

Although the paralyzing effect on the Mice wore off quickly, they didn’t chase him out of the cave.

“Phew, what a relief.”

Outside, Ark ate wheat bread and drank water to restore his stamina.

For there to be an innumerable swarm of Mice... It was truly a dizzying experience.

‘But I can’t just give up like this.’

Ark checked his quest window.

The quest hadn’t been updated yet. That meant he had to go in further. No, quest aside, he already had experience hunting tens and thousands of Mice. It would be stupid of him to give up on the quest just because the cave was infested with Mice.

‘I charged right in since it was my first time and didn’t know a thing, but I should be fine if I calmly work my self forward from the entrance.’

Ark entered the cave, cleared about one hundred Mice, and retreated. After doing this cycle three or four times, a sound effect rang out and a message window popped up.

You have learned a new skill.

Sword Mastery (Beginner, Passive): You have taken the first step towards being a Swordsman.

From now on, whenever you wield a sword, all penalties received shall disappear.

You can now use your sword as an extension of your own hand. You have become more skilled with connecting your sword skills to circumstances when you use them with other skills.

You will gain bonus attack power, based on your sword skill level.

*It has become possible to use the effect of 'Swordsmanship' as a combo, with Hand-to-Hand Combat. (Swordsmanship follows the levels of Sword Mastery and Hand-to-Hand Combat and rises accordingly.)

'Sword Mastery has finally appeared.'

When he was hunting in the village, it was almost always with bare hands. It had been a waste to use the sword to kill the Mice and have to pay the repair fee. That's why Sword Mastery, a skill that other users would have gained first, had only just appeared. However, it was fortunate that he had learned Sword Mastery later.

When he was first catching the Mice, Ark hadn't known about the existence of a separate Sword Mastery skill. If he had known, he probably would have used his sword despite the repair fees.

But because he hadn't known, he had continued to fight with his bare hands. Thanks to that, he had been able to learn Hand-to-Hand Combat. Although Hand-to-Hand Combat was a bare-handed skill, the bonuses applied slightly to every weapon he used.

The bonuses from Sword Mastery— if they were combined with the bonuses from Hand-to-Hand Combat, then in actuality his attack power was raised by 1.5 times. That was an effect he was able to feel right away.

‘Moving is very comfortable!’

Although he was wielding a sword there were no breaks in his movements

The attacks flowed like water!

Thanks to the effect of Sword Mastery, while he was wildly swinging his sword, he was also able to perform kicks. The skill that had been impossible until a little while ago had become possible. And without resting, he was able to ward off the attacking swarm of Mice.

‘So I see that if a related skill is learned, then new abilities form too!’

For the Hand-to-Hand Combat he had regarded as trivial to be so useful was something he hadn’t imagined.

When his combined attacking power rose, he’s hunting speed rose exponentially.

With a full health bar, he was able to hunt two hundred Mice with ease.

After going into the cave five or six times like that, the entrance to the cave was jet-black with Mouse corpses. To make a rough estimate, a thousand of them had fallen over and died.

He had killed so many that his level had gone up to 6 as well.

Ark pushed past the disgusting Mouse corpses and went into the cave.

Just then, something deep within the cave sparkled.

When he got closer and looked, it was a body with only bones left.

If a user dies, his corpse disappeared with his revival.

‘So that must mean this is the corpse of an NPC.’

Then there was a big possibility that his quest information would be updated.

Ark sifted through the remains and discovered a small piece of

parchment on the inside.

It may have been something the corpse had written; there was minute handwriting written on the surface.

— ‘Unfortunate Traveler’s left-behind piece of parchment’ has been acquired.

3 years have passed since I received Sir Viscount Havestein’s command and set out searching for its trails. And with divine intervention, I was able to find what I was searching for by pure chance. But to think such an unimaginable demon would be living within the cave.

I was extremely caught off guard. If *that* was here, then I should have definitely anticipated trouble... Everything is my fault. Because I’ve already come carelessly into the cave, I’ve suffered a huge wound. Is the Viscount’s desire going to come to an end like this?

I am so bitter. It’s regretful but the secret within the darkness of this cave will be...

Whatever was written in continuation of the parchment had been gnawed away by Mice.

‘I can smell that there’s more to this somewhere.’

As he’d thought, the cave wasn’t simply a Mouse cavern.

He couldn’t understand the contents of the parchment, but there was definitely something inside the cave. The probability that the mentioned ‘that’ was an item was high. Ark’s motivation swelled inside him. He tucked the parchment away and continued into the cave.

“Euurgghh!”

With one blow, Ark threw three or four Mice to the floor.

There were only Mice within the cave. The Mice at the entrance had been nothing. Wherever he went, there were Mice running at him from all directions.

The number of Mice that were cut down and cut again seemed to increase more and more. But who was Ark? In Harun, he had cleared hundreds of Mice requests, and he had struck down as many as one thousand Mice and had earned the title of Mouse Hunter.

“You bastards, today you’ve really met your match. SPIRIT OF THE CAT!”

He may have been driven into a corner, but at least there was no risk of death.

When it became dangerous, he immediately used the Spirit of the Cat to paralyze the Mice and escaped from the cave.

Ark crazily ran in and out of the cave and slowly stepped further and further into the cave. After 3 hours had passed, yet another problem emerged.

‘I underestimated it because it was just a beginner dungeon, but it’s deeper than I thought. But I only have 10 wheat breads left now.’

The problem was the wheat bread. If his satiety dropped, the rate of health restoration would severely decrease. If it dropped to below half, his stats would fall temporarily, and if it fell to the zero, in the worst case scenario, he could even die. If he ran out of wheat bread, there’d be no way for him to continue exploring.

‘Do I have to go back to the village and stock up on wheat bread?’

That was a problem in itself. Even if you cleared monsters, after a certain amount of time they spawned again. And the smaller they were, the faster they respawned. Though he’d advanced hundreds of meters into the cave, if he went back to the village and came back, he’d have to start from the beginning.

‘I’m gonna go crazy. If I knew it’d be like this I wouldn’t have sold the wheat bread....’

As Ark was having those thoughts, a brilliant plan surfaced in his mind.

‘Could it be possible?’

Ark thought about it for a moment and stood up.

‘Well, there’s probably nothing to lose by trying.’

Swish, smack!

Ark was struck by a Wolf wandering on the outskirts of the cave.

The Wolf snarled and leapt at him. Now, Wolves and the like were no match for Ark.

Brandishing his sword like lightning, Ark put the Wolf into a near death. But when it came to the final blow, he put away his sword. While being careful not to kill the Wolf, he controlled his strength and struck it with his foot.

Yelp!

The Wolf whimpered as he kicked it aside.

However, Ark held no mercy for it. He stared at it as it panted, when it seemed to get a little better he beat it, and after doing this for three minutes the Wolf finally went into a frenzy.

Awooo!

The forest violently shook, as the Wolf cried out with all of its remaining strength.

A dozen Wolves who heard the heartrending story of their comrade rushed out at him.

‘It’s done!’

Ark had a smile full of satisfaction on his face as he rapidly fled towards the cave.

Ark quickly used Spirit of the Cat to paralyze the Mice and went deeper into the cave. When he reached a place where there were less Mice, the paralyzation wore off and the Mice piled themselves

layer upon layer on Ark.

‘I might even die if I fail!’

Ark didn’t pull out his sword and concentrated on using all his strength to evade the attacks. But because there were so many Mice attacking him, he felt as if his life was getting sucked out with a straw. To top it all, the Wolves were pitching in too, so in an instant, he was bitten an extreme number of times.

However, soon after, the Wolves stopped attacking him. The Mice had started to attack the Wolves too.

The Wolf horde was startled when the enormous swarm of Mice ran at them. However, they were Wolves; the Wolves couldn’t just tuck their tails and flee.

The Wolves bared their fangs and started attacking the Mice.

“Yes, just as planned!” Ark shouted in delight.

New World boasted a system that had few differences with reality. That meant whether they were animals or monsters, it was the same.

In fact, even when Ark came to New World, he had seen instances of Wolves catching and eating rabbits and field Mice. That meant that natural enemies applied too.

Ark, who had figured that out, had purposely gathered the Wolves and lured them into the cave.

The result was a huge success. The best, most perfect situation had opened up for Ark. In the middle of the cave, the Wolf horde were leaping and bucking and the Mice were enveloped in chaos. Since the Mice must have judged the Wolves to be more dangerous than Ark, they were all running at the Wolves.

Ark took a step back and watched the Mice and Wolves fight at his leisure. Each time his mana was restored, he used Spirit of the Cat.

After 10 minutes had passed in that manner, the Mice were almost gone.

“Hu hu hu. You did well.”

With a satisfied smile, Ark took care of the staggering Wolves.

Although they were in a dying state, the Wolves still gave the proper amount of experience.

Simply put, it was like taking a candy from a child!

To earn this unexpected benefit... It was like killing two birds with one stone.

‘Am I perhaps a genius?’

Although he’d thought of it himself, it was truly a brilliant method. There were no restrictions on what methods you used to solve a quest. You could even go as far as to kill the person who gave you the request.

Of course, in that case, the penalties attached were extreme, but the near infinite degree of freedom was one of New World’s charming centerpoints.

Even after that, Ark gathered all the Wolves in the area and had them fight with the Mice. Then he cleared off the Mice and Wolves that were left. Thanks to that, his level went up and up and he reached level 8, and although he’d only consumed 2 wheat breads, he was able to go deeper into the cave.

‘This is a really deep cave. Though I think I’ve gone really deep into the cave, I don’t see any worthwhile items... surely it’s not going to end with just Mice all the way to the end?’

Bit by bit, anxiety reared his head.

It was when Ark was having those thoughts, that all of a sudden, with a *thud* sound, the Mice that had been running at him crazily, abruptly flinched and ran, scattering left and right.

‘Huh? What’s this?’

Ark, who had been turning his head back and forth with an incredulous look, took in a sudden breath. From within the darkness,

on the other side of where the Mice had fled, were a pair of red orbs.

“W-What is this bastard?”

The slowly approaching red orbs took form.

Surprisingly, the orbs were the eyes of a Mouse.

It wasn't a Mouse the likes of which Ark had faced until now. It was easily 10 times bigger than a Wolf — a massive Mouse monster. Enraged that some bastard had intruded, it ROARED and the entire cave shook.

This terrible *fear*!

Ark's legs trembled and the strength went right out of him.

Terrified, the Wolves tucked their tails and fled out of the cave.

“Oh my god. No way, this bastard....”

Was the identity of the demon written of on the parchment this monster?

It was highly likely.

He had written that he'd gotten a fatal wound in the cave. And the place where he had died hadn't been far from the entrance. For he who had traveled a distance after receiving a command from an Aristocrat, to have been unable to escape the cave with a fatal wound... that had been an inconsistency.

‘He went all the way into the cave and met this demon. Then, while inflicted with a fatal wound, he ran away only to be attacked by a swarm of Mice, and he collapsed. That's what happened.’

If he thought like that, there were no inconsistencies. And it was highly likely that Ark would be punished with the same fate.

The dread Ark felt when he had first met a Wolf was incomparable to the horror that drowned him now. At this critical moment, the contents of the quest were updated.

– Boss monster ‘Black Bear Mouse’ has appeared.

The quest has been updated.

Unknown Cave Exploration → The Mysterious Creature Living Within the Cave.

You discovered a massive demon Mouse while exploring the cave.

There’s no doubt this demon Mouse has been controlling all the other Mice.

Escape the cave quickly and tell this truth to the bar owner Kraydon.

Level of difficulty: F

As expected, there wasn’t any mention of having to kill the demon Mouse. That was probably because at his current level, that was impossible. Moreover, just relaying the information about the demon Mouse had a difficulty level of F.

To be sure, he saw a large possibility that the pitch black Mouse swarm was going out of the cave to avoid the demon Mouse. All of the possible situations were the worst, but Ark’s eyes were actually glowing instead.

‘Then that means this Mouse is an lump of experience and items!’

His greed exceeded his horror.

An avaricious light sparkled in Ark’s eyes.

A boss monster was no different from a treasure chest that gave all adventurers the honor of finding it!

It was the first boss monster he’d met. He couldn’t just withdraw without fighting it.

‘Running away is gonna be tough anyways. Then let’s see, let’s find

out how strong you are and fight once!’

Ark courageously raised his sword and charged. However, in the next moment, his expression changed to one of embarrassment. He had swung the rusted sword with all his strength, but the demon Mouse didn’t even register the blow.

The thick leather covering the body had deflected the sword.

Squeek, kiayaa!

The huge Mouse lashed out with its front paw.

When he blocked it with his sword, his palm throbbed from the impact.

‘Oh my god, I blocked it with my sword but my stamina was still cut!’

A full bite from a Wolf cut his health by 30 points. Even though he’d blocked the attack from the demon Mouse, 30 health had been cut away. If he was really hit, he wouldn’t be able to endure two or three hits.

“Damn it, Spirit of the Cat!”

Nyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

When Ark used this as the last measure, the regular Mice were paralyzed. Shortly after, the demon Mouse roared and the Mice quickly regained consciousness.

‘Oh my god, Spirit of the Cat doesn’t work!’

Ark completely lost his previous ambition and turned his body away. In that moment, the Mouse swarm attacked him from all directions. While Ark was struggling in the Mouse swarm, a heavy blow connected with his back and pain exploded.

You have been stunned. All movements are blocked for five seconds.
--

Immediately, his health was cut by 50 and his consciousness

became fuzzy. Before his consciousness could return, he was hit by another attack. At last his health reached rock bottom, and Ark collapsed to the floor.

“Damn it!”

Ark fumed and went inside the bar.

After the demon Mouse’s attacks, Ark lost his life. When he opened his eyes, he was back at the Quartermaster at the entrance of Harun village. However, the quest had updated, he had to stop by the tavern to give necessary reports.

“Oh! Ark, you have returned safe and sound!”

As per usual, Kraydon greeted Ark gladly.

Ark immediately took a look around and shut his mouth before giving his report.

Inside the tavern, some users were sitting and eyeing them. Because Ark did not want anyone else to know about the existence of the cave, he called Kraydon out to the warehouse.

Kraydon’s face turned pale after Ark had told him what he had encountered inside the cave.

“The cave has been inhabited by a terrifying monster.”

“If that’s the case, this is no time to be standing around like this. Before the bastard comes and brings danger to the village, we have to tell Lord the truth. I’ll also ask him to send soldiers at once, to deal with the bastard.”

“Ah, you can’t!”

Ark shouted indignantly.

“What? Why not? What do you mean?”

“Um... Well, you know...”

‘Damn, I shouldn’t have talked about it.’

If the Lord dispatched Soldiers, then of course the users would also come to know of it.

If that happened, Ark will no longer have monopoly over the treasures of the cave. Soldiers might take it, or give onlooking players an opportunity to take it.

That would make Ark feel jealous to death.

‘That can’t happen, absolutely not! The cave is mine. Up until now, how much time have I invested in order to obtain treasures inside the cave? Now there’s one demon Mouse to kill, they can’t just come waltzing in at the last moment!’

However, he could not say his thoughts out loud.

After contemplating on what to do, Ark put his hopes on his intimacy with Kraydon and spoke.

“This is a job you requested of me. You believed in me and entrusted it to me, right? To repay your trust, I want to solve this with my own hands. So please give me a little more time. I will certainly repay your trust in me.”

“Yes, I didn’t know you cared that much about me. Of course, I believe in you. However, this isn’t a matter I can decide on by myself. The safety of the whole village is hanging on this. Even if we barely miss the timing, everything could become dangerous. I’m saying this can’t wait until you’ve become a worthy warrior.”

“I’m begging you. Give me a chance to restore my honor.”

Ark said it with an imploring light in his eyes.

Truthfully, he wasn’t the type of person to say those apologetic words to anyone. However, he was facing an NPC. Even though he acted almost exactly like a human, in the end he was still a computer-generated artificial intelligence. There was no reason for his pride to turn sour over saying such sorry words to an AI.

As Ark begged pathetically, Kraydon deliberated with an uncomfortable look.

“For you of all people to say such things, I can’t stay stubborn. That this village is peaceful right now is all thanks to you, after all. Alright, then let’s do it like this. For now I’ll give you ten days. If I don’t hear from you after that, I’ll ask Lord Jackson for help. Will that do?”

“Ten days.....”

One day in real life was three in the game.

So to speak, one week was three days in real life.

The time it had taken to clear the cave until now was already precious. Furthermore, to play the game he couldn’t give up his job, so even if he reduced his sleeping time to the maximum, the time he had left was a little more than a day.

And Kraydon was wearing an resolute expression that said he couldn’t make anymore exceptions. In the end, Ark nodded.

Though it was too much to ask... There was nothing he could do but to try.

“I understand. Let’s do that to put the village’s safety first.”

“I’m glad you understand. Then I’ll believe and entrust this to you.”

The quest has been updated.

The mysterious organism living within the cave: After hearing about the demon Mouse in the hidden cave, Kraydon has asked you to defeat the demon Mouse.

Stipulation, this request has a time limit of ten days. If you do not clear the demon Mouse within this time, Kraydon will tell the truth to the Lord, and the request will be automatically cancelled.

Level of difficulty: +F

As he’d anticipated, the quest that involved personally slaying the demon Mouse had a ‘+’ attached to the difficulty level. ‘+’ indicated an elite quest, something that had to be completed with a party.

F difficulty level was roughly for level 15 and below. That meant that

this was a request that could be resolved with a party of users at level 15.

However, when it came to parties now, Ark was the type of person to grind his teeth.

‘There’s no way I’m doing it with a party!’

To be honest, it was a matter Ark had thought about often. The quest’s contents were to deal with the demon Mouse, but at his level of 8, it was impossible.

‘A week from now. I have to somehow secretly go into the demon Mouse’s cave and take the treasure.’

As long as he was able to get the treasure, whatever happened to the demon Mouse was none of his concern.

As Ark was thinking that, he turned to leave. The closely watching Kraydon abruptly asked.

“After a closer look, it seems like you don’t have many supplies left.”

“Yes, as I spent time on the cave investigation, before I knew it....”

Ark replied with the most pitiful expression on his face. He thought he might be able to receive some free wheat breads. If he could save even 1 silver, he could put on a pitiful expression any day. Then, after staring blankly at Ark’s face, Kraydon opened his mouth again.

“Do you have any thoughts of learning how to cook?”

“Cooking?”

Ark questioned with an expression that said he didn’t follow.

“Actually, at one time I went traveling to a lot of places like you. The thing that troubled me the most was the problem of food. However, even if you learn how to cook, if you don’t have the ingredients, isn’t that just useless? So in order to solve that problem, I started learning how to cook in a completely different way. It’s a cooking method that doesn’t cost money, and there’s no need to carry around ingredients.”

“Does such a cooking method exist?”

It was really a sound that made his ears perk up.

“Alright, until now I haven’t found any worthy travelers, so I haven’t passed this down to anyone yet. If it’s you, who has unfailingly helped me this long with all your heart, it’s a different matter. You always carried an ample supply of bread with you, so I thought you wouldn’t need this.... if you want it, I’ll teach it to you.”

“Yes, please!”

You have learned a new skill.

Survival Cooking (Special, Beginner, Passive): The owner of the bar in Harun, Kraydon, created this original method of cooking. If you learn this skill, you can use almost every type of food found in nature as ingredients to make food. However, the result cannot be predicted.

Therefore, to find out the effects of the food, you may have to put your life on the line....

Ingredient Foraging (Beginner, Passive): You can gather a variety of food ingredients from nature.

‘Put your life on the line to discover the effect of food?’

The last part was troubling, but he was fairly satisfied with the skill. He could use all the ingredients he could find in nature to make food. Then if he just learned several recipes, he could endure for several days in remote places like the cave even without wheat bread.

Indeed, Survival Cooking had a name that suited it perfectly. For him to learn such a skill for free... NPCs had to be treated with friendliness after all.

And on top of that Kraydon pulled out a large pot and handed it to him.

“If you’re to do Survival Cooking, you’re going to need this too.”

You have acquired an iron pot for Survival Cooking.

“Thank you!”

Ark bowed and slipped out of the bar.

[T/N: In Korea, it is customary to bow to your elders when you see them and leave them.]

Because there was a schedule, he didn’t have a moment to waste. Ark immediately went to the general store and sold off all the Wolf leathers he had saved. Then he swallowed his tears and bought one recovery potion.

Until now, his spirit had somehow endured, but with the demon Mouse, he couldn’t spare money in facing it. This time, with his death he had lost 6 stats. Though he would probably be able to restore his stats killing the Mice in the cave, he didn’t have the time to waste on this again.

The price for a health potion that restores 100 life was a staggering 5 gold. Thanks to his intimacy, he only had to pay 3 gold and 50 silvers. The fortune he had accumulated bit by bit like a diligent ant was one fifth gone.

‘If I add the equipment repair fee to this....’

Automatically, he puffed out a sigh. However, Ark was resolute.

This was an investment. If he could get just one decent treasure from within the cave, even that would compensate for everything. For the last time, Ark had his rusted sword and leather clothes repaired at the blacksmith and set off for the cave again.

Desperate Struggle with the Demon Mouse

As Ark scaled the Harilal Mountains, he used his Foraging skill to gather all the grass and fruit he could see, cramming them in his bag.

It was so he could test out his newly learned Survival Cooking.

As he'd expected, when he arrived at the cave it was crawling with mice again. Because he had cleared the mice swarm before, he was able to recover 2 stat points in just 1 hour. However, his satiety was down to half and his health recovery rate was falling.

It was time to use his newly learned skill.

'Well, shall I just put this and that in and mix it up?'

Ark rummaged around his bag and put mushrooms and some strange looking grasses in his pot. With the Survival Cooking pot, there was no need to make a separate fire. All you had to do was put in the ingredients, and everything would be automatically heated and food would be made. He added water and after about 1 minute, an explosion suddenly erupted from the pot.

You have failed Survival Cooking. All the ingredients have been consumed.

Even after that, he tried again and again with different ingredients, but he just kept getting the failure message. Finally, with his seventh attempt, he completed a soup that radiated a fragrant smell.

You have successfully used Survival Cooking. This is a dish made with the use of Land Fruit and Cochran. However, without personally tasting it, there is no way to tell what kind of dish it is. After confirming its taste, the recipe and its special effects will be

||automatically recorded in the Cookbook.||

Ark quaffed a sip of the soup without a second thought.

There was a sharp feeling accompanying the food down his throat and, suddenly, his vision yellowed. The strength from his body was sucked right out. As his back helplessly twisted, his head struck the floor.

‘W-What’s going on?’

-You have been poisoned with a paralytic poison!The food you have made using Survival Cooking is ‘Fragrant Poison Soup.’The effects of being poisoned are paralysis, a decrease in satiety and you cannot move for 10 minutes. It’s better not to make this soup.

‘Holy cow, so this was what it meant by dangerous?’

Then didn’t that mean that he’d have to suffer these kinds of effects every time he made a new dish? Fortunately, he had already cleared all the wolves and mice in the area, but if he had haphazardly made the dish and eaten it, he might have even died then and there.

After groaning and moaning for 10 minutes, Ark was finally able to stand up. With a shudder, he tore into the wheat bread he had brought just in case.

“Damn, no wonder he taught me this so meekly.”

After all, life was not that easy.

* * *

‘What the hell should I do with that mouse bastard?’

Hyun Woo’s mind was entirely filled with thoughts of the Demon Mouse.

It had already been two days since Kraydon had updated the quest. During the past two days, he had gone into the cave dozens of times, but he gained nothing. The cave’s structure was complicated, but in the end the roads all converged into one place: the lair of the impudently resistant Demon Mouse.

He had also thought about luring the Demon Mouse to a different place and going in. However the Demon Mouse didn't move an inch from where it was planted. In the end he just wasted time in a state where he couldn't do anything. All he managed to do was to restore his cut stat points.

'Is there really nothing I can do but to give up like this?' Hyun Woo puffed out a sigh.

The deadline was until tomorrow afternoon. But since he had to go to work in the day, if he couldn't finish this up by tonight, the quest would be cancelled and the Soldiers would be on the move. The room for Hyun Woo to claim his rights would disappear.

"Eeeek!"

A shriek burst out from within the warehouse.

It was Jung Hye Sun, the night university student who worked part-time at the mart. Though she was smart enough to earn a scholarship, the reason why she was at a night university was because of family circumstances.

He hadn't heard the details, but it seemed like a tough situation.

After being awakened by cold reality, Hyun Woo had become a cynical person. He didn't even get along with his co-workers at work. There were times when he'd been cursed at for that kind of personality. Still, he wasn't like that to everyone. To the few people who truly worried about him, Hyun Woo also treated them with sincerity.

No, could it be that it was their reaction to distance themselves from anyone they couldn't use? He had cared about those kinds of exploiters more than he needed to.

In this case, Jung Hye Sun was suffering through a plight like his own. After learning about her family situation, he had taken care of her as if it was his business to. He had taken responsibility for her mistakes, and sometimes he gave her sodas that he himself hadn't bought and drank for many years. If he'd had a little sister, it would be that feeling.

His consciousness abruptly awakened, Hyun Woo rushed to the scene.

“Hye Sun, what’s going on?”

“Mouse, a mouse...”

Hye Sun, who had collapsed on the floor, pointed to an area as she trembled. As he turned his eyes towards the area, a baby mouse quickly escaped in between some boxes.

Hyun Woo watched the mouse with annoyed eyes and muttered.

“Damn, mice are a problem whether it’s here or there.”

“What? Are there mice at oppa’s house, too?”

“No, there’s something like that.”

As Hyun Woo cleared away the boxes to find the runaway mouse, Hye Sun was appalled.

“Don’t, don’t do that. What are you going to do if the mouse comes out again?”

“It has to come out so I can knock it down.”

“Oppa, aren’t you even afraid of mice?”

“Scared? Of mice?”

Hyun Woo laughed. To be sure, in the past he would have been a little scared. These days, there weren’t a lot of chances to see a mouse. However, now he felt no difference between a mouse and a fly.

New World’s mice were more realistic than reality. He had killed ten thousand of those mice in the village and had killed thousands of them today at dawn. In addition, he was currently waiting for an opportunity to kill the Demon Mouse. Knocking down one baby mouse was no problem.

“Just wait. I’ll thrash it right away.”

“Don’t, don’t do it. I don’t want to see it again. There’s nothing in the world more scary than mice to me. I’m afraid just thinking of mice being here. I think I’ll have to tell the owner right away and at least sprinkle some rat poison.”

It was then that Hyun Woo, who was cleaning up boxes, flinched.

Hye Sun was startled and asked with a shaky voice, "What's wrong? Did the mouse come out?"

"Hye Sun, what did you just say?"

"What? That we've got to put out some mouse poison...."

"That's it!" Hyun Woo shouted while clapping his hands. "Why didn't I think of that? It'll be simple if I do that!"

Hyun Woo suddenly turned around, grasped Hye Sun's hand tightly, and shook it enthusiastically. "Thanks, Hye Sun! Thanks to you, I've finally found the way to resolve this!"

"What? What?" As Hyun Woo suddenly grasped her hand and shook it, Hye Sun turned tomato red.

* * *

"Hu hu hu, you doomed mice bastards. Today is the day you bastards die."

Ark had a satisfied smile as he looked at the bubbling, boiling pot.

The tasty smelling, strongly aromatic food was Ark's masterpiece, the 'Fragrant Poison Soup.'

Ark stored enough of the completed soup into some pouches and entered the cave. Thanks to the repeated attacks of Ark and the wolves, the cave was already mostly depleted of mice. When he reached the innermost part where the Demon Mouse was holing up inside, a great number of mice rushed at him while making menacing noises.

Ark fought the rats with his sword and entered further inside.

Grrrrrrrrr.

Within the darkness, the red lights sparkled. He had seen it so often that it didn't even occur to him to be scared. They were annoying, flashing eyes that said the Demon Mouse was there once again. Thinking the Demon Mouse was a hindrance, he went forward.

"Don't glare at me like that. Today I've come to bring you a present."

Ark strode confidently to the Demon Mouse, then grabbed and threw the pouch. The Demon Mouse reflexively swung its front paw at it and tore a large hole in the pouch, which spilled the Fragrant Poison Soup.

The Demon Mouse hesitated for a bit. However, no matter how large a mouse was, it was still a mouse in the end. There was no way it could go against its nature. After crinkling and darting its nose in and out, the Demon Mouse licked the soup.

On the outside, poisonous mushrooms are beautiful. The Fragrant Poison Soup also appeared harmless from an outward glance. The smell was incredibly good, and the taste was also alright in its own way. The soup must have been to the Demon Mouse's liking because, after eating it once, it thoroughly licked the floor. The other rats had also fallen for the seemingly harmless exterior of the soup and swarmed around.

"That's right, eat lots." Ark threw the rest of the bags with a pleased expression.

Soon afterward, the Fragrant Poison Soup finally took effect. The greedily lapping small mice convulsed and stretched out. Then, the Demon Mouse must have sensed that something was wrong, because it cried out with a sharp sound. But by then, it was too late.

His trump card cooking was already taking effect in the Demon Mouse's stomach.

The Demon Mouse stumbled around and limply collapsed on one side. Belly-up, with its four legs pointed skywards, it started to tremble.

"Kekeke, you high and mighty mouse shit. You're no match for me. Then, shall I take a look at whatever you've been hiding? No, I should get my revenge on all the times I've suffered first, right?"

Ark hummed a song to himself as he approached the Demon Mouse. Then, in front of his eyes, a terrifying claw suddenly shot out at him. As Ark instinctively pulled out his sword and raised it, his hands shook.

“How, how could this be....!”

Ark's face went pale. The Demon Mouse he had thought was completely paralyzed had swung its front paw at him.

Something was wrong! Ark urgently turned his body to run away. However, the Demon Mouse had already blocked half of the exit with its body.

‘Damn it, am I going to die again?’

Just then, when a hopeless expression surfaced on Ark's face, the Demon Mouse breathed hoarsely and wobbled as it stepped towards him.

‘No, the drug is working. It's just that in comparison to its body mass, the drug dose was too small, so the effect is weaker.’ His thoughts racing, a light flashed in Ark's eyes.

New World wasn't a game where you could simply hit and slash anyways. How well he could handle a fighting situation was also important. So there was no reason why he couldn't handle a Demon Mouse that had consumed a paralyzing drug and couldn't properly steady its body. In addition, Ark was already at a state where he had achieved level 10.

“Alright, then even if I die, I'll see this to the end!” Ark brandished his sword and began to attack the Monster Rat.

Maybe it was the effect of his level ups, or because of the paralysis, but his attacks were received differently than before. Every time Ark swung his sword, blood spurted out and the Demon Mouse staggered. However, Ark didn't hurry.

‘The drug effect lasts for 10 minutes anyway. There's no need to rush.’

Ark circled around the mouse and while ceaselessly thrusting his sword. The Demon Mouse brandished its front paw several times, but it lacked the power from before. Ark was usually able to slide past the attacks without difficulty.

However, the system was set up so that avoiding every attack was impossible. As time passed, the injuries on Ark's body grew and his health fell. After 5 minutes of attacking, the Demon Mouse's body turned reddish.

'It's in critical condition! I can see the end at last!' The critical condition was a phenomenon that appeared after the health was down to 1/10.

Ark pushed the Demon Mouse with more boldness. But when his victory was almost assured, the Demon Mouse suddenly howled and sprang to its feet. Its front paw flew towards him with a speed incomparable to before.

"The hell, wh-what's going on?" Ark barely managed to block the attacks and looked at the Demon Mouse with a devastated expression.

There were still 3 minutes to go until 10 minutes was up. But the paralysis must have completely worn off because the Demon Mouse was charging at him with full speed.

With one blink of the eye, Ark had been forced to go on defensive.

It was too much to defend against, let alone attack. He saw his health dropping each time he blocked an attack. After blocking about ten attacks, the sword shattered.

The rusted iron sword's durability has reached 0 and it has broken.

'Damn it!'

At last, even the sword he'd believed in disappeared.

His remaining health was 23. Ark hurriedly downed the health restoration potion. However, the Demon Mouse didn't miss that action and struck out with its front paw, hitting Ark's chest. Fortunately, since he had used the health potion, his life was barely saved, but the situation was grim. Like the Demon Mouse, Ark's body entered critical condition and his body became red.

'Damn, what kind of situation is this...'

As he dodged the front paw that kept flying at him, Ark exploded in rage. Now he could only endure one hit, at best. If a second hit flew out at him, his cold head would undoubtedly hit the floor.

‘No, that can’t happen! If I give up here, then I have to give up this dungeon! If I’m to die, then I might as well bite the bullet! You damn mouse shit, I’ll take you down with me!’

Ark flung himself at the Demon Mouse. The front paw flew out and smacked his chest, but Ark didn’t withdraw. With all his strength concentrated on one hit, his fist struck the bastard’s forehead.

With your Indomitable Will, you have found the Demon Mouse’s weakness. You have dealt a fatal blow.

In that moment, along with the flashing message, the Demon Mouse’s movements just... stopped.

The Demon Mouse reared, heaved a steaming breath, and collapsed with all its limbs splayed out. Then, the Demon Mouse’s appearance slowly turned transparent. With that, his situation became clear.

It was Ark’s victory!

“Is, is this it?”

As if to confirm his thoughts, there was a pleasant sound that accompanied his 1 level up.

His legs belatedly began to tremble, as though he had cramps. As he struggled to raise his head, his life was at just 2. While on the verge of death, in critical condition senses his attack power and chance of critical hits had risen. In addition, his Hand-to-Hand Combat skill’s hit chance and evasion added up so the damage he’d taken was a minimum, he was able to drag out the maximum damage for a miraculous victory.

“Ah, now isn’t the time to be standing around!” Ark, who was absent-mindedly staring at the Monster Rat for a brief time, suddenly raised his head.

There were still hundred-odd mice still left in the cave. If the

paralysis wore off on the mice while his health was at rock bottom, he'd be finished then and there. Ark straightened and glared fiercely at the mice.

"Hey, you little mice shit! Shall I make you pay for all suffering you caused?"

Fear flashed into the eyes of the shivering, convulsing mice.

* * *

"Now, shall I take a look at the spoils?"

Ark, who had completely trampled and killed all hundred-odd mice, checked the spoils the Demon Mouse had dropped. But his expression quickly turned to one of disappointment. The Demon Mouse he'd finally killed after escaping the throes of death multiple times hadn't dropped items that were as good as he'd hoped.

There was only a thick leather and a worn sword.

Black Bear Mouse Leather (Ingredient) The leather of the Demon Mouse, who watched over numerous mice inside the mysterious cave. It is strong enough to block a decent sword, and its ability to block the cold is excellent. It can't be simply used, but if it is processed well, it looks like it can make quality armor.

"Armor... this looks pretty useful, huh?"

Corroded Sword			
Weapon Type	One-Handed Sword		
Attack Damage	1~4	Durability	20/20
Weight	15	Usage Restriction	None

The sword of someone the Demon Mouse ate. It is so corroded that its original form is hard to discern. It's hard to expect much attack power from this sword.

"I guess I can't use this."

Ark shook his head, crestfallen. Even the Rusted Sword had 5~8 attack power. The Corroded Sword was much weaker than that. But it was too early to be disappointed.

There was still the dungeon's treasure that the Demon Mouse had protected. With high hopes, Ark went to the back of the cave. However, even when he'd arrived at the dead end, he couldn't see a worthwhile item anywhere.

"What, what's this? Surely that's not all?" Ark muttered with a dumbfounded face.

Then, as he was turning to go, something caught on his foot.

He looked down to find a slate with a chipped corner. When he lifted the slate, the information window popped up.

You have acquired a mysterious slate.

The quest information window popped up.

The Secret of the Mysterious Slate

You have obtained the slate the Demon Mouse was guarding in the cave. It is an enigmatic slate containing a secret. The surface is covered with unknown characters. It appears that this is the item the dead person in the entryway was looking for. It would be good to deliver this to whoever needs it.

Difficulty: F

'A quest item! Then is this connected to another quest?'

If that was the case, then this wasn't a bad ending. It was a quest that linked with the original, after all. The task was from the single

story of the linked quests. Though it would take a lot of effort and time, there were many cases of people resolving them to the end and earning a high level item.

It was too early to throw away his hopes on getting rich quick.

* * *

“W-What did you say? Did you say that you really got rid of the Demon Mouse?” A surprised Kraydon asked while looking at Ark.

Ark nodded grandly and showed him the leather.

“If it’s this big of leather, then it’s definitely the Demon Mouse. Very impressive.”

You have dealt with the Demon Mouse! The quest is completed.
--

With a drumming sound he hadn’t heard in ages, the quest was completed.

Your level has risen.

His level went up by 2 at the same time, bringing him up to level 13. Since he had resolved a quest that was impossible for a level 10 player, the rewards were that much greater. That was not all. As a reward, Kraydon gave him 10 Gold and told him to go to Hansen.

As soon as Hansen saw Ark, his spittle flew as he congratulated him. “I heard the news. You accomplished a truly huge feat! Since you gallantly stood against the colossal Demon Mouse and knocked it down, I can safely call you Mouse Master.”

You have received Harun Village’s Elder Hansen’s title of Mouse Master.
You have now become an expert at dealing with mice. When fighting mice, your attack power increases by 50%. In front of mice, the chance of landing a critical hit rises by 40%. Because you have become a master at fighting mice, the chance of evasion rises by 40%.

*The received title gives a bonus increase to all stats by 1.
*Fame increases by 100.

As a Mouse Master, the skill Spirit of the Cat has increased to Intermediate.

Spirit of the Cat (Intermediate, Active): The cat's roar and flashing eyes have become more bloodthirsty, making mice and other similarly small monsters tremble in terror. Paralysis for 1 minute. Attack, defense, and fighting morale decreases by 20% (All mice, 50% effect applies to smaller monsters)

Mana consumption: 100

It was an additional bonus, awesome enough to make him faint.

Well, to complete the quest with normal methods, the user would have probably had to be at least level 15. Since a level 10 player had finished the quest on his own, he more than deserved the reward. Along with that, it was linked to another quest.

This was the definition of an opportunity.

‘Huhuhu, I may even have to thank Andel and Bulma.’

If he hadn't been used by Andel and Bulma, Ark wouldn't have even considered doing three hundred mice-catching quests. Thanks to enduring the lost stat restoration, point by point, an opportunity had opened up for him.

Of course, he didn't really have any thoughts of thanking them. Earning this opportunity was the result of Ark's own vicious perseverance. The desire for revenge that he harbored towards those bastards hadn't softened at all.

“Take this as well.”

“What is that?”

“Granny Johansson, who you often took care of, passed away a few

days ago. However, before she died, she did away with the little fortune she had. I was holding onto what she said she wanted to leave to you. It should be about 30 gold.”

Though she was an NPC, hearing that the person he’d personally taken care of had died made his heart heavy. Of course, despite that, Ark was not one to deny the offered money.

It was his duty to fulfill the will she had left.

Anyway, with this, Ark received a bonus of 12 stat points at only level 13. In addition, though he was at a level where he should only be getting copper coins as rewards, he had received a generous sum of money. After Ark pocketed the money, the slate suddenly came to mind and he asked.

“Grandpa, do you happen to know a Viscount named Haverstein?”

“Of course. Sir Viscount Haverstein is none other than the Lord Jackson who governs this district. But why are you asking me this so suddenly?”

“It’s nothing. I’m leaving, then.”

‘It’s simple. I’ve completed gathering information on the next quest.... Now I just have to prepare for my journey.’

With an open smile, Ark found the Smithy. Then, he extended the Demon Mouse leather and requested the manufacture of leather armor. He also left the corroded sword in their care. It was because he had no replacement for the rusty iron sword that broke.

After placing the item in their care, and waiting a day, he went back to reclaim it and the repair on the armor and sword was complete. With an examination of the resulting items, he found the initially disappointing spoils transformed to what he’d originally expected.

The Smithy owner spoke with a boastful expression.

“Since it was your request, I used the best of my skills.”

Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor (Enchanted)
--

Armor Type	Leather Armor		
Defense	40	Durability	90/90
Weight	20	Usage Restriction	None
<p>Armor made from the leather of the Demon Mouse that was watching over the mysterious cave. Its elasticity is outstanding, and because it is covered with strong, coarse fur, its defense is considerable. Its ability to block the cold is especially outstanding, so for wintertime travelers, it is the best armor.</p> <p>Option: Agility 2, Cold Resistance 20</p>			

Sharply Shining Sword (Enchanted)			
Weapon Type	One-Handed Sword		
Attack Damage	8~12	Durability	20/20
Weight	15	Usage Restriction	None
<p>A sword created by whetting the Corroded Sword to a keen edge. Although the durability has fallen because the edge was sharpened to great thinness, its sharpness is without peer. It is comfortable to use because of its light weight. It is better for a beginner to use than a long sword.</p>			

Option: Attack speed +5

Of course, they fell a little short from the Smithy's top leather armor and long sword.

However, those items were nothing more than displays.

If you considered the enormous sum of gold demanded as their prices, no matter how much a user saved money, they'd have to be at least level 20~25 to be able to finally buy those. On the other hand, Ark had been able to acquire enchanted equipment with Options at level 13—he had truly struck it rich.

He also had the inheritance from Granny Johansson and the money he'd earned from brokering the equipment repairs with users. He'd made 60 gold in just 25 days in Harun Village.

Compared to the beginning, he had made great strides.

Ark talked with all the people of Harun Village. He thought there might possibly be another hidden quest. However, there weren't any NPCs who gave him any more quests even when he asked a few times. If that was the case, then there wasn't a need for him to linger in the beginner village any longer.

Ark quickly organized his gear and strode onwards to Jackson Castle in search of Viscount Haverstein.

* * *

"Have all of the applicant reports come in?"

"Yes, we are currently reading them."

"Are there any guys that caught your interest?"

"Quite a few."

Kim Gwon Tae sorted through a few pages of the report and handed them to Ha Myung Woo.

The applicants in Global Exos' recruitment exam submitted scheduled reports, which allowed the evaluators to clearly track the applicant's progress.

As he glanced through the report, Ha Myung Woo asked with a surprised expression, “Hoho, it’s only been twenty days, but are there 20 users who are already at level 50?”

Compared to other games, it was 3~4 times harder to level up in New World.

In other words, if they had been playing another game, they would have reached level 150~200 in just twenty days. It was an unprecedented speed.

“Naturally, it’s a number that’s impossible to reach by playing the game normally. Although they’ve written in the reports as having done it on their own strength, there seems to be an immense number of people who have supported them. Though it’s not the method we wanted, do you think it will be okay?”

“Didn’t you predict this much from the beginning?” Ha Myung Woo replied airily, as if it wasn’t a big deal.

Since the very beginning of their plan to pick an employee from the game’s result, they had predicted the troublesome collaboration to some extent.

It was a test to enter the world-renowned corporation, Global Exos.

There were bound to be people who were pouring an outrageous sum of money into the game, and there would also be people who requested their family, relatives, and even their friends to mobilize and support them. In the end, the applicants who had been watching until now chose to use similar methods. If the applicants were that enthusiastic and absorbed, then it wasn’t such a bad thing for Ha Myung Woo.

“Funding and making use of personal connections are also skills. That’s why we allowed even the idiots who faked their resumes to participate. If mongrels like them cling more desperately, the exam standards are going to naturally rise. In a situation where we can’t directly participate in the system, there’s no better method than that.”

“Are you considering accepting any of them?”

“As if.” Ha Myung Woo laughed as if he was telling him not to joke. “We merely needed users we could control. How are the others?”

“They’re approximately level 30~40. It would be less if they used normal methods.”

“And what about the ones you pulled out?” Ha Myung Woo gestured at the reports piled up on one side of the table.

“Ah, those are the people who are playing the game with rather unique methods.”

“Unique methods?”

“Yes. Should I say they’re stupid, or should I say they’re brilliant... They’re circulating in the lowest of the levels. In a sense, they have been taking full advantage of the system. Even among them, these fellows have caught my eye. Will you take a look?”

Kim Gwon Tae extended two reports. One of them was on an applicant named ‘Shambala.’ The other was on ‘Ark.’ It was Kim Hyun Woo’s report.

As he scanned through the reports, Ha Myung Woo shook his head and laughed. Both of them were still under level 20.

“What we want isn’t a person who properly enjoys the game. We want a person who can properly utilize and cunningly move forward in the game.”

“Isn’t it true that levels aren’t everything in new world?”

“Of course. But their level can indicate and judge their skill.”

“Well, that’s true.”

“If you want to properly furrow into a game, then you’ve got to be smart. It’s hard to say that a person who couldn’t even get to level 20 in twenty days has a good head. Erase them from the consideration list. And didn’t this one fake his resume?”

“Is he eliminated after all?”

“There’s no way we can read all 2000 reports each time they come in. We’ll need to thin them out in the process. Still, we don’t need to inform them of their disqualification right now. While we’re testing we need to be ‘fair’, after all. It’s bothersome if curs like him get scared and pull out.”

“I understand.”

The reports of Gwak Yong and Kim Hyun Woo were thrown into the shredder. On the applicant list, ‘DISQUALIFIED’ was written in red letters by their names.

* * *

“For the past few days, your cheeks have been sunken in like a person who hasn’t slept enough. Did something difficult happen? Well, why wouldn’t it be difficult.....” His mom, who was looking at him pitifully, heaved a sigh.

When she worried about *him* with her quavering voice, her pale white face, and thin vein, bony arms that were pierced with 3~4 needle drips, Hyun Woo’s heart ached.

Truthfully, her concerns weren’t unfounded. After Hyun Woo connected to New World, he hadn’t been able to sleep properly.

‘The game is as important as my real life. I’m behind in comparison to the other applicants, and though I don’t have a lot of time to concentrate on the game, I knew it was gonna be tough from the start. That’s right. Like Team Leader said, if succeeding or failing the exam isn’t simply based on level, even I might have a chance. As long as there’s hope, I can’t just dejectedly give up.’

Having made his resolution, Hyun Woo had only slept 3 hours a day and devoted himself to the game.

And for the last few days, after he started to fight the Demon Mouse, he’d spent the nights with hardly a wink of sleep. Even this morning, he’d briefly slipped into a nap before his alarm went off and he hastily slapped some clothes on and left.

With his haggard face and grubby clothes, he was definitely in bad shape. However, Hyun Woo answered with a falsely bright face. “Nothing difficult happened.”

“I’m sorry. I’m called a parent, but I’m just being baggage...”

“I told you it’s not like that. It’s just that I’ve been playing around with my friends until late at night these days, so I kinda haven’t gotten

enough sleep.”

“But if I wasn’t like this, right now even university....”

“Mother.” Hyun Woo abruptly grasped his mother’s hand and smiled.

“I’m really perfectly okay. Honestly, I like working a lot more than going to university. Work is fun, and my coworkers treat me well too. There are also people who always help me, too. There’s no reason for you to worry, Mother. Ah, there is one thing that’s difficult.”

“What is it?”

“That I can’t eat the mixed noodles (bibimgooksul)^[1] you make.”

“You little... Saying such pointless words....”

“It’s the truth. That’s the only food I really want to eat. Although I tried to imitate it, the taste wasn’t right. So get better quickly and make it for me, please. Okay?”

“Alright. Okay.”

Hyun Woo shot a wink at her and chattered, and finally his mother laughed.

Although he had integrity, his personality wasn’t charming. In the past, he wouldn’t have even been able to imagine saying words like these. But somewhere along the line, in a way that was strange to even him, these kinds of words slowly came out.

This was also one of the effects of playing New World.

‘To think that I could use the experience from taking care of Granny Johansson like this.’

When Hyun Woo had taken care of Johansson in Harun Village, there had been things he’d naturally learned.

At first, it had just been a quest that he’d taken while crying to himself to get to the next one. As repeated the quest, he had realized something. The rewards correlated to how well Hyun Woo treated her—the better he did, the more the reward.

The default reward was 1 Silver, but there were cases when he received more than that if he poured all his heart into nursing her. The time it took was the same anyways, so it was much better if he could receive 1 more Silver.

After finding out about that, Hyun Woo was able to dive into the words and actions Johansson wanted in advance.

What was fun was that his trained senses from the game could transfer to reality too. Although he couldn't use the Nursing skill from the game to increase vigor and courage, just making his mother feel better was not a problem.

It was a small, unnoticeable change, but it made his mother's expression brighten.

'Why wasn't I able to do something this simple for her in the past?' With that alone, Hyun Woo felt that playing New World was worth it.

"Then I'll stop by again the morning after tomorrow. I'll leave the fruit here, so please eat them when you can."

Hyun Woo put down the fruit basket and energetically turned around. After hearing from the doctor that fruits would help with the treatment, Hyun Woo always bought her a fruit basket once a week. Though it was the Hyun Woo who couldn't bear to buy himself one ramen, if it would help his mother recover, he would buy her not just fruit, but wild ginseng^[2].

Hyun Woo dragged his exhausted, sleep-deprived body to the Mart.

After laboring for 6 hours a day while moving heavy crates here and there and stacking them, the monthly wage he received was 1,500,000 Won (USD\$1,500). In addition, he earned 2,000,000 Won (USD\$2,000) from working 3 part-time jobs, each one 3 hours long.

Global Exos paid their employees 1,500,000 Won (USD\$1,500) a month. The amount Hyun Woo earned by working 15 hours a day was 5,000,000 Won (USD\$5,000) a month.

With his income, he could barely cover his mother's hospital fees and living expenses, the interest on loans, and since he needed to repay the payments for her to be discharged, no matter how much he tightened his belt, he lived a continuously suffocating life. So no matter how difficult it was or how much his body hurt, he could not stop working.

Hyun Woo shook his head vigorously.

‘Mother is suffering many times more than I am. Yeah, I can’t say weak things and the like.’

After finally finishing a bout of work, Hyun Woo squeezed in between some boxes and briefly closed his eyes.

The reason why he was able to endure with 1 hour of sleep a day was that he slept while riding the subway, or he napped a little in his spare time at work. Of course, those sweet moments of respite were only possible thanks to his co-worker Hye Sun’s help....

“Oppa, oppa!”

At the sound of someone shaking him awake, Hyun Woo sluggishly opened his eyes.

Hye Sun was shaking him with an anxious look on her face.

“Huh? What’s going on? Did the wares come in?”

“A call came in saying they’re coming in a little bit. The owner is gonna come down soon.”

“Alright, I’d better wake up if I don’t want to be nagged at.” Hyun Woo muttered as he thoroughly stretched himself.

Hye Sun asked with a worried look in her eyes. “Oppa, did you take on yet another part-time job?”

“Huh? Nah. On the other hand I’ve dropped a few of ‘em.”

“Then why are you drowsing like this whenever you can these days?”

“Yeah, that’s....” Hyun Woo scratched his head and made a sheepish look. “The truth is, lately I’ve been playing a game at home.”

“Oppa plays games too?”

“What’s this? In the past, there was a time when I played games like crazy. As soon as it was the weekend, if I clicked my mouse the night was spent, and if I drummed away at my keyboard it was already dawn. There are over 3~4 online games where I reached

the max levels.”

In those days, he really didn't know how the days passed and was completely absorbed in the game. His parents were on the lenient side, so he didn't even have any memories of getting scolded for playing games. But as his life started to turn upside down, everything else had become insignificant.

No matter how hard he tried to concentrate on his game, the burdensome reality got in the way. There hadn't been a game that engrossed him enough to let him forget reality.

‘I'll probably never be able to comfortably play games again.’

That's what he had thought. But lately, those past sensations were reviving in Hyun Woo.

He was so immersed in New World that he was able to forget his goal of playing the game to get employed by Global Exos. That's why his sleeping time had steadily dropped, and he was so exhausted that he could say his body and mind were ‘running on empty fumes’.

It was to the point that he'd completely blanked out on even the report— he remembered two days before the due date and hurriedly wrote one up and submitted it.

Even so, the time he spent playing the game was truly enjoyable. And he wanted to go into the Global Exos that had created such a game. However, it was highly unlikely. Hyun Woo had learned less and had nothing compared to the other candidates. And he was definitely short on time.

Although the competition ratio was 1 in 200, in reality Hyun Woo was up against 1900 people. He could only conclude that there was a greater chance of rejection than acceptance. That's why Hyun Woo wanted to enjoy New World as much as he could. He had to return the 10,000,000 Won (USD\$10,000) unit when the test was over.

‘If I return the unit, with my income, I probably won't be able to play it again. Even for the sake of playing New World, I want to get accepted. No, I will. I have to believe that I can.’

His apprehension from faking his resume still remained. But seeing as Global Exos hadn't noticed all this time, could he somehow fool them to the very end? He wanted to believe that he could.

As Hye Sun watched Hyun Woo lost in thought, her eyes suddenly widened.

"Then what's the game oppa's been playing lately?"

"Why are you asking that?"

"Well, if it's fun I want to try too."

"You've played a game before?"

"Of course."

"What was it?"

"Mmm, well... what was it... the dancing one^[3]..." Hye Sun mumbled with a frown.

"This game is totally different game from those. And even if you know what it is, it's too much for you to play."

"Tch, what exactly is it to make you say that?"

"It's called New World, it came out recently."

"N-New World?" Hye Sun's eyes got round.

"You know it?"

"Of course. That is... you're right. I saw it in a newspaper once. But doesn't it take a huge amount of money to play that game? 'Cause of that unit or whatever."

"Somehow or another, I got to play it for free."

"Somehow or another?"

"I can't really explain it to you in detail. Ah, I heard there are game rooms where units are installed nowadays. The fees are a little expensive, but if you have the chance, try it once. Just trying it once is going to be better than having me explain it a hundred times."

Then, a truck topped to the brim with wares entered the warehouse, and Hyun Woo quickly ran towards it with a loading cart.

Hye Sun watched Hyun Woo's back and nodded her head as if she had made some kind of resolution.

“He said it was New World, huh?”

Viscount Haverstein's Revenge

New World, the continent where sunlight-like peace can be obtained through the blessings of God.

However, the trails left behind by history were carved with blood and violence.

There had been a turbulent period in the history of New World, so far past that no one could even recall.

Thousands of races broke off into various factions, creating endless wars. Blood was washed away with more blood, corpses were blanketed with more corpses. What ended this tumultuous era was not a force of righteousness. It was wickedly evil beyond compare.

The devil incarnate did not differentiate between races and attacked everyone. With immense strength, it dyed the continent in black blood.

All the races were like newborn babies before the devil incarnate. They stilled their breaths and trembled at the chaos and horror. It was the start of the so-called Dark Century.

But it is the law of the world that as the darkness deepens, a more brilliant light will arise. So when the devil incarnate's war situation reached its climax, there were those who broke free with light and rose.

The 7 heroes whose names were left in history's path.

3 of them were Human, and the others were Dwarf, Elf, Orc and the Beast hero they called Maban.

At the center of the continent, they formed a strong alliance. Then the sound of moaning changed to shouts of victory. One by one, as they carved the records of great wars the 7 heroes were finally able to defeat the devil incarnate.

With the disappearance of the devil incarnate, the 7 heroes spoke of what they desired amongst themselves.

“I desire spacious and fertile earth.”

The three Human heroes received three kingdoms on New World.

“I desire a forest overflowing with life.”

“For me a hot fire and rock’s strength!”

“A damp bog and barren wilderness for me.”

The Elf received rights to the forest, the Dwarf the underground, and the Orc the wasteland.

Their eyes looked toward Hero Maban.

Hero Maban spoke with a bitter smile.

“I wish to watch over the blood vow that you made in your hearts.”

“That vow will be kept.”

“Then that is enough.”

Hero Maban spoke those words and disappeared.

The kingdoms the six heroes erected became the present New World. And for over 200 years, New World reached its Golden Age and prospered.

But this time was not only prosperous.

Following the flow of time, the pledge of friendship the six heroes had shared slowly but surely faded away. 200 years was plenty of time to forget the horror and honors of the past.

The vow splintered. And the crack was largely spreading in a way that anyone could see.

* * *

“Hm, this time should I try putting this one in?”

Ark pushed the herb he’d been holding into the pot.

Then the liquid within the pot turned reddish and shortly firmed up like pudding.

After staring at the pudding with a serious expression, he clenched his eyes shut and spooned in the pudding. The feeling of his weak stomach becoming completely full was accompanied by a surge of energy.

You have created Nutritious Jelly with Survival Cooking. Satiety has been filled to 100% and within 10 seconds 200 health will be restored.

For 10 minutes strength and stamina increase by 2. Wisdom and Intelligence are reduced by 2.

“Nice, it’s a success this time.”

Ark blew out a sigh of relief and stored the pudding in his bag.

After his departure from Harun Village, Ark had purposely left the road and diverged into the forest. After actually leaving the village, the users who went to Jackson Castle were mostly at about level 15.

Of course, if you just looked at his stats Ark was also in a state of being over level 10. Still, being at a lower level than others made him feel uneasy.

The level was an absolute number in the game. That his level was falling meant that he was that much weaker!

That’s why he was in the process of completely wiping out any Wild Dogs and Wolves he saw as he cut through the forest. When he killed over two hundred Wild Dogs and Wolves like that, Ark reached level 16. Thanks to that, his sword and armor transformed to a ragged mess, which would crumble if he touched them.

‘I should learn the Repair skill when I arrive at Jackson Castle.’

If the precious equipment he struggled to obtain had cracked, he wouldn’t even be able to sleep for a few days.

Ark changed his equipment to leather clothing for the time being and concentrated on gathering.

He intended to use this chance to raise his Survival Cooking level as well.

At first he thought about erasing the skill after seeing the creation of a ridiculous food and learning ordinary cooking, but hunting the demon mouse had enlightened him of the usefulness of Survival Cooking.

‘I can use it whether it’s poison or food.’

But even though he resolved himself and tried to raise it, it wasn’t easy.

Survival Cooking was not regular cooking. He couldn’t simply mix any ingredients he wanted to create results. When the combination didn’t match at all, with an explosion the ingredients would all go to waste.

At last, after over one hundred attempts, Ark had successfully made 15 dishes, including Fragrant Poison Soup. Out of those the only ones worth using were Howling Seasoned Chili, Refreshing Herb Tea, and the recent success Nutritional Jelly.

The Howling Seasoned Chilies was an enormously strong-tasting food that had the effect of temporarily increasing Strength by 10. But after that effect disappeared the user was plunged into a state of Confusion for several minutes, so it was an incomparably dangerous food. After eating this Ark had fought five Wolves and had almost died.

The Refreshing Herb Tea was a tea that restored Mana. It was incredibly delicious, and Ark frequently made and drank it while on his journey.

So as he did the things he’d been unable to do until now because he’d been fighting mice, his skill rose by a lot and he even earned 2 new skills.

Passive SkillSword Mastery (Beginner:26/100) You do not receive weapon penalties even if you use a sword.

Hand-to-hand Combat (Beginner:24/100) Whenever you fight bare-handed, your Attack Power, Accuracy, and Evasion are increased.

Survival Cooking (Beginner:22/100) You can make unidentified dishes with ingredients obtained from nature.

Indomitable Will (Beginner:27/100) When in critical condition, your Attack Power, Critical Hit Chance, and ability to recover are increased.

Foraging (Beginner:29/100) Food ingredients from nature can be gathered.

Active Skill Nursing (Beginner:21/100) Gives hope, energy, and courage to patients. Mana consumption 10.

Spirit of the Cat (Intermediate:103/300) Plants horror in mice and small monsters, sealing off their movements; Attack Power, Defense, and morale are sharply decreased. Mana consumption 100.

Ingredient Identification (Beginner, Passive): Can confirm the basic effects of food ingredients that you obtain from the Foraging skill. Because your knowledge in food ingredients has risen, when you Forage you will no longer sustain damage from ingredients.

Indomitable Body (Beginner, Passive): Even if you confront fairly dangerous situations, you are granted the fortitude to endure them.

Your excellent Defense will shine more brightly in difficult situations.

Emergency Defense, Evasion of Fatal Blows increased by 30%. Recovery ability increased by 5%.

The Ingredient Identification seemed to be a skill that added to Survival Cooking. In any case, knowing whether the harvested

ingredient was poisonous or not was a good thing. Because then he'd be able to decrease the probability of failure a little.

The truly unexpected skill was Indomitable Body. After squeezing his eyes shut and eating every one hundred plus dish he'd made with Survival Cooking, the Indomitable Body skill had naturally formed. For that kind of a skill to form meant that Survival Cooking was really dangerous.

Ark was satisfied with that much.

"Now that the ingredients are all used up, shall I go?"

Ark shouldered his bag and began to walk again.

Though it was dawn in reality, in New World it was morning.

As he hefted his bag and walked through the forest, a cool wind tickled his face. The smell of grass permeated his nostrils and washed clean his chest.

Though he had thought and marveled about it many times, New World was beyond the classification of a normal game after all. As its name proclaimed, New World was literally a new world.

But what Ark had experienced was still less than 1 out of 100 of New World.

Ark keenly realized this truth after he crossed a hill.

"Oh.....!"

His exclamation naturally burst out.

Endless unfurled plains before a towering citadel city that rose into the sky. The truth that a building made of black stones could be so beautiful was simply shocking. But the Harun Village NPCs had said that Jackson Castle was not such a big city in New World.

'It's unbelievable, but that must mean that there are cities that are bigger and more awesome than this.'

After thinking that thought, his heart fluttered like a youth's.

Anyway, he'd finally parted from the beginner area and had arrived at the real meaning of a city.

When he went into the castle, it wasn't as beautiful as he'd thought from what he'd seen outside. But the castle was overflowing with vitality.

Now when it came to writing someone off as a beginner from the people there were users at level 50~60, and the streets that couldn't be compared to the ones in Harun Village were chock full of crowds. The reason was that there were numerous unexplored dungeons left in the area around Jackson Castle.

"For those who'd enjoy warmth and coziness, please come to Hades Guild."

"If you're a valiant warrior who wants to experience the battlefield, to Black Axe Guild!"

"The best priced rods, selling at the minimum price! 'Tis Nook's Stall."

"Those who need a mercenary, please contact me."

He heard shouts from every direction. The bulletin boards laid on every street corner publicized guilds and shops, and the boards were pasted full of flyers for getting parties.

With stalls covered with items strewn about on the ground it wasn't even easy for people to walk. Having spent over twenty days in the carefree and quiet Harun Village, Ark had unintentionally become a hick and could not adapt easily.

Besides the unexplored dungeons, what made Jackson Castle this bustling was that the NPCs related to job changing and the NPCs associated with guilds were all gathered here.

The guilds were an extremely important element in the game.

If many beginners gathered they could even gain more information, and they were very helpful when trying to accomplish difficult requests. That's why every guild representative's eyes were lit up in

order to procure even just one more high-level user. But Ark had no thoughts of joining a guild.

The first reason was his deep-rooted mistrust of users. The second was that even if he sometimes forgot, his motivation for playing the game was different from other users. To Ark, New World wasn't simply a game, but an employment exam. It'd be tough to needlessly join a guild and waste time doing useless things.

What Ark was interested in was the job change possible from level 15.

It was the biggest reason why users flocked to Jackson Castle after reaching level 15.

In New World, there were twelve broad classes of jobs.

Warrior, Archer, Magician, Thief, Priest and so on... and if you went into details there were several branches included in each class of job. So one would do up to 2 or 3 job changes.

“Stat.”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	None		
Fame	150	Level	16
Profession	None		
Title	Mouse Hunter		
Health	360	Mana	100
Strength	67	Agility	77 (+2)

Stamina	67	Wisdom	16
Intelligence	17	Luck	17
Equipment Effects			
Sharply Shining Sword: Attack speed +5 Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor: Agility +2, Cold Resistance +20			

Though they were meager stats, if meager at all, but considering that he was level 16, they were at a decent level.

If you just looked at his stats, his wisdom and intelligence were too low for him to choose a profession in the magic division. The jobs that matched him were combat-related; up until now Ark had mostly done combat, so he'd unconsciously poured all his stats in Strength, Agility, and Stamina.

'Should I just use this chance to job change to a Warrior?'

Even if they were the same level 15, the difference between a character that had job changed and one that hadn't was enormous.

If he changes profession, he would learn new skills that were particular to the job, and a lot of bonus stats would be added. In addition, if he did the job change quest, he would acquire the matching branch of that Profession.

It was truly like turning over a new leaf!

But Ark shook his head.

'I don't even know the job characteristics properly yet...'

Ark hadn't seen any scenes of job-changed users fighting yet.

Although he could basically see the characteristics of the classified jobs just by looking at their names, there were slight differences between each game.

What skills would form, what skills he couldn't learn if he job changed, he had to meticulously consider them and make a decision. It wasn't a matter he could just choose based on his mood without personally experiencing them.

'In New World, Ark is my one and only alter ego. I've gotta choose carefully.'

If it was another game he could job change and if he didn't like it he could just raise a new one. But there was only one chance to choose in New World. There could be no limit to his cautiousness.

'Okay, for now I'll hunt with Jackson Castle as my base and watch job-changed users. 'Cause right now I've got other things to do too.'

Ark opened his bag and looked over the slate with an affectionate glance.

It was the Mysterious Slate that the demon mouse had watched over. When Ark looked at the slate, he sank into a feeling of delight. Ark had earned many benefits simply from the journey to find this slate.

He'd earned 12 bonus stats, and he'd learned Survival Cooking for free. On top of that, he'd earned 2 of the enchanted equips that were difficult to see at his level. It was enjoyable to simply entertain the thoughts of what other benefits this linked quest might bring him.

'For that I'll have to meet Viscount Haverstein first.'

Ark went and found the Lord's castle with hurried steps.

"What do you need?"

As he'd been wandering about as a hillbilly wrapped in some kind of animal leather, the guard glared at him.

Well, it was a virtual reality game, so he'd expected that response.

"I have come to meet Viscount Haverstein-nim."

"What? You mean the Lord?"

"Yes, if you show him this he will probably meet with me."

Ark pulled out the parchment he'd discovered in the cave.

The guard shot him a doubtful glance and went into the castle. After about 10 minutes had passed, he ran back outside along with a man. He was a middle-aged knight with a bushy bearded face. Seeing as he was wearing modest chain mail, it looked like he wasn't Viscount Haverstein.

The middle-aged knight introduced himself as Cross, the General of Defense in charge of the castle's guards. Once Ark also introduced himself simply, Cross asked with an urgent voice.

"Alright, Ark. Were you the one who discovered this parchment?"

"Yes."

"Did you by any chance discover some strange item near the place where the parchment was?"

"I discovered it."

Ark quickly took out the slate from his bag and showed it to Cross.

Cross blew out the breath he'd been holding.

"I don't know whether I should call this the guidance of God, or the devil's prank."

"What do you mean?"

"That slate is an item Viscount Haverstein-nim has been searching for a long time. However, none of the people he sent to find the slate have returned."

"What is this slate for?"

"I don't know the details either. I only know that it's connected to the ruins that were discovered near this territory. As the years passed and its whereabouts couldn't be found, Viscount Haverstein gave up on the slate in the end. And then he struck off for the ruins while leading the Slyphid Knights. But for the slate to appear after the Viscount left..."

Cross clasped Ark's hand tightly and requested.

“If it’s okay, can’t you personally deliver the slate to the Viscount? If you hurry and follow him now, you might be able to catch the Viscount before he arrives at the ruins.”

At the same time, the quest name was updated to ‘Secret of the Slate = Secret of the Slate II’. The content was about meeting Haverstein, who had left for the ruins that held a connection to the slate.

‘Wahahaha, this is it. I’ve been waiting for something like this.’

As a spark fizzed into Ark’s mind, the formula of ‘quest + dungeon = huge treasure’ arose.

There was no reason to hesitate. Ark quickly nodded. Cross gave him a horse and 2 soldiers.

No matter how busy he was, he had to take care of some business before he left. Ark found the blacksmith, had all his equipment repaired, and mounted the horse. But it was impossible for Ark, who organized a mart warehouse in reality, to have ever ridden a horse.

“Eehuk, eeeeeuhhh!”

Thinking *since it’s a game, it should work out somehow*, was a mistake.

Before he was able to go a few kilometers he rolled and fell off the horse five times. He paled beside the soldiers, who held the reins of Ark’s horse for him.

“Put your strength in your thighs and lay flat on the back of your horse. We shall guide the horse.”

* * *

“Can’t, can’t we rest a little before we go?”

“If we were to follow and catch the Viscount before he arrives at the ruins, there is not a moment to be lost. Giddy up!”

‘Damn it, I’m sayin’ I’ll DIE before we arrive!’

Though his stomach churned, there was nothing good about

(antagonizing) the NPCs who were affiliated with the lord's castle.

Despite that, for the sake of the new skill he had learned, he had to endure.

Riding skill has risen by 3. Horse riding is a little bit easier.

The Riding skill that formed when he was about to hurl (went up by 3 when the urge to spring away penetrated his lower back and he desperately restrained himself.) After that Ark was able to straighten his back and hold the reins himself. And so after a day and a night of spurring the horses on like crazy, the hazy shape of the ruins appeared.

Thankfully it seemed like they weren't late, as the sight of the Slyphid Knights gathered at the ruin entrance came into view.

Ark and the soldiers he'd come together with got off their horses and ran over.

"My Lord, we found the slate!"

"What?"

The person who turned his head was a noble of approximately sixty years of age.

His coarse, white hair fell to his shoulders, and his face looked blue from lack of oxygenation. But his eyes shined with a penetrating light. This was precisely Viscount Haverstein.

With a dignified gait, he approached Ark.

"Are you the traveler who brought the slate? Can you show me?"

"Yes."

"There is no doubt. This is exactly the slate I was looking for."

After Ark pulled out the slate for him, Haverstein looked over it with squinted, trembling eyes for a long while. He needed a very long time before he was able to turn his eyes on Ark again.

"You probably cannot even imagine what a huge help your good deed has become for me. The rule is that good deeds have a price.

Therefore, I, Haverstein, have a responsibility to reward your pains. Say what you desire. If it is the request of a man of your merit, I will listen to anything.”

Starlight rustled and fell from Ark’s pupils.

He could finally receive the reward he’d waited and waited for.

And that he would listen to anything!

‘Should I ask for a magic item? Or should I ask for money?’

As Ark agonized over this and that, he belatedly discovered something strange. Then he noticed the cleverly hidden trap in the words of Haverstein’s quest.

“It’s a request appropriate of my merit?”

Thinking carefully about it, it was a peerlessly ambiguous statement.

Though Haverstein had said ‘anything’, the condition ‘appropriate of merit’ was attached. In the end that meant there was a upper limit. But since the merit wasn’t simply put out in numbers, he couldn’t know what the limit was. Then what method could he use to guess the upper limit?

‘It’s the difficulty!’

Ark opened the quest window and checked it. The difficulty was G. From what he’d experience so far, this kind of difficulty would only earn him a reward of 1 gold at most, or a follow-up item.

‘Is that all I can earn with this quest?’

His feeling of excitement disappeared and was replaced by dismay.

To obtain the slate, he’d had to kill hundreds of mice and defeat the demon mouse. He’d raced the horse to meet Haverstein to the point where his back had almost broken. But the reward was just 1 gold?

Then yet another question rose in Ark’s mind.

‘Is pulling out this slate truly the end? But then why did the General of Defense send me all the way here? He could have just used the

soldiers. And the quest says to meet Haverstein, but there's nothing written about giving him the slate. That's right, this is a branched quest!"

A branched quest was one that changed based on the user's choice.

At the end of many inferences, Ark was sure that this was a branched quest. A different quest related to the slate. In other words, the way to obtain the real reward that Ark wanted was different.

Ark suddenly raised his head and replied.

"What I desire is to go into the ruins with the Viscount."

"What? You can't do that!"

"Why do you say that? Since I brought the slate that's related to the ruins, I think I'm qualified enough. Did the Viscount not promise a reward appropriate for my merits after all?"

"Do you not know? I'm saying this for your own good. That ruin is not just a commonplace dungeon. This is the lair where the devil incarnate is holed up in. I can't drag in a civilian like you inside that place!"

"Are you breaking the promise that you yourself made?"

Ark pressed Haverstein with a sharp voice.

One should always maintain a good relationship with the NPCs. That was Ark's ironbound principle. But it was a different matter if there was an even greater profit on the line.

There were many ways to re-raise intimacy that had fallen, but there were no ways to get back a quest item that he'd failed to hold onto. Whether the NPC was a Lord or a Viscount, if it was necessary he would even go into a head-on clash to obtain the profit.

"You're really... guk, cough, cough!"

Haverstein, who had been glaring at Ark, suddenly fell to one knee as he vomited blood.

“My Lord!”

The soldiers who'd been in the area urgently rushed over. But there was a person who rushed and helped Haverstein quicker than they. It was Ark.

“Please leave him to me. I have a lot of experience in taking care of patients.”

As he quickly used the Nursing skill, the color returned to Haverstein's face.

Ark spoke as he furtively smiled.

“You seem deeply ill. To explore the ruins with a body like this... and isn't it true that there aren't any people here who know how to take care of a patient?”

“I don't need a caretaker or whatever. Cough, cough!”

“No, I can see the state of a patient. You will not be able to walk, let alone swing a sword, like this. Surely you do not wish to become baggage to your subordinates by flaunting your pride?”

“How-however....”

“Please give me permission to nurse you, my Lord. No, you must do so. I too am merely a caretaker. I cannot just leave a patient and walk away.”

Ark spoke with a resolute expression.

Haverstein heaved a sigh.

It was a sigh acknowledging his defeat.

When the ringing sound of drumbeats followed, Ark was sure that his choice had been the right one.

Quest has been updated. Secret of the Slate II = Secret of the Slate III

You must explore the ruin with Viscount Haverstein to uncover the secret of the slate.

Term for quest failure: If Viscount Haverstein dies, you will automatically lose the quest.

Difficulty: +E

* * *

“Attack, sweep away the accursed monsters!”

“Ooohhaaaahhh!”

Over 50 Sylphid Knights stampeded and bravely swung swords and maces.

The Gargoyles and Goblins obstructing their way jumped out, explosively. Then, in the hands of the Magicians, flames burst out and turned the passageway into an inferno. The Goblins swallowed in the path of fire let out horrible shrieks and crawled out, but what was waiting for them was a baptism of swords and maces.

Clearing scores of monsters didn’t even take 10 minutes.

Ark was watching the battle with surprised eyes.

‘Strong.’

Two days had passed since they had entered the ruin.

The insides of the ruin was tangled with complicated, maze-like paths, so it was impossible to distinguish the path, or be aware of the direction. And every time they went around a corner, an incredible number of monsters charged at them. However, they were no match for the Sylphid Knights.

They were knights that the lord had personally led here. Even their equipment was on a different level from ordinary soldiers. They were Knights armed with shining armor and weapons. And their related skills must be at an extremely high level, because they were able to defend every attack with their shields, and whenever they swung their swords, fatal blows were dealt.

It was the first time he’d seen an NPC’s battle — the high level was

to the point where he went and lost his confidence.

After finishing a bout of fighting, a cross mark appeared above the heads of the Knights. It was a sign that indicated their level up.

‘Just how much of a level do those guys have?’

Levels existed for NPCs, too. Of course, if they won many fights, their level would go up. However, the NPCs themselves didn’t know about the concept of levels. If you asked them what their level was, they would return the question, asking what that was. And if you tried to explain it in detail, they would suddenly get mad.

In New World, the vocabulary level, skill, and stats were foreign to them; in other words, those were just users’ terms.

Even magic or skills that let them peek at someone’s information window didn’t get through to the NPCs. Therefore, there was no way to confirm it, but it was definite that they were at a much higher level than Ark.

‘Anyways, if I stay with them there should be no risk of death.’

The updated Secret of the Slate quest’s difficulty was a staggering +E.

It was a quest at a level where it’d be impossible to solve it by himself, no matter what he did. But if he did it with the Sylphid Knights, it didn’t even look like it’d be that difficult.

The problem was the condition of Haverstein’s survival.

After they entered the ruin, Haverstein’s health become increasingly weak. Ark, who had learned the Nursing skill, could tell that he didn’t have much life left. If, by any chance, Haverstein died before the completion of the quest, the quest would end in a failure and the Sylphid Knights would return to Jackson Castle.

That was the reason why a quest where he didn’t even need to personally fight had a difficulty of +E.

‘No matter what happens, I have to save him until the quest is resolved. Tch, what a pain.’

The sight of Haverstein coughing beside him filled him with annoyance.

If the quest didn't have such a condition, he wouldn't give a damn if Haverstein died or not. More importantly, he had to participate in the fight and hit the monsters that looked like crammed up wads of experience at least once.

Even those strong Knights were leveling up without rest. At his level, if he was fortunate enough to defeat one or two of the monsters, he'd probably be able to garner quite a lot of experience. However, he couldn't afford to do that. If he didn't stand by and watch over Haverstein, who was deteriorating by the minute, there was no knowing what sudden result might occur.

"Cough, cough!"

"You are okay. Illness comes first from the mind. If you firmly steel your heart, you can overcome any disease. Have courage. You can't lose hope."

As he prattled on about things he didn't even believe in, he spewed the Nursing skill and Haverstein's face became a little brighter.

"You have my thanks. If I listen to your words, my strength rises as if it's really easing the disease. However, I am aware. That no matter how much I steel my mind, there's no hope for my life."

"What are you saying....."

"No, it's the truth. Because my disease did not come first from the mind."

"Are you saying that you know about the disease?"

"Do you know why I've come here leading the Knights with a body like this?"

Haverstein's clouded gaze swept across the dreary ruin.

"Because it's here, the cursed devil killed my father and planted the disease in me."

“Devil? Can you please tell me in more detail?”

“I may as well. Since you’ve already stepped foot in this place, knowing this won’t be bad. Truthfully, a long time ago there was a terrible calamity that befell Jackson Castle. It buried the land in disease and famine.”

“Are you saying that was the devil’s doing?”

“Yes. It was the doing of this malicious devil that came from a faraway continent. My ancestors of the Jackson family, which came to know of this truth, naturally rallied soldiers and fought with the devil. But with only the final blow remaining, the devil escaped, and since then the Jackson family has suffered from the devil’s curse. All the descendants of the Jackson family eventually die of a curse that brought about a terminal illnesses once they turn twenty.”

“What? But the Viscount is...”

“That my life is still bound to me is thanks to Father.”

Haverstein tightly clutched the silver necklace that fell to his chest.

“As the other ancestors did, Father also strove to release the family’s curse. And then in the same year when I was born, he finally found out. That the devil that had fled that time was hiding in this ruin. If that devil is killed, then the curse will end. But the place where that devil was hiding was firmly locked by an ancient force. The slate that you brought is precisely the key to opening that room.”

At the end of a long effort, his father had finally laid hands on the slate. Then, as Haverstein was doing now, he had led soldiers and searched for the devil.

Haverstein stared blankly at the Sylphid Knights as if meaning to see his father’s appearance from that time among them.

“First, I listened to the soldiers who were in the verge of death. They said a long and lengthy fight had occurred. In the end, it resulted in Father’s defeat. But Father, using the last of his strength, gave the devil a large wound. Thanks to that the curse has weakened, and I

was able to live to this age.”

“So that means that the Viscount is suffering from the disease because that malicious devil has regained its strength.”

“You’re right. And since a few years ago, traces of the curse have even appeared on my now fifteen-year old son. The devil’s strength has become stronger. But the slate had already disappeared with my father’s death. For the last 3 years I tried to find the slate, but to no avail. In that time my body has become exhausted and thin, like this. Having lost the time to wait any longer, I went to battle to destroy the door with sheer force and punish the devil.”

“If the devil is killed, will the Viscount’s disease also be cured?”

Haverstein shook his head.

“No, it’s already too late for me. Now, even if I killed the devil I cannot live on. However, I cannot allow my son to meet the same fate as I. After all my father was also in the same situation as I, and fought the devil for my sake. This time, it is my turn to do for my son, as my Father has done for me. And I believe that I can succeed. That you brought the slate here, is without a doubt, a revelation from God.”

Ark was moved to tears.

A father for the sake of his son, and the son for the sake of *his son*, was burning away the last of his life.

Of course, they were NPCs. Though they looked like people, they weren’t.

Within that too-realistic face there was electricity that flowed along electric wires.

Despite that, the light with which Haverstein looked at Ark was sincere. That he himself was dying, and for his son he would throw away his life — he truly thought that way.

Most NPCs are similar in that sense. Although there were bad people and good people here in this world as there are in the real

world, at the very least, people here don't play with others' sincere feelings through cunning lies.

That was the difference between an NPC and a user.

"The Viscount's wish will definitely come true."

"Thank you."

Haverstein fell asleep with a more comforted face.

After that Ark took care of Haverstein with all his sincerity.

A father who would throw down everything for the sake of his son.

Though it was incredibly embarrassing, Ark could feel the presence of his own father in Haverstein.

Meanwhile, heartfelt sympathy formed towards Haverstein. He had to help Haverstein for the quest anyways. If it was a done deal, wouldn't it be better to do it sincerely?

When a day had passed like that, Ark received a message he hadn't even imagined.

Of the skills Ark had learned, Nursing had the slowest growth. Although he'd nursed Johansson about ten times, the skill points had been at a mere 20. Even after the nursing he'd done for Haverstein up until now, it was at 30.

But then it suddenly started swiftly going up, and in a moment it had reached Intermediate level.

Through care imbued with sincerity, the Nursing skill level has gone up. Nursing(Intermediate, Active): Can instill life by making the patient's body and soul more comfortable with Increasingly proficient skillfulness.

Used on a patient, vigor and courage are increased by 40%. Mana consumption: 10

* Intermediate Nursing bonus effect(Nurse's Soul): Can sincerely pray for the patient and grant the effect of a minor blessing. All

stats are slightly increased, and through devout piety, resistance to curses related to the mind will form.

Ark's mouth fell open.

It wasn't because the skill went up, but because of the reason.

'Does that mean it knows that I treated Viscount Haverstein with sincerity?'

The sudden, rapid growth of the skill had happened, since Ark had started to sincerely worry about Haverstein. Then didn't that mean that Ark's change in attitude influenced the growth of the skill?

Of course, it wasn't something that was physically impossible.

New World was a system that scanned the brain and controlled the character with the user's brainwaves. Emotion was, in the end, a brain wave. It was possible for the system to understand changes in emotion. But for even that part to influence the growth of skill...

Stating that was simple.

'Whether it's interaction with an NPC or learning a skill, the effect is maximized if you pour your sincerity.'

It was a principle that was so natural in reality. But who would have thought to apply such a principle even in a game?

It was shocking technological prowess, and a shocking discovery.

By the mistake in Harun Village, Ark was still in a state that fell far short of the other applicants. Even though he'd received a bonus of 12 points thanks to his special title, making up for half a month of difference in progress was difficult.

Though it'd be nice if they would take a nap like the story of the rabbit and turtle, it was best not to expect that. But now it seemed like he could find the way to narrow that difference.

'There are still many unidentified systems in New World. If I find out about all of them, catching up to them isn't just a long-shot dream!

That's right, the answer was right in front of me all along! Anyways the difference from users that started at the same time is that and only that. If I'm to get ahead of the others, then I can't just follow what the others are doing.'

He saw a found new hope.

Afterward, Haverstein vomited blood more frequently.

As his spark of life continued to flicker out, his health deteriorated to the point where he could not recognize anyone. Every time that happened Ark used his Intermediate Nursing skill and forcefully held his life in place.

For the completion of the quest, for the growth of the skill, and for this unfortunate NPC's small wish...

* * *

"We have finally arrived!"

A light of emotion rose on Haverstein's ashen face.

It had been five days since they had entered the ruins. The group had finally arrived at the destination. A massive stone door engraved with complicated patterns!

The devil they were searching for was hiding behind this door.

The stone door that steamingly emitted a dismal aura, had a space on one side that was big enough to fit the slate.

Haverstein looked toward Ark and nodded his head. With a strained expression, Ark walked up to the stone door and pressed the slate in. Then the ruins rumbled as the stone gate slowly parted.

"Everyone prepare for battle, we will enter as we protect the Viscount!"

"Yes!"

A space that was entirely different from the interior of the ruin appeared. Uneven stone walls, and the ceiling was studded with stalactites like a demon's fangs. It was a colossal hall made by the

strength of Mother Nature.

It happened when Knights stayed vigilant on all sides and arrived at the center of the hall.

Boss Monster Twisted Dream Weaver Debra has appeared.

“The devil has appeared!”

Ark shouted in surprise. At the same time, from the opposite entrance a black aura spewed out. Having received Ark’s warning, the Knights hastily fumbled to raise their shields, but the enormous shock blew away 3~4 people.

“Kekekeke, mayflies without fearful heads have crawled in to die!”

Within the dark, the sight of a huge being that looked to be a good 10 meters came into view. With armor of darkness and an enormous sword, the blood-red cape on its back fluttered as it emitted a dismal aura.

Debra’s body twisted like a whirlwind, and upon coming in contact with the black aura, the brave Knights fell into panic.

“I-it’s Debra!”

“Twisted Dream Weaver Debra of horror!”

“Do not be afraid, this bastard is just the cowardly monster that was coiled up and hiding within the stone door!”

Haverstein squeezed out his vigor and shouted. Only then did the Knights snap back to attention and rush toward Debra.

“Kekekee, foolish newborn pups!”

Deep blue sparks flew out every time Debra opened its mouth.

It swung the length of the enormously large sword. With one blow, 3~4 soldiers were shattered as they were blown away. The Sylphid Knights that had shown their unbeatable strength as they had crossed through the ruin were no match for Debra.

The deep blue sparks that spewed from its mouth melted their

armor, and as the sword flew down in succession, the Knights collapsed with one, two wounds. But the Sylphid Knights didn't yield and endlessly besieged Debra with a barrage of swords. The surrounding Magicians on the outskirts also threw lightning and flames.

At the consecutive, bursting flashes, Debra must have taken a blow, because it staggered.

"Today is the end of you!"

One of the Magicians hollered as he tore in with a skill combo of? Penetrate?.

Then, a red light enveloped Debra and a Health number cut in, about about half appeared above its head.

The Knights' moral suddenly rose.

"The bastard doesn't even have half its health left!"

"The time is now, finish it off!"

"Keuk, you bastards..."

Debra's eyes flashed and a black aura surged out.

Wrapped in the aura, the Knights put on vacant expressions like they were somehow bewitched people, and then suddenly began to brawl amongst themselves.

"It's Bewitching magic! Magicians!"

"Yes!"

The Magicians, who were outside the range of the aura, quickly uttered an incantation.

Resistance Spell, Cleanse Spell, Strengthening Willpower and other spells unfurled in the area. In spite of that, the Knights were unable to shake off the Bewitchment and floundered. Rather, the situation became more serious and 3~4 of them were felled by the swords of their friends.

Embarrassment spread over the Magicians' faces.

“The spells aren’t dispelling it!”

“Everyone please calm down, no matter who our opponent is, we will surely be victorious.”

In the moment of the desperate situation, Ark’s voice cried out into the hall.

The pupils of the Bewitched Knights gradually focused and they suddenly came to.

It was the power of the Nursing skill. Even when the fight first started, there had been nothing Ark could do.

It was Debra’s attack, which could take out a two or three Knights, and got it out of critical condition. If the level 16 Ark was to get grazed it, he would definitely fall into critical condition. All he could do was to nurse Haverstein from the back.

But the situation changed as the Bewitched Knights brawled amongst themselves and suffered wounds. Because they weren’t simple Knights and were able to do a lot of damage to each other, they had become Ark’s patients.

When he used the Nursing skill on a patient, the Intermediate’s special effect, minor blessing, was granted. Thanks to that, they were able to resist the Bewitchment, which was a curse of the mind, and shake it off.

Not just that, but a bonus of vigor and courage 40%, and +3 to all stats. Of course, the Knight’s attack and defense power increased, and the Magician’s casting speed became faster.

“Oooohhhhhh, my strength is surging!”

“We can win! Down with Debra!”

The Knights cheered and with a rush they swarmed and swung their swords. Debra erupted with a howl of fury but there was nothing it could do.

That was because Ark was not letting the soldiers rest.

“Please hurry and stand. Victory is right in front of you. Even though

it's the devil, everyone's fighting spirit must not topple. Through unbreakable fighting spirit and unyielding courage you will undoubtedly become heroes written in history!"

"Haa haa, my stamina has hit the bottom. Let me rest a little..."

"Get out there and fight! Your bravery will carry us to victory!"

"Oooohhhh! En,energy is surging! Come at me, devil!"

As Ark's voice rang out, the Knights that had fallen over one after another sprang to their feet and swung their swords.

Abruptly, as the zombie-like Knights returned to the fight, Debra's life quickly dropped. When it plummeted to 1 out of 10, it fell to one knee. Then Haverstein, who had been directing the Knights, climbed atop Debra's body and thrust his sword toward its throat.

"Die, devil.... kaa!"

Suddenly Debra stretched its arm and seized Haverstein's throat.

"Kekekekeek, was the suffering good?"

Debra slowly raised its body. Screams of disbelief burst out from the surrounding Knights.

"Life, its life....!"

"Oh my god, does that mean this bastard is immortal?"

Debra's cape fluttered as it twirled its body and its life was restored to 100 percent.

Ark flung himself through the disconcerted Knights.

"VISCOUNT!"

Dying was no longer the problem.

If Haverstein died, the quest was a failure.

'To come all the way here and the quest is a failure? No way!'

As Ark ran in Debra swung its sword. It was an attack Ark had

predicted. Ark quickly unleashed Hand-to-Hand Combat, and evaded. Then he pulled the sword aside and struck the bastard's hand with all his might.

A fatal blow exploded and Debra lost hold of Haverstein.

Ark caught him and urgently moved back.

“YOU! YOU DARE!”

With a furious shout, Debra ran at him.

“Look at that! That stranger is fighting for the Viscount with his life on the line!”

“Everyone protect the stranger!”

The Knights, motivated by Ark's action, stampeded forward. But now, no matter how much they struck out with their swords, Debra's life did not decrease. In other words, it was immortal!

Debra didn't even concern itself with their attacks and strode forth, swinging its sword like lightning.

Ark hastily stood in front of Haverstein and raised his sword.

BAM, with a heavy shock his life was cut to at least half.

‘HOLY SHIT, IF I GET HIT ONE MORE TIME IT'S OVER!’

His eyesight blurred. In that moment the sword went up again and fell with a force that split the air.

“No! Everyone concentrate their magic power! Warp!”

The Magicians concentrated their magic power on Ark and Haverstein.

The magic to warp another person was an Advanced 7 Circle spell.

It wasn't a spell that these 4~5 Circle Magicians could produce.

But as 5 Magicians integrated their magic power with ‘Willpower Exchange,’ the 7 Circle spell was completed.

With a flash, Ark and Haverstein were transported somewhere.
Debra's sword struck the floor right after that.

Cat Knight

“What is this place?”

Ark took a look at his surroundings.

Darkness so thick, couldn't see an inch of the area surround him.

“If it was a Warp, it shouldn't be that far away...”

The distance you could move with a Warp was just 200 meters. Furthermore, it was a spell that couldn't designate a coordinate. It just randomly moved you anywhere in the vicinity. Nevertheless, the reason why it belonged under the category of Advanced Spells was because if a Magician used Warp, they demonstrated enormous power.

There were many cases where a Magician with weak defense was attacked by an approaching fighter before he could utter a spell. He would then use Warp, which had a short cast time. The distance wasn't much, and the coordinates couldn't be designated either, but it was the most useful spell for getting behind a disconcerted fighter.

There was an immense difference in the survival rates of Magicians who didn't learn Warp and Magicians who did.

‘Anyway, seems like I've survived thanks to it.’

As Ark wandered around, he soon discovered Haverstein, who had collapsed in the area.

“Viscount, please come to your senses!”

The weakly trembling Haverstein opened his eyes.

“It's Ark... You survived. What a relief.”

Haverstein mumbled with a dull voice.

“Please come to your senses. You can't become weak. Don't you

have to carry out your father's revenge?"

"You're wrong. Even if I listen to your words... strength... doesn't come out... The soldiers have suffered too... Even my father's revenge... I couldn't even protect my son... Pathetic... Cough!"

Haverstein jerkily vomited blood. Soon afterward, he grabbed his silver necklace, ripped it away, and pulled it out for Ark.

"Ark, my son is strong... Without a doubt, he will grow up strong... Tell this to that child... 'I'm sorry I couldn't protect you... And be sure to protect your son...' Tell him... Can you promise me... that you will live and tell him...?"

"I understand."

You have acquired Viscount Haverstein's Blood-stained Silver Necklace.

"Thank you..."

The weakly trembling Haverstein's arm fell limply. Then his body slowly became transparent.

Ark softly clenched his teeth. The body was disappearing. Though it was nothing new, with this scene, he was once again reminded of the fact that NPCs are not human. Nevertheless, his heart was sorrowful.

Although he was an NPC, he was someone Ark had cared for in his own way. Ark had sincerely nursed him. Seeing someone like that disappear before his eyes flooded him with an indescribable mixture of emotions.

Then the sound of rolling drums rang in his ear.

'Ah, that's right. Damn, if Haverstein dies then the quest is a failure, right?'

For it to end in failure after suffering so much... But exploding in anger would be futile.

A dead person doesn't disappear. The NPCs were also the same.

The one and only point that differed from reality, was that when NPCs died a person who could perform their role in their place would soon appear. No, was reality like that too?

While Ark was having those thoughts, the quest window opened.

Ark's eyes widened.

"Oh? What?"

The quest has been updated.

Secret of the Slate III → Deliver the Keepsake to Viscount Haverstein's Son

Viscount Haverstein's death was predetermined; though it's regrettable, you can only accept it. However, he has left his will that you, who he trusted, deliver the keepsake to his son. As his will prescribed, you must escape the ruin and deliver it to his son in the castle.

Note, if you die starting from the time you receive this quest, the keepsake will disappear and you will automatically fail the quest as well. In the case of failure, you can suffer penalties from the item related to this quest, so be careful.

Difficulty: +E

Surprisingly, the quest was still not over.

'Wait, after all the quest didn't say that I absolutely had to kill Debra.'

New World was a game with a high level of freedom.

The quest was the same as well.

It was the same as going into the ruin by badgering Haverstein. The objective of the quest could fluidly change following the user's choice. If Debra had been defeated, then Ark would've received a reward and it would end like that. Even in the case that it couldn't be defeated, there was room left for another choice.

'That's right. Since the goal was to find the secret of the ruin, rooting

through the entire ruin and meeting Debra was already enough to complete this quest. Then this quest is yet another branch.'

Because this was a quest that could only be received with a certain amount of accumulated intimacy with Haverstein.

"Anyway, it's a relief, but what do I do 'bout this? Since they've hammered the nail on not letting me use tricks..."

Ark muttered with an annoyed voice.

In any case, it was difficult to leave the ruin again by himself. So as Ark read the explanation, he had considered whether he should kill himself.

When a user dies, he would awaken at the registered supply base.

The last place he had registered was Jackson Castle. Although his stats would be cut, he was now used to restoring stats.

If all he had to do was restore the stats and turn in the quest, he'd be able to complete in a +E rank quest.

Now he thought about just giving up on the quest. However, he shook his head.

It was a quest that had come linked several times. Who knew how large the reward would be? Also, his feelings weighed into his decision.

If possible, he wanted to fulfill Haverstein's last request.

'He was an NPC who wasn't fond of many people anyways, so I should try to do as much as possible. Getting the item penalties worries me too...'

Because he hadn't properly understood one simple message in Harun Village, there had been a time when he had suffered horribly.

If something seemed suspicious, it was good to be on the cautious side.

'Then, where do I have to go now anyways? Seeing as he gave me the quest, there seems to be a way out... well, there's nothin' I can

do but try moving for now.'

Ark pressed his hand to the wall with one hand and walked in the dark.

It was the simplest way to escape from the labyrinth.

There was a small passage on one side of a round, circular space. When he followed that passage to the end, a wide space appeared yet again.

It was when he had encountered that kind of space three times. He suddenly heard the sound of something moving quickly in the dark. As Ark stopped walking, a red light abruptly flashed in front of his eyes.

You have been attacked. -5 Health.

'It's an enemy!'

Ark rapidly drew his sword. Simultaneously, he heard a slithering sound in the entire cave. It was not the sound of one or two people. In the next few moments, was suddenly pounced at. Although he didn't take any heavy damage, he his Health was being steadily sucked.

If this enemy could cut his Health that fast with 5 damage, then there were probably about a hundred of them at the very least. With that many piled up, even if his opponents were Mice, it was a dangerous situation. When his Health was about a half, Ark jerked his head up.

"Spirit of the Cat!"

Nyaaaaa~!

The sharp cry swept through the cave. In that moment, the stream of mindless attacks just ended.

'Are they caught in paralysis?'

Ark quickly raised his sword to finish them. Unexpectedly, hundreds of pairs of yellow eyes bobbed up in front of him. They were eyes glinting with bloodthirst. The cave became chilly.

‘Damn, they weren’t paralyzed. Did it fail?’

The Intermediate Spirit of the Cat paralyzed mice with a 100 percent chance. But when used against small monsters, there was a 50 percent chance of failure. In the end, that meant it was 50/50 chance, but it had unfortunately gone and tripped on that chance.

On top of that, the mana consumption of the Intermediate Spirit of the Cat was 100. If he used it once, he couldn’t use it for 10 minutes until his mana was completely restored.

While Ark was writhing in distress, the eyes slowly came closer.

All of sudden, he heard a sharp voice.

“Stop. He’s not an enemy.”

At the same time, the danger disappeared as if he were dreaming. Even until then, he had only seen the yellow eyes of his opponents. Ark had thought that was because of the dark. But the area where the eyes were became hazy, and a form he could distinguish, even in the dark appeared.

“Ca-cat?”

What was surrounding Ark was a swarm of about a hundred cats. Cats of every variety that could be found in the encyclopedia of life, even cats he’d never heard of were mixed in.

“Hm, how is it that you used a skill of the Meow?”

Then he suddenly heard a voice right in front of his nose. When he turned his head, a girl was ramming her nose into Ark and sniffing. Ark stumbled back in astonishment.

‘A girl? But what’s with those ears and tail?’

As Ark examined the target, his eyes widened.

The appearance of the person who was prodding him with her nose was undoubtedly a girl. Her face was pretty and the body shape pressing above the tightly clinging leather clothes was splendid as well. But there were pointed ears hanging atop her head, and around

the back of her buttocks, there was a long, gently swaying tail.

She was like a woman in a cat costume that occasionally appeared in mature content magazines.

As the girl stared at him with round eyes, she abruptly opened her mouth.

“I’m Jana. You?”

“Uh? I-I’m Ark.”

“I’m just askin’ just in case, but you’re a human, right?”

When Ark nodded with a dazed expression, Jana spun around.

“I didn’t know a human would really come... anyway, follow me.”

Ark didn’t know how to respond and was vacantly apathetic.

‘Well, since there doesn’t seem to be any hostility.’

In the end, Ark put away his sword and followed that woman’s pendulous tail.

Cats followed closely all around him. The sight of the cats holding their heads high and marching, as if they were escorting a prisoner, made the tension in his body crumble away all at once, and laughter bubbled out.

After walking about 30 minutes, a space diffused with hazy light appeared.

About fifteen people who looked like Jana were gathered in the center of a space teeming with a hundred cats, and an elder of enormously large stature was sitting in the middle.

Her being large was one thing, though that didn’t mean she was packed full of muscles. It meant she had a tight figure, like an ad balloon.

Of course, there were cat ears and a tail attached to her too.

‘The hell, what is this? Cosplay land? Is that what this is?’

In New World, Beast was also a race that users could choose.

However, normally a Beast was made based on a wolf. He had never heard of a cat race.

In that time, Jana approached the elder and whispered something.

The elder asked with a slightly surprised expression, "Come quickly, stranger. I am the elder of the Meow; they call me Hassan. Is it true that you used a skill of the Meow?"

"Skill of the Meow?"

"The heroic cat's strength that completely dominates mice."

'So she was talking about the Spirit of the Cat.'

"Yes, is there some kind of a problem?"

Ark's voice was slightly unfriendly.

He'd suffered from Debra, Haverstein had died, and he had been beaten here after struggling in a cave in the middle of nowhere. Though this wasn't as bad as reality, he was beginning to feel slight pain even within the game. So even for Ark, there was no reason for good words to come out.

However, Hassan opened his mouth again as if that didn't matter.

"Where did you learn that skill?"

"I learned it when I received the title."

"Title?"

"It is a title called Mouse Master."

"Mouse Master!"

Hassan's eyes widened. His ears and tail also sprang up. He was exactly the picture of a fat cat in shock.

That wasn't all. The people and cats that had gathered in their surroundings also stared at Ark with wide eyes.

"Since ancient times, the title of Mouse Master was only bestowed onto a valiant one who killed a Black Bear Mouse. But the Black Bear Mouse is already a race that has become extinct. What's left is Debra's henchman. Even so, if you received the Mouse Master title... are you saying that you killed Debra's henchman?"

“Debra’s henchman? I’m not sure, but it’s true that I killed Black Bear Mouse.”

“Are you telling the truth? Th-then didn’t you see the slate there, by any chance?”

“Are you talking about this?”

Ark pulled out the slate without much consideration.

It was an item that had already served its purpose of opening the door to Debra’s chamber. But Hassan ogled the slate with deeply moved eyes, rushed to embrace Ark, and rubbed him with his balloon-like body.

“You came, you finally came! I knew you would come! Truthseeker!”

“What are you saying? What’s wrong? What’s a Truthseeker again?”

There wasn’t a man out there who would be happy with this elder attacking him with his whole body.

As Ark grimaced and pushed her away, Hassan scratched his head with a slightly sheepish expression.

“Ah, I was a little excited and made a fool of myself. Okay, that’s right. You probably don’t know the situation properly yet. Of course you don’t know. But don’t worry. Because I’ll slowly explain it to you.”

Hassan returned to sit in his chair again and began speaking.

“As you can see, we are Maban, Beast. Even among them, we are the honorable Meow who serve the Cat Sage. The ruin above us was originally our temple. However, Debra suddenly appeared dragging along monsters, and it was snatched away from us. Then, fearing our strength, the bastard imprisoned the rest of us in a place like this.”

“Imprisoned? You were imprisoned here?” Ark asked with a dumb expression. Then did that mean this place was a prison? The place he had flown to riding the opportune Warp to was a prison?

Then didn’t that also mean there wasn’t a way out?

In any case, Hassan continued. “To be safe, Debra, fearing we might

escape the prison, entrusted the key to his henchman and went and sealed it in a faraway wilderness.”

At that moment, Ark was shocked into attention.

“Key? Then this slate...”

“Yes, that slate is the one and only key that can open all the doors in the temple. And the Black Bear Mouse you defeated was definitely the henchman who ran away with the key.”

Ark’s face brightened. If that was the case, now it wasn’t even a problem to find the way out. He could afford to be relieved.

“I clearly grasp the situation. However, I can’t understand.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have already fought with Debra once. It was close to invincible, an absurdly powerful bastard. But for that kind of guy to fear your strength and imprison you, and even seal the key far away is something that I can’t understand?”

At Ark’s words, Hassan’s face filled with pride.

“That’s because we are descendants of Hero Maban.”

“Hero Maban?”

“Oh, you don’t know?”

A disappointed look flashed over Hassan’s face.

“Hero Maban was one among the 7 heroes who saved the past continent from crisis. In other words, shall we say he was one of the strongest warriors in the continent? And we are the tribe who has served that Hero Maban since long ago. Well, that’s not the only reason why Debra fears us...”

Hassan, who darkened at the mere thought of Debra, bared his teeth slightly.

“Since long ago, warriors have revered that Hero Maban and have followed his footsteps. The Meow call those people Truth-Seekers and are entrusted with the role of guiding them to the right path. But in order to become a Truthseeker, there is a stage that one must

pass first.”

“A stage one must pass?”

“Yes, Hero Maban is the hero the Meow worship. To see whether one is qualified to follow his footsteps, one must first receive the Meow’s test. Its first stage can be passed by killing at least ten thousand of what can be called the Meow’s natural enemy, Mice. Only when that is possible can one be said to have begun the first step as a Truthseeker.”

‘Ten thousand Mice!’

That was the task he had finished as a quest he’d received from Harun Village. But he had never dreamed that it might be the path to becoming a Truthseeker.

“But that’s not all. To receive recognition as a true Truthseeker, one must topple what the Meow can call their greatest enemy, the Black Bear Mouse. With that, as friends of the Meow whose hearts are filled with hatred and anger towards mice, you were able to receive the qualification to step into the path of the Truthseeker. That’s why you were able to learn a skill of the Meow.”

Hassan spoke out with a serious expression.

At first, the Meow and the cats had shown interest in him with sparkling eyes. But they must have become bored quickly, because they were stretched out and yawning as they pleased. Seeing this, it seemed that cats understood the phrase “however they pleased.” Anyways, Ark roughly understood the situation up until now.

“That’s why I knew that a Truthseeker like you would appear in front of us one day. Since the Black Bear Mouse left in the outside world is none other than Debra’s henchman.”

Thu-thu-thump.

When Hassan’s words ended, the information window popped up.

You have untangled all the complicated secrets of the ancient relic Mysterious Slate.
--

Intelligence has increased by 10, Fame has increased by 100.

You have acquired a new stat.

Knowledge of Ancient Relics (+10): New knowledge of researching ancient relics has come into your hands.

New World is a continent that guards many legends and secrets that haven't been uncovered yet. By collecting an ancient relic, it has become possible for you to discover this world's hidden secrets, one by one.

This kind of knowledge will provide yet another branching quest for requests that have been entrusted to you, and depending on the situation, it will help you receive a greater reward. Stat distribution is impossible, and if you acquire an ancient relic or discover a hidden truth, the stat will increase.

'Oh, what's this? There's this kind of bonus too?'

Ark's jaw dropped. Because he had already inwardly set his heart on a combat-related profession, it was a shame the bonus stat was the unnecessary Intelligence, but wasn't it free anyway? On top of that, since he had gotten fame as well, he felt like he could fly, he was so happy. But the messages didn't end there.

You have obtained information about the ancestor of the Meow, Hero Maban.

With this, you have taken the first step as a Truthseeker to following the footsteps of the legendary warrior, Hero Maban. It is possible to job change to Dark Walker, the unique profession of a Truthseeker.

If you change your profession, it will become possible to learn the inherent skills of a Dark Walker. In addition, as a profession characteristic, there are also cases where you cannot learn some common skills.

Would you like to change profession?

‘So there is even a related job change with the Secret of the Slate quest!’

Ark’s heart thumped wildly.

This was one of the hidden professions he’d only heard about!

Although he had played many online games up ‘til now, this was the first time he had personally found one.

Hidden professions typically received higher additional stat bonuses than common professions. Given the extreme difficulty of finding one, this reward was a matter of course. Also, there were unique skills only obtainable in a hidden profession, and with their use, one could demonstrate incredible strength.

That was the reason why users didn’t upload information about hidden professions.

Although there was the greed of wanting to monopolize hard-found information, more than that, the reason for hiding a distinctive skill only obtainable in a hidden profession was even greater. When users get into a fight amongst each other, if the opponent didn’t know the other side’s skill, then even that would be a huge help.

‘This is an incredible opportunity!’

His excitement was great after all. But Ark hesitated for a moment.

If he thought about it carefully, it wasn’t only a good thing.

So to speak, a hidden profession was partly a specialized profession, so there were many cases where the abilities leaned to one side. If a person who wanted to become a Magician happened to find a magic-specialized hidden profession, then they would be able to enjoy an enormous additional effect.

But if a warrior style user found the same magic hidden profession, it wouldn’t simply be an extremely upsetting situation. In the end, becoming a character that wasn’t one or the other wasn’t a small possibility. Since users didn’t share information, it wasn’t possible to check that point before job changing.

‘The risk is pretty high. Argh.’

If he made a risky mistake with his one and only character, it would be the end.

However, it was too much of a shame to reject a hidden profession he had found after all of this.

He had come this far struggling with an absolutely impossible quest at level 15, when it was usually possible to change professions. That meant it was a profession that required at least that much ability. Then the extra ability and skill were probably not that extraordinary...

‘Although I can’t know what type of profession it is from just the name... since she said Hero Maban was a legendary warrior, won’t it be combat-related? Alright, let’s believe that!’

In the end, Ark finished hesitating and shouted, “Yes!”

Around him, Ark was embraced with an aura of splendid light.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	None		
Fame	250	Level	16
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Mouse Hunter		
Health	360	Mana	100
Strength	67	Agilitiy	77 (+2)

Stamina	67	Wisdom	16
Intelligence	27	Luck	17
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics (10)			
Equipment Effects			
Sharply Shining Sword: Attack speed +5 Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor: Agility +2, Cold Resistance +20			

“Hm, that’s a good light in your eyes. It’s a light that has received the strength of the Meow and has resolved to live on as a Truth-Seeker. I like it. Truth-Seekers have been the Meow’s friends since long ago. Now you are our friend. To you, the one who defeated the Black Bear Mouse and brought us the slate, we dub thee an honorable knight and will call you ‘Cat Knight.’”

Hassan smiled contentedly as she wagged her tail.

You have received the title of Cat Knight from Hassan, elder of the Meow.

As a knight of the Meow, you can harbor friendships with all the Meow. When fighting Mice, 75% additional Attack Power is applied, chance of successfully landing a fatal blow increased to 50%, damage taken reduced by 50%. (50% applies to small monsters as well.)

*As a bonus from the title, all stats are increased by 2 each.

*Fame has increased by 150.

*You have gained the attribute of the Meow. (All abilities +30% when fighting small monsters.)

*It has become possible to communicate in language with all the cats of the Continent.

*Damage from falling can be reduced by 50%.

The Cat Knight's specialized skill, Spirit of the Cat, has been increased to Advanced.

Spirit of the Cat (Advanced): The cat's roar and sharp eyes can make all small monsters tremble in terror. 1 minute paralysis, Attack Power and Defense, Morale drop 30% (In the case of small monsters, even if they are boss monsters, 50% of the effect still applies.)

Mana consumption: 120

You have learned a new skill.

Eyes of the Cat(Beginner, Active): You can penetrate and see through the darkness with a cat's eyes. In addition, you can see an opponent's Health, Mana, and weakness. 3 minute duration +Night vision. +Life detection. +Weakness perception. Mana consumption: 50

Ark's eyes widened.

His stats hadn't changed at despite having already changed profession. The Mana that had gone up by 50 was just from solving the Secret of the Slate, along with the 10 increased Intelligence. At most all he had gained was learning Eyes of the Cat, and raising Spirit of the Cat to Advanced.

'No, no way!'

Ark let loose a scream inside. Although common professions were also a little different, with a job change, you received a stat bonus of

at least 30.

The specialized skills were also the same. Even as a warrior, who had fewer skills than a Magician, an extra 4~5 of them formed. But what the hell was this?

Then, without knowing Ark's feelings, Hassan put on a delighted expression.

"Oh ho ho, by your expression, it seems you're shocked by the might of Hero Maban."

'This wretch... I was deceived by this bastard's talk of Hero Maban or whatever...!'

Ark complained as his rage surged up.

"What is this? Although I've decided to live on as a Truthseeker, not much has changed!"

"Ah, do you need that after all?"

Hassan spoke as if he had thought of it for the first time.

"Actually, this temple is guarding a treasure that Hero Maban left for the Truth-Seekers. From that treasure, the Truthseekers gained the strength to find Hero Maban's footsteps."

'So that heritage has to come into my hands to complete the job change?'

The new information made his ears perk up.

Ark asked with an urgent tone, "Where is that heritage?"

"Debra was after that treasure since long ago. Even the reason why the bastard stole the temple..."

"That's fine, so where is it!"

"Since the bastard took the temple, of course Debra has it."

"What?"

Ark's face went pale.

He had already plentifully experienced how powerful Debra was. It was an opponent that the Sylphid Knights, which were that strong, couldn't win against even when they all charged at it. No, it was something invincible. How in the world was he to topple Debra and regain the heritage?

However, Hassan replied with a confident expression.

"Don't worry. Since you found the key, Debra and the like aren't even a problem. Like I said, the bastard locked us up because it feared us. That's not purely because we are descendants of Maban. It's because there's a slightly more fundamental problem."

"Wha-what is that?"

"We are the bastard's natural enemy."

Hassan bared his teeth and grinned wickedly.

You have met the Meow, who repulsed the Dream Weaver Debra and were locked up by it. You must defeat Debra with them and regain Hero Maban's treasure. Difficulty: +EQuest requirement: Only a user with the Cat Knight title may receive it.

"The key! Where is the key!" Debra screamed as it rooted through the corpses of the Knights.

Right then, a stone gate situated in a corner of the hall opened and Ark walked in.

"You're looking for the key?"

The place the Meow were locked in was right underneath the hall.

Debra recoiled at the sight of Ark.

"How, how did you...?"

"The key is right here."

As Ark raised the slate from his bag, Debra's eyes became bleary with madness.

Incredible terror blazed in its eyes as it charged toward Ark. Ark simply watching Debra with a very strained expression. Then, when Debra was up in front of his nose, he shouted with all his strength.

“Spirit of the Cat!”

Nyaaaaa-!

A black cat form appeared over his head along with a piercing cry.

After becoming a Cat Knight, the skill went up to Advanced, and the black cat had become 5 times bigger than it was when it was Intermediate.

As the nearly lion-sized black cat glared with golden eyes, the glowering Debra’s movements suddenly stopped. And as it convulsed with shivers, it stared at Ark with disbelieving eyes.

“Ku-kuhhuk! You’re a hu-human, how did you...!”

‘Hassan’s words were the truth after all!’

“The time is now! Attack the bastard!”

Nya, nya, nya, nya, nya, nyang!

As Ark shouted, the Meow and hundreds of cats poured out from behind the stone gate. The cats that traversed the hollow at an extreme speed covered Debra and scratched him with their fangs and claws. Debra shook his whole body and burst out in shrieks. Then, at that moment, its mantle suddenly swayed and the black object abruptly dropped to the ground.

His entire body was covered with a furry mass of cats.

‘The body has finally been revealed!’

Hassan’s confidence had no doubt stemmed from knowing about Debra’s body.

Debra’s body was a Gremlin that had received strength from an Illusion spell.

[T/N: Gremlins are small and often extremely ugly in appearance. They are known for their propensity for mischievous acts.]

That's why it had brought along disease and famine to the Jackson territory, and could not help but instinctively fear the natural enemies of small monsters, cats and the Meow.

Debra feared of having his body's true form revealed.

That it had sealed the temple's key far away and had hidden the physical body it had made with illusions were also due to the same reason.

Unaware of this, the Sylphid Knights had fought the illusion the bastard had created. Of course its health hadn't dropped and it had appeared immortal. The aura of horror he had thought had plunged the Knights in confusion was also actually an illusion. No wonder it had been impossible to clear it with magic.

'But the truth is just this kind of small monster...'

Debra staggered to its feet and stared at Ark.

"You, you bastard... how can a human use skill of the Meow...?"

"You cowardly mouse shit, you still haven't figured it out? He's a Truth-Seeker."

Hassan smiled sweetly as he tore away at the illusion of Debra.

The illusion of Debra was not even able to move properly because it was covered with the cat swarm.

"Wha-what? Then surely not...?"

"It means he's the natural owner of that power you had so anxiously desired."

"S-shut up! That strength is mine! I won't give it to anyone!"

Debra screamed violently and rushed towards Ark.

With the Advanced Spirit of the Cat, at the most 50% of the effect was applied, even on bosses like the Gremlin. Although it couldn't completely paralyze its movement, Debra continued to be in a slowed state.

"Ark, the bastard can no longer use the strength of the Dream while we're holding on. We'll block the apparition, so quickly finish the

bastard off. Everyone attack all-out!”

Nya, nya, nya, nya, nya, nyang!

The cats and Meow let loose yowls devoid of fear and concentrated their attack on the illusion of Debra.

There wasn't a free quest in the world after all. He had thought he'd be able to reap it in after Debra's real body had been revealed because the cats and Meow were helping, but in the end Debra was Ark's responsibility.

Ark delivered a hard kick to the charging Debra and violently swung his sword.

“Kyak!”

With the feeling of the sword lodging itself, Debra stumbled.

When Ark fought with the bastard's henchman, Black Bear Mouse, his sword hadn't really penetrated. But Debra had suffered a great number of blows. Moreover, with the Spirit of the Cat applied, its movement was slowed. When it was blanketed in the illusion, it had given off the feeling of being invincible, but now that the illusion was stripped away, it was weaker than its subordinate.

‘If it's just this much, I should be able to fight it no matter what!’

Ark directed flashing eyes toward Debra.

“Eyes of the Cat!”

As soon as the skill was activated, Ark's eyes were colored with golden light.

Health appeared atop Debra's head, and red points formed on places here and there on its body.

They were Debra's weaknesses that he had detected with Eyes of the Cat. If he focused his attacks on the red points, additional attack power would be applied, as well as a high probability of critical hits.

It was a skill perfectly suited for Ark's fighting style!

“Kyak! Keeeeeeee!”

Ark spun around Debra and consecutively thrust in his sword.

Every time he did so, Debra shook its body like crazy as it swung its cane, but it only struck at the tough ground. Soon 1 minute had passed and the Spirit of the Cat effect should have released, but the bastard's attacks still couldn't hit Ark.

‘But why is something they call a boss this weak? Is it ‘cus because the illusion wore off?’

In fact, it was to the point that Ark became more bewildered. But that was thanks to the ability, which he hadn't realized. The attribute of the Meow he had acquired through the profession change. His abilities increased by 30% when he fought all small monsters. That meant it applied to level, attack power, defense, and of course all skills and equipment effects.

Although Ark's level was 16, he was enjoying the effect of actually being level 25. In addition, Dream Weaver Debra's attribute was a Magician. Since a Magician was only able to block spells, it was no different from an ordinary Gremlin boss. As a boss, even if it were a Gremlin with enhanced abilities, Ark could definitely fight it by himself.

Ark's excitement grew anyways.

His body was as light as a feather and it wasn't that bothersome to swing the sword.

Even then, Ark continued and pressed against Debra. Every time he struck a red point, its life dropped bit by bit. After 10 minutes had passed, Debra's body turned red.

It had fallen into critical condition!

Of course, no matter how highly skilled he was, Ark couldn't avoid all the attacks. He would occasionally suffer an attack, and his Health would be cut down to half. The mana that had reached rock bottom was completely restored again with his skill use.

Ark's eyes flashed.

“Spirit of the Cat!”

The sharp yowl pierced right through Debra's body.

Once again, its movements was slowed as it convulsed. Ark bent his body low to avoid the flying front paw and struck its leg. The leg broke without resistance, and Debra toppled to one side.

Ark thrust his sword downwards towards Debra's completely exposed throat.

“This is your end, Debra!”

You have struck a fatal blow!

As the sword pierced the throat, Debra, who received extreme damage, quivered violently. Its tongue stuck and lolled out. Debra and the illusion Debra had made gradually faded and completely disappeared.

‘I defeated it!’

Although the true body's skill level was no different than the Demon Mouse, Debra was an extremely high level boss monster.

Actually, this ruin was already a place open to the public. However, no one had been able to take down Debra. First of all, the reason was that it was impossible to break Debra's illusion without the slate.

That was why the quest had specified that only a Cat Knight could do it.

Anyways, his level went up by 3 in a single burst with Debra's defeat.

And as a message that he had completed the ‘Defeat Dream Weaver Debra’ quest popped up, he gained yet another level, bringing him up to level 20.

“We finally had our revenge against Debra. You are now our hero! This is a small token of our sincerity.”

Hassan approached him and extended gloves covered with shaggy fur that went up to the elbow.

The Meow and the cats shouted as they pranced about.

Within this scene that lacked any tension, Ark smiled wryly and examined his booty.

A mantle from which dark red light flowed was lying where the illusion had disappeared, and there was a jewel-encrusted hand mirror and an orb of five colors lying in the place where Debra had been.

“Information window!”

Cat Paws (rare)			
Armor/Weapon Type	Leather Gloves, Knuckles		
Defense	30	Durability	50/50
Attack			9~15
Weight	5	Usage Restriction	Cat Knight Exclusive
It is the armor-and-weapon that Hassan, the elder of the Meow, gave to you. Usually it is soft like a normal glove, but during fighting, sharp claws spring out. Simply wearing it can give you the same agility and sharpness as a cat. Options: Attack speed increases by 10%, Agility increases by 15. Critical hit rate increases by 10%.			



Blood-Red Mantle of Dreams (Rare)			
Armor Type	Mantle		
Defense	70	Durability	50/50
Weight	10	Usage Restriction	Level 20
<p>A cursed mantle made by weaving the nightmares of many people, even the wearer will receive the curse — consciousness will grow dim, movement will be slowed. In exchange, once per day, you can turn the strength of the curse on your enemy and make them dream nightmares.</p> <p>Option: All stats -15</p> <p>Special Option: You can use the strength of illusion once per day to wrap your body and recover your health to 100% and give you the state of invincibility for 10 seconds (only useable at night).</p>			

Five-Colored Orb: An orb filled with a part of Hero Maban's strength.

Jewel Hand Mirror: Starting item for a level 40 quest.

'I've hit jackpot!'

It appeared that defeating Debra had been a quest where it was possible to obtain a profession exclusive item. Even so, that he had gotten the Mantle was an enormous harvest.

That he had obtained a rare item in the New World when it had only

started its service for two months was like picking a star from the sky. Unfortunately, there was the bad point of the cut stats, considering the special option, it seemed like it would have enormous value.

He had finally received the reward of rewards.

‘On top of that, now the quest where I just have to report in is left.’

The quest he’d gotten from Haverstein would be completed if he just left the ruin now.

‘Before that, there’s something I’ve gotta do first.’

Ark quickly grasped the Five-colored Orb and raised it to close to his forehead. In the next moment, light of five colors surged out from the Orb and enveloped Ark.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	None		
Fame	300	Level	20
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Mouse Master, Cat Knight		
Health	470 (+100)	Mana	170 (+100)
Spiritual Power	0 (+100)	Strength	79 (+5)
Agility	89 (+17)	Stamina	89 (+5)

Wisdom	18 (+5)	Intelligence	29 (+5)
Luck			19 (+15)
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			10
Equipment Effects			
Sharply Shining Sword: Attack speed +5 Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor: Agility +2, Cold Resistance +20			
*All abilities are increased by 20% in the dark.*The ability to hide your body in the dark has formed (duration time 10 minutes. Cancelled if you start fighting).*Resistance horror, darkness, blinding, and charm spells is increased by 50%.*You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.			

You have learned a new Profession skill.

Dark Blade (Beginner, Active): Assimilate your sword with the darkness and deal your opponent a delightful blow. A sword assimilated with the darkness ignores all physical defenses. Critical hit chance, critical hit attack power 150%. Ignores defense.

Mana consumption: 100 (There is a 1% chance of an instant kill if you use Dark Blade on an enemy in critical condition affected by Eyes of the Cat.)

You have learned a new Profession skill.

Summon Demon (Beginner, Active): You can summon up to three minor demons that wander the world between Middle Earth and Hell. The summoned creatures are currently each at level 1, and consumes the player's Mana. If a Familiar dies and is forcibly deported back to its world, you will suffer a blow equal to 50% of the Familiar's max Health and cannot resummon for 24 hours.

Spiritual Consumption: 100

“From Father...!”

The boy clutched the Blood-stained Silver Necklace tightly.

Ark watched the sight with sad eyes.

After overthrowing Debra, Ark gathered the survivors of the Sylphid Knights, who had been scattered in the ruin, and returned to Jackson Castle. Then, he pulled out the silver necklace for the fifteen year old son of Haverstein.

The boy that was to become lord after Haverstein did not show any tears. He only gazed at the necklace with bloodshot eyes and his throat just quivered a few times.

He was a strong boy.

“Ark, did Father pass away honorably?”

“Yes, he was more courageous than anyone, and was also a person who truly loved his son.”

“... Thank you.”

The young Lord nodded his head and looked at Ark.

“Ark, you nursed Father throughout the exploration of the ruin, watched over Father's death, and relayed the silver necklace to me in order to honor your promise with Father. Also, with surprising bravery you defeated Debra and saved my life. This accomplishment cannot be expressed in words and cannot be repaid with any amount

of reward.”

‘That’s right. He knows it well.’

Ark put on a pleased smile and nodded.

The young Lord fiercely shook his head.

“But I will not give you any reward!”

‘What? This, this little! What nonsense did he spout just now?’

“That Father entrusted you with the Blood-stained Silver Necklace means that he thought of you as a true friend! I dare not dirty that relationship with a material reward. I believe he would have definitely thought of you this way.”

Ark shook his head as if he’d gone mad. But even though it was Ark, he couldn’t just say ‘That’s not true. I like a material reward’ to a young Lord to whom Ark had delivered news of his father’s death. Ark tried his hardest to put on an awkward smile.

“Yes... well... even so...”

“Ark, a friend of my Father is also a friend of mine. Although there is nothing I can give, I give this vow to you here and now. If there is ever a time when you need my strength, I will rush over even to the end of the continent without hesitation!”

“Ah, yes... thank you.”

‘He’s saying he won’t give me anything in the end! He’s just making up for it with his mouth!’

Ark nodded with an expression that looked like he was about to cry.

The difficulty was a whopping +E. Of course, though he had solved it on the side with the profession-changing quest! He’d even received experience and his level had gone up by 1! Even so! He couldn’t receive even a whit of reward for a quest of that difficulty even though he’d completed it. What kind of crappy nonsense was this!

He felt as if he’d been scammed.

However, he couldn't just go into a rage when the young Lord had declared his speech that passionately.

'Unbelievable, you call it friendship? Whether it's father or son, they're too rigid...' Ark grumbled as he trudged out of the castle.

In the end, he hadn't fished out even 1 copper. Still, he wasn't in a bad enough mood to spew his anger.

Rather, should he call it a cleansing feeling?

"ATTENTION!"

As he passed the area of the door, he heard a booming command. Ark raised his head in alarm to find scores of soldiers even decked out in their uniforms lined up on the castle gate.

As Ark wondered what the hell was going on, the General of Defense Cross yelled out a command as he nodded slightly.

"SALUTE!"

The soldiers pulled out their swords and raised them to the sky.

Ark stood there with a momentarily perplexed expression before he suddenly felt a gaze directed at him and raised his eyes to the castle rampart.

In the window, the young Lord was watching him with a glowing face and a gentle smile. His eyes said a lot. Ark watched the young Lord for a moment and shook his head from side to side.

"I knew it, this game's NPCs are all too rigid."

A wry smile appeared on Ark's face as he passed through the soldiers.

The sunlight shining on the rim of his ears was warm, and the gentle wind refreshed him.

Truly... it wasn't a bad feeling.

Users gathered from the valley to sightsee this rare event.

Familiars

“Damn it.”

He subconsciously swore out loud.

In conclusion, the job change was a mistake.

Ark disliked hunting in a party. There wasn't a single person he could trust, and their attitudes could change over a single valuable magic item, leading to an argument. He found these sorts of situations repulsive. Rather than suffering from such mess, he was far more comfortable hunting alone, even if it was a little more difficult.

This was the reason why Ark preferred a combat-relation profession.

Thieves who stab their enemies' weak point, or Magicians who boast of having power to deal a one hit fatal blow weren't bad either. However, these professions could only genuinely shine in parties.

On the other hand, although Warriors weren't all that special, and didn't particularly have any exceptional skill, they had high Stamina and Defense. That wasn't all — they also received bonus bag space and in addition, they had resistance to all sorts of ailments. Thus, it wasn't wrong to say they were professions perfect for soloing.

But the profession 'Dark Walker' was closer to a Thief than a Warrior.

Dark Walker, one who walks the night. He should have guessed when he heard the name.

It was a matter of fact that the profession's bonus stats focused on, Agility, Intelligence, and Luck. But even then, all the additional stats were evenly matched to a Thief's.

No, it'd be better to be a regular Thief. If you debate about it, a Thief is a combat-related profession. If you look at the Summoning skill, or

the Intelligence stat bonuses, it seems like this profession included a Magician's traits to some degree.

'Agility is fine, since it influences critical hits, attack speed, and evasion rate, but Intelligence and Luck? In the end, it's unclear whether it's a Thief-related or Magician-related profession, or maybe even a Cleric.'

Hybrid-characters. They sound good and all, but in reality, it just means they were neither one, nor the other.

With the additional stats totalled to 60, he had gained a bonus amount doubled that of a standard job-change for a normal profession.

There was nothing problematic stat-wise. However, there were a lot of cases where stat bonuses added by a job change influenced the profession's ability as a whole. This meant that whether he liked it or not, he would have to diligently raise those three stats...

'And whose fault is it? The one who jumped the fence after hearing of a hidden profession was me. It was my mistake.'

He let out a stifled sigh.

But what could he do about the profession he had already chosen?

Similar to how he was mice hunting in Harun, if Ark focused on one thing, he had the propensity to obstinately dig his heels in. Be as it may, he was quick to give up if he thought he couldn't do anything about the situation.

At this moment, the situation was exactly the same. In any case, he couldn't turn back time even if he regretted it. So he thought he should make the best out of the current mishap to try and understand the Dark Walker profession and its special characteristics, and quickly adapt to it with the best of his abilities.

'No, it's still a hidden profession. It's because I've been thinking about being Warrior too much. It's probably not all that bad. If I nurture the profession's advantages, I'm sure I'll find more good points. Okay, calm down and examine it carefully. First of all, it

seems fundamentally similar to a Thief. Summoning is definitely one of this profession's unique point. In other words, the profession's nature will be decided depending on how Summoning is used, right?

Anyhow, he could summon up to three Demons that he could handle at will.

'If I use these guys, won't I be able to hunt solo?'

"Summon Demon."

Ark welled with expectation and called out the Summon skill, spending the newly formed Spiritual Power points. However, as soon as he examined the Familiar he summoned, the speck of expectation in his heart crumbled to bits.

'Wha-what is this. This is?'

The summoned Familiar appeared with a blinding flash was just a skull.

The Skull briefly checked its surroundings with eyes of hazy light. It discovered Ark and chattered its teeth together, making a clattering sound.

Ark hastily opened the information window.

Nameless Dead Man's Skull			
The skull of a low-class dead man that had been wandering in the Netherworld. There is nothing special about it. However, it holds unwavering loyalty for the master who saved it from the Netherworld.			
Race	Undead	Alignment	Dark
Class	—	Health	50
Loyalty	200	Strength	10

Agility	10	Stamina	10
Wisdom	0	Intelligence	0
Luck	0		

In other words, apart from its loyalty, it was a bloke no different from a pebble on the roadside.

“Are you kidding me? If it doesn’t have an ability, it should at least have been pretty.”

He exploded in anger, but the Skull simply tumbled around. Ark grinded his teeth as he restored his Spiritual Power and called out the two remaining Familiars.

Hatred-Bearing Bat			
A low-class Bat ostracized in the Netherworld. Having suffered rejection for a long time, it bears frustration and hatred towards the world. Because of its hatred, it cannot be completely loyal to its master. To expect its loyalty, you must first gain its trust.			
Race	Demonic	Alignment	Dark
Class	—	Health	50
Loyalty	50	Strength	5
Agility	10	Stamina	10
Wisdom	10	Intelligence	10
Luck	0		

‘Oh great, now it’s a loser bat?’

A Hatred-bearing Bat? He had to gain its trust? There really were all kinds of crap. However, compared to the familiar that appeared last, the first two were aristocracy.

Netherworld’s Egg			
A firm shelled egg all high-class Demonic beings of the Netherworld enjoyed eating.			
Race	??	Alignment	??
Class	—	Health	200
Loyalty	—	Strength	0
Agility	0	Stamina	40
Wisdom	0	Intelligence	0
Luck	0		

Upon seeing the egg appearing before him, he omitted all feelings of wanting to be angry.

‘An egg? What exactly could you use it for? So what if it’s as firm as a rock? Is it asking to be thrown?’

With these three Familiars in front of him, he couldn’t fathom what the hell they were used for. Ark was stunned.

Hidden professions usually had two types of natures.

One, they held the possibility of becoming a hero through their exceptional abilities. While the other was a profession made through an event for fun and games, which was no more than just a unique

profession.

By the looks of it, it appeared the profession Ark had found was of the latter type.

He did think the three Familiars he summoned were interesting, but that was all there was to it.

They weren't even Halloween decorations... What help would a Skull, Bat, and Egg be?

However, there wasn't anything that could be done about it.

In New World, a one-time choice would determine one's fate. In a way, it was more cold-hearted than reality. In a world such as this, having already made his choice, there was no way to turn back.

"Huhuhuhu."

An absurd laugh escaped Ark's lips.

Ark quickly gave up. But it wasn't the *'whatever happens, happens'* kind of surrender.

Someone once said *'If you can't avoid it, enjoy it'*. It's quite a famous saying.

Ark had lived with those words engraved in his heart. That's why no matter what situation he was in, he had never pitied himself before. If he harbored even a morsel of self-pity, he wouldn't have been able to endure until now.

"The penalty in Harun Village, and then changing my profession to an unwanted one. With so many failures, I can't even get angry anymore. Alright, let's give it a try. Bad luck? Don't make me laugh. Without fail, I'm gonna try turning this ridiculous character into a Warrior."

If the profession wasn't satisfactory, he just had to raise his level more than others. If raising his level wasn't enough, then he could also raise his skill like crazy.

New World was a game with high degrees of freedom.

Just because he'd selected his profession didn't mean that it would decide everything. Even if it wasn't a special technique, there were plenty of common skills he could learn. With a close choice from that boundless array, he could shape the way his character developed in all sorts of manners.

Although there were cases where a lot of penalties were applied because of the profession, there were more skills he could learn than skills he couldn't learn.

A Warrior-type Magician. Thief-type Warrior, etc... that meant with effort, making a versatile Multi-Character wasn't just impossible, but what he had to believe in now was just that endless freedom.

"If I've made my decision, there's no time to sit around."

Ark sprang up and headed to the hunting ground.

Level 20-30 monsters he could catch were scattered in the Jackson area. Currently, Ark's level was 21.

It was good enough to set Jackson as his base and do his grinding.

"Haaayaahh!"

From that day on, Ark immersed himself hunting in day and night.

The opponent Ark had chosen in the beginning was a mud monster called Harpoon. Its body was made of mud, so he couldn't strike it with his sword very well, and it had a lot of health inconsistent with its level, 20. However, it wasn't a difficult monster to fight because it moved slowly.

When the fighting started, Ark won easily with a strategy of unleashing waves of attacks while circling the area around the Harpoon.

When the Harpoon collapsed, it dropped Iron Ore, an item that fetched a really nice price at the Smithy.

If his Health didn't fall below half, Ark wouldn't take a break. Only when his bag was filled bursting or his equipment's durability had fallen to 5 or below did he return briefly to Jackson to address those

matters.

Besides that, the rest of the time was solely devoted to bloody battles with monsters! Despite that, Ark didn't feel fatigue. No matter how tough or tired he was, all his needs washed away with the cheerful sound of a level up.

After hanging on, frantically hunting like that for two days, his level went up by another 3, bringing him to 24. His combat-only skills, Sword Mastery and Hand-to-Hand Combat, went up considerably and were now at Intermediate as well. With that, the two skills combined and a new message information window popped up.

Sword Mastery and Hand-to-Hand Combat have reached the maturity of an expert. Accordingly, the two techniques have combined to allow you to register Sword-Hand Combat as a legal skill.

Note, if Sword-Hand Combat is registered as a legal skill, Sword Mastery and Hand-to-Hand Combat will be automatically deleted.

Sword-Hand Combat (Beginner, Passive): The technique that experts of Sword Mastery and Hand-to-Hand Combat use.

Although you cannot equip a shield along with it, it is an advanced combat technique that thoroughly combines deftness and keenness. It grants you additional attack power with all types of swords and knuckle-related weapons, and your evasion and critical hit rate will increase rapidly. General attack power is increased by 20%. Sword-Hand Combat's effect dissolves shield equipping.

A new stat has formed. Flexibility (+10): Your body becomes more flexible, allowing you to perform difficult movements skillfully.

Your evasion is heightened and you receive extra points if your attack hits the mark. However, if you equip iron armor, a certain amount of the worn equipment's effect will drop.

Stat distribution is impossible, and if you succeed in performing evasion movements of difficult techniques, it will increase automatically.

Ark's eyes lit up.

Was there anything that made a user happier when it came down to a character's growth?

With the level and skill growth, he could definitely feel himself getting stronger. Hand-to-Hand Combat was a skill especially well suited to Ark's fighting style.

Ark's tactic of leaving enough space, discharge attacks and delivering the finishing blow at the chance were all techniques he'd learned from Taekwondo. If he packed the sensation directly into his sword, he would undoubtedly score a critical hit.

With the skill 'Eyes of the Cat' included, it made his critical hit rate even higher. And because of that, a frenzied battle with exploding critical hits wildly unfurled.

Defeating a monster took less than just 1 minute. Although he was bent on believing that he was a Warrior-type, his fighting style, which measured space and watched for gaps rather than blindly throwing himself in, was closer to a Thief's.

"Alright, I think I can proceed deeper in now."

Ark's eyes looked towards the inner depths of the forest.

In order to ensure one's safety when soloing, one was bound to hunt monsters at a lower level than oneself. Ark had done so until now, but this area's monsters didn't give him the proper amount of experience now. Ark moved forward to find stronger monsters.

However, moving his hunting ground without prior information was a mistake.

As soon as he stepped into the forest depths, he heard a menacing cry. As he raised his head reflexively, Ark's face hardened.

In the dark, he saw five wolves prowling about with their gleaming scarlet eyes.

They had enormous bull-like bodies, black fur like the pitch-black darkness, and knife-like sharp canines. They were Dire Wolves.

‘5 Dire Wolves...!’

Dire Wolves were incomparably more powerful than normal Wolves. On top of that, it was now night time. The nocturnal Dire Wolf’s ability went up by 30 percent. They were such formidable opponents that it wasn’t certain if a level 24 would be able to handle two or three of them. Ark’s whole body stiffened rigidly with tension.

‘Damn, I was too careless. It’s too late to run away now.’

His Taekwondo-trained body judged the situation faster than his mind and moved.

The first move meant victory! It was a method used in kung fu, wrestling, and everywhere else.

Ark reduced the distance rapidly as he swung his sword landing a critical hit, with one Wolf falling back. However, the wolves were also beasts that were proficient at pack hunting. A Wolf ran in and avenged its companion with the same critical hit to his back, which he’d left neglected as he focused on attacking.

His consciousness reeled.

You have been critically hit! Damage 50.
--

You have been inflicted with Bleed. Until the battle is over, you will receive 2 damage every 10 seconds.

‘So it’s insult to injury. Since I’m like this, I’ll die after I kill just one more!’

Ark faced the Wolf throng as he unleashed Sword-Hand Combat. He swung his sword wildly and clawed with his Cat Paws. He even rolled on the ground, sprang up, and whipped out kicks.

After 10 minutes of the bloody battle, three wolves collapsed. But Ark, who was inflicted with Bleed, also had to pay a price.

‘Huff huff huff, only 20 percent of my Health is left.’

“Eyes of the Cat.”

As he used the skill, Ark’s eyes turned into golden cat eyes. Their halved Healths appeared above the wolves’ heads.

‘If it goes well, I might even be able to win.’

Just when Ark had momentarily released his tension, a Wolf who had been watching for its chance didn’t miss the opportunity and rushed in.

As it flashed in front of his eyes, his Health plummeted. Ark’s body became awash in red. He’d fallen into the critical state. At the same time, message windows popped up continuously.

Indomitable Will and Indomitable Body, which shone more brightly in a crisis, were invoked. Attack power, critical hit and evasion rate skyrocketed!

‘It’s a chance!’

His eyes flashed as he thrust his sword.

Clang, clang! As two critical hits landed in succession, the wolves collapsed.

Then, the remaining one lunged towards his side and charged in. Ark hastily turned his body as he swung his sword. However, fortune and misfortune were a just hair apart.

Your critical hit attack has missed!

If it was a normal attack, there wouldn’t have been any reason for it to miss. However, because of his skills triggering automatically when in a critical state, he was in a condition where his critical hit rate was abnormally high. That actually acted negatively. As much as a critical hit gave 2 times the damage, the miss rate was also that heightened.

“Ah, no! If I die now the stats.... SUMMON DEMON! This useless skull. Just do something!”

With his heart clutching at straws, Ark summoned the skull, grabbed it, and threw it.

The skull went flying and clamped onto the Wolf’s ankle. Although the damage was just 1, it succeeded in stopping the movements of the Wolf that had rushed in with its bared fangs. It was a chance he’d never even dreamed of.

Ark closed the space in one burst as he thrust his sword, and a flash exploded out.

<p>You have landed a critical hit. As a co-op bonus with the Skull, 30% of the damage has been added.</p>

Awooooo!

The Wolf howled its death throes as it collapsed.

It was a miracle-like victory. Ark, who realized that he’d narrowly won, checked and saw that his remaining health was a mere 3. If the battle had dragged on for just 20 more seconds, he would’ve collapsed from the Bleed. The Bleed had stopped with the end of the battle, but his heart was still thumping violently as it pumped hot blood through his veins.

Arc rushed to a safe place as soon as possible. After recovering his Stamina with a simple snack, he barely managed to calm down.

Ark stared at the Skull with surprised eyes.

Like a puppy begging for praise, the Skull was rolling over and over around him. It was the same Skull that he decided not to summon again because of its disappointing appearance.

It seemed like it wouldn’t be any help, and since it would even suck Mana from him during battle, there wasn’t really any reason to pull it out. However, his life was saved thanks to the Skull, and his opinion of it had changed.

‘At least it’s better than nothing.’

“Anyways, I survived thanks to you, Skull.”

Clack clack clack.

The Skull clattered its teeth as if it understood his words.

For the last few days, Ark had been engrossed in hunting. Besides the occasional times when returned to the castle, he was always alone. He hadn’t felt it until now because he’d been absorbed in hunting, but he realized yet again that that the forest felt unusually broad and desolate.

“You, I’m really pleased with you.”

For one thing, it seemed like he wasn’t going to be bored if he was with the Skull. Additionally, if it could be a help like the way he’d used it just now, it was perfectly satisfactory. It would consume Mana in battle, but as long as he doesn’t use Spirit of the Cat, he didn’t particularly needed the Mana either.

“Alright, since it’s a skill that I’ve learned, should I try using it properly?”

Ark went ahead and summoned the Bat too.

Once he actually decided to use them, the Familiars had many unexpected uses.

The Bat excelled in scouting the area. If he sent the Bat before he moved in, he could reduce the chances of him being suddenly hemmed in by Wolves. It was also useful for surveying the general terrain.

The Skull and Bat also played a part in battle.

“Go!”

As Ark extended his hand, the Skull and Bat flew towards the Yeti.

The Skull bit the Yeti’s ankle to slow its movement, and the Bat covered its eyes to impede its vision.

Ark leisurely studied the situation and flung his sword. Then, a critical hit burst out with a considerably high rate. On top of that, the co-op attack bonus with the Familiars was added!

Just like that, he would start fighting with the monsters and cut down their health by nearly 20 percent. After getting used to this method, it was now difficult to even imagine a fight without the Familiars.

“Wahahaha, this is as useful as expected!”

Although he still hadn't been able to figure out the Egg's purpose, with just the Skull and the Bat, Ark's hunting speed accelerated. Of course, they weren't that helpful when he was fighting a strong monster. In fact, they were crushed even before he went to the nearby area and even dealt [indirect] damage to Ark's Health.

If the Familiar was destroyed, Ark's Health was also decreased by up to 50% of its Health. But the Familiar's Health was just 50, it wasn't fatal damage, and a destroyed Familiar could also be called forth again any time he wanted after 24 hours.

“Dark Walker, this might even be an unexpectedly okay profession.”

Ark became more and more enamored with the Dark Walker's charm like this.

A character that was neither this nor that could mean that it could do anything.

As he went deeper into the forest, Ark shouted valiantly, “Forward, forward! Let's take down everything!”

* * *

Kyaaak!

The Zombie collapsed as it screamed a grotesque shriek.

A message popped up with a cheerful sound effect.

Your level has risen.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	None		
Fame	300	Level	26
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight		
Health	745	Mana	250
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	104
Agility	104 (+17)	Stamina	124
Wisdom	23	Intelligence	44
Luck	23	Flexibility	10
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			10
Equipment Effects			
Sharply Shining Sword: Attack speed +5 Cat Paws: Attack speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit Rate +10%			
<p>*All abilities are increased by 20% in the dark.</p> <p>*The ability to hide your body in the dark has formed (Duration time 10 minutes. Cancelled if you start fighting).</p> <p>*Resistance to horror, darkness, blinding, and charm spells is increased by 50%.</p>			

*You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

‘Phew, it’s harder than I thought.’

Ark’s face was full of sweat, but he was beaming with happiness.

You receive as much reward as your suffering. There wasn’t any reason for him to complain.

As hunting became faster, his mood surged to the peak. Coasting on that mood, Ark entered the deepest part of the forest, called the Shadow Forest.

Among the areas around Jackson, this was the forest with the highest difficulty.

Even from just its atmosphere, the Shadow Forest was different from other places. Within the darkness that made it difficult to distinguish the path in front of him, the sagging branches of old oaks were intertwined like a net, and there was a bizarre kind of plant blanketing the blackened, dead ground.

The monsters that emerged were also grotesque.

Rotting Wolves, Zombies, and Ghoul-like Undead monsters spawned. Even the weakest Rotting Wolf had a higher level than Ark. Even more so was the occasionally appearing level 50 medium boss monster, Reaper, which he wouldn’t even consider approaching.

However, even the Undeads couldn’t make the high-spirited Ark afraid.

No, Ark was able to truly really realize the meaning of the name Dark Walker only when he arrived at this rotting forest.

As he entered the dark forest, a message window popped up soon afterwards.

Dark Walker special effect: All abilities increased by 20% in the dark.

Granted, the same effect applied at night as well. However, most of the monsters' stats go up by 30 percent at night. Ultimately, the difference that Ark could actually feel was almost nonexistent. But right now, it was currently day time. Monster stats stayed the same, while Ark's stats rose.

Although Ark's level was 26, he actually had the abilities of a level 30!

Since all of his skills and stats were enhanced, the difference was enormous. Even late level 20s Rotting Wolves were no match for him.

It was to the point that he didn't have a whole lot of difficulty fighting Zombies and Ghouls in their early level 30s.

On top of that, one of his profession techniques was 'Hiding'. Although there wasn't any effect when he was already discovered, but if he used it appropriately, he could leisurely rest in a place crawling with monsters.

A profession which demonstrated its true ability in the dark, that's what Dark Walker profession was. Because of the Dark Walker's special ability, he was able to hunt monsters that Ark couldn't normally defeat at his level.

That wasn't all. When a user defeats a monster 5 levels above theirs, additional experience is granted. With that, the experience that seemed to have stopped before he entered the forest was now surging up.

'It also drops a lot of japtem, I'm really getting into hunting this Undead.'

Ark was in high spirits.

The Undead monster dropped quite a lot of items. Even so, for the most part they were lumps of rotted meat and the like, but occasionally it also dropped equipment like a dagger, gloves, or shoes.

The japtem were neatly piling up in his bag. Granted, they were lousy items that would be difficult to sell for even a few coppers if he tried.

However, Ark, who had eked out a living through part-time jobs, knew this. They say that many drops makes an ocean. If you gathered even a few coppers, it would eventually become silver and then gold.

Ark personally equipped a few of them.

Used Worn-out Shoes			
Armor Type	Leather Shoes		
Defense	5	Durability	5/5
Weight	8	Usage Restriction	None

Shoes used by an Undead for his entire lifetime. The worn and faded leather emanates rotten smell. No matter how skilled a craftsman may be, they will not be able to repair this pairs of shoes to be worth wearing.

Dirty Leather Hat			
Armor Type	Leather Helmet		
Defense	5	Durability	9/9
Weight	5	Usage Restriction	None

A leather hat used by an Undead during his lifetime. It's a hat that looks like it would struggle to block a raindrop, let alone a sword.

Stat or appearance, they were too wretched for words. With the tattered shoes and hat on, at a distance who would have been mistaken for a beggar. In addition, the material was made out of leather, so the rotting smell was so bad, it paralyzed the sense of smell.

Ark laughed exultantly nevertheless. Purchasing shoes and a hat that lacked defence from a shop would cost a wasteful 50 silvers, at the very least. It was better to hunt while smelling the rotten scent than to spend 50 silvers.

On top of that, they even had defence, so nothing was left to desire.

Ark was extremely pleased with the Shadow Forest.

He received stat bonus and his experience went up quickly. Useful items sometimes dropped as well. Would there be another place as delightful as this one while playing the game? If he could, he wanted to hunt in the Shadow Forest for several days.

However, a problem he hadn't expected arose. What Ark had actually been worried about was the equipment's durability.

He hadn't learned the repair skill yet, because he hadn't felt the need for it.

After finishing the quest in Jackson, if there was something Ark had earned, it was the right to utilize the Lord's personal facilities. Among those was the Lord's foremost Smithy. If he used that place, they repaired his equipment for half the price of normal Smithies.

Since he'd been hunting around Jackson, there wasn't a need to pay out expensive fee to learn the skill. That's why Ark found it troublesome if the durability was suddenly exhausted in a hunting ground far away from Jackson.

However, an even worse problem occurred in an element he'd truly never expected.

It was food.

Ark had prepared just 10 wheat breads when he left Jackson. Since he had Survival Cooking, he'd planned on acquiring ingredients here and there, making food, and eating. Although he was able to do that in the forest where he last hunted, the Shadow Forest was not an ordinary forest.

Of course he saw tons of food ingredients in the Shadow Forest, but the forest was a place where Undead roamed around in broad daylight. He couldn't find any normal looking food ingredients.

The mushrooms or even the grass looked like eyeballs or intestines. Simply imagining how it would taste or feel to chew made him shudder. No, the taste was fine no matter how it was. The problem was that Ark wouldn't know what kind of effect the cooking he learned would have, a characteristic of Survival Cooking.

'That's definitely dangerous. It has dangerous sign written on it.'

Perhaps it was because the grade of the ingredient was too high, he couldn't figure out its information with his beginner Ingredient Identification skill.

But could he find out by just looking at the information?

They didn't have a skull mark, but they were food ingredients that devoted every fiber of their being to claim they were dangerous.

Ark was able to hunt comfortably in the Shadow Forest thanks to his hiding ability. But if he made the wrong food, ate it, catches a Confusion hex and ran amok, he'd become an Undead's meal right there and then. If it wasn't a safe place, it was better not to make a new Survival Cooking meal.

'I'm gonna go crazy. The wheat bread is already gone, and even my recovery rate has dropped by 50 percent. Eventually, there will be some penalty... Do I have to go all the way back to the village even if it takes 1~2 hours? Or should I put my life on the line and try making and eating it?'

As Ark rummaged in his bag, an ingenious thought suddenly came to

mind.

‘Of course. Why didn’t I think of that?’

“Summon Demon, Netherworld’s Egg!”

At Ark’s cry, the Egg Familiar appeared.

It was the Familiar Ark hadn’t bothered with, because unlike the Skull and Bat, it was a good-for-nothing. Ark had thought there’d be no reason to summon it again, but the Familiar’s purpose had finally surfaced.

Ark swallowed his saliva as he gazed at the Netherworld’s Egg.

‘Even if it’s a Familiar or whatever, in the end it’s only slightly larger than a normal egg. There’s no reason why it can’t be used as a food ingredient. Since it was said the Demonic beings also ate it frequently, and an ingredient is an ingredient. An egg will be better than those disgusting ingredients in the forest. And even if a Summon disappears, I can call it again. If it goes well, it might even become an ingredient I can use limitlessly. I’m sure of it, the Egg’s purpose was probably this from the start.’

Ark grinned as he put the Netherworld’s Egg in the pot.

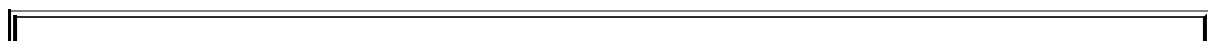
“Huhuhu, an egg is a wealth of protein. A meal of enormous effect might even be born.”

Then he added a little amount of normal food ingredients he had left and began to boil it.

So how was it? Light spewed from the cooking, which wafted a really reasonable aroma. The message that the cooking had succeeded showed up. Now, all that was left was to taste it.

“Ohhh, it succeeded. It succeeded — Boiled Egg!”

Just as Ark reached out to raise the Egg while humming a tune, all the food inside the pot suddenly vanished. Soon afterward, a message window he’d never seen before popped up along with the gloomy laughter as background music.



You have completed Survival Cooking. However, 'Netherworld's Egg' has absorbed all of it.

There is no effect on Netherworld's Egg. You have not grasped what kind of effect the cooking has.

"Wha-what? Absorb?"

Ark stared at the Egg with a dumbfounded expression.

He needed a considerable amount of time before he was able to understand the situation.

'The egg absorbed the cooking. Then, does that mean the Egg as a whole wasn't used as a cooking ingredient? But absorbed? What the hell does that mean?'

Ark, who had his head tilted sideways, suddenly raised his head.

'What, in the end it means the Egg went and ate the cooking! If so...?'

Ark's line of vision shifted to the Skull.

Ultimately, it meant that Familiars could also eat food! As soon as he realized that, yet another method flashed through his mind like lightning and surfaced. Ark quickly made a new meal.

There was no need to agonize, either. Food ingredients were everywhere around him. He roughly gather food ingredients around him and dumped them inside the pot. After several failures, he completed a soup radiating a peculiar smell.

Ark gestured to the Skull with tender eyes.

"Here, Skull. Try eating this."

Lei: IT'S A TRAP!

The Skull stared with sunken eyes and approached him with hesitation.

After dunking itself into the soup, it jumped right out and collapsed.

The Skull shot reproachful looks that said 'why did you do something like this to me' at him and slowly disappeared.

Nameless Dead Man's Skull has received an intense shock. Damage 50!
--

Nameless Dead Man's Skull has disappeared to the Netherworld. You can summon it again after 24 hours.
--

The food you made through Survival Cooking is 'Soup of Horrifying Taste'. Just having a sip of it will deal an enormous shock with its incredibly repugnant taste. Wrap it up well and send it to a mean opponent as a present.

"It was as I expected!"

Ark nodded vigorously. Familiars could eat food after all. And after a Familiar of his had eaten the food he made, it was added to the Survival Cooking's catalog. In other words, no matter who ate it, it was fine as long as Ark checked the cooking's effect. There was no reason to test out its danger personally!

How anxious he'd been until now every time he made a new meal...

"Cooking has suddenly become enjoyable. After all, food has to be made for the sake of others."

Ark made food again as he hummed a tune.

However, the Bat was not as loyal as the Skull. The Bat, which had witnessed the horrific scene of the Skull eating the food and falling over, was filled with fear and backed away furtively. Of course, Ark wasn't one to let it off because of that.

After grabbing the Bat and shoving it into the salad-filled pot, another message window popped up.

The food you have made through Survival Cooking is Suspicious Herb Salad. It appears extremely suspicious, but it actually has the effect of recovering Stamina quickly.
--

Recovery rate +50%. Restores up to 150 Health over 30 seconds.
--

Ark immediately remade and ate food after confirming its effects.

The Shadow Forest's ratio of poisonous and edible food ingredients were half and half. The problem was that the poisonous ones' toxicity was extremely powerful. There were a lot of foods that could send Ark off after one bite if he ate them thoughtlessly. However, Ark didn't worry at all.

He didn't have to shoulder the danger.

Ark, who'd found a method to figure out the effects of the food safely, had no reservations. He gathered all the ingredients he could see and made food without resting, as if he were possessed by the spirit of a head chef.

"Ohohoho, should I also try putting rotted meat in there this time?"

The Skull and Bat were hugging each other tightly as they trembled from the ever-changing approaching horror.

Ark beamed as he said, "At least it's better than your master, me, dying. Right?"

But they were slaves to their wicked master, and had no place to run. The Skull and Bat were helplessly wandering between life and death. After a few hours, the Skull, which had a loyalty of 200, had a different light to its eyes when it looked at Ark. The Bat that had a low loyalty to begin with even attempted to escape.

"Hmmm, even if you try to flee, you can't hide. Cancel Summon. Resummon, Bat."

The Bat who had fled a significant distance disappeared and appeared in front of Ark's nose.

Ark glared at the squirming Bat as he scolded, "You cheeky rascal, this is your third time."

Ark mercilessly shoved the Bat into the pot.

The firmly stuck and trembling Bat suddenly screamed.

"UWAHH, PLEASE STOP, MASTER!"

In the meantime, a message window came up.

As an effect of the mysterious food, the stats of 'Hatred-bearing Bat' have increased.
--

Hatred-Bearing Bat			
Race	Demonic	Alignment	Dark
Class	—	Health	50 (+5)
Loyalty	50	Strength	5 (+1)
Agility	10 (+1)	Stamina	10 (+1)
Wisdom	10 (+1)	Intelligence	10 (+2)
Luck	0		

* The ability to communicate with the Summoner through language has formed

(Note, a food it has eaten once will not have an effect the second time. Only new foods stimulate a Familiar of the Netherworld and bring out its hidden power.)

“Ara, what’s this? A Familiar’s stats can also increase through food?”

Ark’s eyes widened.

He hadn’t even thought that Familiars could grow.

Granted, he could tell from reading the information window that it

wasn't that easy to fulfill the conditions. He had to make and find the right food for the Familiar among hundreds of meals. Plus, he could raise its stats through the same food just one time. If he wanted to raise its stats again, he had to find a new food.

It was a dizzying task that used countless ingredients and an innumerable amount of labor. But even if it was impossible, the fact that a Familiar's stats could be raised was the difference between heaven and earth.

It was possible. That meant it was worth trying. More so if it weren't just stats that rose, but new abilities that formed as well.

"But for the first formed ability to be language capability... It wanted to communicate with me that much?"

If monsters were similar to users, then they would also first learn the skill they needed most.

Ark stared at the Bat with surprised eyes. The Bat was flapping as it gnashed its teeth.

"What nonsense, master! Are you spewing such crap because you don't know why I wanted to speak? Like master, we also feel taste and feel pain! I'd rather die than eat that horrible food!"

"Are you defying your master right now?"

"I-I'm not defying. I'm asserting my right!"

"Do you think that way too, Skull?"

As Ark turned his head a little, the Skull with a loyalty of 200 quickly shook its head.

The Bat leapt up.

"Thi-this traitor!"

"If you keep squealing, I'll expand your food intake by 2 times."

"He—heek!"

The Bat let loose a stifled cry and shut its mouth.

To be fair, how terrible was eating the food that it even developed a speaking ability? As wicked as Ark was, when he saw this kind of response from the Familiar, he also felt a little sorry.

“Alright, we’ll do it less often in the future.”

“But doesn’t that mean we still have to eat?”

“As your master, why would I be doing it with bad intentions? This is all for your own good. Don’t you also want to grow?”

“Li—lies!”

“I can’t lie,” Ark said confidently.

‘Huhuhu, do you think I’d give up on such a comfortable method? And since I’ve finally found a way to make you guys useful, too.’

Now he had a definite reason to feed the Familiars the unidentified food.

He didn’t need to bat an eyelash because of feelings such as guilt. But was that the end of it? Nope. He had also gained a perfect weapon to control his Familiars.

“Ri-ridiculous! I don’t need it!”

“You’re noisy, if you keep whining I’ll only feed you from now on!”

The Bat jumped in alarm and blocked its mouth.

“Listen well. When there’s battles in the future, whoever doesn’t do its job properly will have to eat the food. You understand?”

“I-I get it,” the Bat replied with a quavering voice.

The Skull also rocked its head back and forth as it clacked its teeth.

Ark had complete domination over the Familiars. Of course, no matter how well they listened to his orders, he had thoughts to keep feeding them food. So no matter what, the result would be the same.

“Bat, go scout the area and come back. Meticulously. You know

what'll happen if you mess up, right?"

Ark had a pleased smile on his face as he watched the Bat flying frantically off.

Dark Walker, an extremely worthwhile profession.

They may be just Familiars, but he couldn't just keep swinging his whip at them all he wanted. Sometimes the Bat and Skull both performed in his expectations, so he exempted them from punishment.

Of course the food was given to the Egg.

'If the Skull and Bat can grow, then it's possible for the Egg, too.'

Ark's prediction hit the mark. After making it absorb a certain amount of food, a change occurred in the Egg.

It wriggled, and small cracks also appeared on its surface. They were miniscule changes that couldn't be detected without careful inspection, but it was definite proof that it could grow with food.

You're Dead if You're Caught

"There aren't that many things worth using."

"Even so, they are wares difficult to acquire in the area."

"That may be so, but..."

The shopkeeper scratched his head.

"Alright. Since you've steadily made use of our store all this time, I'll give you up to 5 gold and 40 silver."

"As I've said before, please give me 5 gold and 50 silver."

"Eh, since you don't want to lose out on even a single penny. Fine, let's do that."

"This is why I like you, mister."

Ark chuckled as he pocketed the money.

In New World, even if stores were from the same village, they each had a different sale and purchase price. The prices were always inconsistent and depended on the inventory or market price. This was the reason why users looked for stores that would pay them more each time. However, Ark had only used one place while hunting in the Jackson area.

Because of the experiences he had from living in Harun Village for half a month, he knew a bonus was added if he accumulated friendship with the shopkeeper for a long time.

In the beginning, there were times when it was disadvantageous, but at some point you'll receive 10% more money when you sell goods. When you buy goods, you also receive at least a 10% discount. In addition, if you first buy an item recommended by the shopkeeper, there were cases where they could give you up to the max 30% discount.

This piece of information was known to only a handful of Merchants

and users.

“If you need money, rather than selling worthless wares, why don’t you sell those Cat Gloves instead? I’ll give you a good price for them.”

If he was familiar with the shopkeeper, there were times when the shopkeeper sometimes asked for a particular item. Thanks to these situations, Ark was able to determine the generic value of items even if he didn’t trade with other users.

“No, I’m fine. I’ll come again next time.”

Ark finished what he had to do and left the shop.

“I’ve saved up quite a lot.”

Ark fiddled with his weighted pocket as he walked on the street.

He had approximately 60 gold when he left Harun Village, but before he knew it, he had already saved up 120 gold.

The most costly expenses in New World for users were food supplies and repair costs. On the other hand, it was possible for Ark to save this much because he didn’t spend money for ingredients when he made food, and his repair costs were halved by the Lord’s exclusive Smithy.

However, the time had come to end those privileges.

“So it’s finally time to leave Jackson.”

By hunting in the Shadow Forest, Ark had finally reached level 30. The Rotting Wolves and Zombies were no longer much help in increasing his experience. Although the experience the level 30 Ghoul’s gave were still okay, they were low in numbers. Be as it may, he still couldn’t hunt the level 50 Reapers. It seemed like he had to move his hunting ground soon and look for a new quest.

“Before that, there’s a skill I’ve got to learn.”

It was the repair skill.

There were only five Smithies in Jackson. Near one of those places,

there was the sole master NPC who taught the repair skill.

However, he didn't know the exact location.

They didn't go around wearing name tags just because they were master NPCs, so users were forced to personally wander around as they conversed with other NPCs, one by one.

But who was Ark?

'When did I have time to waste like that?'

"Hey, Thomas. It's been awhile."

As Ark waved his hand, Soldiers who'd been passing by rejoiced and approached him.

"Ark, we haven't seen you in for few days. When did you return?"

"A little while ago. But do you happen to know a Blacksmith in the village who'll teach the repair skill?"

"Are you talking about Norton? I know him. Go that way and cross the bridge, it's the first Smithy you see. But what are you going to do by learning the repair method? If you go to the castle, old man Corn fixes them for you cheaply. And even if you learn the repair method, it's not like you can fix them well right away. It's better to leave them to old man Corn."

"I'm thinking of leaving to go on a journey for a few days in a faraway land. Since it'll be rough if I overlook it, I'm gonna learn it while I'm in the village."

"Faraway?"

Thomas nodded as he looked at him sadly.

"Well, you are an outsider. Then be sure to at least visit the Lord before you leave. Stop by at our barracks too, okay?"

"Alright."

Ark waved at the parting Soldiers and turned around.

At the sight, users in the area had perplexed expressions on their faces.

For the most part, Soldiers weren't that friendly toward a user. They considered the user an existence whose only purpose was to cause trouble in the village. There wasn't a single user who had heard a Soldier asking them to visit the barracks.

It was only possible for Ark, who was a friend to the young Lord.

In any case, Ark wasn't interested in the reactions of the users. Even if it was a small number, the only people Ark wanted to befriend were NPCs.

'Anyway, I've learned what I needed. Looks like my pocket will become much lighter.'

A sigh flowed out of Ark's mouth.

Understandably, it took money to learn a skill from a master NPC. After looking it up on the forums, it costs 20 gold to learn the repair skill. Repairing wasn't possible with just the skill. Each material exclusive repair skill tool set was 10 gold. In Ark's case, it would cost 30 gold since he needed the metal kit, leather kit, and cloth kit sets.

In total, he had to spend 50 gold to be able to use the repair skill.

This was the reason why the majority of users couldn't learn it in the beginning even though it was a useful skill.

'Although it's money I saved up...'

His insides soured since he had to use 50 gold of the money he'd scrounged up.

However, if he went on a journey, the repair skill was absolutely necessary for a user with a profession that required them to hunt.

If users had to look for a Smithy every time they needed to repair, it would result to spending more money. If they accidentally forgot to repair, there was danger of breaking their equipment. Something precious will still be precious. It seemed all the more precious

because he'd wasted money every day on repair costs, whether it was in Harun or Jackson.

"Come on in. Is there something you need?"

When he arrived at the Smithy, a middle aged man with a long beard approached him.

"I've come here after hearing that the owner of this place is the appointed mentor of the repairing technique."

"Do you want to learn the repairing technique?"

"Yes."

"You've thought well. It's common sense that an adventurer needs the repairing technique. There's nothing more of a dilemma than having your equipment go bad while on a long journey. Let me see your hands."

Norton abruptly grabbed Ark's hands and quietly inspected them.

Shortly afterwards, he shook his head back and forth.

"Alas, though it's regretful, it doesn't look like you can learn the repairing technique."

"I can't learn it?"

"Looks like you don't know much about it. The repairing technique isn't something anyone can learn."

Norton gestured towards men who were swinging hammers in the Smithy. Unlike NPCs, looking at the random clothes they had on, there was no doubt they were users.

In the case the repair skill, it wasn't a skill possible enough to learn with just knowledge. There were also cases where one had to personally try using the skill under the tutelage of an NPC in order to get accustomed to it. It seemed those guys had paid money and were grinding in order to learn the skill.

"Like those those, in order to handle the tools proficiently, you need the right strength and experience. If you swing your hammer without

knowing anything, you'll just break your equipment instead. That's why I teach an experienced Knight the technique to handle metal, and experienced Merchant or Alchemist the technique to handle leather and cloth. Even if other people tried learning it, they can't even use it properly."

'Does that mean there's a profession limit on the repair skill?'

His heart plummeted.

Ark's skills had all acquired automatically, or were learned through a quest. Therefore, he'd never considered the possibility of there being a profession limited skill until now.

Although he'd occasionally seen terms with it being an unsuitable skill on the forum, he'd thought that it was just referring to a profession specialty skill.

But for the repair skill, which he considered was absolutely necessary, to have a profession limit...

Ark suddenly thought of the users who had opened stalls within the village.

'Clothes, I will neatly mend your leather armor.'

'I'll make weapons of every kind and metal armor like new.'

They were people putting out signs of that sort and doing business.

Ark had snorted when he saw users receiving repairs from them.

Although the costs were a little less expensive than the Smithy, was there really a need to pay another person money to help them raise their skill? Also, if he saved some money, he'd learn it himself anyways... Those were his thoughts.

But now he understood the situation.

For users incapable of learning the repair skill, they didn't have the freedom of choice. Although he was about to like his Dark Walker profession regret pressed forward again.

'Dammit, I didn't think not being able to choose a combat-related

profession was this fatal!

“Then are you saying that if my equipment breaks in the hunting ground, there’s no way for me to fix it?”

“By the looks of it, it seems you’re a beginner. Come here,” Norton said as he showed Ark the inside of the Smithy.

“If repairing was possible with just words, my Smithy would have been ruined long ago, since rascals who learned the repairing technique from me could open stands and repair cheaply.”

“So it seems.”

“The real revenue of the Smithy is actually this. If you just have this, anyone can repair equipment.”

Norton gestured towards merchandises neatly arranged on one side. It was a case labeled with the words ‘Tool Box’ even beginners could use.

“As long as you have this Tool Box, it’s possible to repair your equipment up to five times, no matter where you are. The General one is used for regular equipment, the Deluxe one for Magic equipment, and the Tool Box of Magic can repair anything above Rare. Of course, you can also repair regular equipment with the Tool Box of Magic, but it wouldn’t make sense to do so. Ah, will you also try using this? They say this oil and whetstone have the effect of raising the performance of weapons and armor for a given period. Isn’t that surprising?”

However, the price of the Tool Box was...

Even considering the point that the Tool Box could be used five times, it was a price 1.5 times more expensive than repairing at a Smithy. On top of that, Ark’s equipment was also the so-called Magic equipment, and his mantle was Rare.

Even if he bought one to keep as a reserve, it would cost him a fortune, 35 gold.

If he had to spend that much money every time he had used up the

five repairs, made his consciousness fade.

‘Are you telling me I have to squander the money I saved by hunting like crazy all on repair fees?’

For the first time, he realized New World’s outrageous prices.

You couldn’t fight without getting hit as you played, so even hunting took money. If you accidentally died and your equipment’s durability was completely drained, it would take several times the money. The better the item, the more money it would take.

Ark hadn’t known about the hardship users had.

He’d always received a 30 percent discount in Harun Village, and in Jackson, he received repairs for half the price at the Lord’s castle. He’d never had to squander a considerable sum on repair fees. For the first time, he could understand the feelings of the people who entrusted repairs to a user in order to save even one penny.

‘If they go hunting and can’t fish out an item, they’d be hard-pressed to buy even one wheat bread.’

Be as that may, he couldn’t just break his equipment because he begrudged the repair fee. With tears in his eyes, Ark pulled out the money as he trembled. However, he couldn’t bring himself to pass it over and stopped.

‘This can’t be. For me to so easily give up the money I saved like that...!’

In reality, there was no part-time job that Ark hadn’t done before.

From general store to door-to-door sales, he was also knowledgeable in the business field. If there was one thing he’d learned from doing those jobs, it was that it was stupid to buy merchandise for the asked price.

Bargain, bargain, and bargain again. At the very least, when the shopkeeper said he’d suffered a loss, then you’d know you’d just barely bought it at the proper price.

“Can you perhaps make a discount for me?”

“Don’t say something ridiculous. Because there’s so many rascals repairing for half of our price in this area these days, I’m barely making a living by selling this. Are you telling me to starve and die?”

“But because I’m so poor right now...”

Ark tried putting on the most wretched expression.

It wasn’t even worth trying.

“I can’t consider the individual circumstances of travelers like you. Well maybe. If you were to purchase the merchandise in bulk, I could make a small discount...”

“In bulk? How many are you talking about?”

“I wonder? If you buy about 100 of them, I’ll give you up to a 5 percent discount off the price. Sometimes there are merchants or travelers who save up money and buy like that. If you’re short on money, why don’t you try that as well.”

Ark’s eyes flashed. It was because the keen sense beaten into him by a destitute life had caught the scent of money.

“I see. I understand. I will come again.”

Ark quickly left the Smithy.

Of course, he had no thoughts of gathering users. He didn’t have the confidence to gather scores of users, and even if he managed to gather the users and receive the discount, with 5 percent on 30 gold, it’d only amount to just 1 gold and 50 silver. The discount was too small compared to the effort he’d put in. But for Ark, no, just for Ark, there was another method that he could use.

‘It’s possible. It has to be possible. I’m sure there wasn’t something like a Tool Box in the Lord’s exclusive Smithy. That means in the end, they probably buy the Tool Box from another place. Then there’s no rule that says I can’t be the intermediary dealer.’

Ark shortly sought out the young Lord.

Then, with his most helpless and miserable expression, he cried out.

“My Lord!”

“Why are you like this? I heard that you were going to leave to another area, but why do you have that sort of expression?”

“I was going to leave. However, a small problem came up. I couldn’t cope with what I should do, so I sought the Lord out in order to at least consult with you.”

“A problem? If it’s something I can help with, tell me.”

‘Huhuhu, I’ve got him.’

Ark had a satisfied smile as he chattered rapidly.

“Actually, I was going to go on a faraway journey with people I know this time. Buying the necessary goods was entrusted to me. But I accidentally went and ordered too much of the wrong item. Later on, I tried to cancel the order because I knew I’d made a mistake, but the shopkeeper had already gone and made the order so I had to carry the responsibility. The teammates who heard the news all said it was my fault and just ran off... waah!”

“They betrayed their teammate and ran away just because of that? Aren’t they men who don’t even know of loyalty!”

As expected, the perfectly rigid young Lord was infuriated, like it was his own problem.

“You can’t blame them. It was all my fault.”

“It’s because you are too kind. In the first place, for you to do such a chore... no, it’s fine. It’s useless to say something like that now. So tell me. What exactly did you order on accident?”

“It’s the Portable Tool Box.”

At Ark’s reply, the young Lord soon put on a smooth smile.

“Aah, what a relief. If it’s an item like that, I think I will be able to help.”

“Huh? From the Lord?”

“That’s right. There’s a Smithy in the castle, but it can’t make the Portable Tool Box. That’s why every time an expedition goes out, it’s an item we purchase separately. What good timing. Our stock has been falling, so I shall purchase them all. No, I may as well procure 100 each of the General and Deluxe. That way, your face will also stand out to the shopkeeper. The bill is of no consequence.”

“If you do that, I would feel too sorry...”

“Think not of it. Didn’t I say this? That I would help you anytime if you needed it.”

“Thank you so much!”

The young Lord immediately pulled out a check worth 2500 gold.

A new stat he hadn’t even imagined formed along with cheerful music.

A new stat has been formed.

The Art of Communication (+5): You are able to achieve what you want with an ornate way of speech. The higher the skill, the easier you can persuade your target, and you can drag out an even greater benefit.

Stat distribution is impossible, and will only increase when you have succeeded in a negotiation, a bargain, or a special deal.

Ark, who received the check, was smiling from ear to ear.

He’d thought it might be possible, but he hadn’t even imagined that the problem would work itself out.

The discount he would receive at the Smithy was 5 percent. Simply buying the wares with 2500 gold and delivering them would yield 125 gold. It was like finding a pot of gold on a clear day.

However, being satisfied with the gains in front of your eyes was something beginners do. The greater a profit you earn, the more profit you need to rake in.

Ark found Norton and extended the check.

“General and Deluxe, 100 of each. How long will it take?”

“100 each? And the delivery is to the Lord’s castle?”

“Yes. But if it’s this much, don’t you think you should give me a 10 percent cut?”

Ark slowly began to make the arrangements for bargaining.

“10 percent, you say! What nonsense! Then I’ll acquire a loss when I sell it. However, if you’re on familiar terms with the Lord, in consideration of the next deal, I can make up to a special 6 percent cut for you.”

“Alright. 8 percent! If you sell 200 of them in one transaction, won’t a fair amount be left?”

Ark suggested as he waved the check in front of Norton’s eyes. Norton, whose eyes moved to follow the check, finally blew out a sigh.

“Alright. I’ll give you a discount of 7 percent. In exchange, I have two requests.”

“What are they?”

“One is that you have to take the discounted amount in merchandise rather than money, since the bill you’re paying with is a check. Of course you have to give in that much.”

“I understand. And the other one?”

“Actually... the materials for making the Tool Box have decreased, so I can’t deliver 200 of them right away. A special material to produce the Tool Box. I roughly have enough of the other materials, but I’m short on the material called Ailard. I’ll do it if you go acquire some of that.”

“Where do I need to go to get it?”

“Ailard is an item that only a capable Alchemist can make. The Alchemist who does business with us is Raymond. But because his

health has fallen these days, so he told me he couldn't go out and acquire the materials he needs for making the Ailard. He sent in a request to introduce him to a useful adventurer. So go find him first. He'll know if you tell him that I sent you."

"I understand. But if I have to go acquire the material of the item I'm buying myself..."

"What a vicious fellow you are. I lost, I've lost. I'll give you 8 percent."

"Thank you very much. And I'm just saying this in case, but to the Lord..."

"I'm a shopkeeper too. Don't worry about that."

Ark, who received Norton's assurance, went looking for Raymond. Just as he'd heard, Raymond greeted Ark with a haggard and pale face.

"You said Norton sent you? Although he acted like he hadn't heard until now... well, it's about time that the Ailard has dwindled."

After explaining his personal musings, Raymond nodded.

"The material you need to find is a mineral that looks like a red mushroom. It can only be acquired in a cave located deep within the Gran Swamp. You'll probably have to go all the way to the end. But keep one thing in mind. That is an extremely precious mineral. You must keep all information concerning the mineral a secret from other people. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Thu-thu-thump

A quest information window came pouring in like the flow of a tide.

Alchemist Raymond's Request

Alchemist Raymond of Jackson is producing Ailard for the Smithy.

However, he cannot acquire the necessary material because he has fallen ill, so he has requested for you do the job.

Raymond has urged you multiple times to not disclose any information regarding the mineral to anyone.

As per Raymond's request, you must guard the secret until the completion of the quest. You cannot be in a party.

Difficulty: F

'So a quest can show up like this, too!'

Who would've known that his plan to get the Tool Box for free would have been connected to a quest!

'Is it a quest that's only given to a person who orders several hundred of the Tool Box by himself? Then there probably aren't many people who have done this quest in the early stage.'

Catching the mice after getting behind was no different.

If it was difficulty F, it seemed it'd be possible to manage it himself.

Ark agreed to the quest without hesitation. If just this quest was taken care of, he could cut 8 percent off the Tool Box price. The money alone that would fall into his hands was a whopping 200 gold! Since he'd get 10 Tool Boxes of Magic for free, there was no reason to decline.

Ark received a mark on his map and received a recovery potion and wheat bread, as well as 2 Deluxe Tool Boxes through his eloquent way of speaking, as advance payment. After packing them, he headed towards the Cave of the Gran Swamp.

* * *

"Bat, go survey the inside of the cave and come back."

"I got it, Master."

At Ark's words, the Bat flapped as it flew into the cave.

When he passed through the Gran Swamp, Ark was level 32.

The Gran Swamp was a day away from Jackson and was a place

inhabited by all kinds of swamp monsters. Even so, it wasn't difficult because he'd raised his level quite a lot in the Shadow Forest, but the Slime was still a fatiguing opponent. Its body was made of acidic phlegm, so every time he fought it, his equipment durability dropped bit by bit. If he hadn't come with the Tool Box packed, he would have had to go in and out of the village countless times.

'Dammit, though one Tool Box is that expensive...'

If a battle broke out with a Slime, he worried more about the repair fee than his Health.

'Anyways, it looks like I wasn't the first to discover this dungeon,' Ark muttered regretfully.

An explanation about the cave had popped up, but a bonus didn't come in.

Even a dungeon was cleared out once, monsters and item were likely to spawn again when time passed. But if you were unlucky, you might not be able to fish out anything. However, Ark didn't worry that much about it, since his most important goal was to finish the quest anyways.

'Since it's a job worth 200 gold, I can't be too cheap.'

Just then, the Bat came out of the cave.

"Master. There's 1 person."

"A person? You mean a stranger?"

"Yeah. He's coming out this way."

Wariness settled in Ark's eyes.

You had to be more wary of a user than a monster. The saying that mankind's natural enemy was himself didn't just apply in reality. It was more so particularly in a remote place like this. In a place where there was no one to help, if he got caught in a high level's PK ambush, he'd suffer without a squirm and that would be that.

Ark waited with a tense face and soon someone walked out of the cave.

As Ark confirmed the face of the other person, his eyes widened.

“... You—you are?”

The other person also recoiled as he took one step backwards.

The Warrior wearing plate armor was Andel.

The name he'd screamed countless times as he ground his teeth!

Andel must have recognized Ark because he stepped back as he winced. Then, as if he was thinking of something, his eyes rolled back and forth. He was deliberating on how he should respond. After a long time, Andel must have decided because he furtively raised the corners of his mouth and began speaking.

“Ah, I thought you were someone I've seen somewhere. You're the person I partied with before. Did you say your name is Ark?”

Ark silently nodded his head.

He wouldn't be satisfied even if he could immediately beat the shit out of this bastard. Well, how long had he actually waited to do just that?

However, Ark suppressed his anger and endured it for now.

He hadn't checked how strong the guy had become yet. If he thoughtlessly followed his emotions, he could be the one to suffer instead. He also wanted to see how Andel would approach him.

“You were Andel, right?”

“So you do remember.”

‘Would you be able to forget if it were you?’

Ark barely managed to swallow back the curses that surged up.

“That's good— I wanted to meet you once again.”

“Me...?”

“Yes, because it looks like I've made a big mistake. Who would've known your stats would decrease every time you die? After hearing about it, I went to Harun Village because I wanted to apologize. But

you weren't there. I worried that you might've given up on the game, but since you're all the way here, looks like you've raised your level quite a lot?"

'You didn't know? Apologize? You will soon, you damn bastard!'

In the end, what Andel was curious about was Ark's level. It wasn't possible to tell how his attitude would transform if he decided Ark's level was lower than his own. Ark answered vaguely.

"Well, just leave it at that. To be sure, I was extremely upset at that time. I even thought about whether I should really quit the game. But there's a circumstance that makes it so I can't quit, so I'm doing whatever I can."

"You haven't been misunderstanding it, right?"

"Huh? Misunderstanding what?" Ark feigned innocence as if he didn't know what Andel was talking about.

Andel scanned Ark up and down with a somewhat relief expression.

With the Black Bear Mouse's Leather Armor, Cat Paws, and the frayed helmet and shoes he'd picked up in the Shadow Forest, no matter what his ability was, as far as outside appearances went, he looked no different than a beggar.

The only thing worth considering was the Blood-red Mantle flapping behind his back!

Due to the enormous penalty from the Mantle, he couldn't wear it while hunting, but he'd equipped it just in case after hearing the Bat's words that a user was coming out.

Nevertheless, he wasn't at that great a level. The Andel's eyes, who'd made that judgement, glinted slyly.

"Ark-nim, if you have time, would you perhaps like to enter the dungeon with me?"

"The dungeon?"

"I discovered this dungeon as I was passing by, but it's a little

difficult alone, so I was going to come later with a person I know, but since Ark-nim is here, I think it'll work even if we go in. How about it?"

"I wonder."

As Ark purposely pretended like he couldn't decide, Andel spoke up quickly.

"If an okay item comes out in the dungeon, I'll give it to Ark-nim."

"If you do that, I'll be sorry."

"No, let's do it like that since there's the happening from last time. Yes?"

"Well, if you put it that way, then..."

Ark nodded. He couldn't know what Andel was secretly plotting, but Ark didn't want to let the bastard go. Even if he couldn't win by any chance, if he couldn't at least cut a knife scar in Andel's side after seeing the opportunity, it was obvious he wouldn't even be able to sleep.

For that, it'd be difficult if he made a party with him. There was the quest condition as well...

"Going in together is good, but to be honest I don't want to make a party."

"It doesn't matter."

Andel accepted readily.

When Ark finished his negotiation, he took a step and entered the cave, and a read suddenly enveloped his body. Just as Ark raised his head with an alarmed expression, Andel scratched his head with a sheepish expression.

"Ah, were you surprised? It's just that I was only checking your status window. Since we haven't formed a party, I can only assist properly after finding out Ark-nim's status in advance."

'Does this little shit really think I'm a pushover?'

Sparks flew from Ark's eyes.

It was common sense to use the [Detect] function, which allows to check another user's status window, after receiving permission beforehand. If they used the command without permission, one couldn't help but think that there was an ulterior motive. No, it was nothing new, but what definitely showed up were just Health and the main stats.

The Blood-red Mantle of Dreams was an item that decreased all stats by -15.

Andel must have thought that Ark's stats were low considering he was a level 32. In addition, there was no doubt Andel had judged that even his abilities and skills were also just as low. It didn't feel good to appear weak, but if it was a wary opponent, it was better to let them underestimate.

As expected, Andel showed a relieved expression.

"It looks like you weren't able to restore all the stats you lost in the beginning."

"I just leveled up without knowing. Although I've already changed my profession, I'm in this state."

"What did you do as your job-change?"

"It is Thief-related."

"Ah, so that's why your Agility and Luck are high. Since I changed my profession to a Warrior, I will take the lead."

Andel pulled out a longsword and raised his shield, and gallantly moved to the front. Showing his back like it was nothing was a sign of his confidence that he could win even if he was ambushed.

It was proof he had completely lowered his guard concerning Ark.

'Hmph, just wait and see. You'll come to regret your judgement.'

Just when Ark was having thoughts like that:

"Master, I don't like that human."

He heard a displeased voice from his shoulder. It was the Bat. Ark had put the Bat on his shoulder, and left the Skull hanging on his side. Since Andel didn't ask, it seemed he thought they were ornaments.

In any case, Ark felt affection towards the Bat for the first time.

An ally he could believe no matter the situation— meeting Andel again made him realize anew how precious its existence was.

Ark exclaimed to the Andel who was showing off his equipment, "Wow, looks like you've raised yourself a lot in the meantime."

"It's nothing special. I'm only level 35 now, jeez."

Andel sprang into the cave with an arrogant expression.

There were enormous numbers of monsters gathered within the cave. The Lizardmen or Goblins he'd seen in the Gran Swamp charged at them in swarms. If it were Ark, he would have fought by hiding his body and luring one or two each time, but Andel set his shield in front and rushed in without care.

Andel, who defeated two of them in an instant, immediately drank a restoration potion and defeated the rest of them as well.

'Hmm, you say that's level 35?'

"Eyes of the Cat!"

Ark activated the skill towards Andel while pretending to use it on a monster. As he expected, the level of Andel, who'd job-changed to Fighter, was a staggering 43.

On top of that, his defense was enormous because he was equipped with a plated armor and a shield. In actuality, even when he fought three or four monsters, his Health didn't decrease by much.

What was more surprising was that Andel's name was marked in red.

Chaotic character— in other words, it meant he had a history of

having PKed.

Though well, if it was Andel, it wasn't something that surprising.

'It was good that I didn't thoughtlessly attack him after all.'

However, it was too early to relax. Andel's ploy was too obvious.

It was a ploy to use Ark in a dungeon that was difficult to penetrate alone. Saying he would give the decent items to Ark if one ever dropped, was the same as meaning of him saying he would kill him if a decent item showed up.

'Even so, I can't withdraw here. So I have carefully look at the way he is fighting. The only way I can win against an opponent with an over 10 level difference is by planning a good strategy.'

Ark meticulously inspected Andel's movements while fighting halfheartedly.

Once he saw Ark panting with one monster as an opponent, Andel became even more triumphant and sprang forward wildly.

It was the typical Warrior's fighting method of pushing forward with Strength, Stamina, and defense. That was the reason why he couldn't break through this level of dungeon even though he was a level 43.

Instead of setting a strategy and handling them one by one like Ark, he set his attack power and defense in front and charged in extravagantly.

'That way might be the answer if it was another game, but this is New World. You still don't really know New World's combat. That is my key point of winning.'

Ark followed Andel's back as he unremittingly set up a strategy inside his mind. In the first place, since it was a dungeon he'd come to through an F difficulty quest, the level wasn't that high.

As the level 43 Andel received Ark's assistance, the aggravated monsters were soon cleared. And when nearly 2 hours had passed, the two defeated at least a hundred odd monsters and arrived at the

last part of the cave.

“I see the end now. It’s thanks to Ark-nim.”

“Oh no, there’s not much I’ve done, jeez.”

“But compared to the difficulty, a worthwhile item hasn’t come out. Although I have to give it to Ark-nim...”

“Please do not worry about it. And it’s not like we’ve reached the end yet, either.”

“That’s true. Then let’s hurry and finish it.”

It was when Andel, who’d finished restoring, stood up.

Kuuooooooooo!

Suddenly, with a roar that shook the cave, a warning message popped up.

The boss monster Crystal Golem has appeared!
--

An enormous hand reached out all of a sudden from behind the corner.

It was a hand that looked like boulder chunks had been clumped together.

As if led by that hand, a monster with a gargantuan body rounded the corner. It was a Golem made of gathered boulders that gave off a bluish light. The Golem rolled its red eyes, and after scanning Ark and Andel, it loosed a shout with a harsh voice.

“FOOD!”

“Be careful!” Andel yelled as he drew up his shield.

With a loud bang, Andel was pushed back. Ark quickly went behind the golem’s back and stabbed with his sword.

The Golem however only shrugged it’s shoulder. It did not seem to have received a significant amount of damage.

When Andel called the status check command, a health bar appeared above the Golem's head. The Health that Ark's attack had decreased was just 1 percent.

"Ark-nim, please give me support!"

"If it's Andel-nim, you can surpass your wound and defeat the Golem!"

Ark unfurled the Nursing skill as he nodded his head.

Andel's sword, who received vigor and courage, and even a minor blessing, struck the Golem as it sliced through the air. With a massive cry, the Golem took a few steps back. At one blow of the Warrior with up to 200 Strength, they could see the Golem's Health drop significantly.

"I'll block from the front, so please guard my back!"

"Yes!"

Ark and Andel's series of attacks unfurled. Andel struck the Golem squarely as he set his shield in front, and as the high Agility Ark sought critical hits from behind the Golem, consecutive attacks unfurled.

Andel was definitely strong. Due to having his whole body plastered in plate armor, his defense was also considerable, and he must've had ample funding because if his Health wore down even slightly, he'd downed a recovery potion. That was a luxury that Ark, who trembled at even 1 copper, couldn't even imagine.

However, the battle was not concluded easily. The Golem was strong to the point of not matching the dungeon's difficulty, so strong that Ark couldn't have possibly faced it if he were alone.

But with the two's concentrated attacks, the Golem's Health also steadily neared the bottom.

At the sight of the Golem wavering, Andel loosed the Warrior-type kill that he'd been saving.

"Charge, crush of Strength— Warrior's Blow!"

Ba-ba-baaang, the Golem took a big step back as its body cracked again and again at the blow.

When Ark's attack struck as a critical hit from behind, the Golem finally couldn't withstand it anymore and collapsed.

Andel and Ark's levels simultaneously went up by 1 each.

Once the Golem collapsed, a single helmet and a mineral in the shape of a red mushroom were dropped as a brilliant burst of light shimmered out.

"We won!"

Just then, Andel hurriedly took out and drank a recovery potion.

He did so even though there wasn't even one monster around them. No matter how paralyzed he was about money sense, there was no need to handle something he could've done with one wheat bread without even a reason.

Just as expected, Andel suddenly swung his sword toward Ark, who'd approached to check the items. But the Ark who'd been expecting his attack quickly stepped back and glared with a sharp gaze.

"So now you reveal your true colors."

"Mwahaha, then did you really think I'd simply hand over boss-drop items?"

"No, I didn't believe you."

"Then there's really nothing to resent me for."

"I'll just ask one thing. Even when I was dying in Harun Village, you knew that the stats were decreasing, right?"

"Of course. Wasn't the guy who was tricked without knowing an idiot?"

"Son of a bitch."

"Say what you want, because this time, I'll make you want to give up

the game.”

Andel's eyes gleamed with bloodthirst as he charged towards Ark.

Ark blocked the sword with all his might. Ark's sword was helplessly pushed back because the strength difference was too great.

However, Andel's continuous attacks were all the same. Because unlike Ark, who'd got by studying countless fighting methods in difficult situations, Andel was the type who raised his fighting ability merely through level ups.

If they were the same level, he probably wouldn't have even be a match for Ark. But in the game, there was a way to overcome a difference of 11 levels with just ability. In some way or another, the reason this situation was unfolding like a battle was because Ark received an ability bonus of 20 percent in the dark.

Andel had an expression which seems to be saying he couldn't understand the situation.

“You persistent bastard, let's see how long you can last!”

Finally, after receiving hits on several occasions, Ark's Health had been slashed by 50%, whereas Andel's Health had only decreased by 20% due to his plated armor.

Seeing Ark had be overcome, Andel sneered.

“Did you think I didn't know anything? When we first walked into the cave, you used a Thief skill ‘Detect’ on me, right? You stupid bastard, you obediently followed me in even after checking my level. At that time, it was already predetermined you would die. Charge of Strength, Warrior's Blow!”

Andel used the skill with a triumphant voice.

As the skill registered in rapid succession, in one blow Ark entered the critical state as his Health neared zero.

‘Now is the time!’

Ark's eyes flashed.

It was just as Andel said. When he'd checked the bastard's level, Ark had agonized over whether he should run or not. But he didn't run.

The first reason was his hatred toward Andel, the second was he had been sure there was a method to take Andel down. And that a method that could only be used now, while in a critical state.

“Eyes of the Cat!”

As Ark's eyes colored with golden light, red points marking Andel's weak points appeared all over his body.

Sure enough, perhaps because he was a Warrior who invested while believing only in his level and defense, his entire body was riddled with weak points. As an effect of the skill, his Health also appeared. Andel's consumed Health up until now was just 35 percent.

But now was the start!

“Dark Blade!”

Ark's sword moved fluidly in the dark and lodged itself in Andel's nape.

A critical hit ignoring all defenses has been delivered!
--

Bewildered, Andel took a step back. Ark succeeded in another Dark Blade attack in an instant as he took one step forward. In the blink of an eye, Andel's Health plummeted by 50 percent.

Ark's learned skill was a result made of 5 simultaneously overlapping buffs.

The very first one that applied was the 20 percent ability increase within the dark. The next ones were raising the attack power and critical hit rate by detecting the weak spots with Eyes of the Cat, and the Indomitable Will and Indomitable Body that were invoked in the critical state swiftly increased the numbers once more.

The final touch was a Dark Walker's profession skill, Dark Blade!

It was a skill which ignored defense and raised attack power of critical hits by 150 percent. Although he didn't defeat the 15 level higher Andel in one fatal hit, with the combined increase from the linked effects, with two attacks he slashed Andel's Health down by 50 percent.

The reason why he'd endured without using his Mana until he'd fallen into the critical state was solely for this moment.

It was an act of burning one's bridges that only Ark, who had grown from only fierce battles, could use!

Andel's face blanched.

"Gasp, ho-how can this be!"

Andel urgently used the [Detect] command.

Then, as he soon checked Ark's remaining Mana, he heaved a sigh of relief. Due to having used Eyes of the Cat and Dark Blade twice, he didn't have any Mana left. Whereas Ark's Health had 5 percent left now, Andel still had 15 percent left.

"Hng, looks like your last-ditch effort ends here. Since you don't have much Mana left, you can't use your skills, either."

"Do you really think so?"

A cold smile touched Ark's lips.

"Blood-red Mantle of Dreams!"

Ark was enveloped as the scarlet mantle suddenly flared out.

Simultaneously, Ark's Health had recovered 100 percent. With his Health suddenly restored, Andel had a flummoxed expression. But the truly surprising thing was from then onwards. After that, Andel's swung sword attacks all deflected off the mantle.

The ability of the Blood-red Mantle of Dreams to nullify all attacks for 10 seconds! There wasn't much meaning in monster hunting, but if the opponent was a user, it demonstrated absolute power.

Andel's eyes flared with astonishment

“N-no way... are you saying that mantle was a Rare item?”

It was true. Ark hadn't just equipped the mantle to hide his stats. And in order to use the mantle's ability, which could only be used at night, Ark had purposefully drawn out the time.

Andel, who realized for the first time that something had gone wrong, hurriedly pulled out a recovery potion.

Ark's eyes froze with urgency.

‘He can't. The mantle's effect is already over. If the bastard drinks the potion, I can't predict the outcome.’

“Summon Demon, Bat! No matter what you have to do, block that bastard! If you don't, I'll make you eat food without rest for ten days!”

“Eeeek! No way!”

As the Bat was summoned, it flew rapidly at Andel.

And then, it hurled and shoved itself into the mouth of Andel, who'd been trying to drink the recovery potion.

“You did well. Bat!”

Ark unfurled his Sword-Hand Combat and toppled Andel. Then he stepped on both of Andel's hands and raised his sword.

After smiling coldly, Ark thrust his sword down without hesitation.

“Kuhuk, y-you little shit... Just wait and see!”

After those words, Andel sagged weakly. He died and was forced to log out.

You have defeated a level 44 Chaotic player. Fame +30.

Ark released the breath he'd been holding in one burst.

He'd finally gotten his revenge. And it'd been against an opponent 11

levels higher!

When the battle tension settled down, an electrifying pleasure swept down his body. The Ark who'd been briefly savoring the pleasure turned around.

It was for the right given only to the victor, picking up the loot.

Many penalties were added to Chaotic users.

One of those was that they lost their equipment at death. When a normal user died, they dropped an equipment item at a fixed probability, but each time a Chaotic user died, they dropped one equipment item no matter what. Steel Greaves at the place where Andel had died.

“Information window!”

Steel Greaves			
Armor Type	Steel Footwear		
Defense	50	Durability	7/80
Weight	30	Usage Restriction	At least 150 Strength
Steel Greaves made from smelting good quality steel. Although movement is slowed, you can expect excellent defense that cannot be compared to a leather product. Agility -5, the penalty is nulled if used by a Warrior-related profession.			

Ark, who'd stored the Steel Greaves, also checked the Crystal Golem drops.

Crystal Golem's Head (Magic)

Armor Type	Stone Helmet		
Defense	40	Durability	50/50
Weight	40	Usage Restriction	At least 135 Strength
<p>A Golem's head imbued with the strength of magical crystal. The material quality is strong enough to block an iron mace, and it can clear your mind with the magical strength.</p> <p>Option: Mana +100</p>			

Crystal: The Mana-filled mineral that the Crystal Golem had been growing in its body.

It was when Ark had picked up the Crystal. Light spewed from his hand all of a sudden and a new information window opened.

Through your Knowledge of Ancient Relics, you have discovered hidden information of the Crystal.

The Crystal is a blood crystal, one of the Ancient Relics.

As a blood crystal, an ancient organic mineral that gives the power of healing, it will naturally develop if fragments are buried within a manufactured Golem's body and furnished with nourishment. Because Mana-rich humans were used as nourishment for the Golem, production was banned long ago.

Bonus for acquiring information of the ancient relic crystal.

Knowledge of Ancient Relics +5.
Intelligence +5.

Fame has increased by 30.

The quest has been updated.

Alchemist Raymond's Request = The Secret of the Blood Crystal

The mineral that Raymond asked you to get was one of the ancient relics, a blood crystal. It seems that Raymond purposefully planted and raised the blood crystal within the crystal golem's body and was supporting it with sacrificial travelers. In order to prevent more sacrifices, you must interrogate Raymond, obtain a confession, and inform a guard of Jackson.

Difficulty: G

After briefly looking at the blood crystal, Ark turned his gaze.

Andel's body hadn't disappeared yet. When a user died from PvP, there was a penalty of their body not disappearing for 24 hours and they couldn't log in as well.

It blocked revenge plays that had been problematic in online games on several occasions and was considerate of giving the victor time to enjoy their win.

However, this kind of penalty had more meaning to Ark.

"Wait and see? Hah, how funny. You picked the wrong guy to mess with."

* * *

Ark immediately returned to Jackson Castle.

While he was waiting at the right time near the Quartermaster, Andel appeared with white light.

As expected, he'd set his resurrection place to Jackson, which was close to the dungeon. It was well worth seeing him standing there

robbed of his shoes, barefooted in his plate armor.

Andel, who noticed Ark, flinched in surprised and his body began to tremble.

“Y-you, you bastard.....!”

“Why are you so surprised? Didn’t you say wait and see?”

Ark sprang up and rushed at Andel.

Even though users were starting a fight right in front of the village, the Soldiers turned a blind eye.

That was yet another penalty that Chaotic users received.

Normally, if users fought amongst themselves near the village, they’d be attacked by a Soldier. However, there were exceptions.

One was if a normal user were to attack a Chaotic user first. A fight like this was far more advantageous for the normal user. When the normal user was pushed back, all they had to do was flee to the village. But the Chaotic user couldn’t enter the village or chase them in either, and on the flip side, they had no where to run.

That was the reason why users feared becoming Chaotic.

Ark beat up Andel without mercy.

Similar to their previous battle, he landed critical hits continuously in the critical state and became invincible through the mantle’s power when he was in a pinch.

The stat penalty was doubled if you were killed by a user. Therefore, it meant all of Andel’s stats had been cut by 2. Andel, who also had lowered defense because he even lost the Steel Greaves, crumbled feebly.

He was a user who wasn’t like Ark who had real skills, but had gotten by through the strength of his stats and items.

“You mongrel, you’re dead...”

Andel babbled nonsense as he dropped more of his armor.

Ark snickered as he stored the item. Then, after hunting while roaming around the area, he camped at the resurrection site and waited when exactly 24 hours had passed. It seems Andel didn't even consider Ark might be waiting for him there again. It was truly a delusion.

'Don't make me laugh, how long do you think I've waited for this day!'

When he fought Andel, who didn't even have shoes, armor, and had -4 stats, soon he didn't even need the mantle's ability. As soon as Eyes of the Cat and Dark Blade went into a continuous combo, Andel collapsed listlessly. The bastard must've realized the severity of the situation at last because next time, he didn't log in even though 24 hours had passed.

'Hah, you're saying we should see whose patience is greater, right? If the bastard is an applicant, he probably won't be able to endure not logging in for a few days.'

For the first time in his life, Ark went as far as to submit a week-long vacation from work.

'If you mess with me, I'll definitely repay you.'

"Please, let's talk a little. I will apologize. Please?" Andel, who'd logged in within 30 hours, spoke submissively.

After ignoring Andel's plea and beating him, he dropped gloves. After killing him two more times like that, Andel became completely naked.

Although Andel tried begging in the end, Ark didn't say a single word and silently raised his sword. Then, after he immediately started fighting when Andel logged in, making it impossible for Andel to replace his equipment and finish logging in, he rained regular attacks on him and razed him to the ground.

Ark killed him six times during his vacation and killed him a total of eight times. Of course, Andel lost his plated armor set and even his sword. Then, from the seventh time onwards, there weren't any equipped items to drop, so he began dropping japtem inside his bag.

Andel lost 96 stats and became truly penniless, whereas besides the time when he was waiting, Ark focused on hunting and raised his level by 2 instead. It couldn't even be called a fight anymore, but it got closer to a one-sided slaughter.

Finally, as if Andel had completely lost motivation, he logged in after a whole two days had passed.

Now Andel was forced to choose between recovering 96 stats by catching mice or quitting the game. And no matter what he chose, it was certain that it would make it extremely difficult for him to pass the exam.

"Alright, it's not enough yet, but this time I'll let you off here."

Only then did Ark get up from the resurrection site as if he were being generous.

Ark then turned towards Andel who was slumped with a cowed and despairing face, he growled,

"If I catch sight of you next time, it won't end like this. I'm stopping here this time, but if I see you in another place, I'll kill you until your stats become 1."

Andel's face went white with terror.

The Two Girls

With a flurry of dim lights, a new user was born into New World. Her name was Roco. She was a cute looking female character.

“Woah, woah, so this is what they call a virtual reality game?”

Roco looked at her surroundings with round, fascinated eyes. The sky, earth, mountains, fields, everything about the landscape before her was just as, no several times more beautiful than reality.

Buildings made of stone and wood encircled her. It was just like the sight of Medieval Europe you could sightsee at a theme park.

Roco carefully raised her foot with an uneasy look on her face, and took a step. Immediately afterwards, whirling her arms and suddenly exclaiming.

“Am I really inside a unit? Even though moving about isn’t different from reality? No wonder the game fee is expensive. Ah? Is this my face?”

Roco was running around left and right like a child when her eyes caught her reflection in a glass window. She stared at her stunning appearance, which looked like the X idols she’d often seen on TV.

She unconsciously let out a laugh.

“Eheheh, alright. My plastic surgery looks like it’s been done perfectly, so should I get started on this thing called New World?”

Although she said so in high spirits, Roco scratched her head in confusion.

“But, what am I supposed to do first?”

Just then, an elder who had been glancing at Roco from behind spoke to her.

“Youngin, is this your first time here?”

“Huh? Me?”

Since he spoke suddenly, Roco was startled and stepped back. The elder chuckled as he nodded his head.

“Yes, that’s right. I’m talking to you. What’s your name?”

“I’m called Roco.”

“Little Roco, do you perhaps need some help?”

“Yes, um... for now, please let me ask you a few questions. This is Harun Village, right?”

“Indeed, this is Schudenberg Kingdom’s frontier village, Harun. I am the village chief, Hansen.”

“Ah, grandpa Hansen!”

Roco excitedly jumped up and down as she clapped her hands. Then, as if she was checking him out, she circled around Hansen, looking him over. Hansen stammered with an embarrassed expression.

“Why, why are you acting like this?”

“Ah, I apologize. I was just amazed to personally see grandpa Hansen, who I’ve only heard about.”

“You’ve heard of me from someone?”

“Yes, Hyun Woo-oppa.... ah, no. I heard it from Ark-oppa.”

“Ark! Are you an acquaintance of Ark?”

“Yes, yes. Does grandpa also remember Ark-oppa? I heard he’d come here.”

“Of course I remember! How could I forget Ark? He was a great young man with proper manners and is considerate of others, which is a trait uncommonly seen in people these days.

“Right? Right?”

“Also, his bravery is like none other. There was a time when he

saved us from a crisis everyone had neglected. The event is still fresh in my memory. Ah, but what relationship do you have with Ark?”

At Hansen’s question, Roco blushed and giggled.

“Excuse me, where do I have to go to meet Ark-oppa?”

“I wonder? Last time I saw him, I heard he was going to Jackson Castle. However, quite a bit of time has passed since then so I’m not sure if he is still there. Why are you looking for him?”

“It’s been a really long time since I’ve seen him. Last week, he suddenly took a leave of absence from the mart and hasn’t returned... I thought I might be able to meet him if I came here. I also wanted to try this once, while I had the chance.”

“Mart?”

Hansen tilted his head as if it was a term he had never heard of before.

Roco quickly shook her head.

“Nothing. You do not need to know. Anyway, how can I get to Jackson Castle?”

“Surely you’re not going to go right now?”

“Why not? I can’t go right now?”

“Ho ho ho, look here, little Roco. Jackson Castle is a place very far away. You’ll have to walk non-stop for days before reaching it. In addition, the road is incomparably rough, and there are countless dangers lurking about. A beginner adventurer like you would become a wolf’s meal before you could even take a few steps away from the village. Since you’re an acquaintance of Ark, I’ll advise you with good intentions. If you want to go to Jackson Castle, you’ve got to gain enough experience first.”

“How do you gain experience?”

“If you want, I can introduce to you a suitable job.”

‘Ah, this must be what you call a quest!’

“Yes, then I’ll work.”

As Roco recalled the stories she heard from here and there, and nodded her head.

But after she listened to Hansen’s words, she immediately lost her nerve.

The quest Hansen gave her was none other than defeating what she feared most, mice. Roco, who had agonized over it briefly, set her lips in a firm line and courageously casted her fears away.

‘Che, am I an idiot? What am I afraid of? No matter how realistic it may seem to be, this is still inside a game. Even if they were called mice, it will probably look more like Mickey-mouse or Pikachu. It’s a little discomfiting having to crush things as cute as them, but there’s no helping it. Since this is a game.’

“Yes, I’ll be heading out now.”

Roco bowed as she smiled cutely and left for the tavern.

Roco went to the tavern and chatted with Kraydon about Ark before entering the warehouse. In an instant, she screamed at New World’s terrifying realism.

“Kyaahhh! What, what is this? The mouse here looks bigger and scarier than a mouse in real life!”

The mice who were previously swarming around the warehouse, focused their attention on Roco. Blood had drained from Roco’s face, and she quickly whirled around.

“I-, I can’t! Fight these mice.... I, I can’t do it! I’m not going to do it! Mister Kraydon, I wanna come out! Please open the door!”

Just then, Roco knocked over a stack of boxes, which wobbled and collapsed, blocking the door.

Then, a scarlet light flashed in front of Roco’s eyes.



||You have been attacked by a mouse. Damage 1.||

However, Roco wasn't even concerned by the damage she had taken.

A mouse the size of her forearm came right up to her nose and bared its teeth. Rather than the damage she incurred, this was much more frightening.

With an expression on her face looking like she was on the verge of fainting, she screamed and climbed up the nearby stack of boxes. After frantically panicking, Roco belatedly thought of an escape plan.

"Oh, tha-that's right. This is a game. I can just log out. Disconnect!"

Game or not, she just wanted to flee the warehouse teeming with mice. However, as a brief message window popped up, even her last hope sputtered away.

||You may not log out during combat. Please try again after finishing the battle.||

"This is ridiculous! It can't be like this! Save me. Aack! Please save me. Wah~ wah~!"

Roco bawled her eyes out as she barely managed to push off a mouse crawling up to her with the tip of her foot.

Unfortunately, in New World, there was no one who would save her even if she continually cried for help. In the end, Roco was trapped in the warehouse, unable to log out or escape. And so she wailed and wailed until she eyes became puffy.

How many hours has it been? Her throat was too sore to let out another scream. Then a new message window appeared.

||You have learned a new skill.
Lady's Wail (Beginner, Active): The wail of a Lady full of sorrows,||

making even irrational enemy feel guilt.

In addition, it will make an ally feel inclined to leap into fire for the sake of the Lady. However, this skill will only trigger when the player feels tremendous fear.

Enemy attack speed, movement speed, and morale decrease by 20% for 30 seconds, and ally attack speed, movement speed, and morale increase by 20% for 30 seconds.

Mana Cost: 20

* * *

* * *

At that time, Ark was grinning as he walked down the streets of Jackson.

“I feel slightly better now.

The constant irritation that had remained in a corner of his heart about playing the game had disappeared.

He had no intention of forgiving mistakes. People were quick to forgive those who whined that it was a mistake even after doing something bad, so bad guys didn't learn their lesson and a just society couldn't be realized.

Evil doers had to pay the due price. If you're wronged, pay them back right away— that was justice. That was Ark's view on life.

Ark was finally able to achieve his justice.

Since Ark endured until Andel logged in if he didn't after 24 hours, Ark hadn't slept even a wink for two days. Despite that, he wasn't even a little tired. Rather, he was so refreshed that he felt he could fly.

Justice was a good thing after all.

‘Now, shall we go and finish the quest now?’

Ark went to find Raymond's house with a vibrant expression on his face.

As soon as Ark went in, Raymond stared at him with a shocked expression.

"Ah! Y-you... returned. No way... did you bring that mineral?"

Ark smiled coldly and nodded his head. Then he took out the Blood Crystal and dropped it onto the table with a clink.

Raymond's face as he saw the Blood Crystal was filled with horror.

"You look quite surprised. Are you disappointed I've returned alive?"

"N-no. Wh-why would I?"

"After all, you must be disappointed since someone you sent as fodder returned safe and sound."

"Wh-what are you talking about? Fodder?"

Raymond denied it as he shook his head vigorously. But he was unable to hide the anxiety in his eyes.

There was no need to rush.

With a leisurely expression, Ark slowly drove him into a corner.

"You said that you went into that cave frequently. If that's so, then of course you would know of the Golem's existence. However, up till I went to the cave, I didn't hear even a single word about the Golem from you, even though you knew it would be difficult to defeat the Golem with my strength. No, you sent me because you judged that it would be difficult for me to defeat it. From the beginning, the reason you sent me was to use me as food for the Golem that was raising the Blood Crystal within it."

Raymond was startled and flinched when he heard the word 'Blood Crystal.'

"Ho-how in the world did you hear about something like a Blood Crystal...?"

Raymond quickly avoided eye contact as he mumbled something like an excuse.

“I-I don’t know what you are saying.”

“Is that so?”

Ark shrugged and turned around.

“I understand. Then it looks like I have to find the Lord and ask him.”

“Wa-wait a minute!”

Astonished, Raymond tightly grasped onto Ark’s arm.

“Wha-what exactly do you want?”

“Are you admitting that you did it?”

Ark put on a wicked smile as he made his jab.

Raymond lowered his shoulders as if in despair and heaved a sigh.

“There, there was nothing I could do, either. If you know about the Blood Crystal, you must also know that it’s not just mineral. That’s right, the Blood Crystal is a magical mineral storing an ancient power. A long time ago, I held it by accident and was fascinated by that magical power. In the end, in order to cultivate the rest of the Blood Crystal that wanted more knowledge, I ended up planting it in the Golem’s body. And then I used strangers like you. But now, even that has come to an end. How would I have known that someone among the strangers would perhaps know of the Blood Crystal...”

Once he broke down, Raymond confessed everything in a steady stream.

As he stared at Ark with bitter eyes, he spoke, “I’ll confess everything I told you to the guards as well. In return, couldn’t you give me just a few days off?”

‘Seems like he’s a very stupid person.’

Ark snorted and was about to refuse.

Suddenly, he heard a coughing sound from Raymond's room. Startled, Raymond quickly leapt into the room.

Ark followed him in and saw a young child coughing, who was obviously very sick, on a small bed.

With a tearful face, Raymond held the child's hand.

"Oh, oh, my baby. Papa is right here."

"P-papa... cough, cough!"

The child broke out into a cold sweat as he coughed violently.

While staring blankly at that sight, Ark asked, "Are you perhaps..."

"Please don't ask anymore questions. It's all over. In any case, the Golem was crushed while the Blood Crystal was in an incomplete state. No, even if the Blood Crystal was somehow completed, there's no guarantee that the illness would be cured. I don't resent you. And if you just wait a few days for me, I'll be sure to turn myself into the guards. I beg of you. Please allow this hopeless father to watch over this poor child's last road."

As he looked at the beseeching Raymond, Ark was speechless.

He had no idea why he kept running into this kind of situation.

Indeed, he could definitely understand Raymond's feelings. If his mother could completely recover, Ark would do anything. If he'd been in the same situation as Raymond, he would have done the same.

However, Raymond was an NPC. The dying child was also an NPC.

He knew. He knew that if he just finished the quest and received his reward, that would be the end of it. But why did he feel such an uncomfortable sensation? Why did he see his mother lying on her sickbed, why couldn't he bring himself to just turn around and find the guard?

'Dammit...!'

"Move it."

Ark roughly shoved Raymond and grabbed the child's hand.

"You're okay. You'll be able to recover your health just as your father wishes. You'll be able to go outside and run like the other children while freeing the laughter that's locked inside your chest."

It was then, when Ark used his Nursing Skill. The Blood Crystal Ark was holding in his hands suddenly turned to dust and disappeared. Rays of light abruptly emerged from the dust, which was then absorbed by the child's body.

At the same time, a dramatic change occurred in the child's body. The coughing stopped in an instant and color returned to his face.

Miracle Nursing has succeeded.

You must convey the sincerity born of the sentiment called nursing to your patient— only then can it truly gain meaning. Sometimes, an illness or the like that cannot be cured with any kind of miraculous medicine or magic can be cured by sincerity.

Now, children who receive this sincere Nursing will recover completely; as you hoped, they will live vigorously while speaking of you as their benefactor of good deed to many people.

*From succeeding Miracle Nursing, all your stats have increased by 1 each.

* You have acquired a new stat, Affection (+10)

It will raise the success rate and effect of all actions that require affection by its numerical value.

Stat distribution is not possible, it will increase when you have done a good deed great enough to be talked about by other people.

* Fame has increased by 50.

* Your alignment to Good has increased by 50.

Since you succeeded Miracle Nursing, you have earned the title of Caretaker.

As a Caretaker, your fame increases and you will receive the praises of many of the sick.

* As a title-related bonus, all stats increase by 1 each.

* Fame increases by 50.

“H-how can this be!”

Raymond stared at Ark with a bewildered expression.

However, the truly bewildered person was Ark. He just used it once because he felt sorry just watching, but he hadn't known that it would yield this kind of result. After staring at the child with dumbfounded eyes, Ark felt embarrassed to look at Raymond who was pouring out tears, so he quickly left the room.

“I'm gonna leave. Whether you turn yourself into the guard or not, do what you want.”

“Dammit, to give up a quest that's almost completed... I must be crazy.”

To be honest, he did feel regret. However, Ark quickly shook his head.

It was a G difficulty quest anyways. Even if he let the guards know, he'd only receive that much of a reward. But Ark had already received a reward he hadn't even imagined. All stats +2! As a bonus, since his agitation had also disappeared, now something like the quest was nothing.

‘The hell, I don't know. Should I just delete the quest?’

“Pl-please wait a minute!”

He'd left the house, but Raymond hurriedly followed him.

Then he grabbed Ark's hand tightly as he pulled something out for

him. One was the ingredient for making the Tool Box, Ailard Powder, and the other was a booklet with a faint light shining around it.

“Don’t you need to take the Ailard Powder? And this book is our family’s inherited heirloom. Although I still haven’t been able to properly interpret its meaning, it might be possible if it’s you. I’m sorry I can only give something like this. I beg you, please take it.”

Ark wasn’t one to refuse something like this. As Ark snatched and packed it away, Raymond spoke as he bowed.

“Thank you for accepting it. Also, I will definitely turn myself into the guard if my little boy gets well, like I promised to you. It’s not because I’m afraid you’ll accuse me, but because I want to become an honorable father to my little boy. So don’t worry about me anymore.”

Thu-thu-thump, the quest information window opened.

The Secrets of the Blood Crystal quest has been completed.

You have found the hidden ending of Alchemist Raymond’s request-type quest.

Hereby, the Alchemist Raymond sincerely confessed and is repenting on his sin. He will keep his promise to turn himself in and receive punishment.

Special reward: Experience +5000, Raymond’s Secret Book (Rare), Fame +50

Through Raymond’s Secret Book (Rare), you have learned a new skill.

Magic Restoration (Special, Beginner, Active): Using Mana, any kind of item can be restored to their original condition. However, if a novice uses it, the item’s maximum durability will be cut by 10% each.

Decreased durability will cease to exist. If skill level rises, it will be possible to fully restore general items and repair higher level magic items.

Mana Consumption: 10

‘A hidden ending!’

Ark’s jaw dropped.

Although he hadn’t even imagined it, it seemed the child’s coughing sound was actually a diverging point of the quest. Thanks to that, Ark had gone up a level and had even learned the repair skill he’d regretted so much.

Although there was a penalty to the durability unlike the normal repair, the explanation that full repair was possible if he raised the skill level was also attached. In any case, he had learned a skill that only Warriors could.

Kind acts were rewarded after all.

Moreover, Ark hadn’t gotten the real reward he’d worked towards yet. When Ark returned with the Ailard Powder, Norton rejoiced.

“Ooh, so you got it. Thank you. Now I can supply General and Deluxe Toolboxes, 100 each, to the Lord. I’ll deliver it, so don’t worry. And here, this is your share. The 8 percent I agreed to discount you on calculates in money to 200 gold, and that’s left after the price of the 2 Deluxe Tool Boxes from last time. 11 Deluxe Tool Boxes.”

He still needed the Tool Box since Magic Restoration was still beginner level.

Ark stored the toolboxes inside his bag and headed towards the plaza.

* * *

The plaza’s bulletin board was pasted full of countless flyers. Guild recruitment ads... and even wanted flyers were there.

If a Chaotic user's infamy rose, the Lord or the NPC Guard Chief would post wanted flyers like this.

Ordinarily the NPCs took care of it, but there were also users who specialized in hunting wanted criminals. That was because they could obtain magic items more comfortably than by catching a boss monster.

However, the flyer Ark was scrutinizing was something different.

A newsletter: it was a flyer similar to New World's regional newspaper. A newly discovered region, brief information about a dungeon, or an event taking place in various villages and the like were written.

Ark was of a mind to finish up his Jackson life if he rose another 1 or 2 levels. Then he planned to choose a few places from among the regions that looked alright and leave for an adventure. Since there were no quests he had received, he was uncertain about deciding his destination.

Just then, he heard a loud "wow" from one side of the village.

When he turned to look, a huge crowd was gathered at the plaza.

"Wow, are those people part of the expedition to raid the Labyrinth of Tarsha?"

"Have you heard the quest difficulty is ++C?"

"Holy shit. I haven't even received an E rank quest yet."

"We wouldn't be able to do it even if we received one. Our levels are different."

"Just look at their gear. They're all plastered with Magic items and even Rares."

"Sigh, when will I be able to put on one of those."

"Look there, it's Sir Alan!"

The chattering people's attention focused to one side.

The person who approached as he received their attention was a Knight riding a white horse. He was a handsome Knight with flowing golden hair wearing a flashing full plate armor set that you could tell was a Rare item at first sight. His arrival took everyone's breath away.

"I think someone said Sir Alan job-changed to 'Holy Knight,' one of the hidden professions."

Holy Knight was one of the few known hidden professions.

"So that's why there are a lot of soldiers who look like NPCs."

"Ooh, just look at that item. New World was launched only recently..."

"They say he started one month after the launch, later than us."

"The gear of the people who are participating in the attack party with him are no joke either."

A raid gathered several parties to complete ++difficulty quests that couldn't be completed with just one party.

It was usually made up of only users, but depending on the quest story, sometimes NPCs joined too. In particular, for a character with high fame like the Holy Knight, the chance of NPCs joining rose.

'So that's the highly rumored Holy Knight.'

Although Ark had heard rumors about him here and there, it was his first time seeing him. While Ark was currently satisfied with his profession of being a Dark Walker, at first Ark had also wanted to choose a Warrior-type hidden profession like that.

Granted, no matter what type it was, finding a hidden profession quest was like finding a needle in a haystack....

While Ark was staring blankly at the people, someone from the crowd suddenly approached him.

It was a female Magician with a black robe and her hood lowered all the way to her chin.

“Are you by any chance Mr. Kim Hyun Woo?”

A dumbfounded expression arose on Ark’s face.

He’d never imagined that someone would call him by his real name in a game where there was not a single person he knew.

Furthermore, it was a woman? He had no idea who it was.

“That’s right... who are you?”

“Ah, so I was right after all. I thought it might be you since you had the same face.”

“Do you know me?”

The Magician took off her deeply lowered hood.

Ark squinted as he looked her over. The Magician was a pointy-eared female Elf. He was definitely seeing this character for the first time, but somehow she felt familiar. His memory wavered dimly between remembrance and oblivion.

As Ark tilted his head, she smiled with a sheepish expression.

“Ah, seems like you don’t quite recognize me after all. Have I modified my appearance too much, perhaps?”

Ark was finally able to recognize her after seeing her smiling face.

“Ah! Are you perhaps the person I saw at the interview?”

“Yes, I’m Kang Misu. Here, I go by the name Lariette.”

“Right, my character’s name is Ark.”

Ark quickly bowed his head to greet her.

He didn’t know why he couldn’t recognize her face right away. Actually, Ark had thought of her several times so far. No, to be truthful, he’d thought of her quite often. It was natural to feel favorable towards a woman who had shown interest in him in an unfamiliar place and had even cheered him on, especially since she was a woman whose beauty that outshone that of an idol. But that

was that. He hadn't even hoped for an opportunity like meeting her again.

But to meet in a place like this by chance, and it was she who first recognized and talked to him on top of it...

"So you started as an Elf."

"Yes, it's a bit strange, right?"

"No, it suits you well."

They weren't empty words. There were few people who suited the Elf this much.

At Ark's compliment, Lariette toyed with her pointy ears as her face reddened.

"But it looks like you're going to participate in the raid this time."

"Yes, my level isn't quite there yet, but I entered through an invitation from someone I know."

"What is your level?"

"I got a lot of help from the person I know, but I'm still only at 50."

Lariette replied with an embarrassed expression.

Ark choked.

"F-fifty?"

"Yes. Is something the matter?"

"Oh, no. Your level is quite higher than I anticipated."

"What level is Ark-nim at?"

"I am now 35..."

As Ark responded in a voice as loud as ants crawling on the ground, Lariette revealed a rather surprised expression. Then she followed by shaking her head with a disappointed expression.

“I’m sorry to say something like this, but Ark-nim, that’s a little severe. Actually, among the candidates, I’m on the low side of levels. The likely people are around level 70. The attack party leader Alan-nim is also a candidate, but this time his level went over 75. Honestly with Ark-nim’s level...”

Even if he didn’t hear the rest of it, he could guess her next words. It was probably that it would be difficult for him to pass Global Exos’ test. He’d basically known, but hearing it right in front of him sucked the energy out of him.

Just then, the Knight riding the white horse approached from behind Lariette. It was Alan, the Holy Knight.

“Lariette-nim, what are you doing there?”

“I met someone I know, so I was just having a little talk.”

“Someone you know?”

Alan examined Ark up and down with a slightly uncomfortable eye.

“Ark-nim is also an applicant.”

“Then your level must be alright. The quest this time has quite a high difficulty so we’re low on people, so this is good. Would you like to join the raid?”

“No, Ark-nim is still....”

Lariette studied Ark’s expression as she whispered something to Alan. As soon as she did so, a flash of ridicule glimmered through Alan’s eyes. ..

“Well, each person has their own circumstance. Excuse me.”

Alan turned his horse as if there was nothing left to see.

“Now then, Lariette-nim, let us be off.”

“Ah, yes. I’ll be going now. Please work hard.”

Lariette stared at Ark with bittersweet eyes before turning around. Ark felt an empty feeling while watching her back. He felt like his

hope was walking away from him with her.

Actually, Ark had felt smug these last few days.

He had grown used to the Dark Walker profession, and he'd ruined Andel, who'd been far ahead of him. Not long ago, he'd even found a quest's hidden ending and had received a reward up to his expectation. It seemed like everything was progressing almost too smoothly.

He had even thought that he might have a chance at passing the much-hoped for Global Exos' test.

But in the end, that was all just his delusion.

Ark's rivals, the other candidates, were going to do a ++C difficulty quest from an unimaginably high place. The difference between them and Ark was one that he had vaguely expected.

That's right. He'd expected it to some extent.

Unlike them, Ark couldn't afford to concentrate on playing games all day. So over time, the difference was bound to grow. In addition, he'd wasted a whole two weeks of time in Harun Village, so this much difference might be certain.

He'd known. He knew, but...

'Dammit. I feel really shitty.'

An unbearable feeling surged and welled up.

It wasn't just because he had fallen behind the other candidates. Alan's ridicule-filled eyes. And Lariette, who followed him.

When he looked back at the scene, Ark felt like he had just lost Lariette to Alan. It was just something within a game, but New World was a game that was more real than reality. So he felt the sense of defeat more keenly than in real life.

He didn't want to lose anymore.

No matter what the cost!

* * *

‘It’ll be really bad at this rate.’

After seeing Alan leading the attack party, Hyun Woo couldn’t shake off his testiness.

When the Planning Director Ha Myung Woo gave her speech in the interview hall, she had said they weren’t going to just look at levels. However, level was one of the absolute numbers in the game.

A higher level player can hunt stronger monsters. Naturally, the chances of getting a better item increased, they could proceed to a broader expanse of regions, and they could receive higher difficulty quests. In the end, level was an absolute value in all senses.

Falling behind from that meant failing the test soon.

He had to catch up. It was the only method of survival.

‘Is there any way to increase my game time?’

As always, the problem was time.

He was confident he could catch up if he could concentrate on the game with the same amount of time as the other candidates. However, Hyun Woo could only invest just 6 hours in one day. He had to decrease his sleeping time while fighting fatigue to make even that time possible.

To be honest, he didn’t expect much for Global Exos’ test.

He still thought so even now. However, if he was to fail the test, he wouldn’t be able to play New World anymore. He didn’t know what would happen after one or two months, but in the end, he wouldn’t be able to meet Ark, the character he’d raised with such care, ever again. His efforts so far would all be wasted.

‘And Alan!’

Forgetting how Ark had suffered his disregard was unacceptable.

Ark was Hyun Woo himself. Insulting Ark was no different than insulting Hyun Woo. If he could, he wanted to raise his level like

crazy and strip Alan like Andel and laugh as much as he wanted at him.

Even so, he couldn't give up reality because of a game.

Although the money paid to him by Global Exos was enough for him to get by, he still couldn't afford his mother's hospital fee if he didn't work. Even now, wasn't it true that the wage he received from the mart, his three part-time jobs, and the money from Global Exos was only barely enough to cover it?

'Even so, I can't keep increasing the debt here...'

What a dilemma, it was a situation in which he couldn't do it even if he did this or tried that.

'Half a year! No, even for just a couple of months, is there no way I can concentrate on playing the game?'

Just then, news he had seen a few days ago suddenly flashed in his mind.

It was an article about buying and selling in game items. Now that he thought of it, he vaguely remembered hearing stories of people making a lot of money just by selling game items.

Now that item trading was completely legal, it was a time when item trading occupied one place in the market. Hyun Woo did remember his school days when he'd earned pocket-money from selling items in an online game. He just hadn't been able to connect that to living expenses, but it was certain that items could become money.

For a game like New World, items could definitely be sold more expensively.

'Maybe I could sell items and use the money from the sale to pay for mother's hospital fees? Well, with my current level, the items I can get won't get that much money, but... New World hasn't been open for very long anyways. There'll be many people who need items that I can obtain at my level. Yeah, let's try at least looking it up once.'

Hyun Woo found and entered the auction site that he'd auctioned in

ages ago.

As expected, New World's item auction was actively growing.

As he searched through the catalogue, seeing the market prices made his jaw drop.

"Wh-what is this? Is this really the price of a game item?"

The items of New World were being sold at an unimaginable price.

When Hyun Woo had played his online game, items worth tens of hundreds, tens of millions of won had been traded, but those were items for the very top level players.

However, New World was a whole different level.

A price of one gold was equivalent to 10,00 won (~\$10), and a magic sword for level 20-30s was being sold for at least a million won (~\$1,000).

For Rare or Uniques, depending on the stats, they ranged from several hundred thousand won to ten million won.

Indeed, the items were valuable. It was a world that Hyun Woo, who would skip a few meals in order to save a few thousand won, couldn't even imagine.

'1 gold equals 10,000 won... Then the toolboxes I've obtained today are worth two million won!'

It really shocked him.

'Maybe the items I have can also be sold at a high price?'

After agonizing, Hyun Woo tried posting the Blood-red Mantle of Dreams on the auction. It was a level 20's Unique item that demonstrated an immense advantage in a fight against a user.

It was a treasure Hyun Woo cherished, but there wasn't really any other item he could sell that was worth much money. Then, like fire, within a few minutes hundreds of bidders entered the bidding war. After an hour had passed, the price had soared to 400 million won (~4,000 USD).

It was equivalent to 2 months of Hyun Woo's salary and a half a month of hospital fees.

It was mind-boggling.

'Holy smokes, what have I been doing all this time?'

Even though it was Unique, it was limited to level 20 and even had a curse on it.

But 4 million won in just one hour! He hadn't even imagined that a single item like that would rake in an enormous price like this.

However, Hyun Woo was unaware of a simple truth.

It was exactly because of Global Exos' candidates. New World's items were expensive to begin with, but it hadn't been this much. But as the candidates shook the money bag, like a gust of wind, even the prices of low-level items had exploded several times their price within one month.

Andel was the same. You couldn't drink recovery potions like water by making gold like normal. That ruthless power of luxury came from cash. In any case, to Hyun Woo, the entire situation felt like a light of salvation.

'This is it. This is exactly it!'

The way to focus on only playing the game!

'I can earn money from the game!'

After finally finding the method, he felt more furious that he hadn't known until now.

At the end of the auction, the Blood-red Mantle of Dreams was sold for 4,500,000 won.

He also auctioned off Andel's plated armor set because although the defense was good, there was too much of a penalty for users who weren't Warriors. Even though it was normal armor, in the end it sold for 2,500,000 won.

Although he was regretful about selling them, he disregarded that

after thinking of it as an investment.

If he could concentrate on the game all day, there was nothing to regret.

By selling the mantle and Andel's armor, two months of hospital fees had already fallen into his hands. It was small, but it meant he could just play the game without thinking about anything else for two months. If he made money like this, he might even be able to buy a unit one day.

Even if he were to fail the test, if he can continue to play New World, he could earn money.

'Alright, we're gonna try this!'

For the first time, Hyun Woo had embarked on the path of a professional gamer.

The next day, 7,000,000 won (~\$7,000) was deposited into his bank account.

As soon as Hyun Woo confirmed the balance in his account, he headed to the Mart. The owner poured curses on him for not showing up for a week. In the face of that, Hyun Woo politely handed his resignation over and fled the mart.

There hadn't been anyone who'd been particularly friendly with Ark. He didn't feel even a little wisp of something like regret.

If there was just one person that he regretted, it was his coworker Hye Sun. Hye Sun, who had never lost her smile although she faced difficult circumstances at home, like Hyun Woo. Even Hyun Woo, who'd never given much care to other people, thought affectionately of her as a little sister.

It was inadequate, but he wanted to personally explain his situation at least to her.

"It might be laughable that I'm quitting because of a game, but it's something extremely important to me."

"But this suddenly..."

Hye Sun made a tearful face.

“Don’t be too sad. My mother’s hospital is nearby, anyways. Whenever I come and go, I’ll come buy you a drink. And if anything happens, call me any time; whether it’s mice or whatever, I’ll come catch them for you right away.”

“Mice...” Hye Sun giggled as she muttered to herself, “Alright, that other thing... now anything is fine.”

Hye Sun looked aloof, as if she’d peeled away a layer of worry.

“By the way oppa, if it’s for the game, you’re always going to be in New World, right?”

“Yeah, I will.”

“Well then, okay. I’ll see you in there.”

“What? You started playing New World? What’s your in game name?”

“It’s still a secret. I’ll come find you soon. Wherever you are,” Hye Sun replied with a beautiful smile.

* * *

“Huhuhuhu.”

A spooky laughter echoed in the Shadow Forest.

The person with a bat and a skull beside him, exuding an aura stained with greed was none other than Ark.

It was not the same Ark as yesterday. The determination to do his absolute utmost was alive in Ark’s face. It was a definite change. From today, Ark had been reborn as a professional gamer.

“Master, why are you acting like that? It’s frightening.”

Sensing Ark’s change, Bat became terrified and shivered.

“Shut up. You get ready too— from now on there’ll be no breaks. Bat, go scout the surroundings. Find a place where there’ll be a lot of

gathered monsters.”

“I-I get it. Calm down.”

With his sword raised, Ark pounded through the Shadow Forest like a madman.

“Wait and see, Alan! One day I will make you fall on your knees right in front of me!”

The entire Shadow Forest heaved. In the past, he had fled if he thought it might be a large group, but now, he went around looking for places where the monsters gathered instead. And when he discovered one, his eyes flashed as he charged.

It wasn't madness, but greed that soaked his sword as it slashed down helpless Zombies and Ghouls helplessly. That wasn't all. He stripped away all the food ingredients he could call ingredients in the area to the point that the forest felt chilly.

‘I can't afford to complain about my profession. Since I've already chosen it, I'll become the best with this profession. And to become the best, I have to apply 100 percent of the profession's special characteristic!’

Ark did not rest even for just a minute.

If he rested for a moment to recover his Health, he immediately made Survival Cooking and shoveled food into his Familiars.

“Sa-save us! PLEASE STOP!”

The Bat and Skull exploded with screams, but Ark had no mercy. That was because raising his Familiars' stats meant Ark would become stronger.

Whenever he acquired an equipment drop from a monster, he would repair it continuously with restore magic until the durability dropped to 1. In order to save even a penny, it was necessary to increase his restore magic early on. It was the same for other skills as well.

No matter which skill it was, if he just raised it, he would either become stronger or it would cost him less money.

There was a reason to raise it with his life on the line.

“Give me your experience! Give me your money! Give me your items!”

At Ark’s frenzied hunting, Undead monsters and the like now furtively avoided him. While his motivation overflowed at even the sight of an Undead’s head, right as he was on the brink of exploding in anger, Ark detected an incredibly dangerous opponent.

A few days after starting to hunt like this, a formidable monster showed up at last. The medium boss that emerged if you slayed a certain number of Undead monsters, the Reaper. A Reaper with a blurred figure approached him cloaked in a black robe as it swung its enormous scythe.

“How dare you make a ruckus in my territory!”

A low cry shook the Shadow Forest.

A truly terrifying sight. However, it only appeared as a lump of experience in Ark’s eyes.

Ark’s level had already become 39 though hunting in the Shadow Forest. With his 20 percent ability bonus in the dark applied, he was no different from a player in the late 40s.

He had raised his skills dramatically, so Sword-Hand Combat had also reached Intermediate.

Even if the Reaper was a level 50 monster, there was no reason to fear it.

“I don’t have time to chat. Come at me!”

“Kukuku. To come at the chief gatekeeper of the spirit world for a human subject, you childish rotten bastard!”

The Reaper rushed towards Ark as it swung its scythe.

Ark quickly dove within melee range as he loosed Dark Blade.

As a BOOM sound echoed, the Reaper wobbled as it stepped back.

The Bat and Skull rammed the Reaper on both sides at the same time.

The Bat and Skull were both desperate. That was because the amount of food they had to eat would depend on the result at the end of the battle.

“Kwak, these little...!”

While the Reaper was still wobbly, Ark used Cat’s Eyes.

The Reaper’s Health appeared above its head as red points were drawn here and there on its body. They were weaknesses perceived through Cat’s Eyes.

Ba-ba-ba-bang!

As he ravaged the red points, the Reaper’s health dropped noticeably.

Once its Health was cut to half, a black aura erupted from the Reaper’s body.

“Feel the fear of death!”

Bat and Skull, who were swept by the aura of horror, convulsed and stiffened.

The Reaper swung its scythe at Ark as if to end him with one stroke. But the scythe was blocked by the sword Ark swung and bounced off.

The Reaper’s eyes were stained with disbelief.

“H-how can this be? A human was able to overcome his fear of death?”

“I’m more afraid of poverty than death!”

Ark pushed forward coldly as he swung his sword.

Dark Walkers had a 50% resistance to Fear. That went up another 20% in the dark. If it wasn’t a Fear used by a monster with a huge level difference, there was almost no possibility of him getting hexed

by it.

After Ark resisted the Fear, the Reaper cringed even more. After that, Ark had full control of the battle.

As his Sword-Hand Combat attacks fell like a max-output storm on the Reaper, it quickly dropped into critical condition.

The Reaper couldn't take it anymore and attempted to flee despite the humiliation.

"Argh! Ju-just wait and see!"

"You think I'd let you go?! Dark Blade!"

Ark narrowed the distance in a single breath and loosed Dark Blade on the Reaper's back, which was rife with red spots.

His mana was increased by 100 because of the Crystal Golem Head he was equipping. Thanks to that, he could cast Dark Blade three times even after using Cat's Eyes.

One, two, three!

Critical hits exploded in quick succession. The Reaper's Health hit the bottom at last, and it screamed with a burst of charcoal miasma. Then the body appeared to slowly dim, then suddenly disappeared with an intense explosion.

"KUA-AAK! FOR THI-THIS BODY TO BE DEFEATED BY THE LIKES OF A HUMAN...!"

Ark had no interest in something like the Reaper's dying words.

The only thing that held Ark's interest was the large scythe the Reaper had dropped.

"Information window!"

Reaper's Scythe (Magic)	
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Weapon Type	Scythe (Modified. For some reason, there was no information window for this scythe.)		
Attack Damage	15~20	Durability	50/50
Weight	45	Usage Restriction	Warrior Profession, Level 38
<p>An eerie scythe carried around by the gatekeeper of the spirit world, the Reaper. The Reaper has mowed down many lives with this scythe and dragged them off to the spirit world. The dead will feel fear just by looking at it.</p> <p>Options: 150% attack power against Undead, Ghost-type enemies. Fixed chance to induce Fear</p>			

It was a weapon two times stronger than the Sharply Shining Sword that Ark used.

Even considering that it was a two-handed weapon, it was a weapon with a considerably high attack damage.

The options were good too since there were many occasions where one had to fight Undead when they were under level 40. Although Ark couldn't use it because it was a Warrior-use weapon, he still made a satisfied smile.

'It'll sell for a nice price since there are a lot of Warrior users.'

The Reaper was a monster with an atrocious item drop-rate. Even this much could be called a bonanza.

From 80% experience, he immediately went up a level after killing the Reaper.

‘Finally level 40! I have achieved my goal in the Shadow Forest!’

Ark urgently opened his status window to distribute his stats.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +50		
Fame	480	Level	40
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker		
Health	905	Mana	300 (+110)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	136
Agility	186(+17)	Stamina	156
Wisdom	25	Intelligence	61
Luck	36	Flexibility	10
Art of Communication	5	Affection	10
Special Stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			10

Equipment Effects

Sharply Shining Sword: Attack speed +5

Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor: Agility +2, Cold Resistance +20

Cat Paws: Attack speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit Rate +10%

Crystal Golem's Helmet: Mana +100

*All abilities are increased by 20% in the dark.

* The ability to hide your body in the dark has formed (Duration time 10 minutes. Cancelled if you get into combat).

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Charm spells is increased by 50%.

*You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

Passive skills

Sword-Hand Combat (Intermediate:113/300): Polishes Hand-to-Hand Combat and Sword Mastery to increase overall fighting power.

Survival Cooking (Beginner: 92/100) Makes unidentified dishes with ingredients obtained from nature.

Indomitable Will (Beginner: 68/100) When in critical condition, Attack Power, Critical Hit Chance, and Recovery Speed are increased.

Indomitable Body (Beginner: 61/100) When in critical condition, Defense, Critical Hit Evasion, and Recovery Speed are increased.

Foraging (Beginner: 82/100) Food ingredients from nature can be gathered.

Ingredient Identification (Beginner: 71/100) Confirms effect of ingredient
--

Riding (Beginner: 3/100) Can handle a horse more skillfully with greater skill level.

Active Skills

Nursing (Intermediate: 149/300) Gives hope, energy, and courage to patients.
--

Mana consumption: 10

Spirit of the Cat (Advanced: 374/500) Plants fear in mice and other small monsters, sealing off their movements; their Attack Power, Defense, and Morale are sharply decreased.

Mana consumption: 120

Eyes of the Cat (Beginner: 88/100) Penetrates the enemy with a sharp gaze.
--

Mana consumption: 50

Restore Magic (Beginner: 59/100) Restore an item to its original state.

Mana consumption: 10

Profession Only Skills

Dark Blade (Beginner:42/100) Deals a one-hit blow to the enemy's weak point.
--

Mana consumption: 100

Summon Demon (Beginner:24/100) Summons up to three demons from the Netherworld.

Mana consumption: 100

With determination, his skill development also quickened enormously.

If he put every ounce of his energy into each and every sword strike when he used Sword-Hand Combat and preciousely devoted his entire soul to Foraging, even if he used them the same number of times, his skill proficiency growth doubled in speed.

This was a fact he'd realized while nursing Viscount Haverstein. However, Ark had not utilized this knowledge properly until now.

You didn't just do one thing in the game. Hunting, foraging, resting, cooking, trading, etc.. the work to be done was as high as a mountain. It wasn't easy to put his heart and soul into every single one of those actions, especially for Ark, who played the game while reducing sleeping time.

But now, the situation was different.

Ark had now become someone who makes a livelihood by being a gamer.

'New World is the only way to live! I must get stronger if only to survive!'

It seemed like his stats and skills reflected the last few intense days.

Plus, a few of his skills were on the brink of rising from Beginner to Intermediate. Until those skills all became Intermediate, Ark would swiftly develop them once again. In addition, his Familiars' stats had also gone up a few times, so now they were quite useful.

'Now, if I just raise my level once or twice and my skills also go up, I can hunt level 50 monsters with little trouble.'

However, Ark still felt he was lacking something.

Although he'd already killed the level 50 monster Reaper without much difficulty, that was only possible because he received the bonus from the dark. Honestly, it was still too much to fight level 50s. There.. utilized all sorts of skills.

'That's right, I shouldn't be satisfied with just this. I still have a long way to go to catch up to Alan.'

Global Exos' employment test and item hunting to make money. These two were his greatest objectives in playing New World. And catching up to Alan became one of Ark's goals to achieve.

Since that day when he was humiliated in front of Lariette...

'Anyways, since I've caught the Reaper now, seems its about time to move hunting grounds.'

Just then, his main window unexpectedly popped up in front of his eyes. In the middle of icons lined up in a circle, his bag icon was flashing.

With his head tilted, Ark touched it and opened the bag. The Jewel Hand Mirror he'd earned from defeating Debra was quivering.

"Right, the Hand Mirror was a level 40 quest starter item!"

Ark took out the Hand Mirror.

You have gained a lot of experience. Even if you do not try, the knowledge you have naturally gathered from walking the world, breathing, talking, and listening will become the key that will lead you to yet another adventure.

This is one among the many kinds of items that treasure countless secrets. A mirror that was specially crafted has fallen into your hands through one of your adventures.

You, who possess a rudimentary knowledge of ancient relics, have carefully inspected the mirror. You quickly realized that someone's memory was sealed inside with ancient power.

Bonus from the knowledge you acquired from observing the Ancient Relic Jewel Hand Mirror:

Knowledge of Ancient Relics +5, Intelligence+2, and Fame has increased by 20.

When you are ready to challenge a new adventure, the mirror will know of your decision on its own and will guide you. However, it is not known if the mirror's guidance will bring your good luck or unhappiness.

*As you have become level 40, the Jewel Hand Mirror's seal can be lifted.

Would you like to lift the seal?

There was nothing to hesitate about.

“Unseal!”

Flash -!

In an instant, an incredible light burst from the Jewel Hand Mirror.

A magical film unfolded with the background of the dark Shadow Forest as the screen.

It was a film that was clear, yet somehow gave off a worn-off feeling, as if it depicted a scene from one part of an old book.

The scene illuminated by the mirror was a beach with a beautiful lighthouse.

A soft breeze caressed the buoyant clouds and gentle waves tumbled as they churned white froth. The sound of singing floated in on the wind on the peaceful beach.

It was a language he'd never heard before. He couldn't tell the meaning. But the sorrow brimming in the singing shook a place deep inside Ark's heart. How much time passed like that?

The dreamlike singing gradually faded, and words popped up.

=====

For Christin's sake...

The Mysterious Mirror's Whisper

From inside the mysterious mirror, images prompted Debra's arrival on the unknown beach. An indication of a long and far journey. When you're ready, go on a journey to the unknown beach and solve the mystery of the mirror. The mirror will serve as your guide and lead you to the lighthouse.

An incomprehensible film of a seaside has emerged from the Hand Mirror that Debra had. This is hinting a long and far journey. If you are done preparing for the journey, you must find the beach and solve the secret of the mirror. Just as a lighthouse guides a ship, the mirror will guide you.

Difficulty: F

Quest requirement: Requires Knowledge of Ancient Relics.

"It's a quest!"

Ark, who had stirred from the song with a hazy expression, opened his eyes like a flash.

A quest. Which meant a reward.

It was common sense that rather than catching hundreds of normal monsters, completing one nicely rewarded quest yielded more experience and money. In addition, this quest was started from an item dropped by Debra, which boasted a +E difficulty.

It wasn't a quest that would end with a reward of just a few gold.

Ark accepted the quest without hesitation.

In an instant, a ray of light extended from the mirror northwards, under the night sky.

"As the lighthouse guides ships... so this is what it meant."

It was a ray of light that would guide him to the beach of the film.

Ark slung Skull on his back and gazed at Bat, which was circling him

as it flapped around.

“Let’s go, Skull, Bat. We will follow this light to solve the quest.”

“Alright, Master. I’ll be good, so don’t feed me food.”

Clack clack clack clack.

Like that, with him leading his two Familiars, Ark walked northwards, where the light extended.

Ark’s adventure was just getting started.

To be continued...

Special Army of Familiars

He followed the Hand Mirror's light for quite a while.

Ark's journey so far was a monotonous repetition of his daily routine.

The light of the Hand Mirror that functioned as a compass only came out at night.

Since he was following the light in a straight line, he ended up on a route consisting of mostly mountains. So when the light disappeared, he couldn't determine the direction and always wandered off.

Naturally, the method of following the Hand Mirror's light at night and wandering the area and hunting at day solidified.

The moment he entered Argue Mountains that surrounds Jackson's territory line, the higher level the monsters became.

The Magal Wolves possessed defensive powers incomparable to a regular Wolf, and the Bengal Tiger boasted of outrageous attack power with its knife-long fangs, constantly ambushing him.

However, Ark had raised his level to the limit in what was called the highest level dungeon in the Jackson area, the Shadow Forest.

There were no opponents dangerous enough for Ark, who had even hunted a Reaper.

The situation changed one week after the journey started; over two days had passed in real time.

The Magal Wolves' and Bengal Tigers' attacks gradually lessened.

Based on his experience, Ark knew what the change meant.

'Looks like I've passed the territory.'

Like people, what was called disposition also existed for monsters.

The disposition determined the friendship between monsters.

In other words, if similar small monsters were set to be hostile, they did not approach each other. If they were set as natural enemies like the relationship between a mouse and a wolf, then fights between them would break out.

Thanks to this system being in place, a monster's domain was naturally made.

The fact that ambushes of the Magal Wolves and Bengal Tigers were decreasing meant the domain was changing.

'What kind of monster's domain is this?'

It'd be a sticky situation if he suddenly encountered a high-level monster.

"Bat, observe the surrounding carefully and inform me immediately if anything shows up."

"Got it, Master."

Ark utilized Bat to increase his vigilance thoroughly as he traversed the forest. Soon, he spotted a few monsters between the thick bushes.

'The face of a dog and a human's body, they're Gnolls!'

There were three of them, and they were drooling saliva while roasting a monster that looked like a Bengal Tiger under a fire. In other words, that meant they were strong enough to hunt a Bengal Tiger.

A Bengal Tiger wasn't an easy opponent either. If they were stronger than a Bengal Tiger, then they weren't opponents to thoughtlessly come at.

'What to do? Should I try fighting 'em?'

Ark was contemplating when one Gnoll suddenly raised its head and let out a cry.

"GRRRRR."

“It’s a Human. I smell the scent of a Human!”

“Let’s catch and eat it, Human meat is more delicious.”

It was a mistake to hide with his back to the wind. The Gnolls with their sensitive sense of smell carried their clubs and approached while flaring their noses.

“Damn, no other choice. Skull, Bat. Assist me.”

Ark swung his sword at a Gnoll as he leapt from the woods.

The Gnoll caught by the ambush received a critical hit and was thrown back.

“Eyes of the Cat!”

Ark’s irises became awash in gold as the Gnoll’s weak points and information were displayed.

‘Level 45, many weak points too. At this level, I can somehow fight them.’

“Skull, Bat. We’re concentrating our attack on one of ’em! Dark Blade!”

Ark loosed a concentrated attack on the Gnoll’s weak point.

It was disadvantageous to be surrounded by three level 45 monsters. When fighting a group, it was important to focus the offensive power on one opponent first to reduce the number of enemies.

With Eyes of the Cat and Dark Blade as well as the addition of the Familiars’ co-op bonus, the Gnoll’s health decreased to 70 percent in an instant. But something strange happened.

The remaining Gnolls kept their distance even while their teammate was under attack. At that moment while Ark was thinking it was strange, the two Gnolls raised their bows.

‘Archer!’

He had not tried fighting any monster using a bow until now.

Therefore, Ark had never even considered a countermeasure concerning a bow attack.

“Damn it! Bat, block it! If you can’t block it, it’s five times of food!”

“Waah, stop, you dog head!”

At Ark’s threat, Bat struck the archer’s face while screaming.

Its outstretched wings blocked its eyes, making the arrow fly off wildly. But the other Gnoll’s loosed arrow sank into Ark’s shoulder.

– You have been hit by a critical blow from a Gnoll’s arrow! 250 damage. Movement speed reduced for 30 seconds.

The situation became desperate.

The arrow decreased attack speed and increased chance of attack failure.

Moreover, just getting hit increased the chance of getting hit by a critical hit and catching an abnormal status like Slow or Bleed.

While Ark was staggering, a Gnoll’s club came flying at him. His movements were slow and his body felt heavy, as if someone was holding onto it.

‘Damn, if I get hit again in this condition, it’ll be another critical hit...’

Clack clack clack!

Just then, Skull’s eyes flashed as it tumbled under the approaching Gnoll’s feet. The Gnoll who stepped on Skull, lost its balance and toppled down. At that moment, a red light poured from the Gnoll’s whole body.

Simultaneously, a message window popped up with a cheerful tune.

After gaining 100 skill points, the skill Eyes of the Cat has leveled up to Intermediate.

Eyes of the Cat (Intermediate, Active): Eyes of the Cat has leveled up to Intermediate, you can grasp more information and weak points concerning the opponent.

As an Intermediate bonus, if you seize a golden opportunity, you can deal a double critical effect. For 3 minutes

+Night Vision.
+Life Detection
+Weakness Perception.
+Double Critical Chance. Mana Consumption : 70

*Double Critical : The opponent will fall into a completely defenseless state.

Depending on the situation and the enemy's reaction, a Double Critical Chance will be provided for roughly 1~3 seconds.

If Double Critical Chance is invoked, one attack can deal 2 times the critical damage.

‘Double Critical Chance!’

The timing when the enemy went into a completely defenseless state, making its whole body turn into weak points!

Using Eyes of the Cat like crazy had paid off.

Ark's sword sank into the Gnoll's nape.

— You have landed a Double Critical hit. As a co-op bonus with Skull, 30% additional damage has been added.

With just one attack, the Gnoll's Health was decreased by over 20 percent. After a few more attacks, the Gnoll disappeared while screaming its death cry.

The situation changed completely once the Gnoll standing in front of him, blocking him had disappeared. There were two Gnolls left. One

of them was being blocked by Bat.

‘With my consciousness, I’ll concentrate on one of them!’

Clink—!

The reflexes he had sharpened and polished by diligently training Taekwondo shone brightly. Ark parried the flying arrow with his sword by calculating the timing.

Perhaps because he did not have a defense-related skill like Warriors did, but parry was not registered with perfect defense. However, New World was a world in which the same rules as reality were applied. The damage was reduced to less than half and a critical hit did not register.

‘As long as a critical hit isn’t invoked, something like an Archer isn’t a match!’

Ark, whose Slow hex had dissipated, quickly advanced on the Archer.

It was common sense that a monster with long-ranged attack was possibly weak to melee attacks! The Gnom who had shot arrows became feeble at Ark’s attack and staggered.

Just then, he heard the sound of Bat caterwauling from the other side.

“Damned Master! Aren’t you even paying attention to me?”

There was a limit when Bat was blocking a Gnom Archer alone. With an arrow lodged in its head, Bat disappeared at the Gnom Archer’s feet.

— Familiar Hatred-bearing Bat has been forcefully recalled to the Netherworld. You have received 50% of the Familiar’s Health as damage.
--

A tingly sensation like surging electricity flowed into Ark’s body and he lost 100 Health.

At the unexpected damage, Ark was thrown into an extremely dangerous situation.

While he was battling against one Gnoll Archer, the other Gnoll freed from Bat's interference, shot an arrow towards Ark's back.

The state of abnormal vulnerability!

'I'll die if I get hit directly!'

Arc suddenly lift Skull.

A critical hit was dealt as the arrow penetrated its forehead, and Skull was forcefully recalled back to the Netherworld in just one blow.

His Health was once again decreased by about 100. But he would have died if the arrow had hit him.

"You swine! I'll make you pay as a revenge for Skull and Bat!"

Truthfully, he didn't have the right to utter such words.

In any case, Ark parried the Gnoll Archer's oncoming arrow and rushed in. At the end of a one minute desperate struggle, he toppled the last Gnoll Archer.

"Dark Blade!"

"Kuuuaak, Human... Just wait and see!"

With a dying scream, the Gnoll's body slowly faded away.

"Phew, I was somehow able to win."

Ark sank to the ground as he exhaled the breath he had been holding in.

Just then, his experience bar which had been stuck at 92% reached 100% in an instant, and with a cheerful tune and his level rose.

The Gnolls gave a lot of experience compared to their level. In addition, the Gnoll was a party monster. It wasn't an enemy that wandered alone. Exterminating a party monster that unleashed

complementary co-op attacks added a 30% bonus to experience.

But he couldn't be thoughtlessly happy.

'Dammit, seems like it'll be difficult to continue hunting Gnolls since all my Familiars were forcefully recalled.'

About one or two Gnolls wasn't a match. The problem was Gnolls formed a party and fought in an organized manner.

Well, it wasn't really tremendous strategizing since they were just dog heads. At best, a Groll Archer would shoot arrows from afar while a Groll Warrior would block Ark, an incomparably simple strategy.

However, it was as effective as it was simple.

If he heedlessly fought alone, he would probably fall over after becoming a porcupine before he could take down a Groll Warrior.

Of course, there would be no problem at all if Ark formed a party.

But Ark, who was consumed by a deep-rooted distrust of users, wanted to avoid party hunting if possible.

And even if Ark wanted to, there wasn't a user who would come all the way to a remote area like this to help him, who was constantly moving because of a quest.

'It would be better to avoid the Gnolls until I can resummon my Familiars.'

He had to wait 24 hours or three days in game time before he could call forth his recalled Familiars.

For the first time since leaving Jackson, Ark turned back.

It was the first time both his Familiars were simultaneously forcefully recalled. He didn't know how useful and helpful his Familiars had been until they were gone.

Bat's scouting ability, and the ability to distract the enemies attention when there were several monsters around, in addition to the co-op bonus of the Familiars. Ark hadn't largely realized these effects. But

now that they were gone, hunting was twice as hard. It also took a lot of time, so just defeating one Bengal Tiger consumed 3~4 minutes. Since it took double the time it took when he'd cleared them in 1~2 minutes, he actually felt his experience wasn't increasing.

But the truly puzzling thing was something else.

'Damn, why does hunting feel this boring now?'

Ark hunted without rest. When a monster appeared, he just took it down with his sword the way his body was familiar with. He picked up items and foraged food ingredients. Then he summoned Netherworld's Egg in his spare time and made it absorb food. Since there wasn't anything different from before, it wasn't exciting.

'I'm gonna go crazy.'

Ark let out a frustrating sigh.

Similar to NPCs, Familiars also had the ability to think for themselves.

Skull and Bat's reactions changed depending on Ark's attitude. For Skull, it was a Familiar with absolute obedience towards Ark, so its reaction didn't change significantly. However, for Bat, if Ark just pushed him around straight up with a heavy hand, it would sulk and there were times when it wouldn't talk for a while, and when a battle broke out, it would run away.

But then when he humored it a little, it soon honeyed him as if it would lick his boot. Sometimes it even pointed out things that Ark hadn't thought of.

'Why are NPCs so picky with their preferences?'

At first, he didn't like that he had to pay attention to each and every one of those points. Moreover, since it consumed Mana when a fight broke out, his usage of skill was limited. So sometimes, there were times when he wondered if he really needed to summon his Familiars.

But it seemed Ark had adapted to them before he realized it.

After his father passed away, he was too busy making a living so he'd never hung out with friends. That same nature applied even in New World. Moreover, because his experience in the beginning was nothing but betrayal, he was stained with a deep-rooted mistrust of users and he'd come to avoid users.

However, Ark was also human.

He'd gotten used to living alone, but it wasn't enjoyable. Even in New World, he'd sometimes felt loneliness while struggling and hunting for a few days in a dark forest. At some point, he stopped feeling lonely, which was after he had his Familiars around.

At the very least, it was evident that Skull, who showed absolute loyalty, and even Bat who constantly grumbled were on Ark's side.

Their existence moved for Ark without desiring any price in return.

They were beings Ark hadn't been able to find in reality or other games.

It was just that he hadn't felt it until now, but to Ark, the Familiars already weren't simply characters, but comrades he could trust.

'24 hours... is a long time.'

For the first time since starting the game, time felt long to him.

'Now I won't let the Familiars get forcefully recalled a second time.'

Ark thought earnestly of his Familiars at last.

"Damn it!"

24 hours finally passed.

As soon as it was summoned, Bat pointed at its forehead and threw a fit.

"Did you see? Did you *SEE*? I'm saying the arrow struck **RIGHT HERE** and it got stuck! Do you know how much it HURT?"

Ark was not surprised.

When a user received damage, they didn't feel the pain. Only a stinging sensation like a slight static shock. But NPCs were different. If they were cut with a knife, they would feel the pain of getting cut by a knife. So if they were hit by an arrow, they would feel the exact pain of getting hit by an arrow.

It was just a programming setting, but everything was real to an NPC.

"If you're the master, shouldn't you take care of your Familiars like a master? But we endured even your **HORRIBLE** experiments of food since you're our master! But for you to use us as SHIELDS! Even if you're our master, I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE! Skull! You say something too!"

Clack clack clack clack.

Skull clacked its teeth with a slightly sullen movement.

"You see! It's so bad that Skull is also acting this way, huh?"

"Alright, I understand. I'll be careful next time."

"Hmph, words like that... eh? What. What did you say?"

The snorting Bat flinched and stepped back. Then it stared at Ark with eyes filled with wariness.

"Ma-master, did you eat something bad? Why're you suddenly acting like this?"

"Like you said, I was a little extreme. I mean this as an apology."

Ark extended food that exuded an aromatic smell.

Then Bat went pale as it shortly made excuses with a servile voice.

"Ma-master. I, I was wrong. I just wanted Master to pay a little more attention to us, so... hehehe. Well, I'm not saying I'll disobey you, just that it's so. Now I don't have complaints. Really."

"Don't worry. Because this dish is a tasty one."

“Huh? *Sniff sniff*, isn’t this is something we’ve eaten before?”

Bat tilted its head after flaring its nostrils. It had wondered whether Ark was beating in discipline with another dreadful body experiment after Ark pushed forward the food without warning. But after blindly smelling it, it was a food that had its effect confirmed not long ago. And it was made by liberally using precious ingredients, a valuable food that raised Health and Agility for one hour.

Familiars did feel hunger, and they possessed gluttony towards tasty foods. But its instinct to protect itself came before the food. Bat stared at Ark with suspicious eyes after gulping down its saliva.

“Thi-this doesn’t have poison in it, right?”

“Shall I make you one with poison mixed in it?”

“Ack! N-no.”

Bat quickly shook its head and shoved its head into the pot.

Next, Ark made the same food again and fed it to Skull as well.

During the time he was alone, Ark had keenly realized the preciousness of his Familiars.

Of course, he couldn’t stop feeding them food, since he wanted his Familiars to grow. But he did think there was a need to converse in a friendly manner now and then. Like the carrot and the stick.

Ark’s virtue allowed him to obtain unexpected information.

– The loyalty of the Familiars, who felt the sincere affection of their summoner, has increased by 1 each. Affection stat has increased by 1.

‘So Loyalty can also increase!’

Even Ark was informed of the changes in his Familiar’s loyalty.

Skull didn’t change, but in Bat’s case, if he shoveled food indiscriminately, its loyalty decreased a little. Every time that

happened, it was a matter of fact that Bat didn't listen to him as much and complained more. Until now, it hadn't gone up even once.

'Looks like it was probably influenced by the newly formed Affection stat.'

Ark roughly understood the situation.

The Affection stat he'd earned from succeeding the miracle of Nursing!

Until now, Ark had no idea what the stat was used for. It didn't help at all when he raised his intimacy with the village NPCs. But he had unexpectedly learned its purpose.

That wasn't all. The proficiency of Survival Cooking went up by 1 each when a new type of dish was create, so it rose by 4.

Food made for other had to have meaning. Since he cooked it to show his apology and gratitude towards his Familiars, bonus proficiency had been applied.

'Attitude applies directly to the game.'

This simple fact, which he had forgotten for a long time, hit home anew.

"Huhuhu. Master. Looks like you've finally realized our value."

After being a little friendly with it, Bat soon became impudent. But Ark, who missed it for 24 hours, indulgently let it slide.

"That aside, there's something I want to say before we start battle again."

"What is it?"

"I thought about it carefully, but I think we've fought with too much of a rule-of-thumb all this while. Which brought upon a problem the last time we fought against the Gnolls. So from now onwards, there's a need to refine our collaboration. It is to increase our survival rate as well."

"Refining our collaboration? What do you mean, Master?"

“So what I’m saying is we need to hypothesize several situations and plot our strategy beforehand. In battle, I can’t afford to assess the situation and provide commands from one to ten, since there’s no time.”

This was the conclusion Ark had came up with after brooding over it for 24 hours.

Ark planned strategies with several patterns oriented to situations beforehand. Then in battle, even if he didn’t issue each and every command, Bat and Skull would be able to judge the situation in their own and move.

It was a method inspired by an online FPS game.

[T/N: First Person Shooter]

“Yeah yeah, I got it. Master, you’ve gotten smarter.” Bat babbled impertinent noises once again.

Ark lightly ignored it and continued.

“There’ll be mistakes if it’s too complicated from the beginning. So let’s restrict it to four methods for now. First, the strategy of focusing the attack on the enemy I’m fighting is Plan A. While I’m fighting one guy, you guys will distract the others’ attention, that’s Plan B. When Skull is fighting with me, and Bat lures the other guys far away, it’ll be Plan C. And the last, Plan D, is an emergency situation. Halt all operations and you guys evade the enemy’s attacks while thinking of a way to survive. Did you understand it all?”

“Got it. I like Plan D.”

Clack clack clack.

Bat and Skull expressed interest as they nodded.

“Now, then let’s try practicing in an actual battle right away!”

Ark immediately led the Familiars and began to hunt. In the beginning, their opponents were the low-difficulty Magal Wolves or Bengal Tigers.

“Plan B!”

As Ark yelled, Bat and Skull leapt out first and drew the monster’s attention.

In the meantime, Ark attacked a monster from behind and decreased the number. When there was one monster left, he shifted the strategy.

“Plan A!”

Bat and Skull, who had been fleeing here and there, suddenly attacked the monster.

This method allowed him to quickly change commands, achieving the anticipated result.

Of course, there were also a few mistakes since it was their first time trying out the formation. Sharp-witted Bat adapted quickly, but dull headed Skull’s understanding fell short, so in some cases, where it was a beat slower were numerous. In addition, since their plans were too simple, there were also often situations where it was difficult for a Familiar to deal with.

Each time it happened, he diligently forced punishment food into the Familiar’s mouth.

“It’s a food experiment for the guy that doesn’t do it properly!”

“Aaack! I was wondering why Master became nicer somehow!”

CLA-clack, CLA-cla-cla-clack!

The Familiars became ghastly pale and went into critical condition a several times. However, since their max Health had increased quite a bit, they stayed alive. And although it was a rather low chance, they discovered growth foods which made Familiars’ stats increase steadily.

Ark also diligently taught the Familiars with patience. By adding several strategies or changing them in repeated actual battle training, these points were improved little by little.

With their horror of the food, the Familiars desperately did their best to memorize and carry out the strategies. Since he used the Nursing skill appropriately, the effect was doubled. The fact that even non-combative skills could be used without limitation according to their methods of use was a charm of New World.

In the meantime, Ark's skill at calling the Familiars also improved.

“Plan D!”

Even in battle, he quickly made a command while constantly checking the Familiars' Health. And when a Familiar was fleeing with all of its might while faced with a life threatening situation, he cancelled the summoning with stunning timing.

If they were to be forcefully recalled, Ark would receive a 50 percent Health deduction of his Familiar's max Health, and it'll be impossible to resummon them for 24 hours. But if Ark cancelled the summoning, so no penalties were applied.

On the other hand, once the target of a monster chasing a Familiar disappeared, the monster was stunned for a while.

Whenever such situation happens, Ark's sword undoubtedly land a critical hit.

Once the Familiars' survival rate increased, their dedication in battle flourished.

“Master, in this case, how about cancelling the summoning after I rush in? And can't you immediately resummon again? You can also do that after you throw Skull; Master's spiritual power is always full anyways, so won't you be able to use it once in every battle?”

Once in awhile, Bat, whose Intelligence had risen quite a bit through food, would even suggest a strategy worth using.

‘This adorable rascal!’

Bat's strategy was effective. Once a monster appeared, Ark grabbed and threw Skull at a weak point he'd perceived while using Eyes of the Cat. A critical hit through an unexpected ambush!

Subsequently, Ark would rapidly cancelled the summoning before the monster attacked Skull. Then he resummoned again, and Skull would appear at Ark's side.

"Groowl?"

The monsters couldn't comprehend the situation and hesitated. Then when Plans C, B, and A unfurled one after another, it wasn't even necessary to use Plan D.

Thanks to Ark and the Familiars' desperate effort, they clicked perfectly. After two days of hunting in such a matter, Ark gained a level, and he entered the domain of the Gnolls again.

"Groowl, it's a Human."

"Impudent Human, you dare to enter our territory."

"We're starting with Plan C!"

Skull and Bat fanned out according to Ark's command.

While the Familiars quickly circled the area and diverted the attention of the Gnoll Archers, Ark deployed Dark Blade and defeated a Gnoll Warrior. Then he cancelled Skull's summoning, who was in danger, while charging at the Gnoll Archer that Skull had been distracting at the same time. While he was attacking the Gnoll Archer, Bat flew low between the trees as it evaded arrows.

Ark, who had gotten rid of even the Gnoll Archer by raining a stream of attacks against it, summoned Skull again as he changed the plan.

"Plan A!"

Ark and the two Familiars charged at the lone Gnoll Archer at the same time.

The battle with the Gnolls, which he felt was difficult to handle before, ended so easily it was boring. The battles after that were the same.

The Gnolls normally moved as groups of three or four, and some Gnolls led around Magal Wolves. Also, since these guys were on the

intelligent side, they waited in ambush. They occasionally raided as well.

In some cases, they would occasionally wound up in a situation where they had to fight as many as six monsters all at once.

However, the Familiars' strategy execution ability had grown to equal even the Special Army the Republic of Korea boasted of.

They weren't lacking even if you did call them the Special Familiar Army. Thanks to that, as they adjusted to the situation and their strategy played out, they were able to win without much difficulty.

It was an effect for a dynamic tactic.

After going around annihilating party monsters, his experience had increased as well. When he gained yet another level, Ark checked his information window.

"Stat window!"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +50		
Fame	480	Level	45
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker		
Health	905	Mana	480 (+110)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	146

Agility	186 (+17)	Stamina	156
Wisdom	25	Intelligence	91
Luck	36	Flexibility	10
Art of Communication	5	Affection	11
Special Stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			20
Equipment Effects			
Sharply Shining Sword: Attack speed +5 Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor: Agility +2, Cold Resistance +20 Cat Paws: Attack speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit Rate +10% Crystal Golem's Helmet: Mana +100			
*All abilities are increased by 20% in the dark. * The ability to hide your body in the dark has formed (Duration time 10 minutes. Cancelled if you get into combat). * Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Charm spells is increased by 50%. *You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.			

Ark invested 30 of the 50 points he'd earned from gaining 5 levels into Intelligence. It was a stat he had barely distributed any points into because in the beginning there wasn't a need to use Mana. But as he used the Familiars, he realized the severity of his lack of Mana. Even though he raised his Mana by a lot, it was still merely 480. Even after getting the +100 Mana with the Crystal Golem's

Head, it only amounted to 580.

In addition, when battles broke out, one Familiar needed 1 Mana per second. So, 290 seconds. In conclusion, he could only endure for 5 minutes from when the battle broke out. Granted, a decent battle ended within 3 minutes.

‘But I’m not able to use other skills because of the Familiars.’

To Ark, Eyes of the Cat and Dark Blade were absolutely necessary skills. But using Eyes of the Cat once was cost 50 Mana. Dark Blade consumed 100 Mana.

Which meant it was too much to cast them a few times even with if he had full Mana. What was worse was, since he kept his Familiars summoned, there were many times when it was difficult to properly cast them one or two times. Because his skill usage was limited, it was a situation where his skill proficiency didn’t increase properly either.

That was why Ark had invested up to 30 stats in Intelligence.

Furthermore, he didn’t have thoughts of regret.

‘These praiseworthy rascals.’

In Ark’s eyes, as he gazed at his Familiars, possessed an affection that couldn’t begin compare to the feelings he had about them a few days ago.

He could feel the Familiar’s growth firsthand.

‘For these rascals as well, stats aren’t simply all there is to their fighting power. It’s certain that their battle ability changes based on their experience, just like users.’

In New World, combat wasn’t determined simply with stats.

A user’s experience and their way of thought, which couldn’t be checked with numbers, were all reflected in battle.

If you only looked at stats, Skull and Bat were still incomparably lousy. A win against one Wolf or the like wasn’t guaranteed.

But by accumulating combat experience along with Ark, they were showing ability beyond their numbers.

They were becoming more and more dependable!

‘However, there’s an ambiguous part of combat experience. The fluctuation based on the situation is serious, and to guarantee definite effect, it’s best to raise their stats after all.’

Therefore, Ark concentrated on ingredient gathering above hunting in order to execute Survival Cooking, the sole method for the Familiars’ abilities. However, since the Familiars did their share, they became difficult.

“Kekeke, how’s that, Master? You survived because of me, right?”

Clack clack clack clack.

After Bat boasted, Skull didn’t lose and claimed its share of the credit.

This was exactly the problem. Bat and Skull’s skills had recently grown remarkably, so there wasn’t much of a justification to feed them food.

It was certain that if he thoughtlessly fed them for growth and decreased their loyalty, Bat and Skull wouldn’t help Ark desperately as they did now. Despite that, they couldn’t grow if he didn’t feed them food.

Matching that balance unexpectedly gave him a headache.

However, he needed the definite concept of reward and punishment. Especially in Bat’s case. Oppressively pushing it yielded the opposite effect since its loyalty was low. It was a frustrating system, but in a way, it was also the reason why Ark had come to possess more attachment to the Familiars.

“Hmph! Why aren’t you speaking, Master? Are you at a lost for words?” Bat crossed its arms and boasted.

“Don’t be ridiculous. For something like just blocking eyes.”

“Who’s the person who lived thanks to that?”

“I could avoid that much even without you.”

“N-no way. Surely you’re not thinking of being evasive like that while feeding that awful food?”

“There are sometimes tasty ones too.”

“That’s once every ten!” Bat lost its temper as it yelled.

“Eh? You rebelled just now, right? Didn’t you definitely rebel?”

“N-no. I am a good Familiar!”

“Shut up, offense taken. It’s food for you.”

What the hell, it didn’t matter if he made an excuse anyways.

Before long, Bat ate a full-body paralysis food and was sprawled on the ground.

Skull, who had avoided the body experiment thanks to Bat’s sacrifice, rolled around happily on the ground.

“You’re... ch-cheap.... Master...”

“I’m not doing this because I like it either. It’s all for your sake”, Ark equivocated while averting his gaze.

Everything was satisfactory except one thing, there were still no changes found on the Netherworld’s Egg. If the number of his Familiars increased, it would definitely be helpful.

But every time he fed the Egg food, it repeatedly trembled as if it were vibrating and just went back to being still.

“Just when is this guy even gonna hatch...” Ark muttered as he licked his lips.

Seeing as it reacted every time he fed it food, it seemed something was definitely going to hatch. But even when Bat and Skull’s stats rose several times, the egg was still an egg. Moreover, he couldn’t check the food’s effect if he fed it to the egg. Since there was a limit

to the food ingredients, he felt regret when he fed the egg.

“Well, it’ll probably hatch sometime anyways.”

Honestly, he had half given up now.

“More importantly, I should really try to find a village now.”

Ark picked up the paralyzed Bat and rose from his seat.

After struggling for half a day while defeating Gnolls, he found the village.

Situated at the foot of the mountain, it was a small, sparsely populated village. There were only about 40 houses. But since people didn’t live in most of them, they were left there like haunted houses. He couldn’t discern anything such as liveliness on the faces of the 1~2 residents he saw.

Since it was a village situated too far from the city, he didn’t see users either.

Then again, if it wasn’t Ark, who had traversed the mountain in a straight line while following the hand mirror’s light, they wouldn’t have even been able to find a mountain village like this. Perhaps because it was a village with a soon-to-be-ruined atmosphere, but even when he stood inside the village, his map wasn’t even marked.

“It’s a place with a bad feeling somehow,” Bat murmured with a discomfited voice from Ark’s shoulder.

“Keep your mouth shut.”

Whenever Ark went into a village, he lifted Skull and Bat onto his waist or shoulder so they appeared like accessories; because although they were Familiars. And since they were Undead and Demon in the first place, Ark’s reputation could drop if the village NPCs found out.

‘Well, though there’s no reason to come back twice to a village such as this one, it doesn’t really matter much...’

Ark looked through the village with indifferent eyes. Even in a dilapidated village, thankfully the oasis of travelers, the General Store, existed.

‘What a relief.’

Ark blew out a sigh while looking through the contents inside his bag.

He had concentrated on hunting without rest for several days. In addition, he had gathered all the food ingredients he could get his hands on. Thanks to that, his bag was packed full of japtem to the point where there were no empty spaces. Although his bag space was expanded slightly because of his job-changed, and most of the items he had were stacked up because he hunted in the same area, he still had to throw away a few items due to lack of bag space.

At last, after arriving at the village, he recalled the items he’d thrown away and tears obscured his vision.

‘Waah, if I’d just brought all that, it would’ve made another 6 gold.’

6 gold meant 60,000 won (~\$60).

He had thrown away 60,000 won on the ground and left.

If he recalled the scene of the six cabbage leaves that he adored flapping as they fluttered away, he felt like he was about to go crazy.

[T/N: The cabbage leaves are referring to won bills, and there are six of them because in Korea, there’s a bill for 10,000 won. Therefore, there are 6 bills for 60,000 won.]

‘At least it’s a relief there’s a village here.’

He feared imagining how much more loss he would’ve had to endure if there wasn’t one.

‘Since I have to travel across mountains, I don’t know when I’ll encounter a village again. I should depart after completely organizing my bag here and grabbing only what I need.’

When Ark entered the store, the owner had a surprised expression.

“Eh? Are you... a stranger?”

“Yes, I am.”

“For a stranger to come find our village... I cannot fathom how long it has been.”

Ark thought of something polite to say and got to the point right away.

“I will sell all of this.”

The store owner glanced at the items and said shortly, “Alright. I’ll give you 10 gold for all of it.”

“What?” Ark doubted his ears.

“Did you say 10 gold?”

“That’s right, is there something wrong?”

“Aren’t the items filling up the entire bag? To say it’s 10 gold without even looking properly? They aren’t some kind of junk, so how can you set the price by the weight of the bag?”

“I can tell even with a rough look. Where’s the good in higher numbers? There’s nothing worth using, so clubs and animal hides like these don’t make money.” The store owner spoke in a blunt tone.

Goods easily acquired in the area were sold for considerably cheaper price than the market price. But was that all? Because Ark had overused the Magic Restoration skill to raise the proficiency on the decent equipment, the max durability of every last one of them was 1. Items with 1 durability were recyclable items that weren’t even worth a few coppers. He couldn’t complain even if the price was set by weight like junk.

Even so...

‘It’s five days. I hunted for five days without rest and all for just 10 gold?’

On top of that, Ark had used up one deluxe repair toolbox while hunting because he couldn’t even consider touching his Magic equipment with beginner Magic Restoration yet.

In the end that meant he'd spent 15 gold on repair fee. Wasn't it a 5 gold deficit rather than a profit? If he nitpicked the break-even point, he had to receive at least 20 gold for the numbers to be right.

But for it to be 10 gold instead of 20 gold!

'Aack, for the result of hunting like crazy to be a deficit...'

It wrung his heart.

Ark sold the mantle and warrior equipment not long ago, bringing a fortune of 7,000,000 won (~\$7,000) into his hands. But the reason those items were expensive was because they were much harder to acquire. He'd have nothing more to wish for if that kind of good luck kept up, but reality wasn't that easy.

Rather than hoping for a jackpot, it was a little more realistic to systematically collect money through japtem, and the majority of users did use such method in order to save money. For a user, 1 gold was a colossal fortune.

But a deficit? Was it a sound that could even be possible?

Ark made his most servile expression and pleaded, "Can't you please pay me a little more?"

"So you acknowledge the fact that it honestly doesn't reach the market price. However, I'm planning to clear the store soon and leave the village. To be honest, even if I purchase goods right now, it'll only become baggage, you see. If you don't want to sell, don't; I'll have no regrets."

It didn't work, as expected. Since it was a village he'd come to for the first time, intimacy was 0. Haggling was impossible from the beginning.

If it was a store in Jackson Castle where he'd accumulated intimacy through trades, he would've received at least 10~20 percent more. If you considered the market value with the rarity value on top of that, he'd be able to receive over 2 times more. But he couldn't just take his baggage and return to Jackson to get 10 more gold either.

Ark held in his tears and nodded.

"I understand. Please take care of all of it."

"You thought well. You should know too, but since there's no village in the area... huh! N-no way? Isn't this Grizzly Gnoll's leather?"

"So you do recognize it."

Ark pricked his ears, quickly approached, and repeatedly rubbed his hands together.

"That's the leather of a monster I defeated with enormous difficulty. The bastards were so strong, every time I fought them one by one, I really had to overcome a life-or-death crisis. Honestly it's nothing short of being a miracle that I've survived till now. Isn't it a bit too much to buy this leather that I earned with such suffering by weight? Ah, since you said you were thinking of clearing the store, I do not hope for much either. I just ask that you think of my pains, so a little more..."

"Are you saying you defeated it?"

"Of course."

"Th-then are you perhaps saying you've crossed the Argus Mountains?"

"Yes, I didn't know the road so I crossed the mountains. Why do you ask?"

"That's surprising. Although those guys don't travel alone.... for you to cross over such a place with your solitary strength. It seems you're a more impressive adventurer than I thought. Perhaps..."

The store owner stared at Ark with newfound eyes.

"If it's true that you defeated the Gnolls, I'll purchase your goods for 20 gold."

"Re-really?"

"In return, won't you listen to my request?"

Ark's mouth stretched to his ears.

'An NPC's request! In other words, it's a quest!'

He was so happy he could die with just receiving more, but for him to give even a quest!

This village was still a place users didn't know. In other words, a quest no one knew about. The reward aside, simply the fact that he had discovered a quest such as this made his heart leap.

Ark quickly nodded his head and the store owner continued with a serious expression.

"Actually, this village is a village still unknown to the outside, and was set up by several pioneers. Though it's just a barren place situated at the foot of a mountain, it was judged that if the village was developed and roads were made, there was a possibility for it could grow as a relay point between Jackson and commercial cities."

The store owner's name was Galen, he was one among the first pioneers. Galen continued with a miserable voice.

"Everything was satisfactory in the beginning. We did worry because there were a lot of monsters, but we had a noble leader by the name of Lancel. He was a mercenary with a lot of experience, so most monsters weren't even a match. We united with him as the center and completed the village. I still can't forget the emotions people had then. Everyone else was so happy, they wept tears."

"But the village looked like it had no vitality."

"That's right, all of it was because of the Groll bastards."

"The Gnolls?"

"Originally there weren't Gnolls in this area, but the Gnolls immigrated here as a group from somewhere. Then, they situated themselves in a cave deep within the mountains as their center. So the dream of fostering the village as a relay point for trade by making roads in the area crumbled apart. Rather, the Gnolls' raids made us tremble in fear every day."

“Did you not think of trying to ask for help?”

“Of course we thought about it. However, this is a village with only a dozen people who put their lives on the line and developed it. We couldn’t afford to hire many mercenaries or the like. And Lancel was still alive and well then.”

“He *was* alive and well....?”

Galen shook his head with a dark expression.

“Lancel was a truly noble warrior. He repulsed the Gnolls raiding the village multiple times. However, Lancel, who judged himself as someone who couldn’t save the village, believed he had to gather the village residents, find the cave personally, and settle the matter with the Gnolls. We also believed if it was Lancel, he could definitely do it, so we didn’t doubt. But there was a trap even Lancel hadn’t foreseen waiting for him inside the cave.”

“A trap?”

“I don’t know whether the Gnolls were raising them, but there was an enormous number of snakes inside the cave. It was a number enough to be labeled as disgusting. In the end, we were hit by the surprise attacks of the Gnolls and the snakes, and we were driven out. But Lancel didn’t give up until the end. He went inside and fought bravely. For several hours, there were resounding roars which shook the cave. However... our heroic Lancel did not return.”

“He was a noble person.”

“Yes, he was a warrior more valiant than anyone.”

Galen let out a sigh.

“In any case, after what had happened, the residents left the village one by one. They can’t be blamed. They witnessed a horrible swarm of snakes, and even their leader Lancel died, so they must have lost the courage to go on. Although it’s a village we established with hard work, it was not more precious than their lives. I’ve endured and came this far, but I was thinking that any longer would be too much.”

“Will it do if I clear out the Gnolls’ cave for you?”

“Wi-will you help?”

“Of course I will. I am an adventurer, after all. How could I ignore this?”

“I’ve said this earlier, but I can’t give many rewards.”

“I know. Since it’s something where I have to put my life on the line, it would be a lie to say I don’t want any reward, but I never help to hope for a large reward. It’s fine if you just give me your whole-hearted sincerity.”

Ark insinuated the meaning of asking for the maximum of what could be given.

Gnoll was a good monster to hunt at his current level.

Since it was mostly a party monster, he received a lot of experience from them too. If he was going to hunt it anyways, of course it was better to get a quest and hunt it.

This was exactly what it meant to kill two birds with one stone.

Galen, who had no reason to know this kind of intention, spoke with a deeply moved expression,

“Thank you. Then let’s do this. If you defeat Gnolls inside the cave and bring me their leather, I’ll pay 20 silver for each one. And if by any possibility you defeat all the Gnolls in the cave and bring peace to the village, I give you another 10 gold as compensation to your success. Of course, it’s probably not enough of a reward compared to the danger, but that’s the most I can do.”

“How many Gnolls are there?”

“We don’t know well either. However, we think there are probably about one hundred.”

‘20 silvers for each one! One hundred of them is 20 gold!’

Ark vaguely heard the sound of jingling coins in his ear. It was definitely not an ample compensation, but it wasn’t that small a reward either. Level 40 monster leather normally sold for about 5 silvers in stores. But Galen had offered 4 times that price. Given it

was a mountain village quest, it was a preposterous offer.

'If you add the success compensation 10 gold on top of that, it's not a small amount of money!'

"I'm sorry, but I can't give you compensation concerning the snakes. Can I entrust it to you nevertheless?"

"Do not worry and entrust it to me. It's certain I was guided to this place in order to do this job."

Ark clasped Galen's hands firmly as he replied with an expression brimming with confidence.

With a simultaneous thu-thu-thump a quest window popped up.

Pioneer Village Lancel's Misfortune

You have discovered a pioneer village still unknown to the world at the end of your long journey.

As a village made after several years of effort by pioneers who followed the admired mercenary leader Lancel, it was named 'Lancel' after the name of their leader. They wished for Lancel to flourish as a relay point between Jackson and commercial cities.

But as a group of Gnolls lead numerous snakes and settled in a nearby cave, all their efforts had gone to waste. The residents put their lives on the line and organized a punitive expedition. However, the village's hero, Lancel, was the sole sacrifice.

Most of the despairing villagers have left the village, and now only total desolation is left in the village. Nevertheless, Galen wants to somehow save the village, so he has requested you to subjugate the Gnolls. Galen has promised a bounty of 20 silvers per Gnoll leather, and a 10 gold compensation for your successful subjugation. You must defeat the Gnolls and save Lancel Village from despair.

Difficulty: C

Hatchling

‘Found it!’

He saw the cave entrance through the overgrown forest.

When he received the quest in Lancel, the location was displayed on his map. It wasn't far from the village. Ark left Lancel after organizing his bags and arrived at the destination in only an hour. Two Gnolls were standing guard at the entrance of the cave. They were slightly different from the Gnolls he had hunted until now as they were wearing shabby leather armor. It was likely they were about 1 or 2 levels higher than him. But he had hunted Gnolls until he was sick of it. Though their levels were slightly higher, they weren't a match for Ark.

“Grrrr, isn't there some kind of smell?”

“Sniff, sniff. I was thinking the same thing.”

“It smells like a human... Are there still humans lingering nearby?”

“Let's catch him and make him into a sacrifice.”

Perhaps because they had dog heads, Gnolls had a keen sense of smell.

The Gnolls raised their spears and, with their noses quivering, approached Ark's location.

At that moment, Ark jumped out from behind the bushes.

“You bitches are the sacrifice. Bat, go!”

Bat shot towards the Gnolls like an arrow that had been loosed from a bow. With a *pa-thump* sound, the Gnoll who had been struck on the bridge of its nose tumbled to the ground. The other Gnoll was alarmed and thrust its spear towards Bat.

But the Bat who had his summon cancelled and then recast was

already sitting on Ark's shoulder.

"Eyes of the Cat! There isn't time. We're going with plan A!"

Ark, Skull, and Bat sprang forward in a flash and concentrated their attack on the stumbling Gnoll.

They had become familiar with Gnolls through battles, so predicting their movements was easy.

Even before the Gnoll moved, Ark made evasive movements and let loose a chain of sword attacks. As a critical hit and co-op attack bonus erupted in succession, the Gnoll died before it was able to properly thrust its spear even once.

The Gnoll staggered and charged in, but instead it received several counterattacks, lost 80 percent of its health, and ran away terrified. The Gnoll was consumed by fear and ran away frightened. But Bat rushed forward to block its path, and when Skull tore into its leg, it fell to the ground again.

Double critical chance!

"Gaaah!"

The Gnoll received a strike to the heart and disappeared with a moan.

As the Gnoll disappeared it dropped a leather.

"Huhuhu, it's too easy, and this is 20 Silvers a piece?"

A smile spread across Ark's lips as he held on to two pieces of leather.

20 Silver a piece, so it was an item worth 2,000 Won (~\$2). He was literally picking up bills that had fallen to the ground, how could he not be happy.

"Master, those eyes are creepy."

"Shut up, what do you know? One of these leathers can become a full sushi roll! That's an entire meal."

“Sushi roll? What’s that?”

“It’s nothing. Cut the small talk and do the recon well,” Ark snorted as he entered the cave.

When he stepped foot in the cave, an information window popped up with a booming roar.

Ghastly Snake Lair

At the edge of the Argus Mountains, you have found a cave emanating a ghastly aura. The chilling aura you can feel from the cold blood flowing through these reptiles and an eerie smell permeates the entire cave. The noise of dogs barking can be heard from the depths of the cave, and slithering sounds are flowing from the small holes drilled everywhere.

There is no way to guess how many Gnolls and Snakes are inhabiting the cave. If you are someone with the wisdom to avoid danger, you will never enter this cave.

You have discovered an undiscovered dungeon. Because this is a newly found discovery, if you register your discovery in the Hall of Fame, you can gain an additional 700 experience and 50 Fame.

Would you like to register it?

“Registration refused.”

Of course, Ark had absolutely no intention to share the information.

After refusing the registration, he entered the cave and found himself in darkness.

He would have hated it in the past, but presently Ark was a Dark Walker.

The dark was Ark’s irreplaceable weapon and armor. Outside when

it turned night time, Gnolls' stats rose by 30 percent. As a result, even though Ark's stats also rose, Gnolls were still stronger.

But right now it was daytime. So only Ark was strengthened from the cave's darkness. His strength was replenished and he felt his five senses becoming extremely sharp. Also, using 'Stealth' in the darkness would further improve Ark's chance of survival.

Dungeons were environments where Dark Walkers can display 100 percent of their abilities!

With Gnolls, even if five or six of them flocked together, he had the confidence to win easily.

"Master, four dog heads are gathered in front of us."

Bat, who had left to survey the surroundings, reported its findings.

"Good, you guys stay here and move when I give the signal. 'Stealth!'"

When Ark used the Dark Walker's special ability, he was absorbed into the darkness and disappeared. While maintaining this state, Ark walked into the interior of the cave. Just as Bat had reported, about 200 meters ahead, four Gnolls had gathered and were whispering.

"We've run out of sacrifices. Grrr."

"This is a big problem. God will be angry."

"We have to storm into the village and catch a human."

"After the humans came, God got really angry."

"Will there still be humans in the village?"

"Even if we have to go far away, we have to capture some. If we don't, we might get caught and be eaten."

'God? He'll catch and eat them?'

He was wondering what they were talking about, but the Gnolls' conversation ended there.

“Shh, this is strange. For some reason I can smell human.”

“Have humans come again? That’s good then...”

The Gnolls’ eyes gleamed as they looked around.

Ark went to stand behind one them and sent Bat a signal through telepathy.

‘Pretend to be a human.’

Since the Familiars were spiritually connected to Ark, communication without words was possible.

Bat received the signal and dropped pebbles as it flew around. Then the Gnolls flinched and looked away. At that instant, Ark cast Eyes of the Cat and stabbed one in the nape.

– Critical strike! Backstab effect has increased damage by 200%. The Gnoll will be stunned for 10 seconds.

Backstab effects were applied when an unexpected surprise attack from behind was dealt! It was an attack often used by Thieves who could use ‘Stealth’.

With a single strike, the Gnoll’s health dropped by 50 percent.

With a rapidfire-like attack, Ark attacked the stunned Gnoll’s weak points. After attacking the weak points exposed by Eyes of the Cat, the Gnoll collapsed without being able to attack properly.

Once ‘Stealth’ was lifted, the Gnolls roared savagely.

“It’s a Human!”

“It’s a sacrifice! Let’s offer the sacrifice. Grrr!”

The Gnolls didn’t even notice the death of their comrade.

They ran forward wildly swinging rusted spears, swords and the like.

“Bat, charge! Skull, Plan B. Support Bat!”

Following Ark's commands, Skull and Bat charged towards a Gnoll.

When Bat violently rammed into the back of the Gnoll's head, it yelled as it turned around.

Bat was wise. While maintaining the proper distance from the wildly charging Gnoll, he led it far away from Ark. Bat surrounded the Gnoll with Skull and ravaged it by nipping at it from both sides.

There were two Gnolls left!

'If there's two of them, it's worth trying!'

Ark deflected the swords and thrust himself between the Gnolls.

The experience he had gained from fighting hundreds of Gnolls became Ark's strength.

New World's graphics was more realistic than reality.

When the Gnolls swung their spears, their bloodshot eyes as they faced him, the movement of their muscles, and even the swelling of their beating chests with every breath, was perfectly implemented.

If it was a monster he was encountering for the first time, it wouldn't be easy to predict its movements by little things. The muscle movement was different for each monster.

But after facing countless battles, with just the movements of a Gnoll's muscles, he could tell where they were thinking of stabbing.

Of course, it wasn't something anyone could do.

Taekwondo was a martial arts where the outcome of a battle was decided in close proximity with the speed of an instant. If one light step or the movement of a shoulder was missed, a person could be defeated in the blink of an eye. The concentration and keenness of threading the eye of a needle was necessary. Also, you wouldn't be able to make the deciding blow if you can't read your opponent's breathing and strike at the right moment. This was a technique that required a high degree of actual combat experience.

There were people who said the modern time usage of Taekwondo

in actual combat had fallen. But it was a consequence of Taekwondo becoming world-renowned Martial Arts. As it became more renowned, there was more research done on it in order to systematically develop methods for dealing with it.

By no means had Taekwondo become weaker.

In the 1970s, throughout North America, Africa, and elsewhere, Taekwondo received praise as the invincible Martial Art. Even the gangs of Harlem showed respect to a Taekwondo Master!

Ark had been training with Taekwondo for years.

In addition, Taekwondo had more sparring than other martial arts. It wasn't an exaggeration to say he was an expert in reading his opponent's intentions.

'The upper right!'

Ark tilted his upper body and deflected the spear.

Simultaneously, a red spot emerged on the Gnoll's side. The weak points identified by Eyes of the Cat weren't just for show. In this situation, it was the strongest strike available and it was in a blind spot difficult to defend! The area Ark had predicted coincided with it.

Before the spots were revealed, Ark's sword was already piercing through a spot.

— Critical Strike!

While staggering, the Gnoll fell backwards.

Taking a single step, Ark twisted in the air and threw out a kick.

It was a habit formed in his movements when he was still unfamiliar with dual-blade combat.

As he reached intermediate in Dual-Blade Combat, all his movements were slickly connected. But it wasn't easy. In fact Ark, who had begun his training once more, had lost the kinesthetic sense needed to perform an advanced technique like a mid-air roundhouse

kick fluidly.

In New World one's stat bonuses were added to their natural strength.

Here, the bonus of an intermediate level Dual-Blade Combat was applied to the technique's success rate and power. The sharpness wasn't comparable to reality.

With a "chop" sound, he attacked the back of his enemy's head.

The Dual-Blade Combat's effects were similar to Taekwondo's points system.

Dual-Blade Combat (Intermediate, Passive 163/300): As the understanding of the technique increases, speed and accuracy will also rise. Grants additional damage to all types of swords and knuckle-related weapons, and dramatically increases evasion and critical hit rate.

General attack power is increased by 30%. When a shield is equipped, Dual-Blade Combat's effect disappears.

* Additional Effects. When a kick hits the target, a random status effect occurs, with a probability of 5% for small monsters, 3% for average monsters, and 1% for large monsters. When a very difficult technique is successful, the probability also increases.

A very difficult attack. So if a techniques like a flying kick or a double kick hits the target, there is a greater probability of an additional effect, such as a knock down or stun, will be inflicted. This effect was not available when he first reached the intermediate level, it was only available after he had gained 150 points, so as he gains more points, probability will also grow.

The difficulty of a mid-air roundhouse kick was of the highest level!

The Gnoll received a stun hex and stumbled.

Ark followed it up with jumping crescent kicks!

He took turns attacking both sides of the Gnoll while switching kicks. After which, he unsheathed Dark Blade. The Gnoll was defeated by a stream of continuous attacks that were truly like a typhoon as it moaned in vain. Then, the Gnoll behind him thrust its spear towards his back.

Ark twisted his hips and let the spear fly past his side. When the newly formed stat, flexibility was applied, the damage was reduced. Then his kicks and sword strikes emanated like a storm!

“Grrrr, this, this Human.....!”

The Gnoll let out a voice of disbelief, as if he couldn't believe Ark's incredible skills.

Ark was actually a little surprised.

‘My body is light as a feather!’

Sometimes while training martial arts, one experiences an awakening event.

There are times when a usual failing technique suddenly succeeds, or a feeling when nerves get extremely sensitive, which allows you to completely see through your opponent's attack.

It was Ark's current state.

Since starting the game, he had been training his Taekwondo without resting for even a day so he was recovering his sense from the past. With his abilities raised from the darkness within the cave, he was able to exert power even surprising himself!

Klock!

The Gnoll who was struck in its abdomen by Ark's side kicks, flew threw several meters in the air and then crashed into the ground. It raised its body while staggering, but at the next blow struck the back of its head and it fell once again.

When the battle against the two Gnolls first began, it already only had 40 percent of its health left.

Falling down for the third time, the Gnoll was consumed by fear.

“Str-Strong!”

However, Ark got momentarily careless due to his heart-pounding vigor, the Gnoll suddenly blew a whistle.

‘This is bad. Did it call its comrades?’

“Bat, Skull! Stop him, make it so he can’t blow that whistle!”

But before Ark’s finished issuing his command, a sharp sound echoed throughout the cave.

It was then when the cave began to shake.

Ark was the first one who smelled something fishy.

A fishy smell so strong, it paralyzed his sense of smell the moment something poured and writhed from the small holes drilled into the cave like a honeycomb.

It was hundreds of snakes!

It was another danger of the cave Galen had warned him about. No matter how good of a swordsman you are, it isn’t an easy task to fight against hundreds of snakes.

However, Ark only let out a sigh of relief.

‘Fortunately he wasn’t calling for his comrades. If the opponents are snakes I’ll welcome them.’

“Spirit of the Cat!”

Nyaaaaa -!

A sharp cry swept through the inside of the cave.

At the same time, the illusion of a huge black cat rose above Ark’s head. As its glittering golden eyes slowly opened, the snakes who had been making threatening sounds were left paralyzed.

The paralysis effect for small monsters!

The Gnoll screamed, “Kyaa, it— it’s a monster!”

“That isn’t something someone with a dog’s head should say!”

Ark ran forward while treading on the snakes and defeated the Gnoll.

He then dispatched the stiffened snakes at random.

“Ooh, master. For some reason you look especially strong today.”

Bat and Skull’s expressions were filled with energy.

The snakes’ paralysis soon wore off, but he didn’t need to worry.

Though the paralysis wore off, the effects of Spirit of the Cat lowered small monsters’ attack and defence by 30 percent. On the other hand, the Cat Knight title Ark had received meant he also received a bonus in attack and critical hit rate against small monsters and damage taken from them was reduced.

It wasn’t an exaggeration to say Ark was invincible when facing small monsters. That was the reason he didn’t care about the snakes when he accepted the quest.

‘Huhuhu, if it’s snakes it doesn’t matter if it’s a hundred or a thousand.’

Whenever Ark swung his sword, three or four snakes were sliced into pieces.

On the other hand, the damage he received was just 1. Ark defeated hundreds of snakes as if he was trampling on worms.

‘The quest’s difficulty being C was probably because of these snakes.’

Truly, if it had been any other user, even if their levels were a lot higher than Ark, they wouldn’t have been able to face such a tough fight with snakes as their opponents. No, they wouldn’t have even dared to enter this cave. But for Ark, who had the title of Cat Knight, snakes and such things didn’t even count as snacks.

The only thing he had to worry about was the poison that was

sometimes inflicted. But since he only lost 50 Health in 30 seconds, it wasn't a very strong poison. He just needed to make food with detoxification effects through Survival Cooking after the battle ends and eat it, so it wasn't a problem.

'This is a smorgasbord of a quest!'

There were no difficulties for Ark who was full of confidence.

While he wove his way left and right through the cave, he hunted down and defeated all the Gnolls he set his sight on.

'This place really is a moneytree!'

A joyful cry unconsciously burst out of him.

To Ark, the Gnolls no longer appeared as monsters.

He saw them as if they were 2,000 won bills or a moving roll of sushi that had come to life.

Whenever Ark saw a Gnoll, he rushed towards them while drooling.

"UHUUUU, MORE, SEND OUT MORE!"

"M-Master. Calm down, your eyes look really dangerous."

Clack clack clack.

Bat and Skull, who had been very excited, were now trembling in fear.

When the Gnolls were driven into a corner, they had always called on the snakes, but to Ark it was nothing more than a bonus game.

Ark defeated a hundred Gnolls in just two hours.

"With a hundred, I've made 20 gold!"

If possible, he wanted to spend a few days hunting inside the cave.

However, perhaps because he had received the quest, the Gnolls didn't regenerate even after he went back to the entrance.

Well, if he returned after hunting about a thousand of them, Galen, a

mountain village store owner, would probably be unable to afford the reward money and go bankrupt.

In the end, the cave's Gnolls were almost completely annihilated by the merciless Ark.

Ark crossed through the deserted cave and headed into its deepest depths.

A hole with no end in sight gaped at the end of the cave, and at its center, there was a jagged, altar-like protrusion.

A totem resembling the shape of a snake had been placed on top of the altar.

As unfortunate as it was, the three Gnolls gathered in that area were the last ones.

Ark hid his body with 'Stealth' and went closer.

'Is he the Gnolls' boss?'

One unusually dressed Gnoll caught his eye.

He was draped in a rag-like robe, and atop his head was a crown that appeared to be woven with tree roots. However for a boss-level monster, he didn't look particularly strong.

'He's still a boss. I don't know what kind of attacks he'll try.'

"Grrr, what the hell happened? Have you still not captured the invading Human?"

"Th-that's... the bastard is stronger than we thought."

"Even though we let the snakes loose, we weren't able to kill him."

"Grrr, we won't be able to appease the God's fury like this."

The Boss Gnoll trembled with a frightened expression.

"God was wounded by the Human who entered awhile ago and is furious. If we allow another human to approach.... Grrr, in any case, we must stop the Human."

“Understood.”

The Gnolls who had received the command lifted their weapons and neared Ark’s location.

Ark stayed far away and waited for his opportunity.

When he judged the distance between him and the Boss had widened considerably, he approached at mach speed and attacked one Gnoll with a Backstab.

The Gnolls were immediately bewildered and the line of battle was disrupted. Once Bat and Skull pitched in, the fight was decided in an instant.

“Ho-how could this be! When did the Human come all the way here... grrr!” The Boss Gnoll burst out in shock as the Gnoll guards were defeated without a proper fight.

“Come on, you dog head!”

Now the only one left was the Boss Gnoll.

Ark leveled his sword as he prepared for the enemy’s attack.

But the Boss Gnoll didn’t come to attack Ark.

Instead, it hastily fled towards the altar, and while shaking the snake-shaped totem he began to recite a strange incantation.

“Nunak, nanak, sandalani! Great King of Snakes!”

‘What the hell is he doing?’

While perplexed, Ark rushed towards the Boss Gnoll.

No, the rush was only for an instant.

The cave suddenly began shaking and something enormous abruptly rose from beneath the cliff. It was a huge monster making a hissing sound as its eyes flashed... Its identity was a snake with a body width appearing to be several meters wide.

A warning message popped up in front of him.

— The boss monster Kundalini has appeared!

“Gulp! W-What is this?”

Ark was petrified.

Ark was no longer a beginner at virtual games.

Whether he saw a wolf, a rat the size of a bear, or a zombie with its flesh decaying, he didn't even blink. But the giant snake that appeared before his eyes, Kundalini, was cut from a different cloth than those monsters.

His felt shivers go down his spine as he faced the hatred mixed with distinctive bloodthirst the snake exuded. Ice-cold sweat poured out of him like a waterfall and flowed down his back.

The will to fight that buoyed him also cooled.

“Ooooh, my God! King of Snakes! Punish the human!”

Once Kundalini emerged, the Boss Gnoll let out a cheer. They were the Boss Gnoll's last words.

Snap *CRUNCH!*

Kundalini moved with incredible speed and swallowed the Boss Gnoll down.

Its jaw convulsed as it munched on the crushed Boss Gnoll, and blood gushed out. Kundalini gulped down the Boss Gnoll and raised its head. The several-metered snake raised its head as blood dripped from its mouth in the darkness!

Roooooar!

‘HOLY SHIT!’

A moan unconsciously escaped him.

The visual impact was enormous.

Ark felt like he was watching a terrible horror movie.

Kundalini's gaze turned towards Ark. They were eyes of a predator staring at him as its prey, not an enemy.

'Was this the reason why the difficulty was C?'

He had been severely mistaken. Ark didn't have to worry about something like a snake. Rather, it was an enormous demon that couldn't even be called a snake.

Kundalini slowly glided across the floor, approaching Ark as if there was no need to hurry.

'Th-the hell is this?'

Bewilderment escaped Ark's mouth.

He tried to raise his sword, but his arm wouldn't move. His legs didn't budge either, as if they were rooted to the ground.

<p>– You looked into Kundalini's eyes, inducing the complete effect of Forestallment. If you are inflicted with Forestallment, you will always be denied First Strike. Until you are attacked, the effect will not disappear.</p>

'First Strike? I'll be swallowed in one strike, so what kind of damned First Strike is this!'

To give up the First Strike to a demon who swallowed the Boss Gnoll in one bite, didn't it mean he was just prey? It really was a bamboozling skill for a bamboozling body.

Kundalini surreptitiously narrowed the gap as it yawned open its cavernous mouth. Ark couldn't even move a muscle.

Just like a frog being captured by a snake, Ark could only stare with dazed eyes at the inside of Kundalini's crimson mouth. In the instant its mouth was about to touch him, a red light suddenly flashed before him.

It was Skull.

At the very moment Kundalini was about to devour Ark whole, Skull

rammed Ark.

Clack, cla-clack!

As Skull clattered, it disappeared into Kundalini's stomach instead of Ark.

"Sku-Skull!"

"What are you doing, Master! Get yourself together!"

As the belated Familiar recall damage registered, he was shocked back into his senses. Once the effect of Forestallment disappeared, the horror that crushed his body disappeared like a dream.

'That's right, this is virtual reality. Even a huge snake like this is just EXP was prepared for the sake of the users. There's no reason why I can't win. No, I will win!'

"Eyes of the Cat!"

Kundalini's information window popped up as he cast the skill.

When he checked the information, he sucked in his breath. Ark's level had risen once inside the cave, so it was currently 46. On the other hand, Kundalini was a whopping level 80.

Even if he included the advantages he had in the dark, there was still a difference of 30 levels. This wasn't an opponent he could defeat by any regular means.

However, there was no need give up yet.

'Kundalini only had 50 percent of its health remaining!'

Ark immediately saw why.

There were exceptionally large red weak points marked on Kundalini's forehead, and in the middle was a single sword was deeply lodged in.

Numerous thoughts instantaneously combined inside Ark's head.

'It's Lancel! It's Lancel's sword!'

Galen said Lancel had gone to the end of the cave alone. And after several hours, deafening roars had erupted.

There had also been an hint about Lancel within the Gnolls' conversation. They'd said an invading Human had inflicted a wound on the God awhile ago which made God sensitive.

So Lancel had faced Kundalini here, alone.

Lancel had been defeated without reaching his goal, but with his will, he had protected the village, and its residents were still living and breathing. The sword lodged in Kundalini's forehead was his will!

A scene of a Warrior fighting desperately against a huge snake painted itself in front of Ark's eyes.

'You're awesome, Lancel!'

Courage surged in him like an erupting volcano.

'Alright! I will inherit your goal!'

Although the monster was level 80, it was a different story when its health was already down to half.

'It's ridiculous if I don't win after all the arrangements have been made for me!'

Ark swung his sword like lightning and struck a red weak point.

Ba-ba-ba-baang!

Kundalini staggered with the sounds of impact. But it wasn't that easy to close the 30 level gap. Even though he'd dealt a critical hit, Kundalini's Health decreased by just 2 percent.

Kundalini began its counter attack.

The thick tail curved like a whip as it flew forward.

When he rolled on the ground and avoided it, the cave walls were hit so it began to crack and shake.

It had power so outrageous, it wouldn't even allow him to block!

‘I’ll have to put my all into avoiding its attack!’

“Bat, attract its attention.”

“Dammit, you always give me the hard jobs!”

Bat wailed its complaint as it hung in front of Kundalini’s nose.

The accuracy of Kundalini’s attacks dropped. It had no time to properly concentrate on Ark, so it randomly swung its tail.

Ark waited until the tail was right in front of his nose, then rolled on the ground and stabbed it with his sword. He didn’t have the luxury of aiming for something like a critical hit.

Although he wasn’t dealing much damage to it now, it was all he could do to steadily chip off its Health.

Once he made up his mind and evaded, Kundalini’s attacks were slower than expected. The sword wedged in its forehead was probably also influencing Kundalini’s stats. However, even Ark couldn’t avoid all the attacks.

KA-POW—!

“Ugh!”

Ark was pushed back several meters.

From just one slam of the tail, he lost 400 Health and he was poisoned. Almost only half of his Health remained.

In other words, it would be game over if he took just one more attack. Moreover, he had only touched the tail, yet he was poisoned and his Health was being steadily eaten away. With an attack of this level, it would be no use even if he was to drink a potion.

If he took an attack while drinking four recovery potions, which cost 100 Gold each, he would incur a loss instead.

‘No matter how slowed Kundalini’s movements are, considering the level difference, I can’t avoid it forever. I can’t help but be hit by one attack every five. And the poison is stronger than regular snakes by 3 or 4 times. The battle will get worse the longer it goes on! Some

kind of decisive strike...'

Ark's eyes turned towards the sword wedged in its forehead.

A bigger red point than any other!

That was likely Kundalini's decisive weakness!

'I have no choice, I'll have to risk it!'

Ark made up his mind and quickly commanded, "Bat, attract its attention upwards!"

"Got it, Master! Up here, you big worm body!"

Bat flew rapidly in front of Kundalini's eyes and soared up. The moment Kundalini's attention turned upward, Ark flung forward and clambered onto its back.

The snake was several meters wide.

Ark ran up Kundalini's back while displaying the sense of balance honed by Taekwondo. When he climbed up to its neck, Kundalini sensed Ark's intention and fiercely raised its neck.

As the slope became vertical, Ark slid down.

"No way!"

Ark flung himself forward and stabbed his sword into its jaw.

Kundalini lowered its neck again and a heavy noise of impact burst out. At that moment, Ark crawled up Kundalini's neck and stood on its head. Then he put all his strength in one strike towards the forehead.

"Dark Blade!"

— You do not have enough Mana!

"Dammit it!"

Ark screamed at the unimaginable pop up message.

The chronic dilemma that had plagued him, lack of Mana, reared its ugly head in the most decisive moment.

Ark had only used Eyes of the Cat once at the start of the battle. But grating away Kundalini's Health had consumed too much time. Because he had steadily used up Mana while sustaining Bat's summon. He only had 80 Mana left.

It had been 7 minutes since the start of his fight with Kundalini. The Mana he'd used was 420.

If Skull hadn't been forcefully recalled earlier, Bat would have already returned to the Netherworld. Ark had forgotten about this fact because he'd never fought this long with them before.

'Stupid! How could I have not checked the amount of Mana I had left!'

It was an absurd mistake.

ROOOAAR!

While Ark exploded in embarrassment, Kundalini began to glow.

Ark groaned as he clutched the sword stuck in the writhing Kundalini's forehead.

'Damn, is it really going to end like this?'

Bat would return to the Netherworld in 80 seconds.

He couldn't use his deadly Dark Blade, either.

Kundalini's remaining Health was 30 percent. A win wasn't guaranteed even if he used Dark Blade three or four times, but he couldn't even use it once! Even if attacked it with at least a dozen normal critical hits, the remaining Health wouldn't be depleted.

Of course, Kundalini wouldn't just let itself be hit, either.

A way to win didn't emerge no matter what. It would be game over if he let go of the sword he was holding onto. Even if he wasn't eaten by Kundalini, he would die instantly if he fell into the chasm with no bottom in sight that yawned underneath him.

Suddenly, an idea flashed across Ark's mind.

'That's right, I may not be able to win, but there's a way to die together!'

Ark opted for this final idea.

Fortunately, before he left Lancel village, he had set it to be his resurrection place. Then even if he died here, he didn't have to worry about returning to Jackson. Dying together with Kundalini was one method.

If he hurried and returned to the cave, he could still get the Kundalini's dropped loot. Since he could complete the quest on top of that, it was worth penalty.

'That's the most I can do right now!'

The problem was *how* they could die together.

"Bat, lure it towards the chasm!" Ark shouted as he hung from Kundalini's head.

"Understood, Master. Hey you!"

GRAAAWR!

Bat stabbed Kundalini's eye and fled towards the chasm.

Ark clutched onto the sword hilt and was wrenched around; when Kundalini arrived at the edge, he stabbed the forehead with his sword with all his strength.

As he landed a critical hit, Kundalini grated its body against the wall. He was wedged between the wall and Kundalini's body, so his Health dropped steadily. But Ark didn't stop and stabbed his sword two, three times in succession.

His tenacity called forth a miracle.

Having writhed against the wall, Kundalini couldn't balance its weight and slid towards the cliff. The bottomless pit gaped underneath it.

"I did it!"

Ark clenched his eyes shut.

He experienced a peculiar sense of floating.

A few seconds, or perhaps minutes flowed past. Then Kundalini crashed into the ground and he felt an enormous shock. Kundalini, who had received a huge amount of damage from falling, had its Health sucked out, leaving only 3 percent.

‘What? How am I still alive?’

Ark was stunned.

Even Kundalini’s incredible Health had been decreased by over 20 percent. Then Ark, who only had about 300 of his Health left, should have died instantly. However, Ark was still alive.

He had just 20 Health left, but he wasn’t dead.

Just then, a message window popped up before Ark’s eyes.

Due to Cat Knight’s ability, falling damage has been reduced by 50 percent. Effect of Flexibility while rolling has also reduced falling damage by 30 percent.
--

‘It’s a chance!’

Ark’s eyes flashed.

Cat Knight had reduced his falling damage! An ability that he hadn’t cared about until now had activated in a desperately dangerous moment.

Also, thanks to the Taekwondo he had trained every single day since starting the game, he had automatically attempted to roll in the moment of impact.

As a result, Ark slid past 80 percent of damage and survived.

‘I don’t have time to waste. The poison wasn’t cured, so my Health is still dropping.’

Ark sprang up.

Perhaps it was because of the falling damage, but his body didn't move properly. However, Kundalini, who had received 100 percent of the falling damage, hadn't even gathered its senses yet.

Kundalini was stretched out panting as its body glowed red.

Double critical chance!

"Die!"

With Bat, Ark plunged his sword toward Kundalini's forehead. It was a single strike enveloped with the effects of Indomitable Will and Indomitable Body as well as the double critical chance.

Through double critical chance, you have landed two critical hits. As a co-op bonus, 30 percent of damage is added.

"ROOAAAR!"

Kundalini's forehead, which had taken massive damage, split right in half.

Kundalini, which writhed like a fish out of water, slowly disappeared.

You have defeated the boss monster Kundalini.

Your level has increased.

You have gained 2 levels, so your current level is now 48.

Ark heaved coarse breaths as he flopped to the ground.

"Huff huff huff."

"Ma-master! We won! We won!"

Only after hearing Bat's shout did Ark realize that he had won.

Ark forcefully subdued his trembling excitement and pulled out his pot. After making an urgent antidote, he made food that recovered Health. His Health had dropped to the bottom, so he finally recovered after making and eating food three, four times.

The sword that had been lodged in its forehead and a skull had fallen where Kundalini had disappeared.

Lancel's Sword (Cursed)

This is the sword used by Lancel, the leader of Lancel Village. It's a sword that gives off such a gloomy feeling that you can't believe that it was a sword used by a normal mercenary.

Additionally, the sword became strongly cursed after being wedged in Kundalini's forehead and saturated by poison for a long time.

Until the curse is lifted, you cannot check its stats.

Lancel's Remains

The remains of the Lancel Village leader, Lancel.

Disappointment floated across Ark's face.

A cursed item was a kind of unidentified item. But it was harder to use than an unidentified item. An unidentified item could be checked after paying a certain amount of money to a user in a big city, but lifting a curse was only possible at a cathedral in the capital city of Schudenberg Kingdom.

That meant it was an item that he couldn't even use until he arrived in the capital. Moreover, it supposedly took a considerable amount of money to lift a curse.

If he lifted the curse and it turned out to be nothing much, his loss

would be extreme. But Ark soon shook his head.

‘No. It’s still a sword that had cut up to 50 percent of the Health of a strong monster like Kundalini. It might actually be an incredible sword. But is there any other item?’

Ark packed the sword and Lancel’s Remains and looked around.

However, he didn’t see an item no matter how much he looked. Instead, he discovered a pathway leading upwards and climbed back to the place where the Boss Gnoll had been. He was able to start leaving the cave when he saw a dim light suddenly flowing from one side.

It was the altar that the Boss Gnoll had prayed at when calling forth Kundalini.

When Ark approached and touched it, a new window popped up.

You have discovered an ancient artifact, the Altar of Incubation.

Through Knowledge of Ancient Artifacts, you have discovered hidden information about the Altar of Incubation. Located in the dreary cave in which the giant monster Kundalini lurked, the Altar of Incubation is one of the ancient artifacts. Since ancient times, the Altar of Incubation has garnered curiosity from many scholars

The Altar of Incubation has the ability to quickly hatch eggs of all kinds. It’s certain that the huge monster Kundalini used this Altar of Incubation to propagate the thousands of snakes that lived in the cave.

By gaining information about the ancient artifact Altar of Incubation, you have acquired bonuses.

Knowledge of Ancient Relics +10, Intelligence +5, Luck +3, and 30 Fame.

‘So that’s why there were so many snakes?’

It wasn’t that big a secret, but it was good since his Mana rose

because of the intelligence bonus.

Since Ark couldn't carry the altar away, Ark was about to just pass it by. But a thought that suddenly surfaced made him stop in his tracks.

'Wait? It'll accelerate the incubation of any egg?'

If so, it might be surprisingly useful.

Ark did have one egg. Just in case, Ark summoned the young Netherworld's Egg. Then he placed it on top of the altar, but there was no change.

Ark tilted his head, placed his pot on the altar, and made food just in case. Then, as soon as he plunged the egg in, a message window popped up.

Survival Cooking has been completed. However, Netherworld's Egg has absorbed all of it. You have not determined what effect the food has.

A reaction from the Netherworld's Egg has been detected.

* Through the effect of the Altar of Incubation, Netherworld's Egg's growth rate has increased by 500%.

'Yeah, this is it!'

The growth rate quickened by 500 percent. That meant that he could give the effect of five feedings with a single one!

'If I can't make it hatch here, I can't guarantee when it'll wake up.'

Ark pulled out all his food ingredients and made food with Survival Cooking. His success rate was only once every ten times. After succeeding about five times in fifty tries, Survival Cooking finally rose to Intermediate.

Your level of Survival Cooking has risen through much experience.

Survival Cooking (Intermediate, Passive): You can mix spices to

ingredients and raise the success rate.

Food with added spices will have stronger effects. The duration of effects of the food will also be doubled. However, please note that not only good effects will be stronger. It will require more courage to test out the effects of the food.

At the same time, numerous cracks spread out on the Netherworld's Egg and it finally split in half.

Netherworld's Egg has ingested sufficient nutrition and has hatched!

"F-finally!"

Ark focused his attention on the form that was rising with hazy light. Finally, he had three Familiars!

Even two Familiars provided considerable power. If he had three of them now, his hunting speed would increase even more.

Ark's eyes glimmered with expectation. But the light disappeared, and the form that appeared made Ark grimace with loathing.

"The hell is this? A s-snake?"

His new Familiar was a snake with a broad neck, like a cobra.

Amongst many, many animals, why the hell did it have to be a snake?

After entering the cave, he had been attacked by a thousand snakes. As if that wasn't enough, he had almost died fighting Kundalini, so he was sick and tired of snakes.

However, when he looked more carefully, he didn't really feel a sensation of disgust.

The Familiar's appearance was very different from all the snakes he'd seen until now.

Its silkworm-like, smooth body even looked pretty at first sight. In

particular, its saucer-like round and large eyes were as blue as sapphires. The way its eyes shined as it stared at him did have a cute aspect.

“In any case, seems like it’s somehow okay since it’s a snake... Information window!”

After checking the information window, Ark once again tilted his head.

“W-what, what is this?”

Alamone Larvae

It is a mysterious snake living in the Netherworld, an Alamone’s offspring.

An Alamone is a mysterious snake with the habit of placing all the items it sees into its stomach. Because they do not digest the swallowed items, those who desire the items have indiscriminately captured them, so now they have become extinct. Therefore, there are not many who know of them.

They are obedient and highly affectionate. Also, an Alamone recognizes the first existence it sees after hatching from its egg as its parent. The first existence the Alamone saw after hatching was you.

Now the Alamone will think of you as its parent, and it will become a loyal Familiar that will never betray its master no matter the situation. In addition, because it is tied to you by familial love, it will not consume Mana even if a battle breaks out.

Race: Creature of the Netherworld

Alignment: Dark

Class: —

Health: 50

Loyalty: —

Strenght: —

Agility: —

Stamina: —

Wisdom: —

Intelligence: —

Luck: —

* It can store the same number of items as the summoner with no weight limit.

He had struggled like crazy and had finally hatched it, but it didn't have a single stat. That meant he couldn't use it in battle.

However, its special ability intrigued Ark.

'It can store items?'

Ark stared at the snake, which was charmingly clambering onto his arm.

Just in case, he tried holding out Lancel's Sword a bit. The snake stared at it blankly, then suddenly shot out its tongue like a frog catching a fly and swallowed it.

'Huh? Did it really eat it?'

Ark stared at the snake with a perplexed expression.

"Spit it back out!"

When Ark shouted in a bewildered voice, the snake opened its mouth again and spat out the sword onto Ark's hand. Then it blinked its bright eyes and rubbed its head into him as if it were asking for praise.

A laugh escaped Ark's lips.

"Ha, what the hell is this?"

Should he call it fascinating, or funny?

He felt an indescribable feeling. He no longer felt his initial disappointment, because he had desperately needed a spare bag. Moreover, there was no burden if it didn't eat Mana during battle like his other Familiars did.

It was something he learned too late, but a Dark Walker had a smaller bag capacity in comparison to other professions. Merchants and production classes were provided 6 basic bags. Magic professions had a basic bag and 3 spare bags with half the capacity. Even Warriors had one spare bag in addition to their basic bag.

But Ark's bag capacity had only expanded slightly with his job-change. After packing in all kinds of food ingredients, he'd found that he always lacked bag capacity.

Of course, there were ways to increase bag capacity. But the magic bag sold in large cities was a whopping 200 gold for only a quarter of the basic bag's capacity! Ark had given up early after hearing about the outrageous price.

'Since it can store the same capacity as a basic bag, it means I've earned 800 gold. Is this little guy the reason why a Dark Walker isn't provided an additional bag?'

"Alright, from now on I'll comfortably call you 'Snake.'"

Snake nodded as if it had heard. Then it excitedly rubbed itself on him repeatedly and wrapped itself around Ark's waist.

It looked like a belt made out of snake skin.

"You're a really likable fella. I'm satisfied with this much."

Now he had finished everything he had to do in the cave.

Ark headed back to the village of Lancel.

* * *

"You really did it!" The store owner exclaimed once Ark spread out the Groll leathers.

"This is the promised compensation. 20 silvers per leather. It's a total of 21 gold. And this is the reward for saving the village."

Galen gave him a total of 31 gold as a reward.

After completing the quest, his intimacy with Galen had risen considerably as a bonus. He was able to sell the japtem he had

acquired within the cave for an additional 10 percent. Ark roughly finished tidying up and returned Lancel's Remains as he spoke of Kundalini.

Galen was surprised, but he soon nodded with understanding.

"So a demon like that lived in the cave. Lancel was a Mercenary stronger than anyone I know. I didn't believe that such a person could be killed by just Gnolls."

"Yes, if it weren't for the wound on Kundalini that Lancel inflicted, I would have never been able to win. But who exactly is Lancel? If he was able to enter the cave alone and face that demon, which indicates that his skill wasn't common..."

Ark asked because he thought he might be able to learn more about Lancel's Sword.

Galen hesitated with a dark expression and spoke, "You're right, Lancel was no ordinary Mercenary. Once, he was so violent a Mercenary that they called him 'Vampire' in a border war. Over a hundred Soldiers died at his hands. But that was against Lancel's will. It's just that the battlefield and the sword made him go crazy. Eventually, Lancel regained his senses, realized the disillusionment of his actions, and left the battlefield. Then, with the determination to be a help to someone, he led the pioneers and decided to set up this village.

"So even as he fought a dreadful demon, he couldn't give up on the village."

"That's right, he really was atoning, in a way."

Galen let out a sigh.

"No matter his past, I admired him. I also love the village he set up. Now that the danger has disappeared thanks to you, I'm of a mind to rebuild this village even if I have to devote my whole life to it. Speaking of which... are you thinking of continuing your journey?"

"Yes, of course."

“Then, will you listen to my request?”

“Please tell me.”

“The pioneers who followed Lancel all love this village. The only reason why they left was because they worried about their family’s safety. But now the danger is gone. If you happen to meet them in your journey, please let them know of this fact. If it’s them, they will definitely return. Of course, it’s good if you find and send new villagers, too. This village is open to anyone.”

“I understand. I will speak of the person named Lancel to people I meet in my journey around the world. I will tell them how honorable and amiable a place this village is.”

When Ark nodded, the quest was updated.

Quest has been updated.

Pioneer Village Lancel’s Misfortune = Find New Settlers!

Lancel’s general store owner, Galen, wants to continue Lancel’s wish and rebuild the village.

What Lancel Village needs most right now are residents. Many people must gather and the laughter of children must fill the air for Lancel to be reborn as a true village.

Galen has requested that you find residents for Lancel, like the pioneers who shared Lancel’s goal in the past and even people who have nowhere else to go. Galen has accepted Lancel’s wish to become helpful in the world and has promised to openly accept all residents. If you guide them to this place, Lancel Village will definitely become the village that Lancel desired.

Finding new settlers: achieved 0%

Difficulty: C

There wasn’t any information about how to solve the quest. But after receiving the quest first, there would be a hint somewhere.

“You should hold onto Lancel’s Sword. I know Lancel would also want that.”

Of course, Ark had no intention of giving it up even if he was asked to.

Anyways, Ark left Lancel after those words.

The very first thing he did after leaving Lancel was to summon Skull.

Clack clack clack

When he saw Skull clacking its teeth as if there was nothing wrong, tears blurred Ark’s eyes.

Although it was revived again, Skull had thrown away its life for his sake. In a sense, it was an action that was harder for an NPC that actually died than it was for a player. But Skull had sacrificed itself without hesitation. In addition, Bat had done its best to help Ark.

When he looked at these Familiars, affection surged forth anew.

‘Such praiseworthy little rascals.’

Snake, the new addition to his family, was definitely lovable. Perhaps because Snake truly thought of him as its parent, but it put its all into rubbing Ark affectionately whenever it could.

‘That’s right, these guys are all I have. Sink or swim, I’ll go together with these fellas.’

It wasn’t just that his sense of unity was strengthened; there was also an actual benefit. He no longer had to give up items because of bag space. Now that he could store double the items thanks to Snake, Ark became even greedier.

‘Now that the family has increased, I have to earn more, even if it’s just 1 Copper.’

Ark scraped in all the japtem and ingredients he could get his hands on as he followed the Hand Mirror’s light. Because of that, his pace slowed even more, and he crossed the Argus Mountains after a week.

There were still unexplored regions on the other side of the Argus Mountains.

Even when he walked for several days, he couldn't find any players, let alone NPCs.

After passing a plain where he could see the horizon and floods a few times and hunting the monsters he encountered in those places, he reached level 50. When his two bags were nearly chock full of japtem, Ark was able to arrive at his destination.

'It's the lighthouse!'

On one side of the beach stood a picturesque, scenic lighthouse.

It was the lighthouse he'd seen through the Hand Mirror; he had finally reached his destination after a very long journey.

When he had seen it through images, it was a place that had only looked beautiful. But when he actually arrived and looked, the area around the lighthouse was crawling with monsters he had never seen before.

They were monsters with shark-like appearances equipped with both arms and legs. When he checked the information with Eyes of the Cat, he found they were called Sharkmen. They were level 55, but they were a little stronger than monsters of the same level.

'Well, I'll manage to fight them somehow, but it's hard to face more than one of them. It'll be good to wait until night for now.'

At night, all his stats increased by 20 percent.

To fight in the dark. It was one of the Dark Walker's basic tactics.

Underwater City of Nodelesse

Ark's steps were full of vigor.

It was thanks to a phone call he had received this morning.

"Is this Mrs. Park Somi's guardian?"

As soon as he realized it was from the hospital, he was stricken with fear.

Until now, he had no memories of hearing good news from the hospital. Since her hospitalization, he had only gotten news of sudden seizures, and after his mother stabilized a little, they would call to press him about the late hospital bill. Either way, it wasn't a welcome phone call.

His voice became automatically nervous.

"Yes, why?"

"Lately, Mrs. Park Somi's condition has improved greatly. Therefore, the doctor has said he feels it would be good to slowly begin the rehabilitation therapy."

"Sh-she's gotten better?"

"Yes, a procedure of this kind requires guardian consent. I'm calling to ask what the guardian intends to do."

"If it's necessary, we must do it."

"Then, please visit the hospital today and sign a consent form. I will walk you through the rehabilitation program and additional costs in detail when you come to the hospital."

It was the best news he'd heard in recent years.

Five years had already passed since his mother had been hospitalized. After receiving surgery on her entire body, including her

brain, she was in a comatose state for the first two years. When she woke up, she hadn't been able properly use her limbs.

What was worse, there had been times when she had occasionally gotten a sudden seizure and lost consciousness for a few days. Whenever that happened, Hyun Woo would hold his mother's hand and spend the night sleeplessly.

"The cause is mental stress from excessive shock."

The doctors explained his mother's symptoms as such.

Stress. For a doctor, it was truly a convenient term, since they just had to attach it to any kind of symptoms.

"As of now, there's nothing we can do. For the time being, we can only wait for her condition to improve."

The prescription of the doctors was to wait. While simply waiting her condition to improve, he had to pay 3 to 4 million Won (~\$3-4,000) in hospital bills monthly. Even so, he was able to endure it.

If his mother's condition suddenly worsened, the doctor babbled he might have to prepare himself for the worst. His anger would rise at the doctor who could only say those kinds of things, but there was nothing he could do.

In a hospital, a patient's family has no power.

Whenever it happened, the only thing Hyun Woo could do was to simply clasp his mother's hand and cry as he prayed again and again to a God he didn't even believe in.

He didn't know if the prayers gotten through or not. In any case, after 4 years passed, hope began to bloom. Since last year, his mother's condition started to improve.

Something like getting up from her bed was still a struggle, but she could eat on her own. In addition, she didn't have any big problems when she conversed. Since the doctor who had babbled Hyun Woo might have to give up was now supporting the rehab, it indicated a huge change in her condition.

Feeling like he could fly, Hyun Woo bought a fruit basket and went to her hospital room.

“Ah, Hyun Woo.”

As soon as he entered the room, a middle aged man quickly got up.

“Hello, Detective Gwon.”

“Yeah, it’s been a while. Nothing out of the ordinary?”

“I’m fine as always.”

“It’s the day I come to the hospital, so I decided to drop by for a bit.”

“There’s no need to explain yourself.”

Detective Gwon blushed and cleared his throat. “Ahem, then have your talk. I’ll be outside.”

The middle-aged man named Detective Gwon limped out of the room.

Hyun Woo laughed as he held his mother’s hand.

“Mother, I heard. They say you’ve improved a lot lately.”

“Yes, perhaps because my body is getting better, I’ve been feeling good too.”

His mother laboriously tried to smile.

Looking at her haggard face pained his heart. His mother was already in her mid forties, but before the accident, everyone had told her she was beautiful. However, five years of life in the hospital had snatched away her past appearance.

‘No matter what, I have to return mother back to her old self.’

Even if Hyun Woo gave up on everything else, this was the one thing he wanted.

As a shadow crossed Hyun Woo’s face, his mother said in a sad voice, “I’m sorry, this isn’t the time for me to be like this.....”

His mother always started with those words when she saw him.

Hyun Woo hadn't said a word, but his mother knew. No, there was no reason why she wouldn't know.

After her admittance to the hospital, relatives had only visited two or three times. Also, they only chattered about how difficult life was these days and other nonsense before leaving.

No matter how sick she was, there was no reason for her to think relatives would constantly be paying the hospital bills. Those relatives had a big impact on why Hyun Woo had closed himself off to people.

In the end, the entire burden was his.

She couldn't show him she knew this, since she was sorry for all the hardship she caused him.

"Please don't say such things. Just concentrate on getting better sooner, even if it's just by a day. Also, I am no longer a child. I'm 22 now. I can make a decent living for myself.

"You're right, you're not a kid anymore."

As she stroked Hyun Woo's hand, her voice became teary with emotion.

5 years... for an old person to whom today was the same as yesterday, it might be an inconsequential amount of time. But Hyun Woo, who had been a high school sophomore, had become an adult at the age of twenty-two. It was the time when youths experience the most changes.

How would she feel, having to watch her son change as the weight on his shoulders crushed him from her sickbed.

Hyun Woo shook his head as he changed the topic.

"I see Detective Gwon comes by often."

"That's right, I'm thankful to him. It's been five years already..."

"Yes, it would have been really hard for me as well if not for Detective Gwon."

Hyun Woo sincerely thought of Detective Gwon, Gwon Hwa Rang,

as his benefactor.

The accident his father had caused five years ago had shaken Hyun Woo's life to its roots.

His father passed away and the victim died. A chain collision occurred, causing over 10 people to be seriously injured. It was only for a few seconds, but the accident had even been on the news. The anchorman mentioned a Mr. Kim while babbling that this kind of irresponsible driving was hard to accomplish.

The impact from just a few seconds of news was amazing.

Criticism had poured in from all directions. Even family turned their backs.

The life Hyun Woo had believed in and thought would last forever crumbled so very easily. For the high school sophomore Hyun Woo, it was too heavy of a reality to accept.

From then on, Hyun Woo began to stray. He drank and he smoked. He even fought on the streets. He hated his father who caused the accident, and he hated the world who pointed fingers.

At that time, the one who found Hyun Woo, grabbed him by the collar, and set him right was the detective in charge of investigating the accident, Gwon Hwa Rang. For the first time in his life, Hyun Woo was beaten to a pulp.

Then he was dragged by Gwon Hwa Rang to the hospital.

The truth was he was running away from there.

The truth Hyun Woo had to acknowledge wasn't in the night streets flashing with neon lights. In the intensive care ward, barely maintaining life through multiple IVs and a respirator, was his mother.

That day, Hyun Woo cried without restraint for the first time.

Gwon Hwa Rang always took care of Hyun Woo after the incident. When there was a problem at school, he put everything aside to come, and he used his connections to introduce Hyun Woo to a part time job with a decent pay. When Hyun Woo urgently needed a loan,

he volunteered to stand as a guarantor. It was thanks to him Hyun Woo was able to safely graduate from high school.

For Hyun Woo, Gwon Hwa Rang was a savior— no, he was more than that.

“It’s just that I always felt sorry toward Detective Gwon.”

“Me too. But you don’t have to think that way, Mother.”

“What do you mean?”

“The reason Detective Gwon comes to the hospital probably isn’t because he feels responsible. He may be like a bear on the outside, but he harbors a sly intention inside. You know this too, right?”

As Hyun Woo smiled wickedly, his mother blushed to the tips of her ears.

“This guy, teasing his mother?”

“Hahaha, your face got red. Looks like you don’t dislike it?”

“You rascal, don’t even think about saying anything in front of Detective Gwon.”

“Mother.”

Suddenly Hyun Woo spoke heavily with a sombre tone.

His mother made a slightly tense expression.

“I’m not against it.”

“Really, this guy!”

“Hahaha, I’ll be back in a bit after meeting Detective Gwon.”

Hyun Woo pulled his hand free from the mother he’d been teasing and left the sickroom.

Detective Gwon, who’d been sitting next to the hospital ward, laughed as he asked, “What do you think? She’s gotten much better, right?”

“Yes, her mood has brightened a lot too. Thank you.”

“I didn’t do anything...” Detective Gwon mumbled with a sheepish expression.

He glanced furtively at Hyun Woo while looking like he was thinking about something, then pulled out a cigarette and hastily put it away again after being pierced by a nurse's glare. Then he scratched his head with a frustrated face and spoke up with difficulty.

"By the way, Hyun Woo."

"Yes?"

"I heard from the doctor that rehabilitation treatment will soon start, but... well... I'm talking about the rehab treatment. From what I've heard, they say it takes a ton of money. You're not being covered by insurance. So, well, I actually have more money than it looks."

Detective Gwon laughed awkwardly as he babbled. "Hahaha, that's right, I have quite a lot of money. That's it. I've got quite a bit left from the retirement pay I got from quitting detective work, and I get pension, and the pay from my current job is good too... No, I'm not saying I'm well off, but I have money and nothing else to spend it on. So what I mean is..."

"It's alright." Hyun Woo shook his head. "I understand what you want to say. I'm really grateful, but it's alright. I can handle my mother's hospital bills somehow on my own."

"No, you see, don't misunderstand. I just have nothing to spend money on."

"Detective-nim. You like my mother, right?"

Pierced by Hyun Woo's bullseye, Gwon Hwa Rang was startled.

"Th, That is...."

"There's no need to hide it. I am not a child."

"I'm sorry."

"What's there to apologize for? If it's you, Detective Gwon, I'll welcome you anytime."

"Then, what's the problem?"

"Me liking you and this issue are different. Do you remember when you beat me to a pulp and dragged me to the hospital?"

“Yeah, something like that did happen.”

“After seeing my mother lying in the intensive care ward, I realized how thoughtlessly I had been living. Then I made a vow. No matter what happens, I will make her better with my strength. It’s not because I feel uncomfortable about using your money, or because it hurts my pride. I just want to keep my vow. Because it’s about my mother, and not just anyone.”

Gwon Hwa Rang gazed at him wordlessly and patted Hyun Woo’s shoulder.

“Commendable lad.”

“I don’t deserve those words. Not yet.”

“What you’ve said made you commendable.”

Gwon Hwa Rang nodded as he rose from his seat.

“I understand. If you’re a man, you’ve gotta be stubborn. Do as you want, but promise me one thing. If something gets too difficult to handle alone comes up, you must come to me first. You can promise me, right?”

“Yes, Detective Gwon.”

“Just call me mister, it’s been a while since I quit being a detective. I will go now.”

Gwon Hwa Rang turned and walked down the hallway.

Whenever he saw the detective’s limping figure walking away, Hyun Woo felt bitter.

‘Why does each and every person around me undergo something difficult?’

2 years ago, Gwon Hwa Rang arrested a robber, who boasted a flashy career after a bloody fight. But, while capturing him, he was stabbed in the ankle and calf multiple times and became crippled.

It wouldn’t have been enough even if he had gotten a medal, but he had to suffer ridicule instead.

The problem was the single bullet he’d fired during the arrest. The

robber he shot was wounded but made a full recovery, and Gwon Hwa Rang became crippled. Despite it all, it was excessive force and irresponsible use of governmental power for many human rights groups, and there had been an uproar.

To them, the robber was a person, but it seemed they didn't even see the detective as a person. Since the human rights groups made a fuss, the media had also rolled up their sleeves and pitched in. Once the two groups joined hands, burying one person wasn't a problem. In the end, Gwon Hwa Rang was stigmatized as the violent cop and was forced to retire in disgrace. Thankfully, his career was recognized and he was now guiding ex-criminals as a probation officer, but it wasn't a sufficient compensation.

From then on, the Detective Gwon Hwa Rang who used to shout, 'REALIZE A JUST COMMUNITY' without a shred of shame like an ignorant child always had sagging shoulders.

'If at least his leg heals...'

When he reached the thought, New World suddenly came to mind.

There were no disabled people in virtual reality games. Since you moved the character by scanning the brain, physical disabilities were no problem.

So in the game, even Gwon Hwa Rang could be a normal person.

"Detective Gwon, have you ever played games before?"

"Game?"

Gwon Hwa Rang tilted his head wondering what was being said out of the blue.

"Well, I played a little in the past, but..."

"Then be sure to try out a game called New World."

"You play games these days?"

"Yes, you will also like it if you try it."

"New World, I did hear about it..." Detective nodded without much thought. "Okay. When I have time, I'll try it."

“You must.”

* * *

The picturesque seashore was awash in darkness.

Because of the darkness, the moon and stars rose shone even more brightly.

It was the time of he who walks in the darkness, the Dark Walker.

The Sharkmen protecting the lighthouse were, as their appearance suggested, nocturnal monsters.

As night fell, their stats rose by 30%. On the other hand Ark only received a stat bonus of 20% in darkness, even so, Ark still waited until it was night to start fighting.

The stat bonus in the darkness— it wasn't something that only applied to Ark. The abilities of the Familiars, using Ark as their host, also increased.

Granted, it was difficult to hope for much attack power or defense, but even so, the increase in Agility and Intelligence demonstrated a significant effect in their team work. Maneuverability, understanding of the battle situation, and the ability to deal with an emergency were all influenced. It was a part of what he'd realized while learning how to use his Familiars properly. In the end, Ark's abilities alone were increased by 20%, but the whole team's efficiency increased by at least 40%. With the special ability 'Stealth' added on top of that, their usable plans became infinite.

In a way, it could be said Ark had become a true Dark Walker at last.

‘The night is long. There's no need to rush.’

His destination was right in front of him, but Ark was in no hurry.

A Sharkman is aggressive. Fighting on the totally open seashore would definitely lead to all the nearby Sharkmen swarming in.

“Bat, go and lure one.”

“Understood, Master.”

Soon, Bat crossed through the darkness and annoyingly pestered a Sharkman. The Sharkman's anger gauge gradually filled, and it cried a strange noise as it chased Bat. All the Sharkmen would have swarmed if Ark had come himself, but since it was just a bat, they didn't feel the need to do so.

Bat lured the Sharkman all the way to the gloomy forest where Ark was using 'Stealth.' There's no need to speak of what happened afterward.

The first strike was a backstab. Activating Eyes of the Cat, he continuously burst out with Dark Blade.

Ark had invested a little more in Intelligence after fighting Kundalini to bring his Mana up to 600. Even after using Eyes of the Cat and Dark Blade in succession four times, he could still maintain the Familiars for over one minute.

The Sharkman who was lured into the shade was turned into soup one minute later.

You have made Shark Fin Soup with Survival Cooking.

A soup made with the rich nutritious shark fin, it boasts a great taste. With the addition of refreshing spices, you have brought out the hidden potential of the ingredients.
--

Satiety +50%. 400 Health recovery over a 1 minute duration, special effect (Shark Skin): Defense increased by 20 for 30 minutes.
--

Once Survival Cooking reached Intermediate, the failure rate decreased. And after adding a few types of spices he'd bought in Lancel, making the same food granted new special effects.

For example, if he added a spice to the Howling Seasoned Chilies, which raised Strength in exchange for inducing a confusion hex, Agility also rose and the confusion duration was shortened.

Of course, good effects weren't the only ones added. It was Survival Cooking, which didn't allow letting your guard down even while making food!

If he added a spice to the Refreshing Herb Tea which simply restored only Mana, it caused a poisonous hex. So if he didn't drink Herb Tea every 10 minutes for an hour, his Mana would become 0.

At times, food made without using spices was better.

It really wasn't a funny effect, but it was fun in its own way.

Ark brought up the cooking information window and smiled in delight.

'Anyway, I have already gathered 80 recipes.'

2 out of 3 of them were close to poison, but it was pleasing to have something grow.

In any case, after being forced to test the Shark Fin cooking, Bat's stats rose another step. Then, they tirelessly hunted Sharkmen to procure more ingredients.

The Sharkmen didn't seem to care about the disappearing allies next to them. They were too busy running around catching the animals wandering around them.

Thanks to their attitude, they were all finished off after two hours with only one Sharkman loitering in front of the lighthouse left. Perhaps because it was a chief, it was bigger than other Sharkmen and black in color.

"Eyes of the Cat."

After checking the information, it was level 58. Ark's level was 50, so considering the bonus from the darkness, it was a monster with a level difference of at least 10. But Ark also received bonuses from his title and quests, so various stats were high for his level. Taking this into account, the difference between them was only about 6 levels.

A smile blossomed on Ark's lips.

‘It’s a good level to evaluate my progress so far.’

“Bat, Skull. Wait here.”

Ark put the Familiars on standby and walked towards the lighthouse alone.

As a human approached, the Sharkman puffed up its chest as it ran forward.

Ark twisted his body for a roundhouse kick into the Sharkman’s jaw, who was then thrown back. The maw shut with a thwack. That was the starting gun signalling the start of the fight.

In New World, level is a universal value. In other words, it wasn’t an absolute value.

In battle, there is no such thing as an absolute.

The surrounding conditions, judgements made on the fly, reflexes, and numerous other variables were also applied.

Combat is where a significantly stronger person sometimes loses against someone who doesn’t seem like they’ll stand a chance. New World also followed the same rule.

Of course, level and stats are still the most important. But, a significantly higher level only meant the probability of winning is infinitely close to 99%; it’s still not 100%.

Ark had learned it from the boss monsters he’d fought until now. So he poured all the techniques his body had become familiar through this recent adventure onto the Sharkman.

He hadn’t even raised his stats with food.

He didn’t use Eyes of the Cat, let alone Dark Blade. He only used the senses he had gained through actual combat to battle the Sharkman.

A chain of kicks followed by sword attacks!

He didn’t even need to borrow the power of skills to be able to discern weak points. As Taekwondo and sword attacks intersected,

he dealt critical hits like crazy.

When Ark's Health had gone down to 30%, the Sharkman finally fell to its knees and died.

"Awesome, Master! This time you were really awesome!"

Clack! Clack! Clack!

Bat and Skull gave him a round of applause as they made a big fuss.

Ark just grinned.

Once his excitement settled, his heart leapt. Even without their chatter, he'd been able to feel he had definitely become stronger.

As the Sharkman disappeared, a Shark Fin and a few other items were dropped.

Sharkman's Shackle (Magic)			
Armor Type	Rock Boots		
Defense	10	Durability	20/20
Weight	100	Usage Restriction	At least 120 Strength
<p>The shackle the Sharkman leader wore; because it is made of considerably heavy rock, it will slow the movement if worn.</p> <p>The defense is also low, so it's difficult to hope it will be useful in combat. However, because of its weight, you can keep your balance even if a storm rages upon you.</p>			
<p>Effect: Agility -15, imparts a heavy weight to the wearer's body.</p>			

Mermaid's Scale (Special): (Quantity 5)

The scale of Mermaids, inhabitants of the ocean; if you hold it with your mouth, you can breathe underwater.

It wasn't a very useful item.

'Since it wasn't even a boss monster, this much should be about right.'

After having defeated the Sharkman leader, Ark's gaze turned towards the lighthouse.

It was the final destination of a long journey.

The lighthouse was considerably older than when he had seen it in the image. He thought it looked beautiful from far away, but with a closer look, the bricks and paint peeling off here and there, reminded him of a haunted house. He felt this way more strongly because it was night.

But, once he rose to the top of the lighthouse, his feelings changed once again.

He looked down from the window on the entirety of the night ocean surrounding him on all sides.

In the dark, the seashore was clearly visible, its crashing waves sparkled with starlight. It had a mysterious atmosphere, just as the music from the mirror had conveyed.

'Then, what should I do now?'

Since the Hand Mirror had guided him here, there had to be a clue to the quest. Ark soon found a small groove in the center of the lighthouse.

When he found the groove, he had a rough idea of what he had to do.

Ark took out the hand mirror and inserted the handle into the groove.

Kukuku!

At that time, the lighthouse suddenly heaved a breath and rotated. He saw the scenery pass by through the simultaneously rotating hand mirror. And when the hand mirror pointed toward a single star, the turning suddenly stopped.

Flash!

The mirror amplified the starlight a hundred fold and shot it out across the night sea, making a road along the dark waters.

With a drumming noise, the quest was updated.

The quest has been updated.

The Mysterious Mirror's Whisper → Entrance to a New World

At the end of a long, long journey, you have finally found the lighthouse.

However, take notice: The lighthouse is not the final destination, but merely a milestone. This is the end of the world. This is the entrance to another world, only for those who have been chosen. Receive the mirror's guidance and find the new world; a new adventure is awaiting you.

Difficulty: E

Quest Limitation: Knowledge of Ancient Artifacts

* * *

'The mirror's guidance? Do I have to follow the light this time?'

Ark looked at the path of light shining down on the water.

It looked as if the light was connected to the depths of the ocean.

In the end he had to pass through the ocean, but how? There was

no need to worry about it. Because there is a rule the answer is always set up beside the problem.

‘Is this the reason why the Sharkmen’s leader dropped Mermaid’s Scales?’

Ark put the hand mirror away and started on his new adventure.

As expected, he was able to breathe after holding a Mermaid’s Scale in his mouth and submerging his head. With each of his Familiars biting down on a Mermaid Scale, Ark entered the water.

Even within the water they were able to move while breathing freely.

Something he had occasionally experienced in his dreams had been made possible.

It was just a game, but the unfamiliar sensation was amazing.

It was beautiful under the sea.

There was a boundless forest made of seaweed and corals shrouded with transparent shades of blue. Colorful fishes were drifting around it. It was a magical sight he’d only seen in documentaries, unfolded before his very eyes.

However the depths of the ocean wasn’t a place where only the beautiful could be seen. As the shoals of fish suddenly dispersed, some massive object attacked Ark.

‘Octopus!’

A demon of the sea, it was an octopus monster with the name Devil Fish.

While brandishing its eight legs, the Devil Fish attacked.

Ark quickly avoided its body, but there was something he didn’t realize.

The physics in the real world also applied in the New World! Since he was under water, he couldn’t move well, let alone keep his balance properly.

As Ark flailed, a bright red light flashed before his eyes.

— You have received a critical hit from the Devil Fish. 180 points of damage.

Since the critical did only 180 damage, it didn't seem to be as strong as it looked.

However the current problem was Ark didn't have a method of fighting properly. As he was hit by the octopus' legs, his body spun round and round. Even Skeleton and Bat could only flounder.

'Dammit, If only I could get my balance.... Ah, that's right!'

"Snake, Sharkman's Shackle!"

At Ark's voice, Snake quickly spat out the shackle.

It was truly fortunate he had entrusted it to Snake because it was too heavy.

When combat starts, weapons, shields, potions, and other items can't be taken out of the bag. But the restriction didn't apply to Snake.

Granted, it couldn't be helped to be unprotected while changing equipment. He was dealt two more blows as he put on the shackles. Then, as he felt the enormous weight, his body plunged down. Thanks to that, he was able to regain his balance.

The items the Sharkman had dropped were absolutely necessary for his journey under the sea. But it alone didn't solve everything.

'My body is heavy!'

It wasn't just the shackle's weight; Ark was underwater. Breathing was made possible by the Mermaid's Scale, but his movements being slowed by water resistance was unavoidable. His sword, which had always flown like the wind, moved like a slow-motion video.

That wasn't all.

— Your attack has failed because of the Devil Fish's elasticity.

Bounce!

Ark's sword bounced off the rubber-like elasticity of the Devil Fish.

"WHAT THE HELL? Eyes of the Cat!"

When Ark chanted the skill, red marks were drawn on the Devil Fish's body.

It was normal for dozens of places to show up for other monsters, but the Devil Fish only had 3 or 4. And those places only showed up momentarily when the Devil Fish attacked.

'So I have to wait for the moment when its muscles tense up for an attack and then counterattack?'

The Devil Fish was level 40. It was lower than Ark, but the special physical limitations of the underwater environment made the difficulty feel several hundred times greater. It was nearly impossible to accurately pierce the ever-changing weak points with his immensely lowered agility in the water.

'I'd be able to dish out damage with defense-ignoring Dark Blade, but...'

He didn't have much Mana left because he had floundered in the beginning and wasted time.

'There is only one way.'

He'd be late if he checked the red points by eye before attacking. He had to predict the Devil Fish's movement beforehand and stab before the red point appeared. Ark concentrated on defense while inspecting the Devil Fish's movements with Eyes of the Cat. Which parts emerged as weak points at which movements, he stored them one by one within his head.

'Alright, I've roughly figured out the bastard's movements. It's here now!'

Ark dodged the incoming octopus's feet and stabbed it with the blade.

— You have landed a critical hit!

Though it was difficult, he dealt a 100% critical hit when the attack succeeded.

‘Good, I can win as long as I know the method!’

Ark dodged the octopus legs as he successfully counter attacked about 10 times. When the Devil Fish fell into critical condition, his sight suddenly darkened as he took damage.

It was because the Devil Fish blocked his vision with ink and attacked.

At the attack he hadn't imagined, Ark was getting completely creamed. Within the darkness, he couldn't see an inch through, it was hard to land attacks, let alone avoid the octopus legs.

Just then, he heard Bat's voice from one side.

“Master, this way, stab now!”

Ark swung the sword in reflex and another critical landed as his sight cleared.

The Devil Fish slowly faded.

‘This isn't a simple matter.’

Ark's face became serious.

The octopus' level was 40. Outside, he could beat monsters of the same level even while picking his nose. But the octopus had driven Ark to the brink of death.

The underwater special environment was no different from applying great penalty on Ark's abilities.

If Ark hadn't grinded and polished his practical sense he probably

wouldn't have won even if he were 10 levels higher than he currently was.

'I don't know what other kinds of monsters will appear from here on. What's certain is that since I'm underwater, they'll be completely different in type from those outside. In my current state, can I win against monsters that are stronger than the Devil Fish?'

There was no guarantee that wasn't the only problem.

His leather armor and rock helmet were fine, but his steel sword received a water penalty and its durability kept dropping just by equipping it.

Coral Dagger			
Weapon Type	Dagger		
Attack Damage	1~4	Durability	15
Weight	15	Usage Restriction	None
A dagger made by sharpening the coral. The blade has satisfactory luster and shape. Excellent for use as a decoration. Because the material is coral, it is impossible to repair with the usual method.			

In the end, Ark was forced to equip the lousy dagger he obtained by hunting the Sharkmen.

'It's fun.'

The entire situation was the worst, but Ark's motivation increased instead.

'Marine monsters can't be beaten just because you have higher

stats. Real skills are needed! This is the chance to raise *my* level, not my character's.'

Ark's maximum interest was boosted.

It was obvious, a higher level allowed you to defeat stronger enemies and created a chance to earn better items and money. But the level up Ark was thinking of wasn't simply increasing stats or skill proficiency.

Didn't you see how a character clinging to only levels and numbers like Andel met its end?

The player's ability to control the character was more important than the character's skill. It was also the reason Ark had been able to fight the Sharkman 1 on 1.

A character's stats were meaningless no matter how high they were if they weren't used properly. The ability to utilize 100% of level and stats! It was something only possible with the effort of the user.

'In any case, it's difficult to level up by hunting level 40 monsters. But there's no where better to truly level up, not in numbers but in my ability. This is where I can level up the second time.'

There was no need to get too impatient because of Alan or the other applicants. After all, haste makes waste.

In the past, he would've just focused on raising his character level. But Ark had completely grasped New World's characteristics now.

'I'll conquer the octopus for now!'

Ark decisively made up his mind and started to train.

The first hurdle was getting used to the water.

Ark started catching the fish wandering nearby. Fish didn't deal damage to Ark, and because they were small and moved rapidly, they were appropriate training opponents.

Ark, Bat, and Skull floundered as they chased the fishes.

The training wasn't fulfilled only within the game. Outside the game,

Ark went to the swimming pool in his spare time. He walked and let fly punches and kicks in the water for several hours. Other people whispered as they looked at him strangely, but he didn't pay them any attention. Self was always more important than others.

The effects slowly began to show after training for about 3 days.

“Uhahah, these guys!”

Bat became able to outstretch its wings like a stingray and swim underwater while chasing the fish. It was a change that couldn't be compared to three days ago, when it had just flailed around.

The wingless Skull also found a measure of its own. It aptly utilized the movement of the current as it reached a level where it could roll its body.

But as useless as it was, the most outstandingly skilled one was Snake, who was always wrapped around his waist. When Ark praised Bat and Skull's growth, Snake snorted and traversed the ocean like an eel. Then it returned and coiled itself as if asking to be complimented too.

He did praise it, but the ability was meaningless since it couldn't be used in combat. Anyway, of course the one who felt the greatest result was Ark.

— You have landed a critical hit!

He countered all of the wildly incoming octopus legs.

There was nothing to hinder Ark's movement. His underwater movements were still slower than on land, there were movements that can only be done in water. How to move while reducing the water resistance; no, rather, it was how to utilize the water resistance.

Ark realized the solution with his body, not his mind.

Water is not stationary. It is always flowing somewhere.

He read the water flow and didn't resist. Rather, he moved his body with the flow.

The effect was as expected!

'The Devil Fish is no longer a challenge.'

Ark went to a deeper part of the water.

As expected, the emerging monsters abnormal in their appearances and abilities. The crab-like Monster Crab had its entire body encased in a steel-like shell, hitting it with his sword lowered its durability. He could only land blows by precisely hitting the joints, where the shell was weak.

There was also a jellyfish like monster, Jellyfish. It swung countless tentacles paralyzing anything it touched.

They were monsters that were each incomparably difficult!

But with steady training, Ark defeated them one by one.

At first, he had to swing his sword three or four times to finally land a blow, but with every repetition the number decreased. After a week had passed, he was able to land a blow every time he swung his sword.

The Devil Fish's ink was no longer a problem either. At first he'd been barely able to locate it through Bat's voice, but once he got used to underwater combat, he was able to make all predictions just through the movement of the current.

The most difficult enemy was the Jellyfish. He could end it with two or three stabs to the body, but its tentacles got in his way. If it touches him, he will be paralyzed and could only stay still while getting hit until he had lose at least 20% of his Health.

But since he'd gotten used to the Devil Fish's octopus leg attack, he became able to dodge the tentacles without much difficulty.

'Good, I'm starting to get the feel of it.'

Ark no longer used food effects. Food made with Jellyfish had the

effect of reducing water penalty by 50%, but he didn't even eat it.

He won with just his sword and skills.

As long as he was rigged up with the ability to fight properly, marine monsters were no match for Ark. Whenever he swung his sword, three or four blows were executed in succession.

Since Ark's actual level was higher, once he found the strategy, fighting three or four enemies at once wasn't a problem. Ten days had passed, and although he hunted countless marine monsters, his level only rose by 2. But since he'd fought under the water penalty, his Sword-Hand Mastery rose by 100 and had surpassed 230.

In addition, his Nursing skill had also risen by 60. He had abused the skill while driving his Familiars to near death.

But the biggest result of it all was Ark and his Familiars' combat sense had swiftly increased.

'Now I can fight any monster that appear, as if they were on land.'

* * *

But no matter how pleased he was about the situation he couldn't stay here forever.

Ark began to seriously follow the road of light.

The ocean road was more complicated than he thought.

There were places that looked blocked but were actually open when he went there, and vice versa. Also, places rife with strong currents were hard to even approach. Since the hand mirror's light always showing the path in a straight line, it wasn't easy to find the road.

Only after two days had passed, Ark reached the destination. After clearing and emerging from a dense seaweed forest, a broad underwater plain unfurled. At the center, the sight of a city bathed in light appeared.

"Is this the destination!"

An exclamation automatically burst out of him.

Brilliantly colorful light poured out from between the buildings soaring up like enormous coral reefs between the castle walls. As shocking as it was, the ones who were coming and going busily between the walls were Mermaids.

Mermaids had the lower body of a fish, and both sides of their faces had fins. The scene of them mingling with colorful fish reminded him of a scene from a fairy tale.

“Fish. Fish!” Bat said noisily while smacking his mouth.

At the end of the fishing training, he knew the taste of fish.

“By any chance, don’t say that to those people.”

“Damn, but they’re probably tasty!”

“... Just keep your mouth shut.”

After glaring at Bat, Ark approached the city entrance.

“Ex-excuse me.”

Ark talked to the entrance guard.

The guard, who was wearing armor made by connecting seashells, and holding a spear that appeared to be manufactured from some kind of horn, made a surprised expression.

“Huh, you’re a Human, right?”

“Yes, I’m Human.”

“First time seeing a human. I thought after the catastrophe the road to the outside was completely severed... Anyway you really don’t have a tail. With those uncomfortable legs I can’t understand how you arrived here. Ah, also how are you breathing? I heard humans can’t breathe under water?”

“A Mermaid’s Scale fell into my hands by chance.”

Ark added he’d obtained the Mermaid’s Scale from a Sharkman.

The Mermaid guard nodded with eyes filled with goodwill.

“Those stupid and vicious Sharkmen are the enemies of Merpeople.

You, who defeated those Sharkmen and avenged Merpeople, are definitely a great adventurer. We aren't opposed to Humans either. Since you're a rare guest, I'll welcome you happily."

"Thank you. But what is the name of this city?"

"You came here without even knowing it?"

The Mermaid guard replied with a prideful voice, "This is the City of Merpeople, the people of the sea, Nodelesse. It has received the sea God's blessing and is the sole place permitted to be called the most perfectly beautiful. If you stay here and see, you too will come to understand."

"I am already aware. I have been to many places, but this is the first time I have seen such a beautiful city. Simply seeing the city conveys the sublimity of Merpeople."

"Ohh, you are wise."

The Mermaid guard smiled brightly and nodded.

Ark had maximized his intimacy with countless NPCs. Sweet-talking one fish was nothing. Ark raised his intimacy with lip service and pulled out the main point.

"Do you perhaps know a name called Christin?"

The name of a person who briefly appeared in the hand mirror's images, Christin.

Currently it was the only clue to solve the quest.

However, the response was strange.

The friendly eyes of the guard suddenly filled with wariness.

"Where did you hear that name?"

"Actually I came here to find the person named Christin."

"There is no one named Christin here."

"Yes, I know. I think it is someone who had lived a long time ago..."

“I said I don’t know!”

The Mermaid guard suddenly got mad and turned his head.

Ark could feel the intimacy he had raised plunging down.

“If you hadn’t defeated the Sharkman and come to this place, I would’ve chased you out immediately.”

The Mermaid guard definitely knew about Christin. Ark wanted to get more information in any way possible, but if the intimacy fell even more then it seemed he’d be blocked entry to the city.

“I apologize. I must have been mistaken.”

Ark roughly equivocated and entered the city.

Once they were in the city, Bat let out its rage.

“What is with that guy? He is just a fish!”

“Please just be quiet. You’re driving me mad.”

Ark shook his head back and forth with an obstinate expression.

It wasn’t just the Mermaid guard. He spoke to several Mermaids after entering the city, but the reactions were all the same.

Just by hearing the name Christin they got into a temper and didn’t want to talk anymore.

He had thought once he arrived here, the quest would naturally solve itself. And the very same thought hadn’t changed yet.

The Mermaids showed such sensitive reactions meant there was some kind of story behind it. However, since they got mad just by mentioning the name, there was no way he could find out.

Win the Hearts of the People

‘Whew, it’s really hopeless.’ Ark heaved a sigh.

He stopped Merpeople at random and asked, but it was of no use. Finding information about Christin was going to be harder than expected. Judging from past experience, there was only one way to solve situations like this. He must raise his intimacy with the Merpeople.

The problem was the information required significantly high intimacy.

Based on the Mermaid Guards’ reaction, the favor he’d earned from just a few words was no use. In addition, he didn’t know how to increase intimacy in this strange Underwater City.

‘The first thing to do is to gain information about Merpeople other than Christin.’

Ark decided to relax and took a stroll around the city.

Nodelesse was slightly different compared to a Human Village. Human Villages, no matter how small always had a tavern, inn, and various shops. However Nodelesse even though it was 3, 4 times larger than a Human Village, only had one restaurant and a General Store.

‘Should I clean out my japtem for now?’

After wandering in the ocean for nearly half a month, his bag and Snake’s stomach were full of items.

“Oh, you’re a Human. It’s surprising for a Human to come to my store. Right, what are you looking for?”

As soon as he entered the store, an elderly Merman greeted him. With his wrinkled face and shaggy beard, the Merman didn’t look quite right, but Ark still sported a friendly smile.

“I have some things to sell and things to buy. May I look around the shop?”

“Go ahead.”

Ark went through the goods in the store.

All of the items available in the store were things he had never seen before. It was inevitable since he was in an Underwater City, and because all the materials could only be acquired in the ocean. Shields made out of seashells, bows made out of Whale bones, Spears carved from tuna bones, etc.

The materials had a slightly crude feeling to them. Perhaps because it was a difficult city to come to, the stats transcended his imagination.

Clam Shield			
Gear Type	Shell Shield		
Defense	190	Durability	60
Weight	30	Usage Restriction	Level 50, Warrior Related
This shield was made by polishing a large Clam shell sturdy as steel, so it cannot be broken by any sword. It was made with a streamline surface, so it is easy to carry it and swim.			
Price	1, 3777P		

Electric Eel Breastplate (Magic)

Gear Type	Leather Armor		
Defense	70	Durability	55
Weight	50	Usage Restriction	Level 55
Armor made from the hides of Electric Eels living in the ocean depths. Attacks will slide off its slippery surface. The characteristic of Electric Eel remains; it will emit an electric shock with a fixed chance when hit.			
Attack Nullification: 30% 10% Chance of counter-attacking with an electric shock when hit.			
Price	2,500P		

Even a normal defensive gear, Clam Shield, had an enormous defense of 190.

Well, Shields were originally set with high defense since the defense was added when the player actually blocked with it. Even so, 190 was definitely an incredible defense.

The added special effects of the Electric Eel Breastplate were also no joke.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call it rare. It is attractive enough to want to buy 1 or 2 if the price is right. But strangely enough, the price was in units of "P."

"What does P mean?"

"Hm?"

The store owner twisted his head around wondering what Ark was

talking about. After staring blankly at Ark for awhile, the store owner nodded in understanding.

“Ahh, you are a Human. P means this.” The store owner raised a Pearl as big as an eyeball. “Here at Nodelesse, Pearl is used as currency.”

“Then for 2,500P, you need 2,500 Pearls to buy the item?”

“Of course.”

Ark’s jaw dropped unconsciously.

He had gathered 3 or 4 pearls when he crossed through the ocean. At that time, Ark was very happy. Since they were rare jewels, he thought they could be sold for a really high price. So far, the jewels he’d occasionally earned were 10 Silver for the low-quality ones, and the high-quality rare ones were worth 5 gold.

But he need 2,500 of those Pearls to buy one armor? Doesn’t it mean even if he bought it for a cheap price, it would still amount to 250 gold? No matter how good the performance of the item was, it was an unbelievable rip-off.

But Ark soon changed his way of thinking.

‘No, it might be because the the value of the Pearls are unbelievably low in this place.’

If so, there was nothing more to desire. If he acquired Pearls in bulk in this place and took advantage of the value difference, he could amass a sizable fortune.

Ark thought of this and opened his bag.

“If I sold all of this, how much can I get?”

The bag was filled with Clam shells, seaweed, and things like the flesh of marine monsters.

But the store owner muttered in an uninterested voice, “Why would I buy them?”

“What? What do you mean?”

“Those things are everywhere outside, so there’s no need for me to buy them.”

The store owner was turning his head uninterested, but then he flinched. He pointed at one item with fascinated eyes.

“Wh-what is that?”

“What? This shoe?”

“Shoe? Ooh, you call it a shoe? It looks marvelous. Do humans wear those on their feet? But I think this is the first time I’ve seen such material. What is it made out of?”

“What do you mean. It is just animal hide...”

While answering with a flummoxed expression, Ark suddenly had an epiphany.

‘Right, this is an Underwater City!’

An Underwater City, the City of Merpeople who spent hundreds of years without any contact with the outside world.

Just like how the Underwater City items were fascinating to Ark, the items found on land were fascinating to the Merpeople; even if it was just a ragged leather shoe. Since they lived underwater, they never had a chance to glimpse at land animal leather before.

In other word, scarcity! No matter where you are, rarity is what decides the value of goods.

Indeed, the store owner’s eyes were filled with desire.

“Interesting! Very interesting! Are you saying this is an animal hide? Why did you only show me trash when you have such amazing goods? I don’t need the other things, but if you’ll sell that or similar goods, I’ll buy them all. I’ll give you a good price too.”

The store owner shook the bag filled with Pearls to say he wanted to trade immediately.

The items Ark currently possessed were no more than japtem. Plus, they were goods with only 1 durability, since he used them to raise

his Magic Restoration skill. At a normal village, it was difficult to receive even a few coppers. But the shop owner was saying he would buy them for a good price.

This was definitely a bonanza.

But Ark's hand that was taking out items suddenly stopped.

'Wait, if these items have good value here, then I don't really need to sell them at a shop, right? And I have to raise intimacy to gain information... What if I sell them to Merpeople in the city?'

He could raise intimacy. Granted, there is a limit when raising intimacy by trading. But if he raises his intimacy to a certain level, he would naturally earn the favor of the Merpeople and might come to learn of another method to raise intimacy.

"I'm sorry. I will return."

"H-hey, wait!"

Ark quickly packed his things and left the shop.

The place Ark sought was the plaza situated at the center of the city, where many Merpeople gathered. Then he found a decent place and spread out land items. When the first Human they ever saw started spreading out items they have never seen before, Ark became the center of the Merpeople's attention.

"Huh? It's a human."

"How did it get here?"

"But what are those goods? What exactly are they made of?"

"It is sparkling? Perhaps it's what you call iron?"

In Nodelesse, iron was something difficult to even catch a glimpse of, there was no way to mine iron ores and refine them underwater. Clam shells, rock, and bones were substituted for iron.

Ark sent out a greeting to the Merpeople who gathered like clouds around him. When it came to selling things, it was something he had done countless of times in reality.

Of course it was his first time having fishes as customers...

“Merpeople with beautiful silver tails, I greet you. I am a Human who is by chance enjoying the honor of visiting the gorgeous city of Nodelesse. They call me Ark.”

“Beautiful silver tail, hmm, it’s the truth”

Merpeople are simple. He figured it out by taking to the Mermen guards. Just a little bit of sugar coating can instantly raise intimacy, but declining was also instantaneous.

“Today, I will show everyone a couple of items found on land.”

Ark skillfully explained like a celebrity who hosts a shopping channel.

“What you are seeing now are various armors made of animal hides which cannot be acquired underwater. In addition, there are iron weapons made with the hearts and souls of Humans. Ah, I know what you are thinking. You must be thinking the performance is subpar. However, these products I’m selling, are not meant for you to use.”

“Are you saying we should buy something we’re never going to use?”

“You do not understand? Think carefully again. The performance alone isn’t comparable to the great weapons of the Merpeople, but they are all made of materials unobtainable underwater. In other words, no matter how thoroughly you look, only one of these items exist in Nodelesse! Only those who purchase them from me can enjoy the right to possess them.”

“So that’s how it is!”

“For those who still don’t quite get it, close your eyes and imagine. Land monsters you cannot even take a glimpse at here. A monster clearing the forest and racing across the plains has been defeated after a fierce struggle by a Warrior. Then it left its hide and was changed into gear such as this. These aren’t just items. They are items filled with the history and a touch of the adventurer who hunted the monster galloping down the plains. You can decorate your living room with this. When will there ever be such a luxury underwater again?”

The light in the eyes of the Merpeople looking at the item changed.

Land monsters which cannot be seen or heard underwater! There was no practicality for either a glove or a shoe. But simply purchasing a single sword, they could imagine a world they had never seen.

This mentality stimulated the Merpeople's desire to purchase the items.

Of course, Ark's Art of Communication special stat was applied and it had a large influence on convincing the Merpeople. Art of Communication didn't demonstrate much of an effect in normal stores. But in a special case such as now, it caused profound influence.

"What is this made out of?" A Mermaid child pointed at the glove as it asked.

Ark sported his most friendly expression as he answered, "Ah, it's a leather of a monster called Magal Wolf. Its whole body is covered with black fur, and countless sharp canines are embedded within its gigantic mouth. They looked like they can swallow a person whole. Try touching it. You can imagine the monster called Magal Wolf by the touch it, right?"

"Whoa, feels amazing."

"H-how much is it?" A Merman who couldn't wait anymore fretted as he asked.

'They're hooked! The fish is hooked!'

"There isn't a set price. The quantity is limited, so please understand. I will award the honor to the one who calls out the highest price. First, this glove this cute child showed interest in!"

"50P!"

"60P!"

When he finished talking, the Merpeople called out prices frighteningly.

At best, they were goods he could only get 10 Silver on land. But 60P! One pearl was 10 Silver, so it amounted to 60 Silver, 10 times the price!

Ark wanted to hit the ground and wail.

‘If I knew this was going to happen, I should have brought anything and everything japtem...’

Not even a few minutes later 20 or so japtem were sold like hot cakes.

Whenever his florid speech raised the price, his Art of Communication also rose. When he had cleaned out all his goods, his Art of Communication stat rose by 13, and he also gathered 450 pearls. Of course, all the Merpeople who bought the goods left with satisfied faces, so his intimacy also rose considerably.

But they still wouldn’t tell him about Christin.

Ark didn’t worry. ‘There should be a strategy even in an unexpectedly ridiculous place!’

After finishing his successful business, Ark became confident.

‘Cultural difference is money!’

Nodelesse was completely segregated from land, and that fact held the strategy to raise intimacy. Something completely useless on land had unexpected effects here. As long as he found out what those were, it was no problem to raise intimacy.

Ark immediately gathered information as he wandered through Nodelesse.

What came next to Ark’s attention was the restaurant.

The Merpeople had no concept of cooking. Even if you ordered food at a restaurant, only raw seaweed and shellfish were served.

It was inevitable. Fire cannot be used underwater.

However it was different for Ark. The Survival Cooking Pot Ark possessed could boil water without fire, and roast ingredients

regardless of time and place! Just like the name 'Survival Cooking' implied, as long as you put your heart into making something, you could even make ramen underwater.

'They'll eat it. Without a doubt, they'll eat it.'

Ark immediately started a food stand in the plaza.

He had so many ingredients left, to the point where they'd rotted and became overripe.

Among the dishes Ark could make with the ingredients he had, Ark chose several good tasting dishes with decent effects. The result was just as he expected.

Merpeople had never even seen cooked food before.

They couldn't even imagine food made from land ingredients. The Merpeople went as far paying an exorbitant fee of 1P per serving and ate the food. And the word-of-mouth of the Merpeople who had eaten it once spread from tail to tail, and long lines formed day after day at Ark's food stall.

Ark made the menu more varied as the sale improved. An invigorating meal with the effect of Health recovery and a nutritious meal raising Strength or Agility were the vanguard. Those special food were priced at a colossal price of 3P! It was really a gimmick to raise the price and receive more profit.

"Ohh, what is this?"

"Wow, it's such a fascinating taste."

"Is this what they call land meat?"

"For some reason, when I eat food from there, I feel my strength rising."

In a single day, the ingredients from land became scarce. But the business stayed as prosperous as ever.

"This is the seaweed I've always eaten, but the taste is completely different!"

"I can't believe it. How can you make such distinctive taste with shellfish!"

From children to elderly, from Guards to Nobles of the Merpeople, they didn't spare their praises.

Some Merpeople brought their lovers and strutted as they ordered food. Of course Ark, who had a sense for customer treatment, satisfied the Merpeople with services second only to first-class restaurants.

Thanks to his customer service, his popularity soared even more. Soon the line of Merpeople who waited at dawn was long enough to surround the plaza.

"Welcome!"

"Give me the baked shellfish I ate yesterday."

"You need to wait 10 minutes."

It was difficult to handle the customers who kept coming even though he made food without rest. In just a few days, Ark became so famous, there wasn't a single Merperson in Nodelesse who didn't know of him.

But it was only the beginning.

"Ah, this is also almost to the point of breaking. Do I need to buy a new one?"

Guards who sought out the stall sighed while looking at the tattered armor.

Ark rapidly approached and put on a friendly smile.

"If it is okay, could I repair the equipment?"

"What do you mean repair? Surely you're not saying you'll fix it?"

"Yes, it won't be in the same state as before, but you'll still be able to use it for awhile."

"But I have never heard of a human repairing Merpeople's equipment?"

"For now, please give it to me."

The Guard took off and gave him the seashell armor with an expression of disbelief.

The concept of maximum durability didn't apply to the equipment of Merpeople. Since the materials used to make them were seashells, they couldn't be fixed after they were broken. Even for someone who learned the technique from a Blacksmith cannot repair a seashell with a hammer. But the technique Ark had learned was Magic Restoration. It wasn't the concept of repair, but restoring to its original state.

“Magic Restoration!”

When the skill was used, the tattered armor went back to its original condition.

At the sight, the Merpeople couldn't hide their astonishment. Granted, since it was still a beginner skill, it didn't completely return to original. 10% penalty was applied and durability only recovered by 90%.

A player would refuse the services even if they were paid. But this alone was a shock to the Merpeople. Since one equip was over 1,000P, replacing one was a big deal.

“You are truly incredible! Even a Magician wouldn't be able to do something like this!”

Ark spoke while gasping, pretending to be tired, “Huff huff huff, it's very difficult when I use this technique.”

“No wonder, since you did something remarkable. This isn't much, but take it.”

The guard readily pulled out 50P.

It was better than selling 20 special cooking!

Ark's pupils flashed with golden light again.

‘Nice. I was getting worried since there's a limit to the ingredients.’

“It's too regretful to simply throw away the great equipment of the Merpeople when they are broken. It's difficult for me, but if you have something broken, please bring it to me any time. If it's a normal item, I will repair it for a cheap price.”

When the rumors spread, all the Merpeople brought their equipment and swarmed around Ark.

‘Hahaha this is truly a cinch.’

He was so happy, he might turn insane.

He used ingredients he couldn’t sell in the store to earn Pearls. Was that all? Every time he cooked, he raised his Survival Cooking skill. As he used Magic Restoration while earning Pearls, he was also able to raise its skill proficiency. As a result, the proficiency rose insanely and he raised the Magic Restoration level in three days.

Magic Restoration has risen to Intermediate through a great deal of experience.

The usual penalty you received when repairing normal items is gone. It is now possible to repair Magical Items. However, each time you repair a magic item, its maximum durability will decrease by 10%.
--

Mana Consumption: 20

* Since both the Nursing and Magic Restoration skill have become Intermediate, you have learned Purification Restoration as an effect of set skills. With Purification Restoration, you can purify curses on any kind of item.
--

‘Set skill effect!’

In the past, he learned Sword-Hand Combat as a set effect of Sword Mastery and Hand-to-Hand Combat. When a couple related skills grow to a certain level, a set effect is given. But seeing it was a skill to lift curses, with Nursing and Magic Restoration being uncommon skills, this set effect was rare kind. Now he could release the curse of items without paying money to the Cathedral.

‘Lancel’s Sword!’

Lancel's Sword immediately came to mind.

Until now, it was maddening to wonder what kind of sword it was.

“Alright, Purification Restoration!”

Once the Sword's curse was lifted, a message window popped up with a new sound effect.

– Once the curse was released, the Sword's original appearance has materialized.

Lancel's Sword (Magic Sword)			
Weapon Type	One-Handed Sword		
Attack	20~30	Durability	50/50
Weight	25	Usage Restriction	Dark Attribute, Level 50
A Sword used by the Mercenary Lancel, who was famed in the past. The reason why Lancel became notorious was due to the magic sword he wielded corrupting his mind. Lancel realized this and didn't utilize the sword for a long time, but he took up the Sword again to exterminate Kundalini, where he then drew his last breath and died.			

‘It's.. it's the jackpot!’ Ark's mouth was wide open with surprise.

Ark was still using the Sharply Shining Sword he had earned from defeating the Black Bear Mouse. The sword's attack is 8-12, whereas Lancel's Sword was 20-30.

Just by looking at the attack power, it was a perfect sword to use at level 50. Unfortunately, there was a restriction of Dark Attribute.

The players Ark knew with the Dark Attribute were so few that he could count them on one hand. Despite it being a rare-class item, it would be difficult to get a high price at the auction. However, there was no reason to be disappointed.

‘Lancel’s Sword would immediately raise collective attack power by at least 30 percent.’

That alone gave it plenty of value.

Just then, another new message window popped up.

The Magic Tool’s ability was drawn out by the Dark Walker’s job characteristic.

Netherworld residents who are at least Intermediate class all possess their own artifact, which they call Magic Tools. Players can activate Magic Tool once a day. You can summon the host of the Magic Sword, who hides in the Netherworld. No kinds of environmental penalties apply to the entity summoned as the Magic Sword’s host.

However, the Magic Sword’s host is not friendly to players.

Job Special : If the player who owns the sword has the ability to summon creatures of the Netherworld, you are qualified to make the Familiar and the host of the Magic Sword duel. If the Familiar wins, you can combine the two entities to evolve into a stronger Familiar.

If the player attacks and uses hostile magic to side with the Familiar during the duel, the duel will automatically end in a defeat. In the cases the Familiar loses, it will be forcefully recalled and the appropriate penalty will apply.

Lancel's Sword's (Magic Sword)

Special Effect: Once a day, you can summon the low-class Vampire Dunphil.

'What is this?' Ark had a puzzled expression when he saw the never before seen message.

After reading it a couple of times, without being mindful of his surroundings he exclaimed.

'A Familiar's growth!'

They were words that made his eyes pop. Truthfully, Ark was feeling slightly doubtful about developing his Familiars, since the condition to develop Familiars was too peculiar.

Newly made dishes with Survival Cooking. However even if the cooking succeeded, if the added effects were negative, the Familiars wouldn't grow. So although he had created about 80 new dishes, his Familiars' stats had only risen about thirty times. And since Skull and Bat split the consumption, it was only fifteen times.

If the risen stats were converted to levels, they were only about level 15, even though Ark had leveled up over 30 times while cooking ceaselessly. Moreover, no matter how many kinds of ingredients there were in New World, there was a limit.

In conclusion, the amount of new dishes Ark can make is limited. Eventually, the Familiar's growth would stop.

Right now they were overcoming the level difference against monsters with tactics, but it would also reach its limit one day.

When it happens, he might have to give up on his Familiars. But before it happens, he has to develop them a little more. The Familiars, who had no thoughts of rushing up to level, trembled uncontrollably at the mere sight of food...

Anyway, it was regrettable for Ark, who had special affection for his Familiars.

‘But now there was another method!’

After ending his sale in the evening, Ark went outside Nodelesse.

The reason being: combat cannot be done inside the city.

“Magic Sword summon!”

Once Ark released the seal, a monster was summoned with hazy light. It had the appearance of a middle-aged man in a suit.

Dunphil glanced around, studied Ark, and smirked. “You summoned me? What is your business?”

Its expression and manner of speech were incomparably arrogant.

It was when Ark was about to say something.

“DU-DUNPHIL!” While staring blankly at Dunphil, Bat screamed.

But Dunphil’s response was apathetic.

“Who the hell are you?”

“Y-you don’t know me?”

“You are a strange one, I wouldn’t know the likes of a bat without even a name.”

“WH-WHAT? THIS BASTARD!”

Without even a chance to interfere, Bat charged at Dunphil.

It seemed it was decided Dunphil would be Bat’s opponent.

Once the fight between the Familiars began, a message came up and all Ark could do was watch. He couldn’t even use Nursing or recall his summon.

Ark took a step back together with Skull and used Eyes of the Cat to watch the fight. Dunphil’s level was 25. On the other hand, when looking at Bat with its level 15 stats, the level difference was apparent throughout the fight.

Whenever Dunphil's attack hit, Bat's health fell by 10%. Even so, Bat blindly pushed forward.

As if Bat forgot all the fighting experience it had gained with Ark, it recklessly charged at Dunphil.

"Bat, carefully lengthen the fight!"

They were underwater. Dunphil doesn't get environment penalty. He wasn't at a disadvantage of not being able to breathe underwater and experienced any movement hindrance. He can move naturally even underwater. While on the other hand, Bat received underwater penalty and couldn't display the greatest advantage of a winged beast — mobility. The difference was very large.

It was a disadvantageous fight from the beginning.

If Bat had a slight chance of winning, it was to use its experience of underwater battle and drag the fight on. But since Bat was only thinking about charging in and dealing damage, he couldn't have a proper fight.

Bat didn't even pretend to have heard Ark's advice.

"I'll kill you! I WILL KILL YOU!"

"Kekeke, you dare to come at me with your level of skill, how laughable!"

"KUAAAAAK!"

In the end, Bat's Health hit rock bottom after Dunphil's claw attack. Bat faded away while gnawing at Dunphil's shoulder.

"How insignificant. The business is settled now, yeah?"

"Yes. F—k off."

"If you're going to make me fight, it would be better to bring someone more commendable."

Dunphil disappeared while speaking with an arrogant expression. In the end, the first fight ended in vain.

'That Bat!'

Ark exploded in rage. Dunphil's scumbag attitude was bad too, but

what made him even angrier was Bat. Thoughtlessly rushing in and tear? The fight was so absurd, it made Ark's face go hot. What the hell had Bat learned while fighting alongside Ark until now?

Ark had returned to the city and spent 24 hours doing business.

"Hey, Bat! The hell was THAT?" After resummoning, Ark castigated Bat with a stormy expression.

But he couldn't keep speaking.

Once it was summoned, Bat bawled as it ground its teeth.

"WAAAAAH, DAMMIT, DAMMIT!"

"Huh? What? Are you putting on a show because I'm angry?"

"Master, I beg you! Call that bastard again! I have to fight with him!"

"What the hell are you saying? Explain so I can understand!"

"That bastard... that bastard is the one who harassed me for over 10 years in the Netherworld."

"What?"

Bat ground its teeth as it spoke.

Dunphil was a low-ranking noble in the Netherworld. The arrogant and ill-tempered Dunphil harassed weak monsters as a hobby, and for the most part, its target was Bat.

Bat, who was born as a relative of the Vampire race, was constantly harassed by Dunphil. In addition, he was ostracized by the other bats as per Dunphil's instructions. In the end he was exiled from the race.

'Now that I think about it, this guy...'

Bat's original name was 'Hatred-bearing Bat.'

An explanation how Bat came to bear hatred and rage towards the world because it suffered harassment in the Netherworld; had been attached in its description.

'In such a setting, it can't be helped for this rascal to fight Dunphil.'

After thinking for a while, a wicked smile blossomed on Ark's lips.

'It's a chance.'

"I understand the situation, however I can't let you immediately fight Dunphil."

"Ma-Master!"

"If you fight like the way you did the day before, no matter how much you fight, you can't win against him. You will lose. And if you don't want to lose again listen to me. First, you need to get stronger."

Bat was startled. Getting stronger; in other words, it meant he had to eat food.

However Bat grit its teeth and nodded. "I understand, if I can win against him I will do anything."

"Alright, and another thing, you can't fight like you did before. He's stronger than you. But not enough for you not to win. From today onwards, I'll train you."

Ark did business during the day and started training Bat at night. And when a new recipe came up, he immediately shoved it into Bat's mouth.

Food made with ocean ingredients had a high chance of having a good effect. Whenever it happened, Bat's stats went up.

Bat's training was sparring with Ark.

"Do it right! If you fight that way you can't win against Dunphil! Do you want to be beaten up again?"

"N-NO! I won't lose!"

Pow pow pow!

The days of gruesome training continued.

Unlike usual, although Bat got beaten up by Ark countless times, its fighting spirit burned. After finishing intense training for a few days, Ark called Dunphil out again and had them duel.

Though Bat's stats had risen a few times, it alone wasn't enough to oppose Dunphil yet. But since Bat's skills had greatly improved over the last few days, a battle far more stable than before unfolded.

"Huff huff huff, this, this much is far from it."

In the end it ended with Dunphil's victory again, but there wasn't as large of a margin as last time. Ark smiled coldly at Dunphil, who swaggered in a way unfitting for his appearance.

"It'll be harder next time."

"Hmph, even so, a bat is a bat."

Dunphil disappeared to the Netherworld as if it was running away.

'Damn, the problem is I have to wait 24 hours once it dies. Next time I'll allow him to fight when I am more confident he can win. Until I can resummon, I should make up the training schedule.'

Ark was busy doing business, raising his Familiar, and doing miscellaneous things.

* * *

Ark accumulated Pearls while steadily doing business.

But when there is a high tide there is also low tide.

As time passed, even his lucrative business slowly died down. His land ingredients ran out so he squeezed out dishes with seaweed as its main ingredient, but since it was an ingredient the Merpeople were familiar with, it didn't hold their interest for very long.

The business of Magic Restoration also didn't gather customers easily after he repaired all the Guards' equipment. Since there wasn't a big war going on, there was no reason for the durability to drop quickly.

'For a business, it is more important to know when to stop than knowing when to start. Well, it wasn't something I could do for long anyway.'

In the end, Ark ended his business in ten days.

It was a business which earned him Pearls without a capital. It wasn't without regret, but he couldn't pick a spot and live in Nodelesse. Also, no matter how many Pearls he had, if he didn't change them into gold then there was no meaning. It was a business he had to stop eventually.

More than anything the reason Ark was able to leave the business without regret was because he already reached his initial goal. Ark was already a celebrity among the Merpeople.

Wherever he went, Merpeople recognized Ark and pretended to know him.

When he was doing business, there were huge fans who came to the restaurant without missing a single day. Finding out a piece of information wasn't even a problem.

"Do you happen to know someone by the name of Christin?"

"Christin you say..."

In the past there would've been immediate swearing first, but this time the circumstances were different.

The elderly Merman earnestly pondered and spoke, "There's nothing I can't tell if it's you, but actually, I don't know very much about a person named Christin either. It's not just me. There probably isn't a Merperson in Nodelesse who knows the details about him. It's a name everyone knows, but nobody knows who exactly he was."

"I don't understand. But then why does everyone get upset when I asked about him?"

"It's because we learned to act as such. I only heard from prideful Merpeople during my grandfather's grandfather's time that you had to hate him. But after listening to your words and thinking back on it, I didn't hear why we have to hate him."

He understood, why else would they be fish?

"Isn't there a way to find out?"

"Hmm...."

The old Merman contemplated for a while and answered as if he suddenly remembered something.

“Now that I think about it, there’s a Crystal Pillar that records the history of the Merpeople in front of the Palace. I think I’ve heard something about him being recorded there too, though we don’t know what it says because it’s written in a language forgotten long ago. You who have many talents may be able to find a clue. Go there and try.”

“Thank you.”

“But are you closing down the restaurant now?”

“Yes, I don’t have any ingredients left.”

“How unfortunate. It was my sole pleasure...” The elderly Merman murmured while smacking his mouth.

Ark left the regular customer and headed directly to the Palace.

“Hey, Ark. What are you doing here?”

“I came after hearing there was a marvelous Crystal Pillar in front of the Palace.”

“There is. It’s quite a marvelous decoration.”

“Could I come in and see it once?”

“Hm, that’s a bit difficult...”

“I wish to learn more about the Merpeople whom I admire deep within my heart. I’ll just glance at it and come out so please let me.”

“Well, since it’s your request and not someone else’s, it can’t be helped. I understand, but you have to come out quick.”

Since the intimacy was at maximum, everything was progressing at lightning speed.

Once he entered the Palace, he saw a Crystal Pillar not far from the entrance.

Bead-like writing was crammed all over the surface of the 10 meter high Crystal Pillar.

‘To progress with the quest do I need to decipher this?’

It was when Ark's hand touched the surface of the pillar. Light suddenly poured out from the pillar and countless images flashed in front of him.

* * *

A beautiful Mermaid was seated on a balcony overlooking all of Nodelesse. It was a Mermaid with brilliant shoulder-length blond hair and sapphire blue eyes.

She was watching the back of a man with unbearable sadness in her eyes. It was a big, strong, perfectly reliable back, but at that moment it filled her with complete despair and anguish. Because the back couldn't become hers.

The man's back slowly grew distant.

The Mermaid cried and cried as she watched the man's back getting farther away from the balcony.

Tears distinctively appeared within the transparent ocean.

Then the scene changed.

The Mermaid clutched the items retaining the man's scent to her chest and left for somewhere. The currents drawn by her beautiful tail conveyed keen sadness.

Christin, Christin, I love you.

Even if all the water in the ocean were to dry up, I'd still love you.
Even if I have to bear the stabbing pain in my chest I'd still love you.

I believe in your promise.

As promised, I believe you will return and find me.

Until then, I will wait for you at the promised place.

Please do not forget the words I whispered with you.

If you want to see me, close both of your eyes.

In a hidden place, I will wait for the day I can be in your arms.

* * *

Through the Knowledge of Ancient Relics, you have discovered the Crystal Pillar's hidden information.

The yearning of a Mermaid for her lover is recorded inside the Crystal Pillar.

For the lover who would find her someday, she carved this in ancient letters. However, sadly, it seems like her love did not come to be.

Knowledge of Ancients +5, Intelligence increased by 5, Luck increased by 2, Fame increased by 10.

'So basically this is a love letter. She wrote a very grandiose love letter.'

CRAAAACK!

Then the image disappeared.

Suddenly, spiderweb-like cracks appeared on the Crystal Pillar, and without time to even do anything it came crashing down. The Guards who gathered after hearing the commotion shouted with astonished expressions.

"Th-The pillar!"

"It's him. The stranger who ran the restaurant broke the pillar!"

"You bastard, what have you done!"

Ark was stunned because he didn't know what was going on. Fifteen guards surrounded him and pushed forward with their raised Spears of coral.

"You dare to intrude the castle and break the ruin!"

"N-no, I don't know how this happened either..."

"QUIET! Drag this Human away immediately!"

* * *

Ark suddenly had to spend a day in prison.

After logging off for half a day and coming back in, a Merman in

scale armor appeared.

“The Queen wants to see you. Follow me.”

Mermen dragged Ark to the throne room.

Merpeople in noble attire were lined up in the ruby throne room. At their center sat a beautiful female Mermaid who looked to be over the age of 30. Since she was decorated with jewels and wore a crown, it seemed she was the Queen of the Merpeople. But her face was familiar.

Ark easily understood the reason.

‘She looked similar to the Mermaid I saw in the Crystal Pillar.’

The Nobles of the Merpeople made a fuss when Ark entered.

“For a stranger to sully the Palace ruins, it’s unheard of.”

“We must deal with him appropriately with severe punishment.”

“But since there is no precedence....”

“The fact this stranger entered the Palace is alone enough to punish him.”

“However, the Merpeople have always upheld fairness, so even if he had committed the crime, should we not assess the situation beforehand and make a ruling?”

The opinion of the Merpeople Nobles were split in two.

Simply put, it was the opinion of the Nobles who had been Ark’s customers and those who weren’t. It was probably because of them that Ark, who damaged the royal ruins wasn’t executed immediately. If he’d been forcefully deported, it would’ve been hopeless.

‘This was definitely something that should have only been done after raising intimacy.’

The Queen raised her hand to silence everyone and looked at Ark.

“I understand because I heard the words of the nobles, but a stranger damaging the Palace ruins is unprecedented. Of course it is an incident deserving of a heavy punishment. However, I have found

the residents of Nodelesse to have great confidence in you. There are even volunteers who wish to take up your defense. It is not easy for a stranger to earn trust. Therefore I will give you a chance to explain. Now, why did you destroy the pillar?”

“I had no intention of destroying it. I just wanted to know about the person named Christin and simply touched it with my hand, but it was destroyed on its own.”

“Christin!”

The Merpeople Nobles opened their eyes wide and looked at each other. The Queen also gathered her brows in considerable surprise and asked back, “Are you someone with relations to Christin?”

“I don’t know.”

“You said the name Christin yourself, but you don’t know?”

“Yes, it’s true I was searching for him, but it’s hard to say I have relations with him. Rather, I want to know more, since I left on a journey to find out who he is and what kind of relation he has with me, so I came all the way here. But no one would tell me about Christin. So I placed my last hopes and approached the pillar.”

“Christin is a traitor who betrayed the trust of the Merpeople.” A fire of rage burned in the Queen’s eyes.

“Traitor?”

“It seems you still need more explanation.”

At Ark’s response, the Queen sighed and continued, “Christin was the man loved by the Queen who ruled the Merpeople before the start of the Dark Century. During that time, the Merpeople were trading with many races while sharing conversations. But then the Queen went out to the land, and she fell in love with a young man.”

“The name of that person is?”

“Yes, it is Christin.”

He heard about the Dark Century from the Meow. It was the time when the powers of darkness had covered the world and thus was called the Dark Century. Then the 7 Heroes appeared and finally, the

days of light returned. So if he was from before the Dark Century, Cristin was a figure from hundreds of years ago.

“But Merpeople cannot live on land. In the end, the Queen had to return to the sea, but she promised to meet again with her lover and gave him the Compass of the Sea God as a token of her love.”

“Compass of the Sea God?”

“Originally, Nodelesse was an illusory city that wandered the sea. Even Merpeople had a hard time finding it again if they left the city. However, the Compass of the Sea God always shined light towards Nodelesse so you wouldn’t get lost. It was the Queen’s greatest treasure. Giving him the Compass of the Sea God was the same as giving him everything, so he could come find her whenever he wanted.”

‘Is she talking about the Jeweled Hand Mirror?’

Ark followed the Hand Mirror’s guidance and reached Nodelesse. Since the name Christin is written on it, there is no doubt.

“But did he not come find her?”

“No, he came as promised. He was a stranger to the Merpeople, but we truly welcomed and accepted the man the Queen loved. But his love didn’t even last one year. In the end he threw away the Queen and returned to the land. Can you imagine? The sadness of a woman who was thrown away by the man whom she gave everything to?”

The Queen’s voice became emotional.

“The queen shut herself in her room and spent her night in tears. Then after more than ten years, she suddenly hid herself. Not after long, a great calamity befell upon Nodelesse.”

“Calamity?”

“Since long, long ago, Nodelesse received the protection of an existence called Gallic, a great White Whale. Gallic, who had shared a spiritual connection with the Queen for generations, is the master

of the ocean and the guardian deity of the Merpeople. But after the Queen disappeared, Gallic became uncontrollably vicious.”

“Are you saying it was Christin’s fault?”

“If it wasn’t, then whose is it? The Queen cursed Christin, who threw her away. It’s certain her feelings and the weight of her curse made Gallic, who was spiritually connected, go mad. In the end, it was Christin’s fault Nodelesse’s lost its past glory.”

“There is no way!” Ark spoke with a determined voice.

The Queen’s forehead scrunched at the unexpected objection. “What did you say?”

“I do not know the whole story. However, I am certain the Queen did not hate or resent Christin. Rather, she tried to understand why he had no choice but to leave. The reason why she disappeared is probably connected to his departure as well.”

“How could you, who didn’t even know who Christin was, know this?”
“It was written on the Crystal Pillar.”

The Merpeople Nobles stirred with shocked expressions at Ark’s reply.

The Queen asked quickly with an expression of disbelief, “Did you decipher the meaning of the pillar?”

“That is correct.”

“Lies, it’s a lie!”

“Yes, he is just babbling because he wants to avoid punishment. You mustn’t be tricked.”

The Merpeople Nobles flailed as they shouted.

“It is not a lie. If you truly cannot believe it, I will show you the proof.”

“Proof?”

“The Queen was in possession of the item Christin left behind. It was an important item she treasured greatly. If we find the item, we’ll know his true feelings towards her and the reason why she

disappeared.”

“Didn’t I say we don’t know where she disappeared to?”

“There is no need to think hard about it. If Gallic suddenly became violent after she disappeared, the answer is there. Please tell me where Gallic is. I will find the answer.”

“So it can be thought of that way too. I’ve also tried sending Soldiers to calm Gallic several times. But Gallic is the Master of the Sea who wanders the ocean; a Warrior of the Merpeople cannot find Gallic. The sole way to find Gallic is the Compass of the Sea God.”

“Then it’s all the more reason why I should go.”

Ark pulled out the Jeweled Hand Mirror from his bag.

The Queen’s eyes widened to an unbelievable size.

After staring blankly at the hand mirror with surprised eyes, the Queen barely managed to stammer after a long while, “M-my goodness... for the lost Compass of the Sea God to return after hundreds of years...”

Ark interrupted, not giving her a chance to speak.

“I won’t talk long for much longer. You know the items inside a stranger’s bag cannot be taken by anyone without the permission of the owner, yes? There is a reason why I must find out why the person named Christin left her. So, please help me find Gallic.”

“Perhaps... This may be the final chance. Okay.”

The Queen thought for a while and nodded.

“If you look at the back of the Compass of the Sea God, jewels of three colors should be embedded. If you arrange the jewels one space to the left, it will lead you to Gallic.”

Thu-thu-thump, the quest information was updated at last.

The quest has been updated.

Entrance to the New World → Guardian Deity of the Merpeople, Gallic

You have found out Christin's past and the ancestral Mermaid Queen who disappeared are connected.

By connecting the information of the Mermaid Queen to the Crystal Pillar, everything is related.

It is certain the ancestral Queen has an item related to Christin. In addition, her disappearance is likely connected to the Guardian Deity of the Merpeople, Gallic. You must find her whereabouts through Gallic and recover the item. You must also find a way to calm Gallic.

The Compass of the Sea God will guide you.

Difficulty: E

* * *

"Huff huff, this whale, you wanna play with me?"

Ark spat out curses while clearing countless meters of Kelp forest.

He had already been struggling in the sea for several days.

Only when Ark went out of Nodelesse did he feel overwhelming motivation.

He was thinking of stabbing the great White Whale or whatever in one blow and thus ending the quest.

From Shadow Forest to lighthouse, from lighthouse to Nodelesse, and doing business to gather information in Nodelesse. All in all, it took a month. But during that time he was able to raise his level many times, earned money, and gather items. For just one quest, he had invested tremendous amount of time.

'It feels like it's coming to an end now.'

But after leaving the city, it wasn't as simple as he thought.

Gallic wasn't far away from Nodelesse. The thicker the light from the compass, the closer he was to the goal. However, there was a problem he hadn't expected — the goal was constantly moving because it was a living whale.

"Did this guy run away again?"

He ran like no tomorrow, but the needle's light pointed to another direction before he knew it. He had always been one step behind for several days.

But when there is a will there is a way. After struggling in the ocean for a few days, Ark finally found a way to catch up to the whale.

It was the same current that swept him away when he was on his way to Nodelesse.

The currents entangled the area Gallic moved in like a spiderweb. You could think of it like hundreds of quickly moving escalators tangled in a building.

'If I use this...!'

Ark removed the Sharkman's Shackles and threw himself into a nearby current. Instantaneously, the landscape zipped by at a extremely high speeds. The coral reefs and schools of fishes swept past like the wind. The beauty he hadn't seen while struggling within them came to his view. Traveling by the current was yet another fascinating experience. After moving in the same direction for some time, the guiding light shifted to the side.

'Are you running away again? Not this time!'

Ark immediately moved to the current flowing next to him. After switching directions a few times, the light became thicker and then suddenly disappeared. It wasn't because he'd lost him, but he had arrived at his destination.

'It's around here somewhere.'

Ark grasped his sword. Suddenly, Bat said in voice trembling with nervousness, "Ma-master."

“I know. Get ready. It is nearby.”

“N-No, that is not it. There...”

Bat's voice trembled more and more.

He turned his head to see what was the matter, but he saw nothing.

“What's wrong?”

“You don't see it? The mountain... is moving.”

“What?”

It was when Ark turned his head to follow Bat's gaze.

The vast background obstructing the view in front of him twitched as it moved. An enormous amount of sand dust rose and clouded the water. Within it, something glossy moved.

“May-maybe that is Gallic....?”

The round object of enormous size turned just then towards Ark!

What were as big as buildings were shockingly its eyes. The enormous background that had been its eyes slowly rose. Bat, Skull, and Ark's eyes also looked up trying to follow it.

He stopped to catch his breath.

Calling it gigantic is nowhere enough to this overwhelming creature.

Ark had felt this feeling before when he was young. It was the same feeling when looking up at Mt. Seorak or Mt. Halla from the mountain base. If there was a difference between them, it was the mountain in front of him being a living creature, a moving organism.

‘White Whale, Gallic!’ His voice didn't come out.

Ridiculous! No matter how big, isn't it too big?

Did he really have to fight something like this? An ant bit a person. The angered person crushed the ant. You couldn't call it a fight.

Right now Ark was no different from an ant.

The Sword in Ark's hand wouldn't even give the gigantic creature a

stinging feeling. In other words, it is like an ant losing all fear and biting a human.

Kuohhh!

The White Whale opened its mouth, revealing a space like a tunnel with a 50-lane road. Simultaneously an enormous pull sucked Ark in.

“WAAAAAAAAAH!” Ark screamed with all his strength.

Then he was swallowed by the White Whale.

The White Whale's Labyrinth

Outside Harun Village was a hunting ground where beginner players spent the night locked in desperate struggles with wolves.

It was here where a new player appeared.

A robust 40-year old man with a scraggly beard, his character name was JusticeMan. The player's real name was Gwon Hwarang, a man who had formerly held the extremely rare profession of a hot-blooded detective.

The first reaction JusticeMan showed was no different from anyone else's. He was surprised by the surrounding landscape looking so much like reality, and astounded by his body moving so naturally.

As the beginner appeared, Hansen, who'd been strolling around with nothing to do, quickly started a conversation. Then, when he suggested the mouse hunting quest, JusticeMan scratched his beard as he asked, "But is it a really difficult task?"

"No, don't worry. It's something anyone can do. I'm trying to introduce suitable tasks to strangers like you who are here for the first time and haven't adapted yet."

"If that's so, then it's okay. When a truly pressing matter arises, please call me then."

JusticeMan nodded a goodbye and exited the village. As always, he was limping on one leg.

As a game that moves the character by scanning the brain, in New World there were no problems with physical disabilities. For someone who couldn't move their legs at all and even the blind, could walk and see like normal inside the game. Because of this, even in hospitals, virtual reality games were prescribed as one of the therapies to treat a disabled person's depression.

However, there were many cases where a person's physical disability had hardened into a habit. This was also the case for JusticeMan. If anything, 2 years of limping on one leg had caused him to forget the sensation of walking normally. Nevertheless, his limping leg was not a big obstacle when it came to playing the game.

JusticeMan left the village, his eyes widened in surprise. Across the wide plain, players were locked in desperate struggles with wolves. Also, they were fighting with swords and clubs, not guns.

It was a scene unimaginable in real life.

Then, he heard a woman's scream to the side.

"Kyaa, he-help me!"

As he turned his head the sight of a female player being viciously attacked by a Wild Dog came to his view.

"Halt!"

While taking his coat off and throwing it aside, JusticeMan blocked the Wild Dog's path.

As a new enemy appeared, the Wild Dog assessed him with a wary eye. But it noticed it was a beginner user who wasn't wielding any weapons; the Wild Dog let out a mocking laugh. A murderous look lit up in its eyes and a threatening growl came out from its fang-filled mouth.

Those who were new to virtual reality gaming should have been frightened. However, instead of being afraid, a refreshing smile actually spread on JusticeMan's lips.

'A sensation like this, it's been a while. It reminds me of the time I went on a tour out of duty in South America.'

Bark! Bark! Bark!

The Wild Dog suddenly charged. JusticeMan's pupils moved quickly as he read the Wild Dog's movements.

'An opening!'

JusticeMan's body moved.

With movements like flowing water, neither could be called fast nor slow, he seized the Wild Dog by its scruff. Then while rotating his body he tossed the Wild Dog over his head.

With incomprehensible strength, the Wild Dog flew several meters before it was driven into the ground, and lost a fourth of its health.

It was a shoulder throw similar to a picture in a judo textbook!

That's right, before he retired, JusticeMan had been a legendary high-ranking judo wrestler even in the police department.

In the National Police Judo Tournament, he had won several times and was a skillful man who had always contended for the first and second places in the worldwide tournament as well. But where his ability truly shined was not in a tournament.

He had work experience in special police force taking down organized crime, a counterterrorism task force, and had even been deployed to South America as a police department instructor representing South Korea in an international treaty. It wasn't an exaggeration to say JusticeMan was a legendary person on the battlefield.

Wielding only a short police baton, he swept away the criminal gangs armed with knives and shotguns, and once he had single-handedly driven away a pack of wild dogs that had raided a village in South America. It was to the point where the South American policemen had called that JusticeMan the Monster of the East.

In others' eyes it might seem like perilous work, but JusticeMan felt he had the right aptitude for this line of work.

His irrepressible sense of justice and his raging vigor couldn't possibly be satisfied by an ordinary life. Although he was living in a modern society, he held the spirit of a medieval knight who revered martial arts and justice more than anything else.

'I haven't even been able to properly train in a while, but it seems the feeling hasn't died yet.'

The spirit that had been broken by the aftermath of his injury was revived.

For him, the likes of a Wild Dog was no different from a puppy.

The Wild Dog sprang up quickly and swung its front paw. As a thick, bloody line was drawn across his abdomen, JusticeMan lost half of his health. Since a level 1 player was struck by a level 4 Wild Dog, this was a natural result. But rather than fear, what JusticeMan felt was excitement.

“That’s good. It wouldn’t be fun if you went down with just that.”

JusticeMan’s heavy body went low to the ground like a swallow as he approached. He took hold of the Wild Dog before it could even react and twisted its forelegs.

One of his strong points was his cross arm break!

The Wild Dog’s forelegs gave a popping sound and were dislocated. However the Wild Dog didn’t even have time to scream. JusticeMan twisted around in a flash and switched to a choke hold. Its health fell steadily as if it was being sucked away by a straw.

After the Wild Dog was taken care of, the girl approached hesitatingly.

“Th-Thank you.”

JusticeMan’s eyes trembled.

He had helped and received thanks.

It was a feeling he had long forgotten for such a long time!

While employed as a detective, he had caught countless criminals. That was definitely justice. But cases where he received thanks after an incident was solved were rare. Since he was a detective, catching criminals was a granted.

It was the truth. JusticeMan truly didn’t catch criminals to receive thanks. But those who made this goal difficult were not the criminals.

When a criminal was caught, he had to hear the resentful curses of

their family. Also if even the slightest wound was inflicted, it would rouse human rights groups and the media who would call it excessive retribution. Even as he was lying in hospital after injuring his leg, outside the voices blamed him nonstop. A news reporter even used a ladder truck to plaster himself to the window and take pictures.

His superiors placed all responsibility onto him.

For the first time, JusticeMan felt doubt about his profession.

He had only wanted to fulfill the justice taught to him in police academy. The bad needed to receive punishment and the weak needed to be helped. That's what he had learned and wanted to live by.

But reality wasn't as simple. He felt like he had become a useless dropout that was thrown away.

'But it's different here!'

He would be thanked if he helped out. There was no one to accuse him of using excessive force. He was able to unleash to his heart's content the passion of a martial artist that he had abandoned after becoming disabled.

'It's here. This is the place I was looking for!'

Motivation overflowed.

From then on, JusticeMan began defeating the Wild Dogs while roaming the plains. Whenever someone looked as if they were going to be struck down by the Wild Dogs, he would always intervene and help out. The Wild Dogs were fine, but there were times when he died trying to help a player being attacked by several Wolves. But JusticeMan did not say a single word of complaint. Instead he gave a hearty laugh as if he had done what he naturally had to do.

There were even some players who were impressed and tried to reward him.

"JusticeMan-nim, this is just cheap wheat bread but please have it."

“Your coat is worn out? If you’re okay with only 2 defense...”

JusticeMan firmly shook his head.

“Receiving compensation conflicts with my principles... No, justice needs no reward.”

Then, he would run off like a gust of wind to find another person calling for help.

While going about and defeating Wild Dogs and Wolves at level 1, his level rose quickly. Without looking through the stat window that popped up before JusticeMan’s eyes, he invested everything into Strength and Stamina.

“For men it has to be Strength and Stamina!”

As he repeatedly fought in highly difficult battles, a new skill and a new stat was formed.

You have learned a new skill.

Jujitsu (Beginner, Passive): You have learned Jujitsu, which is based on a foundation of excellent physical ability and reflexes.

Jujitsu is a skill which uses the opponent’s strength against them to inflict damage. It is a complex grappling technique completely assimilating the oriental ideology of yin-yang.

Joint-locks used on human movements can have the additional effect of greatly reducing the enemy’s ability to move. The damage inflicted on an enemy increases as the proficiency rises when throws, chokeholds, and joint-locks are used.

A new stat has been generated.

Justice (+5) : Justice is a special stat only available to those with a flaming sense of justice to help others.

When a player with the Justice stat joins a battle in order to give aid, all stats will increase by the number of Justice points. Resistance to Fear, Confusion, and Bewitchment is also created in accordance to the the number of justice points.

Everyone in New World has positive attitude towards anyone with Justice. Many people who recognize your talent will request help from you, and if you help them, you can earn higher Intimacy. While stat distribution is impossible, it will increase slightly whenever you help others.

‘Is the Jujitsu talking about judo? And I can think of the Justice stat as a work evaluation.’

The Jujitsu was fine, but he took quite a liking to the stat called Justice. In the real world, even if you help others all you feel is self-satisfaction. Even if your teammates complimented you, they quickly forgot with the passing of time. But here, realizing justice manifested in a numerical value. He would immediately receive an amount that matched his efforts. The Justice stat fuelled JusticeMan’s burning passion.

The opinions of the players about JusticeMan’s actions were divided.

“There’s no way he’s a player. He doesn’t have a single dagger equipped and there’s no reason for him to go around without any armor.”

“What kind of player in the world would go as far as to die for someone else?”

“No player would use a name as awful as JusticeMan, either.”

“I’m sure he is a beginner friendly event NPC.”

“But he has asked about levels and stats sometimes? An NPC doesn’t do that.”

JusticeMan became a mystery of Harun village. And from some point onward, he was more often called Machoman instead of

JusticeMan.

JusticeMan was more popular among players than NPCs.

“Hey, Machoman is surrounded by Wolves.”

“Let’s go, we need to save Machoman!”

“But we don’t have much Health right now either...”

“But we still have to help. We already received so much help from him, so we can’t ignore him.”

“You’re right, let’s help Machoman!”

The Wolves who were attacking JusticeMan were dumbfounded.

Just 3~4 wolves were swarmed by 30 players. Among them, Roco, who’d been struggling in Harun Village all along, was also squeezed in.

* * *

“This is?”

When he was swallowed by Gallic he thought it was the end of everything. But Ark was still perfectly alive. While wondering how it happened, an information window suddenly popped up.

White Whale’s Labyrinth

You have entered the stomach of the Great White Whale Gallic, who is called the guardian deity of the Merpeople. Within a body that transcends the imagination, Gallic’s stomach is also as complicated as a labyrinth.

As the guardian deity of the Merpeople, Gallic was an existence that loved peace, but with the ancient former Mermaid Queen’s disappearance, he became violent and is now preying on sea life at random.

Gallic’s change is likely linked with the dark energy enveloping his stomach.

– You have found an undiscovered dungeon.

As the new discoverer, you will earn an additional 1,200 experience and 100 Fame if you register it to the Hall of Fame. Will you register?

“Refuse registration.”

Ark answered as if it was obvious and stood up.

So far the only person who knew about the underwater city was Ark. There was no need to share valuable information.

‘So this is the inside of a whale stomach?’

The place Ark was standing on was a space full of rough bumps. It was slow, but the wall occasionally twitched as if there was a pulse.

He was amazed, but it seemed he had really entered Gallic’s stomach.

In any case, it meant he had grasped a clue on the quest completion.

‘I’ll have to go in for now, huh?’

To think that he had to walk into the whale’s stomach on his own feet, it was a strange feeling. But before that, there was something he had to do first.

“Units, line up and count.”

“One.”

Clack clack

Hiss hiss

Bat, Skull and Snake answered in turn.

“Master, can’t we stop doing this? It’s embarrassing whenever we do this.”

“Be quiet, everything has a deep meaning. Skull and Snake seem to enjoy it, so why are you the only one complaining?”

“Tsk, it’s because these guys just don’t think.”

Ark dismissed Bat’s complaint and slowly advanced.

‘If this is a dungeon then there’ll definitely be enemies.’

As he entered while following the walls that squirmed like a wave, three Crabs soon appeared in front of him. However, they weren’t the normal Crabs he’d seen outside. After being eaten and killed by the whale, they were Undead Crabs that had been revived by the dark energy. The Crabs, which were melting here and there and had cracked shells, discovered prey and approached as they snapped their claws.

“Eyes of the Cat!”

As he activated the skill, Ark’s pupils emitted a golden glow.

Level 65! The difference in level between them and the Crabs outside was a whopping 30. Ark’s current level was 52, it was the same as when he reached Nodelesse.

It was the result of neglecting combat to focus on business.

Since it was a dungeon, even with the darkness bonus he was still around 60; there was still close to a 5 level difference. He felt taut tension.

‘Even the level 40 Crabs weren’t easy opponents either...’

Underwater monsters were trickier than land monsters. Crabs had strong defence, and the bubbles they spewed whenever they reached critical condition had a Slow hex.

When Ark fought it for the first time, he was more than 10 levels higher, but it still wasn’t easy. Though he’d become used to it, it was certain that they would still be tough opponents. Moreover, at level

65, he couldn't guarantee victory.

Ark tightened his grip on his sword's handle.

'This is the whale's stomach, there's no place to run.'

"Bat, Skull! Plan B!"

At his command, Bat and Skull quickly ran out and lured a Crab. Ark ran towards the remaining two Crabs and bombarded the red points with his sword.

Pow pow pow poww!

Ark's sword moved like a beam of light, and flashes of light burst from four weak points in one strike.

The Crab lost 30% of its health instantly and staggered.

The one who was surprised was not the Crab but Ark.

'Wh-what is this? This sensation?'

He didn't know until earlier, but when the battle started he felt an unbelievable sensation in various places of his body. His body was as light as a feather, and he felt like the sword he was holding was twirling peculiarly in his hand.

If he put his mind to it, he felt like he could attack 4, 5 or even 6 times. He was confident he could display a reaction or speed that was unimaginable in the past. Ark wondered if he had received a different stat bonus, but there was no such message.

'Then maybe?'

Ark suddenly realized something; as he looked around, and knew the reason why he had changed.

'I see, this is not underwater!'

Ark had spent more than half a month underwater. He battled with the Sharkman's Shackles and accepted the water penalty like it was natural. Even in reality, he had raised his stamina while doing special training in the pool. But there were no changes that Ark could

actually feel. It was only to the point that he could perform as well underwater as he could on land.

However, the inside of Gallic's stomach wasn't underwater. He didn't have Sharkman's Shackles on, and he didn't feel the water penalty either. The enormous penalty he'd been receiving until now had disappeared in an instant. It was obvious since he felt like his Strength, Agility, and reflexes had improved manifold.

No, they had really improved. In the end, as Ark had expected, the underwater life had become an opportunity for enormous growth.

That tangible difference was shocking. He felt the Crab's movements sharply. When he had lost his vision because of the Devil Fish's ink, Ark dodged as many as 8 feet just by the flow of the current. That sensation remained even now.

As the Crab's pincer sliced through the air, the feeling of it flying in was conveyed directly through his skin. The four pincers flew at him with complexity, but Ark avoided them all just by moving his upper body.

Crabs can only be attacked at their joints. Although they were undead Crabs, their weak point wasn't different. But this was Ark, who had broken through scores of flailing Jellyfish tentacles to attack the body, the sole weak point. Compared to Jellyfish, Crabs were riddled with weak points.

— You have dealt a Critical Hit!

Ark's attack was perfect in timing, location, and everything. Critical strikes landed when he precisely attacked the right spot with the right strength. It was an effect of the extremely heightened precision from underwater life. In addition, Lancel's sword boasted a fearsome attack power twice as strong as his old one. Wiping out the two level 65 Crabs didn't even lower his health by 30%.

'To think it felt this different!'

Experiencing such a huge change in an instant was actually more

confusing.

Ark was not the only one who had grown. After Ark checked the Crab's level he had calculated that Bat and Skull wouldn't last very long against it. He'd thought that it'd be 1 minute at best, and even then, he'd have to examine the situation and cancel summon for one of them. However, Bat and Skull overturned his predictions.

The one who benefited the most from the lack of water penalty was Bat. As the result of ceaselessly ingesting health food while training with Ark in Nodelesse, Bat's evasion and attack had greatly improved. Additionally, once even the water penalty disappeared, it was a complete spike in performance. He avoided the Crab's attacks nimbly and only when an opening appeared did he fly with a full-body charge. The damage from a single shot was at a trifling level, but his attack rate was so fast that the damage was not negligible.

It wasn't as much as Bat's, but Skull also showed surprising growth. As if it was trying to get revenge for the sorrow of those times, Skull tore with its teeth as it rolled around the Crabs' feet.

The two merely level 15 Familiars toyed with the level 65 Crab and cut its Health by 40% in just a few minutes. When Ark joined in, the Crab didn't even had chance to spray bubbles.

"Ohhh, strangely I am overflowing with strength!"

Clack cla-clack!

"Master, a fight! Let's fight!"

Bat and Skull felt their tangible growth and couldn't hold their excitement.

"Good, I was worried at first, but it won't even be hard to solve the quest if it's like this."

Ark began to seriously conquer the dungeon.

From the pathway of twitching black walls, Crabs, Devil Fishes, and Sharkmen turned undead flocked in all around. Even when they were

undead, they were no different from the ones outside in the ocean. He already knew what kind of attacks they would do, and the weak points they had. Though they were undead, their basic attributes were no different from the monsters he'd met in the ocean. He was aware of what kind of attacks they would do and where their weak points were like the back of his hand.

Also, his condition was so good right now he felt like he could fly!

“Bat, Skull! Plan A!”

There really was no reason to lure with Skull and Bat.

Together with his Familiars, Ark charged in head on. The chain of exploding critical hits! The co-op attack bonus with his Familiars! The monsters' Healths fell steadily.

Around then, Ark realized that fighting hadn't gotten easier just because he had become stronger. The monsters inside the whale's stomach were originally marine life. Similar to how Ark had gotten the penalty underwater, they received the penalty of not being in water. Meaning that Ark's ability had increased and the enemies' abilities had decreased!

‘I'm picking up EXP. *Picking.*’

Although they were easy to defeat, they were still over level 65. Because they were at least 5 levels higher than Ark, they gave a lot of experience. Every time he hunted a group of them his experience rose enough to be visible. The items they dropped were much better than what level 40 monsters dropped.

His body felt like it was flying. EXP was surging in. And the value of items was increased!

Fighting was so enjoyable that it was sickening.

Ark and his Familiars swept through the dungeon like that. While they were beating up four Sharkmen, a roar suddenly came from behind them.

ROAAR, bo-bo-oom!

Sharkmen flinched as they hastily scrambled away.

‘Sharkmen are running away? Just what is going on?’

He didn’t have to wonder for long. Within just a few seconds of the roar, an enormous wave of water suddenly surged in from the opposite wall. As it rolled over the wall, a raging torrent swallowed Ark and the Sharkmen.

It wasn’t a question of whether to resist or not. In the space of the time it took to say ‘Ah,’ they were swept away by the torrent and rushed past the twitching walls. How much time passed like that?

The current seemed to weaken, and then they were hurled onto the floor.

After quickly raising his head, he saw that it was an enormous plaza. He saw monsters and piles of trash that had been swept in by the water current, like himself.

‘Where is this? Ugh!’

– You took Acid damage. Damage 50.

There wasn’t a monster, but he suddenly took damage.

It was not just once. Even before the message disappeared, he received damage again. White steam was rising at his feet. It wasn’t only Ark. Steam also came out of the bodies of the stumbling monsters. There were also monsters already in critical condition.

‘My god, this is... the stomach!’

Startled, Ark looked around.

Thankfully the exit was a few meters away. The exit was wriggling as it closed. Since the food had come in, the stomach’s sphincter was automatically closing.

‘If we fail to escape, then we’ll be digested!’

“No, I don’t wanna become whale poop!”

Bat held his head and screamed. Ark agreed.

To become whale poop after working so hard to get here?

Ark ran towards the twitching and closing exit.

Bat went out first, then Ark threw Skull and himself. Ark was able to barely squeeze through, narrowly leaping out from the sphincter. Looking at the sphincter that soon closed made him break out in cold sweat.

In just a few seconds, he had lost 350 Health.

‘What the hell, what kind of stupid dungeon is this...?’

At that moment, a strange sound came behind Ark’s back.

Slither!

Snap Snap Snap!

As Ark turned his head to look, his expression hardened.

Behind him, he saw a few Crabs that had been swept all the way to the stomach and had narrowly escaped. But the problem wasn’t the Crabs. It was the enormous gray worm-like monster that was grabbing and swallowing the Crabs. The Crabs attacked with their pincers, but the worm even budge and was eating them one by one.

“Wha-what is it this time? Eyes of the Cat!”

Once he used the skill, the worm’s information appeared. Its name was Great Worm, a level 80 monster.

“Great Worm? So it is basically a large roundworm parasite?”

To think he would have to fight not only revived food bits, but also a roundworm...

As if responding to Ark’s voice, the worm turned its head. In ran in as it opened its drooling mouth wide. Ark spun his body as he swung his sword. A dull sound rang out, but the worm didn’t even flinch and swung its tail.

“Ugh!”

With a single attack, his Health went down by 200.

‘I was wrong, I can’t beat it in my current condition!’

Even with darkness bonus, the monster was almost 15 levels higher. In addition, Ark had already taken damage from the stomach. However, he couldn’t flee— behind Ark, the sphincter blocked the way.

‘Dammit, I barely escaped from the stomach, so I can’t become a worm’s meal!’ Ark tightened his grip on the sword.

It was a desperate situation, but not completely hopeless. The worm had lost about 30% of its Health while fighting the Crabs.

“Let’s go, Plan C. Bat, go distract it!”

“Understood!”

Bat flew quickly to draw the worm’s attention. At the same time, Ark let loose a barrage towards the mark that appeared on the worm’s body.

Pow pow pow powww!

The worm shook greatly after being attacked with a chain of critical hits.

The worm had slow movement but it was unbelievably fast when attacking. The worm’s sharp teeth grazed his side as it passed. Ark abandoned the idea of completely dodging worm’s attacks.

If he focused on conserving his Health, his attack would weaken by the same amount. The chance of scoring a critical hit also decreased dramatically. It was better to be prepared for damage and concentrate on counterattacking.

The worm didn’t even budge at his sword attacks.

It was the special effect granted to big monsters with slow movement. But when it took a kick, it winced briefly. When he landed a successful kick, it seemed that set chance of stun or knockback

showed a little effect.

‘I can use this by following its attack pattern.’

Ark stepped as he went around the worm.

He waited for the chance, then immediately loosed a flying kick when the worm was in position to attack.

Taekwondo’s kicks are reputed to the fastest among all the martial arts. Even among these, the flying kick’s speed is outstanding!

Taking the flying kick, the worm flinched and stiffened. In that timing, Ark loosed a counter with his sword and landed a critical hit.

After about 3 minutes of fighting like that, he suddenly took damage.

<p>– The Familiar Nameless Dead Man’s Skull has been forcefully recalled to the Netherworld. You received 50% of the Familiar’s Health as damage.</p>

The Familiars may have gotten stronger, but there was a limit with the worm as the opponent. The worm crushed the obstructive Skull by squashing it with its body.

Soon after, Bat was covered by the saliva spraying from the worm’s mouth, fell to the floor, and was crushed. It was because Ark was too busy concentrating on attacking; he didn’t have time to check on the Familiars.

‘Familiars can be resummoned after 24 hours. But if I die, it’ll be the end. I don’t wanna revive in Nodelesse and get swallowed up again by Gallic!’

Ark clenched his teeth.

His Health, which was already in the danger level, fell to critical condition from the damage he took as his Familiars disappeared. But crisis can soon become opportunity. Indomitable Will and Indomitable Body were activated.

“Now, Dark Blade!”

PO-POW!

Since Familiars had disappeared, there was no reason to worry about his Mana. Ark immediately let fly 2 more Dark Blades.

However, the worm's movements couldn't be hindered by sword attacks. The moment Dark Blade landed, the worm's lashing tail hit his waist. With a dull shock, Ark was pushed back.

Thanks to the effects of Undying and Indomitable a critical hit was avoided, but his Health went down to 50. Without wasting a moment, worm came flying in for a body slam.

'The bastard is also in critical condition from Dark Blade! 104 Mana is left. I can still use Dark Blade once. I'll bet victory on a single blow!'

"Snake, potion!"

The Snake wrapped around his waist spat out a potion.

The Snake wrapped around his waist spat out a potion. This was Snake's good point. In a normal fight, you needed to open the bag and take out a potion to drink it. The time it took was 3-4 minutes for even a skilled fighter, and it was only possible with that time if they always kept their bag organized. But thanks to Snake, it didn't take Ark even 1 second.

He quickly downed the lesser recovery potion and restored 100 Health.

Ark's eyes flashed. "I'll be damned if this doesn't kill it! Dark Blade!"

In the instant Ark and the worm passed each other, a deafening roar burst out.

Ark flew couple of meters and hit the wall.

He quickly checked his Health and saw he only had 7 Health left. On the other hand, the worm that had gotten hit by a critical hit with several added bonuses glowed as it twisted, then slowly melted away.

It was Ark's victory. The moment worm was defeated and his level rose and he a new skill was created.

You have learned a new skill.

Counter Attack (Beginner, Passive): This is a technique that can only be learned by one who possesses the courage and reflexes to grasp the moment the enemy attacks. However, most important is the strong will to not fear the enemy. One who doesn't have Indomitable Will and Indomitable Body and can't overcome fear, cannot learn this skill.

Should Counter Attack succeed, 50% additional attack power will be applied. The 5% stun effect chance doesn't stack with other active attack skill.

Thanks to counters his body had learned while fighting the underwater monsters, he received another useful skill.

When the worm disappeared, a grey skin was dropped.

Great Worm Skin (Ingredient)

The skin of the Great Worm, which only inhabits a very special environment. Not only is it hard to encounter a Great Worm, but it is also extremely rare to find a skin of such good quality.

If a great craftsman were to tan this skin, it can become a great leather product.

He couldn't tell if it was a good or bad item from the description.

"Whew, anyways, I survived."

He had survived with his life, but the price was too great. Both of his Familiars were force recalled, and the durability of his armor fell to a critical level. The japtem shoes he'd worn instead of the Sharkman's Shackles were actually broken.

Although he can say he won, half of it was luck. He didn't think he could win if he fought it again at his current level.

"For now it would be good to avoid the worms."

Ark took out his tool box.

* * *

After tasting bitterness once, Ark became more cautious.

Unlike the first time, he didn't dare sweep the dungeon blindly. He explored cautiously one step at a time. Because Bat was gone, he couldn't scout. So he had no choice but to be careful. When he sensed something suspicious from afar, he quickly used 'Stealth' to hide. He faced monsters besides the worm without difficulty even without the Familiars. If there weren't any worms, this place would have been ideal hunting ground because of the high experience. As he explored the dungeon like this, Ark realized several things.

In the dungeon, the violent torrent occurred approximately once every 2 hours. Ark calculated the time, and when it was time for the violent torrent, he equipped Sharkman's Shackles. By wearing the Sharkman's Shackles that wouldn't budge even in a tempest, Ark wasn't swept away by the torrent. However, the penalties weren't a joke, so he immediately took them off when the torrent passed.

It was really annoying, but the torrent wasn't all bad. When the torrent passed through, piles of trash formed here and there. Once in a while, he would find a useful item among the trash. In many ways, it was a pretty good dungeon.

Ark got so obsessed in exploring the dungeon that he forgot to sleep. 24 hours passed like that.

"You've all worked hard. For now eat this." Ark praised Bat and Skull's hard work as he made them food.

Once the Familiars' Health was restored, he said to Bat, "Bat, do you want to go against Dunphil again?"

"What? Really?" Bat asked in excitement.

Bat hadn't had a rematch with Dunphil after the two consecutive losses. Although they were busy with the quest, the real reason was that Ark had judged Bat's skill was still lacking. The one who'd be regretful if Bat was beaten up by Dunphil and force recalled was Ark.

But this thinking had changed when he was alone for a moment.

Without the water penalty Bat had become considerably stronger. With the current Bat, it might even win. No, its morale had risen because it had suddenly grown stronger, so this was the golden chance.

'If by chance Bat loses, as long as I avoid Great Worms, Skull and myself is enough.'

"Just don't forget all the training we've done. Be cool headed and composed. You know to pay attention when I say something, right? You can't do anything about losing because you're lacking skills, but if you lose without properly showing your skill, then I won't give you any more chances."

"I understand. Master, I will do my best."

Ark received the promise and summoned Dunphil.

Dunphil, as always, talked in an incomparably arrogant tone.

"What is it now? Didn't you give up yet?"

"It'll be a bit different this time."

"Hmph, even so Bat is still just a bat. On top of that, the mere likes of a bat of the Vampire lineage can't beat me, a noble of the Netherworld."

Bat didn't even get mad at Dunphil's provocative words and just shot sharp glares at him.

Ark nodded in satisfaction and said, "Good, Bat. Begin."

"Prepare yourself!" Bat gave a battle cry and flew.

Dunphil swung his fingernail as if it were ridiculous, but the situation

was different from before. Bat charged around Dunphil's arm like a snake climbing a tree and struck a blow to the neck.

"Ack! How-how can this be!" Confusion burst from Dunphil's mouth.

He'd only seen the slow movements underwater, so he couldn't properly cope with Bat's movements that had become several times faster and floundered about.

Seeing the enemy's confused appearance, Bat's fighting spirit greatly increased. While swooping down from above and rising up from below, he hammered Dunphil's chin.

The chain technique it had learned from Ark!

Bat showed a completely different appearance from before. It was so good that there was no need for Ark's coaching.

Every time the attacks connected, Dunphil stumbled.

"You damn cur! This is price for harassing me all that time!"

"Thi-this bastard....!"

When his health fell to about 40%, Dunphil's body was suddenly enveloped by smoke. A big bat emerged from the spreading smoke and struck Bat.

'Transformation!'

Dunphil had judged that it would be difficult to keep up with Bat's speed in humanoid form and had transformed into a bat. It seemed that even though he was a minor Vampire, he could transform into a bat because he was a Vampire in name.

Once Dunphil transformed, the fight became an aerial dogfight.

As the two bats got complexly tangled, they attacked and took hits intensely. The battle was so fast, Ark couldn't tell which side was Dunphil without Eyes of the Cat.

As the fight continued, it seemed like Bat was being pushed back a little. Their abilities were nearly the same, but Dunphil's transformation had bewildered Bat. In addition, Bat had no

experience fighting airborne monsters.

“Bat, there is no need to be confused. Think of underwater combat. For you who dodged the Jellyfish’s tentacles, there’s no reason you can’t avoid Dunphil’s attacks.”

Ark’s advice had an effect.

Bat hadn’t fought with airborne monsters before. But marine monsters were able to move around naturally in water for the most part. Which meant that in the end, they were no different from airborne monsters. In addition, while fighting marine monsters, there was a water penalty in effect.

No matter how strong Dunphil was, it was not more difficult than fighting marine monsters with the water penalty applied.

Bat’s attack pattern changed. Just like when he was swimming underwater, he spread his wings wide and glided; when he found an opening, he swooped down like a hawk. Control of attack speed, this was the fruit of what Ark had beaten into him.

“Cheater, to interfere in another’s fight!”

“Hmph, you said it won’t be a challenge no matter what. Have you changed your mind?”

Once Bat used the technique, the fight returned to the original situation.

Dunphil and Bat’s Health was maintained at the same level as it was shaved away. But since Dunphil had significantly more health, it wasn’t an exaggeration to say Bat was overwhelming in terms of skill.

Five minutes later, Dunphil fell into critical condition first from a slight difference in Health and his body became dyed in red. Then Dunphil let out a screeching scream as he pulled himself back. At the same time, a black air current burst from his mouth, stealing Bat’s vision, and Dunphil charged in. He was trying to put up a last stand.

Ark’s eyes flashed.

“Bat. Don’t dodge, this is the zero situation!”

“Uohhh, die! You impudent bastard!”

Dunphil charged forward as if he’d been shot from a bow.

Rankled, Bat also came in with a charge.

“This will decide it!”

Bat ground his teeth and rushed in. When the two bats seemed like they were going to crash, Bat suddenly did a sharp curve. Dunphil, who had charged with all his strength, widened his eyes in surprise.

“Wha-what...?”

Bang!

Dunphil crashed into the wall. Then Bat spun around in midair and hit Dunphil on back of his head.

Finally, Dunphil, who had his Health depleted, fell to the ground fluttering like paper.

“Well done, Bat!”

Ark nodded as he sported a satisfied smile. This was the ultimate victory move that Ark had trained. Zero situation; this was Ark’s code to move the opposite direction.

“Ugh, to think I really lost....”

Dunphil moaned as he crawled on the ground. Then he tried smiling to the approaching Bat.

“Huhu, you became stronger. Actually, I remembered you from the beginning. But I wanted for you to be stronger, so I was deliberately cold...”

Bam, bam, bam!

It seemed like Dunphil had been hoping for a scene from a youth drama.

But Bat didn’t carry the slightest sense of this sentiment. Bat, who

had approached with long strides, abruptly stomped on Dunphil's snout.

In the end, Dunphil disappeared without being able to squeak another word.

At that moment a message window popped up before Ark's eyes.

Player's Familiar Hatred-bearing Bat has defeated Dunphil.

You can now fuse the summon to evolve it. Please choose one familiar to be the main.

The Familiar created by the fusion evolution will have the main Familiar's stats with the auxiliary Familiar's stats after consideration.

Even though Bat had won, Dunphil had much higher stats and level than Bat. But Ark didn't hesitate to choose Bat. Stats aren't everything. Although it was not indicated with a number, the experience gained with Ark through practice and battle was worth more than ability.

Also he didn't want to give up the Hatred-bearing Bat he'd become fond of and go around with someone like Dunphil.

"Main, Hatred-Bearing Bat. Auxiliary Dunphil."

As soon as Ark's decision was made, light enveloped Bat's body. And as the body steadily changed, it became endowed with a human form.

With a black mantle and slicked back hair was a boy over 10 years of age.

He was like a boy going to a Halloween party dressed as Dracula. That made him give off the feeling of cuteness overall, but the sharply raised eyebrows made his expression quite fierce.

The Familiar's fusion evolution has finished in success.

After fusing with Dunphil, Hatred-bearing Bat has been promoted to a low-ranking Vampire clan. With the mighty will to control the whole Netherworld, he has received the name Dedric. Therefore, Dedric earned low-ranking noble status in the Netherworld and has gained the right to bear an artifact.

Lancel's Sword is now Dedric's artifact.

By using Lancel's Sword, a 10% collaboration attack bonus will be added. Because you have come to possess the artifact, an additional skill has formed in Dedric.

Dedric			
<p>A resident of the Netherworld with a lightning fast ascension to a low-rank Vampire within the race of Vampires. As a self-made Familiar, he is prideful and dislikes humiliation.</p> <p>As an effect of becoming a Vampire, if it is not in a dungeon he cannot turn into a Vampire during the day. In Bat form as well, he receives a 30% reduction in stats when under the sun.</p>			
Race	Demonic	Alignment	Dark
Ranking	Low Class	Health	250 (+200)
Loyalty	43 (-25)	Strength	25 (+15)
Agility	40 (+15)	Stamina	35 (+15)

Wisdom	15 (+15)	Intelligence	55 (+15)
Luck	15 (+15)		
<p>* Can turn into Human or Bat naturally.</p> <p>* Dark Dash can be used.</p> <p>Exhales darkness to temporarily turn enemies into dark status, then uses a low-class charge to inflict damage.</p> <p>Mana cost: 30</p>			

‘Oh, isn’t this pretty useful?’

Every stat had dramatically risen.

If he calculated the general stats, they came out to be around level 27. At Nodelesse it had been around level 18 after stuffing it with food, so in an instant the level had risen by about 9 levels. And he had also learned a new skill. It seemed to be the saved move that Dunphil had used.

Because the Vampire affinity appeared there was a penalty, but overall it was satisfactory growth. But there was one thing that bothered him.

All stats had risen, but only Loyalty had a -25 penalty. He was soon able to confirm that effect.

“Bat, good job.”

“Bat? Who is that?”

“What?”

“Huu, listen well. I am no longer the Bat you know. I am the noble of the Netherworld, Dedric. Until now you hit and tortured me with food as you desired, but I will no longer bear with it.”

Ark’s expression twisted strangely.

Listening to him, it didn’t seem as if he had forgotten about the time

he was Bat. In other words, just because he became a bit stronger, he was defying his master.

Ark was furious. He worked hard to feed his familiars and even trained them. Is that all? He had chosen Bat instead of Dunphil who had better abilities. But the first thing he did was mutiny.

Ark's voice became cold. "So?"

"Of course, I'm not saying I'll reject you outright. My station may have risen, but the fact that you are my master has not changed. However, I flatly refuse to be used as a food test subject. Of course I want to grow, so I will eat, but I will make my decision after seeing the food's condition. This is my obvious right."

Your right?" Ark laughed.

It seemed he was able to use quite difficult words because of his increased intelligence. What should he call this? It was very regrettable.

Why couldn't this guy remember what kind of owner his master was even though he'd become smarter than when he was Bat? That once Ark put his mind to stepping on someone, he didn't stop at a suitable level.

'It seems there is a need to clearly show the Familiars their subservient relationship with me.'

Ark quickly stood up and started to kick Dedric without warning.

Even if he did evolve, he was only about level 27; as he took Ark's kicks, his Health dropped steadily.

Dedric who rolled on the floor screamed in fright.

"Let's-let's talk! This is violence!"

"Didn't you know? I like violence."

"I-I'm a child! This is child abuse!"

"Even so, you've gotta get hit if you do something worth a beating. Wicked kids are a problem of society."

Ark kept stepping on him to the point that it seemed he was overdoing it. In the end, Dedric's Health hit rock bottom and was force recalled.

Skull's and Snake's eyes widened at Ark's sudden change in appearance.

Ark spoke while having soft smile.

Ark spoke with a soft smile. "Don't worry, you haven't done anything wrong. But ones who defy me just because they grew a bit will be beaten. Of course you guys are kind, this will never happen with you guys, right?"

Although he talked with smile, there was a cold atmosphere.

Skull and Snake immediately nodded.

Ark immersed himself in hunting with Skull like nothing happened. For witnessing Dedric's misery, Skull worked even harder in fights. If it felt Ark was in danger, it didn't even hesitate to become Ark's shield. It seemed Skull wanted to show Ark that it was different from Dedric.

Ark gave this Skull delicious food and was affectionate. But it was different for Dedric. Ark summoned Dedric after 24 hours had passed and stepped on him without saying a word.

"Waah, st-stop, I was wrong, I won't do it again!"

"Once a traitor, always a traitor."

After repeating this 3~4 times, Dedric got on to its hands and knees immediately to beg after being summoned.

"Wah, ma-master, I'm sorry! I lost my mind for a bit and just joked once!"

But Ark didn't even pretend to listen and stepped on him without mercy.

If you cut some slack to those who've wronged you once, they're sure to try and crawl all over you. Kids that have grown up without manners, are mostly like that because their parents are indecisive.

Just as pets might try to bite their master if not trained at an early age, when teaching manners you must make sure the seeds are sown deeply.

Ark was planning on stepping on him like this until they got out of the dungeon at the very least.

The Caretaker's Spirit

“Snake, pack them up.”

When Ark pointed to the items gathered at his feet, Snake extended its tongue and swallowed it all. The trash piles that were swept in with the torrent were fairly profitable. Various kinds of seaweed, Merpeople items, recovery potions, Pearls and other random drops. Thanks to that, the bag he had completely emptied in Nodelesse had become quite hefty.

An exceptional amount of monsters had been guarding the pile of junk, but now, even if 5 or 6 of the dungeon's monsters rushed him, he could easily defeat them.

The advantage of a Dark Walker's Dark attribute was the stat increases, which allowed him to pose to be a higher level than he actually was, and thanks to it, he could gain additional EXP from defeating monsters at least 5 levels higher than himself with the same amount of effort. The applied additional EXP was 10% per 5 levels. The monsters he encountered in Gallic's stomach were on average, 10 levels higher.

The additional EXP was a whopping 20%! To maximize the effect, Ark only slept for 2 hours a day and worked hard to level up. Thanks to this, Ark's level increased by another 10 in a week.

“Status window.”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +50		
Fame	520	Level	62

Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker		
Health	1,305	Mana	730 (+100)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	176
Agility	196 (+17)	Stamina	246
Wisdom	25	Intelligence	141
Luck	41	Flexibility	14
Art of Communication			18
Affection			18
Special Stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			35
Equipment Effects			
Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor: Agility 2, Frost Resistance +20 Cat Paws: Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit Rate +10% Crystal Golem's Head: Mana +100			
*All abilities will increase by 20% in the dark. * You have the ability to hide in the darkness (Duration time 10 minutes. Cancelled if you get into combat).			

* Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Charm spells is increased by 50%.

*You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

Thanks to steadily raising his Stamina, his Health was now over 1,300. With the 100 additional Mana from the Crystal Golem's Head, his Mana was 830! It was enough to use Dark Blade 8 times consecutively if he didn't use his Familiars.

Since his level passed 60, his hunting efficiency decreased because he was no longer able to receive 10% additional EXP.

"I didn't notice when the bonus was there, but when it disappeared, it doesn't seem like the experience is increasing. Well, since my level rose enough and the bag is almost full, it should be about time to start finishing the quest."

He still hadn't found a clue about the quest.

The White Whale's stomach was far more complicated than he expected. The long passageway was straight for the most part, but if he strayed a little it soon became a maze-like terrain. The phlegmy cell-like walls twisted and tangled, and there were places looking exactly alike no matter where he went. Some areas activated traps such as acid one from the stomach.

At first, everything was interesting, but after a week had passed, the dungeon covered in dark red flesh began to be stifling and suffocating.

'Anyway, I need to find the place where I can end the quest.'

Ark walked forward.

Ark could approximately guess where the place related to the quest was located.

He had thoroughly combed through the lair for a week, but the sole place Ark hadn't gone to was the lair of the Great Worms.

Ark had avoided fights with the worms to the best of his ability so

far. But now, Ark was also level 62. With the additional bonus of the darkness attribute, he was at a level where he can somehow fight them.

Ark passed through the narrow passageway and came to a wide area. In a plaza-like space covered in red membrane, scores of worms were squirming.

Ark took out his pot, boiled soup, and drank it.

Spicy Flavor Seafood Soup

Health +100, Attack and Defense increased by 20% for 30 minutes.

The Seafood Soup, which could only be made once Survival Cooking reached Intermediate, had the best effects out of all the food Ark learned. In addition, it didn't have the aftereffects that normally goes hand-in-hand with good effects. But it required relatively rare seaweed and shellfish, so he couldn't eat it often.

Energy rose after drinking the soup. After also feeding Skull, he lured the worms one by one.

Even though he'd raised his level and was even enjoying the effects of the soup, the worm felt as strong as ever.

If Dedric would turn into a bat and draw its attention, it'd be much easier. After fighting difficult enemies without him, Ark came to know how much of a big a help Dedric had been. But no matter how regrettable it was, he had no desire to use a Familiar who wouldn't listen. Dedric still needed to have his behavior corrected.

'Although its stats grew a lot while Dedric is being locked up...'

Skull had now grown to level 20, but its usefulness was still much lower compared to Dedric. Its movements were slower than Dedric, and it often ran about in confusion when the battle started because it wasn't smart. Moreover, its stats also rose in the wrong places, such as Wisdom or Luck, so its Stamina was low. If the opponent was the worm, it'd be hard for Skull to withstand one or two hits.

However, Skull had endless loyalty.

When Ark was in the worst-case scenario, Skull died for him without hesitation. Users actually don't feel pain when taking a hit. However, it was set so NPCs or monsters felt pain equal to reality and possessed fear of death.

It was the same reason why Dedric was getting beaten up by Ark and suffering. But no matter how well trained the pet or Familiar was, there were almost no cases where they would die in their master's place.

It was only possible because Skull was dull and had strong loyalty.

'Skull is my additional health.'

Skull's real role was to die for Ark in the worst situation.

Skull also understood its role. If Ark's Health fell below 10%, Skull went in front of him without any orders. Then, with his stats raised significantly by the Indomitable and Undying, Ark let loose a Counter Attack or Dark Blade at the worm and killed it.

Skull also barely endured one or two hits.

If the critical hit or Dark Blade missed by some chance, then Skull would be inevitably force recalled. However, thanks to the experience Ark had gained underwater, the precision of his techniques had risen enormously and skill failure was very low.

The first time is always difficult.

'The worm has strong attack power, but its attack method is a repetition of a simple pattern.'

After killing a few worms, he got the hang of it. He just barely won against the first two, but as he kept fighting, he had more Health left. Later, he was able to win with at least 30% Health left.

'If the worm was not a large monster, I could probably defeat two of them at once.'

A large monster had the ability to cancel many kinds of additional

effects with a high probability. If not for it , it would be possible to fight several of them with consecutive kicks and sword strikes, similar to what he did with the Crabs or Sharkmen.

Using the same method, all the worms were defeated in a span of half a day of hunting.

“You did well.”

As Ark patted his head, Skull rolled around to show its happiness. Skull became a more praiseworthy rascal in Ark’s eyes.

Even though he’d almost died a few times, if Ark patted it on the head once, it’d be completely okay. As Ark gazed proudly at Skull, Snake glared at Skull with a nasty look. It was something he’d found out just recently, but since Snake thought of Ark as its parent, it was especially prone to jealousy. If Ark favored another Familiar for even a moment, it would soon grow sulky, wrap itself around Ark, and behave annoyingly.

Well, though he’d gotten used to it now so it didn’t bother him as much...

In any case, after clearing the worms Ark began to really explore. Once he went to the opposite side, the entire space reverberated, going *boom, boom*.

“It’s the sound of a heartbeat. Is Gallic’s heart on the other side?”

Just then, Snake suddenly teared up and spat something out with a cough.

It was the Compass of the Sea Emperor.

The compass vibrated as it emitted light to match the sound of the heartbeat. Because of it, it seemed like Snake couldn’t endure it and spat it out.

“This is definitely the place where the quest will be solved. But where exactly do I need to go?”

No matter which direction he looked they were all blocked. Then all of a sudden, the passage from the crystal pillar came to mind.

If you want to see me then close both of your eyes.

‘If there’s some kind of trick here, then it’s definitely the hint.’

Ark stood still and closed his eyes.

As he did so, the sound ringing through the whole space gradually died down. Then at some point, the sound focused in one direction. As if the hand mirror was being led by the beating sound, it vibrated to one side.

‘Is it this way? But it’s blocked...’

Ark placed his hand on the wall and moved. Then the wall shrank away as if it was surprised and a path appeared.

It was also the same afterwards. As he moved along the path, he closed his eyes and stretched his hand towards the direction of the sound whenever he reached a dead-end. Then a path appeared on its own. After walking for a few minutes or so, a place flashing with scarlet light came to view.

In the center stood a stone statue in human form. It held an oval stone fragment in its hand. The stone fragment looked like it had been split somewhere, it had an aura so black that he could visually confirm it was being emitted.

“Found it. This is definitely the item she held and disappeared!”

When Ark quickly reached out towards the stone fragment—

The stone statue’s eyes flashed as it raised its head and let out a piercing scream.

“KYAAAAAAA!”

“Eh, wh-what?”

Spiderweb-like cracks spread on the stone statue. Then, as if it were erupting, it scattered all around and the sight of a jet-black figure emerged. As a whole, it looked similar to the Reaper he’d fought in the Shadow Forest.

It had an enormous body big enough to completely fill the space. A

demon with its eyes covered by a black cloth and draped in a black mantle. Behind it, black hair writhed all around like living snakes. Completely black, even the skin was as cracked as an old tree was black.

– Boss monster Adelaine has appeared!

Quest has been updated.

The Guardian Deity of the Merpeople, Gallic → Encroaching Darkness

At the end of your exploration of White Whale; Gallic's stomach, you have finally arrived at the destination. The source of the strength that filled Gallic's stomach with darkness and revived monsters as undead was at its heart.

It's certain the darkness caused Gallic to lose his mind. You must defeat the evil being Adelaine, born from the root of darkness, and return Gallic to normal.

Difficulty: +E

The quest was updated with the warning message.

The difficulty was a whopping +E!

'To think there'd be a boss monster even inside a whale's stomach!'

Suddenly, the drooping hair spread out like tentacles and closed in to attack Ark.

Ark quickly moved his feet to avoid a tentacle. He blocked it as if it were a Jellyfish's tentacle.

An electrifying fear scintillated through him. Even though he'd blocked it, his Health went down by 200.

“Eyes of the Cat!”

Adelaine’s health and level came up.

It was a monstrous 100 level boss monster.

Warning bells of an impending crisis flashed across inside Ark’s head.

“No way, I can’t win with my current level even if I were to die and revive again!”

If you don’t want to die, you have to accurately estimate the gap between you and your opponent’s strength in an exchange of blows.

Once the fight with the enemy started, it wouldn’t be easy to escape. Since one would have to take damage from two or three backstabs while running away with back turned. If one felt he had to run, the secret to surviving was to escape with a little extra Health left.

There was the definite level difference, but more importantly, if he suffered a chain attack from many tentacles, he’d only be able to endure for a few seconds.

Ark shouted as he spun around, “Skull, stop him!”

Pow-pow-pow!

Skull courageously leapt forward, but it was immediately recalled when it was struck by 3 tentacles. Ark had lost 200 Health because of this attack, but it also bought him a few seconds.

“Sorry, Skull. There was no other way.”

Ark held back the tears and madly ran to the exit.

Now there was no choice.

First he needed to get out of the exit and bide this time...

It would take a long time, but he could raise his level to 80 by hunting worms exclusively within the White Whale’s Labyrinth. With the darkness effect bonus, he might be able to fight Adelaine somehow.

Ark dodged the lashing tentacles and opened the exit by extending his hand.

But while he was running madly, the whole dungeon suddenly shook as a howl rang out from behind him. For looking behind, Ark's face paled.

Adelaine screeched as it swung its tentacles towards the wall.

Every time it did so, the flesh of the wall fell in clumps.

The shaking of the labyrinth was due to Gallic being unable to endure the pain and ran amok. But there wasn't enough time to feel sorry for Gallic's pain.

Destroying the walls with monstrous strength, Adelaine was closing in on Ark. Adelaine was truly the manifestation of horror itself.

'Holy shit, it's moving really fast...!'

Every time the tentacles whooshed in with the sound of the wind and grazed the back of his head, Ark's hair stood on its end.

'Dammit, I thought it wouldn't follow me if I got out of the heart!'

He was mistaken. Adelaine intended to follow him to no end.

Ark estimated that even if Adelaine followed him, its gigantic body would be slowed down by the walls.

If he took that chance to completely break away from its view and put a some hundred meters between them, the in-combat state would be cancelled. Then he intended to hide with 'Stealth'. But rather than breaking free, Adelaine was actually closing the distance while destroying the walls and chasing him.

It was as if a message of despair was popping up before his eyes.

'Dammit, am I going to die like this?'

Stat loss! In addition, he had to explore the dungeon from the beginning. But that wasn't all! Dying against a boss monster increased the probability of dropping equipment items. And monsters also picked up items if they saw them.

What if he dropped Lancel's Sword and Adelaine picked it up? The result would be him having to use a crappy sword until he defeats Adelaine.

'No way! Even if I die, I'm going to run until the very end! Let's see how far you'll follow!'

Ark ran through the heaving Gallic's stomach without rest.

Just then, something flashed across his mind as he passed a fork in the path.

'Wait, this way has always been... of course! Maybe with this method...?'

Ark, who had combed through the labyrinth's terrain, realized a hidden method to turn the tide.

'Would something like that be possible? No, whether it's possible or not isn't important. The only thing I can do right now is to bet everything on this method!'

Ark stopped abruptly and twisted his body.

Adelaine quickly swung its tentacle.

Ark dodged the tentacle and ran towards Adelaine. Then, when he was up in front of its nose, he rolled on the ground. As the tentacle grazed his side, he received enormous damage. However, Ark didn't fight back.

Ark sprang up and passed Adelaine, then ran in the opposite direction. Then he leapt into the fork he'd passed earlier. It was a plaza filled with ankle-deep water.

Ark stepped over the piles of trash strewn around as he moved to the center of the plaza, then turned around. Adelaine was pounding into the plaza.

Ark grinned as he muttered, "Now, let's see if I die or you die."

"KYAAAAAK!"

Adelaine ran in shrieking, but stopped. When its feet touched the

surface, acrid smoke rose with a hiss. Too late, Adelaine realized it was in some kind of danger and tried to back away. But Ark wasn't going to let it escape for he had lured it in with such difficulty.

"Getting in is easy but it's not so easy to get out. Snake, Shield!"

As if Snake had been waiting, it spat out a tattered shield.

It was the crappy Shell Shield he'd found in a trash pile. But right now, this shield was his only lifeline.

Ark took the shield and positioned it above his head like an umbrella, then swung at the wall with his sword. The space rocked wildly, closing the entrance and exit. Adelaine screeched in confusion as it flailed its tentacles, but it just blocked the entrance more solidly each time it did.

Simultaneously, a shower rained down from above their heads.

KWAAAA!

— Shield's durability has dropped by 10!

— You took acid poison damage. Damage 50!

When the shower came down, it pierced holes on the shield. Even if a small droplet dripped onto him, his Health dropped steadily.

It was an obvious result. The liquid raining down like a shower was stomach acid!

The place Ark had entered was no other than Gallic's stomach.

Once Ark stimulated the stomach, the surprised sphincter blocked the entrance and exit, pouring down acid.

'I'll be in for it if it doesn't die. Either we die together, or you die alone!'

Adelaine was directly covered in the acid shower.

Its swaying mantle was covered with holes, and tentacles were also breaking off strand by strand. Adelaine thrashed about madly, once its Health has decreased to about 50%, it approached Ark. However, with each step it took, a malodorous smelling steam rose as Adelaine's Health dropped.

It certainly wasn't a relaxing situation for Ark.

"Restoration magic! Restoration magic! Restoration magic!"

Ark repaired the shield without rest as he drank recovery potions. Even so, his Health dropped steadily.

'From now on I'll fight patiently!'

By the time Adelaine crossed the stomach and reached Ark, it already had less than 10% of its Health left.

Adelaine shrieked in rage as it raised its tattered arm.

Ark used his trump card.

"Summon Familiar, Dedric!"

"Ack! Ma-master?"

Dedric let out a confused screech as he was summoned.

"Ma-master, please forgive..."

"Shut up and do everything you can to block that guy. If you do a good job then I'll forgive you!"

"Huh? Really?"

Without even knowing what was going on, Dedric replied with an emotional face. Then he immediately turned into a Bat and rammed himself into Adelaine's face.

But Dedric was forcefully recalled after just a few seconds of being baptized in acid.

"Arghh, it's hot... Master... you... promised."

It was a brave end.

Deric's sacrifice had an effect. When Dedric rushed in Adelaine's hand slipped to the side. Although Ark lost some health he was able to avoid a direct hit.

Ark flipped the shield over his back like a turtle and jumped up.

"Dark Blade!"

The magic sword released a Dark Blade.

With a violent noise, he landed a critical hit. At the same time, a golden opportunity appeared. In tatters from the acid, Adelaine stumbled as it fell to one knee and allowed a Double Critical Chance. Without delay, Ark cast Dark Blade.

— With Double Critical Chance, you have landed critical hit 2x.

— You have levelled up.

As Adelaine's throat gaped open, a black light burst out. Since he defeated a level 100 boss monster, Ark instantly levelled up to level 64.

Streams of black light poured out for a while, then Adelaine's body began to shrink ceaselessly. Then finally, it shrank to a size similar to Ark. A hazy grey light gathered in the form of a female Mermaid. The female Mermaid stretched out a trembling arm as it whispered in a weak voice.

— ...Christin...

Slowly, the acid rain stopped.

* * *

Ark stared at the female Mermaid with a stupefied face. He had toppled the boss monster, but the item which was supposed to drop didn't and something else had appeared instead.

Just in case, Ark widened the distance and scrutinized the female Mermaid.

— Christin, Christin, it's you, right?

The female Mermaid's hands fumbled around her as if she was blind while she was weeping.

— Why? Why don't you call my name? Why don't you hold my hand? Have you forgotten me? Is that it? I waited for you. I've waited for you as I cried until my eyes could no longer see. Christin... please...

The female Mermaid bowed her head as she sobbed.

— You've become angry with me, haven't you? Right? You've become angry because I tricked you, right? I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I... knew you would return. I thought you would return if I did that. You can't forgive me after all? Is that it?

Suddenly, the hand mirror on his chest buzzed as it vibrated. Once he took it out, light poured out, reflecting the inflamed red stomach lining, and started to show a cutscene.

There was the man he'd seen in the pillar. There was also a Mermaid.

The man was agonized because the world was being encroached by darkness.

The power of darkness was enveloping the world had not yet reached Nodelesse. The land was covered in the flames of war, but Nodellese was as peaceful as it had always been.

Because of this, he was even more agonized. He was ashamed he was looking away from the world's suffering. And he knew that one day, even beautiful Nodelesse would be stained in darkness.

In the end, the man stood.

He had decided to devote his life to stopping the great evil that was covering the world. The man explained his feelings to the one he loved for a long time.

His lover understood him, it was all she could do. Because they were the words of the one she loved.

But she didn't accept it.

The lover stayed up on the last night, stole one of the man's treasures, and hid it. She believed if she hid it, the man would eventually give up and return again.

But the man did not return. Even though 10 years passed as time flowed on and the force of darkness was eliminated, the man still did not return.

The woman finally regretted it.

The despair of having to wait for the lover who did not return changed her. Her hair fell and her skin cracked like an old tree.

The never-ending tears even robbed her of her sight. And finally, her end came to her too. Knowing her nearing end, she entrusted her body to Gallic, her soul-companion.

So even if she died, the man's treasure would be protected...

It was the only thing she could do as atonement.

After imprisoning herself, she spent a long time regretting and regretting some more, and atoning, atoning.

Ark felt her emotions far too strongly.

The hand mirror even conveyed her emotions. But it wasn't the only reason.

Why wouldn't he understand the longing, loneliness, and pain for a lost one? Ark had experienced the same thing, after all.

5 years ago when his father passed away, he felt the same indescribable pain.

Even more if it had happened because of his mistake...

The wounded soul trembled as it wept.

— I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Ark lowered his shield and walked toward her.

What could he do? What could he do for her?

His heart was filled with sympathy. She was a girl who was turned into an evil spirit while waiting for her lover. Once the evil spirit's mask was taken off, there was simply a miserable lover looking for forgiveness.

Having received her emotions, Ark cried as he grasped her hand.

"Adelaine... you've done nothing wrong. That's how love is. It can only be beautiful because it is so very selfish. That is love, and it is the same kind of love I shared with you. No one will be able to blame you and neither will I. I will not forgive you because I've never hated you..."

— Christin...

Adelaine's eyes trembled.

It was then.

Suddenly, her grey form was enveloped in white light, and she slowly changed into a younger body.

It was the appearance of the beautiful Mermaid he had seen in the hand mirror and pillar.

She gazed at Ark with a bewitching smile, then approached like the spring breeze and lightly kissed him.

‘Does Adelaine know I’m not her lover?’

As he received the kiss he instinctively thought as such.

But she just revealed an ambiguous smile as she slowly disappeared.

Miracle Nursing has succeeded.

Through sorrow that arose from sincerity, you aided a fallen soul. People with bodily pains are not the only patients. Patients who truly need someone’s hand are people who know an illness of the heart. An illness of the heart is a terrifying sickness that corrupts the soul.

An illness of the body can be treated with medicine, but an illness of the heart can only be treated by a person who understands.

Sometimes, just one word of comfort can demonstrate a miraculous strength no magic can replicate. With your sincere words of comfort, Adelaine’s heart has now found peace, and she can be with the person she loves.

*For succeeding in Miracle Nursing, all your stats has increased by 1.

*Affection has increased by 10.

*Fame has increased by 50.

*Your alignment to Good has increased by 50.

Since you’ve succeeded in Miracle Nursing, your title has been elevated to ‘Soul Caretaker.’

Your fame as a caretaker has increased and you will come to receive the praises of many of the sick.

*As a title-related bonus, all stats increase by 1 each.

*Fame increases by 50

A stone fragment and necklace fell at the spot where Adelaine had disappeared.

Mysterious Stone Fragment Infused with Ancient Power

It is a mysterious stone that emits a dark energy from its surface.

You can check it once Knowledge of Ancient Artifacts becomes level 50. Until it is checked, the owner will suffer a -50% penalty to all stats.

Adelaine's Necklace (Rare)

Item type: Necklace

Restriction: Level 70

A necklace used by Adelaine, it is a simple pearl necklace. However, it responded to the Adelaine's affection as she prayed for her loved one's safety and came to possess a magical power.

Effect: Defense increased by 30, Affection increased by 5.

Special Effect: Once a day, you can use the ocean's blessing to raise defense by 40%.

'It's a R-rare item! And an accessory!'

Users who hadn't been able to put on a single ring even at level 100

were among the majority. Accessories were extremely precious, moreover, if it was Rare then it was an item hard to find even in an auction.

He had been very expectant since he'd defeated a level 100 boss monster in a hidden dungeon, but this was truly above his expectations.

The penalty imposed on the owner of the Stone Fragment wasn't a problem. Once he put it in Snake's belly, it didn't affect Ark.

As Ark drooled while grabbing the items, a humming voice rang in the space.

— Thank you. Adventurer.

“Huh? Wh-who?”

— I am the owner of the body you are inside of.

“Body? Then, perhaps White Whale Gallic?”

— That is my name.

“Haven't you gone insane?”

— I was insane. However, when you purified Adelaine, I came to my senses. Adelaine is my long-time companion. She spent hundreds of years inside me as she waited for someone who would not return. Her body died long ago, but her mind remained and waited for him. However, that was the problem.

Gallic let out a big sigh and said in a bitter voice.

— Dark energy lies in the object she stole. It does not exert very

much influence on a living being, but it is fatal to a soul. In addition, she was wrought with guilt over having betrayed him. Her guilt was as strong as her love. Because of it, she was consumed by the dark force the stone emanated. And I, who shared a spiritual bond with her, was also assimilated into that darkness, thus I lost my senses.

“Someone who would not return? What do you mean?”

– Actually, he died before Adelaine came into me.

“What? Then why didn’t you tell her?”

– She also knew. Even though I did not like knowing, she came to know it. However, she did not acknowledge it. She drew her last breath, and her soul believed he would return. That is love.

Although he was just a whale he was talking about all sort of things.

In any case, after listening to his words, Ark felt even more sorry for Adelaine. As Ark lowered his head with a melancholic expression, the white whale spoke in a loud voice.

– Raise your head with pride. Adventurer! Straighten your shoulders! You have freed a lover from the pain she suffered for hundreds of years. Where could you find a more praiseworthy deed for a man?!

RUUUUUMBLE!

The space suddenly shook and an enormous amount of sea water rushed into the stomach. Unable to prepare the Sharkman’s Shackles, Ark was swept by the torrent in the space of a single breath and sucked into somewhere. In the next moment, he was launched up by an incredible force.

At the same time it became bright before his eyes, and he could see the blue sky.

“Blechh, bleeech!”

From his mouth came the sound of Ark trying to draw breath in vain.

Ark surged into the sky riding the plume of water that was bursting from Gallic’s blowhole. He saw the blue sky illuminated with sunshine and the ocean stretching endlessly underneath him all at once.

He saw the White Whale’s back as it surged above the sea like a mountain range. It was a magical and beautiful spectacle.

* * *

“So that’s what happened.”

The Mermaid Queen nodded.

Ark returned to Nodelesse with the White Whale. When he conveyed the tangled truth about Adelaine, the Mermaids received a considerable shock.

Since everything they had believed as the truth originated from misconceptions, it wasn’t easy for them to acknowledge it.

However, they couldn’t help but believe the words of Gallic, who had witnessed the very truth himself.

“Your courage and love, which just looked foolhardy, have brought about a good result in the end. All Merpeople should feel ashamed for misunderstanding and hating the Meow all this time from a hasty judgement.”

‘Eh? Meow? What is this absurdity?’

Until now, he had never once heard of the Meow from the Merpeople. But why did this term suddenly pop up after everything had been settled?

As Ark made a confused expression, the Queen asked as if she was surprised, “Didn’t you know?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Christin was the hero of the Meow. They also call him Hero Maban.”

“Hero Maban?” Ark was shocked.

Dark Walker was Hero Maban’s initial profession. Because of this, ever since his job-change, Ark had been examining tons of data to try and find information about Hero Maban.

All of New World’s professions had a related hero. If you found information about that hero, there were many cases where you earned a linked quest. It was an essential quest that granted items, skills, or stats matching the profession.

But Ark hadn’t been able to find any information yet and had half given up. But to think the hand mirror quest was a quest related to the Hero Maban!

‘That’s right, why didn’t I think of that? Debra desired the power of Hero Maban. Then the item he dropped could be hiding a secret to earning Hero Maban’s strength. And Merpeople are also related to beasts in the end.’

At last all the clues came together in his mind, though it was meaningless since everything was already over...

“Now he is called Hero Maban, but back then he was just a Meow boy. Because of that, many Merpeople opposed the former Mermaid Queen’s love. Before then, the Meow and the Merpeople did not have a good relationship.”

‘No wonder. At the heart of it, it was the relationship between a cat and a fish?’

“And then he eventually left Nodelesse, and the former Queen hid herself while longing for him. Gallic also went crazy as a result, and in the end the Merpeople who hated Chrstin from the beginning pinned all the blame on him and became sworn enemies of the Meow. All of the Beasts saw Hero Maban as the savior, but the Merpeople did not acknowledge it. Though that was all hundreds of years ago...”

“Will the misunderstanding clear now?”

“Yes, your effort has resolved all misunderstandings. I will represent the Merpeople and send an ambassador to the Meow to apologize for the wrongs so far. I do not doubt the era of hostility will end, and an era of harmony and peace will come.” Queen smiled and nodded.

“Also we will not forget the favor you have done for us. You have returned our patron guardian Gallic to us. You have done what no one, let alone a Merperson was able to do. As the hero of the Merpeople, I give you our most heartfelt thanks.”

The Mermaid Queen approached and gave Ark a kiss. At Ark’s embarrassment, the Mermaid Queen laughed softly as she spoke, “This is the sign of thanks Merpeople convey to someone who has become a true friend.”

‘Ah, so she does know.’

Ark remembered Adelaine’s last kiss and let out a bitter smile.

“You are the most heroic friend and benefactor of the mermaids. I, the Queen of the Merpeople, do so vow. Just as you have sacrificed for the Merpeople, and we promise to help with all our strength when you are in need.”

“For the benefactor!” The Merpeople pulled out their swords and raised them as they shouted.

— The Encroaching Darkness quest has been completed.
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When the quest was completed, his level rose by 1 and became 65.

But Ark was restless.

The process of the story was progressing similar to the quest with the young Lord of Jackson. The story of them becoming friends and what not, and sending him right off without a single reward!

But Ark’s worry was baseless.

Perhaps because she was a Queen in name, she was quite different

from the young Lord.

“This is the small gift we have prepared to thank you for your work.”

The Mermaid Queen gave him an armor made out of transparent scale.

Guardian Armor of Merpeople (Magic)			
Armor Type	Leather Armor		
Defense	80	Durability	100
Weight	35	Usage Restriction	Level 60
<p>Guardian armor, only Warriors who has received the recognition of the Merpeople can equip. Legends say it is made from the scales of a Sea Dragon. It is a light and soft material, so one can move with great ease. In addition, anyone who equips this armor will not receive any water-related damage or penalties.</p> <p>Option: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.</p>			

Ark's eyes became as wide as a cauldron lid.

Although all the options were related to water, it still had a whopping defense of 80. It was double the defense of the Black Bear Mouse leather armor he was using now! Though it was a Magic item, it was Rare-class considering the defense.

It was a leather armor, but it had a much higher defense than the level 40 plated armor he'd taken from Andel.

The one thing that bothered him was the durability, it couldn't be repaired with normal methods.

‘Che, if it wasn’t for that I could have sold it at rare item price.’

“There is one more thing I would like to ask from you.”

“If it is for the Merpeople I would be willing to do anything.” Ark perked his ears and quickly nodded.

“Since we have lived in isolation for too long, there is no one among the Merpeople who knows the outside world. Therefore, if possible, we would like you to go to the Meow as the ambassador of the Merpeople and convey our apologies.”

Envoy of the Merpeople
The Queen of the Merpeople regrets the past mistakes and wishes to reconcile with the Meow. For you who has high Intimacy with both the Merpeople and Meow, you should be able to easily reconcile the two races. Difficulty: G Quest Requirement: Meow and Mermaid intimacy must be over 70%.

Although there was a quest requirement, the difficulty was G. It didn’t really seem like a quest that would yield money.

But Ark always welcomes a quest.

“I understand.”

“However, I do not know if you will be able to meet them. According to the rumors that have floated through the ocean, it has also been a while since they hid themselves on land...”

“If that’s what you’re concerned about, there’s no need to worry.” Ark laughed as he interrupted her. Then he told the tale of how he saved the Meow in the ruins and obtained the title of ‘Cat Knight’.

“If I go the Meow will forgive the past misunderstanding.”

“No way, to think you’d have such a relationship with the Meow... I see. Now I can understand why you were able to find Nodelesse and free Queen Adelaine from her fetters. He... in the end, he kept his promise with Queen Adelaine to return.”

“Perhaps he did.”

“Then it would be good for you, the Seeker of Truth, to keep the stone Queen Adelaine protected so precious. There’s no way to check, but if the idea I’ve formed after hearing your explanation is right, I think it is one of the Three Marvels of Hero Maban told in legend.”

“Three Marvels?”

“They are the three treasures and they are the root of Hero Maban’s strength. They disappeared with Hero Maban, so their whereabouts are currently unknown. But I’ve heard the rumor that one of them was left in the underground world Hero Maban visited last.”

‘It’s quest information for the next profession!’

Ark immediately asked, “Where is the underground world?”

“No one knows. They are Beasts like us, but before the Dark Age, the residents of the underground world lived disconnected from the outside. They are a race completely shrouded in a veil. Among the Beasts, the only person who communicated with them was Hero Maban.”

In the end, he had to find out himself. They were disappointing words, but at least he had a clue.

“Now, please come outside— everyone will want to see the face of the hero.”

Queen led Ark outside.

Once he came out of the castle, countless Merpeople of Nodelesse burst out in a cheer. Once he passed the square filled with Merpeople, he was covered in a flurry of kisses everywhere.

He could handle the female Mermaids’ kisses, but it was really hard

to withstand kisses from the burly Mermen and grey bearded elderly.

When they got out of the square and reached the entrance of Nodelesse, the Queen said, “Since Gallic has returned, the Merpeople will traverse the ocean again for the first time in hundreds of years and return to our native land. Since it is the far side of the endless ocean, even if it’s you, we won’t be able to meet again for a while, but the Merpeople will definitely return here again. Until that time, please take this.”

Queen handed him a small flute.

Flute of the Merpeople (Special)

A flute that calls friends of the Merpeople. You can use it anywhere at sea.

When Ark took the flute and moved a few steps, all of Nodelesse shook. Then, as if there was an earthquake, the ground cracked as the whole city rose. The gigantic White Whale Gallic hefted all of Nodelesse and was rising.

Gallic rolled his building-like eyes to gaze at Ark and let out a roar that resounded through the ocean. Then he raised a tsunami-like current as he cut through the ocean.

The colorful underwater city Nodelesse slowly got further. After settling its dark history, it was leaving to find its home after hundreds of years.

‘Haa, for some reason I feel empty.’

Ark stared at Nodelesse blankly until it was completely out of sight.

It was a place where many things had happened. But although it was regretful, he couldn’t go with them either, and a new adventure, even more EXP, and items were waiting for Ark on land!

Ark blew on the Flute of the Merpeople.

Since he was underwater, there was no way sound would come out.

But after a few seconds, a school of dozens of dolphins approached while cutting through the currents. The dolphins lowered themselves and extended their backs as if they were telling him to ride.

Once Ark got on, the dolphins surged to the surface at an incredible speed. Scores of dolphins raised a spray as they sprang above the surface. And like a surfboard, they began to speed towards the shore.

Although he had walked for days to get to Nodelesse, by riding on the dolphins it didn't even take 30 minutes. From afar, he saw the sight of the lovely shore.

Battle of the Grey Ridge

“Do you know you’ve committed a sin worthy of death?”

“Yes, I’ve really reflected a lot on it. Something was wrong with my head when I suddenly rose to success after spending my earlier days so deprived. If you would just give me one more chance...”

“And to whom do you owe your success to?”

“Of course, it’s thanks to Master. I was impudent without knowing your grace.”

Dedric shed large drops of tears.

‘Look at the rascal.’ Ark laughed to himself.

Ark had lived while unwillingly receiving affected sympathy from many people. Thanks to that, he gained an unwelcome ability; by simply looking at the other person’s eyes, he could tell if the words coming from their mouth were sincere or not.

Dedric’s words were not sincere.

He was just an NPC, but he knew how to cunningly trick someone.

‘It seems I shouldn’t have thoughtlessly evolved him.’

Bat also had a bad personality, but he wasn’t cunning. After evolving into Dedric, he learned how to be crafty. It meant ego also increases with each evolution. He wasn’t sincere, but it seemed Dedric had yielded this time. However, there was no guarantee it would be this easy if it happens again.

Skull was the same. Though it was a faithful Familiar now, there was no way of telling how it would change when it evolved.

‘Summons are also intelligent beings.’

This incident changed how Ark viewed his Familiars.

Each Familiar had a different personality. Even so, Ark tried to treat the Familiars equally. He didn't favor one and neglect the others. That was the problem.

'Seems like I have to use control; the carrot and stick approach.'

Just as there are fellows who do better if you praise them, there are those who get cocky. In addition, there are those who perform properly only with the use of violence and threats.

Granted, even a good medicine can be counterproductive if overdosed, he would need to regulate it.

This was why Ark had beaten Dedric to the point where it seemed overboard. Even the highly loyal Skull or Snake might change personalities one day. To prepare for that day, he set an example with Dedric. In other words, Dedric had been severely punished because he was unfortunately chosen to set an example.

'Whew, it isn't easy taking care of 3 Familiars. I think I can finally understand how hard it is for teachers who have to teach dozens.'

"Alright, since you contributed, I'll forgive you this time as promised."
"Ahh! Thank you, Master."

"Repeat after me, vow one!"

"What?" Dedric tilted his head but quickly raised his hand when Ark pierced him with a glare.

"Vow one!"

"I will always obey Master no matter the situation. I will always serve him with a smiling face, fight when told to fight, and die when told to die. My life and death only belong to Master."

"Vow two!"

"I will gratefully accept and eat the food given by Master. Also, I will never complain."

"Vow three!"

"If I cannot follow the previous two vows, I will soundly receive some form of punishment."

Dedric's face paled at the continuing Familiar doctrine.

"You've memorized it all, right?"

"Yes..."

"Good, then return to the Netherworld and stay there and write an apology letter until I call you again."

Dedric returned to the Netherworld looking as if he'd stepped in poop.

With this, the coup d'état that started with the evolution was hopelessly suppressed. In addition, he even formed a slave contract.

The Child Protection Agency or the Animal Welfare Organization would be appalled if they knew about this. But this was a game, and Ark was truly a dictator.

* * *

Not far from the shore where the dolphins dropped him off, Ark saw a village. It was a bustling village, with quite a lot of users coming in and out. Snake wasn't a problem since it was disguised as a belt as usual, but Skull or Bat would attract a lot of attention from the users, so they were no good. After sending the Familiars back, Ark walked towards the village.

'Huhuhu, how long has it been?' As he headed to the village, Ark had a delighted smile on his face.

The store in Nodeless didn't purchase the items he'd obtained in the ocean. Thanks to that, his bag and, of course, Snake, were chock full of items from the ocean. Since his Magic Restoration reached Intermediate, all the items had 100% durability. Still, though they were rare, they were still japtem. They couldn't be sold for a lot of money.

There was something else that made Ark feel good. It was the bag of pearls he earned in Nodelesse. He had earned a colossal amount of at least 800 pearls from item sales, his food stall, and repairs. Although it was a low-class jewel compared to others, it was still a jewel. So, how could he not be happy!?

After entering the village, Ark immediately sought out the General Store.

“Welcome! What can I do for you?” A pleasant-faced store owner greeted Ark.

“I wish to sell all these things. How much would you give me?”

As Ark took out the mountainous pile of japtem, the owner’s mouth opened wide. There was leather from all sorts of marines monsters, coral, and underwater equipment. Even though they were japtem, they were items hard to see on land.

The store owner calculated the prices one by one and proposed an amount. “For all of it, it’s 34 Gold. You won’t find a better price anywhere else nearby.”

The market value wasn’t bad.

‘If it’s this much, I won’t make a loss even if I sell the pearls.’ Ark nodded as he held out the pearls. “How much can you give me for this?”

“Ohh, these are pretty good quality pearls, and there’s 800 of them... Where did you get them from?”

“I can’t give you the specifics.”

“Well, there’s no need for me to know.”

The store owner carefully inspected the pearls and flicked the beads on an abacus.

“I’ll pay 25 Silver a piece. So in total, it’ll be 200 Gold.”

A look of slight disappointment spread across Ark’s face. He had expected 300 Gold; it was 100 Gold short.

‘Should I just go to Harun or Jackson to sell them?’

If he were to go back to Harun or Jackson, where he had high Intimacy, he could get the expected 300 Gold, but it would take a full week to return to Jackson. The monsters he would encounter while going were only level 40, so a round trip meant he had to give up on

a fortnight's worth of EXP.

100 Gold or a fortnight of experience. There was no contest.

'I'll have to go sometime because of the 'Envoy of the Merpeople' quest, but I don't have time to do that right now. Since I've come this far, I have to at least visit a few cities. It's regretful, but it's better to just sell them.'

"Ah!"

At that moment, a user looking at goods in the shop saw Ark and made a shocked expression. Then, with a somewhat angered voice, he pulled Ark by the arm and said, "How could you sell the items without even consulting me? Even if you do sell, you have to sell it after settling the problem of distribution first. Mister, we'll return a little later."

[T/N: The other user is pretending Ark is his party member, which is why he's offended Ark would try to sell the items without figuring out who gets what first.]

"You do that."

Ark who was dragged out without being able to say anything, freed his arm.

"Who are you? I think you have the wrong person."

"Ah, I'm sorry. You were surprised because I suddenly butted in, huh?"

The man was a Hobbit. He was short and had rounded ears. Since he was covered with many bags, he looked like he was a Merchant. Actually, Ark had let himself be dragged out without a word because he thought it might be some kind of event. But after coming out, the manner of speech and behavior showed he wasn't an NPC.

"They call me Sid. As you can see, I'm a Hobbit Merchant."

"I'm Ark, but, do you know me?"

"Nope, this is the first time we've met. But it was a pity to watch you, so I intervened."

“What do you mean by a pity?”

“This village’s store is famous in the area for having a low market value. The more you sell, the more you lose. Earlier, you figured the japtem you were selling was at market price, but you can’t find out the true market value like that. If items with high and low values are mixed, there are lots of times when you feel it’s generally an alright deal since the sum is similar to what you expect on average. Plus, the value of pearls is low because this village is close to the seaside. If you take them to a city two days away from here and sell, you’ll get about 40 Silver a piece.”

“40 Silver a piece! Is that true?”

Didn’t it mean he could get a whole 120 Gold more just by investing two days into travelling? Cold sweat ran down his back. He had been about to squander 120 Gold from a momentary mistake.

“Of course, and if I help you a bit, there’s a way to earn another 48 Gold or so.” Sid laughed as he implied more profit.

At this point, Ark was more wary than surprised.

“There’s no such thing as ‘free’ in this world though?”

“Of course, it’s give and take. There is something I want. Don’t you want to hear the details?”

The profession of Merchant was rather vague. Merchant was the sole profession who could carry 6 bags. In addition, they were able to learn all sorts of production skills, and they received a considerable bonus when dealing with NPCs. Even if their Intimacy was at rock bottom, they could gain a 20% profit from buying and selling with high trading ability. Thanks to that, they could grasp a fair amount of money from their beginning days.

The problem was combat. Since they carry a lot of luggage, they didn’t have a single combat-related skill, and even received a huge penalty in combat. Even if they were over level 50, defeating a single level 20 monster on their own was too much. Additionally, the EXP they could get from defeating a monster was only 50%.

A Merchant raises their level through trading. They use the market

prices of goods between various village and cities. They sell goods they bought at a cheap price in a place where it has a higher market value. This was the basic growth method of a Merchant.

Of course, they couldn't raise the EXP and earn money simply by trading, because the market prices constantly changes. For a Merchant, information is their lifeline. If they weren't able to constantly keep their ears open and accurately predict the market value, they would suffer sorely. Even if they traded successfully, there were cases where they actually succumbed to bankruptcy. It was a complex profession, in its own way. It was hard to raise, but the growth factor had its own kind of fun.

They traded while carrying bags in the beginning, but, later, they could buy a wagon or a merchant ship to ferry more trade goods. Moreover, they could ply the top ranks and take the lead in trade between Kingdoms.

The larger a single transaction, farther they go, and more they trade while passing through more dangerous places, the greater the EXP and skill proficiency they can gain.

However, New World was a place with poor public safety. The travels of a Merchant, with their nonexistent combat ability, was an adventure gambling their life and fortune. If they encountered a powerful thief monster while traveling, they would suffer a huge loss. If it was really bad, they would even have to declare bankruptcy. Therefore, they needed to hire mercenary NPCs or high-leveled users as guards for long distances. This was also what Sid proposed to Ark.

"Giran, a commerce city, is two days away from this village. It's like a capital for Merchants and production-class users. And the pearls you have, Ark-nim, are a material greatly sought by production-class users. Many Beginner and Intermediate production items require pearls, you see. Of course, since the supply is always insufficient at Giran, the market price is at its highest. Honestly, if I could afford it, it's to the point that I'd want to buy them right away."

"Basically, you're asking me to escort you to Giran?"

As Ark Made an unreadable expression, Sid quickly added, “You definitely won’t regret it. I have the skill to trade jewels, so if I trade in your place, I can get 15% more. Considering the market price of pearls in is 40 Silver, then the current total is 320 Gold. 15% on 320 Gold is 48 Gold. So, in conclusion, you can make 168 more Gold than the store from earlier. If I also sell the japtem, you can receive a bit more. It’s good for me, since I’ll raise my EXP, and Ark-nim gets to make more money.”

‘168 Gold.’

Though he didn’t use Eyes of the Cat, Ark’s eyes glowed golden. He could earn an additional 168 Gold by investing two days of in-game time, 16 hours.

Although he made a rule of not trusting users, it was a different story for this much profit. 168 Gold was 1,680,000 won. It wasn’t an amount he could easily ignore when living a life that required even a single penny more. Moreover, he’d already been thinking of looking for the surrounding cities anyway. If he went with Sid, who knew the road, he could cut down the time.

However, Ark still felt uneasy about readily accepting. Reselling the pearls, didn’t that actually mean Ark would have to hand over all the pearls to him? How could he trust him and hand over the pearls?

As if he knew what Ark was thinking, Sid laughed as he pulled out parchment and a pen. Then, when he wrote a few things down and passed it to Ark, a new information window popped up.

Merchant’s Contract
<p>This is the contract for recording when a Merchant’s profession specialty skill is used for the business of re-selling, exchanging, or acting as the proxy of another user.</p> <p>If you sign the contract, the Merchant will be validated to make deals, has the right to act as the proxy for the other user’s business, and is obligated to return the promised sum. If the Merchant violates the contract, the Merchant Guild will be alerted,</p>

the Merchant's reliability stat and fame will plummet, and you can charge twice as much as the contracted amount. When the contract is complete, the contract will be automatically discarded.

Contract Contents: Resale of Ark's pearls, the contract will come into effect the moment the pearls are handed to Sid in Giran. Sid must give all the money obtained from the sale of pearls to Ark.

"Now, you can believe me with this, eh?"

A contract can be set up from a normal trade to a loan, bill, special trade, or almost any situation. It was like a document certifying that if there was a problem by any chance, all the responsibility would fall on the Merchant. The reason Merchants had high reliability from other users was exactly thanks to this unique contract skill.

'Definitely... if there's a contract like this, there won't be any chance of getting backstabbed.'

"Okay, I'll accompany you."

"Great choice. Since you were able to obtain so many pearls, you should be over level 60, right?"

"I'm level 65."

"That's acceptable. Since we've finally gotten 3 people, we can be on our way."

"Huh? There are other companions?"

"There are two ways to get to Giran. The long way would take about 3 to 4 days. But if we want to get there in 2 days time, the only way is to cross Grey Ridge. However, high level monsters like Trolls and Stalkers are camped out on Grey Ridge, so we need 3 level 60 players."

"But I'm..."

"The other people are waiting at the inn. Let's go, I will introduce them to you."

Sid dragged Ark to the inn without giving him any time to say a word. Two men, named Leo and Hargen, were sitting in the inn. Seeing as they were wearing plate armor, both seemed to be in combat-related professions.

Once Sid introduced Ark, they expressed looks of obvious dislike.

“Sid-nim, you didn’t mention your intent to find another companion.”

“We can pass the Grey Mountains with just the two of us.”

“I’m sorry. We met by chance inside the store, so we decided to go together. I know the two of you are enough, but as I’ve said before, I have a reason to get to Giran as soon as possible. Three is faster than two.”

“And the escort fee?” asked Hargen, who had an axe tattoo on his face, as he glanced at Ark.

“I will pay the escort fee we first agreed upon, since Ark-nim is also going to Giran with the intent to sell goods. I decided to make the sale on his behalf as payment in exchange for escorting me.”

“What did you agree to sell for him that would substitute for the escort fee?”

“Pearls. Perhaps because he wasn’t able to visit a village for long time, he collected quite a lot.”

Sid was boundlessly talkative. Whether it was in-game or real life, there are many humans who will cluster if it seems like you have some money. As expected, as soon as they heard Ark had items worth quite a sum, the two warriors examined Ark with gummy eyes.

Though their appearances were unlikable, their actions were just as disagreeable. However, it would be no good for him to withdraw when he had already agreed to accompany Sid just because he didn’t like them.

‘I won’t see them after 16 hours anyway, so I’ll endure.’

After finishing his conversation with the warriors, Sid took out a scroll. It was a [Low-Level Inspection] scroll.

“Then before we go, I would like to do a basic check up. Please understand.”

The very first thing a Merchant did when choosing a player mercenary or an escort was to check their information. If they were chaotic players, then there was the chance of being backstabbed. Since the scroll was low level, Ark couldn't check the information. Therefore, Sid explained for Ark.

“Leo-nim is level 64 and Hargen-nim is level 62, both of them job-changed to Warrior.”

Warrior was an open profession, but it was a special profession that required 150 Strength.

If you didn't raise your character while intending to become a Warrior from the beginning, it would be difficult to job-change even at level 30. In other words, they were players who had prior knowledge before they began playing the game. They were users who knew much as information as Sid.

“Wow, Ark-nim is really level 65. With this party, 10 hours will be enough to cross Grey Ridge. But your profession is Dark Walker. This is the first time I've heard of it. What kind of profession is it?”

“It's an ordinary thief,” Ark answered lightly.

Perhaps it was the image of the name ‘Dark Walker’, but Sid and the Warriors nodded without thinking much about it. Thief-related professions weren't popular, so there were almost no people who knew the details behind them.

“Ark-nim is the highest level-wise, but it'll probably be a bit difficult to take the lead since you're a Thief. Please leave the front to Leo and Hargen and cover the back. Is that okay?”

“Yes, that's comfortable for me too.”

“Then, we'll leave after another 20 minutes.”

“We're not going to go right away?”

When Ark, to whom every minute and second was precious, asked that, Leo snickered and asked, “Perhaps you've never rested in an

inn before?”

The cheapest inns took 1 Silver and the expensive places took up to 1 Gold.

Heath can be recovered while resting on the ground, so why would you pay money to rest at an inn? That’s why Ark had never entered an inn.

But Sid explained with a surprised expression.

“Like the time in the store, Ark-nim doesn’t seem to know much about the game despite being level 65. The reason people pay to stay in an inn is because of the buff.”

“Buff?”

“You can get a buff if you rest at an inn. It’s a buff that lasts 1 hour per 10 minutes, for a maximum of 3 hours. The inns have different prices because the buff effects are different. There are places that slightly raise Strength or Agility. Some places even have a buff that raise EXP gain by 20%. This place increases movement speed by 30% and Health by 10%. There is merit in waiting for 30 minutes.”

He had no idea. He didn’t think inns would have such a secret.

‘No wonder everyone was visiting inns strangely often...’

It was information he could have used if he’d known beforehand. Basic information like this wasn’t on the site forums. No, it could be that it was too basic to even put on the forums. In any case, Ark didn’t even know such basic information because he’d never interacted with users much.

‘Minor info like this can be a big help in the game.’

He added another goal of the journey. ‘For 16 hours, I need to gather some info.’

He couldn’t keep living as a beginner forever.

* * *

“Bring it on, Giant’s Strength!”

At the booming cry, the muscles in Leo's body pulsed as they grew.

It was the might of the job specific skill that increases Strength and Stamina by 30.

With increased Strength, Leo swung his shield and hammer as he charged at a Troll.

A Troll is a humongous, 4 meter tall monster, but his opponent was a Warrior! A fighter who specializes in hunting big monsters.

As all sorts of skills were applied, the Troll staggered as it lost its balance with each strike of the hammer. When the final blow was struck on its brow, the Troll collapsed weakly. At the same time, Hargen faced a Stalker while swinging his two-handed axe.

Leo and Hargen boasted their incredible strength as Warriors.

Equipped with a shield and plate armor, Leo took decent blows without a care, and the Stalker getting hit by Hargen wielding his two-handed axe was getting thrown around like a baseball. They didn't land critical blows because they were Strength-focused characters, but they easily took out a level 73 troll and three level 66 Stalkers with only normal hits.

Regardless, Ark made an apathetic expression.

'They fight in a really boring manner.'

The two Warriors were weirdly strong for their level. Based on fighting techniques alone, they were incomparably lousy. They didn't even consider avoiding the attacks coming at them. That was characteristic of fighters wearing high defense plate armor. They ignored incoming attacks and just blindly swung their weapons. They didn't pay any attention to distributing their power, managing the distance, or accuracy. They also kept using their skills until all their Mana ran out.

After clearing a group of monsters, Hargen hefted the axe onto his shoulder and boasted, "Hahaha, what did I tell you? With just Leo and me, even Grey Ridge is no problem. From now on we'll handle it, so Sid-nim and Ark-nim, just watch from the back."

Of course he was doing just that.

‘I can’t understand deliberately rushing up to fight.’

The group made a party in the village and hit the road. Thanks to this, the EXP was automatically shared even if he didn’t fight. Granted, you could get more EXP by contributing more to the fight, but it wasn’t worth the loss of equipment durability.

In addition, Ark had no experience in party hunting. Since Leo and Hargen fought in a completely different manner, there would be too many problems if Ark tried to squeeze in.

‘Well, since it’s only a hunting ground of this level, I’ll just sit back.’ Ark distanced himself and spent his time striking the backs of fleeing monsters.

“Good work. Here’s some food!”

Once the fight ended, Sid immediately brought out food. Sid showed an extremely submissive attitude to the reliable Mercenaries. Well, since they were outside the village, Sid’s life was in the hands of the Mercenaries, so that was a given.

Carrying as many as 6 bags at once, it was was profession that could get a hold of a lot of money from the beginning. There was once a time when Ark was envious of Merchants.

But, after looking at Sid, those thoughts disappeared. They do earn money, but without the help of other players, they wouldn’t even be able to trade properly.

They had to waste their money to pay escort fees and bow to the tastes of others. It wasn’t a profession that suited the single-minded Ark.

‘Even though he said there’s a comfortable path, why does he want to employ Mercenaries to travel by this road?’

With sudden doubt, Ark asked while chewing on the free food, “Why are you in such a hurry?”

“I spent my fortune on silk from the Southern region. However, the

prices of silk can change in just a few days. If Merchants who bought silk at the same time were to sell them in Giran, then I can incur a loss instead. Since I invested my whole fortune on it, it could bankrupt me. So in order to get there even one day sooner, I haven't slept properly in days."

"If the market price is good, how much would you earn?"

"I still won't earn a lot. Silk doesn't have a large margin. Price gain is around 2%? With the travel fee and escort fee on top of that, there's nothing left."

Perched on top of a rock, Sid answered while swinging his legs.

"But, since I've invested my fortune on this, as long as I get a profit, my EXP will greatly increase. The greater the risk, the greater the experience. And since silk's market value changes frequently, there aren't many Merchants who trade it in bulk, so it's a good opportunity to raise my market share. Truthfully, that is my objective, rather than money or experience."

"Market share?"

The lives of combat professions relied on EXP and items, but Merchants relied on profit and market shares. Market share was a kind of reward provided to players who consistently traded one type of good. A Merchant with a set amount of market share could get all sorts of bonuses. They can also be exempted from taxes, get quests from craftsmen NPC's, and get profit from related trade goods. If they held the maximum share, they could even earn a monopolized trading privilege with a Lord.

The additional effects of that were enormous. You acquired info about which items would soon be in demand, and, once you gained a monopolized relationship, raising your level or making money was a cinch. Therefore, the Merchants' fight to raise market share first was vicious.

Some Merchants even went as far as to suffer a loss to lower market value if they saw another Merchant coming in with trade goods from afar.

Even if it wasn't from player interference, prices plummeted and skyrocketed if New World's economy and political situation changed. Because of this, Merchants always have to be keen and able to read the flow of the whole continent.

Information soon becomes money. To Merchants, this is common sense.

Sid held vast information as an effect of that.

"One day, I will get a monopoly on the economy of the Schudenberg Kingdom."

Sid stamped his foot as he boldly revealed his ambition.

Although seeing a small, cute Hobbit talking boldly was not very convincing...

In any case, Sid was risking everything on this journey.

He poured in his whole fortune in order to raise market share, and even bought silk with a loan from the Merchant Guild. If the market value plummeted before he arrived, it was instant bankruptcy for him, and he'd be reduced to sewing leather and getting peanuts in a corner of the city.

'Being a Merchant isn't an easy profession either.'

Ark felt it was actually much harder to be Merchant than a fighter.

Then, while Ark and Sid were talking, Leo and Hargen were whispering amongst themselves from a distance. They'd been doing that more often after entering Grey Ridge.

'I have a really bad feeling about this...'

Out of nowhere, he suddenly got an uncomfortable feeling.

Ark's ominous sense hit the mark.

2 hours after leaving village, the party had reached the entrance region of Grey Ridge. After sweeping another monster mob and resting, a message suddenly popped up.

||— You have been kicked out from the party.||

Leo, who was commanding the fight in the front, had the position of party leader. In other words, Leo kicked Ark out of the party, and it wasn't just Ark. Sid, who also got the expulsion message, tilted his head.

"Excuse me, Leo-nim. I've been disbanded from the party?"

Leo suddenly changed his expression as he said, "We aren't going any further."

"Huh? What are you talking about?" Sid blinked as if he did not understand the situation.

Leo grinned and swung his hammer around.

"Since there's no more business to see with you, I'm telling ya to hand over all the silk and fuck off. Ark, if you leave all your pearls and scam like a good boy, I won't kill you in light of our time so far. You understand without further explanation, yes?"

"Per-perhaps from the beginning...?"

"Of course. Do you think I, Hargen, followed you this far just to earn peanuts?"

"Y-you can't. These goods are what I've bought with my entire fortune. If I lose this I will go bankrupt. I would rather die!"

"If you say that much, then there's no choice. Damn it, even though this is expensive."

Leo took out and ripped a red scroll. "Target Sid, designated mark: silk."

Then, a stream of light came pouring out and hit Sid.

'Is it an attack scroll?'

Ark flinched reflexively, but Sid didn't receive any damage. It doesn't seem to be an attack scroll. However Sid's face immediately turned pale, and he sank down while trembling. Tears poured from his round eyes.

“Please let me go. If I sell the silk in Giran I will give you 50%.”

“Why would I do something that difficult when there is an easier way to earn money?”

Ark couldn't comprehend the current situation at all.

When a character became Chaotic, they received a huge penalty. They can't buy or sell anything from the store, let alone enter villages larger than a certain size. They also received criminal status.

If they became Chaotic once, they could remove the status by staying in jail for a few days and paying a fine. Of course, the jail time and the fine were based on their Chaotic value and their level. For those above level 60, the jail time as well as the fine would be no small amount.

No matter how much they wanted the silk, it wasn't worth turning into a Chaotic player. So although Ark had been suspicious of the two's attitudes, he hadn't imagined the worst case scenario.

That wasn't all he couldn't understand. Since he was a Merchant, there would be some japtem inside his bags besides the silk. Even if Sid was murdered, the chance of the silk dropping was rare. However, Leo and Sid both seem to think the silk was guaranteed to drop.

‘Just what exactly is going on here?’

“I'm sorry, but it's unavoidable since we also need to survive!”

As Leo abruptly rushed forward swinging his two-handed axe, Ark still hadn't come up with a plan. If they were monsters, he was confident he could take down two or three even if they were level 70.

However, his opponent were players, two of them were too much to face even for Ark.

‘Should I run away?’ Ark was thinking that, but then—

“Dammit, then I will have to prepare for some losses!”

Sid quickly took out a scroll and, when he ripped it, disappeared with light. It was the effect of the incredibly rare and expensive [Warp] scroll.

“That bastard, he was hiding a warp scroll.”

Leo ground his teeth after slamming the hammer on the ground.

“Hng, did you think I’ll let such easy prey get away? [Trace]!”

Without delay, Leo quickly used another scroll and his eyes glowed red. With glowing red eyes, Leo looked around and found Sid scrambling away about 200 meters away. It was an odd fight using all sorts of scrolls.

Leo shouted while chasing Sid, “Hargen, you take care of robbing him! You can face him alone, yeah?”

“Of course.” Hargen laughed as he looked at Ark. “You don’t intend to obediently hand over the pearls anyways, right?”

Hargen did the same thing as Leo— he took out a scroll and marked the pearls. As with before, Ark couldn’t figure out the scroll’s identity, but it seems it didn’t deal any damage. Afterwards, Hargen immediately swung his two-handed axe as he charged.

It was an absurd situation.

‘What’s with this guy? What does he believe in, to think he can stand up against me?’

Hargen was 3 levels lower than Ark. He definitely knew that fact. So why is he trying to take Ark down alone?

‘Does he think he can take me down because I’m a Thief?’

If so, it was actually welcoming. Ark had been worried because there were two level 60+ players. If there was one opponent, even if the opponent was a higher level, he was confident he could defeat him.

Ark quickly did an evasive movement as he swung his sword.

A heavy sound rang out, but Hargen immediately used the skill again

as if he didn't receive much impact. Ark fended off the blow with this sword, but he still took an incredible amount of damage.

'Wh-what? Is this really damage of a level 62 player?'

It was completely different from what he'd seen while they were fighting monsters. Ark used Eyes of the Cat, and his face hardened.

'Huh? What is going on?'

With Eyes of the Cat, he saw Hargen's level was actually 71.

In addition, he was a Chaotic player!

He was certain Sid checked their levels and status before leaving the village. Level 62 with Neutral status. But in just 4 hours, the info had changed to something completely different. After using his head for a moment, Ark finally understood the situation.

'I fell for it. Was Sid also a part of this?'

Sid had checked the info. And since Sid, whom he had met by chance, had said the info was like that, Ark had just believed him. That situation had been so natural that even the doubtful Ark had blindly believed it.

So In the end, Sid and Leo had just been acting!

'They were aiming for me from the beginning. Damn bastards!'

Rage surged within him.

'I definitely shouldn't trust the likes of players!'

"Alright, let's go at it then. I will make you regret believing in your level and coming at me alone. Dark Blade!"

Lancel's sword grazed a spot on Hargen's side that was glowing red.

— You have dealt a critical hit!

Hargen flinched and took a step back. Even with his plated armour,

he lost 10% of his Health in one blow.

“This bastard, he has good luck. Though it’ll be useless!”

Hargen still made an expression of overwhelming confidence.

It seemed he believed the critical hit was nothing but a fluke. Hargen’s level was 71, Ark’s was 65. With a whopping 6 level difference, he believed there was no way he could lose. But it didn’t take long for him to realize how terrible a misunderstanding that was.

The accuracy and attack speed he had polished underwater!

Ark’s sword and kicks rained down like a flash.

Ba-ba-ba-bam!

Kicks were different from sword strikes. Swords only gave damage, but kicks gave knockback, or a stun effect at a set rate. In addition, the enemy was a heavily armored Warrior; whenever the shower of kicks imparted a special status effect, he couldn’t balance his weight and was pushed back as he staggered.

“Wha-what? What is wrong with my body?”

Hargen shouted his frustration at the special effects of the kicks.

The heavily armored Hargen couldn’t follow Ark’s movements. He also couldn’t defend himself properly. Trained from underwater battle, Ark’s sword precisely pierced into the gaps of the armor.

A heavily armored fighter was no different from a crab. The joints in armor have very low defense. In addition, the Dark Blade Ark occasionally released totally ignored defense.

In an instant, Hargen only had 10% of his Health left.

“H-how the hell did this happen?”

In front of the suffering Hargen’s eyes, Ark lifted his leg. It paused in the air for a split second before falling like a thunder bolt down on Hargen’s head.

HAMMER KICK!

Stunned, Hargen fell to one knee. His body flashed red.

Double Critical Chance!

– With Double Critical Chance, you have landed 2x a critical hit.

Ark seized the opportunity and killed Hargen.

“There’s no way this can be...”

As if he couldn’t believe it, Hargen stammered as he was forced to log out.

– You have defeated a level 71 Chaotic player. Fame +40.
--

The helmet Hargen had been wearing tumbled down.

“Dedric, turn into a Bat and find Sid and Leo!”

Ark summoned Dedric and ground his teeth.

If they’d been playing Ark, they would definitely be waiting nearby for the fight to end. The bastards had conspired and tricked Ark. He was of a mind to chase them even to the depths of hell for revenge. If he didn’t kill them, his rage would not subside.

‘They can never be forgiven!’

“They’re not too far from here!”

“Lead the way.”

Ark equipped the Guardian Armor of the Merpeople he’d been saving and had Dedric take the lead.

The Guardian Armor couldn’t be repaired by repair boxes. The only way to repair it was with Magic Restoration, but he’d tried not to use it since that was only Intermediate. But the current situation was different.

* * *

After entering the forest, he saw a strange scene unfolding.

He'd been certain the two would be giggling together, but the situation was no different from before. Sid was running as if his feet were on fire. Leo was chasing after him spitting curses. As if he'd already taken a few hits, Sid had only about 30% of his Health left.

'What is going on? Aren't they on the same side?'

At that moment, Leo's hammer hit Sid's back.

It wasn't an attack a Merchant could defend against with their incomparably lousy defense.

Sid collapsed as he instantly fell into a critical condition.

"Dammit, you nasty bastard!"

"Huhuhu, isn't this also one of the enjoyments of the game?" Leo raised his hammer while sporting a vile smile.

At that moment, Leo's face was covered by Dedric.

"Wh-what is this? A Bat?"

Ba-bang!

At the same time, a strong attack landed on Leo's back.

He'd been watching the situation from a distance, but Ark shortened the gap in a moment and let fly a Backstab attack. He couldn't understand what was going on, but for now he decided they weren't allies.

Leo turned his head and his facial expression turned twisted.

"H-how did you...?"

"Ask your friend after you revive."

Ark didn't give him a moment and immediately poured forth a chain of Sword-Hand attacks.

'The bastard's level is 73, but if he's around Hargen's skill, he isn't a

tough opponent.'

Leo was stronger than Hargen.

First, his level was higher, and his equipment was better. Additionally, because of his shield, it wasn't easy to aim at the gaps in his armor.

But Leo was still not a match for Ark.

"Uhh, what is this? A Bat?"

Dedric, trying to earn back some trust from Ark, desperately held on. He repeatedly scratched Leo's face while matching the timing of the hammer swings and backing off.

As expected, after receiving Ark's rigorous training, Dedric's battle sense was outstanding. In the current situation, he was determining what attack would be most helpful to Ark. As Dedric continued with the attacks, Leo's accuracy with his hammer dramatically fell. Such sloppy attacks were met with crazy strong counter-attacks. As Leo swung his hammer, a counter attack swept past through the gap in the shield.

If a counter-attack succeeds, the attack power increases by 50%!

No matter how good the armor was, there is no way it could handle 150% of the normal attack. In addition, armor is not something that can be continuously used. Leo's armor became tattered in the blink of an eye and his Health was dropping wildly.

"Dammit! You're dead!"

Pressed to near critical state, Leo pulled out a potion.

'High-grade recovery potion!'

There were all kinds of potions. There is the low class potion, which recovers 100 Health, intermediate potion, which recovers 300 Health, and high class potion which recovers 500 Health. There are also no specific restriction in terms of drinking a Health potion, so as long as one had money they could recover Health anytime. Ark had never once doubted a system like this.

If so, didn't that mean you would never die if you drank high-class potions like water? However, Ark soon found the flaw in this system.

It lay in the time it takes to drink the potion. While opening the bag and drinking the potion, they are in a completely defenseless state. Of course, this will lead to a higher chance of receiving a critical hit. In the end, even if they drink a 500 Health potion, if they were to lose 500 Health while they were drinking it, it would do them no good.

That wasn't the only disadvantage. You could intentionally interfere with the player trying to drink a potion. If you attacked the hand, you could make them drop the potion. Ark had learned that when Bat had shoved himself into Andel's mouth while he was trying to drink a potion.

Because of this, Ark almost never drank potions even when fighting monsters. Of course, the same applied when facing players, who were smarter than monsters.

'Idiot, he was just a high-leveled moron.'

"Dark Charge!"

In fact, Dedric was of a higher level than Leo in the ability to deal with a situation. A black aura poured from Dedric's mouth and blocked Leo's vision. Then, while Leo was confused, Dedric charged powerfully and sent a flying kick.

"Agh! Oowww, my head."

With a thump, Dedric staggered about with a fist-sized lump on his head. Leo, who'd been hurriedly about to drink the potion, shook and stumbled as if he'd taken quite a shock.

Ark ordered without any delay, "Snake, it's an item! Eat it!"

Wrapped around Ark's waist, Snake opened its eyes wide and stuck its tongue out. Like a frog catching a fly, it wrapped its tongue around the potion and swallowed it.

The so-called Familiar combo attack!

After seeing Snake smack its lips, Leo shouted his shock.

“EH! Wh-what is this?”

“What’s what? You’re dead anyways. Dark Blade!”

“Ah, no!” Leo quickly held up his shield.

But before Ark’s blade reached the shield, it vanished

Then it appeared in front of Leo’s nose and dealt a Critical Hit.

Defense was ignored, and since Dedric, who had been promoted to the magic sword’s owner, was summoned, the attack power was even greater. With a violent scream, Leo flew back. He tumbled on the ground until he hit the trunk of the tree and was forced to log out.

Along with 40 bonus Fame, a hammer, two scrolls fell.

“A-Ark-nim...!” Sid, who’d been watching nervously, stammered with a surprised voice.

Well, since the 8 level lower Ark had defeated Leo, of course he’d be surprised.

“Th-thanks to you I survived. I was almost robbed and bankrupted.”

After collecting his wits, Sid jumped up and leapt onto Leo’s corpse. The reason why the corpse didn’t disappear for 24 hours was probably because the developers considered a use like this.

“This rotten bastard! Shitface!”

After panting as he vented his anger, Sid scratched his head.

“Because of me, Ark-nim was in danger. I’m truly ashamed.”

By then, Ark had furtively packed up his items. He turned his head. There was nothing but coldness in his eyes towards Sid.

“Just exactly what happened?”

“What do you mean?”

“Sid-nim, at the inn you said they were lower level than me. You also said nothing about them being Chaotic. So, I thought you and those guys were working together.”

“No, NO, I’M NOT! I was also tricked!”

“Tricked? Didn’t you use a scroll?”

“Well, Ark-nim may not know.”

Sid thought for a moment before remembering the scrolls Leo had dropped.

“First, check the items Leo dropped. That would be faster.”

Giran, a Merchant's Battlefield

Hammer of Merciless Destruction (Magic)			
Weapon Type	One-Handed Hammer		
Attack Damage	15~20	Durability	31/50
Weight	60	Usage Restriction	More than 180 Strength
<p>A hammer with a sharp, steel-forged edge, it is difficult to deal with the massive weight, but the power is outstanding. It boasts power mighty enough to reduce decent armor to scrap.</p> <p>Option: +10% Armor destruction, 150% more damage to Undead.</p>			

Spirit of Separation (Magic)			
Defense Type	Steel Helmet		
Defense	40	Durability	11/45
Weight	45	Usage Restriction	More than 200 Strength

A helmet with overlapping layers of thin steel and specially made magic-resistant gold plate in between. Boasting strong defense, it has the effect of protecting the mind from mind-related magic.

Option: Mind-related Magic Resistance +30%.

Penalty: Agility -10, no penalty if used by a Combat related profession.

Magic Scroll 'Lie'

Usage Restriction: Intelligence +60

Scroll made a long time ago by a notorious Rogue Magician, when used, one can change their information for other people to see at will. Can even fool NPCs of their alignment, level, stats, and profession. However, level can only be adjusted to within the range of 10 levels of actual level.
--

1 hour duration. Single use item.

Magic Scroll 'Robbery'

Usage Restriction: Intelligence +60

Scroll with the ability of a notorious Pirate from a long ago. When used, one can designate an item from a user's bag. While the scroll is in effect, killing the opponent will have a 100% drop rate of designated item. Duplicated items are treated as one item. Note, an equipped item cannot be designated. Effect disappears if the caster dies.
--

1 hour duration, single use item.

The items Leo and Hargen had dropped were very useful, but Ark's attention was drawn to the scrolls.

'There were scrolls such as these?'

For a user who planned and chose to be Chaotic, wasn't this the best item?! Only then did Ark roughly understand the situation.

The reason why chaotic players like Leo and Hargen were able to enter the village, and why Sid, who even checked their information, didn't know their identity. It was because of the scroll 'Lie.' Also Sid's terror was because of the scroll 'Robbery'. Since Leo used the scroll, he would have dropped all his silk if Sid had died. If he'd lost the silk he bought by investing his whole fortune, there'd be no hope for Sid. He could only declare bankruptcy.

'If I died to Hargen, I would have lost all my pearls.'

Belatedly, just thinking about it caused cold sweat to trickle.

"You get it now, right?"

"Yes, I'm sorry for misunderstanding."

"Not at all— in any case, I would've gone bankrupt if not for you, Ark-nim."

"But the items Leo and Hargen dropped..."

In the craziness, Ark quickly claimed ownership of the items. Before there was talk of something else later, it was better to nail it down now.

Sid nodded as if there was nothing to think about.

"Of course, Ark-nim should get them. And when we arrive in Giran, I'll be sure to repay you for all this. My margin is low so I can't give you much, but I can give you at least 15 Gold."

"Why go so far... Well, though I'd take it if you're offering."

Unlike Hyun Woo, refusal wasn't in Ark's dictionary.

"Yes, I'll be sure to repay you. Ark-nim was almost in big trouble because of me, those bastards, just when will such guys disappear." Sid ground his teeth as if his rage was exploding again.

"Anyway, it's a relief it was settled well."

"By the way..." Sid blew out a sigh as he slumped his shoulders. "If we try to go back to the village and take the safe route, it'll take a few more days. That's the worry. I heard silk prices are falling a lot right now."

"Let's just keep going this way. I need to get to Giran anyways, so I will protect you."

"What? But Ark-nim alone..."

"Don't worry," Ark replied with confidence. "It might take longer than when there were three people, but at this level of difficulty, I can protect you just fine."

Of course, Gray Ridge had a high difficulty. As Sid had said before, at least 3 players between level 50 to 60 were necessary to pass through safely. But it only applied to those who blindly charged in like Leo and Hargen. There was no reason for Ark to do something so idiotic.

If he lured them out one at a time with Dedric and took them down with a concentrated attack with Skull, they weren't very difficult opponents. After all, Ark had hunted even more difficult monsters alone.

Granted, now that the situation had turned out this way, there was really no need to look after Sid. But Ark had his own plan. Even if you fall, you never get up with an empty hand.

"Ah, but..." Ark stopped walking and made a suggestion, "If I take the role of Leo and Hargen..."

"If we can get to Giran, I'll give you the protection fee I promised to give those guys. For both of them combined, I promised 25 Gold,"

quickly answered Sid, quick on the uptake.

“Of course the reward you promised would be separate?”

“Huh? Ah. Yes...” A look that said Ark was taking it too far surfaced in Sid’s eyes, but when Ark spoke as if he would get what he should definitely get, all Sid could do was nod. “Of course I’ll give it to you.”

“Then, for the trust between us, let’s write up a contract.” Immediately using what he’d learned, Ark’s caution shone.

In the end, Sid had no choice but to reluctantly write up the contract. But it was not the end of Ark’s demands.

“Ah, and Merchant bag space is spacious, right? It’s just that I don’t have room for japtem...”

In other words, he meant to take all the items from hunting for himself! Sucking his victim down to the marrow once he caught them, Ark’s tenacity was aroused.

Sid nodded with a sullen face. “I- I will see and do it for you. Since I have some space.”

“I’d be thankful if you did that, now shall we go?” Ark turned vigorously and went over the ridge.

Only then did Sid realize how horrible a person Ark was.

As soon as the bag space was acquired Ark’s attitude did a 180 flip. When they found monsters, they never just went past. And no matter how long it took, he annihilated them and stored away in the items. That wasn’t all. He collected all the grasses and fruits that caught his eye.

Needing to get to Giran even one hour faster, Sid stamped his feet, but Ark acted like he didn’t even notice. Sid wanted to spew curses at least, but somehow, Ark was his life’s savior. Plus, they were already in Grey Ridge. He’d get killed by monsters if he got separated from Ark, so all he could do was keep his rage bottled up inside.

“Now, please hold onto this as well.”

‘Waaah, can’t you even see I’m in a hurry? Am I just a bag? Are you treating me like a bag? Is that how it is? Dammit, this is the first time I’ve regretted my choice to be a Merchant this much.’ He hadn’t been this bitter even when he was being chased by Leo.

But no matter what Sid thought, Ark liked him. He liked Sid’s cute appearance and pleasing personality. Plus, Sid was going to give him 40 Gold as a reward and protection fee when they arrived at Giran, so there was no way Ark couldn’t be fond of him. The fact Sid had a lot of information was also helpful.

‘To think that New World had such scrolls. In the future I shouldn’t judge people by level.’

If the ‘Lie’ scroll could hide more than 15 levels, then even Ark wouldn’t be able to do anything but die. ‘Robbery’ was also a scary scroll. Though they didn’t impact the battle directly, they showed enormous power depending on their use. Merchants probably feared these two scrolls the most. Even so, Ark hadn’t even known such scrolls existed.

‘There’s definitely a limit to getting info from a meager site forum.’

This experience made Ark keenly realize the best way to get information was to interact with other players.

But Ark didn’t trust players. The case of Leo and Hargen alone was a testament how untrustworthy a player was. Therefore, as he headed to Giran with Sid, he tried to get as much info as possible. Knowledge was now a matter of life and death.

“A red scroll that can be misused on a player isn’t sold in a normal village.”

“Then where can they be obtained?”

“There is a village only Chaotic players can enter. In the Schudenberg Kingdom as well, there’s a Chaotic village called the Lawless City Kairote. Since Merchants don’t have much to do with it, I don’t really know where it is. Anyway, they say there are lots of various scrolls and items there. ‘Lie’ and ‘Robbery’ are famous among them. For the most part, Chaotic players set on PKing use

them.”

“What other scrolls are there?”

“It’s also good to be careful of the ‘Trace’ scroll Leo used on me earlier. As long as you know their name, it’s a scroll that can find someone’s location within a 1 kilometer radius. And there’s also ‘Null-Recovery.’ If you get hit by this scroll, potions and recovery magic have no effect.”

There were many more. ‘Peek’ let you look at the items inside an opponent’s bag, and it was frequently used in combination with ‘Robbery’ by Bandits.

Of course, there were also scrolls that countered them. A typical one was ‘Sword of Truth.’ If another person was using ‘Lie,’ it was a scroll that dealt powerful damage while dispelling the effect. But ‘Sword of Truth’ was expensive and the places that sold it were limited, so it was too much to use every time you hired a mercenary.

“There are more, but that’s about all I know.”

“Even so, it was a great help.”

‘Until now, I didn’t have any interest in scrolls, but it’s not something I can overlook.’ Ark realized the value of information anew.

In fact, scrolls were such a specialized field that there was even a separate profession related to it. There were hundreds of types of scrolls, and among the Rare-class scrolls, there was even one that could deal a fatal blow to your opponent. And since the indirectly applied ones were also dangerous, even if he didn’t use them himself, he needed to know them all to not be a victim.

‘Kairote, huh...’

A village where only Chaotic players can enter. Since it was indeed a game with infinite freedom, it seemed there was a way for Chaotics could live with other Chaotics. Plus, countless scrolls with unknown effects were only sold in Kairote. If he could use those scrolls freely, it would definitely show an immense effect.

‘I should go look for it one day.’

Ark also asked for information on various regions of the Schudenberg Kingdom, its specialties, and hunting grounds. Each time he asked, Sid answered him freely.

For a Merchant, information turns to money. Merchants who cleared routes alone didn't divulge such information lightly. No, other professions were the same. The reason why the information site forums were scanty was because information hoarding. Since Ark didn't share information about hidden dungeons, he couldn't blame them. But since Sid owed Ark a huge debt, so he couldn't refuse sharing information. It was valuable information money can't buy.

"Ah, do you by any chance know about a place called the Underground World?"

"Underground world? I wonder?"

Ark asked on an off chance he might know, and Sid scratched his head. "I haven't been there, but I heard that among the Dwarven villages, there's even a place under the ground."

"No, I'm talking about a Beast village."

"If it's a Beast village, there's none I know, either. I haven't even seen a Beast myself, and players who choose to be Beasts start in the Sinus Principality."

"I'm not looking for a player village."

"Really? If I get some info later, I'll tell you by mail."

"Thank you."

"But can't we please move a little faster?"

Of course, Ark pretended not to hear Sid's last words. Even so, since they were moving, their goal steadily got closer. After about 20 hours, Grey Ridge finally stopped and the sight of the commercial city Giran came into view from the base of the hills .

Giran was larger and more grand than any city he had gone to.

Encapsulated by thick walls, Giran was divided down the middle by canals, marking off several regions, such as Trade, Production, and Magic. Each of the areas was bigger than Jackson Castle.

As soon as they arrived in Giran, Sid rushed over to the trading post.

“Ah, thankfully silk prices haven’t dropped yet.”

After a long time Sid came out with a much brighter expression. “Thanks to selling the silk, Ark-nim’s japtem, and the pearls, my level went up by 5. Jewelry and Textile trading skill proficiency both went up by 40, and my silk share went up by 2% as well. All in all, this trade was a huge success.”

“Congratulations.” Generous with free lip service, Ark confirmed the ample money sack in Sid’s hand and also felt good. “Then it’s time to divide the money?”

“Ah, yes, of course.” Sid smiled bitterly as he nodded.

Just the japtem in Ark’s bag and what he had left with Sid totaled 50 Gold. Along with selling the 800 pearls at a 15% high price, the total was 418 Gold! It was more than the price of the trade goods Sid had brought while flinging himself around the Kingdom like crazy. Moreover, Ark’s earnings had mostly no investment, so his margin reached 90%.

He received more than half the money bag. But Ark still eyed Sid’s money bag with greedy eyes. It was his silent pressure to be given the promised protection fee and reward.

“Here you go. The 25 Gold I promised when I contracted Leo, and the 15 Gold special bonus.” Sid handed over the money looking like he was going to cry.

Ark quickly took it, packed it away, and laughed. “Thank you. Then I’ll see you again next time.”

“Yes; well, I’m gonna be in Giran for a while, so if you need to see me just contact me.”

Ark parted with Sid for now. However, there were still things he had to do in Giran. Even after selling off that many items, there were still three or four items left in Snake’s belly. They were items he couldn’t sell to the store because they were unidentified.

‘Huhuhu, he said he was gonna be in Giran for a while, right? Then I should check all these items and get Sid to sell them. Sid’s going to get EXP from selling them anyways. This is what they call a win-win situation. Knowing a Merchant makes a lot of things much more comfortable.’

He’d really caught a sitting duck this time. Whether he liked it or not, he’d come to know Sid, so he had to use him to the max!

Inside his bag, 650 gold coins jingled. Thanks to that, as Ark headed towards the item appraisal store, his steps were as light as air.

* * *

“How much did you say it was?”

“It’s 184,700 Won (~\$185).” The checkout clerk spat out terrifying words with a friendly voice.

A sigh puffed out on its own. Buying a 4 kilogram sack of rice, some vegetables, toothpaste, and a toothbrush totaled to over a 180 thousand Won.

It seemed prices had risen yet again, in short order, whereas workers’ wages had been frozen for a year. The people’s economy falling to ruin was like a textbook example. The electric, water, and gas fees also rose.

It had already been 10 years since the privatization of public services. In the name of improving quality, the utility fees had risen fifteen times. As a result, even though he only kept one light on at night in his tiny room, the shivering Hyun Woo was charged a bill of over 150 thousand Won (~\$150) every month.

Though his mother was just lying in the hospital, having to pay a hospital bill of 3 million Won (~\$3,000) a month was certainly an aftereffect of the privatization of health insurance.

Since Hyun Woo was busy making a living, he had no interest in the workings of national bond companies or whatever. Whenever a policy came out, there was a part could not understand the people who rose up in arms like a swarm of bees. But after taking personal

damage from the aftereffect, his thoughts changed.

‘Dammit, there’s a reason why adults talk politics if they simply gather.’

However, he couldn’t live without eating and using water just because money was precious.

‘I’m jealous of Ark, who can use Survival Cooking.’

Granted, even if Hyun Woo could use Survival Cooking, it wouldn’t make much of a difference. In a city where it was hard to even see grass, there was no way he could get ingredients.

In the end, although he valued them like his life, he handed over likenesses of Shin Saimdang (50,000 Won bill), Sejong the Great (10,000 Won), Yi I (5,000 Won), and Admiral Yi (100 Won) to the clerk.

[T/N: Ark is referring to famous figures in Korean history who are printed onto the currency. It’s like talking about giving someone a Lincoln (\$5) or a George Washington.]

Walking home with shopping bags, Hyun Woo’s mind was busy calculating money.

His mother’s rehabilitation treatment started this month too, so it would take about 4,500,000 Won (~\$4,500)... On top of that, the utility bill was roughly 450,000 Won (~\$450), rent and food expenses were 500,000 Won, loan payment and interest were 1,000,000 Won. In conclusion, the total expenses was at least 6,500,000 Won (~\$6,500) a month.

With the 7,000,000 Won (~\$7,000) he’d earned from selling items in the past and 3,000,000 Won (~\$3,000) he received from Global Exos for two months, he had thought he could endure for at least another two months. However, now it would be tough to last a month and a half. It was dangerous if he couldn’t step up his game.

‘Still, I can’t skimp on mother’s hospital fees.’

After life became difficult, the biggest thing Hyun Woo realized was

life wasn't so easy. Everything Hyun Woo had lived on and enjoyed for 17 years were not for granted. They were the result of his father earning with sweat and blood and his mother saving and saving again. They raised Hyun Woo with everything in a world with prices leaping like mad. He had to be grateful.

However that was then, now his pocket swung empty.

Since he had to pay the hospital fee in advance, it immediately took a large sum. His loan payment date was also drawing very near. After thinking, Hyun Woo just shook his head.

'No need to worry. I still have over 2,000,000 Won left. And if there's no other way...'

There was still a final resort left to Hyun Woo. The 650 Gold he carefully kept in his bag!

It was an emergency card he could convert to 6,500,000 Won of real currency at any time. But just as money was necessary to live life, gold was necessary inside the game, too. At least for an unforeseen circumstance, he didn't want to touch the gold if possible.

'I still have time. Since I'm mostly set with my equipment, I'll put any worthwhile items I get on auction right away. Since my level went up too, there'll be more chances to get items worth money.'

Hyun Woo roughly finished cleaning his house and accessed the auction site.

Auction Complete. Reaper's Scythe : 600,000 Won (~\$600)
Auction Complete. Sharply Shining Sword : 350,000 Won (~\$350)
Auction Complete. Merciless Hammer of Destruction: 800,000 Won (~\$800)
Auction Complete. Spirit of Separation : 700,000 Won (~\$700)

‘For now, I’ve scraped together 2,450,000 Won.’

Leo and Hargen’s equipment sold for a better price than expected. Since he’d made a tasty sum from the items he’d taken from them, he thought he could understand why players went the path of the PKer even while bearing enormous penalties.

‘But there’s a limit to the money you can make PKing anyways. And if you keep making enemies like, there’ll be a time when you won’t be able to play the game at all. From a long-term perspective, it’s actually no good. I have to make money my own way.’

Hyun Woo got in the unit and connected to New World.

* * *

“How much did you say it was?” Ark repeated exactly what Hyun Woo had said.

“The Low-grade Protect cancellation is 5 Gold, Intermediate is 10 Gold, and Advanced is 15 gold. Since it is impossible to identify items with the Ultimate Protect, please use the item appraisal store of Bristania Kingdom’s magic city, Hashui.”

After leaving Sid, Ark immediately sought out the item appraisal store, because among the items he’d got underwater, several of them were unidentified. Since he couldn’t even sell them while unidentified, he had to get them identified. But hearing the prices made his jaw drop on its own.

“W-why is it so expensive?”

“We only charge the fee the Magic Society announces. If you find fault with it, you can leave.” The appraisal NPC, named Doltorun, made an unpleasant expression as he replied bluntly.

A sigh leaked from Ark’s lips. The Identification skill only formed for people who observed many goods closely, so besides Magicians or manufacturers, it was nigh impossible to get.

But Giran was a commerce city, and there were many Merchants

and manufacturer players. There were also bound to be people with the Identification skill among them. If he found them and made a request, he would be able to get them identified for 1-2 Gold cheaper.

However, he was reluctant to do so. He also didn't want to mix with other players, because if it turns out to be a good item, he wouldn't be able to maintain his security. Even if his luck was really good and a Rare item came out, the info might leak to Chaotic players.

'Although catching them and getting a bounty or an item wouldn't be bad either...'

There was no guarantee he'd be able to win with luck all the time. Moreover, Giran was a place where all sorts of high-level players gathered.

He wouldn't be able to handle facing two or three players around the level of Leo and Hargen. Now he knew scrolls such as 'Robbery' existed, he had to be even more careful.

'I can't ask a player to identify it even while knowing of the danger to save 1-2 Gold.' In that respect, an item appraisal store run by an NPC was trustworthy. 'Can't be helped.'

"Please check this first."

Ark held back tears as he handed over the fee and requested the appraisal of a low-grade unidentified item. The only weapon among the unidentified items, it looked like some kind of tooth.

"Please wait a moment."

Doltorun inspected the item carefully and the identification was soon complete.

Sharkman Fang Dagger			
Weapon Type	Dagger		

Attack Damage	4~6	Durability	10
Weight	5	Usage Restriction	None
A dagger made from a sharp fang of a Sharkman; the Merpeople use it when collecting pearls. It does not rust in seawater, but it breaks easily and repair is impossible.			
Value: 15-20 Silver			

Marking the value was an additional service of item appraisal stores. Thanks to that friendly service, Ark instantly fell into shock.

“20 Silver? W-what the hell? Then I can’t even get the identification fee back?”

“Can’t be helped. Item appraisal has no guarantee of getting a good result.”

“What kind of irresponsibility...!”

“I simply did as I was asked, and identified it. The results aren’t my responsibility, isn’t that right?” Doltorun replied insultingly.

In the end it was like throwing away 4 gold and 80 silver on the street with one identification.

This was the biggest negative point of an unidentified item. You could make a lot of profit if it came out as an item with a good result, but if japtem like this came out, then you just wasted the identification fee.

‘I’m gonna go crazy. What to do?’

He’d been all puffed up with expectation when picking up the items. But now that he was about to get them identified, caution exceeded his expectation. Of the remaining items, two had Low-level Protect and one was Intermediate. A whopping 20 Gold! If they all turned

out to be japtem, then 20 Gold went up into smoke.

Even so, he couldn't just throw them away. An unidentified item had a drop rate as low as a Magic item. It means there was a high possibility an item as good as a Magic one could surface.

It was a waste to throw them away, and identifying made him scared.

'This is completely being stuck between a rock and a hard place.'

This was Ark worrying about spending 20 gold when having 650 gold. While Ark was going back and forth about his decision Doltorun muttered angrily, "Won't you ponder outside please? Aren't you blocking the other customers?"

"Ah, no. That is...."

"Aaah! Just sell them at an auction and be done with it!"

"Auction? But unidentified goods can't be put up for auction."

Hearing Ark's reply, Doltorun pierced him with a look of derision. "You're driving me mad though I'm so busy I could die. Look here, customer! Giran doesn't have just one auction. Other than the normal auction, there are various types depending on nature. One of them is a place called the blind auction. As the name suggests it is an auction where one doesn't know what item they are getting. So, I mean it's a place where you auction unidentified items."

"Unidentified items?"

"It's a place where people like you who value the identification fee or can't even afford the fee get rid of unidentified items. Since both the seller and the buyer don't know what kind of good it is, whether they make a gain or a loss hangs on luck alone. I personally think it's just pathetic, but if you like it then go take a look. Next customer!" Doltorun fumed as he pushed Ark out.

Ark opened his bag and stared at the unidentified items. They were items with shapes like clam shells— items that strongly smelled like they wouldn't even make a few pennies if he identified them.

'Still, I can't just throw them away, so let's try going to the blind

auction for now. I'll be able to pick up a few Silvers at least if they sell.'

The blind auction was in a corner of Giran, in the casino district. As soon as he entered the luxurious building the Auction NPC came up.

"Are you here to register an unidentified item?"

"Yes, I'm trying to register these three."

"Please register the auction starting price and auction period."

"10 Silver, 8 hours."

"Thank you. Please find the office after 8 hours. Will you look around the auction while you wait? If good luck follows, you can even buy a valuable item for a ridiculously cheap price."

Of course that was the plan. With the NPC's guidance, Ark entered the auction.

In a wide space, there was an enormous number of items on display. There, the auction progressed by looking through the items and jotting down a price on the memo attached underneath the item you wanted to buy.

Ark walked around looking at the items with interest. Weapons, armor, shields, even items like food ingredients and pottery were being auctioned. As expected, players looking to make a quick fortune were interested in the weapons or armor.

A good weapon or armor was incomparably more expensive than other items. Plus, since even an average one could be sold at a relatively good price, you could also minimize the loss in case of auction failure. Of course those items got a high price at auction.

No, it was too high.

'The auction price of an unknown sword is 30 Gold? If you add the identification fee that's 35 Gold. 35 Gold is just thrown away if this is just an iron sword, but people are still trying to buy it.'

While Ark was thinking, someone approached and raised the price to 31 Gold.

It was a robed Magician wearing glasses. The name written on the memo was Vidus. He glanced at Ark, who was blankly staring at him as he put in the bid. Vidus raised the bid again to 35 Gold and laughed. It seemed he thought of Ark as a competitor.

Ark couldn't understand his behavior.

35 gold for an item when he don't know what will come out of it?

If anything, wasn't it the same as gambling?

However, that amount was nothing. After he looked around a bit, he saw that all the auction goods had eye-popping prices. There were numerous items with over 100 Gold as bids.

'For people to pour their money like this, it must mean there's that much merit?'

There was no way all the players were idiots. Participating in the auction while going as far as to pour in hundreds of Gold, there was no doubt it meant they could make a greater profit. The smell of money wafted into Ark's sensitive nose. He was just looking, but if there was money to be made, he couldn't just pass it up.

'For now, I've got to figure out why people are going so crazy.'

As Ark went around the auction, he started gathering info. And he came to learn a surprising truth.

The info was this: just a few days ago, among the items sold in the blind auction, an Epic item appeared.

No matter how low its stats were, an Epic was easily worth 10 million Won (~\$10,000) at the very least; as its name suggested, it was a sensational item. Therefore, player interest was rapidly rising.

That wasn't all. There was a rumor one player had gotten a Rare armor with just 50 Silver, and yet another player got a Rare skill book for 5 Gold.

'This is an incredible place!' Ark was shocked into attention.

Of course, there was no way such good fortune would come into his

hand so easily. But depending on the situation, he could raise the profit by hundreds with a small investment. Moreover, Ark was in an immediate need of money. There was no guarantee anywhere he'd be able to obtain a Rare item within ten days with just hunting.

If he could obtain a Rare item here...?

'This is an opportunity, I might be able to get money for this month if I use it well.'

The problem was, he could accidentally suffer a huge loss.

'Still, I can't just blindly buy auction goods. First, I have to learn the trick to it. There was nothing in the world that had no trick to it. After all, they say gambling is 60% skill and the rest was luck.'

After that, Ark spent the next few hours observing the people wandering the auction.

Be it gambling or anything else, the first and foremost way to make money was to follow the expert. Someone with expertise in this field would have their own know-how. For now, the urgent priority was to find an expert.

After 3 hours, the person Ark found was the Magician wearing glasses he'd met not long ago, Vidus. Other people left after bidding on 1 or 2 items at most, but he went around bidding on scores of items in one go.

'That guy isn't just doing this casually. He's a person who buys and sells auction goods as a profession.'

Ark started to follow Vidus around.

Vidus' work method was rational. He didn't just recklessly raise the auction price, and if he found a worthwhile item, he wrote down the expected price, auction start time, and auction period on a notebook. When the auction closing time drew near, he checked the latest price and bid within a safe range. Vidus successfully won most of the goods after a few minutes.

'Is he checking the price before the auction closes and buying if it's

lower than what he expected and forgoing if it's not? It's the trick to buying with minimal investment.'

Ark decided to use Vidus's method. About 1 minute after Vidus bidded, Ark quickly bid 1 Copper higher. After Vidus bidded, Ark used the last few minutes before the auction ended.

Through that method, Ark successfully won 6 auction goods.

'Alright, shall we check the results?'

Ark immediately ran over to the appraisal store.

The results: 4 were profitable, 2 were losses. Even with the auction and identification fee, there was a profit of 4 Gold left.

Inwardly, Ark cried out in joy. 'This is it!'

Though he wasn't completely convinced about the auction, 4 Gold was left even though he'd only gotten the cheapest goods. It wasn't much money, but the important thing was that he'd definitely made profit. If he won more expensive goods, the profit would rise too. In addition, if he had good luck he could even hope for a jackpot item. It was the fastest way to make money.

'Alright, I'm gonna catch my share with this!'

After that, Ark used the same method to win two more times. This time, both made profit and he was able to earn 20 Gold. Money was rushing in just by sneaking around the auction and making bids. After seizing 24 Gold in just 20 minutes or so, the auction was so fun for Ark that he was quivering with excitement.

'To think making money was so easy!'

As he gained confidence, Ark was emboldened. 'Alright, shall I try a bigger investment this time?'

The more money you invest the larger the profits. Ark chased Vidus around as he bid on very important auction goods. And after Vidus passed, Ark quickly raised the bid.

He chose 6 goods going for over 50 Gold. He poured out a fortune of 300 Gold!

As if fortune smiled upon him, Ark won all 6 bids.

‘Hehehe, looking at past results 4 of these should be good items. Since there’s been a profit of about 20% more than the investment, I should make 60 Gold. There’s no time. I should take care of these quickly and do it again.’

Ark took the auctioned goods and hastily sought out the appraisal shop.

“Welcome, ah, is it these this time?” Once Ark became a regular, the item appraisal shop’s Doltorun became pleasant as well. “Then I’ll identify them right away.”

Fshhh! Looking at the information window with expectant eyes, Ark’s face was drained of blood.

Broken Armor			
Armor Type	Plate Armor		
Defense	1	Durability	2/2
Weight	80	Usage Restriction	More than 150 Strength
Armor in tatters from many battles. In this condition, it can't be used even after repairing it. You can only melt it down and recycle it.			
Value: 10 Silver			

The item he’d bought for a whopping 60 Gold was recyclable trash. He was so dumbfounded that laughter started to leak out.

“The item you brought this time was really no good. Well, this is luck too.”

“T-there’s no way! Another one, identify another one!”

“Work is welcomed anytime.”

As Doltorun checked the items one by one, Ark’s face became steadily paler.

The remaining items were recyclable trash like the first one.

The most expensive one was only 2 Gold. Calculating his investment and loss, 400 Gold went up in smoke. At the same time, his extremely elevated mood plummeted to the ground.

Was this the feeling of not even being able to scream?

‘W-what have I done?’ His mind reeled in the dizziness.

400 Gold... in just a few minutes, he’d lost one month of his mother’s hospital bill.

People who’d gone crazy with gambling and became homeless after losing their house came to Ark’s mind. Whenever he saw such people, he thought they were pathetic. Though they had learned again and again, he couldn’t understand why they were driven so far.

But Ark had no right to curse them. He was no different from them.

Once he made a little profit in the beginning, he’d gotten full of himself, as if he’d grasped the magic all on his own. Why did he believe such a weak idea was an absolute method and not question it? It was probably money, which clouded a person’s eyes— the charm of Gold.

When Ark staggered out of the appraisal shop, Vidus rose from his seat in front of the shop and approached him.

“Have you come to your senses now?”

About to pass him, Ark flinched and raised his head. “What do you...?”

“I’ve spent two months of real time in the blind auction. During two months, do you think there was no one who took what was mine with a method like yours?”

“What? T-then you..?”

“That’s right, since you were using a very dirty method, I joked a bit to teach you a lesson. Even so, I didn’t think you’d actually buy all of them. You must’ve lost about 300-400 Gold. How do you feel? Your insides are souring, right?”

“Y-you—!”

Ark clenched his fists. ‘A joke? Did you say it was A JOKE? Dammit, it may have been a joke to you, but it was a month of my mother’s hospital bills to me! After making me lose them, you call it a *joke*? Is that what you spouted?’

But Ark clamped his jaw down and swallowed the words surging up his throat.

Ark had used him first. And he had never forced Ark to buy the items. Ark was the one who used Vidus as he wanted and was tricked. As upsetting as it was, he had no right to curse Vidus.

After glaring at Vidus, Ark hunched his shoulders and turned away.

“The rascals fooled by me all lost their marbles and spewed curses, but you’re a bit different. Your actions are dirty, but your fundamental character is okay.” Vidus pushed up his glasses. “However, the fact that you are stupid and lazy is the same as the others. I really can’t understand why people get one thing but completely miss the other.”

“What?”

“Using me alone may be a good method. Because when I choose an item, I can ascertain profit with a chance of roughly 70%. But why is it that you or the others aren’t curious at all about how I can choose good items with a 70% chance? That’s the problem with young fellows these days. They only think about making money easily.”

“...!”

Ark finally understood where he went wrong. As he followed Vidus, Ark had considered himself clever. But after listening to Vidus’ words, wasn’t he wretchedly stupid? Ark had definitely only thought

of making money easily, and he hadn't even thought about how Vidus was able to pick out items so well. His eyes had been clouded by the thought of getting fish that he hadn't even tried to learn how to fish.

As Ark turned with surprised eyes, Vidus laughed as he said, "Well, since the situation is like this and I did cause you a huge loss I'll give you a bit of advice. This game is virtual reality. The laws of reality apply directly to most of the things that exist here. Do you get what I'm saying? Just as items are worth money for a reason in reality, it means items in game were also worth money for a reason."

"Reason it's worth money..."

"One more thing—I work in an auction-related job in the real world as well. To say simply, it's not something a youngster with no experience should recklessly stick their nose in. Learn your lesson from this and throw away your dream of getting rich quick. There's no such thing as a way to make money easily in the world." With that, Vidus went towards the auction again.

Ark mumbled as he stared blankly at Vidus' back. 'He works in auctions in real life, too?'

It finally felt like the fog filling his mind was lifting. Just as Vidus had said, this place was a virtual reality. In other words, it was a copy of reality.

Until now, Ark had just thought of the auction goods as unidentified items. It was a misunderstanding. He had misunderstood everything from the beginning.

In the first place, there was no such thing as an unidentified item in reality or in New World. They weren't identified, but the shape of the item could be checked by eye.

He should have personally judged the value with his eyes, not with an information window. That was the strategy for the blind auction!

'Holy shit, how could I have just left everything to luck?'

He'd been tricked by the fact that the blind auction was in the casino

district. Because of it, he had unconsciously thought it was a gamble. But the blind auction was not a place to gamble. Rather, it was the most realistic place. The ability to carefully appraise an item and judge the value. It was a place to test and compete with that ability.

‘In the end, that means you can work hard to succeed. If there’s a means, I can’t just give up like this.’

His tenacity flared up.

Hero Assembly

“I deliberately gave him advice but he still came back? He’s a much more foolish fellow than I thought.” Vidus tutted after he found Ark fearlessly snooping around the auction again. “Well, no need to concern myself about it. Since he took a beating once, he won’t follow me. If he does, I’ll just give him another bitter experience.”

Just as Vidus predicted, Ark didn’t follow him around. Actually, he didn’t even participate in the auction for a few days. He just went around the auction looking at the items with hungry eyes. Ark finally participated in the auction after three days of nosing around. He bought cheap items worth a few Silver and checked them, but 80% were failures. He suffered a loss of nearly 20 Gold in no time, but Ark didn’t give up.

‘There’s definitely something to it.’ Ark steadily bought cheap auction goods after that.

Two days later, he began to see a change, his success rate went up from 20% to 30%, and in once it started to rise, it didn’t take very long to rise to 40%.

‘I’m finally starting to get the hang of it. It’s simpler than I thought.’ After losing another 50 Gold or so; Ark felt certain of his perception.

Ark had experienced countless part-time jobs over the last 5 years. He tried things from basic newspaper and milk delivery, to sales and business. Among them, he especially remembered the job he’d obtained from Gwon Hwa-rang’s introduction, working at an antiques store.

Ark came in contact with items from all around the world in that job. There weren’t many items considered as hard as antiques to value. Things that looked extremely expensive turned out to be worthless, and sometimes the opposite is true. Therefore, losses or gains of thousands of Won hung with the Identifier’s judgement.

He never formally learned it, however, as he worked there the ability to guesstimate the value of antiques by eye and ear developed. There are many deciding factors like luster, shape, use, utility, and scarcity but they all result into one value.

The amount of heart and soul the maker poured into the item was critical. When an outstanding craftsman makes an item with their heart and soul, even if it looked shabby at first glance, something was 'unique' about it. One couldn't put a finger on it, but it definitely felt different.

They say practice makes perfect.

'Ah, that one's no good. Something's not right about it.' Most of the items he thought of in that way were fakes.

'Hm? That one's better than it looks?' Those were the valued antiques worth hundreds of thousands of Won.

'This place is virtual reality; item details are the same as in real life.' In order to confirm this, Ark spent a few days going around inspecting the auction goods. It wasn't a shocker, but New World also followed the same rules as the real world. This meant it was possible to know the value even if he didn't get it appraised and check the info.

After reaching a certain degree of conviction, he started buying items. By getting the items identified, he checked the differences from the actual feeling and steadily corrected his mistakes. It required an enormous amount of perseverance and concentration.

After spending several days like that, he stopped encountering losses.

But that wasn't all. As he checked countless auction goods, he sometimes encountered a totally unexpected bonus.

Old Coin (Ancient Relic)

This is an old coin used hundreds of years ago. The living
--

conditions in those days can be glimpsed by the design carved into the coin's surface. The coin is a relic of the past, but it is popular among collectors, so it can be sold for a high price.

Value: 10 gold

Bonus from acquiring information about the ancient relic, Old Coin:
Knowledge of Ancient Relics +1, Intelligence +1, Fame +5.

There were items relevant to Ancient Relics mixed in with the Unidentified items. If he had such an item identified, and held it, he received a bonus to his Knowledge of Ancient Relics stat.

'Now that I think about it, the Mysterious Stone Fragment that was in Gallic's stomach required 50 Knowledge of Ancient Relics to check the info. I was worried about how to raise the stat, but there's a method like this.'

Currently, the stat was at 36. Although it only rose by 1, there were still many auction goods. It wouldn't be too hard to get to 50 if he steadily appraised them. Moreover, the Intelligence that rose along with the Knowledge of Ancient Relics was critically necessary for Ark, who summoned Familiars.

'I found yet another reason to stay in the auction house. Okay, I'm getting more and more motivated.'

Once Ark made up his mind, it was scary how persistent he was. Besides a few hours of sleep, Ark just about lived in the auction house. Slowly, he grasped how much to bid for each item. As his success rate steadily increased, his money also started to pile up, if only a little.

Once he made some surplus capital, he dragged Sid to the auction.

"Sid-nim, from now on I will point out some items, so please bid on

them at the auction closing time. Of course, give up on it if it exceeds the max sum I tell you and aim for another item.”

“What? But I was just about to leave for a trade...”

“Please do this as a favor. Didn’t we cross Grey Ridge together?” Ark held Sid’s shoulders and stressed Gray Ridge.

‘This isn’t receiving help, but holding them by the scruff of their neck.’

In the end, even Sid became a zombie wandering the auction house.

Completely caught by Ark, Sid heaved sighs; however, it was profitable for him as well. Ark stockpiled the items from the auction and sold them through Sid. Thanks to this, Ark made a profit and Sid’s EXP rose steadily. Of course, no matter how trustworthy Sid was, the Trade Contract was indispensable!

Thanks to Sid, Ark gained some free time and immediately started another job. He re-auctioned items he’d bought cheaply when there were few people.

‘This one is can be sold for 13 gold at most. Since it has Intermediate Protect, once I spend 10 Gold on identification, there’ll only be 3 Gold left.’ He re-auctioned such an item with a starting bid of 3 Gold. However, Ark wasn’t as naive as to just wait for the item to sell itself.

The auctioneer can’t place a bid on their own items. But an NPC can.

Ark used that fact to summon Dedric and made him participate in the auction. Ark had to pay if Dedric won the bid, but since Dedric wasn’t the one who submitted the item, it wasn’t a violation of the rules. The small fee he had to pay to put the item up for auction wasn’t much of a loss, either.

He had hit upon the auction’s blind spot.

Ark had Dedric and Sid raise the prices on his items. The price was rapidly increasing, so of course it seemed like a good item to clueless people. After doing that for a few hours, they hooked 1-2 blind fish. At that point, the two who had been raising the price for a

while immediately backed off.

Even without seeing it, he knew what the expression of the players who took the item they won to the identification shop would be.

“A-Ark-nim. This is a scam.”

“Of course not. Not knowing is a sin, that’s the world of auction.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, it is,” Ark concluded, with a completely remorseless expression. What he said wasn’t wrong. After all, Ark had learned it from Vidus.

Ark spent ten days like this. Except for when he appraised and sold auction goods, he lived attached to the auction house.

Money kept coming and going so crazily that he couldn’t tell how much he made or lost. One thing was for certain: he was making money! No, it was only inevitable he would make money.

‘By now, I’ve probably recovered more than the 400 Gold I wasted in the beginning.’

It was what Ark was thinking of as he headed to the auction house again when a message box appeared with a cheerful sound effect.

You have learned a new skill.
Discerning Eye (Special, Passive, Beginner): You have seriously identified countless items for a long time. As a result, you have gained an outstanding eye for sorting out items.
Mana Cost: 20
* You are now able to clear Low-level Protect of unidentified items. * You can now immediately determine the value of items whose market prices have been checked before.

‘W-what’s this?’ Ark’s mouth fell wide open.

The Identification skill could only be learned by production classes with over 300 Wisdom or Magicians with more than 500 Intelligence.

The only exception was to use a Rare skill book. However, Ark, a Dark Walker, was able to learn a skill of the same effect without spending a single penny. In addition, he also gained the ability to immediately determine the value of an item, which was only possible at the identification shop.

It wouldn't have been possible if he hadn't sharpened his eye at the antiques store.

"That's right, in this game, if one fully concentrates on one thing then a related skill will form. However, to think I was able to learn an Appraisal skill when my class isn't Production or Magician-related."

There was a benefit to spending over 10 days in the auction house. The new skill further increased Ark's earnings. It was only low-grade, but 10 identifications was 50 Gold. In another five days, even after selling 300 Gold to pay the hospital fees, he still has 900 Gold piled up in his bag.

In the end though, there was a limit to the amount of money he could make at the auction house.

"I don't see any more useful items now." Ark looked around the auction with regretful eyes.

It has been half a month since he started his auction house life. Now, Ark had a success rate of almost over 70%. Since he'd bought all the useful items like crazy, there were only lousy-looking goods left.

It was an auction that only dealt with items users put up, so there was no way the auction goods would be submitted infinitely.

'Is it about time to leave this place?'

Ark was torn. Although there wasn't a single worthwhile item left, one thing bugged him— the auction item currently in front of him.

It was a sooty sword blade without a handle. On the surface it looked to be trash; but, if inspected closely, there was a peculiar

aura emanating from the blade. The problem was, the feeling he sensed from it didn't feel like it would make money.

'No matter how you look at it, this doesn't seem like it's going to make big bucks; although it feels like there's something there.'

Normally, he probably would have just bought it; but, the circumstances was a bit different this time.

'Just who is this guy named Danil?'

The item's starting bid was just 10 Gold. Even so, nobody bidded on the item for the next few hours. It just showed how shabby the item looked. That was why Ark thought he could get it easily and bid 10 Gold and 1 Copper. But the moment he took his eyes off, a player named Danil raised the bid to 15 Gold.

Because of him, Ark's competitive spirit was aroused and he kept raising the price. Before he knew it, the price had rose to a whopping 40 Gold.

'What the hell? Why is this Danil guy so obsessed with this item? I haven't seen his name in the auction before...'

Seeing the price higher than he imagined, Ark placed a bid for 40 Gold and 1 Copper as a test. Perhaps because Danil's competitive spirit was flaring up, he bid a whole 100 gold. One could only think he was crazy.

'If that guy isn't crazy, there's something about this. This is too extreme to be fishing.'

After Ark used the method of inflating prices in the auction house, there were players who used similar methods. Such a method, which he called fishing, was used with discretion to the situation. If he raised the bid to 100 Gold in one go, what kind of madman would get hooked?

This was the reason why Ark was concerned. It looked like he was fishing too obviously. It made him think he wasn't actually fishing. In addition, Danil was a name Ark hadn't seen in the auction house. 100 Gold wasn't an amount that an auction noob would recklessly put out

without any certainty.

‘But to spend as much as 100 Gold... It’s too ridiculous.’ It was rare for even a flashy-looking sword or armor to go up by 50 Gold.

‘What to do? Should I think of it as my last go, close my eyes tight, and bet on it?’

Even after recovering his loss, he had still earned 250 Gold. Including the Gold he sold to pay for hospital bills, that was a total of 550 Gold! However, for Ark, 100 Gold was not small change.

To invest the money he had earned, running around the auction house like crazy for half a month, it was not a decision he could make lightly.

‘Fine then, since I’ve learned the Discerning Eye skill you can’t even get with money here, I’ve made a huge gain anyways. I’ve earned all I can from the auction house. Now, as a commemoration of finishing up my life in the auction house, let’s trust my eye! Whether it’s a success or a failure, I’ll part with the auction with this!’

Just when Ark made a big decision and stretched out his hand to the bidding memo, another hand approached at the same time and flinched as it stopped. It was unthinkable for there to be another player who was going to bid higher than 100 Gold on an item like this.

With a surprised expression, Ark stared at a Merchant player he’d never seen before. The player looked at Ark and frowned slightly.

“Are you perhaps Ark-nim?”

“Then you’re Danil?”

The Merchant nodded and said, “I don’t know why you’re trying to win this item, but I absolutely need this item. Won’t you please yield?”

‘This guy must be a beginner.’

Ark’s eyes flashed for an instant. The auction is a battlefield. A battlefield where victory is won with wits and timing rather than

swords and shields!

For Danil to show his feelings like this, in such a place...

After Ark saw Danil's response, he perceived that the sum Danil had bid wasn't just fishing. With his fidgety appearance, it was clear there was some reason he had to win this auction no matter what. In other words, this was an item that was guaranteed to have a profit worth the amount he had bid!

'I'd be an idiot to lose such an item in the auction.'

Without saying a word, Ark raised the bid to 110 Gold.

Danil flew into a rage and bid 120 Gold. However, without even batting an eye, Ark raised the price several times. Danil's face soon paled. When the price finally exceeded 200 Gold, Danil complained with an exasperated expression.

"You're too much."

"It wasn't too much. The auction house has always been such a place. If there's something you want, you don't ask your enemy to yield— you do whatever it takes to crush your opponent. Don't you know asking him to yield was your mistake from the start? If you don't have enough money to bid, get out of the way."

At that moment, another person approached and said what Ark had wanted to say. The person was none other than Vidus, who had been in the auction house for the longest time.

Vidus glared at Danil with disparaging eyes. Danil made an enraged expression, but he walked away as if he had nothing to say.

Then, Vidus' gaze settled on Ark.

"Are you also set on this?"

"There isn't any other worthwhile item."

"Hmm, you seemed to be buying up quite a lot of items. It only takes a rough calculation; you must've made a few hundred Gold."

"I wasn't following you, Vidus-nim."

"I know that much. I saw you buying even items I gave up on early." Vidus studied Ark with fresh eyes. "But this is truly amazing, just how did you learn how to judge items properly in a few days? I may have given you a hint, but it shouldn't have been easy. What's more, looking at the bids you've made, your eye for judging an item's maximum price seems more precise than mine. To be able to judge an item not by Silver but down to the Coppers... Is there some sort of method I'm unaware of?"

It was the result of his tenacity to save even a single Copper.

"I didn't know it then, but my eyes are somewhat high quality." As Ark answered while grinning, Vidus nodded.

"So your high quality eyes have set their sights on this item? Then, I too can't just yield it to you. Since my income isn't the same as before because of your unruly meddling, I'll make up for it with this chance."

"Are you saying you want a bidding war?"

"That's right."

Vidus laughed as if amused by the bellicose Ark. "However, since that fellow has dropped out thanks to you, there's no need to raise the price too much, right? It's ridiculous for professionals like you and I to senselessly raise the price like crazy. It's not good to shed each other's blood. Therefore, I'll make a proposal."

"Please continue."

"There isn't much time left before the auction closes, so there is no need to drag this on. We'll write down the max we are willing to go. And the one who writes the higher amount gets the item. How's that?"

"Sounds good." Ark answered without hesitation.

After all, if they had a price war there was no way Ark would win. Vidus, who had been earning money at the auction for a long time, would have many times more capital than Ark.

In fact, Ark was certain Vidus was the player who had bought the

Epic item, wandering around the auction house. There was no way he could win with money against such a well-endowed player. Even if he did win, he couldn't hope to recover his losses after raising the price even more in a battle of pride.

'Alright, how much should I write down? How much will Vidus call?'

Now that the match had started, he found it quite difficult. Ark agonized for a moment, thought of something, and quickly wrote down a price.

"Now, at the count of three, we'll both reveal them."

At the same time, they both showed their prices.

Vidus had written 220 Gold. After checking the price, a triumphant smile spread on Ark's face.

"It's my victory."

"...Dammit, how did you know how much I was going to write?"

"I remembered the time I spent following you. Vidus-nim, you have a habit of betting exactly 10% higher when you are bidding decisively."

Vidus winced, then let out a sigh and shook his head.

"I lost. I completely lost."

"Then I will take this item."

Ark wrote 220 Gold and 1 Copper on the item's memo. As soon as Ark wrote it down, the sound ending the auction rang and the NPC managing the auction came to collect the item. Once he went to the management office and paid the price, it'd be his farewell with the blind auction.

"I'm leaving this place today. So don't worry and keep making lots of money."

"Look who's talking— you cleaned out all the profitable ones in just half a month, you scary bastard." Watching Ark run off with his backpack jingling, Vidus stuck his tongue out.

Raising the price by 10% at a time was a habit he'd picked up while

managing auctions in real life. But who would have thought a rookie would pick up on the habit he himself had forgotten all about.

“With an eye of that level, it’d be fine to leave him the entire auction house. Should I have asked where he lived? Seeing how fast he picked it up, he’s probably working in the field already. Shame.”

Just as Vidus was turning while smacking his lips, someone ran in helter-skelter and rejoiced when they saw the item had disappeared.

“The auction finally ended!”

Vidus stopped walking and turned around. It was a young player wearing a set of black leather armor. Next to the player was Danil, sporting a helpless expression— he looked around and tearfully made an excuse with an apologetic face.

“I’m sorry, Shambala-nim. Because another user bid more than 200 gold, I wasn’t able to win the item. Since it went past the agreed upon amount the contract was invalidated... I will return the money entrusted to me.”

“Wh-what did you say? What are you talking about? 200 gold should have been enough...”

As Danil returned the money pouch, the user named Shambala’s face twisted.

The player who had actually wanted the item was not Danil but Shambala. Because of an urgent quest, he had promised payment and had entrusted the auction to a Merchant instead.

Vidus grasped the gist of the situation and tutted, “Tsk, tsk, you had a proxy contract with that fellow?”

“Ye-yes, so what?”

“It’s a shame, but the item you wanted was taken by someone else.”

“Wh-who was it? Just who was it?”

“His name is Ark, and he took it for 220 Gold and 1 Copper. That guy is very tenacious, so if you want to buy it, you’ll probably have to add at least 100 Gold on top of that price. If you still want to buy it,

you should hurry and follow him. He's probably going to the appraisal shop right now."

Before Vidus even finished talking, Shambala ran out of the auction house.

"That rascal Ark, he surely took his share to the very end."

* * *

Unfortunately, while Shambala was running towards the appraisal shop, Ark was strolling to the Trade district. The item had low-level Protect; since he had the Discerning Eye skill, Ark didn't really need to go to the appraisal shop.

"Well, shall we see the result? Discerning Eye!"

With a cheerful sound, the item's information window popped up.

Black Frost Blade (Ancient Relic)
It is an abnormal blade made of iron. There is a mysterious ancient rune engraved on the surface, inscribed in a forgotten holy language of magic.
However, the chill emanating from the blade is like a grim aura that has drank much blood. The holy ancient rune seems to have been engraved to restrain the evil aura. There is currently no way to find out where it was used, but it likely wasn't used for good.
Value: —

Bonus for learning about the Ancient Relic – Black Frost Blade: Knowledge of Ancient Relics +10, Intelligence +5, Fame +5.

"Wh-what?" Ark burst out in confusion.

Though the description on the item was good, the problem was the value: '-'. That meant it couldn't be sold in a store! An item he had invested 220 Gold and 1 Copper on was just a DECORATION!?

For the first time in a while, Ark felt dizzy.

'Damn it, as the old saying goes, there is no such thing as a successful gambler... Just when I thought I'd saved up some money, I waste it all in the end!'

Ark was about to throw the blade into the canal in anger, but he soon changed his mind. After reading the item description, it seemed like there was something to the item. If he was lucky, as he had been with the Mysterious Slate, it could also lead to a good quest, or turn into something useful if combined with another item.

'If I acquired a hilt or a sheath, for example, it could become a useable sword...'

The chance of that was very low, but it would be better to hold on to it and hope for the best rather than throwing it away.

Until now, all the ancient relics he had obtained from the auction only raised Knowledge of Ancient Relics by 1. But the Black Frost Blade raised it by 10! The stat had risen by that much when he found the hidden ancient ruin.

If only because of that, it couldn't be called an average item.

'Well, I'll pack it away for now.'

"Snake, stone fragment."

Snake, who was dozing off, snapped awake and spat out the stone fragment. He had failed to make profit, but he did raise his Knowledge of Ancient Relics by 10. He had gained 8 Knowledge of Ancient Relics from the auction house. Thanks to that, his Knowledge of Ancient Relics stat was now 53.

'At least now I can check this item.'

As soon as Ark held the stone fragment, it vibrated as an information window popped up.

– With the Knowledge of Ancient Relics, you have confirmed the Stone Fragment Infused with Ancient Power.

Stone Fragment Infused with Ancient Power (Star Fragment)

This stone is a part of a very mysterious and awesome power. It was created by the power of darkness, but it possesses light properties.

Knowledge of Ancient Relics has confirmed this to be one of the Three Marvels of Hero Maban from the Dark Century, long ago. Hero Maban left a part of his own power in this marvel for future generations. If a Truthseeker comes into possession of this marvel, they can acquire a part of Hero Maban's knowledge.

* The penalty imposed upon the owner has disappeared.

*The owner of the Star Fragment can utilize Hero Maban's techniques.

Experience +30,000. Knowledge of Ancient Relics +15, Intelligence +10, Fame +20.

You have learned a new profession exclusive skill.

Gift of Darkness (Passive): All Dark Walker abilities unfurled in the dark will increase slightly. Stats will receive a 30% increased growth. Duration of 'Stealth' has been increased to 15 minutes. However, it is impossible to level up this skill.

You have learned a new profession exclusive skill.

Blade Storm (Active, Beginner): The first of Hero Maban's secret skills; it shatters the sword to make a maelstrom of shards that violently tears the enemy apart. The used sword is completely destroyed.

Mana Cost: 400

Wasn't it said that there is pleasure at the end of suffering?

He wasted all the money he worked to death on for half a month, but thanks to that, he was able to check the Mysterious Stone Fragment. And as he'd expected, the stone fragment was one of Hero Maban's Three Marvels. A legendary item sealing a part of Hero Maban's power, a Star Fragment!

The rewards from it were enormous. It was hard to say anything about Blade Storm since he hadn't used it yet, but Gift of Darkness was better than leveling up a couple of times.

However, the greatest success of all was that his goal as a Dark Walker was now clear. He needed to find Hero Maban's Three Marvels. If he knew what his goal was, he knew what he must do. Because of this, Ark was able to take a step forward as a true Truthseeker of Hero Maban.

'I'm certain a Dark Walker gets skills whenever they find a marvel.'

Most professions were able to learn 5-6 exclusive attack skills when they were done with the job-change. On the other hand, Ark had only received 2 skills, and Summon Demon wasn't an attack skill he could use directly.

Dark Blade was quite a useful skill, but he had felt that having just one attack skill was lacking.

'Blade Storm, huh... it drains Mana like crazy. If I don't raise my Mana more, there'll be almost no chance to use it with the Familiars out. And the fact that it destroys the sword bothers me. It would be

nice if the damage was as great as the penalty...’

In any case, it seemed he’d received the reward for investing 220 Gold and 1 Copper.

“Alright, if the result is good, all is good.”

Ark made a pleased expression. He went in and out of shops to prepare his bags for a departure from Giran, when—

FSSSHH! FLASH! BOOM!

The sky suddenly darkened, then a flash of light flew in from afar. The light crossed Giran and smashed into the top of a tower high in the sky. Sparks flew as the whole tower swayed. It was Giran’s Magic Institute Tower.

The Magic Institute Towers built in several cities resonated with each other. When there was a need to send a widespread dispatch, it was transmitted and received through magic by the towers just like now. He’d read about this on the Jackson Castle forum, but it was his first time actually seeing it the dispatch being received.

Alarmed, the other users were also staring transfixed at the Magic Institute Tower. Not long after, a Magician hurriedly ran out of the tower and casted loudspeaker magic.

“Urgent message! A few hours ago, an unknown Dark Army launched a surprise attack on Jackson Castle. Because of their attack, Jackson Castle has suffered enormous damage and its people are shivering in fear. The Lord of Jackson is still resisting with his forces, but the Dark Army is stronger than expected, so the future is uncertain.”

At the Magician’s words, the players started to talk amongst themselves.

Monsters organized an army and invaded a castle? It was an unimaginable event.

Users who started in the Schudenberg Kingdom all went through Jackson Castle. All the users held their breath and stared piercingly

at the Magician.

“If left as it is, Jackson Castle will be completely trampled by the Dark Army. But most of Schudenberg’s forces are stationed in the frontier regions, so deploying them will take nine days. Therefore, the Magic Institute has considered the urgent issue and has decided to recruit volunteers from all regions.”

“Volunteers? Does that mean we can also participate?”

“Of course. We are urgently recruiting brave warriors to save Jackson Castle. The Magic Institute promises a great reward for he who contributes in the war. Those who call themselves brave adventurers, please gather immediately at Magic Institute Tower. We have no time. The airship sent by the Magic Institute will depart Giran for Jackson Castle in 3 hours.”

“It’s a special event!”

“An event where one can get awarded by the Magic Institute!”

Wide-eyed users flocked to the Magic Institute Tower. Of course, Ark was also mixed in with the others and ran towards the tower.

But because the airship had a fixed capacity, not all players could be used. Magic Institute Magicians checked the players’ info one by one and only granted the quest to the qualified.

“Next person, please.”

When Ark approached, a Magician pushed a crystal ball toward him. Then, Ark’s character information window popped up before his eyes.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +100		
Fame	700	Level	68

Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Soul Caretaker		
Health	1,415	Mana	975 (+100)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	178
Agility	218 (+17)	Stamina	268
Wisdom	27	Intelligence	186
Luck	43	Flexibility	15
Art of Communication	18	Affection	23
Special Stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			63
Equipment Effects			
Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor: Agility 2, Frost Resistance +20 Cat Paws: Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit Rate +10% Crystal Golem's Head: Mana +100			
*All abilities will increase by 30% in the dark. * You have the ability to hide in the darkness (15 minute duration. Cancelled when you get into combat). * Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.			

*You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

From the EXP he'd earned in Grey Ridge and from checking the Star Fragment, he had leveled up to 68. His Health was 1,415, and his Intelligence had also risen from examining Ancient Relics to bring his Mana close to 1,000. And although it didn't appear in the equipment effects, the attack power from Lancel's Sword couldn't be ignored. If he equipped the the Guardian Armor of Merpeople on top of that, a Warrior was nothing to be jealous of. With his Agility over 200, it greatly increased his crit rate, evasion, and damage. Since his various other skills had also improved dramatically, he was at a level where it wasn't embarrassing to show his stats.

As expected, the Magician's crystal ball recognized Ark's skill and shone with blue light.

"Thank you for volunteering. Please take this badge. This symbolizes your participation in the battle as a member of the Magic Institute. Please head to the top of the tower now. The airship will arrive soon."

Magic Institute Badge

A badge given to those who participate in the defense of Jackson Castle through the Magic Institute. If the battle is won, those with the badge will be rewarded by the Magic Institute according to their contribution.

As soon as he received the badge, a quest window popped up.

Hero Assembly (Event Quest)

An unknown Dark Army has launched a surprise attack on Jackson Castle. The Lord and his soldiers are currently doing their best to block them, but the Dark Army is overwhelming them.

You must defeat the Dark Army before the Jackson walls that have

protected the peace of the residents collapse. It is an opportunity to show the skill you have honed and polished through your long journey.

The hero who contributes greatly to the rescue of Jackson Castle will receive the reward prepared by the Magic Institute.

(You must protect Jackson Castle or defeat the Dark Army after three days in real time or until the arrival of the Schudenberg Kingdom's forces. If you die, the quest will be automatically failed and you will not be able to log in for 72 hours as the quest progresses.)

Difficulty: ++C

Quest Restrictions: Level 60 (A player under the minimum level cannot be recognized for their contribution even if they participate in the battle)

* * *

"Huh?" As he checked the system after eating dinner, Kim Gwon-tae cried out in surprise. The monitor suddenly turned black as an enormous amount of data came up like crazy.

"What's it doing all of a sudden?" Startled, Kim Gwon-tae focused on the data screen. The data coming up like crazy was all in preparation for a single event.

After hastily flipped through a thick booklet and compared it to what was on the screen, Kim Gwon-tae screamed.

"Team Leader, a protect-type level C event has activated!"

"What?" Ha Myung-woo came running in as he asked, "What are the activation conditions?"

"I will check it now."

Kim Gwon-tae took out a laptop, connected it to the main computer, and checked the data while typing as if possessed. He found a few conditions and answered, "It's an event having to do with the 7 Heroes. The starting condition is that there have to be at least 4

players with a Hero-related profession and 2 of them have to find a clue about the Heroes.”

“Damn, it’s progressing too quickly. Kim Dae-ri, do we have any way to find the players with Hero-related profession? If you can also find the players who found the clues, even better.”

“It’s impossible at this time. There are scores of Hero-related professions. Among those, there are people who failed the quest for job-changing and a few who succeeded. What we can do with the system is too limited, so it’s impossible to investigate them all. The only player we’ve currently confirmed as having found a Hero clue is Alan, who job-changed to Holy Knight. You probably know this, but he is one of the applicants.”

“Is there a way to interfere with the event?”

“No.”

“Does it mean all we can do is watch...” Ha Myung-woo bit his lower lip angrily.

It was pathetic. New World, the perfect virtual reality game that still remained unparalleled. But for Ha Myung-woo, New World was full of faults. The game was perfect, but because it was so perfect, it couldn’t be controlled by an administrator.

A sword you can’t use is no better than a stick.

‘Damn those crazy bastards!’

Nausea rose to his throat. He was cursing the developers he had boasted of so vigorously in the reception room.

Those so-called world-class scholars seemed to have gone a little touched in the head after working on the game for a long time. In the end, they fell under the misconception that they were true Creators. That was the start of all the problems.

The world they created must be perfect. A perfect world where all existences must obey the absolute laws.

With those absolute laws, the creations accepted the game as one world and had to overcome trials prepared by the Creator to write a

new history— it was a world where no external influences were permitted.

The result of such a crazy idea was an unprecedented virtual reality game, the true nature of New World.

The developers put up so many locks that there was almost nothing an administrator could do freely. The planning team tried to use all sorts of methods and means to break those locks, but it was all for naught.

As a result, the understanding of New World by the planning team was not much different from what the players knew. They couldn't find out what kind of professions there were, or what kind of skills, even what kind of events would happen.

Even the operation of the game was the will of the AI constructing the game and not because they wanted it. They had released the game since the investment had been enormous, but nobody knew how the game would unfold. Of course the planning team didn't know, and even the developers, who called themselves Creators...

From the perspective of Global Exos, this was an extremely dangerous situation. Collecting players for the entrance exam was actually just an excuse to probe the system.

'Park Woo-seong, you bastard!' Ha Myung-woo ground his teeth.

All the locks on the game were from the developer who had disappeared with the game's completion. Park Woo-seong, a developer who boasted fame as a genius game designer.

In any case, as long as Park Woo-seong didn't release the locks, there was no way for the planning team to engage with the game.

"Then at least search for information on the players involved with the event."

"But..."

"Even if you have to look up hundreds of players one at a time, find them before the event ends! If we find them, it'll be possible to predict when the next event will begin."

“Understood.” Kim Gwon-tae’s fingers danced across the keyboard.

An event no one predicted was happening. A new history was about to begin in New World.

The Silver Arrow

About 100 people were gathered on the wide balcony of the Magic Tower's top floor. They were players who passed the level 60 restriction screening of the Magic Institute.

As expected of a next generation game, New World offered countless variables within the system. To put it simply, the level of freedom was high. Of course, since there were countless variables in raising a character, simply hunting wasn't everything. That said, the unchanging basic formula, which applied to all games, also applied to New World.

It was 'time spent equals level'. If your level is higher than others, then it means you spent more time than others!

New World had been out for a little over four months. Moreover, it was three to four times harder to level up in new World compared to other games. This meant the players would have raised their levels to 180-240 in four months in a different game. 100 such extraordinary high-leveled players had gathered in Giran alone. This was the result wrought by New World's strong addictive nature, which exceeded all imagination.

Of course, everyone had their own know-how. It was the reason why they were overflowing with confidence despite receiving a quest where they didn't know what kind of enemies would appear.

However, Ark wasn't at all interested in their confidence. He was just drooling over their equipment.

'This is no joke, just where did they get such items?'

Ark thought he was pretty lucky with items in his own way. But after looking at the gathered users' equipment, his confidence vanished.

'That one's definitely at least a Rare item.'

A brightly shining, horned viking helmet, gloves studded with sharp blades from the back of the hand to the elbow, shoes made of bones as red as dripping blood, a two-handed sword with a saw-like blade; they were all unusual pieces of equipment.

In addition, although there were 100 users gathered, he didn't see any pieces of the same equipment. It felt like he'd come to an exhibition of high-class items.

He was gulping down his drool. 'If you converted all the items into money, just how much would it be?

Ark's keen eye was further honed at the blind auction. After making calculations on the spot, each person was wearing equipment worth around 400-500 gold.

'With 100 users, that's at least 40,000 Gold. 400 million when converted into Won (~\$400,000)!' An unreal estimate.

Ark was just a commoner who sighed when the monthly utility bills came. Though they said the value of money wasn't the same as it used to be because of the soaring prices, for a commoner, hearing the word "million" was still enough to make them cry out. "Millions" in gold were swimming before his eyes.

[T/N: The author includes a pun here, where the Korean word for million, pronounced "ugk," is like a sound of surprise, like "ah!"]

News he'd seen recently came to mind—the auction site specializing in New World items had already hit 10 billion won in market size. At the time, he just thought, "whatever." It was unimaginable anyways. But now, it didn't feel like someone else's matter.

'Ack, if all those people were monsters...'

"Please lend me your attention for a moment." Just then, the Magic Institute NPC appeared at the top floor after finishing the screening process. "New information has just come in. The Magic Institute isn't the only one who thinks this is a bad situation. A renowned Merchant guild located in the Commerce District south of Giran, 'Midus', has sent an Armed Merchant Ship loaded with already recruited militia to

Jackson territory. In addition, the renowned Warrior guild of the Northern area, not far from here, 'Sword X' has also sent militia to Jackson."

"The Merchant and Warrior guilds?"

"If you add the Magic Institute, then doesn't it mean all 3 Great Guilds are making a move?"

"As expected, this wasn't an ordinary quest." The players chattered in surprised tones.

Ark had also seen information about the 3 Great Guilds on the message boards in each village. In New World, there was a concept of top guilds managed by NPCs. No matter the race or Kingdom a player had chosen to start in, they had to receive permission from one of these top guilds in order to start a guild. In other words, a guild started by a player was affiliated to one of the organizations, the top guild they had submitted their application to. So they had to pay a fee to the top guild if they made a guild, but they also received various support and guild-exclusive quests in exchange.

The unique aspect was that the influence of these top guilds wasn't set in stone. The influence of the top guilds was similar to the market shares of Merchants. Therefore, the more users chose them, the stronger the top guild became.

Presently, the most popular professions with users in New World were largely these three: Warrior, Magician, and Merchant. New World's 3 Great Guilds were naturally decided as a result.

The top Warrior guild Sword X, top Merchant guild Midus, and top Magician guild Magic Institute!

Of course, when a user makes a guild, there's no need to choose the related guild in accordance to their profession. But if they had to choose, they might as well. There were many cases where the support or quest rewards from the top guild were valuable for a related profession. So a guild was chosen matching their profession. Thanks to this, the current 3 Great Guilds wielded influence second only to the royal family and the church.

The Mage continued to speak. "There is probably no need to repeat

this, but saving Jackson is our first and foremost priority. But then again, it is also a battle where the 3 Great Guilds have put their pride on the line. Of course the status of the Magic Institute will change in relation to how well our militia fares in the battle. You will definitely be rewarded based on your efforts, so we hope everyone will do their best.”

It was the reason why the 3 Great Guilds had scrambled to organize militia. Jackson Castle was the first place where players, who started in the Schudenberg Kingdom, changed their profession and became interested in guilds. If they raised their status there, then the allure of a newly formed guild would rise as a result.

Users were not the only ones competing with each other. NPCs also competed against other NPCs endlessly; that is New World.

However, users were not interested in the competition between the top guilds. All they wanted was experience and the rewards!

With the mention of the 3 Great Guilds, players conversed with very excited expressions.

“If all three Great Guilds are participating, then the rewards are bound to be huge as well.”

“You might even receive a Magic weapon.”

“I’m glad I leveled up like crazy these past few days.”

“I just dropped by Giran to clean out my bag, but to think I would get such a quest! Jackpot!”

The grander the scale of the quest, the larger the rewards.

But Ark was worried instead. ‘This isn’t something to be needlessly happy about. It just means there’s going to be more competitors.’

Even if one received the event quest from a different guild, the basic quest contents would be the same. In the end, the EXP and contribution points would have to be split with hundreds of users. As a result, the contribution he could earn would be reduced, so the reward would also inevitably fall. Granted, it would be easier to succeed in the quest with more people, but it wasn’t something to be needlessly happy about.

“There are only about 30 minutes until the airship arrives now. It may be small, but the Magic Institute has prepared some supplies for the people participating in the militia. Please come and get them in order. We couldn’t fully prepare since we were short on time, but it will be helpful.”

The Magician handed out supply boxes one by one. Upon opening, there were several items to be seen inside the box.

Intermediate Recovery Potions (3)

Dozens of herbs mixed with a special technique, a highly refined magic potion. It is an essential item for warriors that can instantly heal wounds from battle.

When used, it heals 300 Health instantly, but has no effect on disease or poison-like conditions.

Highly Nutritious Biscuit (10)

The highest grade of emergency food, made with plenty of highly nutritious ingredients. It doesn’t taste good, but it is rich in every nutrient, so even eating just one of them will make one feel full and satisfied.

Increases Satiety and Health recovery by 50% for 1 min. If consumed with a drink, Mana Recovery increases by an additional 50%. However, only Satiety will be recovered if there is a status condition. Cannot be used in battle.

Letter Movement Orb (Event Item)

A new mode of transport pioneered by the the Magic Institute's surprising technological prowess; when used at a Magic Institute sending tower, the body is converted into a letter and is instantly teleported to a designated receiving tower.

However, since this technology is still under development, it has many limitations and the physical burden on the user is considerable. Much more study is still likely required before it can be used.

Current set coordinates: Jackson – Giran

Number of uses: 1

The mage added a lengthy explanation. "The magic tower in Jackson cannot currently utilize its full functions. It is the reason why everyone has to use the airship. But if Jackson is protected and the Magic Tower gains its full power, you can use the Letter Movement Orb to quickly return to Giran."

In the end, it meant that if the quest was completed, they would take of the trouble in returning to Giran. Then again, hundreds of high level users milling through a low level area would create problems in terms of balance.

"The airship is coming from over there!"

Right after Ark put the supplies away, there was a commotion at one end of the balcony.

Ark's eyes grew wide when he reflexively turned his head around.

Set against the wide open, blue sky, a sparkling silver airship appeared.

"That there is the airship produced by the combined skill of the Magic Institute, Silver Arrow. It is 200 meters in length; not only can it fly at 300 kilometers per hour thanks to the 4 engines driven by powerful magic, but it is an all-weather aerial battleship with a gun also referred to as the 'Spear of Thor' installed. This Silver Arrow will take all of you to Jackson Castle."

With a proud look on his face, the Magician bragged about military secrets. But the name the Magician babbled and what Ark suddenly recalled were totally different.

‘Hindenburg!’

Hindenburg was an enormous German airship, made in the 1900s. But unfortunately, it disappeared due to an explosion of unknown cause during the test flight; now it was a legendary airship that could only be seen through old pictures wandering on the internet.

Well, that piece of trivia aside... in any case, the airship’s basic form was the same as the Hindenburg. Shaped like a ship three to four times larger than a soccer field, the balloon at the top controlled altitude and the four engines at the bottom provided thrust.

However, those functions were the only similarity. The elegance of the Silver Arrow was so beautiful, it couldn’t be compared to the coarse Hindenburg. Engraved into Silver Arrow was a complex, gilded pattern, and around it was a complex array of metal pipes one could only guess the use for. Like a surreal work of metallic art, it boasted perfect aesthetic beauty.

When the airship pulled in next to the balcony, the players swarmed aboard.

“We pray for your good fortune in war!” The Magician shouted loudly.

“Are all the militia on board?”

“Yes, Captain!”

“Alright, turn the Silver Arrow 30 degrees to port, the destination is Jackson!” Ordered the white-bearded captain, with a voice heavy with sleep.

Simultaneously, the air stirred on both sides of the airship as it moved and steadily changed direction. The nose pointed towards the southwestern Jackson territory!

“Quickly! The Warrior and Merchant guild militias left long ago. If we arrive late, the Silver Arrow will be a laughing stock. Set sail at top

speed!”

Roaaaar... BOOOOOM!

A roar burst from the 4 magic engines; befitting its name, the airship shot away like an arrow.

“Woaaaaah!”

“Gasp, I, I almost fell off.”

The users on deck fell to one side. If Ark wasn’t holding onto the rail, he would have fallen into a pile with the rest of them.

“Muahahaha, hold on tight, you rookies. It’s not my fault if you fall off.” The captain’s hearty laughter came from the steering room.

* * *

‘This doesn’t feel too bad?’

A refreshing breeze fluttered his hair.

The airship going at max power raced across the continent at great speed. At first, he was taken aback by the speed. 300 kilometers per hour!

It might not be an impressive speed when flying, but the airship didn’t offer the same comfortable travel a modern airplane did. Sometimes gusts rocked the ship and the wind rushed in undeterred onto the unstable deck.

But once one got used to it, such things actually became strong points. The totally unobstructed view at the highest speed allowed one to amply enjoy the sense of liberation.

‘We already passed the Argus Mountains.’

As he gazed downwards, the mountains and fields zipped past by like a video fast forwarded times 4. It didn’t even take 40 minutes to fly across the same Argus Mountains he had struggled traveling through for several days.

Now, once they traversed the wide plains, Jackson Castle would soon be in sight. While Ark was thinking about it, the surroundings

abruptly began to darken.

‘Eh? What’s this? There’s still a lot of time before nightfall?’

At first, it gradually darkened, as if there was fog, but their surroundings were soon covered in pitch-black darkness. Once they were confined within the black fog, there was suddenly a heavy feeling, as if gravity had increased. Perhaps because of it, the airship which sped forward at top speed, shook as it rocked.

At the same time, the users all got the same message.

The airship has entered the influence area of Dark Fog, which was created by an unknown magical power!

All players in the influence area will receive a Vision penalty and Stats will decrease by 10%. However, players of the Dark Attribute will not receive the penalty.

“What is this?”

“Dark Fog? Damn, stats are reduced by 10%?”

The people who quickly checked their stats spat out curses.

Ark also checked his stats. But thankfully, the penalty didn’t apply to him, as he had the Dark Attribute. Rather, his stats increased from receiving the darkness bonus.

With the 20% stat boost from his profession’s characteristic and the additional 10% from the ‘Gift of Darkness’ he’d learned in Giran, and since other users’ stats had been reduced by 10%, Ark’s stats were 40% higher than them!

‘This is a good sign from the beginning. Is this Dark Fog the reason why the Magic Institute called them the Army of Darkness? If so, does it mean I get to keep my bonuses for the whole duration of the quest? Hehehe, it’s at times like these that I feel like it was a good decision to choose the Dark Walker profession.’

Ark reveled in a strange sense of superiority. But while Ark was grinning, the surrounding situation was becoming quite serious. As

the Dark Fog enveloped them, the crew became busy.

“Captain, we are losing power!”

“No need to panic. It’s probably a move of the enemy to slow down reinforcement. Heh, it’s laughable to try and stop Silver Arrow with a fog of this level. All hands to battle stations!”

“Yes, prepare Silver Arrow for battle, ready the Spear of Thor.”

With a heavy clank of metal, the gunports all over the airship opened. Dozens of gun barrels rolled out from both sides. But what caught Ark’s eyes was the enormous gun barrel that emerged from the gunport at the front.

Made of a silver metal, it was a gun shaped like a trident!

This was what the Magic Institute NPC had boasted of so enthusiastically, the Silver Arrow’s main armament, the Spear of Thor.

As the airship readied itself for combat, the Dark Fog became even thicker. Since the visibility worsened, it was hard to make out objects even a few meters ahead.

“Turn on all the defense lights!”

As the countless lights on the airship turned on, the ground was illuminated. It was then that the faces of the users gathered on the deck became ashen with shock.

“Gasp, are all those monsters?”

“Aren’t those monsters we’ve never seen till now?”

“Holy shit, do we have to fight them to finish the quest?”

There was an enormous number of monsters covering the ground underneath. It was hard to get an accurate number since they were far away, but there looked to be at least a thousand!

They also looked different from the monsters they had faced until now. Most of them were black humanoid monsters, while a few giant monsters reaching a few meters in height were also mixed in.

As the light hit them, they shot arrows and threw rocks.

“They are attacking!”

“Evade!”

The users who were stupidly looking down were slaughtered by arrows and rocks. For a level 60 user, an arrow or two didn't do much damage. But because of the sudden attack, a scuffle broke out as the rest urgently backed away. In the panic, a few users fell overboard.

“Huh? S-sorry! ”

“Damn, you bastard!”

Users who fell were torn apart by the swarming monsters even before they hit the ground. The players' faces turned gaunt. It wasn't because of the gruesome deaths of their comrades. This quest was cut from a different cloth than the other quests. Not only did you fail the quest if you died, but you couldn't even login for three days.

As the users were seized with fear, the captain snorted, “Pathetic squirts, there's no need to be afraid. The pride of the Magic Institute, the battle airship Silver Arrow, is not so weak as to shake from such a weak attack.”

“Captain, all guns are fully charged.”

“Good. Give those stupid monsters a taste of Thor!”

“Yes, ready all guns for firing! Aim 30 degrees to the ground!”

With a mechanical whirr, the small guns and Spear of Thor pointed to the ground. The trident-shaped barrel moved into position with a buzz. A blue aura seemed to gather at the spear tip as it sparked. Then, it suddenly shook violently as an azure laser shot forth.

Flash! BOOOOM!

A huge thunderbolt stuck the ground. It enveloped the ground with blue light with a radius of several hundred meters. The sparks spread along the ground, striking all the monsters in the area with massive electric damage.

“GRAAWR!”

Monsters directly hit by the bolt exploded instantly, and monsters hit by the sparks extending along the ground lost considerable health. Even monsters that seemed to be considerably high leveled were staggering, thrown into critical condition. Afterwards, the small guns also showered them with electric magic. The monsters who were close to death collapsed in disorderly groups.

A fearsome AOE attack!

The captain let out a cheer as he shook his fist. “Uhahaha, how’s that?! You arrogant bastards. This is the pride of the Silver Arrow, the Spear of Thor!”

‘Th-that’s awesome!’

The area was devastated by a single blow. Although it was probably just a pre-arranged scene, the visual impact was incredible.

They were anxious when the monsters first attacked, but if the airship’s force was at this level, it appeared this quest was just a simple event. However, it wasn’t like there was nothing for the users to do.

“The Spear of Thor takes 3 minutes to recharge. Until then, anyone who is capable of long-distance attacks, please provide cover from the deck.”

“Right, now is not the time to just sit around!”

“Those monsters are all contribution points!”

The users gathered their senses as their eyes gleamed. Soon, a massive counterattack began.

Among the militia, there were about 40 Mages and Archers; 40 people using magic and skills at the same time in the darkness was a sight to behold. In addition, there were 30 airship guns capable of continuous fire! Already in critical condition, the monsters literally melted. The Warriors also pitched in, pulling out throwing weapons and bows.

As soon as they started the counter attack, the badges on their chests sparkled continuously. The collapsing monsters were being

turned into contribution points.

Thanks to this, Arks' insides were burning. 'Tch, if I knew it would be like this, I would've packed a bow and arrows.'

Even if a player weren't an Archer, they could still shoot a bow. Range and accuracy paled in comparison to an Archer, but that was no problem if one was going to shoot from the sky with a mass of targets left and right. But because he'd sold off all his japtem in Giran, Ark didn't even have a common wooden bow.

'No, let's not be hasty. This is just the start of the quest anyways. It's going to continue for 3 days so there'll be plenty of opportunities. Let's just do what I can for now.'

"Everyone, please do your best. We are the only ones who can rescue the trembling citizens of Jackson!" Ark ran about the deck using his Nursing skill.

There was no effect on people who had 100% health. But since the monsters counterattacked, most of the users were hit by arrows and rocks once or twice. As a result, they all received courage and vigor, which influenced overall fighting ability, an increase in stats, and a low level blessing. Thanks to the effects of Nursing, the attacks of the allies became stronger and more accurate.

However, the players just thought a Priest-related buff magic had been used.

"Huh? What's this? My stats went up?"

"This is the effect of a blessing. The chance of status effects went down."

"I don't know who it was, but thanks!"

— Contribution points have risen. Contribution +15.

Whether or not people noticed, his contribution went up.

'As expected! Even if I don't personally kill monsters, contribution points rise as long as I contribute to the battle!'

After checking the message, Ark's motivation soared. After that, Ark ran around the deck using Nursing like crazy. Since many users were affected in one use, it also gave a lot of contribution points.

Contribution quickly passed 100!

Since he was running around on the deck, he didn't have to worry about getting hit by enemy arrows either.

'Hahaha, this is like taking candy from a baby!'

During that time, the main gun finished charging and released another thunderbolt. The terrifying thunderbolt ripped through the darkness and bathed the ground in blue. The several hundred meter AoE electricity damage, along with the chain attacks of users!

The monster swarm melted away terrifyingly.

"Hahaha, let's sweep the monsters like this!"

"The hell? They're nothing much?"

"I was nervous for no reason since they were new monsters."

"As long as we have the airship, this quest will be easy pickings."

The confusion had long since vanished from the users' faces.

Ark too was half filled with excitement, but there was something they were forgetting. That this quest's difficulty was a whopping ++C! There was no way the quest could be completed just by shooting arrows over the rail.

FWOOSH!

While everyone was concentrating on the monsters, an enormous mass suddenly cleaved the darkness as it flew in. The NPCs and players who reflexively raised their heads paled.

"Ack! W-what is that?"

A black flaming mass 10 meters in diameter!

Two black flaming masses, from which heat could be felt from meters away, came flying in towards them. Since all the lights were pointed to the ground, they had only noticed it when it was right in

front of their noses.

“Th-those are flash bombs!” The captain burst out in shock. “To think that the likes of monsters would use flash bombs. Bosun, hurry and intercept it with the Spear of Thor!”

“We can’t. The Spear of Thor is still only 50% charged.”

“Dammit, did the bastards attack forcefully to aim for this?”

That was so, the land monsters were bait to draw the airship’s attention, it was a plan to take out the airship with flash bombs during the time it took to recharge the thunder gun.

“Begin evasive action at full speed. All guns, Archers, and Mages concentrate firepower to intercept the flash bombs. We can’t get hit by even one!”

The magic engines were soon at full power and the airship turned quickly. At the same time the guns and users loosed skills at the flash bombs like crazy. As they did so, the attacks from the monsters teeming on the ground became fiercer.

Several users collapsed from the arrows and rocks surging from below. But there was no time to look back at them. It was a situation where you could explode in midair with the ship at the drop of a hat.

TOOONG, BOOOOOM!

Under the onslaught of countless attacks, one of the flash bombs finally exploded in midair. An immense explosion and shockwave burst out and greatly rocked the airship.

The users who were about to unleash skills on the second flash bomb fell to one side. In addition, the aimed guns also fired electric magic at the wrong spot.

Decisive mistake!

“D-damn, all crew prepare for impact!”

BANG! BOOOM!

The flash bomb rammed into the stern of the airship and exploded.

The airship started to sway violently from the enormous shock. It was then that the two magic engines on portside burst into flames and combusted away.

The airship lost balance and started to spin like a top.

‘ACK, just what the hell is going on?’

Ark quickly grabbed onto the railing. However, the players who weren’t able to take action were flung up and swallowed up by the dark fog. Without a doubt, they were forcefully terminated.

“Shut off the magic power!”

As the captain shouted thunderously, the engines were all shut off. Thankfully, the spinning stopped, but the airship quickly lost altitude. The exploding of the engines had greatly damaged the hot air balloon, which maintained buoyancy. Since they also lost thrust on top of that, the impending result was obvious.

A crash!

Despair rose on the users’ faces as the same thought occurred to them.

“It’s the end!”

“Are we going to get wiped out like this even before we reach Jackson?”

“Why the hell is there a quest like this? Damn it!”

“This is all wrong, you can’t even log in for 3 days if you die...”

If they went down with the ship, they would take tremendous damage. Even if you were to barely survive, the result was the same.

There were monsters swarming like ants along the airship’s trajectory! If they were mobbed by them, they would be trampled to death without even a chance to pull out a recovery potion.

But the Captain didn’t abandon his duty till the very end.

“Bosun, use all your strength to keep the Silver Arrow level. And send all power to the Spear of Thor. We’ll raze the monsters with

one final shot and attempt a crash landing. Even if we are to lose the Silver Arrow here, we must save even a few more of the militia and save Jackson!”

“Yes, sir!”

Thanks to the efforts of the crew, the terrifyingly shaking airship started to level out. But they were quickly losing altitude and were barely 20 meters above ground.

It was then the Captain shouted so loudly that the veins were popping out of his neck.

“Spear of Thor, all guns fire at once!”

As if it were opening its wings, electric magic poured from both sides of the airship. The concentrated magic power of the thunderbolt went along the airship’s trajectory and scoured the earth.

BOOOOOOOM!

Once again, it was truly a terrifying force. Even an ordinary gun was 10 times more powerful than a player’s electric magic; when it struck the ground, dirt and gravel were charred black. The Spear of Thor was many times stronger than those guns and was something to be feared!

Only monsters in critical condition were left where the Spear of Thor streaked past. Once the guns showered attacks onto them, the swarming monsters shrieked as they were vaporized.

“We’ll prepare for an emergency landing now!” The Captain looked down on the users gathered on the deck as he said, “Warriors, this is all I can do. The Silver Arrow will now try a belly landing. The impact will be difficult for even a veteran warrior to endure, so escape before it’s too late. If you do survive, make your way to Jackson Castle. The surrounding monsters were cleared with the Spear of Thor and the guns, so I don’t think there’ll be great danger on the ground. I... I hope even one more person survives to save Jackson from danger!”

After the Captain explained the situation, he stood at attention and

saluted.

The crew also stood and saluted the users. Although it was a really cool scene, the users were in a state of panic.

“W-what? Are we supposed to jump from here right now?”

“No way, if we jump from this high, chance of death is 100%!”

‘Stupid idiots, you still don’t get the situation?’

Meanwhile, Ark was climbing the rope ladder to the hot air balloon. It was inevitable for the airship to crash. If so, then there was no time to complain. Wasn’t it more important to find a way to reduce the damage by even 1%?

‘Considering the structure of the airship, the people on the deck will take the most damage.’

However, the place that would take the least damage was the hot air balloon on the top. This was a world made based the Middle Ages. There was no way the balloon would be full of helium. It would just be full of hot air. In other words, he could use it as a cushion.

There were quite a few players who had the same thought; dozens of people were clinging to the balloon while waiting for the right timing with nervous expressions.

CRAAASH!

After a few seconds, the airship collided into the ground. With an ear-splitting roar, an enormous shock crushed them. The hull crumpled instantly as the crew and users went flying in all directions. The hot air balloon also burst like a bubble and deflated.

‘Now!’

It was then that Ark threw himself off.

A peculiar sense of floating ensued as the ground rushed up before his eyes. Ark curled up and rolled forward.

To Jackson Castle

“Whew... I’m alive, for now.”

Ark got up and checked his Health.

He had lost about 400 Health.

The Cat Knight special skill reduced the damage from the fall by 50%. His forward roll, which had utilized the Flexibility stat, further reduced the damage by an extra 30%. Even so, he took 400 damage, meaning the amount he should have taken was 2000 damage. Users without resistance for falling would have perished the instant they hit the ground.

As expected, he saw quite a few bodies lying around.

‘Ah, this is bad. It’s an absolute LARA zone.’

[T/N: LARA is Licensed Agency for Relief of Asia, meaning that Ark’s surroundings look like a disaster zone.]

A classic Tomb Raider Adventure Game he’d played a bit in the past came to mind. It was a game where a young, perfectly normal-looking girl named Lara dashed around finding treasure. When she fell from a high place every once in a while, it was a game over with the gruesome sight of twisted limbs.

The users scattered on the ground were exactly like that. Their bodies had to stay lying like that until the 3 days were up and they could login again.

‘I knew it wasn’t going to be an easy quest, but....’

After completing many unusual quests, Ark’s ability to judge a situation had become quick. There was nothing the players could’ve done about the airship crash. In other words, this was a scenario where users had no power to change the situation. It was clear that this fact was an inferable conclusion.

Receiving the quest was only possible at level 60. But receiving the quest and having the qualifications to participate in it were completely different. It meant the minimum qualifications to truly start the quest were the ability to quickly judge the situation and one or two special skills to survive the airship crash.

‘What to do now...’ Ark took a moment to check his surroundings.

His surroundings were heavily clouded in darkness. The ground also had a rotten, mushy feel to it. This was probably also an effect of the Dark Fog.

Of course, something of this sort was no problem Ark. Once he cast Eyes of the Cat, his surroundings turned green and his vision brightened.

The night vision was an extra benefit of Eyes of the Cat.

‘Now, should I look for survivors, or...’

“Those who are alive, please gather here!”

Just then, he heard someone’s voice from one side. The dazed people hesitantly gathered around. There were more survivors than expected. But Warriors with high Health and defense were nowhere to be seen.

That was because the weight of the plate armor worn by Warriors caused them to take extra falling damage. The people with leather or cloth armor, such as Archers and Mages, took no extra damage, and their survival rate was increased with high Agility or lightweight magic spells.

There were about 40 survivors. 60 people hit the ground and were forcefully logged out.

The one who gathered the survivors was, of course, an Archer in leather armor and a feathered cap. He must’ve had a lot of experience as a leader, as he quickly took control of the situation and took the lead.

“You all are probably aware of the situation, the fall of the airship

was a planned event. Getting to Jackson Castle was our first given task. Luckily, the Spear of Thor took out most of the monsters in the area. But there are going to be some monsters that survived, and more monsters are going to come. Since we still have the numbers, let's make an attack unit and move to Jackson."

"Yeah, let's do that."

"Since there are currently many vacancies in parties, please remake your parties. Others, please use food to recover your Health and Mana."

The people who survived were definitely quick at reading the situation.

They recovered Health while eating food, and checked each others classes as they remade parties. And with the Archer as the leader, the parties united into an attack unit.

However, Ark thought they were actually strange. 'What? Are these people in their right minds?'

After confirming the number of survivors, the first thing that came to Ark's mind was not Jackson Castle. Wasn't it obvious?

There were 40 users who survived. Which meant there were 60 corpses lying around the vicinity. So to say, there could be around 60 items dropped in this area.

Granted, since their alignments were neutral, or they were rookie users, the drop rate was not that high. But there were 60 of them. Even if there was only a 10% drop rate, it was 6 items... Plus, were they your average users? They were at least level 60 users. The chance the items inside their bags were worth a lot was very high. At the very least, the recovery potion in the supply box distributed by The Magic Institute was worth 20 gold if sold in a store.

'If I get lucky and even pick up an equipment item...'

An undisputable jackpot!

That wasn't all. There were still countless numbers of dead monsters

from the Spear of Thor and naval gun barrage. Well, it was hard to expect much since most were completely destroyed by the guns, but there could be an item dropped by a monster. Shouldn't the very first thing a survivor should do be picking up such a lovely item? That was the duty and right of a survivor!

... At the very least, Ark thought as such.

However, it seemed like the other users hadn't thought that far yet. Of course, after going through such a traumatic event, there wouldn't be many users who would think of items first.

Maybe there were a few with the same idea, but it was dark, and one wouldn't know when the monsters would return... They would've thought there was no time to pick up items. But Ark was quite different, he was willing to risk his life even for one more copper.

'None of them are in their right minds. If they only cared about being alive, then why did they join the quest? Wasn't it because of the profit that they joined in on this quest? To ignore the items in front of their noses despite that and go running to Jackson because they're scared of monsters that may or may not come... For me, I'd rather take the items and die!'

Of course, this wasn't something to be said aloud.

'Hehehe, this is better for me. Yeah, all of you should leave. This guy will take all the lovely items for you.'

As soon as Ark made the decision, he quickly used 'Stealth'. Ark's body instantly became one with the darkness and disappeared. Thanks to that, the other users didn't notice Ark. They only thought of getting out of the place as quickly as possible. As such, they glanced around roughly, formed the attack unit, and headed towards Jackson Castle.

After checking to make sure the others were gone, Ark released 'Stealth' and summoned his Familiars.

"Dedric, Skull. Comb the vicinity. Search the areas where there are bodies of strangers particularly carefully. If you find any item at all, let me know immediately."

“Master, are you now going so far as to rob corpses?”

With an appearance of a little kid, Dedric looked at Ark with pity.

Dedric had started to talk back a while ago. It was because Ark wasn't used to hearing honorifics, and also because using honorifics in battle was inconvenient. But while allowing him to speak however he wanted, Dedric had started to crawl back to his bad habits.

“Do you want to eat some cooking, or do you want to search the corpses?”

“Hah, I get to try all sorts of things while living.”

Dedric made his discomfort clear as he changed into a bat and flew off.

However, the loyal Skull rolled around searching the surroundings without a second word.

‘It would be better if Skull had the ability to talk instead...’

It was such a pity.

As such, the one human and two Familiars worked hard at searching the corpses. But because the corpses were scattered in a wide area range, it took a lot of time.

How much time must have passed like that? While diligently searching the area, they finally reached the place where the debris of the airship was.

‘Ara? What is this?’

Suddenly, a black object next to the body of a Mage caught his eye.

At a casual glance, the shape wasn't very different from a stone on the ground, but there was no chance that Ark, who had his eyes wide open so as to not miss a single japtem, would miss it.

As soon as he hurriedly picked it up, an information window popped up.



Fruit of Basium

The Fruit of Basium, also known as the plant of dreams. Basium is a very rare, ancient plant found only in a part of the northern continent.

It is known to possess a violent nature and will move on its own to hunt animals and devour them when it grows. After it gets enough nutrients from hunting, the Basium will bear fruit once in tens, or hundreds of years.

If the Fruit of Basium is prepared in a special way, it will multiply the abilities of various reagents and magics. As a result, it was hunted indiscriminately by magicians of old, and now almost none are left. That is the reason why it is called the plant of dreams.

‘So this is a magic ingredient?’

Ark glanced at the Fruit of Basium with curious eyes.

A Warrior learned new skills through training and repetition. But a Magician had a different method of learning new spells.

The easiest method was to go to the Magic Institute and pay to learn a new spell. But the disadvantages to this were that it cost money and you could only learn common spells. In addition, they didn’t sell very many spells.

Because of this, in order to learn stronger magics, Magicians of a certain level spent day and night searching for ancient ruins. It was to find magic books left by ancient magicians. These magic books were stronger than the spells sold by the Magic Institute, and there were many unique ones.

In other words, just as a Merchant risked his life to trade in order to raise his market share, for Magicians, the ultimate goal was to find magic books holding stronger spells. But the problem was that special magic ingredients were sometimes needed to learn the spells of such magic books.

Of course, magic ingredients necessary to learn powerful magic spells were traded at high prices.

‘If I’m lucky, I can get a pretty high price for this item. Isn’t this a good start?’

“Snake, pack this away,” Ark ordered without much thought.

However, Snake, who normally swallowed items without any problems, suddenly showed a strange reaction. It suddenly went into convulsions and collapsed.

“Huh? Snake, what’s wrong?”

Ss, sssss...

Snake, with great effort, lifted its head. As if it was trying to shed its skin, the scales of the area around its gaping mouth lost their elasticity and became wrinkled.

As Ark was panicking because of this bewildering situation, a new information window popped up before his eyes.

– Due to the Fruit of Basium, Alamone Larvae has started metamorphosis.

‘Eh? What’s this? Then, Snake really ate the Fruit of Basium? More importantly, metamorphosis? Then Snake can also grow up by eating food? Growth is growth, so what is metamorphosis? And metamorphosis has started?’

He totally could not understand what was going on. Then, a new message appeared again.

A new skill registration window for Alamone Larvae has been formed.

New Skill +?????

Alamone Larvae can learn a new skill through the process of metamorphosis. However, the summoner must find out what kind of skill it is and how to learn it. You have a time limit of 20 days. If you cannot complete metamorphosis by that time, it will end in failure.

During the transformation process all of Alamone Larvae's skills are sealed; as such, it will lose its item storage ability.

Ark stared at the window blankly.

Snake is learning a skill? He hadn't even imagined this.

'To think Snake can also grow through such a method. Is this an opportunity to be able to expect a greater role than a bag from Snake?'

To be sure, if a Familiar gained a helpful skill, using up one or two items wasn't a big deal. But he wasn't sure if he should call this good fortune or not.

'Well, I will be near Jackson Castle during the event quest, so not being able to use Snake as a bag shouldn't pose much of a problem...'

The problem was that Snake had to learn the new skill for the metamorphosis to succeed. Seeing as the transformation would fail if the skill wasn't learned within 20 days, it didn't seem like the it wouldn't be learned on its own.

"How in the world—?"

If it was Skull or Detric, he could try training their fighting techniques. However, Snake didn't even have any stats, let alone fighting ability. So what method was he supposed to use to learn what skill?

The situation was too sudden, so he couldn't come up with any ideas. In addition, he didn't have time to think of such things.

"Eek, g-go away! Aaack!"

"Kekeke, I will kill all humans."

He suddenly heard the sounds of someone being attacked from the rear of the wreckage.

Setting aside his thinking for now, he quieted his footsteps and went back to see a wounded NPC crew member. He was surrounded by three black monsters that Ark had seen from within the ship.

‘There were surviving crew members?’ Ark examined the monsters by using Eyes of the Cat.

They were naked black humanoid monsters, with a faces as smooth as that of egg demons, white pupils, and pierced lips. They were monsters that would come out of a horror movie promo poster; level 80 monsters named Shadow.

On the other hand, Ark’s level was currently 68. But thanks to the Dark Fog’s influence, the land was covered in darkness.

Within the darkness was the Dark Walker’s battlefield!

His dark attribute bonus and the Gift of Darkness, gave him a 30% stat increase. Converted to levels, that was a whopping 20, so one could say Ark’s current level was equivalent to 88.

This was the real power of the dark attribute.

When he was a beginner, it was hard to notice any great changes. However, attribute bonuses like this showed a greater effect the higher one’s level was. At level 3, it was only a difference of 1 level, but at level 300, it was a difference of 100 levels!

“With this much, it’s definitely worth a try!”

Ark immediately used ‘Stealth,’ approached a Shadow monster from behind, and then attacked at the nape of its neck.

– You have dealt a Critical Hit! As a bonus effect, Backstab will deal an additional 200% damage. Shadow will be stunned for 10 seconds.
--

“Skull, Dedric, Formation C!”

“Okay, looks like I get to stretch a bit!”

Clack, clack, clack!

Formation C, Skull attacked one Shadow together with Ark, while Dedric kept the others busy. It was the most effective plan to use when they were surrounded by enemies, and also the one his Familiars had the greatest success rate with by training through countless battles.

While Ark was locked in the blind auction house, they hadn't been able to fight. They were itching for action, so Skull and Dedric moved more actively than ever before. To be honest, Ark, who was thirsty for battle, was the same.

“Take 'em!”

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

A series of explosions ran along the Shadow's body at the spark-light sword attacks. It was Ark's specialty, dealing continuous critical hits.

The Shadow wobbled greatly as it stepped back.

After swinging his sword refreshingly for the first time in a while, vigor surged up anew. Stimulated by the rising thrill he felt, Ark pressed forward another step and thrust his sword.

At that moment— was that thing reaching out of the Shadow's chest a hand?

‘Wha-what? What's that?’

Ark reflexively raised his sword. With a sharp metallic sound, the arm bounced off.

Luckily, thanks to his instinctive defensive movement, he avoided a critical hit, but he still lost about 80 health. One couldn't block an attack with a sword but rather can only reduce the damage. However, the problem wasn't the damage.

‘What, these bastards? Arms popping out freely?’

It was an attack method he'd never even imagined. It wasn't just the chest. Arms extended from the back, butt, and even the head of the Shadow, wherever needed, stretching several meters like rubber. Moreover, though it wasn't like Ark's 30%, it seemed that they too were receiving the darkness attribute bonus. Well, they were probably using the Dark Fog because it was beneficial for them...

'And the dirt floor is rotten, so it's slippery.'

Because of this, evasive actions were inevitably restricted.

"Wah! Master, this is crazy!"

Though he had flown off with great vigor, Dedric was also unable to deal with the stretching arms.

"Skull, go and help Dedric, we're going with Formation B!"

Ark sent Skull to help Dedric and adjusted his grip on the sword.

The enemy was trickier than expected, and the terrain was also poor. Although it couldn't be called the worst possible scenario, it also couldn't be counted as the best. However, Ark's eyes shone more brightly than before.

'So I'll have to fight guys like these from now on, right? Alright, I'll be sure to warm up properly for you.'

After shaking his body and stretching his joints, Ark leapt in while swinging his sword. At the same time Ark's taekwondo trained body started to show its true potential.

Ark, after making up his mind, was said to be determined!

All this time, Ark had never once neglected to exercise even while playing 18 hours a day.

That was how exercise worked. If you missed a day with an excuse, one day became two, three, four days of rest. Once you make up your mind and start, there can be no excuses, even if you can't sleep or have to skip a meal. Only by steadily adding up the sweat can you obtain the desired result.

“Come at me, you rotten egg!”

Ark's sword pierced the Shadow's vital point. As the Shadow twisted its body, another arm sprouted from its shoulder. An unexpected attack, but if you are expecting an attack from all directions, it can no longer be considered unexpected.

Not even being able to rapidly perform evasive movement because the ground was slippery wasn't a problem either.

‘Without teeth, they're just gums!’

POW!

Ark knocked away the arm and let loose a sweeping low kick. Struck in the knee, the Shadow lost its balance and wobbled.

It was off-balance for only 1 or 2 seconds, but one who is trained in Taekwondo can kick at least 4 times in that span of time. He performed a low kick followed by a roundhouse kick.

The chance of a medium monster getting a bad status effect by a kick was 3%! The Shadow took a roundhouse to the jaw, fell into a confused state, and extended arms all over the place. It was actually harder to block such a haphazard attack.

He took considerable damage from the arms attacking from all directions. However, Ark wasn't one to stand still and take hits. The instant an arm was about to strike his shoulder, with a twist of his body, he back-kicked the Shadow monster for a Counterattack and killed it.

‘Nice, not bad! The Shadow's darkness attribute bonus is only about 10~20%!’

If the enemy's level was the same or slightly higher, the odds were more than enough. Ark immediately ran at the remaining 2 Shadows.

Ark took advantage of the slippery footing. Accelerating with a slide, his frontal kick stuck the Shadow's stomach. With a cry of pain, it bent over at the waist. Once Ark started to attack, he showed no mercy.

If they were egg demon lookalike Shadows, there wasn't much left to say. Just knee them in their flattened, egg demon-like faces! Having knocked its head back, Ark's sword slit open the Shadow's throat.

"Ack, y-you human!"

Like a storm, the consecutive attacks brought the Shadow's health down to 50% in an instant.

'So they can't grow rubber arms since I'm not giving them time to breathe!'

"Skull, Dedric, Formation A. Let's finish this as quickly as possible!"

"Understood, Master!"

Skull bit the legs, Dedric used Dark Rush. With Ark's Dark Blade, the Shadow wildly took damage. Adding in the attack Co-op bonus with his Familiars, the Shadow's remaining life hit rock bottom and it collapsed.

"Keke, you're strong!"

Once two of them collapsed, the remaining Shadow quickly turned to flee.

"Where do you think you're running to?!"

Dedric snorted as he rammed into the Shadow's back with Dark Rush. An 'ack' sound was heard.

With a lump the size of a chestnut and tears dripping from his eyes, Dedric boasted, "Wa-wahahaha, how do you like the taste of that? I am the Dedric, noble of the Underworld!"

Clack clack, clack clack clack!

As if rather excited as well, Skull bounced about while landing strikes. The level 85 monster was getting beaten up by opponents 30 levels below them. With Ark striking continuous kicks and landing critical hits, the Shadows quickly fell into critical condition.

"Kekekeke! Hu-human... I may fall... but in the end, the day of rest

will find you...”

“Ah, now I’m embarrassed, monsters should just simply die!”

Having changed into child form, Dedric pulled a face and stomped on the Shadow, which vanished with an aggrieved expression.

Ah, a rascal with no mercy...

In the beginning, Dedric didn’t have such a bent personality. However, he was steadily becoming similar to Ark in both actions and words.

In particular, only in the bad parts...

‘So this is why they say you shouldn’t even drink cold water in front of kids...’

[T/N: Many Koreans believe that drinking cold water is unhealthy. Basically, don’t do unadvisable things in front of kids, because they’ll start emulating those actions.]

Seemed like it was about time to pick a date for disciplinary action, but now wasn’t the time.

“Are you alright, sir?”

“Yes, thanks to you. Thank you.” The crew man who gave a sigh of relief was the Bosun.

“By any chance, are there any other surviving crew members?”

“I don’t know. I was with the Captain in the wheelhouse until the end...”

“And the Captain is...?”

The crew member shook his head with a dark face. “He passed away. I was in the wheelhouse, so if I survived, then there might be other crew members who made it. Please, I beg you. Will you go with me to find any other surviving crew members? As the bosun, I can’t leave my subordinates behind. But, since I am a stranger to fighting...”

Thu-thump, a quest window popped up.

Hero Assembly!

* Sub-quest: Rescue the Silver Arrow Crewmen

The Magic Institute's airship, Silver Arrow, has unexpectedly crashed in the Jackson region.

Though it was a disastrous accident that caused numerous casualties, the efforts of the Captain and crew members who were prepared for death were able to decrease the damage.

In a stroke of fortune among misfortune, Jabel, the Bosun, also survived. If he survived despite being in the wheelhouse, there may be other survivors. Jabel has requested that you to search and rescue the surviving crew. Rescue the crewmembers with Jabel and escort them to Jackson Castle. It will be an honorable act if you rescue those who have been completely abandoned.

Difficulty: E

'A sub-quest!' Ark snapped fully awake.

'Hero Assembly' was an event quest that gathered hundreds of users and spanned 3 days. Of course there would be many events during it. The sub-quests to complete such a task existed separately. One sub-quest could affect the chances of succeeding in the main quest.

'A sub-quest exists. Then this means there's a method to raise contribution points by myself.'

It was the same feeling as finding a clue to solving a quest.

"Hey, hey, aren't you being too shameless? You're demanding a gift after being rescued from dangerous waters. If you're going to ask for a favor, you've got to offer some compensation. Who do you see Master as?"

Dedric interrupted without any manners.

Just how did he know Ark's inner thoughts so well?

However, Ark put on the mask of a righteous man in front of NPCs!

Ark ignored Dedric's comment and accepted the quest. "Please don't pay any attention to what this brat said. I was able to survive thanks to the efforts of the captain and crew. Rescuing the crewmen is something that of course I must do. In order to make sure that no one loses their lives in a pitiful manner, I will search every nook and cranny. So please help me, Bosun."

"Of course."

Since it was a sub-quest, he would definitely get contribution in compensation. However, Ark had another ulterior motive in undertaking this sub-quest.

"Ah! Also, Bosun, please carefully search the bodies and give me anything you find. Although they are already dead, shouldn't we take something back to their families?"

"Ah, indeed. I understand. Let's do it that way."

It was exactly this: the corpses of the players were spread out in a fairly large area. Even with help from his Familiars, who knew how long it would take. But with the Bosun and any surviving crew members they found, the search would end faster.

'So, while doing the quest, I can also collect items. This is killing two birds with one stone.'

As Ark searched the area, he watched the Bosun from the corner of his eye with satisfaction. In the end, Ark was able to rope in an NPC as a free worker.

Dedric, watching from the side, exclaimed, "Oho, as expected of Master. How underhanded."

"Shut it. I'm always saying this, but I go for the win-win."

After 30 minutes of searching, they were able to rescue 10 crew

members from the debris of the airship.

Of course, it wasn't just a relaxing situation. On average, for every 3 he rescued he had to fight three or four Shadows. However, a battle was always welcome. In addition, there were crew members with fighting and healing skills. They weren't of a high level, but as their numbers grew the fight with the Shadows became quite a bit easier.

“Ark-nim, I found this in the wreckage.”

“Ah. Great work. I'll be sure to find someone who knows the person and return it to them.”

As Ark had instructed, the crew members gathered the user's items and gave them to Ark. It was a shame, but the monsters destroyed by the Spear of Thor did not drop any items.

But the items the users had dropped far exceeded his expectations.

‘5 Intermediate Recovery potions, 1 Magic Tool Box, and 2 equips!’

“Information Window!”

Gauntlets of Strength (Magic)			
Armor Type		Steel Gloves	
Defense	50	Durability	3/60
Weight	50	Usage Restriction	Level 60, Warrior
High-quality steel gauntlets sold in the Merchant City, Giran, and specialized stores. Although they are mass produced, the seams are soft and have high defense, so they are loved by many adventurers. During the process of smelting the iron, drops of Ogre's blood were added to give an effect adding to the wearer's Strength.			

Option: Strength +10

Norad Boots (Magic)			
Armor Type	Leather Shoes		
Defense	35	Durability	4/40
Weight	20	Usage Restriction	Level 65 or higher
Boots made from the leather of a legendary horse that only inhabits the northern region. They are among the masterpiece armor series made by the famous armor maker 'Norad,' who is known to have disappeared long ago. As fast as a gust of wind, the legendary horse's strength still remains, giving an increase to the wearer's movements.			
Options: Movement Speed +10%, Evasion +5%			

Both items were well worth 60-70 thousand Won (~\$600-\$700) if placed on auction.

‘Let’s put the gauntlets on auction right away and use the boots for now.’

He didn’t have any boots worth using besides the Sharkman’s Shackles anyways. Ark immediately used the Deluxe Tool Box to

repair the boots, put them on, and of course, he didn't forget to say a word to Jabel, who was staring at him impassively.

"I'll only use them until I can find the people they're related to. We need all the help we can get to guide everyone safely to Jackson Castle, you see. The deceased would definitely have wanted that as well."

"Ah, yes... That's right," Jabel replied with a doubtful expression. However, the one protecting them was Ark. Perhaps because he was also angry after hearing that 40 players had run off to Jackson Castle without even thinking about searching for the crew, Jabel didn't raise any other objections to Ark's actions.

"Now, since we searched the entire area, let us head to Jackson Castle." After feigning innocence, Ark led the crew through the Dark Fog.

Once they reached a certain distance away from the airship wreckage, the number of monsters increased. There were as few as 3-4 Shadows and as many as 30 of them in a mob. There were also mobs with the same large monster they had seen from the airship. Though they were similar to the Shadows in appearance, these monsters, called Hiptons, were 5 times larger and had rock-like skin. They were a whopping level 90! However, they didn't pose much of a problem for Ark.

'Hm, the attack group that left first must've suffered quite a bit.'

Ark followed the trail left by the first group. Thanks to the raid that had left first 30 minutes ago, monster corpses were piled up like mountains at regular intervals. They were marks of battles between the raid and the monsters that had ambushed them.

It was truly fortunate. Thanks to their desperate fighting, Ark was able to pass by without even fighting a single group of monsters. Ark just hummed while rummaging through the bodies.

"Snake, if you see any items I've missed, swallow them all."

Perhaps because the raid group had been continuously ambushed, but they hadn't picked up the item drops properly. However, Snake

nodded feebly while grabbing an item and swallowing it, but it spat it back up with a painful face. Then it hung its head.

‘Ah, that’s right. It said it was in metamorphosis?’

During metamorphosis, Snake couldn’t swallow or spit out items. In addition, Snake was having a hard time just staying wrapped around Ark’s waist. That was probably the unexpected metamorphosis’ fault. Seeing the always charming Snake in such a limp state made him feel pity.

“Snake, until I figure out a way to solve this, do you want to go back to the Underworld?”

Hiss, hiss!

Hearing this, Snake violently shook its head as it tightened its grip on his waist and rubbed its head on him.

Well, Ark was no different from a parent to Snake. Since it was in pain, it didn’t want to be separated from him even more.

“Okay, I understand. It must be hard, but just hang on a bit. let’s find a way no matter what.”

Once Ark used his Nursing skill with a sympathetic heart, Snake nodded with a rather brighter face.

‘At least the Nursing skill works. Anyways, I feel sorry for Snake, but I can’t leave this place for 9 days as long as I’m participating in the event quest. Haahh, it can’t be helped. 20 days in game time is almost a week in real life. Fortunately, there’s still some time to spare. I’ll steadily look for a way after finishing the event quest.’

Ark blew a sigh as he stroked Snake’s head. There was nothing more he could do for Snake. Plus, this wasn’t a situation where he could pay attention to Snake.

Even though the raid group had passed through the area, there were still monsters left. Therefore, Ark moved carefully and sent Dedric to scout the area. Though there were still times they had to go into battle, they never had to fight more than six Shadows thanks to the

scouting. With the help of the crew members, 6 Shadows weren't very difficult opponents.

"I will also help!"

"Let's get revenge for the Captain!"

If fighting broke out, the battle crewmen pulled out their daggers even without being asked to. The medic even ran over during the battle while taking hits from Shadows and bandaged Ark when he got injured. He didn't recover much Health when the medic applied first aid, but it was a significant help because it had a continuous effect.

"You're injured. I will treat you."

"You don't have to go so far..."

"No, you are fighting for our sakes, so I cannot leave your wounds unattended."

They repaid those who helped them no matter what. Ark couldn't help but like NPCs because they were like this.

After fighting around 15 battles, his EXP surged up. Although he fought with the crew, Ark got all the EXP since most of the damage was from him. Thanks to that, his EXP rose by 50% and he went up a level. The raid group that went ahead must've also killed many monsters, but since the EXP was shared among 40 people, they probably didn't get as much as Ark.

'The sky is dark! EXP and items are all over the ground! This is really a stage made for me!'

He felt sorry for Snake, but he felt like he could fly. But his pleasurable hunting ended upon reaching Jackson Castle.

Once they reached the castle gates, Jabel took Ark's hand with emotion.

"We are truly thankful. If it wasn't for Ark-nim, we would have pitifully lost our lives. I will never forget your kindness. Although we can only reward you with gratitude right now, we will notify the Magic Institute

of your deed so that you can receive a just reward.”

“I am happy by just being able to help you. Though of course, I won’t stop you if you say you’ll report it to the Magic Institute...”

* The sub-quest ‘Rescue the Silver Arrow’s Crewmen’ has been completed.

You have safely brought the crewmen who survived to Jackson Castle. They will never forget your dedicated help. The Magic Institute will also think highly of you for rescuing their precious staff.

Reward: 100 Contribution Points for every rescued crew member, +50 Fame, +100 Friendship with the Magic Institute.

The contribution one gets for killing a Shadow was just 10. Saving 12 crew members, on the other hand, was 1,200 contribution points. He received the same amount of contribution points he would have gotten from killing 120 Shadows. He even obtained the items dropped by users.

‘Not bad, considering it’s the first leg of the quest.’

After sending off his Familiars, Ark walked to the gate.

The event quest starts now.

* * *

‘Is this really Jackson Castle?’

Jackson Castle looked totally different from the memories he had of it a month and a half ago.

Thanks to the monsters’ attack, the castle walls were in ruins here and there, and destroyed homes could be seen inside. The Lord’s manor also showed signs of attack. With the area surrounded by darkness, it was as dismal as looking at a ruin.

‘It’s only been 2 days of in-game time since the attacks started and it’s already this bad?’

Ark had fought alongside Jackson's Sylphid Knights before. Though they weren't able to defeat the boss of the ancient ruins, Debra, they were the strongest NPCs Ark had met. If the enemy did that much damage even though the Sylph Knights were fighting back, it meant the enemy was that numerous and strong.

'Well, all three top guilds sent reinforcements, so the quest will be completed one way or another... but more importantly, what should I do now? Do I join up with the Magic Institute? Or...'

Ark sent the crew members inside first and snooped around the gate.

Just then, he spied a group of users passing through the gate. Ark began to approach them in hopes of getting some information but then flinched as he stopped. He quickly retreated and hid behind a wall.

'How did that rascal...?'

One of the players walking in the middle of 10 others— he was one of the few users Ark knew of.

It was Andel!

The bastard who tricked Ark, who was then level 1, into losing 84 of his stats! Of course, he was caught by Ark afterwards, lost 128 of his stats, and flaked off. An average person would have already given up on the game at that point. No, he was certain he would give up on the game.

'Just how did that bastard join the event quest?'

Even considering that he could get his equipment back with money, did that mean he still reached level 60 after losing 128 stats?

In addition, if he was able to participate in an event quest, it also meant he was able to get rid of his Chaotic state. After Andel was caught by Ark, he realized how fearsome the Chaotic penalty was. If he meant to continue playing the game, then he must first get rid of his Chaotic status.

'It couldn't have been easy... it seems he has suffered quite a lot all this while, hm?'

However, Ark's eyes did not show a hint of sympathy.

Even though he had backed off after cutting 128 of Andel's stat points, it wasn't because Ark had forgiven him. It was just that he couldn't waste any more time on the likes of Andel. It might be a different if Andel just gave up on the game, but if he was going to play, then he was still an enemy.

His promise that he would kill until Andel's stats hit 0 if he showed up before Ark again were not empty words. If they had met again in a different place, Ark would have reduced him to 0, as promised.

'But the bastard isn't Chaotic now.'

Ark might be angry, but he wasn't stupid enough to become Chaotic in the middle of an event quest.

'Plus, I can't even touch him right now because he's with Bulma or other teammates. No, it would be rather disruptive if he were to spot me now. While the event quest is going on, it'll be better to stay away.'

Just when Ark was thinking that, someone from behind suddenly spoke to him.

"Hey, were you the one who rescued the crew members?"

"Yes, it was I. And you are?"

The moment Ark turned his head, his eyes grew wide in surprise.

Surprisingly, Raymond was approaching him accompanied by Soldiers. He was the Alchemist of Jackson who was caught by Ark while secretly raising a Crystal Golem to treat his son's illness.

"Raymond?"

"Oh, so it was you! I came running over when I heard the name of Ark from the crew members."

"How did you...?"

“I am ashamed. Actually, right after you left, I surrendered myself to the Lord. But when the Lord heard my circumstances, instead of punishing me, he made it so I could live while serving Jackson. And now, I’ve been temporarily entrusted with the work of managing the volunteer troops. Certainly, I’m still a prisoner, but thanks to you and the Lord’s grace, I am able to proudly straighten my shoulders and care for my son.”

“That’s good, I’m glad.” Ark smiled broadly as he held Raymond’s hand. Raymond had worried him as he left Jackson, but it seemed things had worked out better than expected.

Those who sin must be punished. It was obvious, but sometimes there was room for sympathy. Could anyone stone a person who committed murder in order to save his son? At the very least, a person who valued his family more than others wouldn’t be able to throw the stones.

Of course, Ark’s affection towards Raymond was due in no small amount to the rare scroll ‘Magic Restoration’. It was truly one of the skills he made really good use of.

“I feel like I have been relieved of some heavy burden thanks to your words. My heart has been heavy every day because it didn’t look like I was able to keep the promise I made with you.”

“There’s no need to think like that. There is no rule that says one must pay the price of sin with suffering alone. I think the Lord judged wisely as well.”

“I’ve already heard about the relationship between you and the Lord; even after Jackson was attacked, the Lord occasionally mentioned you. No, this is no time for idle prattle. The Lord would be glad to see you. I’ll take care of the registration process for the militia, so you go visit the Lord.”

“Alright.”

Ark immediately went towards the Lord under the escort of guards.

“What, who’s that guy?”

“How is he going straight to the Lord’s Castle right away?”

“Maybe he’s a user with extremely high Fame?”

The users whispered amongst themselves while watching Ark receiving VIP treatment as soon as he arrived at the castle.

It was only natural that he drew their attention. There were very few people who received such treatment from NPCs. It was a benefit only for those with incredibly high Fame or people who had raised Intimacy to the limits by completing a special quest. Of course, Ark wasn’t at all happy about their interest in him. It would be troublesome if he caught the eye of Andel.

In any case, once Ark entered the Lord’s castle, the young Lord’s eyes became as wide as saucers.

“You... Ark! You’re Ark!”

“Have you been well?”

“Haha, I can’t really say that...” The Lord smiled weakly and sagged his shoulders. “Anyway, you have come.”

“How could I not come after hearing that Jackson Castle has met a crisis?”

“Yes, I believed you would surely come.”

“However, the situation looks worse than what I heard.”

“Indeed.”

The Lord nodded with a heartbroken expression. “It is as you said. The situation is very serious. Since you have arrived, you must have been riding the airship sent from Giran. Am I right?”

“Yes, it was dangerous because we were intercepted during our journey, but I was somehow able to survive to Jackson Castle.”

“I see, even after suffering many difficulties, thank you for not giving up on Jackson and coming. As your friend and as the Lord of Jackson Castle, I express my thanks to you. My heartfelt thanks go to the brave Warriors who were sacrificed while participating in the militia.”

Comfortable. The first feeling Ark registered while talking face to face with the Lord was comfort. Ark did not feel the slightest pretense in the young Lord's tone. If a person did something worth being grateful about, he expressed his heartfelt thanks, and he sincerely sympathized with those who perished. It was such a natural response, but the same natural reaction was hard to find among players. Maybe because this was a game, it was considered acceptable to not act earnest.

But perhaps because Ark hadn't been able to experience many virtual reality games, there were many times when NPCs felt like real people. Was that why? Now he was more comfortable talking to NPCs than to users. Unlike unpredictable users, conversation with NPCs unfurled in orderly fashions. At least he didn't need to worry about what to say to them.

"Your words alone are surely enough to comfort the fallen, my Lord."

"That is all I can do. In any case, the crash of your airship is an incident that explains Jackson's current situation. After all, we weren't able to send out rescue parties despite knowing your airship was intercepted. Furthermore the airship was not the only one that took a surprise attack."

"Not only the Silver Arrow?"

"As you likely know, all three great guilds come forward and sent militia to Jackson. The 3 great guilds mobilized their most superior weapons. However, they were all defeated one by one while on route like the airship."

The young Lord began to explain the gist of the situation.

The unidentified army of monsters attacked Jackson Castle 2 days ago, which was 16 hours ago, last evening, in real time. The sky was suddenly engulfed by Dark Fog as the army of darkness attacked. Without any time to take control, they were dealt a huge blow.

"Many of the foreigners who were dedicated to hunting around Jackson Castle perished. Still, the good thing was that the foreigners

who survived combined their strength with the Soldiers and finally blocked the attack. Then, before we were completely engulfed in the Dark Fog, we urgently sent an SOS from the Magic Tower to Giran.”

That was the magic signal Ark saw in Giran.

The 3 great guilds all received requests for help. They responded quickly and decided to send militia. The first to arrive were the ones sent by the Merchant Guild. The representatives of the Merchant Guild cut through the Jackson principality aboard the ironclad merchant ship, Prize. After getting close to Jackson Castle, they planned on beginning their large-scale landing operation.

“So they failed.”

“That’s right, it seems that the monsters knew that the SOS was sent from the magic tower. As soon as the Prize crossed into the Jackson principality boundaries, they were ambushed by the monsters lying in wait and sank. Among the 100 militia on board, 60 or so were lost with Prize, and just this morning, some 40 survivors arrived.”

As expected, not all who participated could reach Jackson Castle. There was a trial prepared for each guild, and only those who passed could participate in the actual quest.

The Merchant Guild and Magic Institute were both in Giran, so the level of the militia was similar. That’s why the number of survivors from the airship was also similar to the number from Prize.

“Then the Warrior Guild’s militia must have also received a surprise attack.”

“Yes, but fortunately, the Warrior guild did not receive much damage. Though they were ambushed, 70 survived and arrived at Jackson a few hours ago. They say it’s thanks to the famous Warrior who led the battle. He’s the Holy Knight, Alan, who we’ve heard of several times even in Jackson Castle.”

“Alan!”

Ark’s felt like his mind was splashed with cold water.

Alan... His name was unforgettable in another sense than Andel's. Ever since Ark met him, he had felt an ever present thorn of discomfort in playing the game.

He was the first to make Ark feel so frustrated. He was also the one who had made Ark feel like Lariette had been snatched from him. And he was the reason why he took the first step towards being a gamer for a living.

'So *that* guy is also participating in this quest!'

He had encountered competition in an totally unexpected place.

His feelings were mixed after hearing Alan's name. He knew an opportunity like this would come one day, and as candidates of Global Exos, it was unavoidable anyways. However, Ark was not yet ready to compete one on one with him.

Not yet... That's right, it wasn't time.

If they met when he wasn't ready, it was very likely that Ark would just come to feel the same frustration as before. The stronger Ark's desire to win against him was, the greater his frustration would be.

"Besides, if Lariette is still with Alan..."

More than anything, he didn't want to be humiliated again in front of Lariette.

As Ark's expression became grave, the young Lord asked with a quizzical voice, "Do you know him?"

"Yes, a little..."

"I see. Then I'll continue what I was saying. Raymond is reorganizing the militia sent by the 3 Great Guilds to form a temporary force to guard the exterior. Sir Alan has been put in charge of commanding them on the field."

"Entrusted to Alan?"

"He is a Holy Knight recognized by the Cathedral. It should come as no surprise considering the Fame he has garnered."

This was why users were obsessed with Fame.

If your Fame was high, then you didn't really have to bother with raising Intimacy. With Fame alone, you received VIP treatment no matter where you went, and there were cases where NPCs went looking for you after hearing rumors to request quests. In addition, you could also be personally bestowed a title from a famous guilds or royalty. Whether you had it or not, it was an absolutely necessary value for Knights, Merchants, and professions like Scholar alike in progressing through the game.

The main characteristic of Ark's chosen hidden profession, Dark Walker, was the dark attribute bonus. Meanwhile, Alan's main characteristics as a Holy Knight were Faith and Fame. Disregarding his original character, Alan was a faithful, sacred Knight in the game. Therefore, even by doing the same quest as other people, Alan received bonus Faith and Fame.

Faith showed its power when dealing with monsters, and Fame could win the right to be entrusted an advantageous role when a big event like this occurred.

'If he's registered as a commander in the system, he'll get more contribution points and experience points as a bonus. Damn, does that mean it'll be hard to win more contribution points than Alan in this quest?'

This was a fact Ark had learned recently learned, but the path of darkness the Dark Walker tread was the opposite of Alan's— Ark suffered a Fame penalty. It was intended to balance his profession.

However, Ark was able to obtain almost as much Fame as other users thanks to successful miraculous treatment with Nursing.

'There's no point in thinking of such things now. All I have to do is raise my Dark Walker my own way. Just as our chosen paths are different, there may be things I can do that Alan can't.'

"Sir Alan failed the Taresha Labyrinth expedition twice, so his Fame isn't as great as before, but there was still no one in the volunteer troops who can match him. Also, he is working as hard as we

expected.”

‘So he failed that time when he said he was going to the Taresha Labyrinth!’

Ark was able to receive unexpected information from the young Lord.

If so, then Alan wouldn’t have been able to raise his level and Fame by much. That in and of itself was good news, but Alan would be desperate to make up for the failure with this event quest. Looking at this quest alone, he couldn’t say it was really good news.

“Well, Sir Alan’s situation aside, this is the current line of defense. After conferring with Sir Alan, we put the volunteer troops in the defense line.”

The young Lord called attention to himself and spoke while pointing at a map of the Jackson principality.

Alan split the volunteer troops into 3 platoons. He assigned Platoon 1 to the front gate, where the enemy attacks were the fiercest. Platoon 1 was likely the one Alan was personally leading. Platoon 2 and 3 were placed on the sides to assist Platoon 1.

‘With this placement, Alan and Platoon 1 will definitely get the most contribution.’

Was that all? Giving and denying contribution points to each platoon or user all depended on Alan’s whims. Of course his first priority was going to be himself. Alan had seized the top spot right from the get go of the event quest with his high Fame.

‘Alan...’

While participating in the quest, Ark had never even hoped to take the top spot. But after finding out there was no chance at all, he lost all motivation. What’s more, to think his opponent was Alan...

Besides the volunteer troops, a group called the militia were participating. The militia was comprised of users who were in Jackson at the time of the ambush; they got the event quest from

the young Lord and not from the 3 Great Guilds. But since they were all low level, they were being used as reserve troops.

“The assignment of the volunteers has been entrusted to Sir Alan, but you are an exception. Speak if there’s a platoon you desire. I will confer with Sir Alan to make it so that you are assigned the platoon you want.”

Ark briefly looked at the map and pondered.

Considering EXP and contribution points, Platoon 1 was the best. But the commander of Platoon 1 was Alan; even if Ark couldn’t obtain a decent reward, he couldn’t find it in himself to take orders from Alan.

platoons 2 and 3 were also in a similar situation, as they were also under Alan’s direct command. In addition, even if he were assigned to the front lines, it would be difficult to gain the contribution he needed if he wasn’t put in an attack squad. Furthermore, if he ran into Andel or Bulma, there was no telling what the outcome would be.

Whichever he chose, neither were desirable.

‘Is there a way I can raise my contribution while fighting independently?’

After thinking a while, Ark asked the young Lord, “Where are the castle troops fighting?”

“The Sylphid Knights left the defense of the front gate to the volunteer troops and are out blockading the enemy’s supply line. Defense isn’t everything— striking the enemy is the true mission of the Sylphid Knights. The Jackson guards are guarding the back gate.”

‘That’s it!’ Ark’s eyes flashed.

Jackson’s soldiers were NPCs. If he were to fight alongside them, he wouldn’t need to worry about Andel or other users. He also wouldn’t have to worry about being sandwiched in the midst of many users and would have many chances to gain EXP and contribution

points.

Regretfully, the scenario of hunting with the Sylphid Knights was not to be. Well, if the powerful Sylphid Knights participated in the defense line, there would be a problem with the quest difficulty balance. However, the Jackson guards were also NPCs that Ark was very familiar with.

“I would like to guard the back gate along with the Jackson guards.”

“You will?”

“Yes, as you probably know, I am well acquainted with the Jackson Soldiers. Rather than mixing with strangers, I would be more comfortable with the Jackson guards with whom I have shared my heart.”

“But... The back gate they are currently guarding is not a very safe place. The number of enemies and frequency of attacks are low compared to the front gate, where monsters attack relentlessly, but there are only 30 Jackson guards left. Compared to the main gate which is being guarded by about 140 volunteer troops, the back gate is more dangerous.”

“My Lord.” Ark gazed at the young Lord with blazing eye and spoke forcefully. “Jackson Castle is a second home to me. In addition, you called me a friend, my Lord. How can I desire safety when Jackson Castle is in the midst of a crisis? If protecting Jackson Castle is dangerous, then that is fine. Even if I were to perish while guarding it, that is what I desire. I beg you, please let me do so.”

“Ark, you’re really.....!” The young Lord struggled with his emotions.

Even the guard captain, Cross, who was listening in from the side was overcome with emotion.

“Milord, I also ask this favor. If the righteous foreigner Ark who was acknowledged by the late lord were to help, it would raise the morale of the guards. Please grant this request. I will swear to protect him from harm.”

“Fine, although a foreigner participating in the guard force is

unprecedented, Ark fought the devil with the Sylphid Knights before. And if it's you, who loves Jackson more than anyone, you have the right to do so. Sir Cross, Ark is my friend. I leave him to you."

"Yes, sir."

As Cross firmly nodded, a message window popped up.

– Art of Communication has risen by 5.
--

The Art of Communication stat was of crucial help.

'Hehehe, the way to solve this quest is becoming clear at last.'

Like that, Ark was able to participate in the battle without coming to the attention of the other users.

Jackson Crusade

“Kekeke, attack! Sweep them away without leaving a single human behind!”

Once again, a group of monsters swarmed towards the back gate.

“It’s the enemy. Everyone prepare for battle!”

At Cross’ order, soldiers who had been taking breaks rose urgently. Then they clashed with countless metallic clanging noises!

As the young Lord had said, it was definitely not easy to defend the back gate.

A legion consisting of dozens of monsters came to attack the back gate at regular intervals. Though they weren’t at the level of the Sylphid Knights, the Guard demonstrated abilities matching players at level 80 or so. In addition, their equipment was considerable, so their attack and defense were also quite good. Alone, they could easily take down one or two Shadows, but there was a problem.

In terms of composition, battle ability, and strategy, the Guard was a long ways off from the Sylphid Knights.

First of all, the Guard’s composition wasn’t as good as that of the player raids. Unlike the player raids, which were evenly made of Warriors, Archers, Magicians, and Clerics, the guard force only had Warriors and Archers. Therefore, when the enemy was upon them and they didn’t even have a strategy, charging in while swinging their swords was the whole of it.

It was no wonder that there was a considerable loss of Health with each round of battle.

The second problem was, even though they had lost that much Health, there wasn’t a Cleric so there was no way to recover properly. Thanks to that, they had to apply first aid or eat food to

recover Health after the fighting was over. There were many cases along the way where they had to fight a monster legion before they were done recovering. A battle with lacking skills took a long time, and since it took long, the guard force had to fight again before their Health was 100% recovered. They were caught in a vicious cycle. Still, they were able to endure thanks to the powerful equipment that had been bestowed upon the guard NPCs.

“This is a fight where everyone is holding on with their enormous defense and Health.”

But Ark wasn't supported with as much defense and Health as the Guard. If he faced monsters by throwing himself into battle like they did, he would soon meet his end.

“Finishing off the weak monsters while the guards are protecting themselves with shields will be good.”

Ark faced the three or four Shadows that had lost most of their Health and had been pushed to the rear. However, even that required much caution. NPCs also leveled up when they accumulated EXP, and if their contribution went up, they advanced to a higher position in society. Of course they were greedy for EXP and contribution. Fortunately, they didn't openly state their complaints since his intimacy with them was high, but they stared at him uncomfortably when he snatched monsters with rock bottom Health.

“My place with them will disappear if my intimacy with the guards falls.”

Ark felt the crisis of the situation and decided to abandon his blazing greed.

After several battles, he began to see a rough compromise.

When he picked off monsters with 50% Health left, the guards showed no obvious reactions.

“Hey Ark, don't push yourself too hard.”

Rather, they occasionally even encouraged him.

“Alright, so they overlook this much! Now there’s no need to worry.”

Once he was certain of the limit, Ark began to move briskly. Ark’s sword cleaved the darkness like a flash.

The Shadows that had already lost half their Health were put down with three or four critical hits from Ark. Ark kicked wildly in all directions and let loose Dark Blade to exterminate the monsters.

There was no need to worry too much about his Health and Mana. After fighting until he fell into critical condition, he backed off when it grew dangerous and ate food. The trusty guards were holding up the front, so he could leave it to them and take a break. This was something he wouldn’t have been able to do if he had been fighting with players.

While fighting like that, a new message window appeared.

The skill ‘Indomitable Will’ has reached 100 points in skill proficiency and has increased to Intermediate.

Indomitable Will (Intermediate, Passive): Overcoming innumerable life and death situations have made your courage even more unwavering. The concentration ability that shines during a crisis has become one level stronger.

In a crisis, Critical Hit Chance will increase by 40% and Regeneration ability will increase by 10%.

Indomitable Will was the first skill Ark had learned.

Indomitable Will was a skill that only activated in critical condition. The skill had stopped growing because Ark grown to a point where he rarely reached critical condition. Even so, he couldn’t purposefully fall into critical condition to raise the skill since there was no knowing what kinds of situations would arise while hunting alone. However, it was a different situation when the guards were backing him up like now.

‘Indomitable Will finally reached Intermediate. Now is the chance to

raise skills. Indomitable Body doesn't have much left either, so I should use this opportunity to fall into critical condition more often. But if I'm going to approach the jaws of death, wouldn't it be good to raise intimacy as well?'

"Dedric, Skull. There's no need for you guys to participate in the battle. Patrol the area and assist any guards at risk!"

"Understood, Master."

Ark had Dedric and Skull meticulously check the battle situation. Then he was able to quickly run in front of guards in critical condition who were in danger.

Just then, he glimpsed a guardsman who was under concentrated attack from monsters riding lizards, evolved versions of Shadows called Avengers.

"Kekeke, die. Human!"

"Stop, ACK!"

Ark's Health plummeted from taking a critical hit by a lance.

"Oh, Ark!"

"Please go, I'll take it from here!"

"Th-thank you."

"Your opponent is me!"

"Kekeke, you took a hit for another, so is this the insignificant humans' code of chivalry?"

The Avenger lunged in as it jabbered in a derisive voice.

"Dedric, now. Cover that guy's eyes!"

Dedric flew in quickly and unfurled both his wings to cover the Avenger's face. Then Ark grabbed and hurled Skull at the Avenger's face, making it stagger and sway. At that moment, Ark leapt onto the charging lizard's body and loosed a lethal move.

“Dark Blade!”

The Avenger took a considerable blow from the defense-ignoring attack and rolled off the lizard’s back. Ark showered the Avenger with kicks and sword attacks as it staggered to its feet!

Of course, since he had to raise his skill points for the Indomitable set, he didn’t forget to get hit a few times. Then, as soon as Indomitable Will and Body were activated, he immediately dealt a Dark Blade and ended the Avenger’s life.

– You have defeated Avenger and saved your teammate from a crisis. Contribution +20 (+10)

‘Added contribution points!’

He was granted bonus contribution points since he took down an enemy after taking a hit for the guardsman.

That wasn’t all. When he fought while saving guardsmen like that a few times, there was a change in the way the guardsmen looked at Ark. From simple familiarity to respect...

“Thank you, I survived thanks to you.”

“You are indeed Ark. I’ll be happy to die for your sake!”

As the knights grew to respect him more, Ark’s restrictions became less strict. They didn’t complain even when he snatched monsters with about 40% Health.

‘Is there still room to raise intimacy more with the guards?’ Ark’s eyes were shining.

Only then did he catch onto the rough sense of what he had to do.

When it became Ark’s time to rest, he made Survival Cooking food without sparing his ingredients. Health recovery was manifold faster than normal food, and it even granted additional effects!

“Ah, after eating this food, my fatigue seems to have somehow flown away.”

“Somehow, it makes me feel like I can run 100 meters in 10 seconds.”

“And the taste is delicious as well.”

After only eating dried rations for several days, the guards spoke up with energetic faces. Moreover, their stats increased and their recovery rate quickened, so it was easier for them to face the swarming monsters as well.

Next, Ark turned his eye on repair.

The guards had toolboxes, but they had to hammer away at their equipment for a long time to make repairs. But Ark's Magic Restoration was instantaneous!

“Bring me all the broken equipment!”

Ark drank the Mana restoring Herb Tea during breaks and quickly repaired the guards' equipment. The attack and defense of the soldiers' equipments were exceptional, but they were all Common equips. As a result, the guards rejoiced when Ark repaired their equipment without penalties to the durability.

“Thank you, to think that repair would be done so quickly. Now fighting will be much easier.”

“Consider this as thanks. It's easier thanks to you, so please take it.”

When he completed a set number of repairs, Cross even pulled out a spare tool box and gave it to him. Though they were just common tool boxes, each one was worth 10 Gold!

Was that all? His skills went up, and since he was contributing to the battle with food and repairs, he received additional contribution points. At the same time, his intimacy surged up, so when he dealt the last blow on monsters in critical condition or even snatched up items from a monster felled by another soldier, they didn't gripe about it.

Once he got the ball rolling, it was smooth sailing from there. After repeatedly fighting in battles where he recklessly fell into critical

condition, Indomitable Body soon became Intermediate. Both Indomitable Will and Body had only had 7 skill points left to fulfill, so it hadn't taken much time.

Indomitable Body (Intermediate, Passive): As a great warrior, countless wounds and agonies have made your body even stronger. Your increased defense will shine in a difficult situation.

In a crisis, defense and Critical Hit Evasion will increase by 40%, Regeneration ability will increase by 10%.

* As a set effect of Indomitable Will and Body, you have learned "Adrenaline."

Adrenaline: A true Warrior will not feel fear in a critical situation. Rather, their intense excitement will release adrenaline and make them forget fear and fatigue. Now, when you face a crisis, adrenaline will be released and you will be able to bring out the most of your body's ability.

In a crisis, +50% Immunity to Fear, Reaction Rate +20%.

'I finally raised both of the Indomitables in the set to Intermediate!'

When he set a goal and aggressively pursued it, the skill growth was also fast.

The effect of Adrenaline was incredible. Once he fell into critical condition, all his senses sharpened, making him feel as if the enemy was Slowed. Naturally, it was much easier to avoid the enemy's attacks. Also, his attack speed increased, letting him make six attacks in the time it had taken to make five. With the Indomitable series effects added on top of that, his fighting power skyrocketed. After about three or four hours of fighting, he was even able to match his breathing with the guards.

"Everyone, be strong! Only we can defend Jackson Castle!"

"OOOHHH!"

The Nursing skill he occasionally used also had a great impact. Their spirits uplifted, the soldiers fought monsters even more powerfully.

In order to maximize hunting efficiency, Ark occasionally stepped out of battle to receive side quests from Raymond. Raymond, who was in charge of the volunteer troops, commissioned him small quests.

“It will be a great help in protecting the castle if you defeat about fifty Shadows.”

“Avengers are platoon leaders that lead the Shadows... if you defeat them, we’ll be able to shake their chain of command.”

“You’ve seen a Hipton before, right? They’re giant monsters holding hammers or iron bows. They say three or four Hiptons are advancing to attack the castle walls. Please stop them.”

The side quests had simple narratives, like the above. When he completed a quest, his EXP, contribution, and a value called operation performance evaluation went up. At first, he didn’t know what the operation evaluation value meant, but after completing about ten quests, he grasped the gist of it. He received harder quests with higher operation performance evaluation value.

However, players didn’t take quests despite knowing that they were available. Firstly, the rewarded EXP and contribution points were scanty, and in the raid, it was too eye-catching to go all the way to the front gate to receive a quest alone.

On the other hand, with the NPC guards, taking quests was quite favorable for Ark. Sometimes, they even put themselves in danger to help Ark complete a quest. Thanks to that, Ark was able complete quests much more easily and accumulate additional EXP and contribution.

‘The penalty for raising contribution points alone is gone. No, it’s actually a hundred times better than an average raid. Since more than anything, I can fully place my trust on the NPCs.’

Just 5 hours after Ark joined the guards, he leveled up 2 times.



Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +100		
Fame	750	Level	71
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Soul Caretaker		
Health	1,415	Mana	1,125 (+100)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	178
Agility	218 (+17)	Stamina	268
Wisdom	27	Intelligence	216
Luck	43	Flexibility	17
Art of Communication	23	Affection	23
Special Stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			63
Equipment Effects			
Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor: Agility 2, Frost Resistance +20 Cat Paws: Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit Rate +10%			

Crystal Golem's Head: Mana +100 Norad Boots: Movement Speed +10%, Evasion +5%
* All abilities will increase by 30% in the dark.
* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (15 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat).
* Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.
* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

However, his time hunting with the guards reached a totally unexpected deadlock. After 6 hours, the guard commander, Cross, spoke with a fatigued face, "Today, we'll head back in around now."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Since they've charged in for awhile, the monsters will be quiet for a bit. And the guards are all tired. If we don't get proper rest, we won't be able to endure tomorrow's battle."

It was a problem of fatigue. The concept of time was different for NPCs. For a player, a full day was 8 hours in real time. A player could push themselves to stay up a few nights and wage battle. So when there was a lull in monster attacks, players went out looking for monsters to hunt.

However, 6 hours to a player was 18 hours to an NPC. In addition, unlike users, NPCs felt fatigue and the pain of being injured realistically. Even if they recovered their Health with food or potions, their fatigue did not also disappear.

"With the situation as it is, we won't be able to get sufficient rest, but since we've passed one round of the enemy's attacks now, we'll be able to rest until dawn. Since you have also pushed yourself quite hard, you should at least get a bit of shut eye."

"... I understand."

Those words were like pouring cold water over his rising spirits.

However, even Ark couldn't impose a tighter schedule on the guards.

'So that means for every 6 hours, I have to fight alone for 2 hours.'

But the monsters that attacked the walls came in legions. They were difficult opponents for Ark to deal with alone. Even so, he couldn't ask to squeeze in with the attack raid for just two hours.

'What to do? If I play around for 2 hours for every 6 hours, I'll be doing nothing for 6 hours every day. The others will be staying up all night to hunt, so the gap will just grow larger...'

Having headed in with the guards for replanning, Ark blew out a sigh. 'And to think that Snake's inability to eat items would be this critical.'

Since he was fighting at Jackson Castle, he had thought he'd be able to keep selling his loot. But there was a variable that he hadn't even imagined. It was that all the NPC shops had closed shop when Jackson Castle was attacked. Necessities could be bought through the quartermaster inside the castle, but the sale of loot was impossible.

The event quest had just begun. However, Ark's bag was already 80% full.

Since there was no knowing what kind of item would drop and when, he was now unable to blindly grab items except for ones that stacked.

'To think that I've fallen into situation where I can't grab everything in front of my eyes...'

They were japtem worth a dozen coppers and a few silvers at best, but collecting small change eventually leads to quite a sum. Since he couldn't take money that was on the ground, he was likely to go crazy and tear his hair out.

That wasn't the only problem.

Hiss, hiss...

Having entered metamorphosis, Snake was gradually weakening and was spitting out an item from its belly at regular intervals. Since all the items Snake had been storing were useful, depending on the item, there were times when he left items that he'd obtained or picked them up. Ark really felt like his skin was being peeled away with each item he had to leave behind.

'I can't blame Snake since it ate the Fruit of Basium by my mistake...'

Seeing Snake throw up yet another item with a grueling expression, Ark could only sigh. Now that he knew that Snake was throwing up items at regular intervals, he could no longer unsummon it. If Snake vomitted all the precious items in the Netherworld, there'd be no way to retrieve them.

At the very least, Snake was able to regain its strength a little when Ark occasionally used Nursing, which fortunately decreased the vomiting. Of course, Ark had mulled over many ways to end Snake's process of metamorphosis. However, there was nothing in particular that came to mind.

Thinking he might know, Ark asked the Alchemist Raymond, who was rich in knowledge concerning magic ingredients. However, Raymond shook his head.

"Even I have heard of the Fruit of Basium. However, the Fruit of Basium is processed in a special manner to make magic medicine or is used as a catalyst. I've never heard of a living creature that has eaten it directly, so it's hard to say. I'm sorry I'm not of much help."

"It's alright."

He was aware that this was not something that could be solved so easily. With a sour face, Ark shook his head and turned around.

Then, Raymond asked cautiously, "Ark, can I talk to you for a moment?"

"What's the matter?"

"Actually... having heard that you were here, there's a fellow who

says he absolutely must see you.”

Embarrassed, Raymond gestured towards a boy lingering around the doorway. It was a familiar face. As Ark looked towards him, Raymond explained, “This is my rascal you saved, my son. Which reminds me, I haven’t even introduced him to you. This is Tom.”

“Ah!” Only then did Ark remember the boy.

This was Raymond’s child, who had been lying on his sickbed. His face back then had been haggard, but now he looked completely healthy. Of course he did, since nearly half a year had passed for an NPC.

Tom’s eyes sparkled as he looked at Ark and said, “You’re Ark, right? Father has told me so much about you. That I would have died if not for you, and that I must never forget your name. Of course I will never forget you. Ark, you are my life’s savior.”

A fresh smile spread on the tired Ark’s lips. Although he knew it was an NPC programmed response, it was still heart-warming to see that the boy had become healthy thanks to his actions.

Actually, Ark hadn’t been able to understand when there were occasional news reports of moving stories about someone donating anonymously or devoting their entire lives to others. For what reason would one give away the money they worked to the bone for? But seeing the tears in Tom’s eyes, he thought he could understand their feelings. Granted, he only felt that way since this was a game; in real life, there was no way.

“I’m not such a great person. Rather, your father is more admirable.”

Tom rubbed the tip of his nose and answered with a proud face, “Hehehe, I know that. But you are as great a person as my father.”

Then Dedric whispered from Ark’s shoulder, “He still doesn’t know Master’s real character, poor guy. It’s better if he doesn’t find out.”

While Ark was giving Dedric a dirty look, Tom said, “But Ark, you help injured people, right?”

“I want to help them, if possible.”

“Then, do you think you could also help my friend and his dad?”

“This fella, what are you saying? Ark here has only just returned from fighting monsters to protect Jackson Castle. Don’t you think we should let him rest?”

“But...” Tom lowered his head with a sullen expression.

“Raymond, what’s this?”

“No, actually... After Jackson Castle was covered by the Dark Fog, many residents have been suffering from an inexplicable disease. And since refugees from the entirety of the territory have gathered here, they aren’t able to receive satisfactory treatment. We’ve asked for help from a few of the volunteer troops, but they say they don’t have the time to spare... No, since they have come to protect Jackson Castle, we can’t complain.”

Since the Clerics were the core power of the attack raid, of course it would’ve been hard to lend their time.

Ark contemplated for a moment, nodded his head and said, “Please lead on. I probably won’t be much help, but I cannot let it pass.”

“But didn’t you just return from battle?”

Ark replied without hesitation. “I am trained, so it’s fine even if I don’t sleep for a few days or so.”

In any case, it was hard to go hunting alone for 3 hours. Therefore, he had determined that it would be better to increase his intimacy with the residents instead.

“I told you so! I said Ark would help, didn’t I?”

“Haah, it has become an inconvenience to you because this little guy said something unnecessary.”

Raymond led Ark to the temporary refugee shelter with an apologetic look.

As he’d heard, the shelter was filled with people who were obviously

ill. The families could only watch their suffering parents or children with anguished eyes.

He was used to such a scene by now, but his heart still felt bitter. He knew that this was just a virtual reality. But it was like watching a sad story and tearing up even though it was just a fictional movie. That effect was even greater in New World, where everything felt more real than it did in a movie.

“Papa, papa... Please wake up, waaah!”

“Cough, cough, Mom. My head hurts.”

“My child, be strong. You’ll get better.”

“Ohh, how could such a good child... God, please let this child live...”

A child trying to wake her parent up by shaking him. A parent holding her pale child and praying.

He had a lump in his throat. It was as if he was watching his past self.

How much did he cry while holding the hand of his mother, who could not wake from her sickbed? How much did he pray? How afraid and fearful was he at the thought that perhaps he would lose his mother?

If he closed his eyes even now, Ark could recite from memory the Bible verses that he had read over and over again in the dark hospital room. He did everything he could to clutch at straws. He wished and wished that God would appear and tell him to sacrifice his own life instead.

That desperation... these people felt the same way as he had. Awash in recollection, Ark’s eyes had become moist at some point.

‘They’re not just NPCs. They are people.’ Ark clenched his teeth.

To be truthful, at first, he didn’t want to acknowledge that he felt sympathy for NPCs.

Crying because of a game? He thought it was something only a one

or two year old child would do. But as he travelled around New World and met countless NPCs, Ark abandoned those thoughts.

If the definition of life was to be able to think for themselves, then NPCs were living creatures too. Though they were man made AIs, if they had consciences, then they were already no different from living beings.

What was the shame in sympathizing with them?

The ones who should be truly ashamed were people who showed their insensitivity by giggling while watching a sad movie. We must accept things that are sad as sad. Isn't that what makes humans human?

"Grandpa... Uwahh."

"Kid. Move aside for a moment."

Ark sat next to the whimpering child and held the trembling old man's hand.

"Please shed your fear and be strong. Before you are patient, you are the grandpa of this kid and an excellent friend to your neighbors. Though of course it is difficult for you, you are not the only one who is suffering from your pain. Your grandson, who is crying here, your friend who is moaning next you, and is enduring as much pain as you as they worry. Please keep that in mind. Lean on them as much as you want and borrow their strength to fight the pain. This is just an ordeal, not a fate that cannot be overcome. The tears of your grandchild and the sincerity of your friend's worries will be your weapon."

This was what he had wanted to say to his mother long ago while she lay in her hospital bed.

At those words, the Nursing skill was activated and a bright light emanated out. Then, as the light grew stronger, the dark energy that had been filling the shelter began to weaken.

Afterwards, there was a dramatic change. Faces of deathly ill patients lit up. Their breathing became comfortable, and the sound

of coughing from the shelter stopped.

Miracle Nursing has succeeded.

You can sincerely understand the heart and minds of the sick in further.

What patients want is not medicine to immediately wash away their pain. What they want is a warm hand that can understand their pain and cleanse their wounds with a sincere heart. Everyone, especially the refugees, were feeling a sense of alienation that was more hurtful than their illness. Now, your sincere words to them will be a treatment more excellent than medicine.

As long as the Dark Fog remains, the refugees will not fully recover. But your sincere words gave them the courage to fight the illness. The refugees will briefly forget their pain and will endure until the Dark Fog is gone.

- * By succeeding Miracle Nursing, all stats have increased by 1.
- * Affection has increased by 10.
- * Fame has increased by 50.
- * Alignment to Good has increased by 50.

* You have acquired the title 'Caretaker of All' from succeeding Miracle Nursing. Fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many patients.

* As a title bonus, all stats increase by 1.

* Fame increases by 50.

He received 2,000 additional contribution points. Though it didn't have any influence on the battle, they were contribution points he received for saving residents. But the greater reward was the smiles

that returned to the patients' faces.

'What a relief...'

"Thank you. Thank you so much."

"I told you so! I told you that Ark would be able to help!" Tom had tears spilling from his eyes as he proudly yelled out.

It was then—he suddenly heard a crashing noise from the entrance as a perplexed voice cried out.

"Ark? Did you say Ark?"

When he turned around, he saw a girl wearing a white robe staring blankly at Ark. When Ark made a strange expression, Tom pointed at her and explained, "Oh, she works and helps out here. Her name is Roco..."

"That reminds me, you did say that you started the game, too, didn't you? It's been crazy lately, so I forgot about it."

"Hehe, I'm already level 25." Jung Hye-sun, aka Roco, declared proudly.

She had recently arrived in Jackson Castle from Harun Village. Then, only when she reached Jackson did she first learn about job-changing. The profession she selected was Minstrel, a profession that could use both slight recovery and support skills.

"Of all the..." Ark clicked his tongue.

Though he had met many users, he'd never seen a Minstrel. Although Minstrels had recovery and support abilities, they were less efficient than Cleric-related professions. In addition, Clerics were equipped with their own fighting ability, and were able to solo without much difficulty as a result. However, the fighting ability of Minstrels was as low as Merchants.

A Minstrel's strong point over a Cleric was that since it used music, most of its skills had a wide area effect. However, not being able to solo easily was a big penalty, so it was a profession looked down on by players. Therefore, there were many cases of people who

mistakenly job-changed, canceled extremely early on, and chose a different profession. Cancelling a profession was only available to starter professions, and you had to pay a fine of 200 gold to the profession NPC. Meaning, it was a profession that people wanted to cancel even while having to pay such a large fine.

But Roco shook her head. “I like this profession. I’ve always had a lot of interest in music, you see. I can try instruments that I never even had the chance to touch because they were expensive, like the harp, piano, and flute, to my heart’s content. Also, with a little effort, I can quickly learn to play here. And...”

She had not started New World to play solo. Since it was a game that she had started to play with the desire to meet Ark and be helpful to him, she had chosen Minstrel without hesitation. However, she could not say that in front of Ark, who was the same as Hyun-woo in reality.

“I didn’t know you were interested in music.”

“Because we’ve never gone to karaoke together.”

“Well yeah. Still, it’s a relief that you found a job you like.”

“Yes, it was a good idea to start New World.”

As Roco let escape a muffled laugh, Dedric stared at her suspiciously and butted in, “Who’s this, Master? Your girlfriend? Is that how it is?”

“Wanna die?”

When Ark threatened, Roco asked with shining eyes, “Oho? That bat, it wasn’t just an decoration? Does it also speak?”

“I am not a bat. I am a noble of the Underworld, Dedric!”

“Kyaaaa, it said it’s a *noble*. How adorable!”

Dedric was puffing his chest with pride when Roco suddenly grabbed and shook him. She also discovered Skull, who was rolling next to her and picked it up.

She was not the same Roco who had screamed at the mere sight of mice. The life-like virtual reality game had completely changed her.

“Aish, you won’t let go? How dare you...”

Unable to endure Roco’s grabbing and shaking, Dedric transformed into a person and expressed his irritation. But that simply added oil to Roco’s interest. When he turned into a cute boy, Roco hugged him while giggling.

“Omo, so you can also transform. Seeing your wild eyes is like looking at my little brother when he was young. Hohoho, it must be nice, Ark. You get to carry things like this around, too.”

“What? *Th-things like this?*”

“Uwah, so cute. Hey, how old are you?”

“...Three hundred years old.”

“Hohoho, even the way you answer is cute. Come here and big sister will give you some wheat bread.”

“Wanna die?”

“Come on, don’t be like that and play with big sister. Skull, you come here as well.”

“Ma-Master, do something about this chick!”

As Roco nuzzled her cheek on him, Dedric asked for help with a pale face. However, since Ark had been displeased with Dedric’s arrogant attitude these days, he completely ignored Dedric and asked Roco, “But you’re still managing pretty well. It isn’t easy to endure in this place...”

“Oh, that’s right!” Roco clapped, as if remembering something just then. “Come to think of it, there’s someone I have to introduce to you, oppa.”

“Introduce?”

“Yes, he’s the one who’s been helping me since Harun Village. He’s out on a small errand, but he’ll be back soon. I’m sure you will be

happy to see him, too.”

Roco grabbed Ark’s hand and pulled him along.

Since the start of the event quest, it had become impossible for players in Jackson Territory to log out. Therefore, unless they died, they couldn’t escape until the event quest ended. So even if a player left the unit, the character was left in the game in a sleeping state. The person Roco introduced to him had also not returned to his unit and was still sleeping against the wall of a building.

“Do you not recognize him?”

“Well... there’s no one I know in New World...” Ark examined the character with an indifferent eye.

He was a big-bodied male character. His armorless body was bulging with muscles. As for weapons and such, he was wearing martial arts gloves like what you might see in MMA games, and his wrists, elbows, and shoulders were wrapped in leather bands.

Overall, the atmosphere around him was like an American pro-wrestler.

‘He knows me? But I’ve never seen a person like him in New World?’

“Eh? EEHHH?” While staring at the man’s face, a bizarre scream burst from Ark’s mouth. The square angular face, the bushy beard. It was indeed a face he knew from memory. And it wasn’t from the game, but reality!

Just then, the character vibrated and lifted his head. He looked at Ark and Rocco with a vacant stare, roughly sized up the situation, grinned and stood up.

“Isn’t it Hyun-woo! It’s really nice to meet you in the game. How have you been?”

“De-Detective Gwon?”

“Why are you so surprised? You were the one who told me to try out the game. I gave it a go and I’m quite pleased with it. So I’ve been so busy playing that I haven’t even slept for a few days. Well, I still

go to the hospital. I'm used to staying up all night from my detective days. Ack, my shoulders hurt."

Gwon Hwa-rang. No, JusticeMan mumbled while rotating his arm.

Surprisingly, JusticeMan was already level 40.

"Ah, it has really been an eventful month." JusticeMan mumbled while absentmindedly looking at the distant mountains.

* * *

In fact, Gwon Hwa-rang hadn't leveled up very quickly after first starting the game.

Since he had ignorantly beaten Wolves to death from the beginning, of course he received a lot of EXP. But while helping others, he was never able to get 100% of the EXP and sometimes he even died, so leveling up became slower and slower. Moreover, even though Gwon Hwa-rang was as strong as he was ignorant, he was actually a newb at games.

Of course, since he had brute skills, dealing with Wild Dogs and Wolves posed no problem. However, once he somehow reached level 20, Wild Dogs and Wolves no longer gave much experience. So he went out a little further, and problems that he couldn't make head or tail of occurred.

A beginner village was literally a beginner village. It is an area where people without knowledge of the game can live in, somehow or another. But once he left the beginner village, his situation changed completely.

What bothered Gwon Hwa-rang in particular were the monsters that applied abnormal conditions. Because it was still a low-level area, there were no monsters that applied powerful abnormal conditions, but Gwon Hwa-rang had no idea what to do and just struggled even when he received 'Bleed' or 'Weaken'.

Abnormal condition resistance was influenced by Agility, Intelligence, and Luck. However, without any knowledge of stat distribution, he blindly poured his stat points into only Strength and Stamina. His

resistance against conditions was rock bottom, so when he took a blow, he almost certainly received a status condition.

A normal player would have come up with countermeasures by that point. But Gwon Hwa-rang was nothing if not fighting spirit– the harder the situation, the more his motivation burned, so he began to die like crazy. As a result, his stats were being cut down and he was even dropping his shabby equipment, so of course fighting became harder.

Was that all? Though he was over forty years old, he had no concept of money management. Thus, he didn't even have the money to repair his equipment, so they broke, and there were even times when he couldn't buy himself wheat bread to eat. Granted, the players who received his help occasionally took care of him, but New World wasn't so easy a place that one could live on just that.

“Damn it, why is this game so complicated?”

Beaten to death by monsters that looked unbelievably weak *yet again*, Gwon Hwa-rang scratched his head while smoking a pack of cigarettes. With the situation this severe, he was forced to acknowledge that he couldn't properly raise his character by just blindly rushing in and fighting.

Gwon Hwa-rang put out his cigarette and glanced at the manual for New World that had come when he bought the unit. Though he had thought about reading it, he quickly shook his head. He couldn't even remember the last time he had read a book. Especially not a gaming manual filled with game terms that were strange to pronounce. Looking at the fearsomely thick manual, he couldn't even draw the nerve to pick it up.

“This is driving me crazy. Just when the game was getting good. What is this? Still, I can't just cling to the busy Hyun-woo and ask for help...”

Then, something flashed into Gwon Hwa-rang's mind. “Wait a minute, to think of it, aren't there quite a few game fanatics? If I drag them in...”

Gwon Hwa-rang got up immediately and made some calls here and there.

A short while afterwards, 10 men were gathered in his house. They were men with colorful pasts as fairly infamous pickpockets, smugglers, fraudsters, violent offenders, etc.. Gwon Hwa-rang, who had become a probation officer, managed these so-called good-for-nothings with criminal records.

Gwon Hwa-rang summoned them and grinned as he asked, "Alright, anyone here who is confident in playing games, put your hands up."

All 10 people raised their hands.

"Okay, then there'll be no problem. From now on, you will all be my coaches."

"Huh? Your coach?"

"Yes, from now on, all of you will take turns coming over to my house to coach me."

"What game are you playing?"

"New World."

"But we haven't had the chance to play New World yet..."

The ex-convicts scratched their heads with unconfident expressions.

But after hearing Gwon Hwa-rang's questions, the looks on their faces turned to utter amazement. Gwon Hwa-rang was a person without any MMORPG, no, any gaming basic knowledge at all.

If you fight, your level will rise, If you level up, you become stronger. Then you have to fight stronger enemies. That was all Gwon Hwa-Rang knew about New World.

"What are active skills, you ask? Do you seriously call that a question?"

"You *still* don't know what potions do?"

"Why exactly do you go around with your armor *off*?"

“You took it off because it was annoying? Then why in the world do you think people are uneasy when they aren’t wearing heavy plate armor?”

“Why do you keep blindly rushing in and dying? Huh? Know no retreat? Are you kidding me?”

“How in hell did you even manage to level up to 20?”

“Ah, dammit. I can’t take this anymore, it’s too frustrating. Hey you, order units!”

In the end, with the good-for-nothings tearing their hair out with frustration, they brought in units and ended up playing the game together. Following the former detective, the ten ex-convicts came to walk the paths of gamers.

Their character names were number 1401 to 1410, their probation numbers.

With the help of these game-knowledgeable fellows, Gwon Hwa-rang began to learn the basics of New World. But he was still a passionate detective. Gwon Hwa-rang’s basic playing style didn’t change.

“Over there! Someone’s asking for help over there! Let’s go!”

“EHH? *Again?* Just what do we gain for deliberately going over to help?”

“Regardless of how this started, this is one of your social adjustment programs. Rather than putting in time later you will practice justice here and learn how satisfying it is, understood?”

“It’s okay if we don’t learn that.”

“Quiet! You want to get hit and go or just go?”

Gwon Hwa-rang bullied them and dragged them around. The sight of them was the talk of the players in Harun Village.

“Look at that, Machoman’s crew grew!”

Just like that, the party made up of a detective and ex-convicts

became a new hot topic in the beginner village. This was how Gwon Hwa-rang, who had no knowledge whatsoever about games, was able to reach level 40 in a month.

Well, with 10 users backing you up, you can't help but level up quickly.

* * *

JusticeMan and Roco met in Harun Village. After JusticeMan rescued Roco a few times, they started go around together whenever they logged in. That was why Roco was able to reach level 25 without any combat ability.

Then, they naturally came to know that they both knew Ark, and with that connection, they ended up going all the way to Jackson Castle together. Not long after they arrived, the event quest started and they unknowingly joined the militia.

"Then what did you job-change to?"

"I haven't chosen a profession yet. I looked around but I haven't found one that fits me yet."

"You still haven't chosen a job at level 40?"

"Not having a job doesn't seem to matter? Plus, with the castle in such disorder right now, I can't even if I wanted to." JusticeMan answered with a disinterested expression.

Ark briefly stared at JusticeMan and Roco. He wanted to be of some help to JusticeMan and Roco, who were still newbs to the ways of New World. Also, one was like a savior to him and the other was one that he thought of as a little sister.

They were truly people he sincerely wanted to help.

Even though the ex-convicts were with them, their levels were still below 20. Moreover, since the start of the event quest, 8 had died, leaving only #1401 and #1405. There were only 2 of them left.

'Wherever I go with JusticeMan and Roco, we'd probably be treated coldly... if so...'

After pondering for a moment Ark decided to drag them into the Guard. It wouldn't be easy, but he didn't think it would be impossible if he use the intimacy he'd raised with the Guard and his relationship with the Lord.

"Mister, do you want to raise contribution points with Roco and me? Since this is an event quest, if you raise your contribution by participating in the militia, you'll be able to receive a pretty good reward."

"Sounds good to me. What the militia is doing is boring. Roco also started this game to play with you, so that's not a problem, but I'm not sure it'll be alright since we've got so many other members."

JusticeMan mumbled while scratching his head.

"Other members? #1401 and #1405?"

"No, actually, JusticeMan mister is the current militia leader. The people he helped in Harun Village recommended him. In the beginning there were about 200 people who received the militia quest, but almost all of them died on the first day. There are only about 20 people who survived out of the 50 who followed JusticeMan."

"Fifty?" responded Ark with a surprised expression. It was fascinating that so many users were following JusticeMan, who had only been playing for 20 days. Of course, JusticeMan had a charm that somehow drew people towards him. But that was in the real world. Just how in the world did a gaming newb gather so many people? Having never seen JusticeMan's unusual gameplay, Ark had a hard time imagining it.

'Anyways, 20 militia... it might be tough, but I might as well try asking.'

He didn't like interacting with other players, but these were people who followed JusticeMan. If it was someone else, Ark would have refused them even if they had offered him a bag of money, but it was a different story for people related to JusticeMan and Roco.

Whether in reality or the game, they were the only two people Ark

didn't calculate profit or loss with. The fewer there are, the stronger the attachment.

* * *

"You're asking me to combine the militia with the Guard?" Having received Ark's request, the Lord responded with a perplexed expression. "Well, it's true there isn't anything to assign the militia right now... but it pricks my conscience to send out the militia again when many have already sacrificed themselves. And truthfully, I don't even know if they would be much help."

"I will take responsibility for them. Also, they will definitely be helpful."

"Hmm..."

As the young Lord pondered, Cross, whose intimacy with Ark was even higher, gave his support. "Ark must have a plan of his own, seeing how he asking like this. And even if they aren't much of a help in battle, we can still entrust the rear of the Guard to them. The militia are also volunteer troops who rose up to protect Jackson, isn't it wrong to push them to the back just because they are weak?"

"What you say has merit, alright. I'll leave that matter to you. But keep this in mind. Resident or foreigner, their lives are equally precious. In addition, protecting them and reducing the sacrifices is our duty. If it seems dangerous, you must return them to the castle."

"Of course."

Like that, the 20 militiamen that no one even looked at were added to the Jackson Guard. The one most happy with the decision was the former detective, JusticeMan.

"Finally, we've gotten a job worth doing. I was about to get fed up with luggage moving quests."

"Please don't push yourself too much. Even if you just participate a little, your contribution will increase." Ark worriedly entreated the extremely motivated JusticeMan.

But JusticeMan just snorted. “I can’t do that. Even if I die, dying in flames is how a police officer of South Korea must go.”

After a while, Ark realized that his fears were baseless. ‘Wh-what is that?’

Ark’s prediction that JusticeMan and the militia with their low levels wouldn’t be helpful was overturned. Though they couldn’t fight many monsters at once like the Guard could, the skill with which they systematically pressured monsters while perfectly in sync was incomparable to the Guards.

The 20 users lured monsters, surrounded them, and completely annihilated them all in one beat.

JusticeMan, who had started way later than Ark, even figured out the skills of various jobs and used them effectively in combos. Thanks to that, even users with an average level of 35 were able to hunt level 85 monsters. The fact that they had survived in battle until the volunteer troops had arrived was not all luck.

‘Come to think of it...’

It was then that Ark remembered that JusticeMan was no ordinary government official. He was a person who had been dispatched to South America in a special squad as a police instructor.

To put it in words, in group battle, he was a professional!

Was that all? Ark was too focused on the game and forgot one obvious fact. No, most users probably forgot this fact.

It was the fact that 80% of healthy males in Korea received professional military training! 80% receiving military training was not common worldwide.

The potential of that was unimaginable.

People usually said that one would rot if they went into the military, but they said that because they didn’t know the potential of military training. There was even an incident like this in Japan long ago. Korean international students in Japan resented the rash violence of

the local yakuza and declared an all-out war. However, their opponents were specialized killers who didn't hesitate to murder. When the international students came at them, of course the yakuza snorted at them.

And as expected, at first the international students were pushed back. What changed the situation was when command was entrusted to an international student who was a commissioned officer. Once the chain of command was established, the situation changed completely. Pushed to near annihilation by a military operation counterattacks, it ended with the yakuza kneeling and begging for forgiveness.

The scene in front of Ark's eyes was not very different from that incident. Though they were only level 35 and couldn't demonstrate much strength by themselves, if they carried out tactics under a proper commander, the users who had completed basic military training showed amazing teamwork and unity.

The teamwork of gamers from the Republic of Korea who had dominated the online gaming world in the 90s came from their military training.

'So you can play the game like this!'

Ark, who had been about to teach JusticeMan, ended up learning from him instead. But there was someone who received a greater shock from JusticeMan's tactics.

"Ohh, the strategy of these foreigners isn't bad. Who in the world is that guy leading the militia?"

It was the commander of the Guard, Cross.

JusticeMan had unwillingly ended up leading the militia. But once he was entrusted with a mission, he would get it done even if the sky fell down. Since he was always leading the militia while making strategies, he had gained a totally unexpected skill, 'Tactics'. Cross was reacting to that skill.

"Without a doubt, that guy was a general in some foreign land. My God, to think we kept such an outstanding man like him locked up

inside the fort... I see, so that's why you wanted the militia to join the Guard."

"Yes, well... that's about right." Ark smiled with a strange expression and equivocated.

"Thanks to you, I have finally opened my eyes. I have realized what true tactics are!"

Cross ran over to JusticeMan with a cheer. And then he began to ask JusticeMan to teach him about tactics from the very beginning. JusticeMan, who lived for the fun of helping others, gladly agreed.

"Okay, but my training is really hard!"

"I am resolved!"

JusticeMan gained command of the Guard in an instant. Thanks to that, the soldiers had to fight monsters while receiving his special task force training.

"I am nothing without the group. There is only US!"

"Actual battle soon turns to training. No matter how pressing the situation is, don't break formation!"

"Lax! Hey, you! Fall back and give me 100 push ups!"

The NPC getting dragged out while in the heat of battle to receive punishment wasn't even a funny situation.

"Hey you there, can't you do it right?"

Of course, the people doling out the punishments were the skillful TAs, #1401 and #1405. In any case, the Guard's lack of organizing skills were strengthened by JusticeMan. Naturally, their monster hunting speed also increased.

Roco was also above ordinary. Although Roco chose the Minstrel profession that was shunned by all, she demonstrated an enormously active role in group battle, despite being only level 25. As soon as it got dangerous, the sound of the harp and Roco's singing could be heard.

“The fragrance carried on the wind is coming to wipe away the fatigue of the day and drive away the darkness.”

— Song of Vitality has applied. For the next 5 minutes, fatigue decreases and night-vision is given. Affects all the people who have heard the song.

The support skills of the minstrel affected a large radius. Additionally, most of them had long lasting effects.

‘Fight Song’ increased the morale and courage of allied forces, while ‘Song of Despair’ decreased the morale and courage of the enemy. Also, if she sang ‘Song of Recovery,’ 200 Health was recovered over 3 minutes. Although it wasn’t much compared with a Cleric’s recovery magic, it had a wide range! Moreover, it was a skill with hardly any Mana consumption.

But the highlight was ‘Song of Vitality,’ which reduced fatigue! Thanks to it, the Guard didn’t feel fatigued and had more time to receive JusticeMan’s rough training.

‘NPCs are working together with players, this is awesome!’

Ark hadn’t even been able to imagine such an additional effect.

The low-leveled militia leveled up like crazy. Of course, Ark accumulated considerable experience and contribution points.

“Quest-related information window!”

— Ark’s current contribution is 9,400. You are in 68th place.

When Ark joined the Guard, his rank was 127. Since there were about 160 users in Jackson Castle including the 20 militia who were participating in the quest, he was in the mid-upper range.

‘But there is still a long way to catch up to Alan.’

The top 10 contributors were updated every 8 hours on the plaza’s

bulletin board. The current top 10 players were all in Platoon 1, which was led by Alan. And Alan's contribution points were a whopping 30,600, putting him in an overwhelming first place.

He was using his position to eat up the contribution points of Platoons 2 and 3, but no one voiced their complaints because he was the commander of the strongest platoon.

Alan was recognized as number 1 by not only the NPCs, but also the players.

'I can really overtake Alan?'

Everything was going better than Ark expected. However, the wall of the Holy Knight Alan, who was still backed up by the players, was as high as ever.

Moreover, unlike the other volunteer troops, Ark and the militia couldn't continue battle without the Guard. Naturally, it wasn't easy to catch up to the volunteer troops who went seeking battle without rest.

'Should I be satisfied with this level?'

Holy Knight Alan

“Phew, I’m tired.”

Hyun-woo dragged his tired body back home. With the start of the event quest, he had stayed up for two days. Other players were able to leave their characters, and occasionally rest when the monsters’ attacks slowed down, but Hyun-woo couldn’t afford such luxury.

Even when there wasn’t any fighting, he had care for the sick patients in the shelter. Although they had regained their vitality with the success of his miraculous treatment, the disease hadn’t been fully cured. For Hyun-woo, who regretted missing out on even 1 contribution point, it was actually rather fortunate.

However, no matter how busy he was with the quest, he couldn’t forget to stop by the hospital once every two days. If he neglected his mother because of a game, then wouldn’t that be putting the cart before the horse?

‘Still, it’s a relief mother has gotten so much better.’ A smile spread on Hyun-woo’s lips.

After starting rehabilitation treatment, his mother’s complexion had been improving day by day.

Even though he, himself, had heavy, dark circles under his eyes, Hyun-woo was still as worried as ever. However, because there was the option Gwon Hwa-rang had roughly suggested, his anxiety wasn’t as sharp as before. In any case, there was no better cure for Hyun Woo’s intense fatigue than the news of his mother’s health improvement.

‘Should I sleep for a couple of hours before I log in?’ If I don’t sleep now, I won’t be able to sleep for the whole day...

It had already been two days since the start of the event quest.

There was only one day remaining now. Hyun-woo forcefully lifted his eyelids, which were slowly drooping on their own, as he turned the TV on out of habit. He didn't know when such a habit had formed, but he couldn't fall asleep well if his surroundings weren't noisy. As a result, setting a timer on the TV and falling asleep had hardened into a habit.

A game coverage broadcast happened to be starting on TV. It was a program that usually handled general games, but recently, two thirds of the reports were about New World, which was being broadcasted as a social topic. Moreover, since the start of the event quest, it had turned into a New World feature program altogether.

A pretty reporter was giving a lengthy report regarding New World on the TV screen.

"I shall now take you to find out about this event quest. Mr. Ha Myung-woo, have you been well?"

"Yes, it's nice to see you."

When a familiar face appeared on TV, Hyun-woo turned up the volume slightly.

"As I said mentioned before, the viewers are curious about many matters regarding this event quest. First, it's said that there was no announcement before this quest started, and, because of it, I've heard there's been a flood of complaints from players who could not participate. What do you think about this issue, Sir?"

"We are listening attentively, since they are words coming from those who value New World so much. However, New World is a perfect virtual reality world. If an operating interferes with such a world to announce future incidents in advance, or if information is leaked, it will cause a severe problem in the game's overall balance. Therefore, Global Exos is adhering to an onlooker position regarding game progress."

"Then, do you mean to say the next event will also occur without any prior notice?"

"As it has not yet been discussed in detail, I cannot say. What I *can*

say is that New World is a world exclusively made for the players. The start of the event was not intended by the developers, but by each and every user's course of actions and decisions, naturally influencing the progression."

"How surprising. Then, ultimately, it means that New World is no different from reality, right?"

"That is exactly the game ideal we seek." Ha Myung-woo laughed, as if pleased with the reporter's words.

"Then let's change the topic. There was recently the subject of the epic item sold for 70 million Won (~\$70,000) on the auction site specializing in selling New World items. What are your thoughts on such an event?"

'70 million Won?' Hyun-woo felt choked. It had only been three months since the opening of New World. Ultimately, players were, at best, were under level 100, but 70 million won... Then, didn't it mean items of such value could easily appear in the future?

However, on TV, Ha Myung-woo did not show a very surprised reaction. "Well, it has already been 20 years since item trading was made legal. Since then, countless items have been traded, and more than a few of the expensive ones exceeded the millions in price. Though it hasn't been long since we opened, I think it is natural for an item with such a price to appear. In addition, I believe an item of unprecedented price will appear in New World soon."

"Wow, I'm already trembling in anticipation! I'm starting to understand the words of the many game tycoons who were chatting on the internet. Then, please continue to make a good game for us."

"Yes, we will try."

Ha Myung-woo bowed as the TV visual changed.

'Game tycoons...'

That was the term coined for the people who struck it rich by selling a game item. Of course, becoming one would require investing countless hours and luck, but it was a fantasy dreamt by every

gamer who played for a living as they logged in.

Hyun-woo was surely not an exception. Even if it wasn't to the extent of being a tycoon, he thought there would be nothing more to desire if he could just live without worrying about his monthly bills.

'But that too will only be possible if my stamina keeps up.'

Hyun-woo closed his eyes as he yawned wide. However, his eyes snapped open like a surprised rabbit at the next sounds from the TV.

"Unfortunately, due to the secrecy of the developers, we are still unable to acquire videos related to the event quest. Apparently, players participating in the quest who have captured screen footage, were unable to send us their videos because they cannot logout. However, we were able to meet, with difficulty, the famous player who, according to the reports of several players, currently stands at 1st place in quest contribution points. Did you say your ID was Alan?"

'Alan!'

Hyun-woo shot to his feet and locked his gaze on the TV screen.

"Yes, I am Alan."

The person who replied to the reporter's question was a young man in his early 20s. With a handsome face and wearing clothes that looked expensive at first glance, even his figure was model-class. Seeing his easy composure despite being on camera, it seemed like he was a successful celebrity.

'So this man is Alan...' A sigh flowed out on its own.

There were many cases where players with good-looking characters in the game were actually dull in appearance. But for Alan, it was the opposite. The Holy Knight Alan was a considerable pretty boy, but seeing the real Alan was enough to make you think the in-game character had actually been a little messed up.

At the sight of Alan smiling from within the TV at him, Ark felt a baseless sense of defeat.

Rich, handsome, and he likely had a good academic background, since he was enough to be recruited into Global Exos. There was nothing he lacked. He was not someone who could even be compared to Hyun-woo, who lacked so very, very much. Thinking of the Kang Mi-su, whom he had liked quite a lot, he inadvertently blew out a sigh. Honestly, if Hyun-woo was a girl, his heart would lean towards Alan rather than himself. It appeared the reporter thought so as well.

“I didn’t expect you to be so handsome. If you say you like games, no wonder I get a dark feeling...”

[T/N: The reporter is wryly suggesting that considering his looks, Alan could be a playa. Of girls as well as games.]

“That too is a story from the past.”

“Oh ho, is that saying you believe you’re good-lookin’?”

“Surely not. However, I think it is a bias to say I am ‘dark’ for playing games.”

“Yes, looking at Alan-nim, I do think that way. But often, famous individuals are usually reluctant to show their faces in-game. What are your thoughts on that, Alan-nim?”

“It would also differ depending on one’s individual personalities. The Holy Knight Alan I am raising is always a dignified character. I have never done anything bad in the game, and I’ve never sowed anyone’s hatred. There’s really no reason to hide.”

“Wow, so cool. Then you’re saying you’ve gotten 1st place in this quest fair and square.”

“Of course. However, I am not first because of my own successes. In reality or in-game, there’s no one who succeeds alone. I have many friends, and I simply became first some way or another through their help. So first, I have to give them my thanks.”

“You even speak well. Even I would want to help you.”

“Thank y—”

Hyun-woo turned off the TV.

No one can succeed alone. Hearing those words made Hyun-woo feel as if everything he had done in New World was being denied. Even if those words were true, he didn't want to hear any more. Hyun-woo threw off his blanket and entered the unit.

'I can't win in anything against Alan in reality. So I cannot, and will not lose to him in the game. Wait and see, Alan, I will surpass you someday at all costs!'

He had long since forgotten his fatigue.

* * *

<p>— A sudden assault by an assassination skill has dealt you a critical hit. 300 X 3 damage taken.</p>

As soon as Ark connected to the game, he was greeted by a red warning message. Nearly 60% of his Health was lost in an instant.

In order to avoid paying a lodging bill, Ark logged out in a fairly deserted alley. However, he was dumbfounded since it was still a street in the castle, yet he had suddenly taken damage as soon as he connected.

'Huh? Did something happen in Jackson while I was gone?'

Then, someone suddenly appeared before his eyes.

It was not a monster. The character wearing jet-black leather armor and even a bandana over the face was definitely a user. Ark hastily withdrew and cast Eyes of the Cat. However, he couldn't check the user's information.

By using Eyes of the Cat, the basic information, name, profession, and Health of the opponent was shown. Of course, this was not applicable to all players. Only Health was displayed for enemies who were more than 10 levels higher. However, his information window just looked blurred with noise altogether.

He was definitely using a special skill or scroll to hide his identity. And if he was deliberately concealing his identity and attacking, he certainly had no good intentions.

“Who are you?”

“Hmph, so *now* you answer, I thought you might be asleep in the unit since there was no answer when I called you. That greeting was just a substitute for an alarm clock, so don’t be too touchy.”

A somewhat androgynous voice came out from the space in the bandana.

“What? You call that a greeting?”

“Whatever. I don’t want to argue with you.”

When Ark expressed his anger, he flicked his hand as if it was troublesome.

“I’ll keep it short. Hand over the item called Black Frost Blade. Then, I’ll leave quietly.”

“Black Frost Blade?” Ark knit his brows as he asked.

The Black Frost Blade was the last item he won in the blind auction. Ark had bought it because he had the feeling there was something more to it, but he had just been storing it since its purpose was unclear. But how did he even know the name of the item?

“Stop pretending you don’t know. I know you bought it at the auction.”

“... You attacked me to steal it?”

“I told you, right? Earlier was just a greeting, and well, I might have killed you if you hadn’t answered even then... To be honest, I’m not a very patient person. I had to chase you all the way here even after receiving a timed quest because you snatched the item. I still have one day. Do you know how much I struggled to find you because you hid in a frickin’ weird place after reaching Jackson?”

“That’s your problem.”

“You’re saying some pretty words.”

“Cause my actions are pretty?”

“Enough. Let’s get back to the point. Hand over the item. I’ll tell you in advance, it’s better not to make up excuses. I’m sure you don’t want this precious event quest to end with your death.”

It was obviously a threat.

Ark glared at him with a slightly tense look.

He definitely didn’t seem like an easy opponent. Ark’s current level was about 70. With the darkness attribute bonus, he reached 90. Even if Ark was in ‘Stealth’ and succeeded in backstabbing a level 90 player, he couldn’t deal 900 damage. Even if he didn’t know what kind of Assassin skill it was, it didn’t seem like there was room for doubt the stats and level of this opponent were higher than Ark’s. Besides, based on the equipment he was wearing and his use of ‘Stealth,’ it was likely his character was also of the dark attribute, like Ark. He wasn’t someone Ark could win against with 60% of his health down from a pre-emptive strike.

‘The quest will fail if I die. 24 hours of being unable to login!’

Dying would mean that two days of staying up for this quest would fly away in an instant. However, Ark wasn’t one to just obediently hand over an item he had paid 220 Gold and 1 Copper approximately 2.2 million Won (~\$2,200) in cash. Even if he met a robber with a knife, 2.2 million Won was worth risking your life for in a fight. At the very least, Ark would do it.

“Hmph, you’ve got to be kidding. If you kill me in town, wouldn’t you immediately come under a concentrated attack from the Soldiers?”

“That’s not something I have to worry about.”

The opponent spoke in a brazen tone. They weren’t empty words; Ark felt confidence from him, as if he surely had some measures in place.

“And if I won’t give it to you even if I die?”

“I can just take it from you after I kill you.”

“I’d like to see you try.”

“You’re diggin’ your own grave, idiot. If you really have a death-wish, I’ll kill you. Target Ark, designated mark: Black Frost Blade,” he shouted while tearing a red scroll he had pulled out.

It was the ever-so-familiar [Robbery] scroll, which designated an item in the opponent’s pack and stole it after death. However, the eyes from behind the bandana were filled with confusion.

From his confused eyes, Ark was sure his own thoughts were right on the mark. After Ark found out about the existence of dangerous scrolls such as [Robbery], he had stashed away all valuables in Snake’s stomach. He had calculated that if the scroll’s scope was a backpack, then it wouldn’t be able to search an NPC’s stomach.

His prediction hit the mark.

Fortunately, Snake hadn’t vomited the Black Frost Blade yet. A message saying there was no such item probably popped up in front of the guy’s eyes.

Ark grinned as he slyly asked, “What’s wrong? Did you see a disappointing message or something?”

“You... just what did you do with the item?”

“I wonder? Maybe I sold it off somewhere?”

“Do-don’t make me laugh! There’s no way you sold off an auction item you bought for 220 Gold. No, the store probably wouldn’t even buy it. Of course, there’s no way another person bought an item like it, cause other people have no need for it.”

“So you even know how much I won it for. Did you come in with Giran’s volunteer troops?” As Ark spoke with narrowed eyes, the guy flinched. “Well, whatever. In the end, your guess is right. I still have the item. But you’ll never be able to steal it with the likes of the [Robbery] scroll. Are you still gonna kill me?”

He couldn’t reply.

If he couldn't take the item he wanted, then there was no profit in killing Ark. He would just get marked as a Chaotic player and would get swarmed to death by the Soldiers. Now, Ark had the initiative.

He glared at Ark for a moment and said, "Fine. Then let's negotiate. I'll buy the item for 250 Gold. The item is related to my profession exclusive quest anyways. I don't know what you were expecting when you invested 220 gold on it, but it's useless to you. This isn't a lie."

"Don't wanna."

"What? I'm giving you 30 more Gold and you still say no?"

"Sure, maybe I would have agreed if you had come out with an offer from the beginning. I might've even sold it for 220 Gold."

Of course it was a lie. Ark wasn't such a pushover that he would hand it over in a sale to someone who was willing to take the risk of killing a player within a city for it. But since the situation had become like this, it was better for him to act generous.

"But you attacked me without warning and even tried to kill me. Now it's not about money, it's personal. Let me make it clear — I have no intention of selling it even if you offer 300 Gold."

"Do you really wanna die?"

"Go ahead if you want to," Ark quipped with a laugh.

This was a guy who had followed him all the way here for one item. He couldn't kill Ark while knowing he would forever lose the way to get the item if he killed Ark here and aggravated their relationship even further.

It was time he learned what Ark wanted. With an angry glare, he asked in a threatening voice, "What do you want?"

"I wonder? It depends on what you can do for me. No, before that, won't you show me your name? Since you know my name it would be unfair if I don't know yours. The trade starts from fair ground."

"... Release skill."

When he muttered in a low voice, the noise on the information window disappeared. It said his name was Shambala, and his profession was Saint Assassin.

It was a profession Ark had never heard of. There were Thief professions in New World, but it was his first time hearing of an Assassin. Well, it wasn't surprising since Ark only knew 1/10 of the professions. But a Saint Assassin? What kind of ridiculous job was this?

'A holy assassin? Are you kidding me?'

What he thought was even stranger was that Shambala's name was still displayed in white. If a player attacks another player first, even if they didn't kill, the attacker's name turns gray. It basically means that although he's not a murderer, he's still a bad guy. As a result, even though the Soldiers wouldn't go so far as to attack, there were many drawbacks because favor with NPCs would fall. However, Shambala's name was still white...

There was also the skill used to hide his info window; it seemed like he was a fellow who used a strange skill.

"Why didn't your alignment go down? Is that also a scroll?"

"..."

"If you don't want to answer, then whatever, see ya."

"It's a profession exclusive skill."

As soon as Ark whirled away, Shambala answered in a frustrated voice.

'A skill...'

Once again, Ark realized the importance knowing skill information. JusticeMan's recent tactics were also only possible because he knew the skills of other professions like the back of his hand.

In the future, he would often end up having to PVP when he went to high level areas. It would be very disadvantageous if he couldn't figure out his opponent's skills. As much as Ark worked hard to hide

Dark Walker skills, figuring out other professions' skills was also important. It was even more so for the profession of a player who might become an enemy.

"Description?"

"'Death's Agent', if you get permission from the Death God for certain behaviors, if you commit a misdeed or even kill a player, you won't be made Chaotic. As long as you're not caught by other players or NPCs, whatever you do is fine. While the Death's Agent skill is active, other people can't even look at your info window."

Shambala answered as if there wasn't really a need to hide it. Well, even if you knew about it before hand, it wasn't a skill that could be blocked.

'There's no impact on your alignment even if you do something bad? Isn't that a scamming skill? Doesn't it mean he could even beat a Merchant NPC to death and rob his shop if needed?'

Of course, there was no way the New World system was that easy. There was surely a considerable penalty to maintain balance. But to be able to commit evil deeds without punishment, depending on its use, it could be a very strong skill. Particularly against players...

After considering it for a bit, Ark thought maybe and asked, "Then, could you kill someone like Alan if you wanted to?"

"That's too hard." Shambala shook his head. "There have been many instances where my skill didn't work against people at much higher levels than me. Someone with the Faith stat is also hard. Though well, turning Chaotic isn't too much of a problem, but... Alan and I aren't a good match. A Holy Knight is constantly receiving continuous aura protection, so it isn't easy to get close to him even if I use 'Stealth.' A lot of my skills don't work on him, either."

In other words, if he had a good match on someone, he was confident he could win even against Alan. His voice sounded certain, in its own way.

Ark thought about it long and hard before nodding. "Alright, then let's do it like this. Throughout the progress of this quest, you'll help me

unconditionally.”

“What? You’re gonna make me your lapdog?”

“There’s only one day left until the quest ends. You said it took you two days to find me? And there’s one day ‘til the quest ends anyway. It’s not such a bad condition, don’t you think?”

“...What the hell do I have to do?”

“You’ll have to find out and see.”

“You’ll keep your promise, right?”

“Of course. Didn’t you say that the item is useless to me anyways? Then isn’t selling it for a profit and getting rid of it best for me?”

“Sell? Surely you’re not saying you’ll sell it to me?”

Shambala’s eyes abruptly narrowed.

Ark’s eyes widened in surprise at that reaction. “Would I just give away a 220 Gold item to someone I hardly know? As long as you follow your promise to follow my orders for the duration of the quest, I’ll be generous and give it to you for 300 Gold. Even this much is really generous for me.”

“300 Gold?”

“Think of 70 Gold as a fine for trying to kill me. It’s fine if you don’t want to.”

“... Dammit. Alright.”

In the end, Shambala answered while grinding his teeth.

‘Huhuhu, I didn’t do business part-time jobs just for the looks.’

When making a deal, it’s better to set a slightly difficult condition in the beginning. If Ark had asked for 300 Gold from the beginning, Shambala would have probably tried to haggle. But if a price was named after putting down an outrageous condition, it’s a human tendency to lose the ability to think about the price. That’s because they would be too worried about losing the trade from being too

greedy and bargaining.

He actually didn't know if there would be a use for Shambala or not. He had just used it as a sufficient excuse to lead the bargaining into his favor. Thanks to that, he got an ally he could trust for one day and made an easy 70 Gold.

'Huhuhu, 70 Gold right from the start. Looks like things are going to work out nicely.'

It was more than enough compensation for being attacked from behind.

* * *

'Sigh, they've still got a ways to go.'

He'd dropped by the barracks, but the Guard was still snoozing away. Since JusticeMan, Roco, and the Guard had stayed up for a whole day, they were getting a bit of shut eye and had become living statues.

So, although Ark had forced himself to log in, there wasn't really much for him to do once he came in. Even so, he didn't want to leave again, so he was going to the refugee shelter to look around. However, when he saw the board that was suddenly set in the square, he couldn't help but sigh.

The true heroes who had gathered for Jackson!

The current 1st contributor in the Jackson Guards was the Holy Knight Alan. Contribution points: 37, 800.

Even though Ark was hunting like his life depended on it, in the end, Alan had exceeded him with 4 times the points. That was the difference between soloing and leading the attack raid.

Ark hunted with the Guard, but it wasn't a formal attack raid. The Militia was the same. Because of that, the contribution points from the monsters felled by the Guards weren't registered as Ark's. However, Alan's situation was different. He had gotten to Jackson before Ark and had snatched the position of the volunteer troop

commander early on. Thanks to that, the efforts of not only the 1st, but also the 2nd and 3rd platoons were added bit by bit to Alan's total.

That was the special characteristic of the Holy Knight, a profession granting a tremendous benefit other players couldn't even imagine in a war situation.

Even in profession-only skills, the gap was widening. The Holy Knight profession skill granted a buff aura that raised the stats of every party member. So his contribution rose every time he used the skill, and since he commanded the overwhelming force of Platoon 1, he was able to accumulate even more contribution. On the other hand, all of the Dark Walker skills were for soloing. He was confident he could win if he fought Alan one on one at the same level, but if they fought with the same number of teammates, it would be Alan's overwhelming win.

This was exactly that kind of situation.

Just then, the square suddenly erupted with noise.

Turning his head, he saw Platoon 1 coming into the castle.

The lucky leader who had recently risen in New World as a blazing figure in the battle, Alan, was confidently riding into the square on a white horse. He had handsome face, flowing blonde hair, and a shining, full set of Rare-grade armor. He exuded a forced that daunted observers with one look.

Once Alan appeared, the girls gathered in the square screamed.

"KYAA, it's Sir Alan!"

"Did you see the special TV report that was broadcast just now?"

"Yeah, yeah, I heard about it from a friend and downloaded it online."

"Isn't Sir Alan so handsome?"

"He could be a celebrity."

“And his overflowing composure, that air of gushing elegance, he’s a gentleman from a wealthy family for sure.”

“Ahh, won’t he just look at me once?”

The women prattled as they gazed at Alan with desire in their eyes.

After his appearance on TV, Alan’s popularity was rising rapidly. It was a world where one could earn wealth and fame simply by playing the game well. But on top of it all, he was good looking, looked loaded, had a sense of humor and leadership... damn, even his hair looked good. For the majority of the girls, who had seen the broadcast, especially those addicted to New World, Alan was the ideal of their dreams! He was their prince in shining armor.

As the girls made a fuss, Alan grinned as he waved. Though everything was enveloped in the Dark Fog, it was as though a ray of light shined through and flashed off his tousled blonde hair and white teeth. That was the full effect of the special skill Halo, which was said to only follow distinguished bastards.

At Alan’s adept showmanship, the girls fell over screaming wildly.

“Tch, he’s playing around. Does he think this is a cheap third-rate drama?”

“Dammit, film your adolescent drama on a broadcast or something.”

“He’s acting like a celebrity just ‘cause he was on TV once.”

“Just who do you owe being first in contribution points to, jeez.”

Unable to bear the injustice as they watched, a few guys muttered with jealous voices.

There were many players in the 2nd and 3rd platoons who bore complaints against Alan. He used his position as commander to openly lead the Platoon 1 into advantageous situations. Thanks to that, the 2nd and 3rd platoons couldn’t keep up with the 1st platoon in points, even after running around like crazy. Despite it all, their casualties were double that of the 1st platoon’s. As if it wasn’t enough, now he was snatching away all the interest of the girls. As

passionate males, gripping a little was a given.

However, Alan wasn't the one who voiced displeasure at their complaints. If he was the Prince, then they were the shrieking self-proclaimed Cinderella candidates.

"Oh my, what's with those guys?"

"Are you jealous cause you're a pathetic man?"

"Very funny. Why are they getting mad at Sir Alan for their own faults?"

They were still being reasonable up to that point, but their arrows soon turned to a completely off target.

"But what's that girl sticking to Sir Alan?"

"Yeah, she's always going around with Sir Alan, isn't she?"

"Is she his little sis or something?"

"No, I heard a little of their talk together before and they even speak informally with each other?"

"But why does she stick to him like that? Is she Sir Alan's wife or what? That eyesore*."

"She must be following him around hoping to get something out of it."

"Seeing as she's draped in a jet-black robe, her personality is definitely gloomy too."

"Since she picked the pretty Elf, she's gotta look like an ugly maid in real life. They say it's a common case to change the face to the opposite look when making a character. The stronger the image complex, the stronger those symptoms. Though Sir Alan is an exception."

"Geez, it's just gross to imagine a girl like that sticking to Sir Alan."

Even in reality, it was the female mentality to badmouth when they saw a girl next to a famous, handsome celebrity. There was even someone who recently suffered hate and emigrated from the country

when a picture of her sitting next to a celebrity got put up on the internet.

It was a behavior Ark couldn't really understand. If they had time to spare, they should just save up some money and buy some gum to chew instead. He didn't know why they trolled others when there was nothing good to be had from it.

As long as he didn't participate in something he couldn't understand, then whatever. But the target of their insults was someone he knew well. The woman next Alan was none other than Kang Mi-su, Lariette. As if it wasn't her first time hearing all kinds of slander, she had her hood down low as she trembled. About to turn his head away and pretend not to recognize such a pitiful sight, Ark froze in his tracks.

'That's really just too much...'

Ark didn't want to get tangled up with Alan or Lariette yet. Though he had narrowed the gap, he was still a long way from Alan. However, he was angry and spat a few words at the throng of thoughtless girls who were not only insulting Lariette right in front of him, but also following Alan.

"Aren't you being a little harsh to someone you don't even know very well?"

"What's with this guy?"

The girls raised their eyebrows as they glared at him. But Ark wasn't one to flinch from the looks of girls.

"If you're going to insult someone, shouldn't you at least find out who that person is first? The Lariette I know is not the type of girl who squawks at anyone, unlike you people. She is a sincere person who knows how to work hard for the future. It is not my concern if you like Alan, but liking him is not a sufficient excuse to slander others."

"My, how funny. Who do you think you are to tell us what to do?"

"Then who are you to insult Lariette as much as you want?"

At Ark's counter, the faces of the girls became even more venomous. They were just about to counterattack when Lariette turned her head with a slightly surprised expression, presumably having heard the arguing. Then she discovered Ark and murmured with an alarmed voice, "Ark?"

When Lariette approached, the girls backed off while muttering "tch" under their breaths. The basic characteristic of these kinds of girls was that they couldn't even squeak when confronted by the target of their insults.

"So it really is you, Ark!"

"Ah, yes... it's been a while." Ark sighed as he bowed his head.

He'd ended up meeting Lariette while getting angry. It wasn't really a situation he welcomed, but Lariette must have been pretty happy to meet him because she kept speaking with a bright expression completely different from just moments before.

"So you're participating in the event quest. It didn't occur to me at all. Did you join the Militia?"

"No. I've been acting with the Militia, but I received the quest from the Giran Magic Institute."

"Huh? Then do you mean to say that you've passed level 60?"

"Yes. I'm about level 70 now..."

To be precise, after joining forces with the Militia, he had gone up another level to 72.

Lariette's eyes widened in response to Ark's answer.

Ark had been level 35 when they had first met in New World. It was about a month and a half after he had started the game. Another month and a half had passed since then. Ark leveled up 35 times. Just looking at the number, it wasn't strange. But it was common sense in games that the higher your level, the harder it was to level up. If it had taken ten days to get from level 1~10, then it would take fifteen days to get from level 10~20.

Of course, those rules also applied to Ark. After meeting Lariette while putting several hours a day into playing the game, Ark had decided to walk the path of a game for a living and his play time increased manifold. Furthermore, 35 levels was only possible because he had only faced stronger monsters than himself after changing his profession to Dark Walker. Honestly, considering Ark's play time, his growth speed had been incredible even when they had met at level 35.

Having no way of knowing this, Lariette showed a surprised reaction. "That's amazing. Truthfully, I thought you'd be doing well if you got to around 50..."

"I was lucky. But what about you, Miss Lariette?"

"I... I finally turned level 70 today."

"It must be because the Tarsha Labyrinth raid failed."

"How did you know about it?"

"I just picked it up from here and there."

"Yes, you're right," Lariette answered in a dispirited voice. "The raid we attempted then failed three times. As a result we actually lost levels while wasting a week. Because of that, it was an extremely difficult time for Alan. But since he leveled up well, unlike me, he is level 98 right now. If we had succeeded, he would have passed 100 by now."

It relieved him greatly to hear that Alan hadn't reached level 100 yet, but it wasn't something he could express in front of Lariette. Ark spoke with a tone that voiced regret, "So that's how it was. You must have also gone through much hardship, Miss Lariette."

"Since I'm 27th in contribution in this quest, I'm sure the situation will get a lot better as long as I can handle just more day. Though, well, that's also thanks to Alan."

Since she was part of Platoon 1, of course she was ranked higher than Ark. Still, to be in 27th place, it seemed like Alan was probably paying a lot of attention to her.

But there was something else bothering Ark. He didn't really like the way Lariette mentioned Alan at the end of every sentence.

'Does Miss Lariette also...'

About to think of something, Ark soon shook his head.

Just then, the Prince atop the white horse suddenly came up behind Lariette with his group of followers.

"Miss Lariette, what are you doing? Everyone is going to the inn."

"Oh, Alan. You came at a good time. You remember this person, right?"

"Do I? Have we met before?" Alan glanced at Ark and tilted his head.

Ark's face suddenly flushed. After meeting him for the first time in Jackson, Ark's only goal had been Alan. He had intentionally avoided Alan after joining the quest because Ark placed that much importance in him.

But Alan really couldn't even remember Ark. To him, Ark was no different from an NPC he had met on the roadside. Though he had not a sliver of desire to be acknowledged by Alan, actually being one-sidedly ignored made something indescribable surge within him.

"Ark. You don't remember? You met him here before and I introduced you to him."

It was then— a rough voice abruptly came from behind Alan.

"EH? Y-you bastard!"

Andel, who Ark had really not wanted to encounter, was also a part of Platoon 1.

'Damn, this is why I didn't want to do something to stand out...'

But since they had met, there was really no reason to avoid him either. Ark laughed as he muttered piercingly, "It's been a while. I didn't know you were still playing the game? Seems like you escaped your Chaotic status."

“What? You rotten—!”

“Andel, stop. Can’t you see he’s talking with me?”

Just as Andel was about to come at him, Alan made a face and glared. Then Andel wavered as he took a deep breath and stepped back.

‘Was Andel acquainted with Alan?’

Alan made Andel back off with one word. It wouldn’t have been easy to do if their relationship had formed in the game alone. Therefore, it was likely they knew each other in real life as well.

‘Is that how Andel recovered so quickly after being totally wrecked by me? Well, it wouldn’t be all that hard if a player like Alan was backing him up. And if he was backed up by a high level player like Alan, their relationship must be pretty close. No, there’s a chance most of the players in Platoon 1 are examinees, like Lariette and Andel. I didn’t like him from the beginning, but there’s yet another reason why I hate Alan.’

While Ark was having such thoughts, Alan, who had been whispering with Andel, slightly turned his gaze.

“Come to think of it, I do remember. Ark, I apologize if you were offended.”

“It’s alright. Things like that can happen,” Ark replied in a cold voice.

Then, with an uncomfortable expression because of the odd mood, Lariette suddenly grabbed Ark’s hand and said, “Ah, that’s right, why don’t you join Platoon 1? It would be fine at your level, we lost some people in the last battle so we have some openings in the raid. That’s okay, right Alan?”

Lariette surprised Ark by suddenly grabbing his hand, but the one who reacted more sensitively was Alan. He frowned as he briefly glared at Ark before saying with a displeased voice, “It’s true there are openings. But there are already people waiting to be added at an opening, so... I may be the commander but I can’t just add people I don’t really know. And since it looks like there’s some bad blood between you and Andel...”

“But Alan, I know him very well.”

“Platoon 1’s command structure is already set. We’ll have to fight the hardest battle for the last day of the quest, so adding someone who doesn’t match our rhythm could break our formation.”

“But...”

“It’s fine.” Ark cut off Lariette and shook his head. “As I said before, I also have people I’m working with. I would have to turn down an offer to join Platoon 1 anyway, so there is no need for you two to fight.”

Even if there wasn’t the Militia or Guard, Ark didn’t want to be Alan’s subordinate.

One could say it was the jealousy of the good guy or the pride of the bad guy. He just wanted to engrave his name in Alan’s mind with his own strength.

“Then there is nothing more to say. I’ll take my leave. Miss Lariette, let’s go.”

Alan looked down on Ark from atop his white horse before whirling around. Then he headed to the inn with his shrieking lady fans behind him. After briefly following Alan’s departure with lonely eyes, Lariette bowed crisply to Ark and turned.

“I’m sorry. Ark.”

Her strangely regretful voice grazed past his ears.

‘Just why is she sorry? Alan or Andel’s attitude? Or not being able to put me in Platoon 1?’

Ark sent her a questioning look, but she was hurriedly going after Alan. Gazing at her, Ark casually remarked to the murderous Andel, “Considering your attitude, I think I can roughly guess your relationship with Alan.”

“What?”

“Your master is going. Shouldn’t you hurry and follow him?”

“You bastard, I’ll let you go for now but just wait and see after the event quest!”

“If you want your stats to go to 0, then anytime.”

At Ark’s brazen answer, Andel clenched his teeth, glared, and left with Platoon 1. Then, a little while afterwards, when Ark was about to turn around, a message window popped up before his eyes.

— Alan has used [Feather of Whispering] to initiate a private chat.

Whispering was a method of communication that allowed two people to have a private chat. It was only possible if you used [Feather of Whispering] or the [Secure Communication] scroll when you knew the other’s name and they were in a set range; in other words, it was a costly method.

‘What? Did he change his mind to tell me to join Platoon 1?’

Without much thought, Ark permitted the whispering. Immediately afterwards, the volume from his surroundings dimmed and he clearly heard Alan talking into his ear.

- You said your name was Ark?

He was speaking rudely right from the start. Ark frowned as he answered.

- So what?
- Do you know Lariette well?
- And why should I answer that?
- Well yeah... Anyway, I’ll give you one piece of advice. It’d be best for you to not think of dabbling with Lariette. Both in the game and in real life.
- It seems you’re giving advice to the wrong guy? I wasn’t the one who initiated a conversation with her. And even if I did, it’s not something that concerns you. Truthfully, hearing something like

this from you makes me feel pretty pissed off.

Then Alan laughed in a low voice.

- You still don't get why Lariette suddenly grabbed your hand?
- What? What do you mean?
- You're as dull as you look. Think long and hard about it. And don't forget my advice.

After saying only what he wanted to say, Alan ended the whisper.

'W-what? This jerk? Isn't he a completely two-faced bastard?'

Ark felt like he was hit with a bucket of water while sleeping.

Both the Alan who had appeared on TV and the Holy Knight Alan were very cool and well-mannered people. He had a cockiness that looked down on people, but from the outside he looked perfect. But his voice in the whisper was completely different. Wasn't it a blatant way of talking to slight his opponent, and didn't he also show a strange obsession, treating Lariette as his possession?

'Just what are you telling me to think long and hard about? What's wrong with Lariette grabbing my hand?'

He couldn't understand what Alan meant to say with those words, but he didn't have the time to ponder it for very long.

"Ark!"

He turned at the sound of someone calling from behind him to see JusticeMan and Roco running towards him.

"When did you login?"

"Just a while ago, but anyways, it seems like something urgent has happened!"

"Something urgent?"

"Yes, Sir Cross found me as soon as I logged in. He said the Lord was looking for you, so it can't be normal. He asked that I find you

and relay the message with an extremely stricken expression.”

Come to think of it, it was also strange that Platoon 1, which had been keeping the line of defense while doing almost all of their resting and treatment outside the castle, had suddenly returned. There was no doubt they had received some kind of order from the young Lord. Well, it was true that there was only one day left until the event quest’s completion.

Ark had not expected the quest would just end like this. It was time for something decisive to happen.

“Alright, let’s leave at once.”

Operation Bomb the Scorch Cannons

After arriving at the Lord's Castle, Ark encountered an unwelcome face again. When Ark's group followed Cross inside, Alan, who was already there, made a slightly surprised expression.

Only the leaders of each raid had received the young Lord's summons. It wasn't a place for a regular grunt who wasn't even the leader of the Militia composed of low-level players. But Alan soon turned his head as if uninterested. His attitude was like a noble ignoring a commoner.

'That bastard, he's getting more and more irritating.' Ark was even more displeased with Alan's attitude.

Then, the young Lord looked around and spoke, "All of you worked hard to protect Jackson Castle. I've sent out summons, even in this busy time, because a pressing situation has arisen. Raymond, explain."

"Yes, this morning, at dawn, the scouting unit discovered enemies moving towards the plains to the west of Jackson Castle. There are around 600 of them. They are currently divided into two battalions; each is transporting a scorch cannon."

"Scorch cannon?"

The commanders stared at each other with quizzical looks.

The young Lord explained with a heavy voice, "They are the mobile cannons that intercepted the airship, steel-armored merchant vessel, and tank sent by the three guilds."

"Those black fireballs back then!"

"You must know their power well, as you have already experienced

it. It has been just half a day since a scorch cannon attacked Jackson Castle. The result of that is the current Jackson Castle you see now. We mustered all the magic power from Jackson's Magic Tower to erect a shield at the castle walls, but it couldn't resist. If their other mobile cannons had not moved to intercept the three guild's volunteer troops, the castle may have already been turned to ruins."

"What a big problem."

"If the two scorch cannons are left to situate themselves within range, Jackson Castle won't be able to hold for even half a day. Our only option is to carry out an ambush operation now, while the scorch cannons are on the move, and blow them up. The reason we called you all here is to discuss that operation."

The young Lord scanned his surroundings before speaking to Alan. "With the situation like this, we must wage an all-out war and stop the scorch cannons without fail. Therefore, when the Sylphid Knights return, they will blockade the front gate and stall for time. During that time, I'm thinking of dividing all our forces in Jackson's line of defense into two units to attack one scorch cannon each. First, I will entrust the first unit to Sir Alan. I leave the details of the formation and strategies to you."

With his level, Fame, and his occupation of 1st place in contribution among the volunteer troops, it was an obvious result that the young Lord would entrust the command of the first unit to Alan.

Alan nodded smugly. "I understand."

"Then, the second unit will be..."

When the young Lord turned his gaze, the warrior in charge of Platoon 2 lifted his head stiffly. He thought he was the obvious choice after Alan. But the person the young Lord chose was a nameless, ordinary player.

"Ark, it'll be good to leave it to you."

"Huh?"

Alan and the leaders of Platoons 2 and 3 made bewildered expressions.

This was something Ark had never expected, so he wore a shocked expression. Ark's contribution points were still struggling in the mid-upper levels. How could he be suddenly entrusted with such a task?

If someone was registered as a commander of a special task, of course they would get additional EXP and contribution. Alan was able to take 1st place in the rankings because of this. Because of this, anyone would want to become the commander of a large operation.

But passing over the leaders of Platoons 2 and 3, who were in the top 10, and giving the position to Ark was something they couldn't accept. As expected, Alan immediately raised an objection.

"Please wait a moment! That person still hasn't accumulated enough contribution for this. To entrust such a large undertaking to him, it's not a sensible judgement. Also, it isn't fair."

'Dammit Alan, you bastard. Saying useless things...'

Ark wondered inwardly. New World was a game, but NPCs thought the same way real people do. They couldn't act without sufficient reasoning, and this was more pronounced in management NPCs like Lords. They would help someone they had high intimacy with if it was something trifling, but they couldn't designate command of an operation with Jackson's fate depending on it without any justification and intimacy alone.

Alan was pointing that out as he demanded a revision. But the young Lord's decision was a result of factoring in a value that Alan, and even Ark, hadn't known.

"That's not it. This task is being entrusted based on operation performance evaluation criteria; according to Raymond's report, you, the commander of Platoon 1, have the highest operation performance evaluation, and then Ark. Though, it's just a hair's breadth from Platoon 2's commander."

'Operation performance evaluation!'

That was the value he had raised while doing Raymond's quests. He hadn't even imagined such a thing would come into play like this.

He completed about 30 small sub-quests, thanks to that, his operation evaluation had risen considerably; on the other hand, since Alan and the commanders of Platoons 2 and 3 got contribution and EXP just from being there, they had ignored Raymond's meagerly rewarding quests. As a result, the only operation evaluation they had was what they had received from being registered as commanders.

Alan clenched his teeth as he looked at Ark. In such a case, there was no way the decision would be reversed.

"Then, let's continue with the briefing, Sir Alan, Ark. Discuss the formation between yourselves."

Th-th-thump, a quest window popped before Ark's eyes.

Hero Assembly!
* Sub-quest: Operation Bomb the Scorch Cannons
The two scorch cannons possessed by the Army of Darkness are advancing on Jackson Castle. If the scorch cannons get into range, they will place Jackson Castle in great jeopardy. Therefore, Jackson's Lord has suggested an operation to stop the scorch cannons.
– Quest success conditions: This quest is split into A and B groups. All players in the defense of Jackson must choose between the A and B group. Upon completion of the quest, all players in the group will be awarded bonus experience and contribution.
– Quest failure conditions: Quest automatically fails if all players are killed during the operation or if they are unable to complete mission within the time limit. Also, if both A and B group fail and the 2 cannons get within range, and start attacking Jackson Castle, then the main quest will fail even if there are still surviving players.

*Time limit: 3 hours

* Ark is currently the leader of Group B. A player registered as a Commander obtains a 20% bonus in experience and contribution points. However, there is a -30% penalty upon failure.

Difficulty: D++

A sub-quest that could possibly cause the main quest to fail!

“Well, then let’s divide up the troops now,” said the young Lord while looking at the Commanders.

Having finished reading the quest info, Alan suddenly smiled coldly as he spoke. “Are the volunteer troops free to choose which unit to join?”

“Yes, it’ll only work if the group works well together, so I will honor the decisions of the field commanders.”

“Then Platoon 1 will of course be in Group A, but what will you do, Platoons 2, 3 and the Militia? It doesn’t matter to me either way.”

“Platoon 2 will also join Group A.”

“We will as well...”

After seeing the look in Alan’s eyes, the commanders from Platoons 2 and 3 quickly answered.

The young Lord spoke with a shocked expression, “What? Wouldn’t that be a problem? If the whole force goes to Group A, then what is Group B supposed to do?”

“Isn’t there still the Militia and the Jackson Guard remaining?”

“But the Militia only amount to 20. The Guard is only 30, and even combined they only amount to 50.”

On the other hand, Platoons 1, 2, and 3 combined amounted to around 120. Though there had been casualties over two days of battle, their numbers were still twice that of Group B. Moreover, there were up to 300 monsters escorting each scorch cannon.

Against that many monsters, all hell would break loose if there was a battle. In such a melee, no matter how sturdy their organization was, the Militia of level 35 players on average would be no help.

Alan answered with a smirk, "That is no concern of mine. They just choose the leader with the higher chance of survival. They don't trust someone who hid in a corner and racked up points with the management with petty tasks."

"But..."

"And rather than catching two rabbits, it should be less burdensome for Jackson as well to organize the forces to ensure that we can succeed with one. After taking care of one, the other shouldn't be hard to get rid of, after all. Of course, Group B is needed, since it would be hard if the enemy concentrated their forces. So, don't be foolish and just buy time until Group A takes care of one scorch cannon and comes to help. You should be able to do that much with 50 people, yes? How does that sound?"

The quest had a high degree of freedom, and Alan had struck its weakness precisely.

The quest said there had to be two groups, but it didn't specify that each group had to take down a scorch cannon. So it didn't matter if one group took down both, and even if they ran out of time and couldn't take down one of them, the quest wouldn't be unsuccessful.

Alan had nothing to lose from concentrating the power to Group A. Rather, it was a method that would ensure him EXP and contribution. Moreover, since the Guard led by Cross were NPCs, they couldn't be controlled by a player's whim, and the low leveled Militia would only be in their way. Therefore, he took the useful Platoons 2 and 3 and left those two for Ark.

'Alan, you bastard...!'

Curses were surging to his tongue. But JusticeMan spat out with a heavy voice before Ark could.

"This young little nipple-sucker talks dirty, how rude."

“What?”

“I get the gist of it from hearing you talk. There is always one like you, living for the taste of superiority. It’s hopeless bastards like you that I hate the most.”

“Hmph, thank goodness. I was worried the Militia would come crying to ask me to let them into Group A.”

“What bullshit. I wouldn’t join you even if you asked.”

As JusticeMan snorted, Roco also gave him a tongue-lashing. But with no acquaintances among the players, there was no way Ark could sway the leaders of Platoons 2 and 3 anyway. Rather, they seemed to think Ark took the commander position of Group B unfairly, as their looks towards Ark were less than friendly. Thanks to that, Ark had no options.

He had no choice but to face 300 monsters with just 50 troops, half of which were the level 30 Militia.

There was nothing he could do about it, so he didn’t want to seem like the troops were dumped onto him by Alan’s coercion.

In the end, Ark nodded his agreement. “I understand, I will move out with the Militia and the Jackson Guard.”

The young Lord nodded with a troubled expression. “Alright. If you accept it, then I have nothing more to say either. Let’s proceed with what Sir Alan said for now. Operation starts in 1 hour. After you’re done preparing, go to the Quartermaster. I will have him prepare the goods necessary for this operation.”

* * *

“Will this really be alright?” Cross asked with a worried expression. “There’s definitely a point to Sir Alan’s words. While we hold one monster battalion down, there may be a greater chance of success if Group A takes down one cannon for sure and combines with us to take down the other, but Group B might be unable to avoid annihilation. Even so, if we’re sloppy about pressuring the enemy, Group A will certainly take heavy damage...”

Honestly, that was the problem. If Group A succeeded, then the main quest wouldn't fail. There was really no reason for Ark to move according to the plan. But since the Guard was part of Group B, he couldn't use the method of pretending to attack while stalling for time. If he did such a thing, his intimacy, contribution, and reputation would plummet.

'Either way, I have no choice but to move according to plan.'

Ark laughed with an indifferent expression. "Don't worry. There will be a way. No, I will find a way."

"Yeah, alright. I'll trust and follow you for now. I'll be preparing the Guard, so come find me when your preparations are done."

"Understood."

After leaving Cross, Ark went to the Militia and explained the quest. Having heard the circumstances, the Militiamen showed slightly disappointed looks. That they had to join Group B, which had no hope of success, seemed to weigh heavily on their minds.

"That's enough, going out in a blaze is better than sponging off a bastard like that. Yah!"

"Understood. We will only follow you, JusticeMan!"

As Justiceman shouted, the Militia just accepted it without objections. Once Ark shared the quest, the Militia automatically became a part of Group B.

'But really, what should I do now?'

He had gotten the quest for now, but he was at a loss.

The monsters they would meet on the way to the cannon weren't a problem. However, there were at least 300 level 80~90 monsters guarding the cannon.

'It would be possible if we lured out twenty to thirty of them at a time...'

For the most part, the monsters in a battalion were a collective

whole. If one attacked, they would all attack.

Of course, it might be possible to lure out a few at a time using Dedric. But there was a limit to that as well, and this quest even had a time limit. Getting to the scorch cannon with just 50 troops, with alternating battles and rest, would take over 2 hours. If they met more enemies than expected, there might be less than half an hour, or only a few minutes left when they reached the scorch cannon. It meant that they had take care of 300 enemies and blow up the scorch cannon in just minutes; with just the Militia and the Guards, it was a hopeless quest from the beginning.

‘Even if I somehow make it back alive, the difference between Alan and me, for this quest, would be like heaven and earth; if we both fail then we fail the main quest so I can’t interfere with Alan. But still, there’s no way to get rid of a few hundred monsters in an instant...’

Just then, an idea suddenly flashed into Ark’s mind.

‘Wait? A few hundred? That’s right, that method might work...’

It felt like he was shocked back to his senses. Truthfully, the possibility was low. But if he could use this method, Ark definitely had a chance to succeed.

‘Okay, here goes nothing. Let’s go find out for now. There’s no time.’

Ark immediately set off for the refugee camp that had been scraped together at one end of Jackson Castle. There he met up the airship’s Bosun, Jabel, and consulted with him about the method he had thought up. Jabel listened for a moment, thought for a long while, and responded skeptically.

“Maybe. It’s honestly hard to give you an answer right now. We attempted a crash landing and there wasn’t a second explosion, so it’s not entirely without hope, but before seeing it personally... and even if it’s fine, the time to disassemble and reassemble would differ based on the situation.”

“Anyway, so it is possible.”

“Well, yes.”

“The Magic Institute’s help is absolutely necessary to save Jackson Castle. Will you help?”

“If it’s something we can do, then of course. We are alive thanks you, Ark. In addition, we are people who came to save Jackson Castle. As the crewmen of the honorable Silver Arrow, it is our duty.”

Jabel answered courageously, as befitting of the brave Captain’s subordinate.

‘All right then. It’s not guaranteed yet, but at least there’s some hope now.’

As expected, if you think about it, an answer will come. It was the advantage of a game with a high degree of freedom.

Having found a clue for the solution, he was able to relax a little and think about the situation more deeply.

‘But even if I finish the quest, nothing will change in the end.’

Since Alan had swept up all the volunteer troops, that he would finish the quest was already no different from a proven fact. It meant the situation wouldn’t change even if Ark succeeded; there would be no change in the rankings.

The best thing that could happen to Ark was if he succeeded and Group A failed. But this was Group A with 120 users at an average level of 80. Even for them, it wouldn’t be easy, but there was little chance they would fail.

‘I have to strengthen my resolve!’

Ark clenched his teeth. Truthfully, he had made a plan to make Group A fail. To be precise, it was a method he had thought of after meeting Shambala. But then again, if Group A ended up failing and Group B also failed, then the main quest would end in failure.

It would cause Alan despair but everything Ark had done for the past few days would turn to dust.

‘However, I can’t beat Alan without taking some risks.’

The quest wasn't the problem now. It had turned into a grudge fight with Alan, and that wasn't all. There was even Andel, none the worse for it even after being chewed and swallowed, sticking to Alan. It wasn't a time to hold back for fear of the losses.

'Alan, and Andel. You guys chose the wrong person to mess with.'

Ark made up his mind.

To be willing to use any and all methods, no matter how cheap...

Ark immediately took out his pot in an empty alley. Then he shook out the ingredients left in his bag and started cooking.

Howling Seasoned Chilies

A food made from the extremely stimulating fruit of a chilli tree; if eaten, an unstoppable heat will radiate from one's body. Warning, something might go slightly awry because of the severe heat.

Strength +10 for 5 minutes, 'Confusion' for 3 minutes after effects wear off

Intermediate Survival Cooking Effect: Adding spices will lengthen 'Confusion' by 5 minutes.

After making 120 portions in nearly 30 minutes, Ark stuffed it into a sack and went off to find Shambala.

Since Shambala didn't belong to Platoons 1,2, or 3, he shared the quest with him and made him join Group B. As he explained his cheap plan to Shambala, he soon narrowed his eyes.

"You said you had skills, but it's just something like this?"

"Say it simply, can you do it or not?"

"... I can do it."

"Good, there isn't much time left until we depart now, hurry up."

“Got it. I really don’t know what the purpose of this is, but I’ll do it since I promised.”

Shambala took the sack with the Howling Seasoned Chillies and disappeared into the darkness.

Shambala was using ‘Stealth’ to go to the warehouse within the castle. The target was the supplies prepared by the young Lord for this operation — the food to be given to Group A would also be there. Ark asked Shambala to mix in the Howling Seasoned Chillies into the food in the supplies.

‘Survival Cooking shows its effect even when mixed with other foods!’

It was something he had already proven. Moreover, if it was mixed in a different food, it became unidentified again and the additional effects couldn’t be known without trying it.

‘The food produced in the castle is small in quantity, but it has additional effects other foods lack. With a decisive battle in front of him, Alan will definitely eat the supplied food. If the effects show then...’

Since it was mixed in with other foods, every player in Group A might not be affected, and the effect would likely be greatly reduced. But even if only half were affected, it would no doubt to be a highly unfavorable situation.

It was a mean and cheap method!

The reason he hadn’t used this method before wasn’t because of his conscience. If there was a certain profit for him, Ark was willing to do any despicable deed without blinking an eye, at least in New World. He had only resisted because getting caught doing such a deed by NPCs or players would influence his alignment. But now he didn’t even have to worry about that. There was Shambala’s trump card skill ‘Death’s Agent,’ after all.

‘Hahaha, Alan you bastard. Have a taste of this.’

After finishing all his preparations, Ark went off whistling to find the

Quartermaster.

* * *

“We have provided supplies for the Guards separately. Here are the supplies for the Militia.”

Having found him an hour later, the Quartermaster provided the supplies. As expected there were 20 units of food and 20 General Tool Boxes. Then, an NPC from the Magic Institute gave an orb the size of a soccer ball to the two groups’ Commanders, Ark and Alan. The supplies mentioned by the young Lord had left out this.

“This is a magic bomb.”

“A magic bomb?”

“Yes, the scorch cannon is encased in a layer stronger than steel. It would take a few hours to break it with your weapons. But if this magic bomb is installed in the machinery, it can turn a scorch cannon into scrap metal in one go. But, there is one thing you have to be careful about. Because we produced it in a rush, we weren’t able to put proper safety devices on it. It should last a while, but... if you discover some kind of weird symptom from the magic bomb, throw it away and flee to a safe place.”

“Understood.”

Magic Bomb
<p>A magic bomb made by the Magic Institute with great explosive power. However, it is unstable because it is still a prototype and may not be able to control Mana properly.</p> <p>The bomb timer can be set from 10 seconds to a maximum of 1 minute. But because the safety devices are unstable, the switch will automatically activate and initiate explosion in 2 hours and 50 minutes.</p>

Since the quest time limit was 3 hours, it meant the bomb had to be installed within 2 hours and 50 minutes and the remaining 10 minutes

could be spent appreciating the scorch cannon explode in leisure as the quest was finished.

“It would be great if you don’t get wiped out quickly and have the monsters rush us.”

Taking and storing his supplies first, Alan spoke as he looked at Ark.

“The same to you.”

“You have a strong will, fine. Then shall we bet on who destroys a scorch cannon first?”

“Do as you please.”

As Ark answered bluntly, Alan snorted and turned his mount around. Then the 120 people in Group A went out the front gate like an ebbing tide.

Watching them leave, Cross abruptly scanned his surroundings and asked, “But, why haven’t Teach and the Militia come yet?”

The person Cross was calling Teach was JusticeMan.

“The Militia have already left for somewhere else. After we defeat the monsters and get to the scorch cannon, they will come, following our path.”

“What do you mean by that? Did you divide our already small forces?” Cross asked in a worried tone.

The Militia hadn’t been a decisive help, but there was still a difference between having and not having them.

“They are preparing something we need for this mission.”

“Just what is the plan?”

“It is difficult to explain it in detail right now. Won’t you just trust and leave your life to me?” Ark spoke forcefully as he stared at Cross with serious eyes.

Cross met his gaze for a while before nodding. “Alright. Both you and I are undertaking this operation with our lives on the line anyway.

Also, the Lord placed you in command. If you ask, we will follow.”

“Thank you.”

Like that, Ark went out the castle gate with just the Guards.

After advancing roughly 10 minutes from the gate, they came to a fork. These were the paths the two scorch cannons were coming from. Alan’s troops went left, so, naturally, Ark took the right.

After choosing which path to take in the fork, the monsters started their full scale offensive.

“Kekeke, Humans. To crawl all the way out here!”

“Die!”

It was a unit of forty to fifty Shadows and Avengers.

“Knights forward, put your shields up and charge; strike the enemies in the lead. Archers, move to the flanks and block the movements of the rear enemies! If a melee breaks out, form up in 3 to 1 triangle formation!”

The Guard’s movements were different from before. While Cross quickly sized up the situation and gave orders, the troops moved like clockwork.

Fifteen Knights ran out smacking Shadows with their shields. They rushed towards the knocked back Shadows as the Archers in the back let loose arrows that stopped the Avengers’ movements with a Slow hex.

It was different from before, when they would all charge and deal a round of attacks, every man for himself. Like the cogs of a wheel intersecting, once they assisted each other their combined fighting force had a great increase.

This was the result of JusticeMan’s so-called Spartan training.

“Attack the flanks as you charge the front again!”

After receiving JusticeMan’s tactical training, Cross’ ability to read the situation had improved enormously. On top of that, Ark made up

for the deficit by adding generous amounts of food with additional effects. Thanks to that, with all sorts of abilities enhanced, the Guards were displaying greater skills than their levels would suggest.

‘As expected of mister JusticeMan. To change NPCs like this in just two days...’

He was only filled with more admiration.

‘In any case, it shouldn’t be too hard to move to the scorch cannon with the Guards alone.’

It had been his greatest worry before leaving the castle, whether they would be able to defeat the enemies as they moved towards the scorch cannon with a small force, and also, if they could get to the scorch cannon in time. Those two alone were worries that were out of Ark’s control.

But this battle made him sure it was definitely possible.

“We will eliminate the monsters as fast as possible and advance! Dedric, Skull, Plan A!”

“Okay!”

Clack, clack, clack.

With one Familiar rolling on the floor and the other flying in the air, Ark also leapt into battle. His successive critical hits erupted from his sharp sword attacks. He returned all of the enemy’s attacks with critical hits, and he let fly kicks when he could to bombard the Shadows with status abnormalities.

Used to battling Shadows now, Ark could face five of them on his own. In addition, Shambala also had skills equalling Ark’s. He didn’t attack as aggressively since he had been dragged out against his will, but he easily fought three or four on his own.

With Ark and Shambala taking care of about 20% of the enemy forces, the Guards’ burden were lightened considerably. Thanks to that, it didn’t take long to easily wipe out the monsters. Having

learned tactics, the Guards didn't lose much Health, either. It decreased the rest time and sped up the advance. But, there were more monster units than expected blocking the road. Even though they were advancing while finishing one round of battle in 10 minutes, it took over 2 hours and 20 minutes to reach the scorch cannon. After finishing off the last monster unit and topping the hill, they saw a huge cannon made of steel within the darkness.

"Is that the scorch cannon?"

The scorch cannon reached a height of a whopping 20 meters. With a siding that looked like it was made of densely packed, small plates of iron, there was a huge arm-like thing extending from the upper level. A black flame was flickering from the five bizarrely clenched fingers. The thing that looked like an arm was probably the barrel that shot out the Mana surge.

Ruummmbble...

The cutter on the ground whirred softly as it rotated. It was slow, but it was definitely narrowing the distance between it and Jackson Castle. Alright, now the problem was the swarm of 300 monsters surrounding the scorch cannon!

'The only thing left is to wait and trust in mister JusticeMan and the Militia!'

There were only about 40 minutes left before the time ran out. Even so, Ark waited patiently. The 30 Guardsmen couldn't defeat monsters 10 times their number alone. Ark, Shambala and even the Militia wouldn't make a difference. So, he had no choice but to take a gamble.

After 10 minutes had passed, Cross asked in a worried voice. "Just what are you waiting for? We don't have much time left!"

"I know. But right now, it's time to wait."

"Just who are you waiting for? Are you talking about Sir Alan?"

"No. It's mister JusticeMan and the Militia."

“But don’t you know that even if they joined, the situation won’t change much?”

“I suppose it’s time to tell you. Actually...”

Just when Ark was about to say something, Shambala, who had been resting in the rear with an indifferent face, jumped up.

“Ark, it’s a scout!”

As Ark turned his head in surprise, about ten Shadows went up the hill, discovered Ark’s party, and turned around in astonishment.

“Holy shit! Shambala!”

Ark and Shambala shot off like arrows and fell upon the Shadows. They both ran in and poured on attacks while dealing continuous critical hits. Once the Archers from the Guards joined in, the Shadows fell over weakly. But even Ark and Shambala couldn’t defeat them all in just a few seconds.

In addition, they were scouts; from the beginning, they had no intention of counter-attacking. While the rest of the bastards were blocking Ark and co’s attacks, one of them fled down the hill and let loose a piercing scream.

“Squaaaawk! Enemies! Enemies!”

And BAM! 300 monsters simultaneously turned to look up at the hilltop.

“There are Humans! Humans!”

The three hundred monsters ululated cries filled with exultation as they charged up the hill. Hiptons swung huge hammers, and Avengers riding lizards brandished their swords like crazy as well. Shadows followed after them like a swarm. That alone made them all waver.

“Th-this is the end!”

“If that many monsters come at us...!”

The Guards’ faces drained of color.

There was despair even in Cross' eyes. "Da-damn it! If it's like this then I'll at least take one more with me! Everyone charge!"

"YOU CAN'T!" Ark screamed desperately as he blocked Cross' path.

"What? I can't? What do you mean?"

"There is no chance of victory if we fight like this."

"Then...?"

"All we have to do right now is focus on defending. If we defend, we can last to some extent even if there are three hundred monsters."

"Are you saying there's a purpose for enduring?"

"This is a request. Please do as I said. Enduring for a long time is currently the only way we can survive."

"Hnng... alright. Shields forward, block the enemy's charge! Hold on until the end!"

At Cross' order, the Guardsmen made a wall with their shields. Then, while roaring fiercely, the monsters and the Guards clashed. The attack of the Shadows and Avengers mostly bounced off the shields. A shield's defense was usually greater than the defense of all the equipment combined. Of course, defensive power is useless if you don't block, but if a Soldier gives up on attack and assumes defensive posture, their defense increases dramatically.

As expected, the Guards' Health didn't decrease by much despite taking the charge of monsters ten times their number. But the enormous, muscular monster resembling a troll, the Hipton, was not deterred by the defensive posture. There was an additional effect, 'Disrupt Defense,' with the blunt-edged weapon variety that the huge monster was swinging!

"Wooaaah!"

CLAANG!

When the Hipton swung down his hammer, three or four soldiers went flying with a Stun hex. Though just two of those Hiptons had

appeared, the Guard's formation collapsed in an instant.

"Shambala, I leave the Hipton on that side to you!"

"Sheesh, you're really milking me for all I'm worth."

"Don't complain. You have to complete the quest, too, anyway."

"I'm not interested in a quest like this, how many times do I have to say it for you to understand?!" Shambala complained as he ran towards the Hipton.

With the darkness attribute bonus, only Ark and Shambala were able to fight one on one with the Hipton.

"Dedric, attract its attention! Skull, attack! Plan C!"

Pow, pow, poooww!

Ark circled around the Hipton as he dealt successive critical hits. The slower they moved, the higher the chance of critical hits. On top of that, there was the additional damage of the Familiar Co-op Attack bonus, and the Counter Attacks he dealt while slipping past the occasional attacks.

With the flurry of damage, the Hipton, with Health numbering in the thousands fell to the ground in the end. Ark went to the front and let loose Counter Attacks while parrying the attacks of the charging Shadows.

Unlike dodging, blocking with a sword shaved away Health, but he had no choice. The ground was rotten and slippery from the Dark Fog, so he couldn't unleash agile evasive maneuvers like normal. What was worse, more than ten attacks flew in at once. Dodging them all was impossible!

But the situation took another turn for the worse. He couldn't ignore the Health that was dropping little by little from blocking all the attacks with his sword. In addition, there was a durability loss whenever he blocked an attack.

'Dammit, I won't be able to last long like this!'

Then, while Ark was groaning, he parried yet another Shadow arm that flew in and a message window popped up with the sound of a trumpet.

You have learned a new skill.

Parry (Beginner, Passive): You have become familiar with the defense of blocking enemy attacks by placing all your will into the sword alone. You will now be able to block enemy attacks with even greater skill.

Should Parry succeed, defense increases by 3 times your sword's damage. No loss in sword durability.

Then, there was a spark-like effect as a new window formed.

A new Chain Skill has been registered.

Chain Skill: When at least two skills that can be used consecutively are joined, they will automatically be registered as a new chain skill. If the skill is successfully executed, the chain skill will activate and give you a chaining bonus effect. However, if even one of the chained skills fails, you will incur a penalty.

* Current usable chain skills

Riposte (Parry + Counter Attack)

An advanced counter that sharply parries an enemy's attack and counters back.

Chain skill succeeds: 50% chance of knocking back the opponent 5-10 meters.

Chain skill fails: 50% chance of being paralyzed for 3 seconds.

‘A chain skill?’ Ark stared at the message window with a dazed expression.

Then, a Shadow extended its arm. Ark parried the arm with his sword out of reflex, then loosed a Counter Attack as he rotated. In that instant a spark flashed at the tip of his sword as the chain skill activated. The Shadow was flung back several meters, crashed into a pile with another monster, and sprawled on the floor.

‘So this is a chain skill!’

Ark felt like cheering. There was a special effect of knocking back his enemy 10 meters! In his current situation, it was more useful than a skill that just did more damage.

Ark quickly went into battle and abused the chain skill. His ability to judge the success chance of the skill was still low, so not all were knocked back. But Ark’s physical ability was excellent! He was soon grasped the timing of it and was able to raise the success rate.

“Riposte!”

Boom, boom, boom, boom!

The monsters attacking Ark were flung back in all directions. As if he were bowling, when one went flying, another collapsed in a heap. Thanks to that, he lightened the load on the Guards and the shaky line of defense regained its footing. And after ten minutes passed, they suddenly heard a resounding shout from behind the hill.

“I have arrived!”

Ark, Shambala, Cross, and the Guard turned their heads so hard they almost broke their necks.

It was JusticeMan and the Militia. They approached with the twelve crewmen of the Silver Arrow dragging a large object emitting blue light. A gun barrel in the form of a sharp trident, it was the Spear of Thor that had been attached to the airship.

That’s right, this was the emergency card Ark had brewed up. It was impossible for Group B to kill three hundred monsters within the time

limit. While he was thinking, he remembered the scene he saw from the airship. The Spear of Thor, which had dealt crushing blows to three hundred monsters!

The conclusion of what he learned from Jabel and the Mechanic was the Spear of Thor hadn't taken too much damage from the crash landing. Also, he learned if they charged it with the magical power left in the engine, they would be able to fire it at least once. The problem was the time needed to disassemble it from the airframe, reassemble it with the engine, and then drag it all the way to the scorch cannon. It was why Ark sent the Militia as guards for the crew out first. It was also why Ark spent precious time to defeat all the monsters on the path, it was to clear out the path for the Militia that would follow.

"You finally arrived, you're not late!"

"Everyone, split to the sides and retreat at full speed!" Having figured out the situation at last, Cross swiftly barked out an order.

The Guard threw down their shields and fled to the rear. Vibrating like it would explode at any second, it was then that the Spear of Thor expelled lightning.

Flash, BOOOOOOOOM!

A blue light pierced the darkness and painted the ground blue. Since it had been makeshift charged from the engine's magical power, it was weaker than when it had been used on the airship. But even that much was more than enough to flip the situation.

Monsters bathed in sparks instantaneously lost their Health and fell into critical condition. Even Hiptons with their thousands of HP were down to just 30%. And there was even a Paralyze hex from the lightning as a bonus!

"Now's the time, ATTACK!"

"WOAAAAAH!"

At Cross' order, the Guards rushed in with recharged morale.

Even if the enemies were 10 times their number, it was a different story if the opponent was in critical condition. Moreover, if they were also paralyzed, then it was no different from striking a scarecrow. Since the Militia joined in as well, the monsters were quickly reduced in number. Ark was running around excitedly killing monsters when Shambala yelled from beside him.

“Now’s not the time to do this, stupid!”

“What?”

“Quest time limit!”

Ark immediately came back to his senses. He urgently checked the quest window and found that there was only 20 minutes left.

‘Riposte!’

Ark used the chain skill to knock back the swarming Shadows and ran towards the cannon. When he went inside, he saw a power source spewing black smoke within a complex maze of pipes. He instinctively knew that was the place to put the magic bomb.

‘There!’

“Master, watch out!”

The instant Ark stepped forward, Dedric suddenly screamed. He reflexively jumped back as an enormous axe grazed past and struck the ground.

“How dare the likes of a HUMAN try to sully the scorch cannon guarded by ME!”

‘There was still a monster left?’

Startled, Ark twisted his head around. That instant, a huge monster leapt from the darkness and rammed into his chest with its shoulder.

Flung into the air, Ark rolled out of the scorch cannon. When he initiated a forward roll and sprang up, a monster holding a blood red axe walked out from the entrance.

A Shadow 5 meters tall wearing thick plate mail!

A warning message popped up in front of him.

— Mini boss monster ‘Gun Captain Narak’ has appeared!

‘Oh shit, a mini boss...!’

“Go to hell, Human!” Narak shrieked as he ran forward.

Ark parried Narak’s axe as he loosed a counter. Chain skill! But Narak only flinched back one step and immediately rushed in to swing his axe like crazy.

Claash, CLAAASH!

He raised his sword to block, but he lost a whole 150 Health.

Narak’s level was a whopping 130. Since it was a mini boss, it probably didn’t have as much additional Health as a regular boss, but as far as levels went it was higher than the Adelaine he met inside Gallic’s stomach. In addition, since it was draped in plate mail that looked more than several centimeters thick, its defense couldn’t be compared to Adelaine’s.

“Dammit, Dark Blade!”

Ark kicked off the ground and swung his sword. As the blade that became one with the darkness plunged into Narak’s throat, he screamed. A critical attack ignoring defense! But as if he didn’t take a hit at all, Narak grabbed and lifted Ark by the neck. He choked as his strength seeped away.

“The likes of a Human dares—!”

“Dark Dash!”

Dedric fiercely charged into the arch of Narak’s nose. As Narak flinched and took a step back, Skull quickly rolled in under his feet. Stepping on Skull and losing balance, Narak staggered. Just then, a shadow rapidly narrowed the distance and leapt up like a panther as two daggers slashed at Narak’s wrist.

At last, the hand clutching his throat loosened. Ark kicked upward

and broke free from Narak's grasp. Nimbly landing like a cat, Ark gasped deep breaths as he turned his head. The person who had attacked Narak's wrist with a pair of daggers was none other than Shambala. Ark laughed while breathing roughly.

"I didn't know you'd come even when I didn't call."

"It's a problem for me if you die," Shambala muttered as he watched Narak in a crouched position. "The others are too busy finishing off the minions. It's just you and me."

"Alright..." Ark nodded. The Guards and the Militia were crazily fighting the three hundred monsters. In fact, it would be more troublesome if they came to help. If Narak and three hundred monsters got mushed together in a melee, the situation would become even more difficult.

"I'm going in first. Join in when you can, newb!"

As Shambala used his skill, and he vanished with a poof right where he was sitting. Then, he suddenly appeared several meters ahead and swung his daggers at Narak. With a roar, he landed a critical hit. Narak swung his axe with a cry of rage, but Shambala slipped past the entire attack with peculiar footwork and flowing arm motions. It looked like he wasn't affected at all by the slippery ground. Then, he connected swings of his dagger with his evasive movements and dealt critical hits at a high rate. They were similar to Ark's Counter Attack, but they were far more skilled and smooth movements!

'That movement, I've seen it before somewhere...'

Raking through his memories, Ark soon remembered.

'That's right, that's Chinese Martial Arts!'

Back in middle school, it was when a friendly match between the Taekwondo Dojo and Kung Fu Dojo training instructors started. Then, when the two gym's masters came forward for a spar, he had seen the Kung Fu Master displaying such movements. Seeing the Kung Fu Master dodging the Taekwondo Master's rain of kicks and countering with movements like Shambala's had enraptured the disciples.

He thought the Kung Fu master had called that technique 'Qigong'.

The feeling of the movements the Kung Fu Master had shown then and Shambala's were similar. He gently flicked his fingertips to change the trajectory of Narak's axe, which struck the floor.

Of course, skills are skills, and a game is a game. No matter how skillfully he used qigong, the damage registered in the system couldn't be entirely ignored. But when Ark checked Shambala's Health, it seemed that qigong reduced the damage taken by 80% when successful.

'As expected, Shambala doesn't just have a special skill.'

Ark used Taekwondo to access the game's hidden skill set. Shambala likely used Chinese martial arts to attain similar results. Shambala's peculiar sense of confidence Ark had felt from the very beginning — this was exactly why.

'Well yeah, the Jujitsu that mister JusticeMan said he learned was also registered as a skill from martial arts he had learned in reality. If he's someone who learned martial arts like mister and I, then it's likely that the level of his base attack skill is high.'

"What the hell are you staring blankly at?" As Ark watched vacantly, Shambala shouted in a frustrated voice. "If you've figured out my style, then you know what to do, right?"

Of course he knew. Ark regained his bearings again thanks to Shambala and narrowed his distance from Narak with footwork. The basics of all martial arts comes from the footwork. Especially in Taekwondo, which used kicks, the footwork was the most important fundamental in determining the level of attack and defense. Finding his normal rhythm again like that, Ark took in short breaths as he began releasing a fury of kicks.

Roundhouse kick, front kick, back kick!

At his kicks that stormed in like a gust of wind, even Narak flinched and backed away. As Ark unleashed his full-scale offensive, Shambala's attacks gained speed as well. When there was a gap between Ark's kicks, Shambala's dagger pair pierced a vital point,

as if he'd been waiting for it. Taekwondo and Kung Fu, two forms at the zenith of martial arts, were unleashing a combined attack in a virtual reality game. Since Dedric and Skull, who had experienced countless battles with Ark, added their assistance on top of that, the additional effect was incredible.

“Aaack, the likes of Humans—!”

Narak couldn't even swing his axe properly and stepped back several times in succession.

‘This feels weird.’

This was the first time he was fighting with Shambala, but their rhythm matched well, as if he was a team-mate Ark had fought together with for a long time. Maybe it was because both of them were people who had polished their martial arts for a while, or because they were on the same wavelength in the system since both of them were of the darkness attribute. Shambala's Kung Fu and Ark's kicks both complemented each other as they bore down on Narak.

Actually, there was greater meaning to this than the simple cooperation of these two professions, the Dark Walker and Saint Assassin, in New World. In the game's history, the two professions were linked together by a connection from the Dark Ages. However, that fact was not yet known by either Ark nor Shambala.

However, Narak was also much stronger than expected. Even after taking Ark and Shambala's attacks for nearly 10 minutes, its Health had only decreased by 40%. On the other hand, getting hit full on by one of Narak's attacks by a momentary mistake would cost them 20% of their Health. Fortunately, the Guards and Militia were finishing off the minions and were on their way to help, so Ark and Shambala were able to receive the effect of Roco's song. Roco sang the ‘Song of Recovery’ that healed 200 Health over 3 minutes without resting. Therefore, as long as they weren't hit in succession, they could steadily recover Health.

‘There's about 10 minutes before the quest's time limit, I can win this if it's with Shambala!’

Then, just when Ark was sure of victory, his bag suddenly vibrated as it automatically opened.

An orb the size of a soccer ball was emitting red light from within the bag.

The magic bomb's Mana is going off!

Time left until the magic bomb's explosion: 59 seconds.

“OH SHIT, 1 MINUTE...!”

Ark's face paled. Now that he thought of it, he hadn't entered the fact that the magic bomb's time limit was 10 minutes faster than the quest's into his calculations. If they couldn't finish the battle within 1 minute, the bomb would explode! Ark and Shambala, and of course, Group B, would all take irreversible damage.

‘FRICKIN’ IMPOSSIBLE! We can't take down Narak within a minute!’

If the bomb went off like this, they would be annihilated for sure. Then there was only one method left — they would have to give up on the quest and throw the bomb far away.

Seeming to have understood the situation as well, Shambala shouted in an urgent voice, “Give up on the quest! You can't self-destruct for the sake of some contribution points!”

“I know!”

‘Dammit, to have to give up on the quest after coming this far...’

But there was no choice.

‘It can't be helped.’

It happened when Ark clenched his teeth tightly as he pulled out the magic bomb. With exquisite timing, one of Shambala's strikes brought down Narak's Health to exactly 50%. In that instant, Narak suddenly set his axe upright as he struck the ground, releasing a roar at the sky.

“YOU BASTARDS... I WILL KILL YOU, AAAOOO!”

That was when Ark’s body stiffened.

‘Oh, hell no!’

Narak’s special skill ‘Howling’ has taken effect.

All players and NPCs in range have been paralyzed by violent Fear that seizes the mind and body for 1 minute!

“KEEUK, you shitty fly bastards!”

Narak’s eyes glowed as he approached.

‘Is this the end?’

Ark was in despair. If he took a hit from Narak like this, he would die. Even if he wasn’t hit, he would die when the magic bomb went off. As soon as he got the Paralyze hex, the end had already been decided.

Just then, the rigidly stiffened Ark saw Skull. Unlike Dedric, Skull had immunity to Fear to some extent because it was an Undead; Skull crawled towards Narak while trembling uncontrollably. It was squeezing out all of its will to come to Ark’s aid. Seeing that, something leapt and surged up within him.

“It’s no use, Skull! There’s nothing that can be done even if you block!”

CRUNCH!

In the end, Skull was trampled underneath Narak’s feet and was forcefully recalled. But Skull’s sacrifice made a miracle. Ark took over 200 damage with Skull’s disappearance, and he instantly fell into critical condition and was dyed red.

You are in critical condition, so Indomitable Will and Indomitable Body have activated.

* The set effect 'Adrenaline' has activated. Immunity to Fear has increased by 50% and you have broken free of the effect 'Howling.' Reaction speed has increased by 20%.

'Adrenaline!'

The Dark Walker originally had a 50% immunity to Fear. With Adrenaline's additional 50% on top of that, it became 100% and he was released from paralyzation.

Following the activation of Adrenaline, he felt a sensation like an electrifying current. His reaction speed increased explosively at the same time. Ark rapidly rolled as he evaded the axe. He checked the magic bomb's information, there was only 20 seconds left.

There was no way he could know how big the bomb's explosion range was, but he thought he could narrowly escape death if he ran about 100 meters and threw it. And in the instant when he was about to turn his body, countless thoughts abruptly erupted within his head.

'No, there's still a chance! Alright, I'll be frickin' amazed if I don't die!'

Ark turned around again and ran towards Narak.

Shambala and the other people were staring at Ark's indecisive actions with shocked eyes. But they were paralyzed, so they couldn't even move their mouths. They could only follow Ark's movements with their eyes.

Narak laughed as he swung his axe. Ark slid on the rotten ground as he struck the bastard's solar plexus with a back kick.

"KEUUUK!" Narak groaned uncomfortably as he staggered.

Then Ark kicked up with one foot as he struck the bastard's chin with a mid-air roundhouse kick, and then he shoved the magic bomb into Narak's gaping mouth.

"Y-you bastard! What are you... ack! Ack!"

The disconcerted Narak retched as he tried to spit out the magic bomb. Flinging himself up like a ball, that's when Ark's vertical front

kick raged into Narak's jaw!

Narak's jaw flung up, and his mouth closed with a clack. Simultaneously, Ark landed on the ground and released the chain skill 'Riposte' with all his strength and knocked Narak back.

All these movements happened in just one moment.

BOOOOOM!

Immediately afterwards, the sound of the explosion burst from within Narak's belly. His stomach inflated like a balloon before being sucked inwards. White smoke drifted up from his listless, gaping mouth. But even though the magic bomb had exploded within his belly, Narak was still alive. His whole body turning crimson, Narak stared at Ark with bloodshot eyes as he ground his teeth.

Double critical chance!

"Fuck off, DARK BLADE!"

— You have dealt a critical hit X2 with Double Critical Chance.

The final blow Ark unleashed made Narak's Health reach 0 at last.

"Y-you... don't even think of... returning alive... just because you... defeated me... AACK!"

He was truly as resistant as a cockroach. Narak spat out all the words he had to say even though his Health was at 0 before screaming and exploding. He was blown to bits in all directions, and while his flesh and skin went flying, Shambala, the Guards, and the Militia's paralyzation was released as a cross symbol surfaced above their heads. A cross symbol appeared above Ark's head as well.

— Your level has risen.

Everyone was granted enormous EXP. Ark and Shambala also rose

2 levels, and the rest of the party members also went up by 2 or 3 levels. Roco, who was at just level 25, rose 5 levels in an instant. Thanks to that, their Health and Mana, which had been grazing the floor, were fully restored. Ark and Shambala blew out a deep breath as they both sank to the ground. Shambala stared blankly at Narak's corpse before snickering, then broke into laughter.

"Hahaha, you're over average. That last part was really awesome."

"Aren't I the one to say that!"

Laughter escaped from Ark's mouth as well. This was the first time he felt that fighting with someone was fun. However, the situation wasn't that appealing. They had somehow defeated Narak, but there were still other minion monsters left. Moreover, the remaining time was now just 10 minutes. Since they didn't have the magic bomb either, their method to destroy the scorch cannon within 10 minutes had also disappeared.

'Quest failure can't be helped. If we finish off the minions first and take some time to destroy the scorch cannon before returning, we should be able to secure some EXP, at least. Let's get the items for now.'

There was a key dirtied with fingerprints, a parchment, and a ring where Narak had exploded.

"Information window."

Bloodied Old Key

Written Instructions Stamped with Lord of Darkness Valderas' Approval

The written instructions sent to Narak by the Commander of the Army of Darkness, Valderas. You can see the contents in detail if you search its information.
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Resurrecting Spirit (Magic)	
Item Type	Ring
Usage Restriction	Level 70
The ring Narak dredged the last of his magic power to lay a curse on. If any player touches the ring, then the curse skill 'Ultimatum' that Narak invoked will activate. When the curse is released, it can be used as a normal magic ring.	
Option: Strength +5, Mana Recovery Speed +5%	

'What? The curse skill Ultimatum?'

Then, while Ark was tilting his head as he looked at the message—

Narak's 'Ultimatum' skill has activated.
By the power of the curse laid by Narak, all dead monsters within a 500 meter radius will revive as Undead for 30 minutes. Revived Undead will harbor great animosity towards living beings.

Along with the message, he heard Roco's scream from behind.

"KYAA, monsters are crawling up from the ground!"

"H-how can this be!"

A choked scream flowed from Ark's mouth too. The two hundred or so monsters they had finally managed to kill with the Spear of Thor were raising their bodies as Undead. The Hiptons, Shadows,

Avengers. Even... wasn't that a tattered Narak crawling out from the earth too?!

"Dammit, to think he set a trap like this!"

"There's no place to run!"

"God dammit, we even lasted until now.."

The faces of people in the Militia were sunken in despair.

But Ark shook his head.

'NO! There's no way! There's gotta be a method!'

Ark had succeeded in several quests with difficulties that were unthinkable with his level until now. If there was something he had learned while doing them, even in a quest that seemed impossible, there was always a clue prepared to breaking free of a crisis if you looked carefully enough.

What would determine life or death was how quickly the clue was found!

Ark stared at an item on the ground.

'This time, this is the clue. If what I'm thinking is right...'

Ark grabbed the item and ran towards the scorch cannon.

"Shambala, mister JusticeMan. Come into the scorch cannon and blockade the entrance!"

"What? What are you saying? In this situation where we can't even *run away*?"

"Just believe in me and follow!"

"... Alright. Everyone, let's go to the scorch cannon!"

Once JusticeMan made the order, the Guards and Militiamen followed Ark in. Ark raced up the revolving stairs inside the cannon. At the top was a huge room completely open on all sides. After rapidly glancing around his surroundings, Ark soon discovered a

machine filling up an entire side of the room. It had several levers, and he saw a keyhole inside.

“Discerning Eye!”

Once he used the skill, the unidentified key’s information appeared.

Narak’s Key (Special)

The key Gun Captain Narak used when controlling the scorch cannon.

‘As expected, this was the answer; this key is the master key that moves the scorch cannon!’

Ark ran forward one step and put in the key. The scorch cannon vibrated as four legs protruded from its lower frame, fixing it on the ground. When the stationing ended, a pitch black flame flickered in the window. When Ark grabbed the lever and tried moving it, there was the sound of machinery as the cannon rotated.

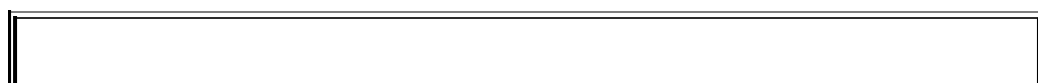
‘Shall we try testing its power?’

Ark adjusted the cannon to set the aim on the swaying, swarming Undead. Then he firmly pressed a button attached to the side and the cannon vibrated violently.

Ruummble!

The scorch cannon that had reduced Jackson Castle to ruins and had crashed the airship with a single blow!

The same terrifying force was unfolding before his eyes. Once the scorch cannon heated up, a black energy raged out like a storm. The Undead swarming around the scorch cannon were literally torn to rags and went flying. Undead Narak was no exception either. As soon as it crawled up from the ground, it was swept up into the scorch cannon’s storm and lost at least 50% of its Health in an instant.



— 3 minutes before the scorch cannon's energy recharges.

'Huhuhu, this is exciting!'

The Undead that survived swarmed around the scorch cannon. But the steel-encased scorch cannon did not even budge an inch. Then, the recharging was done. The storm of black flames rose once again! Undead Narak couldn't endure any more either and disappeared. Three hundred undead monsters had been swept away with just two shots.

"A-Ark!"

Having leapt up helter skelter to the top floor, JusticeMan and Roco shouted with deeply moved voices. But Ark didn't even turn his head and rotated the cannon. There was still something he had left to do. He scanned his surroundings with Eyes of the Cat and spotted the other scorch cannon far away.

'That bastard Alan failed!'

The scorch cannon's time limit had already passed. The other scorch cannon was fine and well which meant Alan had failed the quest! Shambala seemed to have checked the scorch cannon as well as he approached from the side, then butted Ark's shoulder and whispered, "Seems like your wicked trick worked out."

He was talking about the Howling Seasoned Chillies that had been mixed into Group A's supplies before departure.

Wordlessly, Ark smiled evilly.

'He must've gotten *lots* of strength from an unknown source for a while.'

Ark clearly envisioned what Alan had experienced. With the scorch cannon in front of him, Alan likely ate the food to brace himself for battle. And he must've been quite satisfied when his Strength strangely increased. At least, until five minutes passed and most people fell into Confusion.

Once he was Confused, he wouldn't be able to control his character.

But before that, he would go around as he pleased blindly firing skills. Then, while he and his teammates were fighting hard in such manner, something would go slightly awry, and the conclusion was obvious.

Confusion generally had the shortest effect duration among the status abnormalities, but if one was to be hexed with it once, then it was treacherous, since there was no knowing how the situation would unfold.

‘Alan, you scoundrel, it would be good if you died...’

It was simply wishful thinking. It seemed like the possibility of Alan’s prospects turning dark were slim considering Alan’s ability, but...

“Holy Knight Sir Alan, I shall accept the quest you have failed.”

Ark aimed the scorch cannon and pressed the button.

A huge black flame gathered before his eyes before shooting off into the darkness. And, a little while afterwards, he saw the scorch cannon slowly collapsing with a roar from afar.

Thu-thu-thump, that was when a resonant drum sounded as the quest was updated.

* You have found a hidden conclusion to the sub-quest ‘Operation Bomb the Scorch Cannons.’

You have succeeded in defeating Gun Captain Narak and taking possession of the scorch cannon.

You blew up countless monsters and even the other remaining scorch cannon. Now there should be no way for Jackson Castle to take a scorch cannon attack. Rather, the scorch cannon will become used as a weapon to protect Jackson Castle from the Darkness Army.

This is a success no one expected or even hoped for, and you will be able to receive sufficient contribution for it.

Special reward: Monsters killed with the scorch cannon within 30 minutes X5, additional EXP and contribution, Fame +50

* Commander's additional reward: EXP, contribution points +3,000. Fame +50

The cross symbol appeared above Ark and Group B's heads again. And then a level up, with contribution points and Fame, were added like crazy.

"Keuhaaa, is this what they call leveling up twice in quick succession? An awesome quest like this, it's a first!" JusticeMan also laughed broadly as he spoke.

"That bastard Alan, I wanna see what his expression will be."

Lord of Darkness, Valderas

Move the cannon, aim, and FIRE!

When the black fireball hits its mark, it crushes the annoying monsters crawling around in an instant as it scatters them. Since it has a long range as well, even the monsters that looked like specks, far into the distance, were no problem.

Should he say that it felt like he was playing an FPS (First Person Shooter) game? His stress and fatigue flew away in an instant.

When he saw the message that 5 contribution points and EXP were added per monster, he had thought it was trifling, but he could fire the scorch cannon ten times in 30 minutes. The monsters destroyed in just one shot would range from a minimum of dozens to over a hundred, so his contribution points and experience went up like crazy. With 2 from killing Narak and 1 from the the sub-quest, Ark had gone up 3 levels and was now level 75. Shambala also leveled up similarly, while the low-leveled JusticeMan, Roco, and the other Militia went up by at least 5 levels.

Had the level 30 players ever leveled up this astonishingly fast? The Militia were touched so deeply that they couldn't get over it for awhile. Ark's contribution points also went up from 9,000 to 18,000 in the blink of an eye.

— Ark's current contribution is 18,560. You are in 21st place.

'My ranking went up by 40 in an instant!'

He had finally started catching up to the players in Platoon 1. Alan was still leading the contribution ranking, however, the difference that had been 4 times as great had shrunk to 2 times. It felt like the fog had cleared, allowing him to glimpse the summit of the mountain at last.

‘I don’t know if I can beat Alan, but I might be able to get into the top 10.’

“You’ve worked hard. Rest a while.”

Having reached the castle, Ark dismissed Group B and was heading to the Lord’s Castle to report the result. However, while passing the square, he heard a ruckus off to the side. Turning his head, he saw the players from Group A, who had failed the operation and returned to gather there. Unlike when they had confidently departed, everyone was surrounding and glaring at Alan, Andel, and the rest of Platoon 1. He happened to meet them just as he was curiously thinking about what happened to Group A. Ark pushed through the crowd to survey the situation.

“If you’ve got a mouth, say something,” snapped a Warrior.

“Just how are you going to take responsibility for this?”

“How is this my responsibility?”

“What?”

“I never carried out the operation arbitrarily. I always went forward while discussing it with the leaders of Platoons 2 and 3. Don’t you think you’re forcing it a bit by putting the blame for failure only on me?”

Alan held his head high and answered with an arrogant expression. The gathered users argued as though they couldn’t believe their ears.

“We’re not acting this way because we failed the quest!”

“That’s right, because of the magic bomb that *you* threw, 6 people from our raid died!”

“Ours lost 7. Even our raid leader died!”

If you pieced together their words, it came down to this. As everyone had expected, Group A had easily reached the scorch cannon. Then they attacked the 300 monsters head-on. Their fighting forces were nearly equal, but as soon as the totally unexpected mini

boss 'Gun Captain Najak' showed up, Group A was pushed back.

Alan was forced to call a retreat. The enemy was stronger than he thought, so he was going to raise their stats with food and individual buffs before attempting an all-out attack again. And as Alan planned, at first Group A unleashed a fierce assault as they pressed back the enemy. The problem was 5 minutes later...

Players suddenly began to go on a rampage. Hexed with Confusion, they went around casting their skills everywhere.

The 'Howling Seasoned Chilies' Ark had substituted in were showing their colors. But there was no one in Group A who knew they would fall into Confusion. It was because they had never heard of getting hexed from eating normal food. In any case, thanks to everyone going crazy, Group A took an enormous blow. Truthfully, up to this point, it wasn't Alan's fault.

However, before the Confusion wore off, the magic bomb's time reached its limit. Finally breaking free from Confusion, Alan had two options. To embrace the bomb like some kind of heroic trooper and die alone. Or, he could ensure his own survival no matter who else died.

'The choice Alan made is obvious even without seeing it.'

The Health of the players were already reaching rock bottom because of the Confusion. Since a bomb exploded in their midst, the result was obvious. 15 killed, with dozens more hurled into critical condition. The shocked Group A immediately retreated and the sub-quest ended in failure.

"We understand that it was an unexpected situation. But there was a lot of damage from *you*, the so-called *Commander*, throwing the magic bomb. That's definitely your responsibility!"

"Then what was I supposed to do? Was I supposed to embrace the magic bomb and die or something?"

"What?"

"The people who died just didn't have any luck."

Alan was smart. This may be a game, but he wasn't able to lead this many people simply with his high level. He needed wit, leadership, and charisma for it to be possible. Alan was equipped with all of it. As though that wasn't enough, he got one extra, unnecessary thing. The greatest disadvantage of those who think themselves clever; pride. Truthfully, no matter who looked at it, Alan was in the wrong. However, he didn't apologize. It was because of his pride that stuck with him to the end. It was the reason the players were angry. And, once the rage burst through the floodgates, it swelled uncontrollably.

Those of merit attract undue attention and envy. In order to command others, one cannot help but gain an egotistic side.

Alan has lived this way until now; there had been small complaints, but nothing had become too great of a problem. However, Alan's recent, rapid rise to fame had started drawing much jealousy. And, now that there was an excuse, people were attacking Alan left and right.

'This is why I don't like players.'

Of course, he disliked Alan even more. At first place in contribution, Alan was also firmly seated at first place in the players that Ark disliked. Thus, Alan's plight was Ark's joy. A wicked smile spread over Ark's lips.

'I worked so hard for this, it would be a shame to let it pass with just an argument. Now, shall we properly kindle this fire?'

"Dedric, this is a special task."

Ark summoned Dedric and whispered into his ear. Dedric's eyes sparkled as he pricked his ears.

"Oooh, as expected of Master! What a truly underhanded— I mean, awesome, idea."

"Think you can do it?"

"Just leave it to me, something like this is welcome any time."

Dedric smiled with a strange expression as he crawled low along the

ground. Crawling between the feet of the noisily arguing players, Dedric was as nimble as a cockroach. In such a manner, Dedric crept past the players and leapt to attach himself to the rear of Alan's white horse. That was when a rough holler exploded out.

"Shut the fuck up, you bastards! Do you know who you're fucking with? You think I'm some pushover because I stayed quiet? You guys should just move as you're told! Dammit, do you think that I, Alan, would deal with bastards like you if not for the experience and contribution?"

The clamoring players suddenly quieted. Alan shook his head with a flummoxed expression. "N-no. I didn't..."

"This bastard, is that how he thought of us?"

"I can't believe my ears, seems like he's under the delusion that he can do anything he wants after being on TV once?"

"On TV, he said this and that about other people's help... so his true self was like this."

Players muttered in dejected voices. Even the women, who had always blindly taken Alan's side, whispered as they glanced at him disappointedly. Just then, another shout burst from *Alan*.

"I told you to shut up, you damn wenches shut up too! You wretched bitches, I put up with your annoying squawking and chasing after me, but you're betraying me now? Go to hell!"

"Wh-what? Bi-bitches?"

"Alan, that's too much!"

As the girls started to boil, the boys sprang up to shout insults at Alan. With a shaken expression, Alan backed up while shaking his head.

"N-no, it wasn't me who said that!"

"Are you thinking of treating us like idiots 'til the end? Who else is there but you, huh?"

Alan whipped his head around to see, but Dedric had already been unsummoned and had returned to the Netherworld. He was stuck between a rock and a hard place. Alan was suddenly stamped as someone with a dual personality.

“He has revealed his true colors at last.”

“Sheesh, there are even guys like him?”

“What an unsociable jerk. I won’t take your fucking orders anymore.”

“Such a disappointment. I didn’t know he was such a person. Let’s go.”

The players quickly scattered, as if they didn’t even want to talk about it anymore. As though he didn’t quite understand the situation, Alan was left with a dumb look. 100 people had been gathered around him, but now there were only fifteen players left.

‘So pitiful. Well, he did do something worth becoming that pitiful...’ After leaving the square with the others, the corners of Ark’s lips rose slightly. ‘That’s why you have to mess with people secretly.’

It’s not like he didn’t think he went too far, but he hadn’t made Dedric tell untruths. The Alan Ark knew, at least, was a two-faced bastard for sure. There was no need to feel something like shame when telling people about the truth, right? Granted, he didn’t expect Alan would fall to the ground with something like this. But the players had abandoned him, so his contribution points that had been endlessly soaring up would inevitably falter.

‘This is the start. Alan, you’ve made an enemy of me. Don’t think that’ll end with just this. Someday I’ll expose your true identity in front of Lariette.’

Ark was growing more wicked day by day.

* * *

“Ark, I heard the news from Sir Cross. You did it!”

The young Lord rejoiced as he ran over and took Ark’s hand.

“Not only did you stop the scorch cannon, you actually seized it! You have done us a great deed indeed. No words of praise are enough. We must immediately inform the residents of your heroic accomplishment. Raymond, write up a notice to put onto the message board.”

“Yes, sir.” Raymond beamed as he raised his pen.

“N-not at all. This mission was not something I did on my own. If not for the help of the Guard, Militia, and the crewmen of the Silver Arrow, I wouldn’t have been able to do anything. That’s why they are essentially the ones who completed the mission. If you are putting up a notice, please put their names rather than mine.” Ark spoke humbly as he refused the honor.

Just a few minutes ago, he had witnessed the fall of Alan, whose popularity had been flying sky high. Granted, half of it was Ark’s work, but regardless, it had happened. Someone who sticks out draws attention. It didn’t just apply to Alan. The object of envy soon becomes the object of bitter jealousy. Alan had the level and organizational power to deal with such attention, but the interest of other players was a considerably uneasy element for Ark. He could easily become the target of a Chaotic player, and it was obvious that many limitations on his actions would follow him. He wanted to avoid at least that at all costs.

‘I’ll just take the profit without sticking out.’ That was the goal Ark had made while participating in this quest.

Having no way to know such inner thoughts, the young Lord nodded, deeply touched.

“I believe the fact that I have been of help, is a sufficient reward in itself.”

“As expected of Ark! No need for a price on a good deed? You are truly a person who is like the crystal of chivalry. To be sure, that’s why Father was able to trust you and entrust the keepsake to you. I understand, if you truly mean it, there’s no helping it. Raymond, list on the notice that this operation was succeeded by the actions of the Guard, Militia, and the crew of the Silver Arrow, as Ark requested. Is

that fine?”

“Yes, thank you.” Ark grinned as he brought up the main subject.
“Actually, I came to show you this, my Lord.”

Ark held out the parchment he had obtained after killing Gun Captain Narak.

– You have checked the contents of ‘Written Instructions Stamped with Master of Darkness Valderas’ Approval.’

It told of the Gun Captains of the scorch cannons, Narak and Najak.

You idiots, what the hell are you doing that’s taking over a week?!

Due to your incompetence, our Great Master Valderas has decided to personally lead the Demonic Army towards the front line. And, by demonstrating the Great Power of Darkness in person, He will annihilate each and every one of the weak Humans.

You two, move the scorch cannons to the location marked in the enclosed map before the full moon rises. As soon as Great Master Valderas arrives, we will assault Jackson Castle along with the scorch cannons.

“Valderas!” Exclaimed the young Lord in astonishment.

“Is it a name you’ve heard of?”

“Yeah...” The young Lord put a hand to his forehead as he rambled on with his inner musings. “I have seen the name in an old document kept inside the castle. I heard that Valderas was the one who ruled the current Jackson territory before the Dark Ages as a warrior of the legendary Draconians. It was said that he was an excellent Lord, but once the Dark Ages began, he suddenly transformed into a vanguard of the darkness and terrorized the continent. Then the 7 Heroes soon appeared, and I heard Valderas disappeared along with the Power of Darkness.”

“How did someone who disappeared hundreds of years ago—?”

“There’s no way to tell. Perhaps...” The young Lord continued speaking in a severe voice. “I am only saying this because it is you, but truthfully, ever since the unidentified Army of Darkness attacked Jackson, there has been much a lot of uneasy talk going around. The alarm that the darkness of the Dark Ages may be awakening is spreading dramatically. The Dark Fog covering Jackson shares many similarities with the Power of Darkness that can be found in the records of that time. It is part of the reason why the 3 Great Guilds sent volunteer troops so swiftly. Because if this matter is truly related to the Army of Darkness, then it is no ordinary problem.”

“Then?”

“Of course, it’s still too early to conclude that the Dark Ages have come again. As I said, Valderas was a descendant of Draconians who originally ruled Jackson. There’s the possibility he was hiding somewhere and attacked Jackson to reclaim it again. However, there is no doubt the situation is more severe than expected.”

Cross and Raymond also exchanged words with grave faces.

“According to the records of our documents, Valderas is said to have strength that rivals the force of a single army division. The renowned Heroes who acted in the Dark Ages lost their lives at his hands.”

“I didn’t think it would end like this...”

“We have no time. The full moon is rising tomorrow.”

“There are still two days before the Kingdom’s reinforcements are expected to arrive, but the castle walls are already too weakened to resist due to the continuous daily monster attacks. If they come in to attack the castle, Jackson will take irrecoverable damage, even if we are victorious in the battle.”

“We must stop them from reaching the castle at all costs.”

There was no doubt that the parchment heralding Valderas’ appearance was set to announce the final battle. In other words, that meant Valderas was the C++ quest’s final boss!

He would surely be stronger than any boss that Ark had faced before!

“My thoughts exactly, we simply must stop Valderas from arriving here, at all costs. There are two days until the reinforcements arrive, if we can hold him for two days, it will be our victory.”

“Of course. It won’t be an easy battle if the opponent is Valderas, but, thankfully, we have the written instructions brought by Ark, so we know the enemy’s route. Also, one of the scorch cannons has even fallen into our hands. If we mobilize the scorch cannon and all our forces to ambush the route they’re taking, we have a good chance of success.”

The young Lord nodded his head as he grabbed Ark’s hand.

“As you heard, all of this is your accomplishment.”

– By supplying decisive information that will influence the result of the war, your contribution has risen by 3,000.

A very welcome message popped up with cheerful sound effects.

“The upcoming fight will be longer and more dangerous than any of the battles before. However, we can win this fight if we hold on for just two more days. Furthermore, the accursed darkness that has covered Jackson will be lifted as well.” The young Lord spoke with a voice of resolve. “Sir Cross, prepare the necessary supplies at once and discuss the details of the operation.”

“Yes, sir!”

Cross ran out hastily. Then, after about an hour has passed, Raymond announced the Lord’s mobilization order in the square. At the same time, a quest window popped up before every player in Jackson.

Heroes Assembly!

*Sub-quest : The Final Battle

The Lord of Darkness, Valderas, is leading the Demonic Army towards Jackson Castle. If Valderas reaches Jackson, it will receive an irreparable blow. Therefore, the Lord has decided to concentrate all his forces to ambush their movement route in order to stop their advance.

This operation is a general mobilization issued by the Lord's command; all garrisoned players must participate. There are 2 days until the Kingdom's reinforcements arrive—if Valderas' advance is stopped or if he is defeated before then, Jackson's garrison will win. The final battle with Jackson's life on the line is starting now. Raise your swords and defeat the darkness!

(All players participating in this operation will get 50 additional contribution for every monster they kill. All players who participate in damaging or slaying Valderas will get an increase in contribution points. In addition, all players who successfully complete the quest will get a calculated increase in contribution points.)

Difficulty: C++

* * *

It was decided that the operation area would be a valley several kilometers from Jackson Castle. It was good terrain for performing a pincer attack after pushing back the monster army.

The players who had accepted the quest and gathered at the operation area were the combined Platoons 1, 2, and 3, but barely numbering 100. There had been a little over 140 people in the beginning, but while constantly fighting and undertaking Operation Bomb the Scorch Cannons, some 40 people had perished.

In addition, they weren't grouped as one, as they had been before. With their trust towards the central point Alan broken, the players had all split into parties.

It wasn't all Alan's fault that the raid had broken up. This quest gave more contribution points than any before. Also, this was the final

battle that marked the finale of the quest. It was now time to get more points than anyone else, rather than staying alive. It was inevitable that they would challenge the operation in parties rather than a raid.

“Each monster gives 50 additional contribution.”

“At best, even we might make it into the best 10.”

“This is our last chance to turn the tables. No need to pay attention to the others. Since this is the last anyway, take care of the people in our party only.”

“Cleric-nim, do not use recovery magic on other parties and save your Mana.”

The players were busily whispering amongst themselves in groups of twos and threes.

Ark was busy in his own way because there were more people he had to tend. “Once the battle starts, there won’t be time to survey the situation. The ones in the most danger will be the low-level Militia. You earned quite a lot of contribution from the scorch cannon, so you absolutely mustn’t be too greedy for contribution. Do you understand? Surviving is most important.”

“Yes, understood.”

Roco also nodded with a totally nervous expression. With Platoons 1, 2, 3, the Militia, the Jackson Guard, and even the Sylphid Knights, the headcount was nearly 179. In addition, the young Lord was mapping the details of the operation and conveying it to the players. However, it was certain that once the battle broke out, the players would act on their own, blinded by the experience and contribution.

In the end, only you can take responsibility for your own life.

Of course, it was the same for Ark. The only thing he could do for the Militia was to give them food that raised their maximum Health by 300. Once the battle started, he wouldn’t have the time or the inclination to help others.

‘A battle where you have to improve your results with your ability alone!’

It was actually the situation Ark had hoped for.

“What are you going to do?”

Ark looked at Shambala, who was sitting with a relaxed face.

The promise with Shambala was that he would help until the end of the event quest. But Ark had given him the item he wanted after Operation Bomb the Scorch Cannons had ended. Snake had already thrown up everything within its belly. It was a shame to let the item take up a space in his bag, and Ark had judged that he had done as much work as promised. And also, if he really had to say it, he didn’t want to keep Shambala tied down with such terms because he, personally, really liked Shambala. Of course, no matter how much Ark liked him, he hadn’t shaved off even 1 Gold from the 300.

“I’m not all that interested in the contribution, but... I’ll do it with you. ‘Cause it’s fun to fight alongside you.”

It appeared that Shambala also liked Ark quite a bit.

“It’s the Demonic Army!”

Just then, the Magician who had been on watch with Night Vision shouted from one side.

Ark also used Eyes of the Cat as he turned his gaze. A thick swarm of monsters were coming into the valley. Shadows, Avengers, Hiptons... but they were on a completely different level from the monsters they had faced before. Players and NPCs, alike, saw that, while the monsters looked the same, their levels and equipment were all different. The monsters coming into the valley were all draped in durable armor, and they were also twice as large in size.

The faces of the players hardened like stone.

‘Level 100 monsters are mixed in too.’

The levels above the monsters’ heads were a whopping 90~100!

The players were mostly level 70~80. Only Platoon 1, commanded by Alan, maintained an average level of 80, but even then, they couldn't display 100% of their ability due to the influence of the Dark Fog. On the other hand, the monsters received the darkness attribute bonus, and, considering the levels alone, the difference between the two groups was enormous.

However, Ark's drive was surging up instead. Ark's level had finally reached 75, but calculating in the darkness attribute bonus, his stats were at level 97. There was no difficulty in hunting them even if he didn't make a party.

'Alright, it's worth doing at this level. There isn't even a penalty for not being in the raid. The higher the level, the higher the base contribution points should be. No, let's not worry about other people. My goal is Alan alone. My contribution is still nearly 20,000 away from his. What will determine how much I can reduce that difference in this battle is currently my skill.'

Like a predator watching his prey, Ark gripped his sword as he readied his body. A short while passed, and the Demonic Army had approached until they were right in front. Suddenly, a resonant hoofbeats rang throughout the valley as a group charged towards the Demonic Army. The group shooting forward with their spears erect was Jackson's elite force, the Sylphid Knights.

"It's the decisive moment. FOR JACKSON'S PEACE!"

"WOOAAH, FOR JACKSON'S PEACE!"

"Kekeke? A-ambush!"

"Humans are here, stop them!"

The Shadows at the forefront burst out in shock as they raised their shields. Metallic sounds rang out as spears and shields collided. Taking hits from the accelerated spears, the Shadows went flying everywhere.

They were indeed Jackson Province's ultimate corps, the Sylphid Knights! They fully paraded the skills that had cut off the monster supply route as they went around the province separately during the

quest's progression. Once the Sylphid Knights charged, the Demonic Army's formation broke instantaneously.

Cross sprang up as he raised his sword. "Now's the time, attack the flanks!"

"WOOAAH!"

The players hiding in ambush along the flanks of the valley poured out. As players cast their top skills simultaneously, the dark field brightened like daylight. The skills used by the players were mostly offensive skills, but buffs or assisting magic casted by Magicians or Priests were numerous as well. With the effect of the AOE curse skill used by the Demonic Army overlapping on top of that, colorful message windows popped up like crazy before Ark's eyes. There were so many that it was impossible to tell who had used what skill, whether it had applied to him, or if that was a buff or a curse.

But Ark didn't pay any attention to the messages. 'The effect will disappear since the curses and buffs will mostly cancel out anyway. No need to pay attention to other things. No matter how many enemies there are, my opponent is only the one in front of me anyway!'

He didn't even summon Dedric. With countless players around, he had to restrict his skills — there was a great danger of taking an attack from a player who mistook Dedric for a monster. He broke away from the Militia and the Guard too. He had come this far receiving their help out of necessity, but, right now, everyone was a teammate and also competition. In the end, you could only ensure your life with your own skills.

'I'm definitely more comfortable alone. Whether I die or live, it's my responsibility.'

That's right, this was originally Ark's fighting style.

Ark concentrated all his attention on just his sword and the monster before his eyes.

"Kekeke, Human! Die!"

“Shut up and die, DARK BLADE!”

Ark narrowed the gap between them in an instant and struck the throat of the charging Shadow. Unleashing continuous roundhouse kicks at the staggering Shadow, its Health fell by 70% as it collapsed limply. When he loosed another Dark Blade on top of that, the Shadow shrieked as it disappeared.

‘I’ve gotta defeat as many enemies as possible from the start.’

If a drawn-out war began, only the strong monsters would be left. If the players swarmed in then, of course it would become difficult to get points. So he had to secure his contribution by killing even one more monster at the very beginning, even if he had to abuse his Mana.

‘Riposte!’

Ark parried the attack flying in at him as he immediately chained with Counter Attack. As the chain skill activated, the Shadow went flying. Thanks to that, three to four monsters all fell over. Ark immediately ran at them and swung his sword left and right.

Po-po-po-pow!

The continuously bursting critical hits!

The Shadows who were wearing plate armor posed no problem for Ark. The weak points revealed by Eyes of the Cat were the joints of the armor, where defense didn’t apply! Having reached the peak of accuracy, Ark’s sword furrowed into the joints as if being sucked in and dealt critical hits. Wearing the heavy plate armor, the monsters’ reaction speed was slow. Also, other status abnormalities registered frequently from his kicks. Moreover, the Dark Blade that occasionally shot out ignored defense altogether. The armor meant nothing to Ark.

His counter attacking strengthened as he blocked the attacks rushing in from all directions. The fighting instinct that he had repressed for a while due to watching out for the Guard and Militia revived. His entire body’s senses sharpened as vigor surged forth.

“So you crawled out to die, Human!”

The lizard-riding Avenger's breastplate sparkled as it thrust its sword. Ark twisted to slide past the sword, then stepped onto the lizard to spring up. Soaring into the sky, Ark's heel kick plummeted straight down and slammed into the top of the Avenger's head. Reeling with a stun hex, the Avenger lost its balance and rolled off. The finisher was the Double Critical Chance made possible by its defenseless state!

Ark wasn't one to miss that chance. His sword slid in between the armor with a metallic hiss, cutting the Avenger's throat.

Shambala's skill was so compatible with Ark that it was surprising. When Shambala attracted the enemy's attention with 'Blink,' the rate of hexes with Ark's kicks increased greatly. Also, since both of them had professions that could use the Backstab effect, monsters fell into critical condition in just three to four hits if they attacked from the back and front.

Even while unleashing a combo attack like that, the two didn't need words. If Ark moved first, Shambala naturally fell into step with him, and vice versa. That special “something” only two people trained in martial arts could share was between them. They bore down upon the monsters like fish in their element.

However, the overall battle situation was inching towards the Demonic Army, bit by bit. The power balance had tipped because supporting fire from the Mana-depleted Magicians and Archers died down after several minutes of battle, and the Warriors were also collapsing one after another. But there was a greater reason.

‘That bastard Alan...!’

Alan's party, which was in fact the strongest in the garrison, did not go forward aggressively. Since the beginning of the fight, they posed at the outskirts and were assuming a wait-and-see approach. Even when the party right next to them was annihilated, they simply sat back and watched. Since he wasn't the commander anymore, his attitude was totally unconcerned.

That attitude of Alan's suddenly changed when flames filled the valley.

Shhriieek! BOOOOOM!

The black fireball crossed the valley and fell onto the valley. Enormous flames flared as monsters were instantly melted down.

“IT’S THE SCORCH CANNON!”

The tiring players burst out in cheers as they turned their heads.

The scorch cannon stood high on a faraway hill. The scorch cannon had positioned itself and was beginning to let loose supporting fire at last. Finishing its recharging, the scorch cannon spewed flames again. Every time that happened, the Health of the monsters, who were packed in like sardines, plummeted.

Alan's party ran into battle right after that.

“Now's the time, attack! Judgement of the Sacred Earth!”

Charging down the valley, a flashy halo swept out with Alan at the center. AOE magic that dealt Holy damage to all monsters of the darkness attribute!

In a single blow, the scores of monsters with their Health at nearly rock bottom could not endure the ceaseless damage and exploded. It wasn't just Alan. The party members who leapt into battle with him cast AOE skills like crazy with the Mana they had been saving up. ‘Arrow Shower,’ which poured forth countless arrows like a rain from the Archer, the Magician's ‘Inferno’ that enveloped a space of 10 meters in flames, the Warrior's ‘Shock’ that struck a maximum of 8 monsters with the shield in one blow!

All of them were skills that sucked an enormous amount of Mana — their Mana already depleted, the other players could only look on dumbly.

‘Alan, you bastard, so you were aiming for this after all.’

Ark ground his teeth with an enraged expression.

The majority of the monsters had lost at least 70% Health from the scorch cannon and the players' attacks. With AOE magic piled onto them layer by layer, there was no way the monsters could withstand it. One AOE magic brought down scores; Alan's party was accumulating an outrageous amount of contribution.

Even after that, the battlefield was dominated by Alan.

'So there's a reason why people followed Alan even while cursing him.'

His first sight of the Holy Knight Alan's fighting really took the cake.

"Immortal Aura!"

As Alan used a Holy Knight exclusive skill, his surroundings were enveloped in white light. It was an aura that reduced the damage his party members took from darkness attribute monsters by 30%. Moreover, though normal Paladins could only use one aura, the Holy Knight could stack them. Afterwards, Alan used an aura called 'Celestial Light' and Mana recovery speed increased by 30%. As a result, the Mana of Alan's party didn't decrease by much even as they cast skills. Simply being in Alan's party gave you this much of an additional effect. The fact that Platoon 1 players had held the best 10 in contribution all this time was a completely inevitable result. That was why Alan had been able to command the volunteer troops despite the mishaps.

Was that all? Astride a horse, Alan even had mobility. He ran faster than anyone to the place where the scorch cannon had fired and cast his AOE skill. Capable of taking down five Shadows in 2~3 minutes, Ark and Shambala also had an extremely fast hunting speed, but they couldn't compare to Alan, who melted down scores in a single blow.

'Are these the Holy Knight skills I've only heard of?' It felt like a wet blanket was being thrown over his motivation. 'So there was a secret to his 40,000 contribution points. Dammit. If it's like this, it's obvious I can't catch up with him even if I fight to the death. I'm pissed, but only Alan can hunt like that.'

If the Dark Walker was a profession that specialized in soloing and PVP, then the Holy Knight was one that specialized in group battle. With their profession characteristics, there was no way Ark could win against him in a group battle. Moreover, Alan had now broken up the raid and had parted from other players. There was really no reason for him to play the hypocrite and let them secure contribution. Because of that, he indiscriminately strutted around the battlefield as he indifferently fired skills on monsters that another player had reduced to half Health. Even the Shadow that Ark had beaten into critical condition collapsed from one of his AOE skills.

‘Dammit, my fighting drive is really being put out.’

“DAMN IT, that’s too much!”

“The cheap bastard, coming out like this! Let’s go before Alan takes it all!”

The players raged at Alan’s outrageousness, but there was no way to stop him. Also, a chance to win the losing battle appeared as a result of Alan’s actions, so there was no use cursing him either.

‘Still, for Alan to be the one getting the most contribution...’

Right when Ark was bursting in anger—

GRRRR, ROAAAR!

A roar exploded from the rear of the Demonic Army. At the vibrations that shook the area, everyone’s attention turned to the direction from whence the sound had come. The monsters that had been pressing in ceaselessly parted to the sides as an enormous monster appeared. A monster, 20 meters in height, with its entire body covered in black flames! The demon was a dragon from the waist down and had the appearance of a human from the torso, which was covered with red armor.

“GRRRRR, LAUGHABLE SCUM. YOU DARE TO BLOCK MY WAY...”

Tongues of black flames flickered out every time he opened his mouth.

A red message popped up before Ark's eyes.

— The boss monster 'Lord of Darkness Valderas' has emerged!

'Valderas! That guy is...!'

Every player halted and stared at Valderas.

"I WILL RECLAIM MY TERRITORY AND DRINK OF YOUR FLESH AND BLOOD!"

An terrible energy befitting of his size poured from his flashing eyes. An overwhelming existence that silenced the battlefield instantaneously! But the emotion that flared into the players' eyes was not just horror. Their happiness was greater instead. A certain number of enemies had to be defeated for Valderas to appear. It meant the quest was entering its final stage.

Now, if they just took down Valderas, the quest that had gone on for 3 days would end. Regardless of their ranking, the people who survived until the final battle had accumulated a lot of contribution points' if they just defeated Valderas, they would be rewarded for their 3 days of effort.

"You get contribution points just from hitting Valderas!"

"Let's defeat Valderas and finish the quest!"

"Concentrated attack!"

People pressed forward like a swarm of bees.

"That bastard is the evil that threw Jackson Castle into despair!"

The Sylphid Knights and the Guard also raised their long swords high as they charged. Countless magic strikes and arrows bombarded him and Warriors surrounded Valderas, swinging their swords.

But Valderas was ridiculously strong. Even after taking countless attacks, there wasn't even a sign that his Health had dropped at all. Enveloped in black flames, even curse magic didn't work on

Valderas.

“FLIES!”

Valderas swung an enormous iron mace. The durability of steel shields became 0 in an instant and broke. The Warriors who lost their shields were hit by the iron mace and were flung away. Ark used that chance to approach Valderas’ rear and thrust with his sword. Contribution would be awarded if he just dealt damage. He couldn’t just sit around and watch.

“Dark Blade!”

A Backstab and a critical hit ignoring defense! But Valderas didn’t even turn his head. It wasn’t even an attack worth his attention. Rather, the black flames encircling Valderas dealt Ark damage when he successfully attacked.

– You have taken 100 damage from Valderas’ ‘Bastion of Corrupt Flames.’

– You have caught a ‘Burn’ and will take 10 damage every 10 seconds for 1 minute.

“Holy shit!”

It meant he would take 160 damage every time he unleashed an attack. To say that contribution points would be given every time you damaged Valderas, it seemed there was no such thing as free in the world after all.

“GRRRR, DID YOU BLOCK MY WAY WITH SKILLS AMOUNTING TO JUST THIS?”

Valderas swung his iron mace like a windmill.

A gale was swept up as Valderas dealt enormous damage to the all

the players surrounding him. But, the attack did not end there. Then Valderas opened his maw wide and black flames spewed out. The special skill of the Draconics, Breath!

Four Warriors who were reduced to just 50% Health from the horrible AOE attack fell over without even a chance to pull out recovery potions. If they were level 70~80 Warriors, their Health should be at least 1,000 at 50%. Moreover, they were wrapped up in plate armor so their defense should be over 200. Even so, they couldn't take two hits and collapsed. Ark had rapidly unleashed evasive maneuvers but he also took considerable damage. When the Warriors fell over limply, the morale of the players plummeted.

"Damn, how the fuck are we supposed to win against a demon like this?"

"Recovery magic can't even keep up with the damage we're getting while attacking!"

"But the Magicians and Warriors have it better! Our arrows aren't even hitting him altogether!"

But there was one, sole exception.

"Holy Sword!"

Alan ran in as he swung his flashing sword. As he struck the demon with the sparkling sword, Valderas seemed to take quite a shock as his Health decreased noticeably. Alan cast Holy Sword onto all of his party members and lashed out at Valderas.

Once Holy Sword was used, Valderas' auto counter skill was nulled, too.

"A Holy Knight indeed!"

"Dammit, I should've joined Alan's party after all."

"But there's a way to block that auto counter!"

The Magicians cast Water magic all at once. If Water offensive spells were used against the flame shielded Valderas, he took damage, as slight as it was. And if Water magic was cast onto a

sword, they found out that the flame counter was nulled. But most of the Magicians were out of Mana and couldn't grant that magic effect to more than a few people.

'Dammit, to think that I have to sit and watch, leaving that lump of experience and contribution...'

Having to watch Alan excitedly attack Valderas, Ark's insides burned. Moreover, he even had to watch Platoon 1 and Andel raise their contribution, so his innards were about to turn to ashes. But, there was no other way.

A formation where Alan's party and the few high-leveled players with the magic effect besieged Valderas and the rest of the players blocked the minions pressing in from their surroundings was naturally formed. Like it or not, they could only help Alan since the quest had to be defeated first.

"anyway, there's a chance to win!"

"If we have Alan and the scorch cannon, we might even be able to win!"

After several minutes passed, Valderas's Health fell to about 50%. No matter how impressive a boss he was, he couldn't withstand more than 30 players gulping down recovery potions like water as they attacked like crazy.

At last, the scorch cannon's recharging was finished as well. A laser-like light extended from the scorch cannon and took aim on Valderas, the players backed away like an ebbing tide. Simultaneously, the fireball flew through the air and landed a direct hit on Valderas.

BOOOOM!

"Good shot!"

"It may be a boss monster, but it should've taken a lot of damage!"

The players shouted with excited voices. But the sight of Valderas that emerged afterwards made their faces pale.

"H-how could this be—!"

“Didn’t he recover Health instead?!”

Surprisingly enough, Valderas’ Health had recovered to 70% again.

“N-no way, can he even *absorb* flame damage?”

They realize too late. The black flames enveloping his body even stronger than before, Valderas smiled faintly.

“GRRR, YOU ROTTEN HUMANS! AURA OF BLACK FLAME!”

– Valderas has used ‘Aura of Black Flame.’
--

All monsters within 100 meters of Valderas will receive the ‘Bastion of Black Flame.’

All the monsters pressing in around them were wrapped in black flames, like Valderas.

“Dammit, fucking ridiculous! All the monsters have the Bastion of Black Flame?!”

“Now we can’t even use the scorch cannon!”

Even though it was useless against Valderas, the scorch cannon had been protecting the players from the Demonic Army onward. It was thanks to the scorch cannon that Alan’s party was able to focus on Valderas. But if all the monsters received the protection of flames, the scorch cannon would really be rendered useless. There was no way the players could block the Demonic Army since they took damage with every attack.

“BURN IN THE FIRES OF HELL, HUMANS! FLAME RAGE!”

Valderas jeered at the shocked people yet again as he used a skill. The entire valley shook as if there was an earthquake as the ground split right open. Then, hundreds of flames surged from the rift and exploded when they collided with players. The flames flying around were the size of tennis balls. They weren’t so fast that body motions polished in the heat of battle couldn’t avoid them, but it was almost

impossible for ordinary players to avoid flames of this speed. There was nothing more to be said about the Warriors wearing heavy plate armor. The low-leveled Militia group took even more severe damage. Roco took a hit from the flames right off the bat, and JusticeMan was helping another person when he collapsed from a hit to his back. Players at level 80 lost 30% of their Health in a single blow. Of course the level 30~40 Militia would perish with one hit.

There was nothing Ark could do, even as he watched them fall.

‘Dammit, something like this—!’

The defensive formation collapsed in an instant. The Demonic Army or Valderas were no longer the problem anymore.

“RETREAT, ALL HANDS RETREAT!”

They heard Cross’ scream from afar. He had ultimately judged that the damage would only worsen in their current state. But even retreat was already impossible. They had made a circular formation in order to pour concentrated fire onto Valderas and were buried within hundreds of Demonic Army monsters. As they watched their teammates falling over one by one, the same message popped up before every player.

Annihilation and quest failure!

‘No fucking way. There’s no way to win with Valderas having 100% resistance to fire!’

Ark dodged the successive balls of flame as he clenched his teeth.

‘That 100% fire resistance, it’s an option attached to a Legendary item. If it’s not an item, then that resistance can only be defeated in the underwater world. Flames would be no good there, but here...’

It was then. Ark recalled the map that had been attached to the written instructions.

‘That’s right. Up this valley, there is...!’

Ark summoned Dedric as he rolled on the ground.

“Dedric, fly! Raymond is controlling the scorch cannon. Go to Raymond and tell him to smash a fireball into the river bank!”

“What? What the hell?”

“Shut up and just do as I say! There’s no time!”

As Ark screamed, Dedric floundered as he flew to the scorch cannon.

And then several minutes later, when half of the forces had fallen from Valderas and the Demonic Army’s flaming attacks, the scorch cannon suddenly rotated towards the North. Then a roar sounded as a fireball shot out.

Watching the fireball disappear into the darkness, Ark’s eyes flashed.

‘It’s a success. Now we just have to hold on!’

And, a short while afterwards, he felt a vibration at the bottom his feet. At first it was a barely noticeable, small vibration, but it soon became violent enough to make his body shake. Ark dodged the flying flames as he opened his bag.

“Sharkman’s Shackles!” Ark rapidly changed his shoes and shouted at Shambala. “Shambala, grab onto me!”

“What?”

Slipping past flames with qigong, Shambala spoke incredulously. The vibrations seemed to grow stronger, then suddenly, a roar burst from up the valley with a rumble.

ROOOAAR, CRAASH!

“Water? How?”

Players, NPCs, and even Valderas and the monsters all halted and burst out in astonishment. An enormous amount of water shook the earth as it rushed in. Located up the valley was the river where the steel-armored merchant ship sent by the Merchant Guild had sank. Having confirmed on the map that came with the written instructions,

Ark had blown up the bank between the valley and the riverside with a fireball. Of course, the overflowing river water followed the slope and rushed down into the valley at an enormous speed.

‘If this isn’t underwater, then all I have to do is make it underwater!’

The enormous water attack rushed in, uprooting rocks and trees!

Naturally, you would take enormous damage if hit head on. Players paled immediately as they fled in every direction. Then Ark spotted Andel among the panicked players. For a moment, a wicked gleam flashed from Ark’s eyes.

‘Andel! It seems your fate is to die at my hands after all!’

“Snake, I have a request. Do you think you can move?”

The limp Snake raised its head high and nodded.

“Even if it’s hard, suffer just this once. That bastard is an enemy who messed with me many times. No matter what you have to do, tie up his legs so he can’t run away!”

Hiss, hiss!

At the mention that he was Ark’s enemy, Snake hissed sharply as it dropped from Ark’s waist. Then it nimbly crawled on the ground and wrapped itself around Andel’s legs. At this totally unexpected attack, Andel fell flat on his face. Then he stared at Snake with flummoxed eyes and discovered Ark too late.

“Y-you bastard, what have you done...!”

“Who’s the one who said wait and see?”

“You’re gonna try to do something to me with a snake like this?”

Andel scowled as he raised his sword.

“Too late.”

Then as Ark murmured with an evil smile, the torrent filled the valley with a fierce roar. The torrent alone didn’t damage the players, but the rocks and trees dragged in with the wave were different. The

writhing Andel took a hit to the head from a large boulder and lost 70% of his Health. Snake took damage at the same time and was forcefully recalled, but Snake's Health was just 50, and thus, Ark only received 25 damage.

"Arghhh, d-damn it!! YOU, I'LL KILL YOU!"

Andel screamed as he was carried down with the torrent.

"Don't make me laugh. I wouldn't have even messed with you if I was gonna end it here."

Thanks to wearing the Sharkman's Shackles, the torrent didn't affect Ark at all. And, if he wasn't affected by the torrent, simply avoiding the rocks and trees rushing in was no problem. But Ark ran towards a boulder that was quickly approaching.

'Riposte!'

Ark parried the rock with his chain skill. In that moment, the rock was flung away with a heavy clang.

"AGH! W-what...!"

Andel's face drained of color. The rock Ark had pushed away with his chain skill, was shooting straight towards him like an arrow. Andel urgently raised his shield, but there was no way he could make proper defensive movements while being tossed around by the torrent.

CRUNCH!

With the sound of something being crushed, Andel's face crumpled in. And then he dropped the sword he was holding as he disappeared, swept up by the rapids. Ark had killed him, but there was no reason for him to become Chaotic since he hadn't attacked Andel directly.

"I'll let you off this time with this. But the next time you show up in front of me, I'll definitely make your stats 0."

Ark grinned as he picked up the sword.

While Ark was taking his petty revenge, the deluge had completely engulfed the valley.

Encircled in flames, Valderas and the monsters that had gained the fire attribute were swept away by the rapids; steam whooshed out with the clamorous sound of water meeting hot metal. As a result, the valley was shrouded in fog made from the steam.

Water. It was Ark's world once again.

The Underwater Master

CRAAASH!

The violent current struck Valderas and his Demonic Army. The Demonic Army, and even Valderas, couldn't resist and were swept away by the current. There was nothing more to be said about the players. The frantically running users went flying in the torrent like leaves in a storm. Several perished after taking a hit from a rock or tree. However, despite taking the rapids head-on, Ark was perfectly fine. This was thanks to the Sharkman's Shackles, which nulled environmental effects.

'It's just as I expected!'

Swept into the current, the Bastion of Flame protecting Valderas and the Demonic Army completely disappeared. What's more, the monsters crashing into the water took enormous damage. However, those effects were only an extra. Ark's true goal was the underwater penalty on the monsters. Ark had already experienced the terror of the water penalty. Nature's environmental penalty, which made one unable to move properly, let alone attack or defend!

The environmental penalty applied to monsters as well. Moreover, since the monsters were wearing plate armor, the penalty would be many times worse. Indeed, even after the torrent subsided, the monsters couldn't regain their balance and flailed around. In other words, like blind fishes!

"Just what did you...!"

Shambala shouted with an aghast voice as he gushed out air bubbles. Ark pulled out a Mermaid Scale, flicked it over to him, and grinned.

"You'll get it once you see it from here on out, though only if you can follow me."

Ark changed his shoes and armor into the Norad Boots, which raised movement speed and evasion rate, and the water penalty nulling Guardian Armor of the Merpeople. Then the weight pressing down his body completely disappeared. Though he was underwater, his movements were natural, as if he was running around on the plains.

“Alright, shall we begin? Eyes of the Cat!”

Having stretched his joints with cracking noises, Ark ran towards the floundering monsters.

“Just who the hell is this dude? And what’s with this scale?” With a dumb look, Shambala stared at Ark’s back as he ran like the wind.

Ark ran in the water.

Po-po-po-pow!

The Health of the monsters Ark grazed past plummeted in an instant.

He didn’t even see the monsters flailing around as enemies anymore. Underwater, level or numbers had no meaning. Though it hadn’t been easy to face even just five monsters only a short while ago, the situation was different now. Even if he was surrounded by twenty to thirty monsters, he was confident he could clear them away in a minute. Having previously received the Bastion of Flame, the monsters took a huge hit to their Health from being submerged. But more than that, what applied most right now was that this place was now underwater!

The water penalty was fatal to those who had never experienced it. When Ark had first gone underwater, he had nearly died several times from monsters 10 levels lower than him. But, he overcame all the difficulties and mastered underwater fighting.

Was that all? Right now, the Guardian Armor of the Merpeople was nullifying the underwater penalty altogether. To Ark, the likes of the floundering monsters were no different from newborn babes. Ark could only see the Shadows, Avengers, and even the Hiptons as experience and contribution. An absolute situation created by the combination of the environmental effect and items!

‘This is my world!’

Looking around, the surviving players were waging fierce battle with the monsters pressing in. Although it was a fight that would give one sweaty palms in its own way, it was an absolute comedy to Ark.

A Warrior lost his balance while swinging his sword, causing him to spin around and around, and a stupid Magician thoughtlessly used lighting magic and ended up damaging himself with the sparks. At least the situation for the Warriors was a little better. Thanks to their heavy plate armor, they sank to the bottom and were able to get their footing. But the Magicians and Archers floating in the water ended up taking concentrated attacks from the monsters pressing in from all directions.

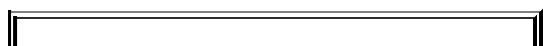
Whenever he saw a player like that, Ark rushed in, killed the monsters, and then calmly disappeared. He wasn’t trying to save them, it was just because it would be a shame to waste the monster’s EXP.

‘This is really a cakewalk!’

Experience and contribution were floating about in the water. All Ark had to do was run around in the water and gobble them up. Where could one find something more exciting than this?

But it wasn’t all enjoyable. The countless japtem floating around with the corpses! Snake had disappeared and his bag was full; since he had to leave behind all those items, his tears hindered his vision. He didn’t even have bag room for the sword Andel had dropped so he was forced to go around carrying it.

Suddenly having to carry a sword in both hands, his movements weren’t as agile as before. His center of balance had changed subtly so the actions he had become used to all this time didn’t connect like he wanted. But it was one more precious item he had picked up. Even if he died he had absolutely no thought of dropping the weapon that fell into his hands. Also, this was underwater; his actions being slowed down was no threat against the monsters receiving the enormous penalty.



||— You have dealt a critical hit.||

Whenever Ark swung his sword, a critical hit burst out along with a shriek.

That was because the evasion rate of the monsters was at rock bottom due to being underwater. Kicks were also the same. Each time he kicked, a monster would lose its balance and go flying. Nevermind counter attacking, simply swimming back to Ark took a long time. Killing monsters like nothing.

Even without the Guardian Armor of the Merpeople, Ark was one who had dodged the countless tentacles of the Jellyfish, and had stabbed his sword into the pin-sized gap in a Crab's joints. He could deal critical hits on the monsters going in slow motion with his eyes closed. Moreover, with monsters down to 30-40% Health, it wasn't a battle but a slaughter.

Every monster that moved disappeared, as if melted away by Ark. Many monsters appeared even after that, but there were none that could keep up with Ark's movements.

"Kekeke, that Human, how can he move this fast?"

"Ack! H-he's strong!"

The monsters' words were their last. It was literally a full-blown sweep!

'I want to clear away all the monsters if I can, but...' Ark sighed in regret.

The countless EXP and contribution lying around him! Ark could hog it all if he just put his mind to it. Unfortunately, he didn't have enough time for that.

Many monsters were already fleeing out of the water. Of course, the surviving players would take down those monsters on their own. But if Valderas left the water, there was no knowing how the situation would change. If Valderas got out of the water and regained his strength, the method to complete the quest would disappear. In

other words, no matter how much contribution he accumulated, he wouldn't be able to receive a reward.

'I've got to win while he's underwater!'

Ark ran in the murky water as he chased after Valderas' trail.

'There's no time! Where is he? How far was he swept away?'

Ark dashed all the way downstream like that while annihilating the monsters pressing in.

Thump, thump, thump.

Just then, tremors suddenly arose underwater. He looked in their direction and glimpsed the sight of an enormous shadow moving heavily in the murky water. A demon with a dragon's body and the upper torso of a Shadow!

'Valderas!'

The final boss monster that dozens hadn't been able to defeat even after bombarding him! But the situation was different now. Valderas only had 40% Health left. The 70% Health had been cut down by 30% after being swept by the torrent. It did seem that the stronger the flame power, more damage it took from water. In addition, unlike the monsters that had been granted the Bastion of Flame for a set period of time, Valderas' attribute was originally fire. He was taking steady damage as the intense reaction of the flames and water erupted around his body.

'Now's the time. If I miss him here, there won't be a second chance!'

"Valderas, I'm not going to lose you!"

Ark blocked Valderas' way. Valderas spat out a savage cry as he swung his iron mace.

"FUCK OFF, *HUMAN*—!"

But the force of the mace was not the same as before. The attack was as slow as a fly coming down to rest, and there were no fearsome black flames. It wasn't hard to evade. But Ark resolved

himself to take the damage, parried, and counter attacked.

‘Riposte!’

— You have dealt a critical hit!

As the chain skill burst out, Valderas was knocked back. He had gone out of his way to use Riposte in order to push Valderas into a deeper place so he couldn’t escape.

Originally, Riposte could only knock back monsters up to the medium size; large monsters had weight to them so the knock back effect activation rate was very low. But this was underwater, so Valderas’ size or weight were of no concern when the monster couldn’t even gain its center of balance.

‘As expected! This guy is no different from a regular monster now!’

He was certain of it after one blow. The fire attributed Valderas was extremely weakened. Also, the flame skills that had made Valderas invincible were all sealed. Lastly, with the Bastion of Flame gone, the damage went through properly. He had so much Health that even a critical hit only shaved away only 0.1%, but it was huge progress compared to when there had been no effect at all.

‘I can win. I can fight him on my own.’

After having unsummoned Dedric, Ark resummoned him again.

Dedric, who had flown to the scorch cannon, appeared in front of his nose with a frightened expression.

“Master! Ack, this guy... isn’t he Valderas?”

“Dedric, don’t talk back and attract his attention!” Ark ordered as he handed over a Mermaid Scale.

“Uhuhuhu, you fat bastard! Playing around with something of your level is no problem if we’re underwater!”

It seemed Dedric also took the struggling Valderas lightly. Dedric immediately showed off the underwater skills he had learned in the

sea as he started to harass Valderas.

“THE LIKES OF A HUMAN WOULD DARE TO STAND AGAINST ME, A DRACONIAN WARRIOR, ALONE?!”

“You haven’t grasped the situation yet? I’m the one who threw you underwater. Why do you think I did that?”

“WHAT?”

“You stupid lizard, it’s because you’re no match for me here.”

“Y-YOU DARE TO INSULT ME!”

Valderas shrieked in rage as he went crazy. But the more he did so, the further he fell into Ark’s pace. Even if he didn’t use Eyes of the Cat, he could see numerous weak points in a glance. Ark’s sword didn’t go off by even a hair’s breadth and accurately thrust into the weak points.

BOOOM!

Even against a boss monster, he dealt critical hits at a rate of 70%.

Ark, who didn’t receive underwater penalty, could also kick without any problems. When Valderas wavered even a little, he let loose a barrage of kicks. Beaten like crazy with his Health being shaved away, even Valderas seemed to start to feel a little fear. He used all his strength to try and get out of the water by swinging his iron mace. But the fight became even easier as Valderas panicked and swung the mace around. Ark rammed all the mace strikes with Riposte and Valderas was actually pushed into a deeper place.

“ARRGHH, TH-THIS BASTARD!”

Valderas’ Health began to hit the ground under the shallow attacks of the Critical Hits, Counter Attacks, and kicks.

However, it wasn’t as if Ark didn’t take any damage. Although he didn’t have to worry about the Bastion of Flame, the monsters in the area gathered to protect the boss. Though they were just weak monsters taking the underwater penalty, it was impossible to dodge all the attacks pouring in from dozens of monsters. Even worse, he

had to keep using Riposte in order to keep Valderas from escaping, so he had to take some damage. Also, even if he successfully dodged, it didn't completely nullify the damage. 90% of the damage was reduced with a perfect dodge, so if he dodged ten attacks, it was the same as getting hit once. The damage was even greater if he defended with Parry. When Ark blocked Valderas' attack with a parry in order to use Riposte, he lost 200 Health in an instant.

'However, I can control Parry. I can just use it appropriately while checking my Health. Also, the Shadows' attacks won't be a problem if I occasionally take care them as I drink recovery potions.'

He had diligently saved up the recovery potions he'd gotten at the start of the event quest and the potions he'd picked up while doing the quest. He had a whopping 7 Intermediate Recovery Potions which recovered 300 Health each! He could recover 2,100 Health at any time. The slowed monsters' attacks wouldn't be able to hinder him from drinking the potions.

'I can win! I can beat him!'

Ark was confident of his victory.

Then, the fog that had filled the valley slowly disappeared. Only then were the people who had narrowly escaped from the water able to see Valderas. It was hard to see properly with the fire and water reaction constantly spewing steam around Valderas, but they could at least tell that he was fighting someone underwater— with unbelievable movements.

"It's Valderas!"

"He's fighting with someone!"

"Who is it? Is someone fighting Valderas alone?"

"Damn, just look at those movements! How is he moving like that underwater?"

"I was only barely able to get out of the water..."

"Is it Alan?"

“No, I saw Alan gasping while swimming in the opposite direction earlier.”

As they watched Ark, who was going head to head with Valderas, the players shouted.

“Lo-look at that! Valderas only has 20% Health left!”

“He could really win!”

“This is no time to be dallying around! Let’s attack too!”

The Magicians, Archers, and Clerics started shooting concentrated fire at Valderas.

“YOU FLIES!”

Valderas leapt up, extended his head, and shot a fireball. The Magicians hurriedly put up a shield, but the fireball erupted as it blew the shield to bits. Five to six players went forward needlessly, took massive damage, and were forcefully logged out.

Valderas was as scary as ever, but his opponent, Ark, was not outside of the water, but inside.

“Your opponent is me. Valderas!” Ark shouted as he struck Valderas’ leg.

“AUGH, YOU ANNOYING BASTARD!”

Valderas leapt up again and spewed a fireball down below. As the fireball shot into the water, a column of steam erupted up and draped the surroundings in dense fog again.

Ark quickly rotated his body as he dodged the attack. Even though it was a fireball of enormous force, he didn’t take any damage in the explosion underwater. In other words, he just had to avoid a direct hit! Having dodged the fireball, Ark unleashed a barrage of successive kicks!

Boom, boom, boom, boom!

The surface of the water shook as roars erupted.

Then, when about 20 minutes had passed, Valderas, who had felt invincible, fell to below 10% Health and dropped into critical condition. On the other hand, Ark had 40% Health left and also had 4 Intermediate Recovery Potions remaining.

‘I’ve won!’

Ark made a triumphant expression.

Pushing him back into the water with the chain skill, Valderas’ Health fell to 5% under the focused assault. That instant, Valderas suddenly roared and violently smashed the ground with his iron mace. Ark, who had been raining attacks, flinched and took a step back. From his experience, most bosses had their own killer move. They would activate their killer move when their Health fell to a certain level. Indeed, the atmosphere was grave.

Valderas’ body suddenly turned black as the water around him began to boil.

“IMPUDENT HUMAN! FINE. I SHALL ACKNOWLEDGE YOU. YOU ARE STRONG. HOWEVER, EVEN YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO TAKE DOWN *ME* IN THE END. BY MY HONOR, I SWEAR BY THE NAME OF SLAUGHTER THAT I WILL DRAG YOU AND ALL THE HUMANS HERE DOWN TO HELL WITH ME. RAAAH, POWER OF DESTRUCTION!”

At the same time, a red message popped up in front of Ark.

The Lord of Darkness Valderas has activated the skill ‘Curse of Black Flames!’
--

Curse of Flames: A curse skill that automatically activates as soon as Valderas’ Health goes below 5%. When ‘Curse of Black Flames’ is activated, Valderas will become unable to perform any actions. In exchange, his physical defense and magic resistance are both increased by 100%. When the curse is complete, Valderas will self destruct and all living beings within a 1 kilometer radius will receive 5,000 explosive damage regardless of defense or magic resistance.

Remaining time: 30 seconds

Ark's face went pale.

29 seconds, 28 seconds ...

Time passed even as he checked the message.

The message Ark had just checked was received by all the players in the blast radius. They had just been waiting for Valderas to fall as they stared at the surface of the water with bated breaths. And surprisingly enough, their wish was becoming reality. But what kind of absurd skill is this, all of a sudden?!

There was no one here who had more than 5,000 Health. Even the highest leveled Warrior didn't even reach 3,000. It would be no use even if they gulped down recovery potions like crazy. Once the skill was complete, they would definitely die! Jackson Territory would become peaceful again as a result, but the annihilated players would see the quest failure message.

"We, we have to bring him down before that with concentrated fire!"

The players poured in attacks like crazy at the surface of the water, where steam was spewing out. But with his defense increased by 100% with the activation of the skill, there was no sign of Valderas' Health falling. In addition, the surface was so clogged up with steam that they couldn't even aim properly.

"NO WAY!"

"Damn it, let's run away!"

Too late, the players turned and ran. But in the remaining time of 20 seconds; it was impossible even for Magicians, who could use speed spells, to run 1 kilometer in 20 seconds.

And like them, Ark couldn't escape either.

'Damn, have I really come so far only to die like this?'

How far could he get when he was right in front of Valderas' nose?

Only way to live was to take down Valderas within the time limit, but he was already out of Mana. He couldn't even use Dark Blade, which was the only move he had that could ignore defense.

10 seconds, 9 seconds...

Even while he was thinking, the timer went down in front of his eyes.

"Unsummon, unsummon me! I don't need to die with you! I don't wanna die anymoreeeee!" Shouted the panicking Dedric as he held onto Ark.

'That's right!'

At that moment, a thought flashed into Ark's head.

He thought of the scene when Dedric had last died. The battle with Adelaine in Gallic's belly! Back then, Ark had taken down Adelaine and a Rare item fell into his hands.

"Adelaine's Necklace!"

Ark quickly backed away and took out Adelaine's Necklace. He had gotten the level 70 restricted accessory at level 64, so he had packed it away and had forgotten it. But he remembered it thanks to Dedric. And Ark's level was now 75! He had long since passed the level needed to use the necklace.

Ark shouted while equipping the necklace, "Blessing of the Sea Spirit!"

A blue kernel flowed from the pearl and transformed into the form of a beautiful Mermaid. It was the lover of Hero Maban, who had been purified by Ark; the former Queen of the Merpeople, Adelaine.

Adelaine smiled warmly as she looked at Ark. Then she approached him like a spring breeze and lightly kissed him.

Only usable once a day, the special effect of the necklace, Blessing of the Sea Spirit, was invoked!

A 40% increase in defense and 500 Mana recovery!

'This is my last chance!'

Ark's mind ran at a tremendous speed. Now the remaining time was just 5 seconds. He had to kill Valderas within that time!

'I can use Dark Blade five times in 5 seconds. But then I'll be forced to give up on this adventure!'

Ark raised the sword he had pinched from Andel. He hadn't even had time to check it properly. But since it was from Andel, who drank recovery potions like water, it was a Magic item at the very least.

Since he had to break it, tears sprang to his eyes.

But he had no choice. It wasn't like he could break Lancel's Sword just because it was a shame to lose Andel's. Ark switched Andel's sword to his right hand and activated the skill with all his might.

"Blade Storm!"

The killer move of a Dark Walker that consumed an enormous 400 Mana! He had never been able to use the skill because of his lack of Mana and the penalty of having to destroy a sword. Of course, there was no knowing what kind of effect would come out of it, but all he could do right now was to hope it could produce a mighty attack worth 400 Mana and the loss of one sword.

As soon as Ark used the skill, cracks spread like a spider web over the blade. Then, with a flash, the sword broke into shards and raised a vortex.

...Suddenly, all the sound around him disappeared.

In a space of complete silence that blocked the sounds from outside, the shattered sword fragments serenely embroidered the darkness like the Milky Way.

And then, they gathered in one place and shot out in all directions with a tremendous explosion.

BOOOOOOOM!

You have used the skill 'Blade Storm.'
--

The opponent will take 5 unavoidable damage per sword shard. Depending on the sword's performance and the proficiency of the skill, the sword will break into smaller shards and tear the opponent apart.

5 damage for every shard!

In a glance, there looked to be hundreds of shards, and each did 5 damage.

Its power was beyond imagination. As each of the sand-like shards stabbed into Valderas' body, his Health quickly fell from 5% to 0.5% in an instant. Even with his defense raised to 100%, Valderas couldn't handle the enormous damage and dropped to one knee. Valderas' body turned crimson.

Double Critical Chance!

'Now!'

There was only one second remaining, and Ark had 120 Mana left. There was only one skill Ark could believe in and use in the final moment.

"Dedric, this is the final blow. DARK BLADE!"

Ark swung up Lancel's Sword high and brought it down.

— You have dealt double the critical hit with Double Critical Chance. You have dealt a 150% damage critical hit that ignores defense with Dark Blade. 40% damage has been added as a co-op bonus of the magic sword owner Dedric.

— The 'Curse of Black Flames' skill has been cancelled.

As three effects activated at the same time, the curse skill disappeared. At last, Valderas' Health also hit the ground.

'Huff huff huff, I, I made it.'

“HUK! BY A HUMAN, I... IM-IMPOSSIBLE. IMPOSS... KEEUK, KUAAAK!”

Valderas stuttered with an agonized face, and then abruptly screamed towards the sky. Jet black energy swirled from his mouth as it gushed and began to rise. After expelling the black energy for some time, Valderas collapsed, as if completely spent. But even that was for a moment— he suddenly flung his head up.

‘Damn, is he still alive?’

Startled, Ark took a step back.

Luckily, there was no hostility in Valderas’ face. The grey eyes that had emitted foreboding energy had turned to a red as transparent as rubies. After looking around himself like a person who had just woken up, Valderas blew out a long sigh.

“Stranger... thank you...”

“What?”

As Ark replied with a puzzled expression, Valderas spoke with a guilty face.

“I am Valderas... a Warrior with... the blood of the great Fire Draconians. Long ago... when a great evil covered the world... I led the nobles to... protect Jackson Territory... and fought the evil... but the evil was... stronger than I expected. I was drawn by the darkness’ seduction... and walked the path of corruption... and met a dishonorable death at the... hands of Warriors.”

“You died?”

“Yes. I died... even after dying once in the past... I could not... break free from the power of darkness... Rather, my fetters became even stronger.. But your sword... freed me from my chains... How such a thing was possible... even I cannot understand... But I am truly thankful... your sword that drove away... the darkness... has saved the Jackson Territory... I loved.”

Valderas gazed at him profoundly before shaking his head.

“There’s no need... to pity me.”

Of course, he had no thoughts of sympathy. Honestly, he was just scared. Therefore, it would be nice if he would just quietly die already. Ark swallowed the words on his throat.

“You are... similar to someone I knew... like he who loved the darkness... even as he hated it... Warrior... I will warn you for your sake... your strength, that freed me from the darkness... it will be a great threat to the darkness... if I, who fell into darkness, woke again... the darkness that should have disappeared long ago may... awaken again... Stranger... become stronger... The darkness... is strong.”

With that being the last of his super awkward words, Valderas slowly disappeared. Once Valderas faded away, the Shadows in the vicinity also disappeared, as though it melted down.

— You have leveled up.

Successive messages popped up as he rose 3 levels.

“I, I did it!”

Ark had miraculously killed Valderas at last. It was thanks to the item he had remembered in the last moment, Adelaine’s Necklace. Through Adelaine’s help, he was able to use Blade Storm, which he had never been able to use because he lacked Mana. This victory was perhaps a miracle created by Adelaine’s feelings towards Hero Maban. After thinking that, he crinkled his nose.

However, emotions were emotions, and reality was reality.

‘Huhuhu, I should grab the items before the other people crawl over.’

Fortunately, there was no one nearby. They had all fled, terrified by Valderas’ suicide skill. Granted, no one who would object to Ark getting the items anyways. However, it was a rule that one should pick up items without others knowing.

Valderas, the boss of the event quest only a handful out of hundreds

of players had survived! He was a boss Ark had narrowly managed to kill after overcoming several near death instances.

Naturally, a reward worth it all would follow.

Fire Slayer (Unique)			
Weapon Type	Blunt Weapon		
Attack Damage	50~70	Durability	210/350
Weight	70	Usage Restriction	Level 80, 300 Strength
The iron mace used by the Lord of Darkness Valderas. A powerful magic mace made by smelting the magma of Mt. Lava, the origin of the Fire Draconians, it boasts the mighty power to destroy the opponent's defense in an instant. In addition, it is imbued with the strength of Valderas' powerful flames.			
Options: +20% Armor Destruction, Fire Damage +10 Special Option: Can use a 200 damage mini fireball (range 10 meters) three times a day.			

‘A Unique weapon...’

Ark's jaw dropped. It may be a Warrior-only weapon, but it had a whopping damage of 50~70! It was *double* the attack of Lancel's Sword. In addition, the fire attribute did 10 damage! Even the special option was outrageous.

A Unique weapon of this level was hard to even find in the auctions. It even had a distinctive appearance, so there was no doubt that it

would be extremely popular with item collectors.

‘I was worried since my bank account is running low because I’ve used all my money for this month...’

It was worth the trouble. Did people call this a welcome rain at the end of a drought? After changing his job to a pro gamer, he had been very anxious because he hadn’t gotten a decent item. But to think such an incredible item would come into his hands in the event quest!

‘He really lives up to his name as the Lord of Darkness!’

2 items had dropped besides the weapon.

Fire Draconian Scale (Material)

A scale of the Fire Draconians that ruled the northern continent long ago. Made from sturdy keratin, the scale faintly retains its surface sheen; a holy energy of flame is flowing from it. If processed by an outstanding craftsman, a leather product imbued with powerful magic can be made.
--

Lord of Darkness Valderas’ Insignia: Starting item for a level 150 quest.

You need 100 Knowledge of Ancient Relics to identify this item.

The scale had quite a grandiose explanation, but it didn’t look like it could make money right away. He was more interested in the quest starting item. Just looking at the Jeweled Hand Mirror’s case, one could expect a big reward for that kind of quest. But the level requirement was 150, and he needed 100 Knowledge of Ancient Relics. It was still a quest he couldn’t do until the far future.

Before anyone could see, Ark hurriedly threw away cheap items in his bag and stowed the loot.

Just then, a ray of sunlight suddenly shone from above the surface. Lifting his head, he saw the Dark Fog that had covered Jackson gradually fading, revealing the blue sky.

Only after staring up at the brightening sky through the water was Ark able to realize the quest was over. Indeed, the quest was updated with a sound effect afterwards.

Hero Assembly!

* The sub-quest 'Stop Valderas' Advance' has been completed. Through the efforts of Warriors who gathered from various places, the Lord of Darkness Valderas was defeated. The Dark Fog covering Jackson Territory has also disappeared; the time of terror is now over.

The Warriors who survived to the very end and saved Jackson will be granted great honor and Fame. In addition, they will receive a reward if they take their Badge to the Giran Magic Institute.

* You have made a chief contribution in defeating Valderas.

Additional reward:

+20,000 contribution points.

+200 Fame

All missions have succeeded; 'Hero Assembly (Event Quest)' has been completed.

With the completion of the main quest, all contribution points have been added up and the final ranking has been decided.

Ark is currently in tie for 1st place with 50,830 contribution points.

“1st place?”

Ark's eyes became as big as plates at the unbelievable message.

When he received the final quest, Alan had twice as much contribution than Ark. And in the last battle, Alan had monopolized an enormous amount of contribution points with his AOE magic. Because of that, Ark had just about given up, but thanks to the contribution he earned in the ensuing underwater battle and by killing Valderas, he had caught up to Alan in the end.

He couldn't check the name of the other person who had tied for 1st place with him, but it was undoubtedly Alan.

‘Still, to tie for 1st place...’

He didn't like that he had to share 1st place with Alan. He would've been able to overtake Alan if he had just killed one more monster before fighting Valderas... when he thought about it, it was such a shame. Still, he was 1st anyway. Thinking about what reward he would get from the Magic Institute made his heart race already. Then, another message popped up.

Your combined contribution has reached 1st place and can be registered on Jackson's message board.

If registered on the board, you will automatically enter the Hall of Fame and will earn an additional 2,000 EXP and 100 Fame. In addition, your name will become known to the many NPCs who see the board and you will receive respect.

Will you register?

It was a bonus given to the players in the top 10, who could put their names onto the message board. Ark shook his head without even considering it.

“Cancel.”

NPCs weren't the only ones who saw the message board. Players would see it, too. There were, of course, many players who wanted

their names known no matter what, but Ark absolutely rejected it. First of all, he didn't want his name put right next to Alan as the tied 1st place, and he didn't want the attention he'd receive. All he wanted was to quietly and discreetly collect the profit.

"Let's go, Dedric. Our business here is finished."

Ark walked underwater towards Jackson Castle. The long event quest had ended.

Jackson's Hero

"Huhuhu, since I resolved the quest and even took 1st place, I'll definitely get a ton of bonus points!"

In the corner of a dark room, Hyun-woo grinned while his fingers tapped on the keyboard as though they were flying. After returning to Jackson, Hyun-woo had immediately logged out and gotten onto his computer. This was because all of the candidates had received an email telling them to submit a report as soon as the event quest ended. But even without the email, Hyun-woo wanted to write up a report right away.

Although he didn't register in the Hall of Fame, of course the Global Exos planning department would be aware Hyun-woo had tied for 1st place in contribution. If he sent in a report with the details on top of that, he would be able to make a strong impression. Only now did the vague idea of joining Global Exos feel real.

"I'm definitely in front of the other candidates! Getting into Global Exos isn't just a dream!"

In just a few minutes, Hyun-woo wrote up a 10 page report and sent the email.

Only then did his fatigue from the past three days hit him all at once.

* * *

"Hahh, I feel like I've completely become an idiot." Kim Gwon-tae sighed with a fatigued expression.

It had been exactly 3 days since the event quest began. Though the same was probably also true for the players who had participated in the quest, he had needed to stay up all night battling with a computer during that time, in order to find out system information related to the quest. But his efforts were completely in vain; surprisingly, whenever the situation changed as the quest

proceeded, the related information was locked down anew.

‘This is really a monster.’

Even if it could and did exist within the realm of common sense, it was something that couldn’t be. Despite being a regionally restricted quest, the participants numbered in the hundreds. As a result, there were thousands, tens of thousands, of possible variables. For a single computer to be checking all those simultaneously arising variables and automatically renewing the locks on them... Seeing as the data was being constantly updated on the screen even now, he felt a little fear. A living monster... it could only be expressed in such terms.

‘The only way to make that possible is to put a master key on the highest level of the whole system. But how can the system realize this much freedom with a master key? Just what is it? Where is it hiding, this master key programmed in by the genius game director Park Woo-seong?’

Kim Gwon-tae was the deputy of the Global Exos Planning Department. He was a competent programmer and hacker, a hidden heavyweight who was known to be capable of hacking into even Interpol’s (International Criminal Police Organization) information network if he put his mind to it. Of course, it wasn’t like such rumors weren’t exaggerated, but he was certainly an internationally famous hacker.

Not only was he unable to clear a lock on the game, he couldn’t even identify the location of the hidden program that renewed the locks.

‘There’s only two things I can think of.’

Either New World’s main computer had an AI that was beyond imagination, or Park Woo-seong was continuously monitoring the game as he updated the locks from wherever he was hiding.

If the first option was the answer, then there was hope of lifting the lock one day. But if it was the second, the situation was more serious than expected. Even if they cleared a lock with difficulty, their efforts would go right down the drain if he renewed the lock, and an

endless war of attrition would continue.

‘I heard that Park Woo-seong would have received considerable shares if New World went commercial, but why did he go as far as to give up on those shares and pull something like this? Damn it, I’m not really sure but Park Woo-seong is indeed amazing. Designing such a crazy system wasn’t enough, so he threw in all those locks like mines while maintaining the sense of unlimited freedom. It was not something a human can do.’

Aside from fear, respect for Park Woo-seong formed.

‘Hahh, seeing I have to fight such a ridiculous human being, maybe I chose the wrong job...’

It was nothing new, but for the last three days, he’d been forced to feel the piercing truth that he wasn’t a genius.

Kim Gwon-tae turned his gaze onto the monitor beside him. Since there was no way for him to access the system despite being an administrator, all he could do was to go through the scanty information sites and monitor the forum. Quite a few posts of participants who had been logged out in the final battle of the quest were currently being uploaded.

As he pulled out a cigarette and bit into it, his head tilted while scanning.

It was a post written 1 hour ago, but it already had 8,000 views and over 2,000 comments. Even posts put up three or four hours ago didn’t exceed 1,000 views.

‘Just what could it be about...’

When he clicked the info, an attached video started. It was gameplay taken from a player who had participated in the quest.

“What, what is this?”

Staring blankly at the screen, the cigarette fell from Kim Gwon-tae’s lips.

The video showed about three minutes of an unknown player fighting

the boss monster.

Visibility was poor due to the fog, but there was someone moving quickly within the murky water. Most of the players were busy struggling to escape, but he was actually pushing back the enemy and fighting fiercely in single combat. He dodged the outrageously swinging iron mace by a hair's breadth.

The scene of him counter-attacking and pushing the boss back with continuous attacks was the real highlight! With his occasional flashy kicks, it was enough to make someone think they were watching a martial arts movie. The duration was 3 minutes; it wasn't long, but it had the energy to overwhelm the viewer.

– I saw a player solo the 130+ level boss that 50 players couldn't beat together. Because he was in the muddy water and was out of range of the [Detect] scroll, I couldn't check his name or level. I was unable to watch to the end because I was logged out in the middle of it, but it was amazing. I really want to know who it was.

There was a tremendous number of comments on the poster's thread.

– If he could fight a 130+ level boss on his own, just what is his level?

– Where do you learn the kicking skill?

– I have never seen someone move like this underwater, could it be an NPC for balance?
--

– Is this maybe a fake?

– It feels like a fake... but it's amazing if its real.

— It's me. I defeated the boss monster. Uhahahaha.

-To the person who commented above, as if. Shut up, wash your feet, and go to bed.

Overall, the reaction was that it was unbelievable.

Kim Gwon-tae had a hard time believing it too. That it was a player with a character in New World. He knew, at least, that it was hard to move underwater. In truth, the submerged players in the video were struggling.

Well, let's be generous and say there was a still unknown item that could remove the underwater penalty. But what the hell was that absurd situation of facing the boss monster head to head?

'Valderas is an elite boss. That means you'd have to be at least level 300 to face him... in just 4 months? In New World and not another game, is that possible?'

They were mostly aware of the high level players, but there was no player of such a level in his memories.

"Deputy Kim!" Just then, Ha Myung-woo shouted as he burst into the office. "Did you see the video on the info site? Fighting solo against the boss monster."

"Yes, I was just watching it."

"Can you find who that player is?"

"I do not know. I would ask around if we at least knew his face... but there is a way to find out. If he really killed the boss, then he would have gotten a huge number of contribution points. Naturally, he would be in the top of the rankings, so his name will probably come up onto the Hall of Fame soon."

"When does the event end?"

"There are about 30 minutes left."

“Report to me as soon as you have the information.”

“Understood.”

The data that the event quest had ended came up after 30 minutes passed. The lock that had triggered as the Dark Fog covered Jackson Territory was completely released. Kim Gwon-tae hurried to access the database and searched the contribution's top rankings. But the IDs that were on the message board were all just people he was already aware of.

“Just who the hell is he!”

“Damn it, reporters from the mass media will come out soon. Just how am I supposed to explain this?”

In the end, Ha Myung-woo made an appearance on TV on the evening of the next day and fudged it off with, “It could be an NPC. In order to stimulate more of the players' thirst for information, we will gradually publicize the exact details.”

Having returned from the broadcast station, Ha Myung-woo spoke as he scratched his head with an annoyed expression.

“I'm sick of making shit up now. Deputy Kim, keep searching for that player's info. Whether he killed the boss monster or not, if he has that much skill then he'll definitely have burrowed deep into the system. There's no way he would have reached level 300 in 4 months otherwise. The media is showing interest in him too, so find him somehow and add him to the entrance examination no matter what. If he wants some kind of favor, then say we'll support him to the best of our abilities.”

“For now, I will find out.”

But the information Ha Myung-woo was so anxious about was not very far away. A shredder was situated in a corner of the office. Having been judged early as rejected, Ark's report was being shredded within.

* * *

Around that time, the main character of the uproar that was heating up the Internet, Ark, was staring at the message board in Jackson Square with a displeased expression.

Notice to the residents of Jackson!

The Army of Darkness that filled Jackson with fear has disappeared. We express our gratitude and respect to the countless Warriors who fought to protect Jackson. If not for your sacrificial efforts, we wouldn't have never been able to see the light of daylight again.

Count Juan, who led the reinforcements from far away, has bestowed the title 'Honorable Knight' upon the Warriors with high contribution on behalf of the King. In addition, to the great Holy Knight Sir Alan who led the volunteer troops and accomplished a heroic feat, the shining title 'Knight of Glory' has been bestowed.

In order to commemorate their deeds, the Lord of Jackson has decided to erect a 'Bronze Statue of the 10 Warriors' in the castle square. From this day hence, the Bronze Statue of the 10 Warriors will bring great respect from Jackson residents and foreigners who come to Jackson and will forever remembered as a true model for Warriors.

Right after the quest ended, he logged in after collapsing into sleep for 10 hours to see that this notice had been put up. It felt like getting hit in the back of the head while sleeping.

'Aside from the reward from the 3 Great Guilds, they're even granting a title!'

In New World, a title had significant meaning. First of all, All Stats would rise by at least 1 if you received a title. Moreover, you sometimes gained a new skill or ability, and it could even serve as a chance to earn a top title.

When Ark received the titles Cat Knight and Caretaker of All, the raised stats, skills, and additional abilities created a tremendous

additional effect. But Ark's name was not included in the list of the 10 Warriors written on the notice. That was because he refused to register on the message board. Even if he didn't register his contribution ranking, he received his proper reward from the Magic Institute. He had just been preoccupied by the message that had come up with the contribution ranking, but if he had known then that a title would be granted, the situation may have changed. He didn't like drawing player interest, but he would have put up with it if it was for a title.

Actually, not getting a title was fine. That other people had received it didn't sour his stomach too much either. The thing that really twisted his guts was that Alan had taken 1st place independently with Ark's registration refusal and had received the 'Knight of Glory' title. Thanks to that, Alan recovered his fallen Fame and established footing on growing faster. It really couldn't be anything but an extremely frustrating situation.

However, Ark then shook his head. 'Let's stop. It's already in the past. And there's no need for me to obsess too much about profits right in front of me. No matter what Alan gained, it's fine if I play the game my way and catch up to him.'

Ark's clinginess in everything was strong enough to be called vicious. But he was also quick to give up on something if it wasn't possible with effort. That was because he had learned that it was pointless to wave your hand after the bus left through his life that had involuntarily started sooner than others.

'At least it's good that I logged in after sleeping.'

If he had personally seen Alan receive the title and get puffed up about it, his mental health would have taken quite the wayward plunge.

But for better or for worse, Jackson was currently as quiet as if a typhoon had swept through it. After the Dark Fog lifted, the ship and carriage sent by the Merchant and Warrior Guilds reached Jackson. Rather than the Magic Institute's Letter Movement Orb, the Merchant and Warrior Guilds had sent NPCs to escort the players who safely completed the quest. As a result, all the players left like

an ebbing tide and the once crowded Jackson felt deserted.

‘Mister JusticeMan and Roco also pushed themselves quite a bit throughout the quest, so they’re probably sleeping like logs right about now... but what happened to Shambala? He shouldn’t have died. Is he still sleeping? Or did he already go somewhere else?’

He hadn’t seen Shambala after being swept away by the rapids. Well, since he had given and received what was proper, it didn’t matter if Shambala had left, but Ark was pretty sad that he had disappeared without a word.

His first meeting with Shambala hadn’t been great. Ark had just wanted to try using his unique skill. But after fighting together, his impression of Shambala had changed a lot.

Shambala was a straightforward character. He says what he wants and keeps his promises. He wasn’t the kind of person to talk smooth to your face while planning other schemes behind your back, like Alan. He did have a slightly prickly side, but Ark preferred that type to a smooth-spoken, good person.

‘Well, it’s fine if he left. I’m not the kind of person to go around with Shambala anyway.’

“Stat window!”

Ark decided to put those thoughts away for now and opened his stat window to leisurely check the results from the quest.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +150		
Fame	1050	Level	78
Profession	Dark Walker		

Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of All		
Health	1,575	Mana	1,235 (+100)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	190
Agility	230 (+17)	Stamina	300
Wisdom	29	Intelligence	238
Luck	45	Flexibility	18
Art of Communication	23	Affection	37 (+10)
Special Stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			63
Equipment Effects			
Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor: Agility 2, Frost Resistance +20 Cat Paws: Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit Rate +10% Crystal Golem's Head: Mana +100 Norad Boots: Movement Speed +10%, Evasion +5% Adelaine's Necklace: Defense +40, Affection +10 Resurrecting Spirit: Strength +5, Mana Recovery +5%			
* All abilities will increase by 30% in the dark. * You have the ability to hide in the darkness (15 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat). * Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is			

increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

When he first received the quest, his level had been 68. In other words, he had raised his level a whopping 10 times in just 3 days! It was a huge leap that couldn't even be imagined with just hunting.

The monsters that appeared in the event quest gave more experience compared to their level. But the decisive reason he leveled up 10 times was because he had beaten heavyweight boss monsters such as Narak and Valderas.

He had also obtained items of considerable value, like the magic ring he had gotten from Narak, the Resurrecting Spirit. A magic ring itself was an incredibly rare item. In addition, the Mana recovery rate option was such a thankful effect that it brought tears to Ark's eyes, as he was always suffering from the lack of Mana. Was that all? He had also gotten the Unique iron mace Fire Slayer after defeating Valderas!

It was a difficult item for Ark to use, so he put it up on the auctions before logging in. He'd have to wait and see for the results, but it was on a different level of quality from the items he had sold off until now. It would probably sell for a considerable price.

Huhuhu, there was still more. That wasn't the end. The reward he had looked forward to most in the event quest! When he returned to Giran soon, he would get a reward fitting for a 1st place in contribution from the Magic Institute on top of it all.

Even if he didn't receive the likes of a title, for a reward that he had stayed up 3 days for, it was more than enough.

'That's right, I can't hope for more than this.'

Ark shook off his feeling of annoyance and strolled within Jackson Castle. After he finished his business here and returned to Giran, he didn't know when he would be back. He was of a mind to meet the Jackson NPCs who had helped him a lot and to whom he had much fondness for and say farewell. However, Ark soon had to experience

a shocking situation.

“The Lord is busy with official business. Come back next time,” said Cross in a cold voice when he went to see the young Lord.

“What? But I’ll be leaving Jackson Castle soon. Just a moment is fine. I just want to say goodbye and...”

“Didn’t I say he’s busy?”

“Don’t you know my relationship with the Lord?”

“Are you going to use your friendship with the Lord to get your way?” Cross’ voice became a level colder. “The young Lord said he doesn’t want to see anyone, leave.”

“Even me?”

“Of course. Even you. No, especially you.”

Ark was shocked. Until now, there had never been a problem when he went in and out of the Lord’s Castle. His friends in the Soldiers had always greeted him amiably, and the young Lord had made time for him despite official business or whatever. But to suddenly refuse entry? In addition, his intimacy with Cross had reached maximum while going through the quest together. But he had suddenly changed and was treating Ark like a person he was seeing for the first time.

‘Did something happen again?’

Ark asked more questions, but Cross wouldn’t answer anymore. In the end, Ark left the Lord’s Castle.

But the change in attitude wasn’t limited to Cross and the young Lord. Even the village NPCs he’d worked up a friendship with looked at him differently. The residents who used to recognize him from afar and approach were sneakily avoiding him. If he approached them first and initiated a conversation, they would flinch as they left without even replying or just brusquely nod.

“Ah, hey. It’s been a while. I’m busy so I don’t have time to chat. See you.”

“Ah... so... um, see you next time.”

‘Just what in the world is going on?’

He understood that the NPCs were busy restoring the ruined Jackson Castle. But no matter how busy they were, Ark couldn’t understand why they were treating him like this when his intimacy with them was high. How could they respond that coldly? Now they were treating him even more frostily than a beginner player who had just come to Jackson Castle. Even Raymond’s son, Tom, had the same response.

“Eh? Tom!” Ark saw Tom from afar and called out.

Holding a large bundle and moving quickly, Tom turned his head, startled. “Ark hyung!”

“Good timing, there’s something I want to ask...”

“No, that is... uh... I’m sorry. I’m busy right now. See you later.”

Tom stammered with an awkward look and hastily disappeared without giving Ark a chance to speak.

Ark was dumbfounded. Tom was an NPC who had revered Ark like a hero. And even just before he logged out, Tom had trailed behind Ark when he was in the village as he sent looks of respect flying towards him. But for him to run away even when Ark spoke to him first? As he stared blankly at Tom’s back, an ominous thought suddenly flashed in his mind.

‘Surely not... did the intimacy fall?’

If Cross and Tom were showing such an attitude despite having been at max intimacy, it was the only thing he could think of. But why? There was no reason that should be. He had never thieved or robbed in the village. Wasn’t there no reason for his intimacy to fall?

‘Could *that* have been a problem?’

There was just one difference between now and before he logged out. Ark didn’t register his contribution ranking on the message board. Of course he would have been erased altogether from the list

of contributors maintained in Jackson Castle. On the other hand, all the other players had gotten their names up on the contributor list, and the top 10 players received a title and were even inducted as the 10 Warriors.

NPCs responded sensitively to information on the message board and to rumors. The reason why players with high Fame could receive good treatment from NPCs no matter where they went was thanks to an internal value, the rumors between the NPCs. But Ark didn't even register on the message board, and he had always solved the quest while hiding in the back. In the eyes of the Jackson NPCs, Ark hadn't put in that much effort. If intimacy had fallen, then that was the only reason.

'Dammit, it's definitely something like that.'

When he came to that conclusion, something surged within him. Ark had worked harder than anyone all this time for Jackson's sake. Granted, it wasn't just for Jackson, but the result was he had played a crucial role in saving Jackson. He just hadn't registered onto the message board, but their treatment had changed this much.

Until now, Ark had really treated NPCs like people. He sympathized when he saw a pitiful person, and he minded his manners when he met the elderly. It was something another player would snort at, but to Ark, they were more precious than players.

'However, an NPC is just an NPC in the end...'

Since they were NPCs, of course they would receive the system's influence. If there was a reason that dropped their internal value, it was a natural result for their attitudes to take a sudden change.

He knew. He knew they were existences made to act this way. But he was also boundlessly dispirited by it. Though it may have been his own delusion, the reality hit him even harder because he had thought of them as real human beings.

'The relationship between the computer, humans, and NPCs has been that way from the beginning.'

He tried to understand, but there was no way to suppress his

bitterness.

But no matter how much he regretted it, it was hopeless. Ark sighed as he headed towards the castle gate. He could use the Letter Movement Orb to fly to the Giran Magic Institute in an instant. However, there was still something he had to take care of in the Jackson vicinity. But just when he was about to leave through the gate, two Soldiers saw Ark and blocked his way, startled.

“A-Ark! S-stop!”

“Huh? Why?”

Ark cocked his head. The Guardsmen watching over the castle gate were also NPCs Ark had accumulated quite a lot of intimacy with.

“You cannot leave the castle right now.”

“What do you mean? Didn’t other people leave?”

“I don’t know about other people, but you can’t for now.”

“Only I can’t? Just why...?”

“If you can’t, then you can’t. We absolutely can’t let you leave until this evening.”

“I do not have time to wait until the evening. There is something I must do. Also, just what sin did I commit to be forbidden free entrance and exit of the castle gate?”

When Ark argued with an unhappy face, the Soldier thought for a while before answering.

“If you’re that curious, I’ll tell you. Actually, someone told the Lord about something related to you last evening. They said there was something suspicious, you know. So the Lord ordered Sir Cross to investigate that matter, and said to not let you out of the castle until the investigation ends.”

‘Is this the reason why the Jackson NPCs treated me coldly?’ Only then did Ark realize that returning to Giran wouldn’t be so simple. ‘Even so, something suspicious? Just what is he talking about?’

Granted, there were quite a few things he was guilty of. There were the items he'd pocketed when rescuing the Silver Arrow crewmen, and also the incident where he had made Alan's mission fail by making his raid eat the Howling Seasoned Chilies. If a crewman or Alan found out about these and made an objection, then there was a possibility it could become a problem.

"If you're innocent, then do as I said and wait inside the castle until the investigation ends."

'Dammit, this isn't an intimacy problem. If this goes wrong..'

He could be labeled a criminal and a big issue could arise.

Ark became urgent at heart. He had to leave the castle at once. But if the Lord had issued a command, then there was no doubt he would be denied use of the magic tower as well. Moreover, it was currently daytime. He couldn't use 'Stealth' to leave through the gate. Even so, he was leery about thoughtlessly waiting until the evening. Ark was agonizing with a troubled face when—

"Ark, so you were here." Cross approached from behind him with three or four Soldiers. "I was looking for you. You'll have to come with me for a bit."

"Huh? But I'm..."

"You have no right to refuse. Oi, take Ark."

Without even giving him a chance to speak, the Soldiers tied Ark up.

* * *

'Where is this place?'

Ark turned his head around with an anxious look, but he couldn't see anything because the Soldiers had even thrown a blindfold over him. But judging from the distance they had moved and the sounds he heard around him, it didn't seem like a prison or a court. Considering his ears were picking up birdsong and he could feel the brush of the wind, he was probably in an expansive, open space...

'How come I've been dragged to a place like this?'

Just then, he suddenly heard a heavy voice in front of him.

“Are you Ark?”

“Yes, I am. But...”

“From now on, answer only to the questions I ask. I won’t permit any other talk. Now, this is the first question. I heard you’ve used your friendship with the Lord to receive the task of guarding the back gate with the Guard even though you came to Jackson with the volunteer troops. Did you think to sit in a sufficiently comfortable position and take credit for participating in the volunteer troops?”

“It’s not like that!” Ark shouted in an angry voice. “It’s certainly true that I joined in with the Guards through my friendship with the Lord. But I swear upon my word, I had not a whit of selfishness. I simply thought I should act in such manner for Jackson, and I always fought the enemy on the front lines even while I was with the Guard. You could verify as much if you check with Sir Cross, the guardsmen, and the Lord.”

“Not a whit of selfishness? Then just why did you go so far as to put your life on the line and fight?”

“I came to help Jackson Castle simply because of a sense of duty.”

“Sense of duty? A foreigner like you?”

“Yes, this place is very special to me. I was friendly with all of the residents and the territory’s Soldiers, and of course with the current Lord, but even the previous Lord treated me, a mere beginner foreigner, like a friend. I felt the sincerity of the Lord and residents of Jackson and was touched. So this is how it feels to have a heart to heart friend. That is how I felt. And even now, there is no change in what I feel.”

“Is that why you went in and out of the refugee camp to nurse the patients?”

“H-how did you know that...?”

As Ark murmured with a shaken voice, he heard laughter in his

vicinity. Then he heard the familiar young Lord's voice.

"Hahaha, let's stop joking. Sir Cross, remove the blindfold."

When the blindfold came off, Ark wasn't able to open his eyes because of the fierce sunlight. As he blocked the sunlight with his hand and blinked a few times, Ark's face went blank.

It was a broad lot in the corner of Jackson Castle— countless people were gathered there. The young Lord, Cross, the Sylphid Knights, the Guards, residents, and the patients from the refugee camp...

All the NPCs of Jackson had gathered and were looking at Ark. And they weren't the frosty looks he'd gotten just a little before, either.

Their gazes were filled with affection hard to put into words.

"J-just what in the world is this..."

"Ark, we are truly grateful to you," Said the young Lord as he seized Ark's hand.

"Huh? What are you...?"

"You led the Guards and Militia numbering only 50 people and accomplished the seizure of the scorch cannon. In addition, the person who blew up the dike in the final battle and drove Valderas into a corner was you, right? We all heard from Raymond, who was controlling the scorch cannon then. Even with that alone, you achieved an astonishing deed. It is not second to the 10 Warriors... no, it is a greater service than them. Honestly, it's to the extent that I cannot understand how you slipped out of the contributor list."

That was, of course, because Ark refused registration. But an issue related to the system was something an NPC couldn't understand.

"However, there's something else that I am truly thankful for. I knew many of the refugees, who fled to the castle, were suffering from the disease. But there wasn't much I could do. Also, many volunteers turned away from them as well. However, I heard you went to them every single day even while fighting battles and nursed them with

sincerity. Even so, not once did you speak of your own good deeds.”

When the Guard was sleeping like babies, there was no other way for him to raise his contribution. And since contribution came in automatically when he nursed, there was no need for him to run off his mouth and draw the attention of other players. But the young Lord believed it was because of Ark’s sacrificial spirit and had an expression devoid of doubt.

“Thanks to you, many patients have now regained their health. And they came to me and requested, saying they were just refugees with nothing, but they wanted to repay you somehow. You’re not one to flaunt your good deeds, so weren’t you unable to receive a reward from the commander of the reinforcements, Count Juan? While it’s difficult to call it a substitute reward, it would be an eternal shame if we sent you, a person who loves Jackson more than anyone and doesn’t spare himself any suffering for its sake, off with empty hands. Therefore, we joined hands with the residents and prepared a small gathering.”

Cross and the Soldiers smiled sheepishly next to him. “I went and said something harsh while trying to keep it a secret from you. Sorry. Please understand.”

“...!”

Ark glanced around him with a dumb look. Jackson NPCs were gazing at him with eyes filled to the brim with affection. A war had swept through Jackson Castle, rendering it so devastated that it was painful to behold. On one side of the lot, worn tables that had fallen from somewhere were laid out in rows, and the food the refugees had wholeheartedly prepared had been set on top.

“Being truly grateful to you, these are dishes the refugees made by hand. I thought you might like these more than food prepared by me. Are they not to your liking, by any chance?”

“How could I not...”

The tip of his nose abruptly crinkled. An indescribable emotion welled up.

The NPCs were living within the reality of the game; having endured a war in such a place, a handful of food was as precious as their lives. They had offered it without regret to Ark. It was only common bread, a little meat, and alcohol in crude bowls, but how could he think of it as meaningless? Furthermore, for a whole five years, Ark had never eaten food prepared by another person. However, a great number of NPCs had prepared him a meal inside a game. For Ark alone...

As he looked at each and everyone one of the residents, the sadness that had filled him just a little before disappeared like melting snow. In its place, he felt boundless fondness for those who had prepared a party for him.

"This is a more precious gift than any other I have ever received."

"I thought you would say so," said the young Lord as he smiled gently.

As Ark's eyes welled with tears, a wave of quiet emotion swept through the lot. A few of the residents were following Ark and even dripping tears. Looking at Ark with brimming eyes, Tom wiped his tears as he spoke to Raymond.

"Dad."

"Ah, that's right. Hey, all of you. This isn't a place we made so we could snuffle and weep, yes? This is a place we prepared for our true hero, Ark. Everyone raise your glasses. To bless our hero Ark's future!"

"OHHH, ARK!"

"OUR HERO!"

The residents cheered as they raised their glasses high.

The young Lord raised his glass with a pleased face and handed it to Ark. "You aren't a person who sings his own praises. Even if you do a virtuous deed, not many people will recognize you for it. But look. A heroic deed won't be hidden if you try to hide it. Rather, the more you hide it, the more it shines; we call such a person a hero. No matter what someone else says, to the people raising their

glasses in this moment and this place, you are a hero. A brilliant hero who shines from a distant, high place. I am truly proud to know such a genuine hero.”

It was then. A cheerful tune rang out as a message window popped up.

You have received the title ‘Jackson’s Hero’ from the Jackson residents.

A person who receives the praises and interest of the people is not the only one who can become a hero. Rather, a true hero is someone who does not speak of his own virtues. As you do not boast your contributions, not everyone in the world will recognize you, but a heroic action will most definitely be rewarded. It will also be found out at some point and will impart a deep impression.

Jackson’s Hero is one of the ‘Unknown Righteous One’ titles. This is not known to many people, but it possesses the characteristic ‘Unrevealed Virtue’— many people will quickly approach you with friendliness. The characteristic will induce many changes in a quest’s progression or commission.

* As a title related bonus, All Stats rise by 2.

* Intimacy with all Jackson residents has increased to the maximum value.

* Fame increased by 50.

* As an influence of ‘Unrevealed Virtue,’ there will be a 30% penalty to Fame in all quest rewards from hence forth. In exchange, you will receive a 30% bonus in intimacy with NPCs.

‘I didn’t even register in the Hall of Fame, but a title...!’

Ark’s lips spread from ear to ear.

Jackson’s Hero— what a marvelous title! And it was a top title that

raised all stats by 2! It was a bonus he hadn't even considered.

The one thing that bothered him was the Fame penalty from the title. But the profession Ark had chosen was Dark Walker; to a Dark Walker who lived enshrouded in darkness, Fame was merely a decoration. Rather, it was far more profitable to trade off the unnecessary Fame for an intimacy bonus.

'When you dig a well, you have to dig deep after all.'

The bellyache that had triggered after hearing the news of Alan receiving a title flew away in an instant.

A merry festival began shortly afterwards. Some residents came out holding instruments and played, and some clambered onto the tables and danced. The young Lord and the Soldiers also went along with them and sang as they clapped in rhythm. For the first time since the Dark Fog had descended, the residents shouted brightly and laughed openly.

"Isn't that music?"

"I hear it from the lot over there, but just what could be going on?"

"All the so-called shops are closed, too... I can't see that many Soldiers, either?"

The players in Jackson showed interest as they gathered. But they couldn't enter because Soldiers were blocking the area around the lot. Having judged that Ark liked the 'Unrevealed Virtue,' the young Lord had blocked the entrance of other players. This was an event for Ark alone... it was a party.

As the party went on, Ark received so much food and drink that his stomach was on the verge of exploding as he was dragged around everywhere. At around the time when the fun ripened to its peak, Ark suddenly remembered JusticeMan, Roco, and the Militiamen, the people who had been with him to the end. They had participated up until the final battle despite their low levels, but they had regrettably died and hadn't been able to receive any rewards.

'Isn't there something I can do for them?'

Ark approached the young Lord and gently tested the waters. “I am truly happy that Jackson Territory has regained its peace.”

“Indeed, this is all thanks to you, Sir Alan, and the volunteer troops.”

“Yes, but the Militia’s help was as great as theirs.”

“Of course. If not for them, Jackson might have fallen before the volunteer troops even arrived.”

Tipsy with wine, the young Lord nodded with a serious face.

“Among them, several participated in the final battle and contributed greatly in bringing down Valderas. But unfortunately, they all took great injuries and were unable to participate in the battle until the end. Many volunteer troops will receive their deserved rewards from the 3 Great Guilds, but not a single one of the Militia, who rallied at the Lord’s request from the very beginning and didn’t spare themselves for Jackson’s sake, received recognition for their contribution. It pains my heart so much.”

An NPC recognized a player who died in battle as wounded. It seemed NPCs regarded the fact that resurrection took 3 days, unlike usual, as having taken a big injury, making the recovery slow. Fundamentally, it didn’t hold up to the rigors of logic, but for the NPCs who accepted New World as reality, there was no other way for them to interpret the death and resurrection of a player.

“Mm, you did well to tell me. I too was bothered by that.”

“Though it was difficult for the entire Militia, there were several who didn’t spare themselves until the end— is there no way to give them, at least, the reward their efforts deserve?”

“I wonder... I too am aware of the Militia’s hard work. I also heard the Militia leader is an individual with such outstanding tactics and sense of justice that Sir Cross praised him with spittle flying from his mouth. However, it’s a custom that contribution is only acknowledged for those who end the battle successfully...”

Even when Ark, who had 100%, no, 1,000% intimacy tried to persuade him, the young Lord only sighed with a troubled

expression.

It seemed that an NPC really couldn't mess with the game system. Ark gave up on rewards in the end and changed his direction a little.

"Of course, I know it's too much to hope for some kind of material reward. But if the Lord would remember their efforts and treat them as such in Jackson, it would be a great help to them."

Ark had personally experienced just how much profit there was when a high ranking NPC like a Lord paid special attention to you. In some respects, getting their names known by the Lord could yield a greater profit for the still low-leveled JusticeMan and Roco than a reward of several Gold.

The young Lord showed a positive response at Ark's suggestion. "Something like that is not very difficult, alright... You're right. As a matter of fact, Jackson Territory's forces have been greatly depleted from this incident, so I was worrying because there are gaps in our public security. Ark, tell them to come find me when they regain their health. It won't be bad to try slowly discussing what they can do and what I can do for them, either."

"Yes, sir."

To Giran again

“Hey, Hyun-woo. Over here.”

As he entered the cafe, Gwon Hwa-rang waved from the side. Jung Hye-sun was also sitting next to Gwon Hwa-rang. Though it hadn't been long since they had met, there was no sense of awkwardness between them.

Well, there were many people who grew close from hunting together even back in the days when they enjoyed online games with cookie cutter characters. Gwon Hwa-rang and Jung Hye-sun had spent almost a month together with characters that looked similar to their real selves in a virtual reality game. There was no reason to be awkward.

“What's the occasion to call me out at a time like this?”

“It's because we don't have much time to talk in the game.”

“That's true.”

Hyun-woo nodded as he sat on the opposite side.

“Is the game worth playing?”

“Ahhh, it's really such a shame. I could explode in anger from not knowing about something this good until now.”

“What about you, Hye-sun?”

“I'm having fun, too. But I'm upset I don't have much time to play.”

“That can't be helped, since real life is more important than the game. You have to study, too. Speaking of which, you don't have much time before your test, right? You can raise your level anytime if mister Gwon or I help you, so concentrate on studying for now, understand? One should study when they can.”

“Che, nagging like an old man...” Jung Hye-sun pursed her lips, but it

didn't seem like she disliked Hyun-woo's meddling. "But what are you going to do now?"

"Hm, I thought about it, and I think I'm going to have to hole up somewhere decent and level up a lot. I felt just how terribly weak I was during this quest. Whether in real life or the virtual world, I can't stand being weaker than others, because justice can only be realized with strength."

"You're really the same as ever."

"Walk the path of work, people, and games! That's what it is to be a man!"

Enthusiasm blazed in Gwon Hwa-rang's eyes. It was a look that Hyun-woo hadn't seen in a really long time. Once again, he thought that he had done well to suggest New World to Gwon Hwa-rang.

"It's good that you're going to stay at Jackson for a while. When you log in, go meet the Lord."

"The Lord?"

"Yes, the Lord says he has something to talk to you about. Try becoming well acquainted with him. Raising your intimacy with an NPC like the Lord will be a huge help."

Hyun-woo laughed at Gwon Hwa-rang's dazed expression. After that, he ate dinner with Jung Hye-sun and Gwon Hwa-rang, visited the hospital, and returned home. Even though it was already night time, he turned on his computer and accessed the auction site as soon as he got home. He was extremely curious about the result of the auction items he had recently put up.

— Auction has ended. Gauntlets of Strength: 750,000 Won (~\$750)
— The auction has been in progress for 7 hours. Fire Slayer : 6,800,000 Won (~\$6,800)

'6,800,000 Won!

He felt like he couldn't breathe.

The Gauntlets of Strength he had put up in the 6 hour auction were sold for a final bid of 750,000 Won. He thought he'd be able to get 800,000 Won for it, but the sum was a little short of his expectations. However, there was still the Unique mace he had put up in a 72 hour auction with great expectations. Within just 7 hours, an enormous price had been attached to the Fire Slayer. He had expected it would sell for a high price since it was a rare and Unique weapon, but the price had rocketed to 6,800,000 Won in 7 hours in a 72 hour auction. There were still 65 hours left. Looking at how things were going, it seemed like it could easily exceed 10,000,000 Won (~\$10,000). That was enough to live for two months without worrying about money.

'This is no different from my first harvest as a pro gamer. But I can't be satisfied here. Getting by is most important, but I'm not playing the game just to get by. Now there's hope in passing the entrance exam. I submitted the report about getting 1st place in contribution with Alan in the event quest, so my evaluation in Global Exos has probably gone up a little.'

He had worked to death in the quest, but once the floodgates started to open, everything worked out well. Hyun-woo couldn't contain his overflowing enthusiasm and got into the unit.

* * *

Ark left Jackson Castle and went into the forest.

If he used the Magic Institute's tower in Jackson, he could teleport to Giran in an instant. Truthfully, he was impatient to get to Giran right away to check his reward for the event quest. He also had to find a way to end Snake's metamorphosis as soon as possible. However, Ark still had business to attend to in the area.

Envoy of the Merpeople

The Queen of the Merpeople regrets the past mistakes and wishes to reconcile with the Meow. For you, who has high Intimacy with

both the Merpeople and Meow, you should be able to easily reconcile the two races.

Difficulty: G

Quest Requirement: Meow and Merpeople intimacy must be over 70%.

There was a place he had to go to at least once sometime to resolve the quest he had received from the Mermaid Queen of the Underwater City, Nodelesse. Truthfully, the difficulty was so-so, and even if he completed the quest, he couldn't go back to the Merpeople to get his reward. At best, he could get a little EXP. That was why Ark hadn't been in a hurry even after receiving the quest. However, the ruins where the Meow lived weren't far from Jackson Territory, so he thought he would resolve it before leaving.

The first time he went to the ruins, he had ridden a horse. As a result, he had thought it wasn't such a far distance, but once he was actually walking there, it took quite a while. However, that was fine in its own way.

'It's been too grim lately.'

Throughout the event quest, he had fought while engulfed in Dark Fog. Although he had leveled up 10 times thanks to the quest, both his body and mind were tired. Even if he was a Dark Walker, there was no way he would be peachy since he had spent 3 days of real time in the darkness.

Ark appreciated the awesome landscape of New World as he leisurely headed towards the ruins. Of course, Ark wasn't one to let his hands idle even if it was a break. He didn't forget to root through every corner of the forest to restock on the ingredients he had completely used up. Most of his skills were Intermediate now. Collecting or cooking low level ingredients didn't raise his skill proficiency. But Ark had already moved to a high level hunting ground, so obtaining low level ingredients was even more difficult. He needed some low leveled ingredients to make safe food, so it was

better to get them while he could.

GRRR!

As he swept through the forest, a Wolf or a Dire Wolf would occasionally show up. But now, such opponents were cute instead. Killing them granted almost no EXP or skill proficiency; a player of a similar level to Ark would probably find it troublesome and simply pass by. However, Ark was different. Although he didn't go looking for them, but he could never just pass by a monster that showed up before his eyes.

'Even 1 EXP is EXP, and 1 Copper is still money!'

Accumulating even 1 EXP would bring you up a level, and saving up 1 Copper would become Gold. That was Ark's steadfast mindset. Also, it was fun to hunt comparatively low level monsters. Seeing a Wolf lose 60% of its Health in one strike made him feel he had become stronger.

Hunting that was actually comfortable!

They were no good for EXP, but it was really refreshing. When he was sweeping through the forest later, the monsters were frightened and stealthily avoided him. Just when he was growing tired of that kind of hunting, the ruins came into sight at last.

'Huh? The feeling is way different.'

The ruins had changed so much that he wondered if he was in the right place. The bleak atmosphere around the ruins had vanished, replaced by a brighter one. All sorts of wild flowers were in full bloom at the warm, sunny entrance, emitting a feeling of splendor. He saw cats peacefully enjoying naps amongst the wild flowers. Ark approached a girl who was surrounded with cats.

"Long time no see, Jana."

"Oh? Aren't you Ark?"

Looking glad to see him, Jana approached with her tail waving gently.

“Have you been well?”

“Well, there hasn’t been anything special,” Jana replied insincerely as she pressed her nose in at him, sniffing. Then she giggled as she looked at Ark anew.

“Hnng, back then you were a kid, but now you smell like a man. You’ve become quite tempting. When you have the time, want to go out with me?”

“Thanks, but I’ll decline,” Ark answered with a wry smile.

If your level or Fame rose, the responses of NPCs changed slightly as well. There were many times when NPCs in a new village would show a disdainful attitude if your level and Fame were low, but once your level became high, they would give you proper adventurer treatment. Jana was also merely responding to the rise in level; there wasn’t any other intent to it. Even if there was, he wasn’t desperate enough to want to date an NPC yet.

Of course, it would be different if a beauty like Jana were to approach him in real life...

As expected, Jana asked as if she didn’t really care, “But what’s the occasion?”

“I want to meet the elder, is he in the ruins?”

“Nope, after you left we took care of all the monsters left in the temple, so there’s really no need to stay in the temple. We’re currently making a residence around here.”

“Will you take me to it?”

“Yeah, follow me.”

The place Jana guided him to was a forest pretty far from the ruins. The fifteen Meow Warriors he had seen before were gathered in a sufficiently sized clearing. The Meow Warriors were concentrating on something else for a while, so they weren’t aware that Ark had come.

However, there was no knowing what exactly they were doing. The

big bodied men trembled as they piled up a mess of small logs. But even a child could see that the logs were poorly stacked, and they soon fell over.

“Agh, dammit! This is so frustrating!”

“I can’t take it anymore! Nya, nya, nya!”

Whenever that happened, the Meow youths angrily scratched the logs with their claws.

“What the hell are you doing?”

“I told you. We’re building a house.”

“But I can only see that you’re playing around?”

“What I’m saying is…”

Jana heaved a sigh. “Meows are originally Warriors from birth. We can fight for days without rest, but our handicraft skills suck. Thanks to that, we’ve been building a house for two months already, but it’s as you can see. I think it’s gonna take about 10 years or so.”

“Then where did you live before you trapped in the ruins?”

“Our friends among the Humans built the village we lived in before. However, it was neglected while we were locked up for a long time, so now there isn’t even a trace of it left. The Humans we knew all grew old and died, and sociability isn’t our strong suit. So we haven’t been able to ask the Humans and ended up like this.”

“Can’t you live in the ruins?”

“It’s not a ruin. It’s a temple, and a temple is not a place for the homeless to live. It’s alright for me since I’m the temple’s Shaman, but the other Meows can’t. We finally cleaned out the monsters, so if dirty men were crawling around in there, what would be the difference from before?” Jana retorted with pouty lips.

So she was saying she didn’t care if the Meow built a house or slept in the open, huh? Just like a cat.

Anyway, whether she was a cat or a dog, it wasn’t Ark’s concern.

Once he passed the Meow who were either building the house or breaking it, he found Hassan under a huge tree. Hassan had given the work to his underlings and was stretched out in a nap.

When Jana gave him a kick, Hassan sprang awake. Then he looked around, shaking his head like crazy, and when he saw Ark, he greeted him with a grin.

“Ohh, who’s this? Isn’t this our friend, Truthseeker Ark?”

“I have come to meet you, elder.”

“Me? Okay, what’s the problem?”

“The truth is...” Ark fully explained the situation between Hero Maban and the Mermaid Queen, as well as how the Merpeople had misunderstood the Meow due to conflicting opinions on their relationship. Then he added, “The current Mermaid Queen wants to clear up the past misunderstanding and reconcile with the Meow. How about accepting their apology, at least in consideration for Hero Maban and Adelaine’s sad love, which ended in tragedy long ago? Apparently the Merpeople one-sidedly hated the Meow, but isn’t that all in the past now?”

“Aahh, right. Something like that did happen,” answered Hassan indifferently as he scratched his messy head.

It seemed like he hadn’t thought much of the fight with the Merpeople.

“Well, I didn’t really care, but it was certainly a nasty incident. However, as you said, that, too, is a thing of the past, since the latest friction with the Merpeople occurred when I was young. The other kiddos probably haven’t even seen the Merpeople.”

“You’ve met the Merpeople before?”

“Of course.”

“The elder has lived for hundreds of years. He’s a living fossil,” Jana commented with a laugh.

“Shush, who are you calling a fossil?” Hassan pierced Jana with a

glare before opening his mouth again with a cough. "Honestly, I don't really care whether the Merpeople want to reconcile or not. It's not that hard to accept their apology, either. However, it's a bit much to accept an apology for such an old grudge with just one word. It's like we've been waiting on our hands and knees for it or something."

"Don't be like that and please accept for me, at least."

"Hmm, if you say it like that, I can't just refuse... How discomfiting." Hassan scratched his head with an uncomfortable look. Then, as if a thought had suddenly struck him, he asked with flashing eyes, "Now that I think about it, you are a Human. Then how about we do it like this?"

"What do you mean?"

"Look around. As you can see, we're currently stuck in a very big predicament. If we go on like this, we won't be able to build a mud hut, let alone a house, even after a few years. I would like you to solve that problem for us."

"Me?"

"Yeah, since you're a Human, don't you have one or two friends in the nearby village? Go ask them to build a house for us. A simple cabin shouldn't even take a week to build for a Human. Only then will I accept the Merpeople's apology," said Hassan with a proud expression, as if he had cooked up a great idea.

In contrast, Ark's expression contorted strangely. "What does that have to do with accepting the Merpeople's apology?"

"It's related. You're our friend, but didn't you come as the envoy of the Merpeople? Then you should help us. Then doesn't that give us a justification to accept the apology in exchange?"

Put that way, it made quite a lot of sense.

'There's a saying about being as wily as a cat; contrary to his looks, Hassan really used his head.'

But to Ark, it was an unwelcome condition. He hadn't come all this

way expecting a great reward. He just wanted to finish off a quest he'd picked up while he was here. But if he were to go Jackson and back for a G level quest, he'd be wasting too much time. He also couldn't be sure of finding an NPC craftsman. All the NPC craftsmen in Jackson were mobilized to repair the damages from the war. No matter how high his intimacy was, a request without a decent reason would be rejected, and there wouldn't be an NPC willing to fling away Jackson to follow him all the way here to build a house for cats. Even so, not being able to finish the quest after coming all this way here bothered him.

'A house for cats... maybe that...?'

At that moment, an idea sparked in Ark's head. There was a quest that fit this situation perfectly.

'The 'Find New Settlers' quest!'

He hadn't been able to find a clue to solving that quest after receiving it in Lancel Village. Actually, he had brought it with a few NPCs, but they had all refused. But shouldn't there be a high chance of success if it was the Meow, who weren't tethered to the territory and were looking for a place to live?

'Yeah, the Meow are homeless right now. Then should I try bringing it up once?'

After thinking about it for a bit, Ark said with a subtle tone, "Then how about this?"

"Go ahead."

"There is a settler town I know well not far from here. Many people left, so there are a lot of empty houses there. If you ask them, they will supply the Meow with the necessary housing."

"A Human village? Are you saying the honorable Meow should sponge off a Human village?" Even before he finished talking, Hassan grumbled with an unpleasant voice.

It was the reaction he had expected. Unlike dogs, cats were originally animals that didn't match well with humans. Even if one

was raised with affection from kittenhood, it wasn't subservient to the human as its owner. There were even many cases where some cats acted charmingly only at mealtime, only to immediately abandon the facade after mealtime and leave the house.

To put it badly, they are mannerless; to put it nicely, cats are animals with a strong sense of independence and pride.

Having inherited such catlike natures, the Meow wouldn't want to become beholden to Humans. That was also the reason they struggled to build a house for 2 months without being able to go ask Humans for help. Once their friend Ark showed up, they were being "generous" and asking for help. But that was what Ark was aiming for.

Ark let out a sigh as he nodded. "You really don't like it, huh? Truthfully, I also thought it was a shameless request. It's also dangerous..."

"What? A request? It's dangerous? Just what are you saying now?"

"No, it's fine. Pretend you didn't hear anything."

"Dammit, do you want to see someone explode and die? I can take pain but I'm the kind of person who can't contain curiosity. Whatever it is, just give it to me straight!"

Did they say curiosity killed the cat? Just like a cat, Hassan couldn't contain his restlessness and got caught.

'Huhuhu, got him. I've got him on the line.'

Ark hid a satisfied smile as he pretended to be against it. "Yes, the truth is the village was once under attack by monsters and pushed to the brink of life and death. Thankfully it has become safer than before, but monsters are still around. There's no knowing when it could face danger again. That's why I thought it'd be nice if the valiant Meow could protect them. It's not sponging off, but being reasonably rewarded while protecting them. Just like nobles."

"Ohh, monsters? Are there a lot of monsters in the area?"

“Yes, there are a lot of strong monsters. The ones called Gnolls in particular are pretty dangerous.”

“Gnolls! Did you just say Gnolls?” Hassan yelled, jumping up. The Meow building the cabin also approached, their eyes wide. “If they’re Gnolls, then they’re the dog-heads! Right?! You’re talking about the noisy dog-heads that bark?”

“That’s right. They are quite strong and vicious. Even for the Meow, protecting the village from such monsters would be...”

“Nonsense!” As Ark subtly slowed to a stop, Hassan shouted. “Even if hundreds of the likes of those stupid dog-heads were to press in, they’d be no match for the brave Meow. Yes, the dog-heads have long been enemies of the Meow. Why? Don’t ask, because I don’t know either. Anyway, I hate the dog-heads like crazy! To think those dog-heads got this close to the sacred temple of the Meow while our eyes were briefly turned away! Knowing this, we can’t just overlook it!”

“Then are you accepting my suggestion?”

“Yeah. If they’re being threatened by the dog-heads, then we must go help Lancel Village or whatever it’s called. It is definitely not because of a house or food. We’re just staying there a bit to defend the pride of the Meow while we wipe out the dog-heads for them. Though of course, to do that we must rest comfortably and eat our fill...”

“Don’t worry. If you will protect the village, the residents will gladly cover the room and board the Meow desire.”

As Ark said that with a grin, a message popped up with a cheerful sound effect.

– Art of Communication has increased by 3.
--

The quest ‘Find New Settlers’ has been updated.

You have wisely convinced the Meow Elder Hassan to migrate to Lancel Village. The Meow are a valiant tribe possessing a natural Warrior disposition. If they guard Lancel Village, the villagers will no longer have to fear monsters.

This will be a great help to the Lancel villagers, who wish for safety more than anything else. As they will get what they want thanks to the Meow, they will readily provide a housing and food.

Finding new settlers: 15% complete.

You have found settlers with special abilities.

With the migration of the Meow, a Warrior tribe, Lancel Village's safety has risen by 40%. However, since they have to be steadily furnished with food, the food situation has worsened by 10%.

If you invite a settler with a special ability, trade, safety, and the food situation values will increase. Depending on the values, you will be able to receive a bonus reward upon quest completion.

‘What’s this?’

After checking the message, Ark’s eyes widened.

It was an unthought-of message. He had thought that he just had to increase the number of people. But looking at the message that popped up last, it seemed there was a hidden achievement system besides the completion value. Just like a RTS (Real-time Strategy) game he had tried a long time ago, safety increased if he sent a Warrior, and a Craftsman NPC would increase trade. The reward would change depending on the result when the completion hit 100%.

‘I’m not supposed to just send random refugees!’

It was obvious if he thought about it a little more deeply. The quest’s objective was to revive Lancel Village. If he supplied the village with good manpower, then of course it would develop more.

There are countless ways to resolve a single quest. There was no knowing how an action or a single word would take effect. Ark realized that point once again. It was a system that could either be called picky or fun.

‘But only 15%?’ Thinking the quest would definitely be completed, Ark was displeased. ‘I sent fifteen folks but it amounted to 15%? So does that mean I need to find at least 80 more?’

He had found fifteen people one month after receiving the quest. Considering he needed to go looking in other places to gather another 80, his mind reeled. But in any case, he’d found a clue to resolving the quest.

‘Well, if a quest is difficult, it’s better the more difficult it is. ‘Cause that means the reward will be greater.’

Ark was positive at all times.

“Dog-heads, you say they’re the dog-heads? Huhuhu, you’ve given us good info. My blood is boiling for the first time in a while.”

Hassan’s whiskers were already stiff as his will blazed. He thanked Ark, who had changed their boring house building to Gnoll hunting, by rubbing his entire body over him.

“We don’t have to build a house now?”

“We can really play around and eat while only hunting, right?”

“Hooray, freedom!”

The gathered Meow Warriors also wagged their tails like crazy as they leapt around.

“You are truly a lump of good luck. I mean, we can’t help but love you since you solve our problems whenever you show up. No, I

shouldn't be doing this, I want to give you some kind of reward... Dang it, we've got nothing right now because that Debra rascal ransacked the temple..."

When Hassan fretted about wanting to do something for Ark, Jana snapped at him with a pitying voice. "Elder, do you have dementia? There's that one thing you said you'd do for Ark if he happened to come again."

"What? Ahh, yes. That's right. I completely forgot about it."

"You'll do something for me? What are you talking about?" asked Ark with a piqued expression. Could he possibly receive a separate reward with the Envoy of the Merpeople quest?

"Huhuhu, we have a surprise present prepared for you. No, I shouldn't be saying it, follow me."

Hassan and Jana took Ark to the temple. With the monsters gone, the inside of the temple had become much neater. They walked along a long corridor and the chamber that Debra had inhabited soon appeared. Once they arrived in the room, Hassan extended his hand.

"Fortunately you still have the Cat Paws I gave you. Give them to me for a bit."

As Ark took off the Cat Paws, Hassan explained, "You probably don't know how valuable these are because I gave them to you so suddenly. Actually, they are an extremely precious magic armament that can completely draw out the wearer's ability. However, to draw out the full ability of a Meow armament, it has to receive a Shaman's blessing. But the temple was polluted when I gave the armament to you, so we couldn't bless it. You also looked like you weren't qualified to equip a blessed armament."

His question of 'then shouldn't you have told me that sooner?' was resolved by Jana.

"Che, you're just making that up... you just forgot about it."

"S-shut up! Don't talk back and bless it already!"

Hassan hurriedly equivocated and put the Cat Paws on top of the altar. Jana's face sobered. A short while afterwards, he heard a melody, as if an acoustic guitar was being played somewhere.

That was when Jana started dancing around and around the altar in rhythm to the melody. The cats that had followed them into the temple chased Jana as they sang.

Nya, nyaa, nyaaaa, nya, nya, nya~

Just what should he call this... A scene like the one where animals had performed a musical in a cartoon film he'd watched when he was young?

Since a girl that looked perfectly normal was doing such a thing, the watching Ark was more embarrassed, but it was fun in its own way. Then, after some time had passed, a beam of light suddenly shone in from above the altar; when it touched the Cat Paws, a bluish light flowed out.

"Phew, it's done. That was frickin' embarrassing," Jana mumbled as she wiped the sweat that had soaked her. As expected, she had been embarrassed too.

"Tsk, what poor conduct despite being a so-called Shaman..." Hassan grumbled as he handed the Cat Paws to Ark. "Alright, they're all done. Here, try equipping them now. You'll find out why the Meow are so strong."

They didn't look any different except for a blue light shimmering at the ends of the fingertips. But the moment he checked their info, his mouth fell open on its own.

Blessed Cat Paws (Rare)			
Armor Type	Leather Gloves, Knuckles		
Defense	30 (+7,8)	Attack Damage	9-15 (+7,8)

Durability	50/50	Weight	5
Usage Restriction	Cat Knight only, at least level 60		
A defensive weapon that has been passed down for generations among the Meow, new abilities have surfaced after receiving the blessing of the Meow temple. Now, the Cat Paws will display their true abilities, as befitting of a Truthseeker's equipment. As the wearer becomes stronger, the Cat Paws will also become stronger.			
Options: Attack speed increased by 15%. Agility increased by 20. Critical hit rate increased by 15%.			
Special option: Defense and damage will increase by x0.1 of the wearer's level.			

‘A growth item!’

The fundamental stats hadn't changed. But the important part was the special option attached at the end!

They had changed to a growth item with added defense and damage according to his level. Therefore, when he reached level 100, the damage and defense would also rise by 10. In the game world where one is constantly out of breath to find a better item every time they leveled up, a growth item was a tremendous treasure.

With its stats raised, the Cat Paws' defense was on par with the Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor, and the damage wasn't too far behind Lancel's Sword, either. He could only be more surprised the more he looked at them.

He hadn't been able to acquire a decent item for himself because he'd been concentrating on the event quest for a while. But once

things started working out, he had been effortlessly striking it lucky. The quest was resolved successively and items were randomly pouring in.

‘So that’s how it is, the purpose of the Envoy of the Merpeople quest was this!’

When Ark was given a quest that told him to return to a low level area despite having returned from clearing the White Whale’s labyrinth, which could normally only be done at a considerable level, he had thought it a little strange. But now he knew the reason.

The profession exclusive item that is given to those who clear a profession quest— Envoy of the Merpeople was a scenario quest to give him that reward.

“This is a true armament of the Meow. How is it? Do you like it?”

“Yes, thank you. It really makes me think I did well to become a Truthseeker.”

“That must be so, indeed. Uhuhuhu. Of course you should like it. Because a Truthseeker is honorable. Anyway, I’m happy because you’re satisfied with it. Now, shall we finish this? Having come to me as the envoy of the Merpeople, you listened to my request, and I gave you a just reward. Since we both got what we wanted, now we have a justification. I, Hassan, the Elder of the Meow, will formally accept the apology of the Merpeople. The Meow scattered all over the world will think of the Merpeople as comrades from today onwards.”

Th-th-thump, the quest information window opened.

The quest ‘Envoy of the Merpeople’ has been completed.
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You, who sought the Meow as the envoy of the Mermaid Queen, convinced Elder Hassan and achieved the objective. Now the two races have promised to forget the grudge of the past and be concordant. As the witness of this promise, you have become the first Human to receive respect from both races.
--

Reward: Item upgrade, EXP +500, Fame +35.

Even with the completion of the quest, his experience didn't go up by much. But he was more than satisfied with the upgrade of the Cat Paws alone.

"Now, we've finished our business here. Shall we go rescue the village called Lancel?"

"Wait a minute. There's something I want to ask you."

"What is it?"

"Actually, I found a legacy of Hero Maban when I went to the Underwater City."

"A legacy of Hero Maban?"

"Yes, this is it."

When he took out the Star Fragment and showed it, Hassan made a surprised expression. "This is definitely one of the Three Marvels that disappeared along with Hero Maban."

"As an honorable Truthseeker, I wish to find all of Hero Maban's legacies."

"Indeed. After all, it's said that Hero Maban first started with the work of finding the Three Marvels. He didn't need the help of the Three Marvels after realizing his true strength later, but the Three Marvels were certainly the origin of Hero Maban's power. If you're a Truthseeker, of course you'd want to gather the Three Marvels."

"Do you happen to know where the other Three Marvels are?"

This was Ark's second objective. The Three Marvels were absolutely necessary for him to grow as a Dark Walker. As such, it meant that finding the Three Marvels was his main goal in the game, for the moment. But the clues were currently too insufficient. Therefore, he had thought that the Elder of the Meow, who had served Hero

Maban, would have a clue.

"I said this earlier, the Three Marvels disappeared with Hero Maban. I only know about the origin of the Three Marvels. I don't know if it'll be a clue or not. If even that is fine, it's not hard to tell you."

"Yes, even a small clue is fine."

"Hm... it's a bit of a long story, but... I'll put it simply. First, you have to know the Three Marvels didn't originally belong to Hero Maban. They were ancient legacies of the three races that represented the Beasts. Around the time when the Dark Age was starting, Hero Maban went searching for them, asking to borrow their power, and he received the Three Marvels at the cost of undergoing their trials. And it's said that Hero Maban, who later achieved complete power, returned the Three Marvels to their original owners."

"He returned them all?"

"That's right, it's actually ridiculous that Adelaine stole the Star Fragment. The Merpeople who inhabit the ocean serve the stars. The Star Fragment was probably a treasure of the Merpeople from the very beginning. Hero Maban likely intended to return it to the Merpeople sometime as well."

"Where are the other two races that gave Hero Maban their treasures?"

"I don't know that." Hassan scratched his head. "Humans lump us all into the Beast category, but in truth, the Beasts hardly interact with each other. Moreover, we were locked up for a long time, so there's nothing more to say. I heard Hero Maban also went looking for countless Beast races in the past and spent a long time before he found the Three Marvels."

"Then have you heard of the Underground World?"

"The Underground World?"

"The Mermaid Queen said that one of the Three Marvels might be in the Underground World."

“To be sure, she might know the whereabouts of the Three Marvels, since she receives information from all sea creatures. But the Underground World... I remember hearing a snatch about it somewhere.”

With his arms folded, Hassan fell into thought for a while.

“Yes, that’s right. There were a few times when we traded with the Beast race of the Underground World when I was young. Among the Beast races, they’re the only ones who have good craftsmanship. Well, we always traded through a deputy so I’ve never seen them myself, but... there was always the same shape carved into the goods that they made. That’s right. It was probably this shape.”

Hassan drew a picture that was like three triangles overlapping.

“Though I don’t think it’ll be much help...”

“That’s not so, thank you.”

The only information he’d gleaned was a simple figure, but Ark wasn’t disappointed. For now, he’d gotten a clue. It was a big advancement compared to when he didn’t know what he had to look for. What was left to do now was to thoroughly go through New World, as he had been doing until now. As he gathered information and completed quests, he would definitely be able to find a connected clue.

He sometimes forgot, but this was a game. It was a world made for the players.

* * *

For the time being, Ark returned to Jackson Castle. When he entered the Magic Institute’s tower, a Magician NPC approached him.

“What service do you desire?”

“I’ve come to apply for letter movement.”

“What is your name?”

“It is Ark.”

“Ah, Ark-nim! I’ve been waiting for you.”

“Huh?”

“Wait a sec. Here it is. This is a letter was entrusted to me from a person who utilized letter movement here a few days ago. Looks like the sender is Shambala-nim.”

‘Shambala!’

Ark quickly took the letter and read it.

FROM Shambala
I’m leaving first because of an urgent quest. Fighting with you was fun in its own way. But if possible, I want to try a proper test of our skills with you. Ah, I’m not saying we should be enemies, ’cause I don’t want to get mess with a dude like you as an enemy. If you think the same way, then come to the arena in Selebrid, the capital of the Schudenberg Kingdom, later on. ‘Cause I’m planning on being there for a while starting from next week. PS: I’m taking the Mermaid Scale.

‘So Shambala thought of the same thing as I did.’ A smile spread on Ark’s lips.

As he looked at Shambala’s fighting skills, he’d thought of really wanting to test their skills. It was made so that no matter the martial art, anyone who had learned a certain level of hand-to-hand combat would harbor a competitive spirit, regardless of whether or not the opponent was friend or foe. In addition, this was a virtual reality game. They could fight with not just martial arts, but with the special skills they had learned while playing the game. They would be able to feel a completely different pleasure that was impossible in an ordinary match.

‘An arena, I’m getting curious about it...’

Ark remembered the arena advertisement flyer that had been pasted on the village message board. The arena was a place where player vs monster, player vs NPC, and player vs player hand-to-hand matches unfolded. There, it wasn’t just that you weren’t penalized even if you died, but you could also be rewarded Gold, a rare item, or a title depending on your points. Several kinds of match events were also prepared, so there was no guarantee a high leveled player would definitely win. The kinds of skills you had learned and how you used them were more important than level.

‘He said in a month, right? Okay. I’ve got plenty of time, so I’ll raise my skills a ton until then.’

Actually, Ark had determined Shambala was at a level higher in martial arts skill. But this was the virtual reality game world; martial arts skill wasn’t everything. He still had a grace period of a month, so it shouldn’t be impossible to catch up to Shambala.

Alan was an enemy to Ark, but Shambala was a rival who meant well. While he was having such thoughts, the Magician spoke.

“There’s normally no incident of holding onto a stranger’s letter. However, I specially received it because the receiver was you, a famous personage in Jackson. When you give and send letters next time, please utilize the Transfer Mailbox.”

“The Transfer Mailbox?”

“You don’t know of it? It is a service operated by the Magic Institute. If you’re interested, please read this. It hasn’t been long since we started the service, so we are giving a special 20% discount during our event period. If you register now, we will also discount the usage fee you’d have to pay next month.”

Speaking like a cellphone sales representative, the Magician pointed to a pamphlet pasted on the wall.

Transfer Mailbox

Have you been worrying because there is no way to contact a faraway friend? Worry no longer, for there is the Transfer Mailbox, developed by the Magic Institute at the end of long research!

The Transfer Mailbox will allow you to contact your friends spread all over the continent at any time.

An initial registration on a Transfer Mailbox costs only 50 Gold. The usage fee is 5 Gold a month (Usage Restriction: At least level 50)

How to send a letter using the Magic Institute's transfer magic: If the player writes a letter and puts it in a mailbox prepared all over the continent, it will immediately be transferred to the Magic Institute. The transferred letter can be found at the Magic Institute in your area of choice at any time. If you pay an additional fee, you can even send an item. However, usage is only possible if you have a Transfer Mailbox. If the receiver doesn't have a Transfer Mailbox, of course they cannot send a reply.

‘Ehh, so there was a function like this.’

Ordinary mail could only be sent to a village designated by a player. In other words, if the receiver left for another region, then they wouldn't be able to receive the letter. In addition, unless you asked someone, there was no way to send an item to a faraway person. But there had been a method like this... Ark still didn't know even a tenth of the vast New World.

However, there weren't really any players Ark currently knew besides Shambala. Calling JusticeMan and Roco by phone was much faster and more convenient than a letter. He had no reason to fork over 50 Gold and a monthly usage fee of 5 Gold.

“No thanks.”

At Ark's reply, the Magician nodded with a sullen face. “Understood. Then I will impart the letter movement. If you enter the magic circle on the top floor and use the Letter Movement Orb, you will immediately move to the Giran Magic Institute. It is still a technique in the testing stage, so the situation won't be that comfortable.

Please prepare yourself firmly before departure.”

Ark went up the stairs and stood on the magic circle. He pulled out the Letter Movement Orb and gazed at Snake for a moment. Having been resummoned after 24 hours, Snake looked even more haggard.

“Just hold on a little, Snake. I’ll definitely be able to find information that will help you when we return to Giran. There are many Merchants, and there are high ranking Magicians in the Magic Institute, too. No matter what, I’ll help you complete metamorphosis successfully.”

Hiss, hiss...

Stroking Snake’s head as he spoke, Snake nodded weakly. When Ark raised the Letter Movement Orb to his forehead, the scenery of Giran popped up in his mind like a panorama.

His body instantly turned into particles of light which were then strewn asunder. Then, sucked into the uppermost floor through a narrow glass pipe, Ark was flung out towards Giran from the transmitting tower.

He was pressed forward at a tremendous, dizzying speed.

The Giran's Institute of Magic

BOOM, FLAAASH!

A ray of light struck the magic tower. Sparks came off the equipment attached to the transmitter as light particles gathered. The light particles that moved along the complicated tangle of glass tubes soon transformed into the shape of a person atop a magic circle.

It was a normal-looking youth, which was actually rare in the virtual reality game where 90% of players changed their appearances. He really couldn't be called handsome, and there was a surprising grain of truth in calling him ugly; this incomparably vague character's name was Ark.

"Pant, pant, arrived at last... bleh, BLEECH!"

Ark retched with a green face.

"I thought I was gonna go mad. I've never even been carsick, this is really..."

From Jackson to Giran, letter movement only took 3 minutes. That was the time it took for cup noodles to become done at the perfect state for eating. But that mere 3 minutes dealt Ark mental damage that he didn't want to experience a second time. Still, it was quite fresh and fun at first. When he turned into particles of light, it felt just like he was leaving his body. The sense of weightlessly becoming one with the air! Since he was cutting through the sky in such a state, it was like he had become wind. Everyone has probably imagined it once; becoming a wisp of wind and speeding over mountains, valleys, and plains. That imagination had become reality.

"Woaaaaah, this is awesome!"

That sense of liberation! That freedom!

A cheer burst out of him as he looked at the scenery that was

speeding past. But it didn't even take 10 seconds for his cheer to turn into a scream.

The sudden jumps, dives, and turns that unfurled!

Would riding a rollercoaster without the seat belt feel like this? No, it felt like being in a cocktail cup being swished around by a bartender. He jolted from side to side, and the sky and ground flipped countless times...

It still seemed like the floor was shaking underneath him, so he couldn't even stand up straight.

'Dammit, what the hell is this frickin' over the top reality!'

"Are you Ark?"

He heard a rough voice from behind him. Turning around with sunken eyes, he saw an old Magician with a beard that fell to his chest approaching him.

"Do you know me?"

"I just received word from the Jackson Magic Institute. But I knew of your name before that, from the crewmen of the Silver Arrow who arrived a few days ahead of you."

"Ah, did they arrive well?"

"Of course. They couldn't come meet you because they're out on other business, but they told me to send you their greetings." The old Magician laughed awkwardly as he shrugged his shoulders. "But it looks like you're not in any shape to ask after *their* health. Are you okay?"

"Honestly, I can't really say that I'm alright."

"Well, letter movement is still in the testing stage, so it couldn't have been a comfortable journey."

"It's not just at the level of not being comfortable though?"

"Apparently the weather was particularly bad today so letter movement was also several times more unstable than normal. Even

if we are the Magic Institute, we can't do anything about the weather. So to speak, you had bad luck."

"Ah, is that so? Thanks so much for your kind explanation. Why didn't you tell me that a few days earlier?"

Ark glared at the old Magician who was smiling as he explained. But even if his insides were heaving, Ark wasn't one to talk carelessly to a NPC.

The Magic Institute reward that he'd been waiting and waiting for was right in front of him. There was no reason to complain and lower the Magic Institute NPC's mood.

"But ah, the promised..."

Just when Ark was about to gingerly bring up the topic at hand, the old magician slapped his knee as if he had just remembered.

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"Ah, just look at my state of mind. Introductions are late. My name is Bargenhardt Shannen. I'm the president of the Giran Magic Institute."

'The Giran Magic Institute president?'

Ark swallowed what he was about to say and stared in surprise at the old magician, Shannen.

There were about 20 Magic Institute branches set up throughout the large cities of Schudenberg Kingdom. The Giran Magic Institute was the place that centralized all those branches. Therefore, it meant the Giran Magic Institute president was the NPC who had the highest status amongst the Magicians of Schudenberg Kingdom. You'd have to be a guild master affiliated with the Magic Institute to meet this top NPC.

"If it's fine with you, can you spare some time to drink a cup of tea?"

"Of course."

Ark hastily drew out his business smile as he nodded.

Truth be told, he wasn't in the mood to leisurely share idle prattle. Leaving the nausea from the aftereffects of the letter movement

aside, Ark was only interested in the Magic Institute's reward right now. But in both reality and the game, personal connections were the most important aspect. What's more, it was hard for a normal player to even glimpse this high ranking NPC's face, and he had amiably approached Ark first. There was no reason to refuse.

You had to make an impression on people in lofty positions first. Also, in light of his experience so far, there was a 90% chance that a situation like this was connected to a quest.

"I was just wanting a steamy cup of tea because my stomach isn't feeling so well."

"That's a relief."

Shannen pointed to one side and a door on the opposite side automatically opened. A table with refreshments was prepared in a tidy room that emitted the atmosphere of a study.

"The heroism I heard of from the former bosun of the Silver Arrow, Jabel, made a very deep impression." said Shannen slowly as he raised his teacup. "Not only did you remember in such a crazy situation and rescue the crewmen, but you also nursed the refugees out of your own accord even though no one forced you to, yes? Everyone knows that they were the right things to do and that they should do them, but it's not easy to actually take action. I was truly touched."

"I'm flattered."

"No, no. That was something anyone would praise. Is that all? The ingeniousness and boldness you displayed when succeeding an impossible operation by using the Spear of Thor was incredible enough to make me immodestly burst into a cheer. Well, though the Spear of Thor which cost thousands of Gold to make was broken beyond repair thanks to that."

"That... I'm sorry."

Ark watched Shannen with a guilty expression. 'Surely he's not asking me to pay for it?'

Thankfully Shannen wasn't thinking about it so seriously and burst into jolly laughter. "Hahaha, I didn't bring it up to blame you. An item has to be used where it's needed to get your money's worth. There's no point if you spend ten thousand Gold to make it but you don't spend it where necessary. In any case, your deeds were great enough that it's not out of place to call you a hero. However, that is not the reason I took an interest in you. It was actually what you did after that."

"Huh? After that?"

"You took 1st place in contribution in this operation, right?"

"How did you know that?" Ark asked back in a slightly surprised voice.

Since he had the Magic Institute's Badge on him, of course the Magic Institute would be able to check how much contribution he had accumulated. Only then would they be able to prepare a reward suitable for the contribution points. But Ark hadn't fathomed that Shannen would be aware of the ranking when even the Lord of Jackson hadn't known.

With a faint smile, Shannen lowered his voice. "The 3 Great Guilds are a larger and more massive organization than you know. You might have thought you didn't reveal yourself, but the Magic Institute, the Warrior Guild, and the Merchant Guild have memorized the name of Ark. Although, I can't say if that is a good or bad thing for you."

The NPCs of New World were really not to be underestimated.

Ark hadn't registered his contribution ranking in the Hall of Fame. Of course, he had been certain that the only ones who knew that would be himself and Global Exos. However, it seemed that it wasn't such a simple issue.

Besides the historical background, New World was no different from reality. Unlike existing games, the NPCs here didn't just move and think based on the information they were given. Like people in reality, they were existences with perfect AIs that thought and gathered necessary information on their own initiative. Like players, the

experiences and thoughts of these NPCs produced variables separate from the system.

‘To think such a thing would be possible...’

Actually, Ha Myung-woo had already explained something like this in the reception room before. But hearing the explanation and experiencing it yourself was a completely different feeling.

‘Well, I didn’t register in the Hall of Fame because I didn’t want to attract the attention of the players...’

It wasn’t much of a problem if an NPC knew. No, this could be a good thing, since there would be more NPCs like Shannen who approached him while praising Ark’s contribution.

“That’s why I definitely wanted to meet you. Just why did you hide the fact that you took 1st place? And why did you suddenly hide yourself, not even showing up while the foreigners who rose to the top 10, including Sir Alan, were all being praised? Can you tell me why?”

“There wasn’t a great reason for it. There wasn’t really a reason to hide, but I didn’t want to put myself out there and show off. Shall I say that I didn’t have the confidence to deal with the attention I would receive from it? I just did my best with what I was given, and I was more than satisfied enough with the fact that I helped.”

“It’s just as I imagined. Admirable! I don’t know about others, but I rate that attitude highly. It is never easy for a hot-blooded young man to control his ambition.” Shannen nodded with a satisfied expression. Then he continued in a low voice, “In fact, I’ve been waiting for a person like you.”

“What?”

“A warrior with the strength and courage to win in any situation, no matter how difficult, and also has the prudence to keep a secret. I thought that such a person would be able to listen to my concern. How about it? Are you such a person?”

‘As expected!’

Ark's eyes glittered. He was right on the mark with his guess that this might be linked to a quest. Without delay, Ark gave the answer Shannen wanted to hear.

"Of course. I am always prepared to hear the concern of another person. In addition, I don't like speaking out in front of others, so no one will know my requester's trouble."

A request is always welcome! A thorough guarantee to safeguard the customer's information!

Ark presented words that were like the advertisement phrases of a moneylender.

It seemed like he scratched the itch properly. Shannen nodded in satisfaction. "Good, you're very much to my liking. Then let's get right to the point. I'll tell you this in advance, but this is a very delicate problem. It could easily deal a fatal blow to the Magic Institute's status if it were to get out. However, I'll believe in the actions you showed in Jackson and tell you."

'Ah, how long is he intending to go around and around dodging the point?'

Around the point when his annoyance was slowly boiling up, Shannen finally brought up the main subject. "The issue I want to discuss with you is about a stolen artifact."

"An artifact?"

"It's called the Heartsoul Bead. As one of the ancient relics, it is a dangerous item imbued with powerful and ominous magic. If this artifact were to fall into the hands of evil, there is no knowing what kind of horrible calamity it will bring about. That's why it is something that the Magic Institute has been sealing away since long ago... one year ago, it vanished completely."

Listening to the explanation, Ark tilted his head. "The Magic Institute is an extremely large organization, right?"

"Of course. It is a guild with 70 branches all over the continent. If you add in the sub-guilds founded by foreigners, then there's too

many to count.”

“Then are you saying that the Magic Institute wasn’t able to find it for a year even with such power?”

“That’s...” Shannen shook his head, looking troubled. “I understand your question. However, the Magic Institute is in a position where we cannot openly look for the Heartsoul Bead.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Heartsoul Bead was being guarded by the Magic Institute, but strictly speaking, it doesn’t belong to the Magic Institute. A long time ago, the Schudenberg Royal Family requested that the Magic Institute safeguard it. If it gets known that the Heartsoul Bead was stolen, the Magic Institute will have to take responsibility and will be put into a very difficult situation. That is why we couldn’t openly seek the location of the artifact.”

“So in the end, you mean that maintaining the secret you entrusted to me and being careful is so that the Royal Family doesn’t find out.”

“It’s not just the Royal Family.”

“Huh?”

“We have to be more careful of the Warrior Guild and the Merchant Guild than the Royal Family.”

Shannen went on to explain that even if the Schudenberg Royal Family were to find out, they could use political force to soothe them to a certain degree. The Magic Institute had that much influence. But those methods wouldn’t work on the Warrior Guild and the Merchant Guild, who wielded influence rivaling the Magic Institute. On the surface, the 3 Great Guilds solved the continent’s problems while holding hands, but they were actually rivals waging a cutthroat power struggle. If they were to find out about the artifact robbery, there was no knowing what kind of ridiculous demand either guild might impose using the incident as an excuse.

‘Hmm, I’m roughly starting to understand the power structure of New World.’

The relationship between the Schudenberg Kingdom and the 3 Great Guilds... the worldview of the New World that surrounded Ark was slowly becoming more complicated. It wasn't just New World, but most online games had a unique worldview. There were power relations between the various organizations and countries that existed within the game.

Of course, there was no need for you to give yourself headaches thinking about it in your beginner days. In addition, the power relations didn't often affect the players. But the situation would change as your level grew higher and you did harder quests. Depending on how the worldview was set up, situations would branch into countless choices, and the player's experience would be affected based on their choice. For example, doing a quest for Party A could make you the enemy of Party B.

However, Ark didn't think about it too seriously. 'I can't be afraid to build a house for fear of splinters.'

There was still more he didn't know about New World than what he did know. With the little knowledge he had, he was in no position to shirk this and that. No matter how realistic it was, New World was an online game; what the player Ark had to do and what he was interested in wouldn't change.

He would solve the quest given to him and receive a reward!

There was a need to know the NPC's inside story in order to solve a quest, but there was no reason for it to get more serious than that. Though of course, he needed to make a serious expression in front of the NPC...

"It seems like you have many concerns."

"Indeed, it has been a year since the Heartsoul Bead was stolen; it seems that the Warrior Guild and the Merchant Guild have gotten wind of it. They haven't been frankly expressing their suspicion yet, but if they've caught on, then the secret won't be kept for much longer. More so if we flounder to openly look for the artifact, of course."

“So that’s why you’re asking me, someone who has no direct relationship with the Magic Institute.”

“That’s exactly right. You proved that you aren’t one to betray someone’s trust because of greed with the Jackson incident. I can believe you and entrust it to you. How about it? Do you think you can help?”

“I have never turned away from a person seeking help”

“Are you saying you’ll accept?”

“Of course. If it is an item that could bring about disaster to the world, we have to recover it no matter what. However, I don’t know where to start since there aren’t any clues.”

“I wouldn’t have even brought it up to you if we didn’t have a clue.”

“Is there something?”

“It’s something that happened a while back. The Guards took care of one of the thieves that had infiltrated Giran, but something like this came from him. The Guards felt magic power from it, so they asked the Magic Institute to examine it.”

Shannen showed him a small shard of iron that glittered with silver luster.

“This is...?”

“It’s a shard that fell off the Ward that was sealing the Heartsoul Bead.”

“So that means someone among the thieves around Giran stole the Heartsoul Bead.”

“Indeed.”

“Are there any other clues?”

“Unfortunately, that’s all we currently know.”

Ark sighed at Shannen’s answer. One of the thief gangs around the extensive Giran had the artifact. Wasn’t that information as vague as

telling him to find a grain of sand in a desert?

‘Well, whatever. There must be some way to solve it since I received the quest.’

Ark had intended to immerse himself in hunting around Giran for a while anyways. Rather than thoughtlessly hunting, he would be more motivated if there was some kind of objective. Moreover, the quest was about something very serious. Since it was such an important matter, that meant he could expect a considerable reward if he solved it. There was no reason to refuse.

“I’ll do my best.”

As Ark nodded, the quest information window popped up.

Find the Heartsoul Bead!
The president of the Giran Magic Institute has offered you a secret task. One year ago, the Heartsoul Bead, which was under the protection of the Magic Institute, was stolen. Shannen suspects that one of the thief gangs active near Giran is the culprit. You must gather more information from the thieves and find the Heartsoul Bead.
However, you must maintain completely secrecy for this task. If the task is exposed to an NPC within the Royal Family, Merchant Guild, or Warrior Guild, then the situation will worsen. Should that happen, Shannen will cancel the task and harbor animosity towards you, who was unable to keep the secret.
Should you cancel the quest or fail, Friendship with the Magic Institute will become 0. In addition, if the secret is exposed, the Merchant Guild and Warrior Guild will become hostile towards you even if you succeed the quest.
Difficulty: ??
Quest Restriction: Within the top 50 for contribution in the Hero

Assembly quest. At least 50 Friendship with the Magic Institute.

‘Eh? What is this?’

After actually checking the quest description, the conditions were more particular than he thought. Ark had planned on gleaning information from the Guards that had executed the thief or from a mercenary NPC first. It would have also been good to ask a merchant NPC, who had to keep tabs on thief information at all times. But if there was a condition that he couldn't be found out by the Merchant Guild and Warrior Guild, then it would be tough to interact with them.

‘I have to find a single bead in the vicinity of this huge Giran in a situation where I can't even ask NPCs for information... dammit, I'm starting to think I made a mistake.’

However, he had already accepted the quest. His Friendship with one of the 3 Great Guilds, the Magic Institute, would be reduced to 0 if he abandons the quest, so he had no choice but to try whether he felt he would live or die.

‘It's uncomfortable on many fronts, but it can't be helped. I've accepted the quest, so I've got no choice but to look for a way somehow.’

Ark set aside his worries about the quest for now. That was because the reward for the quest he had already solved was more pressing than worries about a new quest. Also, Ark's second objective, obtaining information about Snake's metamorphosis, was an urgent matter. Since it was something that had happened because of a magic ingredient, getting info from a Magician would be faster.

But Shannen just tilted his head. “I do know about the Fruit of Basium. It *is* used as a magic ingredient for various things, but the fruit itself has a fatal poison. If a Human, of course, or any monster were to eat the Fruit of Basium, they would perish. But to think that there is a creature that survived even after eating it... I don't know how that came to be. And I know nothing about the Alamone Larvae.

I'd have to look for materials on it, but I can't be sure since it is a race that went extinct long ago, even in the Netherworld."

"I see..." A quiet sigh flowed out of him on its own.

Snake only had 6 days left now. To be honest, he had half given up on successfully ending the metamorphosis. But there was no guarantee that another opportunity like this wouldn't come again. If at least for that time, he needed to figure out the secret to Snake's growth beforehand. But if even the Magic Institute's president didn't know, then just where in the world was he supposed to find the information?

"I'm sorry about that."

"No, it can't be helped."

"Then there's just one thing left to do. I should give you the promised reward," Shannen said, as if to excite the mood.

Needless to say, Ark's depressed eyes became luminous as a result.

Shannen grinned as he nodded. "Actually, after receiving the report on the results, I had quite an enjoyable worry to consider until now. I didn't know that there would be someone among the Magic Institute's volunteer troops who would accumulate more than 50 thousand contribution. You can be proud of yourself, since it means you contributed that marvelously. So you know, how about you choose the reward yourself?"

"Are you saying I can choose it myself?"

As Ark tilted his head, Shannen lightly clapped his hands. A door opened on one side as a young Magician walked out.

"Did you call, President?"

"Guide this friend to the repository on the 10th floor."

"To the repository on the 10th floor?" The young Magician asked back with a surprised expression.

“Yes, this young man is that qualified. Allow him to take one item of his choice, no matter what it is. He has already received permission from the upper echelons.”

“I understand.”

“Ark, I’ll rise first.”

At the end of those words, Shannen left the room.

The young Magician approached and politely bowed. “Please follow me.”

Ark followed the young Magician to the 10th floor. Once he got out of the elevator that moved via magic power, he was blocked by a stone gate engraved with a complicated pattern. As if it had several layers of Protect on it, the stone gate crawled upwards with a heavy groan only after the young Magician worked on it for a while.

‘Damn, these, these are all items?’

At the sight that was gradually being revealed with a radiant light, Ark’s eyes became as wide as saucers. All kinds of items were on display, packed closely and in abundance within the large stone chamber. Each and every one of them were shining brilliantly; he could tell they were Rare items in one glance. So to speak, they were lumps of money!

It was a spectacle that would set any gamer drooling.

“This is the repository where the Magic Institute’s most precious treasures are gathered,” said the young Magician with a proud expression. “Even the cheapest one here would likely be well worth 100 Gold. Also, you are the first stranger to enter this place. Since you have Master Shannen’s permission, please select one of the items here. We will give that to you as a reward.”

“One... you say?”

“Yes, one. I’m saying this by way of caution, but you will only have one chance. Please choose carefully.”

The young Magician replied firmly as he operated a device. Then

there was a sound of machinery as the display case protecting the items was pushed up. As a result, the brilliance shining from the items became a level stronger, making his eyes hurt.

‘Be careful or whatever, you say...’

Ark gulped down his saliva as he went around the room.

As the young Magician had said, any one of them would reap 100 Gold. No, they were Rare items well worth hundreds of Gold. Since he was surrounded in such items, it felt like he couldn’t breathe.

‘Gulp, are you telling me to choose *one* from all of these?’

The young Magician had spoken as if to do him a kindness, but to Ark, there was no greater torture than this. He had to pick just one item in a room filled with Rare items that were so close he could touch them if he reached out his hand? Rather than hearing that he’d be given one, he heard it as taking away all the rest.

But Ark steeled himself with all his effort. ‘Be, be cool, Ark. This is really a chance that doesn’t come twice. One choice can bring in several tens of Won, no, several hundreds of Won. If I get excited and choose foolishly, I might regret it for the rest of my life!’

There was a trap to the Magic Institute’s reward. If he put his hand on an item and checked its info, that would be the end of it. In other words, it was the same system as the blind auction.

Thankfully, Ark had a perceptiveness that had been polished and refined in the blind auction house. But that ability actually became a hindrance here. It would be easy if the good and bad were cleanly divided instead. However, this place was literally a treasure storage. The goods inside the room all looked incredibly awesome. No, all of them were good. Since had to choose the one that was the best out of them all, it was hard for him to appraise them properly because his greed kept flaring out.

‘Gasp, this sword... it looks good! Just what stats does it have?’

Ark was stretching out his hand as if drawn like a magnet before he shook his head, startled.

‘No, no. Get ahold of yourself, Ark. There’s no time limit, so there’s no need to rush. Look at them all and choose the one that looks the best out of them!’

Ark composed his breathing, which had become rough. Then he began to carefully check out the items as he went around the repository. Cold sweat trickled down his forehead, as if he had just gone through a battle. Then, when he had gone through around half of the items—

Hiss hiss!

He felt his waist being constricted as Snake squirmed. Having as much interest in items as Ark, it seemed that Snake was also overexcited. But Ark had no time to pay attention to Snake’s reaction.

“Don’t distract me, Snake.”

As Ark glared brusquely at it, Snake lowered its head with a sullen face. Snake pestered him a few times after that as well, but Ark had no leisure to pay attention to such a reaction.

Stats varied wildly between items, even if they were all Rare. It was common sense that an item with a high level restriction generally had higher stats; even if it was a Rare item, he wouldn’t be able to expect much money or performance from a level 10. On the other hand, if it was level 100, then he would be able to get an enormous price for even a simple Magic item.

Therefore, Ark’s choice centered around the item with the highest level restriction. And after roughly 30 minutes had passed, he was finally able to narrow it down to three items.

A longsword that emitted a frosty blue luster.

White plate armor engraved in a golden design.

A leather helmet decorated with jewels of five colors.

As befitting of items he had picked and found, the energy they exuded was unusual. Having picked three items for the time being,

Ark agonized for a long time.

‘I’m gonna go crazy. I’m certain these three are items at the highest level here...’

In the end, Ark started ruling them out one by one through the process of elimination. ‘There’s no merit to getting an item and just selling it. It’s best to use it for as long as its worthwhile before selling it. For that purpose, it’ll be better to give up on the item with a high chance of being for Warriors only.’

Accordingly, the plate armor was out.

‘The rest are the sword and helmet... Dammit, this is as hard as choosing between black bean noodles and spicy seafood ramen. But even if they both have magic effects on them, it’s way harder and more expensive to acquire a weapon than armor. My ultimate objective is to sell it in the auction anyways, so if I had to choose between the two, it’d have to be the sword. Alright, I’ve decided. Huhuhu, now, how awesome an item will it be...’

[T/N: Black bean noodles and spicy seafood ramen are very common Chinese-style foods in Korea.]

Having made up his mind, Ark stretched his hand towards the sword.

At that moment, something he’d never even imagined happened.

Hiss hiss, HISSSSS!

Restless ever since Ark narrowed it down to three and started agonizing, Snake suddenly yanked on his waist. Having been concentrating on the item alone, Ark was dragged over with nary a chance to resist. Then, in the moment when he was about to catch his balance with a shocked face—!

Wasn’t Snake desperately extending its neck and stretching out its tongue? And then, in the space of a cry, Snake gulped down a frayed book that was lying on the side.

It was after that the display case closed with the sound of machinery.

“EHH? W-WHAT?!”

A message window suddenly popped up before his eyes.

Deadly Poison Preparation Tome (Rare)

Usage Restriction: Thief-related profession at level 50 or higher.
--

“A tome? A TOME, YOU SAY?”

Ark’s face went green. Just what kind of unexpected bombshell was this?! Out of all the items that he could get hundreds of Gold for, a fucking *tome*?

Granted, a Rare tome was also a considerably valuable item. But no matter how precious it was, it couldn’t compare to a Rare weapon. Even worse, Deadly Poison wasn’t even a tome for all professions. Since it had a profession restriction, he couldn’t expect a very good price for it.

“W-what the hell is this, Snake!”

As Ark screamed, Snake shrank away, startled. Ark ground his teeth before hurriedly staring at the young Magician.

“You saw, right Th-this is a mistake. I wasn’t the one who chose, so please let me choose again.”

But the young Magician replied with a smooth smile. “Of course, you cannot.”

Th-th-thump, a quest window came up.

The quest ‘Magic Institute’s Reward’ has been completed.
--

You, who contributed greatly to protecting Jackson Castle, received a reward worthy of your effort from the Magic Institute. Even with many treasures left in front of you, you have decided to be satisfied with a small reward. The young Magician will report your humility,

and Shannen will be deeply impressed once again.

With this, your contract with the Magic Institute has ended.

+50 Friendship with the Magic Institute.

“ARRGHH!”

Ark’s scream rang within the repository.

* * *

“...This is a disappointment. Snake!”

Having been rolling around on the ground tearing out his hair for a while, those were the first words Ark spat out.

With a very downcast face, Snake was on the verge of tears. It was a very pitiable sight, but there was not a whit of sympathy in Ark’s eyes.

The glamorous longsword that had emanated a blue chill was still shimmering in front of his eyes. There were many weapons with magic effects, but swords that showed such obvious magic effects were certainly few and far in between.

Just how much damage would it have had? What kind of options did it have?

Having been unable to acquire it, he came to think of the sword as an even greater item. In addition, a weapon with a frost-related magic effect was something that all players would drool over. Unlike other magic effects that ended with just dealing additional damage, frost-related ones activated the Slow hex at high rates. Thanks to that, there were cases where such items were sold with a premium of an additional several thousand Won, even if they were at the same grade of rarity. That had been replaced with an old tome right before his eyes.

Wasn’t this like going into a buffet that cost a thousand dollars and coming out after eating just green beans?

It was to the point where it would actually be more strange if he didn't go mad.

"Just why the hell did you do such a thing!"

Hiss hiss, hissss!

Snake put a lot of effort into justifying itself, flickering its tongue. But there was no way Ark could understand Snake's words, so he could only see it as Snake teasing him. Since the opposite party wasn't even Dedric, but the Snake he had trusted, the feeling of betrayal was even greater.

"Put away your tongue! Shut up! Dammit, do you know what the hell you did? It was a chance for me to choose any item worth hundreds of thousands of Won, an item that could buy several thousand rolls of kimbap!"

Ahh, what poor imagination, to use just kimbap as a metaphor for the value of hundreds of thousands of Won; but Ark's staple was the cheap and simple kimbap, so there was no helping it.

"You ate a thousand rolls of kimbap just now! Do you even know?"

At last, tears began to drip from Snake's eyes.

Dedric grinned as he added oil to the fire. "Kekeke, just look at you. And you're the one that always gets loved by Master! I knew a day like this would come some day! Master, you can't let it go. You have to use this chance to clearly teach Snake its place! Snake's place!"

"Shut up!"

"Che, why're you getting mad at me? I'm the one you always kill."

"You, really—!"

"Alright, I get it. I'll be quiet."

Ark pierced Dedric with a menacing look before abruptly tearing at his hair.

He knew. It was already spilled milk. No matter how much he raged and struggled, the quest was already finished; no matter what he

did, there was no way to turn back what was done.

In a case like this, the usual Ark would quickly let it go. Ark was the type to carry out something to the end with all his power once he made up his mind, but he was also quick to give up on things that couldn't be done even if he tried. But this time, it wasn't easy to give up on it. A person who thought they had won the lottery, but found out the date was wrong would feel like this.

"Dammit, I don't need a Familiar that acts as it pleases, scram!"

For some time, Ark clutched his head, and Snake cried.

Once his agitation calmed down a little, he realized something strange.

'Huh? Wait, how did Snake swallow an item?'

Ark finally realized that there was a contradiction to Snake's actions. Snake had gone into metamorphosis through the Fruit of Basium. And during metamorphosis, it couldn't swallow or even spit out items. Hadn't it tried several times to eat items, but immediately spat them out? But Snake hadn't expelled the tome yet. Metamorphosis lasted 20 days. He had spent about 13 days in Jackson, so there were still 7 days left.

Just then, Skull, who had determined the atmosphere early on and had been laying low, suddenly leapt up as it forcefully clacked its teeth.

Clack, cla-cla-clack! Cla-clack!

"What, even you... eh? Snake!" Raising his head, Ark burst out in shock.

Snake was lying limp next to Skull. Startled, he urgently lifted Snake and felt it was as cold as ice. Then the scales lost their elasticity as Snake had gone into metamorphosis began to peel and fall away.

"What? What's wrong? What's happening? Snake!"

"Ehh? Why is this fella suddenly like this? Su-surely not *obliteration*?"

“Obliteration? *Obliteration?*”

“Dammit, this is because of you, Master! All because you said you didn’t need him! We’re Familiars. If our Master casts us away, we can’t live on! How could you obliterate Snake because of a mere item!”

Dedric seized Ark’s hair and shook it around. His relationship with Snake wasn’t good, but it was still a teammate that had been with Dedric so far. He had teased Snake accusingly, but it seemed he didn’t actually feel that way. Not knowing what to do, Skull was also trembling. At the reaction of the Familiars, Ark’s heart plummeted.

‘S-surely not really because I said I don’t need it...?’

Was his relationship itself with the Familiar canceled? Thinking about it, Ark’s face blanched. Though he had gotten angry and snapped at Snake, who had disobeyed him, he didn’t really mean it. Of course! There was no way he meant it, right? Snake’s item storage function couldn’t be traded for even several hundred Gold. No, no! What was important wasn’t an issue of function.

The emotion Ark felt towards his Familiars was special. It wasn’t important now that they were simply helpful in the game. Loyal Skull, Dedric, who always became Ark’s strength in the moment of crisis even as he complained incessantly, and Snake, who thought of Ark as a parent.

Though he had never expressed it, they were no longer just Familiars to him, they were friends who couldn’t be replaced with anything. To the point that he couldn’t even imagine a New World without them...

“Snake, get ahold of yourself. I’m, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it. It was something I just said because I was angry! Are you telling me there’s a parent anywhere in the world who would throw away his child? You can’t disappear, take strength. I’ll forgive it all so please... please get ahold of yourself! I need you!”

Ark constantly cast the Nursing skill with a shaking voice. In that moment, he felt something slip from his hands. It was Snake. Snake

had slipped out and had fallen to the ground, leaving only skin in Ark's hands.

Surprisingly, Snake's scales had regained their former luster and were glossy again. Also, didn't Snake also have a red stripe on it that hadn't been there before? That wasn't all. As if amazed by its own transformation, Snake stared around dazedly before opening its mouth, as if it felt something there. When it did so, two sharp fangs, one on each side, were revealed. It had only been a snake in name until now, and it hadn't even had any fangs.

But those changes didn't matter to Ark just then. "Snake, Snake! You rascal, do you know how worried I was?"

Ark abruptly embraced Snake. Snake flinched, confused, before sniffing as it rubbed its body on Ark.

Hiss, hiss hiss hiss...

"It's fine, I'll forgive you now. Who cares if it's a sword or a tome? It's okay, it might sell for more than the sword. That's right. Let's think like that."

Hiss?

Snake flinched as it lifted its head.

It was then that a message window popped up in front of Ark.

– The tome 'Deadly Poison Preparation' has been digested within Alamone Larvae.

"What? Digested? Does that mean it's gone?"

Alamone Larvae's metamorphosis has been completed successfully.

A mysterious snake that lives in the Netherworld, whose state hasn't been completely disclosed.

The Alamone Larvae will undergo metamorphosis several times until it reaches adulthood. When started by a special magic ingredient, metamorphosis will end with the learning of a new skill. The Alamone's adult appearance and characteristics will be determined based on the skills it learns during metamorphosis.

Alamone Larvae digested a tome and has acquired the skill 'Deadly Poison.' Influenced by the skill it learned during metamorphosis, it has evolved into 'Poison Alamone.'

Poison Alamone

The Poison Alamone has the special ability of producing deadly poison inside its body by refining poisonous plants. However, the Alamone cannot use the deadly poison itself. In exchange, it will temporarily add a deadly poison effect if applied to any kind of weapon belonging to the summoner.

The number of uses and additional effects of the deadly poison will differ depending on the kind of poisonous plant. In addition, it will be able to refine poisonous plants of higher grades as the skill grows, and deadly poison of a higher grade will have an increased number of uses and greater effects.

However, Alamone currently only has one skill slot. Only one skill can be loaded. In order to use the item storage function, the deadly poison skill must be removed and the item storage function must be reloaded. Skill swapping is possible at any time if there were no items being stored inside the Alamone's body.

Race	Creature of the Netherworld	Alignment	Dark
Class	—	Health	50

Loyalty	—	Strength	—
Agility	—	Stamina	—
Wisdom	—	Intelligence	—
Luck	—		
* Usable Skills: Item Storage, Deadly Poison Preparation			
*Currently Loaded Skill: Deadly Poison (Beginner, Passive)			

‘???’

‘Huh?’

Ark read the message with a dazed expression. It felt like he had been hit in the back of the head with a hammer. Come to think of it, why hadn’t he thought of that? The easiest way to learn a skill was obviously a tome. But he had just thought there would be some kind of special method at the words “metamorphosis”— he hadn’t been able to think of tomes, the most sensible option.

“You... you knew that tome was Deadly Poison?”

Snake nodded with uneasy eyes.

‘So that’s how it was. That’s why Snake was being so annoying in the repository.’

Only then did Ark grasp the gist of the situation. Well yeah, there was no way Snake would have disobeyed him without a reason when Snake considered him its parent. He was certain that Snake had known instinctively that the tome was an item it needed as soon as it discovered it. If he thought about the actions Snake had shown him thus far, what happened afterwards was obvious. It had probably thought that it could be useful even in battle if it swallowed the tome. That’s why it had prepared to be cursed and had gulped down the tome. Because it was Snake. Ark could guess that

because it was Snake.

‘Goodness gracious. I can’t even thoughtlessly scold it since its intention is way too obvious...’

Ark stood up with a severe expression. “Alright. I said I would forgive you, so let’s just say this didn’t happen. It seems to all appearances like a useful skill, but next time you can’t eat anything without my permission again. Understood?”

After saying it, it really seemed like something a parent would tell their child.

Hiss hiss, hiss hiss hiss!

Snake nodded in quick succession as it wrapped itself around Ark’s waist and charmingly rubbed itself on him.

In the end, Ark dropped the charges on Snake. He was particularly weak towards Snake.

‘I can’t hate it because its like this.’

At that, the Dedric who had been on the verge of tears when Snake had become strange soon burst out in complaint. “Che! What’s with the discrimination! When I did something bad, you beat me up like crazy for several days and nights...”

“So that’s why I’m telling you to behave properly at all times.”

“What did I do?! Is there a Familiar as nice as me?”

“Are you going to keep talking back? You’re starting to feel hungry, I see?”

“Ah, Master. Who said anything? Skull, was it you? Did you defy Master?”

Clack clack, cla-cla-clack!

Skull stared at Dedric with pitying eyes, as if saying ‘why did you act up if you were going to just dig your own grave like that.’

At any rate, he had paid a big price and Snake’s metamorphosis had

ended with this.

‘Let’s hurry and get out of here. I feel like there’s just going to be more foolishness if we stay here. I’ll know how useful the Deadly Poison skill is after I check it, but what’s done is done, so let’s just cleanly forget it.’

Ark recalled Skull and Dedric and left the Magic Institute.

“Selling level 40-60 items cheaply! Buying accessories!”

“I’m seriously quitting the game today. I’m taking care of my items so use this chance to get your equipment.”

“Recruiting party members who will stay up all night with us. Two spots left. Cleric wanted!”

“Seeking level 70 merc! Payment will be determined later!”

As soon as Ark left the Magic Institute, he was greeted by the sounds of the main street. Hundreds of players were using Shout to do business or look for parties, so it was a complete uproar. But for Ark, who had no interest in shopping for items or parties, it didn’t matter.

‘Alright, now what?’

Ark summed up the situation as he went through the market. The quests Ark currently had were « Find New Settlers » and « Find the Heartsoul Bead ». And although it didn’t have anything to do with the quests, he had to find the Three Marvels. But he still had too little information to seek the Three Marvels, and he’d have to spend a lot of time finding settlers for the quest. In that case, there was only one thing he could do right now.

Hunt down the thief gang around Giran to solve the Magic Institute’s quest.

‘The problem is where to start...’

Having opened up the map, he couldn’t tell where to go. Simply put, it would be in Giran’s vicinity. Giran was 3-4 times larger than Jackson. Naturally, the area that could be called Giran’s vicinity was

just as big.

From the Brandt Mountains in the North and all the way to the Argus Mountains in the South, all of it was within Giran's vicinity. It was near impossible to find the thief gang in such a large area. Even so, he couldn't just grab an NPC and ask them, either...

'Might there not be a way to easily find out the location of the thief gang?'

He was able to find that method surprisingly easily.

The answer was the message board placed in one side of the square. Information about the nearby villages or events were posted on the message board. However, it played another role besides that. Information about Chaotic players or thief NPCs with bounties on their heads! He had just passed by that information until now because of his lack of interest. Perhaps because Giran was a large city, the message board was 3-4 times larger than normal. Also, the information was managed separately in categories like Trade, Regional, and Event.

Ark searched the board where the WANTED bounty posters were put up. 'Are these all the WANTED bounty criminals?'

Dozens of wanted posters with bounties were filling up the large board.

'Eh? This guy is...?'

Ark was able to find an unexpected face among the wanted.

Leo (Foreigner)
A thief who habitually plunders Merchants in the vicinity of Giran. Masterful at telling lies; requires particular caution.
Area last seen : Grey Ridge
Difficulty: ???

Bounty: 40 Gold

Bounty payer : Bambino (Foreigner)

‘This fellow, is he still thieving?’

Ark grinned. Leo was the guy who had tried to rob Ark when he was first crossing over to Giran, but got served instead. However, he must have been unable to snap out of his misdeeds and continued to thief, because his WANTED bounty poster which even had a bold likeness drawn on it was taking up a spot on the message board.

Since a bounty of 40 Gold was 400,000 Won (~\$400) in real currency, it wasn't a trifling sum. It seemed Leo had incurred quite a lot of resentment from the player named Bambino.

If the authorities accepted a player's request and a bounty was put on them, a WANTED bounty criminal would automatically be locked up in prison if they died at the hands of a hunter. Then they would have to pay a fine and stay imprisoned for a number of days to get rid of their Chaotic status before they were released. In other words, if you were unlucky enough to get caught, it would be a pain in the ass. Because of that, there were many cases where people were careful not to incur too much resentment even if they did a Chaotic deed. It seemed Leo really didn't have any tact. Though well, it was obvious from just seeing that he had tried to take all of Sid's trade goods.

In any case, Ark had no interest in the likes of Leo. Ark was interested in thief NPCs, and not just any old heinous thief gang, either.

The Grey Axe Gang (Group)

A thief gang composed of 7 Warriors. Will be rewarded with the bounty if you take down the gang's boss and bring back his grey axe.

Place last seen: Near Rodellin Village in northwestern Giran.

Difficulty: E

Bounty: 15 Gold.

Bounty payer: Giran Guard.

The Silver Arrow (Group)

A cutthroat thief gang composed of about 10 people. Will be rewarded with the bounty if you take down the gang's boss and bring back his bow as proof.

Place last seen: Old Forest in southern Giran.

Difficulty: F

Bounty: 10 Gold

Bounty payer: Giran Guard.

Unlike the other WANTED bounty posters that were, for the most part, already torn away, the thief gangs had barely been touched. In fact, among the WANTED bounty criminals, the most popular ones were the Chaotic players. If a Chaotic player died, they dropped an equipment item with a 100% chance. Since you could secure a bounty on top of that, you could expect a jackpot. The next most popular were the named monsters becoming well known in a nearby region, because depending on the case, you could get a fairly useful item.

On the other hand, the thief gangs had no merit to speak of. It was hard to subjugate them because they were high in numbers, but there was little chance that a useful item might come out since their overall levels were low. Despite that, the bounty was only 10-20 Gold, so there was no reason to struggle to catch them.

'It's comfortable if I don't have any competition.'

Ark tore off the wanted poster of the thief gang that looked the easiest.

— A new bountied criminal has been registered in your information window.

You have participated in bounty hunting for the first time.

Bounty hunting starts when you register a WANTED bounty poster on the city message board. If you take part and take them down, you will receive the bounty and your city contribution will rise. When your Hunter Rank goes up according to your contribution, you will be able to acquire information regarding stronger wanted criminals and will also be paid various kinds of different rewards.

However, the registration will be canceled if you perish while the bountied criminal is registered, and you can start hunting again after re-registering in the village. In addition, there is a 60% chance that you will lose an equipment item due to the special 'Looting' characteristic of the thieves.

Ark's current Hunter Rank is —.

The usual point was that he had to go back to the village and register again if he died after registering. Therefore, if he went and died while getting rid of the thief gang, he would have to start from the very beginning.

He also hadn't been aware that his city contribution would rise if he caught a wanted criminal. A Merchant raised city contribution through trade, but it seemed a combat profession raised contribution with a method like this.

There was a surprising amount of depth to the world of a bounty hunter, too.

'How fun. Shall I try it once in earnest?'

He would receive bounty money and get information as he hunted, and he could even raise city contribution. Once he thought of it in that way, his motivation surged greatly.

‘I’ll be eating the pheasant, eating its eggs, *and* using its nest to kindle a fire!’

Ark’s life in Giran began.

Bounty Hunter

Ark didn't have much knowledge about the Giran region yet. Even when he spread out the map and looked at it, it was almost completely covered in black fog. He had first come to Giran through the Grey Ridge shortcut, and after that he had lived holed up in the blind auction house. Then, the event quest had started right afterwards, so he had no time to hunt. That's why he stopped by a General Store before leaving Giran to buy some maps. In the case of large cities like Giran, if you bought a map with the geography and information about nearby hunting grounds, new info would be added automatically.

Based on that information, there was a diversity in hunting grounds around Giran. There were forest, plains, swamp, and mountain regions, and depending on the region, the monsters that appeared varied vastly and ranged from level 50-100 as well. This was a perfect place for low leveled players to level up after leaving Jackson Territory.

'Let's see. The Old Forest where the Silver Arrow thief gang is...'

When he checked the map, it was marked as a level 60-80 area.

'It's a reasonable level.'

Ark was currently level 78. He felt it was a bit easy, since he had hunted monsters stronger than him until now, but since his goals were information collection and bounty hunting anyway, the easier it was, the better.

Ark moved to his destination along the road. When he travelled on a paved road, an additional effect of +20% movement speed was added. Therefore, he could minimize travel time. Thanks to that, Ark reached his destination in just 30 minutes.

Trees of enormous width were packed closely in the Old Forest, where the Silver Arrow thief gang was hiding.

“It’s meat...! Fresh... human meat!”

When he entered the forest, three Trolls appeared as if they had been waiting,. Ark’s eyes flashed.

‘This is good. I wanted to try out the Deadly Poison skill before I encounter the thief gang.’

“Grrrrrr, DIE!”

Claaang!

Shrieking, a Troll swung its club. But, being in the early level 70s, the Troll was already no match for Ark.

“Dedric, Skull. Buy me some time.”

“Huhuhu, playing with such a slow fellow is no problem.”

Clack clack clack!

Dedric and Skull replied confidently as they attacked the Troll. With that opening, Ark dodged the club with light footwork and fell back. Then he fed Snake the ingredients he had confirmed as poisonous, having gathered them since entering the forest. A short while afterwards, light blue fluid flowed out of Snake’s fangs. It was venom made with the Deadly Poison Production skill.

Swish, ka-chink!

When he spread the venom on the blade, the blade’s surface turned blue with an eerie sound effect.

You have applied Neurotoxin (Beginner) to Lancel’s Sword.

If the enemy is hit with an attack, the nerves of the struck region will be paralyzed for 5 seconds (5 uses).

“Dedric, Skull. Distract the other guys now!”

Having applied the poison, Ark flexed his muscles before flying out like an arrow.

The Troll swung its club with a roar. However, Ark had faced the irregular attacks of Shadows at Jackson not long ago. He could dodge the incomparably slow Troll's attack with his eyes closed. Ark twisted his head to dodge the club as he stabbed horizontally with his sword. A Counter Attack burst out in that instant as the Troll swayed to one side.

— The Troll's left leg has been paralyzed by Neurotoxin!

Paralyzed in one leg, the Troll retreated while limping very pitifully. But Ark wasn't one to spare a monster because it was pitiful. He immediately rammed his sword into the Troll's other leg. Then, when he let loose a sidekick as he dodged the club, the Troll with both legs paralyzed flailed both its arms before falling over. It was in a perfectly defenseless state!

Double Critical Chance activated.

"Dark Blade!"

After taking immense damage with a brilliant flash of light, the Troll disappeared.

It was the same for the two remaining Trolls. The Troll's arm would droop limply if he struck it with his sword. Occasionally, the spinal nerves were paralyzed when he dealt a critical hit to the body.

Of course, the activation rate wasn't 100%. Perhaps because it was Beginner Deadly Poison, the success rate was roughly 20%. The rate was slightly higher than succeeding a kick with high difficulty.

But there was a point that Ark hadn't thought of. In the case of kicks, large monsters like Trolls almost never got status hexes. But the poison activated at a pretty high rate even when facing large monsters. In addition, it wasn't random like a kick; a specific status condition could be dealt by choice.

This had a considerable effect. Ark took down three Trolls in just 2 minutes.

“Isn’t this surprisingly useful?”

In battle, even a single second couldn’t be ignored. Especially when in a crisis, the few seconds it took to drink a potion could decide victory or defeat. So if the enemy could be paralyzed for 5 seconds at a 20% chance, there was nothing more to say. Moreover, an enemy could be paralyzed for a maximum of 15 seconds since it could be used five times.

‘I’ve always got the ingredients on hand, especially since I don’t use poisonous ingredients that often. In other words, I can use this whenever I need it!’

Having thought that far, Ark completely forgot the likes of the frost attribute sword. Unlike a sword that he would simply sell off after using it when he got a better item, he could make use of a skill for a long time once he learned it. If it was a useful skill, then it could be better than a Rare item and wasn’t bad at all.

‘This skill might even be more useful than the Rare sword!’

Humming, Ark scraped up all the poisonous ingredients around and tested them one by one. However, because it was still a Beginner skill, he could only make venom from ingredients with weak poison. Most of the effects were just so-so, but there a few useful ones.

Hesitation Poison, which reduced the enemy’s movements by 30% for 5 seconds, Acid Poison, which dealt 30 damage every 10 seconds for one minute, and Vulnerability Poison, which reduced the enemy’s defense by 20% for 10 seconds. It was hard to expect absolute effects, but it was more or less fine to use them as support.

However, it wasn’t a skill he should recklessly overuse, because the effect didn’t apply the same way to every monster. For example, it had a low activation rate on large monsters and the duration was slightly shorter as well. But the Thorny Plant Poison that caused Bleeding actually raised activation rate and lengthened duration. Whereas, if he used Acid Poison on a monster with the acid attribute, it would heal rather than damage.

‘In other words, it means I have to determine the monster’s attribute well before using it!’

He would study the monster and attack it with a more effective poison. The skill suited Ark’s fighting style.

If there was one drawback, it was that it had poor cost to product ratio. There was a limit to ingredients, and there were times when poisonous herbs were needed to use Survival Cooking. He couldn’t just make them all into poison. In addition, poison had a usage limit, unlike kicks. Once the poison was applied, the usage count would decrease whether it was blocked or wasted.

‘But that too is up to me. There isn’t a skill that matches me 100%. To expect something like that is just being greedy.’

No technique is perfect. For balance, of course they all had their own weaknesses. Using that properly was the player’s skill!

“Okay, Snake. I like it. You did well.”

Hiss hiss!

As Ark grinned for a change, the color returned to Snake’s face. Then Dedric grumbled with a very displeased expression. “Tsk, tsk, tsk!”

“What? Do you have a complaint?”

“No, I don’t! What complaint would I have towards the distinguished Snake when all I have is a talent for flying? I’ll just quietly do some recon, jeez.” Dedric sharply turned his head as he flapped away.

At that sight, Ark held back a wry smile. Dedric pretended not to be, but he really was very jealous.

As Ark’s party meandered through the forest while quarreling, at some point the monster spawns suddenly became sparse. Ark knew what such a change meant from experience. He had entered a boundary where the monster domain had changed. But this time, it wasn’t just a simple monster. It was probably the Silver Arrow thief gang’s turf.

‘Come to think of it, this is the first time I’ll be facing a human.’

Not humanoid monsters, but real humans. Since this was a realistic virtual reality, the feeling shouldn’t be different, though once he thought of it like that, he started to feel pretty uncomfortable. Actually, there was really no reason for him to be uneasy since he had already killed Leo and Andel before.

‘A thief gang isn’t much different from monsters anyways.’

Ark was thinking like that and moving forward when he thought he heard a sharp whistle. A crimson light burst out before his eyes. Looking down, he saw a thick arrow quivering in his shoulder.

– You have been ambushed. 200 damage. Your shoulder has been wounded, so attack speed will be decreased by 10%.

“Hehehe, we’ve got good luck today. A guest has crawled in with his own legs.”

“It’s been tough ’cause we haven’t had profit for a while, we’re grateful for this guest.”

“Then we should entertain him.”

“Kekeke, though of course, it’s our way of entertaining.”

‘Dang... is this the Silver Arrow thief gang?’ Ark glanced around himself with shocked eyes.

The tree branches were so dense that he couldn’t see the sky. He heard the voices of the thieves from somewhere up there. And not just from one place, but all around... they were already in place.

He’d gotten so caught up in testing the Deadly Poison skill that he became careless.

‘Even so, to think they would go as far as to lie in ambush...’

No, it was natural if he thought about it with common sense. His opponents were a thief gang in name, so there was no way they wouldn’t guard the area around their hideout. But Ark hadn’t thought

that far since he had only thought of them as monsters. In any case, Ark wasn't particularly worried even though the situation wasn't that good.

'The Silver Arrow thief gang's difficulty was F. Their average level is probably only in the 70s. If it's only that level, there's no need to worry much.'

"Dedric, second tree on the right!"

"Okay!"

As Ark pointed to one tree, Dedric answered excitedly as he flew off. Then, with a "bam" sound, one of the thieves screamed as he tumbled off the tree.

"Aack, wh-what the hell? This bat is—?"

"Shut up, I am a noble of the Netherworld, Dedric-nim!"

"Plan A! Skull, let's go!"

Ark ran at the thief with Skull. But just as he was about to swing his sword, four arrows shot at him from all directions. Ark hastily turned his sword, but even with reflexes trained through Taekwondo, it was impossible to parry four arrows in an instant.

"Argh!"

An arrow lodged into his abdomen and leg yet again.

Hexed with 'Bleeding' and then 'Reduced Movement Speed,' while Ark was staggering, the thief that had fallen off hurriedly scrambled up the tree.

"That bastard, isn't he commanding monsters?"

"Don't be caught off guard. Seeing as he's holding on even after being hit by arrows, he's not an easy one."

"Let's get rid of that bat first!"

"Concentrate attack on the bat!"

“Dedric, dodge! Plan D!”

“Ah, alright! Ack, what the hell is this?”

At Ark’s voice, Dedric hurriedly soared into the sky. But before he could fly even a few meters, he got caught in something and flapped. He had been caught by the crude trap of the entangled, dense branches above Ark’s head.

“Kikikik, idiot. How embarrassing.”

Bam! Bam! Bam!

The thieves laughed as they launched their arrows. Caught in the tree branches and rendered unable to move, Dedric was hit by three or four arrows in an instant and fell into critical condition. Flying creatures were vulnerable to ranged attacks like arrows, so he took 30% additional damage.

“Dammit, unsummon Dedric!”

Ark barely prevented Dedric from being force recalled by unsummoning him. But then the situation became even more difficult. All the attacks that had headed towards Dedric were concentrated on Ark. Lacking a ranged attack skill, there was nothing Ark could do since they were shooting arrows from atop the trees. Ark rolled on the ground as he blocked and dodged the arrows flying at him crazily from all over the place.

However, it was impossible to avoid all the arrows. He took one hit from every three to four shots, and his situation only worsened because he was hexed with Slow or Bleeding whenever he got hit.

The thieves even acted cunningly.

“I’m next!”

Hearing sound from behind him, he quickly turned around, and an arrow lodged into his back.

“The idiot looked back. Kikik.”

“What kind of dickhead would point out where each and every arrow

would fly from?”

“Hey, this time I’ll attack. Try and block this!”

“Shut up!”

‘Do you think I’d fall for that one a second time?’... was what he thought, but when he didn’t even turn his head, this time an arrow really did come flying in. After taking a few attacks like that, red-hot anger surged in him.

Who would have even thought of it? That he would take attacks while being teased by thief NPCs.

‘Argh, th-these bastards...’

Ark ground his teeth. But no amount of grinding his teeth would improve the situation.

Ark struck a tree with Dark Blade in rage. He was trying to shake a thief loose from the tree. But being a few meters in diameter, the tree didn’t even budge.

‘Damn it, the hell am I supposed to do?’

He also tried to climb up a tree, but even that wasn’t easy because of the thieves’ arrow attacks. He only ended up getting hit stupidly by a few arrows before retreating.

Of course, Skull was no help at all. There was no way Skull, who rolled along the ground, could crawl up a tree that even Ark couldn’t climb. It also couldn’t take the arrows cutting through the air in Ark’s stead. In the end, there was no difference whether Skull was there or not. Maybe for that reason, the thieves paid no attention to Skull. While Ark and Skull ran around in confusion like that, his Health was cut down bit by bit and he fell into critical condition.

‘No, I can’t die against these guys!’

Urgency filled Ark’s face.

His opponents weren’t ordinary monsters. If he died at the hands of the thief NPCs, there was a 60% chance that he would drop an

equipment item.

‘I’m angry, but surviving is the first priority!’

“Unsummon Skull!”

Ark returned Skull back to the Netherworld and began to flee.

“You think we’d lose a fish that’s already caught?”

The thieves were really not to be taken lightly. They used the vines hanging everywhere in the forest to move from branch to branch like Tarzan as they shot arrows.

Ark slipped between the trees while dodging the arrows, but in the end he took yet another arrow to his knee and collapsed.

“Got him!”

“Finish it!”

‘Arghh, dammit... Am I really going to die from level 70 thieves?’

Ark was grinding his teeth while watching the bandits approach when he suddenly spotted a familiar object on the branch the thieves were moving towards. It was a brown object that looked like a rugby ball hanging upside down on the tree branch. Ark knew what that object was.

They were honeybees that inhabited the forests of New World, a Red Bee beehive.

In his beginner days of struggling in the Argus Mountains, there was a time when he almost died after finding out that a top-level ingredient, honey, could be acquired from the Red Bee beehive and recklessly rushed in.

‘Good, with this it’s all or nothing!’

“Summon Skull! In the end, I can only depend on you!”

Ark grabbed Skull and threw him with all his strength. Skull flew out in a straight line and hit the beehive. Afterwards, the beehive shook greatly and then Red Bees began to pour out in droves. Buzzing with

aggressive cries, when the Red Bees poured out, the thieves' faces blanched.

"Shit, Red Bees!"

"R-run away! It's the end if you get caught!"

"Aaaaah!"

As the Red Bees rushed in, the thieves screamed as they fled in all directions. One of them was attacked by the Red Bees and fell to the ground. Then the Red Bees swarmed in like clouds and lowered his Health to the bottom in an instant.

In the meantime, Ark sent Skull back to the Netherworld and ran into the forest. Belatedly discovering Ark, the Red Bees swarmed towards him.

Ark had fallen into critical condition, so the Indomitable skill series and Adrenaline effects were activated. Thanks to that, his movement speed had increased dramatically, but he couldn't lose the Red Bees completely. The buzzing sound closed in on him until it was right behind him.

'It was somewhere around here, wasn't it...?'

Ark tore through the forest like crazy. After a few minutes had passed like that, the forest suddenly disappeared and an expansive lake appeared. It was a lake he had discovered not long after entering the Old Forest.

'Alright, found it!'

Ark immediately jumped into the lake.

"Whew ...!"

The Red Bees milled around above the surface for 10 minutes before leaving. If there hadn't been a lake nearby and if he hadn't had the Mermaid Scale, he would have died without a squeak.

Firstly, Ark recovered his Health while making and eating food.

"Dammit! That hurt, IT FRICKIN HURT! Those bastards! I won't

forgive them!” Resummoned, Dedric flew about in rage.

Ark felt the same way.

Thinking about the battle just now, he suddenly recalled an unpleasant memory from when he was young. It was right when he’d entered elementary school. Ark had been a very withdrawn child. And at that age, there was always a brat who bullied such kids. There were punks like that in Ark’s class, too.

The brats harassed Ark whenever they could. Most of it was just hiding his shoes or eating his lunch, but there was one joke that made him mad even when he thought of it now.

It was a joke where 3-4 kids would steal his bag and pass it around, taunting him to take it back. If he ran towards one kid it would be passed to another kid, and if he ran to get it once more it would again be passed... Someone who hadn’t experienced it wouldn’t know the feeling.

He had felt exactly that way when he was getting toyed with by the thief NPCs. A truly incomparably dirty feeling!

‘Those bastards... I’ll annihilate them no matter what it takes!’

Ark ground his teeth tightly with terrifying eyes. At that sight, Dedric and Skull got scared and shrank away.

“Hiik, w-what’s wrong? I did what you told me to do, Master!”

Cla-clack, clack clack clack!

“I know, don’t throw a fit and be quiet!”

When Ark yelled at them, Dedric and Skull slinked away carefully and flattened themselves in a corner.

He raised his temper at the Familiars, but Ark knew it wasn’t their fault. He wasn’t generous enough to defend someone else’s mistake, but he also wasn’t as narrow-minded as to blame others for his mistakes. He only had himself to blame for the insufferable humiliation from this battle.

‘I’ve got no excuse.’

Actually, Ark had been a little conceited all this time. After changing his profession, Ark had always fought enemies with higher levels than him. 5-10 levels was the usual, and sometimes he even hunted monsters 20 levels higher than him. In addition, he took down boss monsters that he shouldn’t have been able to even touch at his level. Moreover, he got 1st in contribution in the event quest at level 70.

While doing all the things he wanted to do, Ark had forgotten the most important thing.

It was nothing new, but in New World, level wasn’t everything.

The competence of the player controlling the character was more important than the level. The reason why Ark had grown faster than others was because he had realized that early on and had refined and polished himself without rest, and because he didn’t neglect putting effort into making use of realizations from real life in the game. But at some point, he began to neglect that effort. It wasn’t that he didn’t work hard to exercise. Like before, he was still working out for two hours every day to the extent of getting muscle pains. The problem was that he had neglected finding out how he could apply the results of the exercise to Ark. He had also neglected research on ways to learn or use new skills. Satisfied with his current self, he hadn’t improved.

‘I was too easy-going. Because the monsters I’ve fought up until now have been easy, I thought it would stay that way. But is a game. I can’t fight the same monsters forever.’

There was an absolute, immutable law in all games.

The higher your level went, the harder the battles would become.

If you leveled up, of course you would become that much more powerful. But the monsters you’d have to face at a high level were even stronger. In addition, they would gain various characteristics, making them even trickier to face. In other words, as your level grew, you needed more precise control and a greater understanding of the game. Of course, it didn’t matter if he was satisfied with the

monsters he was hunting now, but...

'If I'm to make money with the game, I'll always need to be ahead of the others.'

Ark was playing the game to join Global Exos and to make a living. Others invested money in order to play New World, but Ark had to do the opposite, make money off it.

Wasn't it obvious that he had to be one step ahead of everyone?

If the majority of players sold their level 30 items after reaching level 40, of course they wouldn't make any money. You had to sell a level 45 item at the very least to make money. And to do that, you'd have to take down stronger monsters before other people did and finish quests of a higher level.

'I was out of my mind. For me, the game is my job. It's not bad to enjoy the game, but I can't lose sight of my objective because of that enjoyment. If I'm to do better than others, I have to do more and work harder. I can't just play the game for fun.'

Ark clenched his teeth.

'What's important right now isn't the quest or leveling up. My level right now is 78. I'm not level 40. So I have to bring my skills up to match my level 78 character. That is what I have to do right now. Alright, this is actually good. There's no need to think of anything else. My only goal right now is the thief gang!'

The thief gang was no longer simply part of acquiring a clue for a quest. It was a mountain he had to overcome in order to get stronger.

The thief gang went beyond their level and were of a higher difficulty than other monsters. It was natural. The AI that applied to every monster was matched to the monster's intelligence level. But the bandits were human, so of course they would have higher intelligence than regular monsters, and their level of cooperation was also high. But with his Familiars, Ark was in fact no different from a party. If the difference between them and the thief gang had been this great, then the problem was teamwork!

‘The most pressing thing is how I use my Familiars.’

The Familiars were now a part of Ark. Looking at the ratio in battle, if Ark was 60%, then the Familiars occupied 40%. In other words, the abilities of the Familiars became Ark’s strength in battle; in order to face enemies that used cooperative play like the thief gang, they absolutely needed to level up their teamwork.

‘There’s a limit to the simple operations we’ve used until now. We’ll use this chance to reinforce the operations a little so that we can deal with more complicated situations.’

It had been A, B, C, and D until now. They had only used four plans. Of course they were as effective as they were simple, but if the number of monsters increased and the situation became more complex, it limited their maneuverability.

‘We need an operation that’s a bit more methodical and mutually beneficial.’

Ark’s strong point was that he could immediately immerse himself in thought.

However, the only operations Ark knew were the ones he had experienced in FPS (First Person Shooter) or RTS (Real-time Strategy) games. After struggling and racking his brains for a long time to think of a plan, he found a way. It was the battle professional who had been sent to South America to train SWAT, JusticeMan.

Hadn’t he already seen how powerful JusticeMan’s tactics had been in Jackson?

Finishing his thoughts there, Ark immediately logged out and called JusticeMan.

“Strategy? What are you talking about all of a sudden?”

“I really need it. Do you have anything that could help?”

“Well... I do have something. But the textbook I have is too high level. It’s only got things that are hard to understand even for people who came back from the army.”

“Isn’t there a textbook for learning the basics?”

“Ah, I do have one. I don’t know if it’ll help, but I’ll send it to you.”

Just like when he first made the plans, his training opponents were the slow Trolls. Ark used Dedric to lure out Trolls one at a time to try out various operations.

“Plan A-4!”

When Ark gave the command, the Familiars attacked the Troll sufficiently while luring it to the back. After luring the Troll to a remote place like that, they switched to A-1 and Dedric and Skull split to the left and right as they besieged the Troll. When they did so, the Troll floundered, unable to decide on who to attack. Since the attacks weren’t focused they were also easy to dodge. In addition, since they were all on different sides, one out of the three was always able to deal a Backstab.

A-2 was a series of attacks where they would strike and back off instantaneously. This was for when the enemy was strong; it helped preserve Health. Also, A-3 was a useful operation when facing a quick monster, where all three of them attacked at once. When Snake’s Deadly Poison skill was thrown in properly on top of that, the effect was multiplied.

Like that, Ark used all the A operations to hunt the monsters in the area. And once they reached a level of familiarity with it, he trained them on the B operations.

Of course, the general training went on in Spartan style.

“Skull, you were a few seconds slow in changing operations this time. Food punishment!”

“Kekeke, I knew it. Well yeah, could a skull without a brain even memorize them properly anyways?”

“Dedric, don’t act up. Food punishment for you, too!”

“EHH? W-why me?”

“Didn’t I tell you? From now on, it’s shared responsibility.”

“Ridiculous, this is violence!”

“I told you, right? I like violence.”

Ark opened the Familiars’ mouths and crammed in food. There were a lot of new ingredients because they had never been to the Old Forest before. This was actually JusticeMan’s suggestion. When establishing teamwork, wasn’t it best to brand them with shared responsibility?

A specialist was indeed different. Thanks to him, the two Familiars put their heads together and whispered whenever they could even when Ark didn’t say anything. They didn’t want to be hit by a bolt out of the blue because of the other guy. It was a bit oppressive, but it seemed that the Familiars had finally begun to think in terms of the ‘all for one, one for all’ idea. In any case, through training and punishment, the Familiars’ combat ability increased rapidly once again.

Also, the increase in punishments led directly to the rise in the proficiency of Survival Cooking. And then—!

“Yuck, wha-what is this? It tastes hella bad!”

The food you have made with Survival Cooking is ‘Appetite Killing Stew.’

It smells and looks fine, but it tastes so awful that when eaten, it will cause trauma. It will make the eater lose their appetite and they won’t even want to look at food, no matter how fragrant, for a while. Perfect dieting effect!

The taster will become unable to eat any kind of food for 2 hours. If they force themselves to eat, they will vomit and lose the effects of previously eaten food instead.

The moment when Bat crawled out of the pot and threw up, the skill finally leveled up.

Through much experience, Survival Cooking rank has gone up.

Survival Cooking (Advanced, Passive) : You used various ingredients scattered in nature to make countless new foods. Thanks to your limitless spirit of inquiry and appetite for cooking, you have finally become a Survival Cooking expert.

You can now draw out 100% of the hidden effects in ingredients. Also, the expiration date, additional effects, and the penalties have risen greatly.

As an Advanced bonus, you can make the special dish 'Medley.'

*Medley: Makes a new dish, a 'Medley,' by mixing 2 kinds of dishes together. The Medley dish will mix the characteristics of the two dishes and increase the additional effect, or may even nullify the penalty. Sometimes, a completely different form of additional effect that is impossible with normal dishes will form at random.

However, food made with Medley will not be saved as a new recipe. If there are dishes in your bag that are taking up space but are too regretful to eat or throw away, daringly making them into Medleys wouldn't be bad either...

Survival Cooking, indeed!

Ark hadn't only made food with good effects this whole time. Since there was a limit to the kinds of ingredients, sometimes there were times when he made dishes that he knew would have penalty effects out of necessity to raise his proficiency, and he had to throw away those dishes while holding back tears. One wouldn't know how wasteful it was to have to waste perfectly good ingredients to make trashy food.

'But now I can recycle the trashy food by making them into Medleys!'

Ark immediately pulled out his useless dishes and tried making Medleys. After putting two dishes in the pot and activating the skill, a new dish was soon made with a bubbling sound effect.

You have made a Medley.

Soup of Horrifying Taste + Tea Tasting Like Steamed Rags =
Essence of Fury

Possessing a taste that is hard to even describe, the person who eats this will experience extreme fury.

Fury +50, shouting volume will grow louder by 100%.

Since Medleys had random effects, he could find out the effect as soon as he made it, unlike Survival Cooking.

‘Fury?’

Like the Spiritual Power that Ark used when calling out his Familiars, Fury was a value that warrior professions consumed when using a special skill. Moreover, there was no knowing why the shouting volume increase effect had been made. In other words, it was an effect that Ark didn’t really need. However, Ark was quite satisfied with the result.

‘Soup of Horrifying Taste has a damage dealing effect. And Tea Tasting Like Steamed Rags is a food that actually consumes Mana. It’s not bad since useful food was made from mixing two dishes I would have had to toss anyways. And even if I make a Medley, Survival Cooking proficiency rises. Even if a bad dish comes out, it’s better than just throwing away food.’

After that, Ark experimented with this and that.

Foods made with Medley had random added effects. Even though the same result was still made at a high rate when he mixed food with the same formula, occasionally an entirely different dish was made as well. Though well, it didn’t make much difference anyways...

Since it was a hard-won technique, he attempted using it with great enthusiasm, but he didn’t make any really decent foods. For the most part, there were a lot of effects that gave off the... vague

feeling that they were useful somewhere, or maybe not, like the Essence of Fury.

‘Well, it should be fine if I think about the purpose of these foods slowly. Since I’ve halved the foods I’ve been carrying around ‘cause they were a shame to throw away and I’ve gotten some space in my bag, let’s pack them for now.’

If possible, he wanted to test it out a little more, but Ark currently didn’t have the breadth of mind. He could take his pot and use it at any time. But there was an appropriate time for training and that was now.

‘It’s my turn now.’

Ark had no thoughts of being satisfied with just the fact that his Familiars’ combat ability had risen. Even if the importance of the Familiars had increased, it was still only 40%. The other 60% was Ark’s share. Even if the Familiars got stronger, it wouldn’t make sense if Ark didn’t grow.

‘Thanks to the training I did in the sea, the skills I learned in the beginning have mostly reached their peak. However, I can’t use the new skills I’ve learned properly yet. The success rate of Parry and Counter’s chain skill, Riposte, is especially too low. If I’m to face ranged attacks, I have to make these two skills completely mine.’

After thinking that, Ark sealed all his other skills. He only concentrated on activating Riposte by chaining Parry and Counter Attack. Of course, it was easier said than done. There was no proficiency to Riposte; it was a technique that had to be activated with the gamer’s ability alone. In order to activate Riposte, he had to grasp the almost momentary timing between Parry and Counter Attack. It wasn’t easy even if he got into position and aimed for just that moment. It also wasn’t easy to activate it successfully with a risky position in a battle situation that constantly changed. Rather, he often ended up taking a hit from getting the 3 second paralyzation penalty upon failing to activate Riposte.

“It was a mess this time. I was only able to succeed with it twice!”

When that happened, Ark ate food. Naturally, he had to use new dishes for the growth of the Familiars, so he made and ate a dish that tasted awful from the ones already registered in his recipes. Ark was stern with others, but also equally stern with himself.

Dedric and Skull stared at him with horrified eyes.

“What a brutal master... he’s scary, scary. Let’s not be impudent with him anymore.”

Clack clack clack.

Like that, the Silmido-level, extreme training went on for five, long days.

[T/N: A special military group called Unit 684 underwent hellish training for over three years on Silmido island for an infiltration mission into North Korea. This is the same island that was used for the membership training in Moonlight Sculptor.]

20 hours of training a day without going to a village even once!

As a result, Ark and the Familiars came to look completely like beggars. It was such a difficult time but it was definitely effective. The Familiars memorized all the operations up to D-4, and their fellowship had become stronger as well. That wasn’t all— Ark dragged the activation rate of Riposte up to 80%.

“Alright, now it’s time for revenge.”

“Huhuhu, I’ve been waiting, Master.”

Clack clack clack!

Hiss hiss hiss!

With only evil left in them now, Ark and the Familiars’ eyes gleamed with bloodthirst.

* * *

“Oho, it’s a guest!”

“Huh? Isn’t that fellow the one who ran away a while back?”

“He was alive?”

“Kekekeuk, he’s braver than he looks, seeing as he’s throwing away his life.”

“Then I oughta put an arrow in his head, as he wishes. ‘Cause customer satisfaction is our motto.”

Once he crossed the boundary into their turf again, the bandits mocked him.

Soon afterwards, arrows began to pour from the tree tops.

“Dedric, Skull. Plan D-1.”

“I know.”

Dedric and Skull quickly went out in all directions. Unlike D, where they blindly fled, D-1 was an operation where they determined the location of the bandits and moved into blind spots, using rocks or trees as shields. Ark, however, exposed himself and blocked the arrows with the Parry skill ingrained in his body. After buying a few minutes or so of time, Ark whipped his body around and began to run away.

“Plan A-1!”

“Okay! Skull, come here!”

When Ark shouted, Dedric picked up Skull and cut through the forest.

“Eh? Those bastards are running away again?”

“Catch them! If we lose them again, it’ll be a disgrace to the Silver Arrows!”

The thieves yelled as they pursued on vines. When some time had passed like that, there was a crashing noise as the bandits who had been quickly narrowing the gap suddenly yelled while falling to the ground.

That was exactly what Ark was aiming for. Having found out that they moved from branch to branch, Ark had sliced the branches in

the area beforehand. As a result, the branches broke as soon as the bandits jumped on top of them.

“Now, Snake!”

Hiss hiss hiss!

Craaash!

Snake opened its mouth wide. In that moment, an enormous number of leaves spewed from its mouth. As the leaves flew out in all directions, it was as if the forest was enveloped in a fog of leaves. It was yet another plan that Ark had prepared for just this moment. He had filled Snake’s belly up with leaves in advance for an attack that used Snake’s attribute of throwing up items!

“Urgh, w-what’s this?”

“Damn, where are they?”

With their vision blocked by the leaves that were pouring out like a rain shower, the bandits fell into confusion. That was when Ark and the Familiars leapt into the swirling leaves.

“Plan A-3!”

“Uhahaha, you bastards! Have a taste of this!”

At Ark’s shout, Dedric soared into the sky. Then he drew a steep arc as he plunged down like a lightning bolt. Struck on the top of his head, a thief hurriedly raised his bow. In that moment, Skull sprang up from a pile of leaves as it tore into the thief’s thigh. The bandit screamed as he staggered and the arrow went astray. That was the only attack the thief could attempt. Afterwards, Ark ran in and crammed successive critical hits on him, and the thief fell over without even a chance to shout.

“Snake, Neurotoxin!”

After destroying one of the thieves in an instant, Ark fed Snake an herb. Venom immediately pooled on Snake’s fangs.

Ark applied the Neurotoxin on his sword and went around all over the

place, striking the arms of the bandits. The arms of three or four thieves became paralyzed and went limp. Once three or four thieves became unable to shoot arrows like that, it all fell into Ark's pace from there.

"Th-these bastards...!"

The rogues moaned as they faltered.

A few of them urgently tried to go back up into the trees, but Ark wasn't one to stand by and watch. He immediately unfurled operation C-3, and Dedric flew around in all directions as he stepped on the heads of the thieves. Skull also clamped onto their ankles and dragged them down. When they fell from the trees again, what was waiting for them was Ark's sharp, blue sword.

"You would've played with me oh so well!"

Po-po-pow!

Stabbed in the back, the thieves undoubtedly took Backstab damage and staggered. In the end, they gave up on escaping up the trees and pulled out their daggers. Seeing their flashing blades, a chilly smile spread on Ark's lips.

"You're going to try facing me with blades? I'm thankful."

Ark immediately dove in between the 3 rogues. Daggers were swung in every direction. But who was Ark? A strong, level 78 person who had trained his body day and night with Taekwondo.

Ark had been chased away by the thieves because of their arrow attacks. But if it was simple hack and slash close combat, Ark wouldn't bat an eye even if he were surrounded by monsters over level 100, much less the likes of level 70 thieves...

Moreover, his opponents were human NPCs. It would be easier to predict their attacks with muscle movements than to try and do so with strange-looking monsters.

'Time to strike!'

If a bandit raised his blade, Ark's body would react more swiftly than

expected. He would slip past the blade at an angle and unleash a front snap kick. Then he shot forward as he went right up to his retreating opponent, and unfurled a knee kick and sword strike in rapid succession. Since he was pressed tightly to his opponent, the others couldn't easily swing their swords at him. This was a weakness formed within them because they were clever humans and not ignorant monsters.

Po-po-po-pow!

The three thieves went exploding off in all directions.

“Hiik!”

At that sight, the remaining thief let loose a choked scream. Seeing as he was wearing a stylish hat, unlike the other rogues, it seemed he was the boss of the thief gang. Perhaps because he thought he couldn't face Ark with a dagger after seeing him fight, the thief quickly pulled out his bow. Then he shot an arrow with practiced hands. As befitting of the boss, he must have used a special skill because the arrow was enveloped in black energy. However, Ark didn't even budge and stood right in its way, glaring at the arrow.

Then, the moment when the Arrow was about to lodge itself in Ark's neck—!

‘Now!’

Ark's hand moved like a flash. He parried the arrow as if flinging it away with the tip of his sword, then fiercely stabbed with a chained movement.

The technique had become as fast and delicate as to parry away an arrow zipping in almost within the time it took to mark a decimal point and unleash a Counter Attack! He had practiced Riposte for five days to the extent of getting blisters on his hands for this moment. The arrow was an attack, so he had judged that he would be able to parry it and deal a counter. Lacking a way to deal with a ranged attack, this was the desperate measure Ark had cooked up.

The effect met his expectations. With the sound of metal, the arrow bounced off and lodged itself in the thief boss' face.

“Arrggghh, how, how could such a thing...!”

The thief clutched his face and swung his dagger all over the place, but Ark wasn't one to get hit by such a blind blade. Ark, Dedric, and Skull soon ran in at him, and the bastard quickly turned into a cold corpse.

“Urrgggh, y-you bastard...!”

When the boss collapsed, he dropped a silver bow. Ark picked it up and a message window opened.

– You have killed the boss of the Silver Arrow thief gang.
--

If you take the evidence to the Giran Guard, you can claim your reward.

Within five days, he had finally taken care of the first bountied criminals.

“Uhahaha, how was that! This Dedric-nim's skills!” Dedric leapt around as if he had annihilated the thief gang all on his own.

“Snake, skill change. Item Storage”

It was time to rake it in. Having annihilated the thief gang, Ark went around the area as he started packing away the items. Compared to normal monsters, the bandits dropped a considerable amount of japtem. Unlike monsters that only dropped things like leather or clubs, there were quite a few daggers or clothing equipment items. That wasn't all— since they were thieves in name, all sorts of items emerged when he rooted through their hideout. The dishes and lanterns the thieves had used, and even the miscellaneous items they had gathered through thievery... Of course, there were only shoddy things that wouldn't make much money since they weren't high leveled thieves, but money was money. Ark even threw all the leftover food that the bandits had eaten into his bag.

‘This is more savory than I thought.’

After sweeping up every little copper the thieves had owned like that, Ark immediately moved to his next destination. His next objective was the Grey Axe Gang, which was said to have appeared in the area around Rodellin Village.

Unlike the Silver Arrow thief gang, it was composed of warrior professions. However, they were just as tricky to face. He had always thought of a party with various professions like Warriors, Archers, and Magicians in it to be ideal, but a Warrior party where everyone was armed with shields and axes was also stronger than he expected.

“Chop him up!”

With their shields in front of them, the Warriors surrounded Ark and swung their axes. They were also 5 levels higher than the Silver Arrow thief gang, putting them at 75. And it was no easy matter to take down even one of them because they had tremendous defense. However, Ark broke through the siege with Riposte and used the operation he had practiced with his Familiars to strike and back out as they took care of the Warriors one at a time. When he downed the last Warrior, his level went up.

— You have leveled up.

He had leveled up within five days.

‘Now I know why people didn’t go for the thief gang bountied criminals.’

Annihilating a thief gang was three to four times harder than catching monsters of the same level. It was due to the cleverness of the human NPCs and because they were armed with profession skills and equipment. They didn’t give any extra EXP despite that, so there was no reason to hunt a thief gang with such difficulty. There were plenty of bountied criminals besides the thief gangs anyway.

But Ark shook his head. ‘My ability to adapt to circumstances will grow the more I fight tricky opponents. Like how I hadn’t even thought of returning an arrow with Riposte a while back, and since I

also don't know when I'll have to fight a human NPC next, I have to gain experience with this opportunity.'

"Now, shall I see what you've got?"

Ark swept up all the items that were lying around in the campsite of the Grey Axe Gang. After shaking down two thief gangs like that, Snake's belly filled all the way up. He wouldn't make much even if he sold it all, but the fun of packing away the abundant japtem that poured from the thief gangs was quite pleasurable.

Of course, it was tough to expect much of a quest reward or a jackpot item, but for steadily making money, he felt that the profit was better than going through a hunting ground.

Ah! He almost forgot to mention it, but right when the rascals who had bullied Ark when he was in elementary school rose to 4th grade, they were beaten up by Ark. Ark had been learning Taekwondo for 2 years. His personality of repaying his suffering many times over hadn't changed at all from back then.

* * *

"Oh, did you take care of these guys? I haven't seen you before, so you must be a newcomer? Good work, I'll remember your face from now on since you took care of two of them. Ah, this is the promised bounty. I ask that you work for Giran's peace in the future as well."

-You took down a bountied criminal and received a reward.

For completing the task successfully, your Giran contribution has increased by 15.
--

You have completed your first bounty hunt and your Hunter Rank has been elevated to E.
--

When he turned in the evidence to the Giran Guard, he received 25 Gold and his contribution and Hunter Rank went up as an additional reward. He thought there wasn't much meaning besides the bounty, but it did feel good to have something rise. Also, he caught wanted

criminals and received a bounty. This simple work was surprisingly quite fun.

“I didn’t get information about the quest, but... well, it doesn’t matter. I’ll get it eventually. Let’s just sweep through the thief gangs and get experience for a while. It’s unexpectedly fun and seems profitable, too.”

Ark pulled off two more wanted sheets from the message board.

Meeting Sid Again

Giran's main street was as noisy as ever. Even at dawn, the Trade district in particular was so crowded that there was no space to walk due to the players selling and buying goods. With the exception of a space where three or four people could barely slip out, the street was covered with stalls. It looked exactly like a European flea market that you could see on TV. There were all kinds of items, from material items worth several Coppers to Rare items; there was nothing they didn't have.

If you used the auction house, you had to pay a fee of 5%. As the price of the item grew higher, the fee became very burdensome. From the buyer's perspective as well, there were a lot of players who preferred direct dealing since they could get the item they needed right away. However, there was the risk of getting scammed in a direct deal if you didn't know the market price, so you had to be careful.

'Well, though that doesn't matter to me...'

Ark hadn't been interested in business like that from the very beginning. He could get the items he needed on his own, and it was Ark's opinion that it was more profitable to just use the time to hunt rather than do business to save on the fee.

Ark went through the flea market without much thought. He intended to quickly sell off the japtan he had gathered from the thief gangs in the store and go bounty hunt. But at the end of the flea market, he suddenly stopped.

In Ark's gaze, shoddy clothes were piled up in a secluded corner.

— We are having a clothing sale for all items. Flat price of 50 Coppers!

In New World, casual clothes existed in addition to armor. They didn't have any defense, but they were worn in villages or cities to look cool. Also, there were cases where expensive clothes had an option called 'Charm.' Charm was a stat that influenced intimacy when talking to an NPC. That's why Merchants went around with several articles of such high-class clothes. Naturally, fancy clothes like that were as expensive as armor.

The clothes piled up on the stall right now were just casual clothes. They could only be used for something like trying them on once for a change of mood. Of course, since Ark had no interest in clothes in reality either, there was no reason for him to be interested in game clothes.

What interested Ark wasn't the clothes, but the Hobbit Merchant squatting behind them. The player who was so absorbed in needlework that it was as if he couldn't feel Ark's gaze on him was Sid.

'Why is Sid selling clothes here?' Ark tilted his head.

Sid had changed his profession to Trader. It was a profession where one would buy and sell trade goods from distant villages or cities. But he was making and selling clothes worth just 50 Coppers? Moreover, the feeling that emanated from Sid wasn't bright and cheerful, like before. As if the backdrop around him had changed to grayscale, he gave off a heavy feeling of gloominess.

"Hey..."

As if afraid of Ark's shadow, Sid flinched as he quickly bowed his head. "Ah! We-welcome. I am selling all kinds of apparel at a special discounted price. Use high quality goods to get off on the right start every day. We even have the feathered hat and small fashion items that are popular these days. Please buy one. It's only 50 Coppers. If you buy two, I'll cut 10 Coppers for you."

"Sid, why are you doing business in a place like this?"

Spreading out his goods one by one, Sid's hands abruptly stopped. Then he slowly raised his head and stared at Ark for a moment with

a dumb expression.

“A-Ark—!”

Tears suddenly dripped from Sid’s acorn-shaped eyes. Not knowing the reason for this outburst, Ark asked with a shocked voice, “Ehh? What’s the matter?”

“Waaahh, Ark. I wanted to see you.”

“Why in the world are you crying? What happened?”

“I... the truth is, I was ruined.”

“Ru-ruined?”

“I mean, I even got a loan from the Merchant Guild and bought goods, but... sniffle, I struggled to death and returned, but the market price had dropped all the way to the bottom, and... sob sob, I was put into debt by that... it’s hard to even repay my interest, so... waah, I started to do business to make a living somehow, but... my items don’t even sell ’cause my Tailoring skill is low, and... I can’t even pay my interest so my debt is just growing, and.. WAAHH, I’m tired of making items that don’t even sell now.”

It seemed quite a lot had happened.

After explaining with snot and tears dripping, Sid ended up weeping with abandon. He cried so noisily that his wails rang throughout the flea market, making players glance over. Getting glared at unnecessarily as a result, Ark consoled Sid for now. After barely managing to cease his cries like that, Sid rubbed his eyes as he explained with a much calmer voice.

“You know how I was trying to raise the prices of Giran’s silk shares, right?”

“Yes, I heard.”

“When I parted with you, I had quite a lot of capital. So I went trading with the thought of raising my shares a lot with that. And after reaching the south-eastern region, I found out through the Merchant Guild that Giran’s silk prices had been booming for a long

time. I thought it was an opportunity!”

Sid clenched his tiny fist tightly, as if reviving his excitement at that time.

No matter how irregular a trade good’s market price was, something that had been booming almost never plummeted overnight. Since it had just started to rise, there was a high chance that he would definitely make a net profit despite the time it would take to return all the way to Giran. Having judged it as such, Sid decided to try engaging in a contest with his fate as a Merchant hanging on it.

“The top Merchant Guild Midus gives loans to Merchants as well. So went to a nearby guild and received a loan of 300 Gold, and wrote a contract that I would repay it after selling the silk in Giran. Then I even hired an expensive mercenary NPC to hurry and return to Giran, but...”

“The price of the silk fell.”

“...Yes.” Sid’s eyes welled up with tears again as he nodded. “I was tricked.”

“Tricked?”

“There were actually a few Merchants who competed with me for the silk shares. I found out later, but one of those Merchants used his guild’s funds to control the price.”

“Control the price? How?”

“He offered a price higher than the trading post to the Merchants who came with silk from the southeastern region and bought it all. Since silk wasn’t coming into the trading post, of course the price could only skyrocket. Then, when I arrived with the silk, he sold off all the silk he’d gathered at the trading post.”

The silk scraped up from players had been sold in an instant. The result was obvious— the dramatic price drop of the suddenly abundant silk!

When Sid arrived at Giran, the price wasn’t even 50% of his

purchase price.

In a case like this, the Merchant could only sell his goods to another region. But Sid had written a contract upon borrowing the money to sell in Giran. While he was unable to do anything, the contract time ended, all his silk was seized by the Merchant Guild, and he even racked up a debt of 200 Gold.

... Simply put, he had become bankrupt. As a result, Sid's Reliability stat and Fame dropped to the bottom for violating the contract. In addition, his level and the proficiency of all his skills decreased for making a negative trade; since he had a debt on top of that, he had no money to buy goods and had completely become a beggar.

"Kekeke, I knew that would happen. For a Merchant, he looks stupid." Dedric grinned as he rubbed salt in the wound.

But seemingly lacking the energy to even reply, Sid just sighed as he pointed to the clothes. "Now I'm just barely working on repaying my debt by selling clothes with the Tailoring skill I learned before, but..."

There was no knowing how many years it would take to repay 200 Gold by selling clothes worth 50 Coppers. In addition, his Tailoring skill was low so he could only make clothes without any options; there was no reason for them to even sell well.

After explaining that much, Sid glanced at Ark. "Ark-nim, by any chance..."

"I don't have money." Ark quickly cut him off.

There was actually quite a fortune in his bag. He had almost 700 Gold when he left Giran. He had made 100 Gold from selling the japtem he had gathered from the event quest and the bounty he'd gotten just now, so he had 800 Gold in all. But who was Ark? Ark's bag was a gaping black hole. Money that had gone in once would never be thrown back out again.

As if he had remembered Ark's intense personality, Sid's shoulders slumped. "I see... Haahh..."

"I'm sorry. I had a lot of expenses here and there."

“No, it’s fine. It was my mistake anyways. Hahaha, I can only work hard on my needlework and repay my debt. Well, hahaha. Pay no attention to me.”

The despairing Sid laughed bitterly to himself. Seeing Sid being broken like this made him feel very uncomfortable. Sid was one of the few people he had met in the game, a player he liked. Ark had earned quite a lot of useful information through Sid as well, and he had gotten lots of help from him in the blind auctions too. But to turn a blind eye on Sid as he requested help...

‘I’m just like my relatives.’

After his father passed away and his mother was hospitalized, his relatives had changed face overnight. Ark had felt hatred towards them and had vowed to never live like them. Although this was, of course, a game, looking away from Sid, who he thought of as a friend, made him feel just like them. That bothered him more than anything.

‘Still, I can’t just lend him money when he’s sitting atop a pile of debt... isn’t there a way I can help Sid without incurring a loss? Without costing money...’

After pacing around for a bit, Ark was soon able to find a way easily enough.

Ark was a combat-style character, Sid was a Merchant. Then wasn’t the answer unexpectedly simple?

‘Right, there was a method like that!’

“Sid, would you like to hunt with me?”

“Hunt?”

“Yes, I’m of a mind to go around Giran while focusing on bounty hunting for a while.”

“But you know that I’m no help in hunting.”

“You don’t have to hunt.”

Ark grinned as he explained. Ark had to go around a large region in order to hunt the thief gangs. Naturally, he would end up hunting trivial monsters and not just the thief gangs. And he even had to collect ingredients, but he couldn't entrust items to Snake if he wanted to use the Deadly Poison skill. As a result, he was always short on bag space. If he had to return to Giran every time his bag filled up, the time wasted wasn't insignificant.

However, if Sid joined in, all the problems would be resolved in a single go. He had the 6 bags of Merchants, so there wasn't a problem with storage, and if Sid returned to Giran instead of Ark, he could even concentrate the movement time on hunting.

"So you're asking me to be your sales agent?"

"Yes, you won't need to shuttle back very often because you have a lot of bag space. Also, when your bag fills up, it shouldn't be dangerous to get to Giran if I escort you to a safe road."

"Then the distribution...?"

"I'm also tight on cash, so it's hard for me to give you a separate compensation. In exchange, you can have the profit that you make with your Merchant skill outside of the original prices of the items. At the very least, it'll be better than selling clothes here. You'll also be able to raise your dropped Reliability, EXP, and skill proficiency."

To be honest, Ark hadn't been the one who had thought of this method. If you went up to Giran's store, Merchants who had failed in business like Sid were gathered. They were people who dreamt of comebacks as they sold japtem gathered by players and prepared capital with the commissions. Of course Sid was aware of this too, but those people were mostly Merchants who could net a profit of at least 20%. But having chosen Trader, Sid could get a 10% profit by selling normal japtem, so no players would leave their japtem to him.

"I'll, I'll do it! No, please let me do it!"

Sid grabbed Ark's hands. He had already experienced how fiercely Ark scraped up japtem before. If he could take a monopoly on those items, then even if he only netted a 10% additional profit when

selling them off, it wouldn't be a small sum. If Ark was lucky enough and he occasionally picked up a few expensive items, Sid would be able to make that much more money. It was at least better than sitting here selling clothing for 50 Coppers.

'Huhuhu, this might be an unexpectedly good idea...'

Ark made a satisfied smile. If Sid joined in, he would get 6 bags for free. Moreover, since Sid would automatically return to the village and exchange the goods for money when the items accumulated, he was no different from a walking shop!

Sid was just a bag to Ark after all.

"Alright. Then let's take care of the items I've got right now first and leave."

"Yes!"

Sid hurried to clean up his stand. Then, while Sid was heading to the store, Ark went back to the message board, tore off all the thief gang wanted posters, and registered them. Now that he had no reason to stop by again, he planned to live in the hunting ground altogether.

"I got 15 Gold for it all, and a 2 Gold profit." Having met Sid again in the square, the color had returned to his face.

"Nice. Then you can buy a contract with that money, right?"

"Huh?"

"You have to write up the Merchant contract. Didn't you say that cost about 1 Gold?" said Ark with a suave smile.

In the end, Sid had to hold back his tears, spend 1 Gold, and write up a sales agent contract.

In any case, that's how Ark came to meet the credit delinquent Hobbit Merchant Sid again.

* * *

In a dark cave that stirred with dismal energy, two men were walking

along the cave. One was a handsome man with blond hair wearing sparkling white armor. It was the highly renowned Holy Knight Alan. The man wearing normal plate armor and looking relatively more lacking was Andel.

Andel looked all around as he asked, "I don't sense any presence at all? Is this really the secret hideout of the ones called the Dark Brother?"

"Don't make me say it multiple times," replied Alan as he lit his way with a shining sword.

In New World, there was still a lot of information that wasn't known to ordinary players yet. One of them was how to use a tavern. There was always a tavern in city-sized villages, and if you paid a certain amount of money to the tavern owner, he would tell you a rumor drifting around in New World. It might be a rumor about what kind of item was where, and there was also quest info. Of course, it was still a rumor so there were cases where you could struggle to find it, but get nothing. But in New World, where the player had to find every clue on his own, even that had considerable merit.

"But there is a separate NPC who gives the really rare information. It's the tavern's Minstrel. If you listen to a certain number of the Minstrel's songs, he will even tell you rare information. Well, he only gives you real info if you pay at least 10 Gold for listening to one song, but the Minstrel's info is at least 80% reliable. We got the clue about the Labyrinth of Tarsha from a Minstrel last time, too."

That really meant the Minstrel was an NPC you could only use by using money like water. Like that, Alan acquired high-quality information with a method Ark wouldn't have even dared to try.

"It took a whole 100 Gold to get the info about the Dark Brother. This is definitely it."

"Then that's a relief, but..."

"Wait, there's something there."

Just then, something got picked up by the 'Life Detection' aura that Alan had cast. When he stopped walking and raised his shining

sword, a red crest that looked like a blood-red fingerprint appeared on the cave wall. One old man was standing in front of the crest like a stone statue, staring at the two. It was an elderly man who emitted a somehow strange feeling, but a faint smile spread on Alan's lips.

"Seems like we found it properly." Alan approached by one step as he asked, "Is this the secret meeting place of the Dark Brother?"

"From whom did you hear about this place?"

"I heard it from the capital's Minstrel."

"It appears that he has become lax in keeping secrets, for him to have slipped the info to those who do not even smell of blood." The smell of blood the NPC mentioned was referring to the Chaotic alignment. The elder's eyes narrowed. "And for you to be Holy Knight Alan..."

"You know of me?"

"Huhuhu, just where do you think this is?"

"I don't want to reveal my identity."

"I suppose you would," the elder smiled faintly as he nodded, "since nothing good will come of a rumor that the highly reputed Holy Knight Sir Alan was getting involved with people like us. However, there's no need to worry. We ensure customer privacy; that's our iron-clad rule. In any case, seeing as you're talking like that, it seems you're not idiots who rushed over to subjugate us or something... Alright, shall we hear about your business now, Holy Knight Sir Alan?"

"I heard that you handle all kinds of jobs here."

"Of course. You could call illegal works in particular our specialty."

"There's someone, no, a foreigner... that I want dead."

"An assassination request? I thought you were someone with quite an overflowing sense of justice, how surprising."

"You're saying more than expected."

“Are you offended? Well, alright. The bottom line is that of course it’s possible. But... making contact with us shouldn’t have been an easy decision for someone like you. For you to come all the way here and ask for an assassination... it seems you have a resentful relationship that you can’t reveal?”

“Do I have to say that much?”

When Alan showed a nasty look, the elder laughed bleakly. “No, there’s no need. I get it, we always welcome requests. But of course you know that we aren’t volunteer workers, yes?”

“State your desired compensation.”

“The price differs depending on the term of the request. You probably know since you’re also a foreigner, but all foreigners have a mystical ability, so it’s impossible even for us to murder them completely. It is, however, possible for us to deal as much damage as you desire. Naturally, how much damage we deal differs depending on the compensation.”

At the end of the elder’s words, they heard the sound of bleak laughter as a message window popped up.

You have succeeded in having a secret meeting with the secret assassin organization only heard of in rumors, the ‘Dark Brother.’

The Dark Brother is an underground organization that keeps countless secrets. They have covertly taken part in the history of New World, and at times they are dangerous people who achieve their objective by any means necessary. However, there are only very few people who know of their identity.

A player who succeeds in having a secret meeting with the Dark Brother can request a special job that cannot be resolved alone.

However, bear in mind that dealing with these shady people can cause a fatal impact on your alignment and Fame. In addition, if the truth of your dealings with them is found out, you could even become enemies of the Church.

For every request made to the Dark Brother, 'Good' alignment will drop by 50 and Fame will decrease by 500. In the case of an alignment of 0, it will become -50 and you will become Chaotic.

'Dark Brother' Assassination Request Manual

A-rank request: Murders the target at least 5 times. Takes at least 3 equipment items. 200 Gold commission.

B-rank request: Murders the target at least 3 times. Takes at least 2 equipment items. 150 Gold commission.

C-rank request: Murders the target at least 1 time. Takes at least 1 equipment item. 100 Gold commission.

"I choose the A-rank request." After reading through the message, Alan replied without hesitation.

At that, the elder's eyes gleamed faintly. "Oho, there aren't that many people who request the A-rank... looks like you've built up quite a lot of feeling with the opponent. Alright, we accept. The person we have to get rid of is?"

"Can I believe in your ability to kill?"

In response, the elder grinned as he flicked his finger. At the same time, torches lit up here and there in the cave. As they looked around, that was when Alan and Andel's faces stiffened. Before they knew it, three men wearing black masks were pointing swords at their backs.

"A-Alan!" Andel murmured with a slightly scared expression.

But Alan smiled faintly instead as he nodded. "Good, you're worth trusting."

Ever since he entered the cave, Alan had left his Life Detection aura turned on. But he hadn't sensed any signs of them, meaning that the

level of their 'Stealth' was high enough to not be perceived by the aura.

"I'll ask again, the target is?"

"...Ark!"

At Alan's reply, the elder's eyes twitched slightly. "Ark, you say... Jackson's hero? He's not an easy opponent indeed."

"You know him?"

"This is the Dark Brother. Information of that level is basic."

"Good, you're becoming more trustworthy."

"Wait." Just then, Andel ground his teeth as he took a step forward. "I want to accompany the kill team. I must see that bastard die with my own eyes."

"There's nothing bad for us if someone who knows the objective's face accompanies us. But it shouldn't be good if your relationship with us becomes known?"

"That doesn't matter!"

"Alright. We are prepared to take in the customer's demands at all times. If you tell us where you're staying, we'll compose the kill team and send them to you tomorrow night. Are there any other matters?"

"No."

Alan paid the 200 Gold and backed out of the cave. After walking for a while without talking, Alan asked as if in passing, "Will you be okay? If you're to follow the kill team around, you'll have to give up on leveling up for a while. Your stats dropped again from dying at Jackson. You haven't recovered them yet, right?"

"Something like that doesn't matter anymore." Andel's eyes gleamed as he muttered. "I only did the Global Exos entrance exam for fun anyways. I have no interest in it anymore. My only goal is Ark, that bastard. Lariette said that bastard was an applicant too, right? Che, a fucking beggar with his life hanging on entrance into Global Exos..."

but it was a mistake to mess with me. No matter what method I have to use, I'll make it so that he won't pass the entrance exam. No, I'll make it so he won't even be able to dare to play the game anymore!"

Alan nodded heavily.

Andel was the eldest child of a considerably wealthy family. He was getting allowance from his parents and using that right now, but in time he'd be able to get at least one decent shopping mall. He was only taking the Global Exos exam because he was trying to pretend that he couldn't overcome his parents' pestering. He didn't have something like an earnest reason, like Ark did.

"Anyways, thanks, Alan. I didn't think you'd go this far for me."

"How bad must it be for you to ask even me?"

"Your alignment and Fame must've been cut down too... I won't forget this favor."

"Don't worry about it," Alan replied with mock graciousness.

The NPCs Alan had sought out were the assassin organization, Dark Brother. When the person you had a grudge with wasn't Chaotic, this was the only way to kill them without becoming Chaotic yourself. But perhaps for the game balance, there were considerable limitations that came with using an assassin guild.

First of all, it wasn't easy to meet the assassin guild in secret because it was an underground organization. Also, the minimum commission fee was 100 Gold, a sum that reached \$1,000 in cash. That wasn't all— if you made an assassination request; even your alignment and Fame were cut. Alan had a different perspective from Andel, whose Fame had already reached the bottom because he had a history of being Chaotic. For a Holy Knight, to whom Fame was as important as level, it was truly an extreme measure.

'Andel, I didn't do it for you.' Alan lightly clenched his teeth.

This was something that had happened a while ago. Occupying 1st place in contribution, Alan had proudly returned to the Warrior Guild.

And there, he heard the name of Ark again.

“Have you heard of the name Ark before?” asked the Warrior Guild branch leader.

“I have.”

“Actually, there’s intel that you tied for 1st place with him.”

“What? Are you serious?”

“Moreover, he’s neither a Magician nor a Merchant. If you know each other, could you contact him and ask him for the exact details? If you could have him join a subordinate guild of the Warrior Guild, even better.”

Alan’s face contorted at the branch leader’s words.

‘... That bastard damaged my pride.’

Until now, the existence called Ark had been no different from a fly to Alan. He was annoying, but he was someone Alan hadn’t cared enough about to get up and catch.

Alan was often called a modern noble, and he himself knew that very well. Whether it was sports or grades, he had always insisted on being the best. Everything he wanted came into his hands. That was the same in the game as well. Alan had to be the best in every field that he was interested in. But a meddler he hadn’t even considered interfered. And around that time, Alan witnessed a video of Valderas and one player that had been uploaded on the Internet.

The player who was fighting Valderas was... Ark.

‘He’s a hindrance.’ Displeasure crept up in Alan’s chest. ‘It’s a matter of fact that I’ll pass the entrance exam. What’s important isn’t passing or failing. It’s about whether I can be the top or not.’

The main character of the video hadn’t been revealed on the Internet yet, but Global Exos was probably already paying attention to Ark. They must have received his report, and if you really compared them...

The impact Ark had made was far bigger than the one Alan had made.

That meant that Alan was falling behind Ark in their assessment. That was something Alan couldn't tolerate.

'Alan is my other self. His defeat is my defeat. And...'

He also didn't like how Lariette chattered about Ark whenever she had the opportunity. Alan pretended like he had met her by chance in the game, but Lariette was a girl that Alan had picked out since the day of the interview. That's why he used the game as a pretext to draw her in, and he was slowly winning her over. After all, there was no girl who wouldn't come his way if he put his mind to it. But he absolutely couldn't condone the fact that Lariette was showing interest in a man other than himself. That was what made Alan start to dislike Ark. It was absurd, but considering such an absurd thing so earnestly was the mentality of guys with lots of money.

And now, Ark had touched his pride. It was just a game, but he couldn't fall behind anyone all the more *because* it was a game. He also had to top Global Exos' entrance exam, of course. He could never tolerate someone who got in his way.

'If there's someone blocking my way, I'll destroy him with all my power, no matter who he is!'

That was the way Alan had always lived, and how he would continue to live.

Alan stopped walking and looked back at Andel. "I also dislike the guy that you dislike. That's all."

"Alan, thanks. After we've smashed the bastard, I'll devote all my power to helping you," responded Andel with a deeply moved expression.

But Alan's eyes were infinitely cold as he looked at Andel's face. 'The reason why I like you is because of that servility.'

Thus, the Anti-Ark Alliance was made.

Meeting the Girl

“Chiiik, I-I’m angry...!”

The brawny, muscular Orc collapsed as it trembled. At the same time, the chain mail the Orc had been wearing dropped. It was a pretty awesome-looking armor, but it wasn’t an item he could use—it was the proof that he got after defeating the Orc Thief Gang.

“Phew, the thief gang this time took quite a lot of time.”

Ark opened his stats window as he collected the proof.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +150		
Fame	1,335	Level	85
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of All, Jackson’s Hero		
Health	1,695	Mana	1,295 (+100)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	212 (+5)
Agility	252 (+17)	Stamina	322
Wisdom	31	Intelligence	250

Luck	42	Flexibility	21
Art of Communication	23	Affection	40 (+10)
Special Stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			53
Equipment Effects			
Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor: Agility 2, Frost Resistance +20 Cat Paws: Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit Rate +10% Crystal Golem's Head: Mana +100 Norad Boots: Movement Speed +10%, Evasion +5% Adelaine's Necklace: Defense +40, Affection +10 Resurrecting Spirit: Strength +5, Mana Recovery +5%			
* All abilities will increase by 30% in the dark. * You have the ability to hide in the darkness (15 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat). * Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%. * You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.			

“The level up speed is more or less okay...”

It had already been 2 weeks since he started bounty hunting. Since he spent five days training the Familiars when he first started, he had only invested 9 days into hunting. He had level up from 78 to 85, a total of 7 levels.

He had raised his level 10 times in just three days thanks to the event quest, but that was a special circumstance. It was impossible

to level up even once a day with normal hunting, and for a level 80 character, it was hard to level up once in 2 days. It was because the monsters that showed up were much stronger, so it would take longer to fight and recover. One also had to return to the village after a certain amount of hunting. There was equipment repair, food procurement, and clearing the bag filled with japtem to take care of. And depending on one's profession, an Archer needed to restock their arrows, and a Magician had to get the reagents used in magic.

Town – Hunting Ground – Town – Hunting Ground. This was the basic formula in all games. As a result, the time lost moving and reorganizing in the village was considerable. The higher the level you were and the the hunting ground was from town, the more of an obstacle it became to leveling up.

However, this formula didn't apply to Ark. That was because after becoming a scrub, Sid was dragged in as his exclusive merchant.

Sid acted faithfully, as per the contract. He kept all the items Ark had scraped up, like a warehouse, then he took them to Giran when his bags were completely full to exchange them for items necessary for hunting or Gold. In exchange, Sid got 10% of the sale sum, but since it wasn't money that came out of Ark's pocket, it wasn't a loss for him.

The terms were close to slavery, but Sid had no choice.

Anyway thanks to that Ark was able to hunt for 9 days and during that time he fought an average of 2 bandit groups a day.

In 9 days he wiped out 18 bandit groups. Then, it got to the point where word about Ark spread around the bandits, and they avoided him.

'Tsk, if the Orc bandits didn't run away, too, it would've been done an hour ago...'

Once the bandits run it gets really hard to find them again.

But in it's own way there were benefits.

The bandits would run away and then lay an ambush for Ark, who

had to fight them back using all of his skills. Due to this, many of his skills rose very quickly in proficiency.

Passive Skill

Sword-Hand Combat (Intermediate: 252/300) Sword mastery and hand to hand combat have been refined to increase overall attack power.

Survival Cooking (Advanced: 332/500) Unknown dishes can be created from ingredients obtained in nature.

Indomitable Will (Intermediate: 134/300) Attack power, recovery capabilities and critical rate increase near death.

Indomitable Body (Intermediate: 127/300) Defense, critical evasion, and recovery capability increase near death.
--

Foraging (Intermediate: 255/300) Ingredients can be gathered from nature.

Ingredient Identification (Intermediate: 264/300) Ingredient effects can be identified.

Horse Riding (Beginner: 3/100) The higher the level, the more skillfully horses can be handled.

Adrenaline (Beginner: 27/100) Reaction rate increases and fear state is released near death.
--

Counter Attack (Beginner: 88/100) Counterattack enemy attack with a critical strike.
--

Parry (Beginner 58/100) Block half of the weapon damage from enemy attack.
--

Active Skills

Nursing (Intermediate:234/300 Gives patients hope energy and courage. Mana cost:10
--

Spirit of the Cat (Advanced: 374/500) Mice and small monsters tremble in fear and receive a decrease in their attack, movement speed, and defence. Mana Cost: 120

Eyes of the Cat (intermediate: (203/300) Use sharp eyes to identify enemies. Mana cost:50

Magic Restoration (Intermediate: 239/300) restore an item to it's original form. Mana Cost:10

Profession Skills

Dark Blade (Intermediate: 120/300) Assimilate attack with darkness and strike the enemy. Mana Cost: 100

Blade Storm (Beginner: 10/100) Sword shards create a vortex and tear apart the enemy. Mana Cost: 400

Summon Demon (Intermediate: 125/300) Summon up to three kinds of demon familiars. Spirit Power Cost: 100

Now, all of the skills he learned in the beginning had reached intermediate level.

The job skills, Dark Blade and Summon Demon, had even greater effects when they reached Intermediate Level.

Dark Blade critical hit damage went up from 150% to 180%, Summon Demon was reduced from 1 mana every second to 1 mana per 2 seconds. Additionally, there was the Resurrecting Magic Ring which increased mana regen.

Because of this, he could use his skills as he pleased even when he had his familiars out. And his Sword-Hand Combat which he used the most, but had the slowest growth rate, reached advanced level.

Ark wasn't the only one to improve. Learning new strategies gave him a new excuse to feed the summons food. Therefore the summons now reached level 40.

‘Not bad!’

After Ark had verified the information he wore a satisfied smile.

Actually, he had still not gotten the clue or information for the quest, which was the reason he was hunting robbers. However, it wasn’t that big of a deal. As long as he kept hunting robbers he would eventually acquire the clue.

Ark peacefully thought about it. Even if he worried about it, the clue would not come any faster. The most important thing right now is to level up and raise his skills. And he was having fun hunting bounties one by one.

“Well, first let’s reorganize and continue hunting, shall we?”

“Oh, are you done now?”

When he walked out of the forest, Sid welcomed him.

After Ark passed him the items he got from the thief group and sat in front of the campfire, a message appeared.

– You have arrived at a campground.

50% faster health and mana regeneration. 50% decrease in the possibility of a monster attack.

This was a skill from Sid’s job, a skill from being a trader called the ‘campsite’ effect.

Once the thief group was spotted, there was nothing for Sid to do. Therefore, Sid would find a safe place and make a camp while waiting for Ark. But Sid wasn’t just playing around.

“You didn’t find the information you needed this time either?”

Sid asked without stopping his work.

Sid was salvaging items one by one with his merchant skill called ‘Item Decomposition’ while waiting for Ark.

He tanned the hide and then cut the leather. As for the equipment items, he cut the connecting parts and sorted them according to their type of material.

Although this takes a lot of time, when battle breaks out, Sid had nothing to do. Also, he would get more money this way than if he just sold them as is.

‘Yeah, still... this is taking longer than I thought it would’

“Don’t worry about it.”

“Actually Sid how much debt have you paid so far?”

“I’ve paid 50 gold.”

“You’ve paid a lot so far.”

“Yes, my Japtem Selling Skill increased, so I’m now making a 15% profit. And when I have time, I made clothes, so my tailoring skill also rose. Maybe because of that, whenever I go to Giran the clothes I make sell.”

...Well, at least he hadn’t created a incur a bigger debt.

The hobbit merchant, Sid, was travelling the continent to trade not long ago. But now, he was sewing until his hands blistered, and dismantling items just to earn a few more coppers and silvers. It was a scene you couldn’t watch without tears.

However, Sid was quite a positive-minded user.

“It was hard to even pay the interest, but I am now also able to repay the debt, I can see the hope. It’s all thanks to Ark-nim.”

Sid, who was sitting on a tree trunk, was swinging and stamping on it with a satisfied expression.

‘Well, it’s all good if you are satisfied...’

“But where are we heading to next?”

“There’s a group of Kobold Rogues nearby. We should go there first.”

“I hope there’s a lot of material to make useful dyes.”

“There will be, since it’s a higher leveled forest compared to here.”

“Wow! That means we can create better clothes.” After saying this, Sid went back to sewing and started humming to himself.

“Now that our Health has been filled, let’s start moving.”

“Okay, right after I dismantle this last item.”

Dedric glanced at Sid with eyes filled with pity. Even before, the two weren’t on good terms. Dedric, who says detestable things to anybody except Ark, would call Sid a beggar midget. So whenever they had time, they were arguing each other. But even so, Dedric couldn’t help but pity Sid in this state.

“Really, I can’t see past my tears.”

It was then, while Dedric was shaking his head left and right., heavy footsteps suddenly approached and the nearby bushes shook.

“Dedric!” Ark shouted as he stood and jumped up.

Dedric quickly flew up into the air and looked around.

“It’s from 3 o’clock. Master, two Trolls!”

Ark, who checked the direction, went through the forest with Skull. The two Trolls showed up about 10 meters away. However, they weren’t approaching the campsite.

“Grrrrr, human... it’s humans... Let’s eat them!”

The person the Trolls were chasing while showing their teeth was a bobbed haired girl. A shoe was missing on one of her foot, and her clothes were torn here and there, as though she had been wandering the forest. The girl was full of wound, ran between the trees quickly.

‘She seems like a NPC, but... why in this forest?’

Boom!

Then, the club swung by the Troll hit a tree.

The girl, who was trying to hide behind a tree, fell due to the surprise. She was shaking like a leaf while holding her ankle she seemed to have sprained because of the surprise. As though her figure looked appetizing, the Troll raised its club while licking its lip.

“...!”

The girl covered her pale and terrified face with her two hands.

And at the moment, the club had been dropped...!

Booo-boooooom!

With violent sounds, the Troll was pushed back a few steps

The girl lifted her head with a surprised expression.

A young man with a large back and black hair flowing in the wind was standing in front of her.

It was none other than the ‘Warrior of Justice,’ Ark!

Ark turned his head slightly and revealed a gentle smile.

“There’s no need to worry anymore. Stay back. I’ll be done with it right away, and I will be right back.”

Ah-ah, what a splendid phrase it was!

If it was a user, he wouldn’t have spared a glance, but Ark was always kind to NPCs. Of course that kind behavior was deliberate for the rewards that may come along afterwards.

“Come here, you Trolls harassing such a frail girl!”

Ark rushed toward the Trolls while saying such a cliched speech.

“Don’t bother me... Grrr!”

The Troll was angry at Ark for raining on his parade, and swung his club. However, Dedric came down like a thunderbolt on the Troll’s mug, and the Troll staggered and stepped back. Then, came the continuous critical strikes from Ark. Skull bit the staggering Troll’s

ankle, and it fell like an old tree.

Taking not even a moment to catch his breath, the double critical chance triggered.

“Take this, Dark Blade!”

“Kwaaaaaack!” The Troll shrieked and disappeared.

After taking care of one, the rest was no problem.

Under the combine assault of Dedric, Skull, and Ark from the 3 directions, they fell in panic and started to run away in rush. But after getting hit on the head with Skull thrown by Ark, it fell down.

Ark went over to the girl after grabbing the loot dropped from the Troll.

“Are you okay?”

The girl nodded with eyes filled with uneasiness.

Then, Ark vacantly stared the girl.

Since he rescued her there should be some reward, like a quest, so he waited for her to speak. But she just stared blankly at Ark.

‘What? There’s nothing?’

At that moment, the girl stood shakily, then fell down wrinkling her forehead.

Ark sighed after staring the girl a while.

Apparently, there was nothing to gain from the beggar like girl. However, Ark didn’t have such cold heart to leave an injured girl alone.

“Anyway, for now let’s go to my camp, it’s just close by.”

When Ark offered his shoulder, the girl blushed while relying on him.

“Ark! Huh? Who is that girl...?”

“She was being chased by a Troll.”

“Is that so?”

Sid, who was gazing at the girl while examining her, the girl suddenly flinched and stared back with an idiotic expression on her face. Although she was dirty, the girl was considerably pretty.

She looked like she was around 15 years old, yet Sid, who was a Hobbit, had to look up to her while bending his neck back completely because of how tall she was.

Ark had asked the girl to sit down and used the Nursing skill on her ankle. Nursing was not healing. Thus, it wasn't fully healed but the swelling had greatly decreased.

When the girl nodded as an expression of thanks, Sid uselessly made a surprised expression. Then after searching in his bag, he took out a pair of leather shoes off.

“Looks like you don't have shoes. This isn't much, but please put them. Hehehe, Ark-nim, I'll be taking this off from my pay so please don't worry.”

“I don't care that much but...”

“Oh, by the way, are you hungry?”

When the girl touched her belly, the witty Sid quickly handed her something to eat. Ark started to open his mouth after taking a moment to look at Sid strangely.

“Why were you wandering around at such place like this? Shouldn't there be a village nearby?”

At that moment, the girl who stopped nibbling at her food and suddenly burst into tears.

Sid became perplexed, then shouted. “Ark-nim, she's surprised because you asked her as if you were interrogating her!”

“Ah? What have I...”

“Apologize to her right now!”

Ark was confused by Sid's behavior which changed dramatically

after the appearance of the girl. The girl wiped away her tears, and wrote something on the ground with a tree branch.

— Help me!

* * *

“So... some bandits kidnapped your father and you barely escaped?”

The girl nodded her head in response to Ark’s question.

The girl’s name was Sarah. If Sarah didn’t say anything to Ark when he rescued her, it was because she was mute. And once she found her a little of her composure back in the campsite, she explained her situation by writing on the ground with a tree branch.

Her father’s job was Cartographer, and he was making maps of various regions while travelling the continent. And when he heard there was an undiscovered ruin nearby Giran, he went there to investigate. However, a rogue group had already settled on that territory.

As a Cartographer, he had a lot of techniques to avoid monsters thanks to his job’s characteristic of often travelling to dangerous regions. However, he couldn’t get away from the rogues’ tracking. Eventually, her father got caught by the rogues after he hid her, and the girl was heading to Giran in order to find help.

“Wahhhh, so that’s what happened. And then there were the Trolls...” Sid nodded his head with tears in his eyes.

— I’m begging you, please help me. It’s been four days since he got caught.

“Of course we must help! Right, Ark-nim?” Sid suddenly turned his head and looked at Ark.

Ark asked after looking at Sarah for a moment. “Where is the

location?”

Then, Sarah scribbled on the ground again.

‘The Brown Rock Zone... It’s on the borderline of Giran region.’

Ark immediately opened the information window and checked the information on registered wanted criminals.

‘As I thought, there’s no information about the rogue group in the Brown Rock Zone’

Ark took all the wanted lists that were in Giran’s billboard. But he still had no clue regarding his quest although he had already clear 70% of the area. And the left ones were not said to be found near the Brown Rock Zone. Then, there’s only one answer : there was a rogue group other than the ones registered as wanted.

‘Right, how did I not think of this earlier? What I’m looking for is a rogue group related to a quest. I didn’t even think if they would be wanted or not.’

Ark finally understood his thinking process was wrong. The wanted rogue group will disappear if a user cleaned it up. There will be another rogue group created, but the new rogue group will be different from the annihilated rogue group. Maybe the rogue group Ark have been cleaning up were probably new rogue groups.

But the Heartsoul Bead had been stolen over a year ago.

‘In the New World, I can’t get clues from NPC without causal relationship. It means the rogue group who stole the Heartsoul Bead existed for over a year. Yet, they weren’t registered as wanted is because they didn’t have had any activity from them.’

It was a simple story when he thought about it.

There’s no way a rogue group that could be cleaned up by a headhunter at any time would hold a clue regarding a quest. It means Ark was cleaning up unrelated rogue groups almost for two days.

‘Maybe this is an opportunity. A hidden rogue group... there’s a high

possibility. And more, no matter the form, it's clearly a quest since it's an NPC's request. If it's a wandering traveler, I can hardly expect a big reward, but there's no reason to refuse.'

It was when Ark was diligently running his brain.

Since Ark did not respond for a while, Sid said with an angry voice. "Ark-nim, there's no way you'll ignore it, right?"

"Kekeke, of course he'll feign ignorance. Master doesn't do any job that doesn't bring money!"

"Wha-what?"

"So, why would someone whom *this Dedric* calls Master have to help that dirty looking girl?"

"Shut up, you heartless Bat!"

"A Bat? This one is called *Sir Dedric*, the noble of the Netherworld!"

"Noble, my ass. You're nothing but a bat..."

"You bastard, do you want to die once?"

"Huh, you think I'm scared of you?"

Dedric and Sid started to glare and growl at each other.

"Dedric, enough! Sid, you as well."

Ark shouted and then revealed a gentle smile towards Sarah. "Don't worry. I can't pretend to ignore it after listening to the circumstances."

"Eeh? M-master! Look, look! Why are you trying to help this girl who looks penniless..."

"Shut up!"

Sid quickly covered Dedric's mouth and looked Ark with an impressed expression. "Woooo, Ark-nim. I'm actually very touched. So Ark-nim does have feelings after all."

After thinking about, it was a strange phrase.

“So what have you been thinking of me so far?”

“...A heartless Scrooge” Sid mumbled in small voice while turning his head slightly.

Even if he was smiling and thanking him at the same time with a naive looking face, he was actually thinking of him that way inside? As he thought, there was no one he can trust in the world.

However, Sid quickly smiled and shook his head. “But now, not anymore”

“Thank you so much, it’s touching me to tears”

“Come on, it’s just a joke. Would I really think like that?”

As Sid was flattering him and smiling like a silly goose, Sarah burst into laughter. Sid’s face reddened and coughed since he found her laugh quite cute.

“Ahem. If it had been decided, let’s go quickly. We don’t know how long Sarah’s father will last. Sarah, if it’s Ark, he can definitely rescue your father safe and sound.”

– Really? Will you really help me?

Sarah look straight at Ark with big eyes as to confirm his decision.

“Yeah, if he’s still alive, I’ll definitely rescue him”

– Thank you. Thank you very much.

Sarah bowed with eyes brimming with tears.

Ding! At the same time, a sound rang and a quest window popped up.

Rescue Sarah’s father!

You have saved a girl from a Troll in the dark woods. The girl has opened her heart to your warm attention and revealed her problem. Her father, who's been travelling with her together, got kidnapped by bandits.

You, who is full of sense of justice, can't ignore her pain and have promised to rescue her father. But be careful. There's not much time. It has been 4 days since he was captured.

The bandits won't be hospitable, it might be too late if you don't hurry. (The quest will be considered as a failure if you can't resolve it within 12 hours after receiving it.)

Difficulty: E +

"Huh? A quest!" Sid's eyes went round and he started muttering to himself.

'Shouldn't he already know she would be giving a quest?' Ark looked at him with a dumbfounded eyes.

Even Sid who was quite knowledgeable about the game didn't seem to know much about how quests turns up. Well, since one would usually receive quest for merchants in a Merchant Guild or in a trade point, he probably hadn't experience this kind of quest yet.

'Anyway, the difficulty was "E +". Since it was a party quest, it won't be easy. But I have done a few E + quests before. Since then I leveled up and skilled up a lot, it should be okay.'

"Sid, let's go"

"Yes!" Sid replied in high spirits and helped Sarah up.

The other party was an NPC. Ark could not understand why Sid was looking at her with expectations. In any case, Sid's eyes were glowing as he looked at Sarah.

* * *

"Heave ho!"

Boooooom!

The golem which weighed hundreds of kilograms flew up, and then got stuck in the ground.

Like its heavy weight, the fall damage was tremendous. The golem lost 350 HP in one go, its body became all red and was on the brink of death. However the attack did not end there. The body slam came into as soon as the golem was tried to get up.

The golem got slammed against the ground once more. Its Health emptied and was destroyed.

“Hahaha come on, this is too easy.”

The person who laughed broadly above the broken golem was the former hard boiled Inspector, JusticeMan.

JusticeMan, who was depressed after he had failed the event quest, found a new hunt ground thanks to Ark.

The day after Ark asked the young Lord of Jackson to look after JusticeMan, JusticeMan went to see the young Lord.

“I’ve heard of your brave act from Sir Cross and Ark quite well.”

“I’ve only done what I’ve need to do.” JusticeMan replied politely.

A much younger looking NPC, but age didn’t bother much to JusticeMan who was familiar with the hierarchical society. Since he was a Lord of a territory he deserved a certain amount of respect. And Ark also advised him to be well seen by the young Lord.

“I know how much you all put into helping Jackson. But the rules being what it is shames me that I cannot reward you with something fancy. So... although I can’t reward you for saving Jackson, I can give you some amenities.”

“Amenities...?”

“From now onwards, use the Blacksmith and canteen that belongs to me for equipment repairs and food supply. I have already informed them, so it’ll be 50% cheaper than if you use the village’s shop”

“Really?” JusticeMan asked him again with a bright expression.

JusticeMan who did not have any financial sense was struggling with the food and repair fees. But to be able to get them at 50% off!

But JusticeMan sighed with a troubled expression. JusticeMan already reached level 45, so it became harder to level up in Jackson Castle where there were only level 40 hunting grounds. To get such a bonus when he was thinking of moving elsewhere...

The young Lord nodded, smiled, and questioned, “I really don’t get foreigners. Why do you all risk your lives in search of stronger monsters? Well, if that is your way of life, then there is nothing to be done. Even so, if it’s just that kind of reason, there is no need for you to leave Jackson.”

“Yes?”

“Truthfully, there are a few dangerous areas around Jackson restricted to Soldiers. The ruins Ark went to with my father in the past is also one of those areas. Of course, they are off limits to the general public, but if you’d like, I will give you special permission to enter it.”

In New World, not only Jackson but Giran and other regions, too, had restricted areas. They were regions to not open to the general public, either following a scenario or for various other reasons. And to enter one, one had to fulfil certain conditions. In Jackson for example, it seems the key to unlock that restriction was the event quest.

Therefore, the region permitted to JusticeMan by the young Lord was placed in the Shadow Forest, a region called Rotting Bog where monsters from levels 30 to 60 appeared.

“First, gain experience there. There’ll be time when you’ll need it...” The young Lord told him while making a subtle smile as though he was anxious.

In any case, thanks to that, JusticeMan could monopolize a hunting ground nobody went to.

Probably since it was a restricted area, the Rotting Bog was overflowing with monsters. But, was that all? The monster drops were also substantial. There was an equipment item dropped for every 3 monsters, and about twice a day a magic item would drop. And in addition, repair fees only cost half so gold quickly piled up in his bag.

JusticeMan looked the equipment items with a pleased glance.

Studded Knuckles			
Weapon Type	Knuckles		
Attack Damage	12~15	Durability	14/40
Weight	10	Usage Restriction	Level 45 or Higher
Knuckles once used by a famous Martial Art Fighter. On top of the tough leather, the iron studs was added to protect the hand while increasing the Fighter's attack.			
Options: Hand to hand skills +20% Attack.			

Comfortable Trunks			
Armor Type	Underwear		
Defense	20	Durability	28/60
Weight	5	Usage Restriction	Level 50

Armor from the south where they like comfortable clothing. Boldly cut along the hem for ease of movement. However, to one not accustomed to trunks, one could appear very distasteful.
Options: Reaction Speed +10% , Dignity -20.

These were all items he got from the monsters in the bog. JusticeMan thoughtlessly put on various equipment such as the trunks, paired with a sleeveless t-shirt, and he ended up looking shabby, but that didn't bother him. In any case, he didn't look very different in real life as he did now.

"HuHuHu, To think I would be able to monopolize such a hunting ground. Do the people in the neighboring village even know about this place? I'm greatly benefitting from Ark!"

"Damn, what are you doing? If you have time to pose please come help us!"

Suddenly, from the side an angry voice called out.

Turning his head he saw a few users being chased by 2 golems.

They were the ones JusticeMan had dragged in to play the game; 1401 to 1410... users who used their parole numbers as their in game name.

At first, he came with around 30 players, but they all scattered leaving only Roco and the paroles' group.

And working to death from level 45, JusticeMan already went up to level 55. However, their average level was only 35. They came when they were at level 20, so they leveled up at least 15 levels, but it was still impossible to fight against a level 60 golem.

"Cheer up, everybody. The earth is your friend, she will always protect you."

As the rehabilitation group started to get beaten, Roco took out her

harp and played 'Song of Protection,' raising their defence stat. But, then, gravels jumped from the ground and coiled around the paroles' group.

"Oh, it's our cute Roco!"

"We can only rely on you."

"That Mr. Boxer-shorts has muscles inside his brains, and knows only to fight!"

The parole group crowded around Roco and cheered for her.

"Your words, I'll remember it, number 1403!"

"Damn, that old man has also good ears."

As soon as JusticeMan joined in, the situation reversed instantly.

The golem flew up in the air like a dead leaf after getting a monkey flip.

JusticeMan was only level 55, but he was no different than a level 68.

It was the effect of the stat "Justice."

The Justice stat was a rare class stat that would raise all of one's stat points as much as the stat level whenever he would join a battle of another person as a helper.

Currently, JusticeMan's Justice stat was at 13 and its effect was comparable to leveling up 13 levels. And even more, the user himself was a Martial Artist who had numerous real battle experiences. A level 60 monster wasn't even worth fighting.

JusticeMan shouted at number 1406 after quickly getting the golem near its death.

"Hold on for just a little bit! I'll be there in a sec to steal."

Number 1406 ran towards the golem and quickly moved his hands.



||— You have stolen an ‘Iron Ore’ from the golem. ||

The parole group with people who had learned special techniques in real life, learned skills matching their specialities. Among them, the ex-pickpocket, 1406’s skill ‘Pickpocketing’ was a skill that was able to steal an item from a near dead monster.

“Okay, now you can kill it.”

While number 1406 grinned at the iron ore, the golem reverted back to gravel. The other golem also vanished after taking a concentrated assault. After taking care of the monsters while recovering their health, Roco said hesitantly.

“I-I think I should go. It’s almost time for my part time job...”

“Eh? Already?”

“Ah, it’s no fun when the only girl leaves...”

“Quit your part time job and let’s just play the game. I’ll pay for your allowance.”

The parole group members mumbled with a regretful expression.

Roco can’t afford to play much since she was busy with school and her part time job. Even so, she could raise her level to 30 was thanks to the parole group giving her a lot of experience whenever she’s logged on.

“Hohoho, I’ll log on at the same time tomorrow.”

“It can’t be helped. Then, let us head back to Jackson, since we have to repair our equipment, too.”

So after having spent another rewarding day, JusticeMan and the parole group headed back to Jackson with heavy steps. When he was about to go to the young Lord’s affiliated Blacksmith, Sir Cross suddenly approached him.

“Sir, you came back at the right time. The young Lord was looking for you.”

“The young Lord? Did something happen?”

“I do not know the details either.”

“Understood, I’ll go at once. Hey, parole group, stay put and don’t cause any trouble.”

After warning the paroles, JusticeMan went to see the young Lord with Cross. The young Lord, who was rummaging in the paperwork for a long time, greeted them.

“Ah, JusticeMan. You came at the right time”

“Did something happen?”

“It’s no big deal. Let’s sit down first and talk.”

The young Lord proposed for him to take a seat, and sat in front of him. He had the same subtle smile when he sent JusticeMan to the Rotting Bog.

“You, you haven’t chosen a job yet, right?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“Hmm, Good. Do you remember me telling you to get a lot of experience?”

“Well. I think so...” JusticeMan didn’t have very good memory.

The young Lord nodded as though it didn’t matter and continued.

“There is something I thought of sometime ago. The Jackson territory had a lot of foreigners gathering due to its geographical condition. And you might know of it as well since you have experience. However, there are still a lot of unknown monsters around the area. It’s hard to deal with foreigners who do not know much about the region’s laws and the monsters around it.”

“I fully comprehend the difficulties.” Since he had been an Inspector.

“Therefore... I wish to found a Civil Organization able to move more actively than Soldiers to patrol and manage the territories. To put it simply, like a Militia. However, back then I couldn’t find the right

people, and that's when I was introduced to you by Ark. After observation, you are a man with overflowing with the sense of justice. So, I would like to entrust this task to you... How about it?"

"A-a militia? Are you talking about the Police?"

"Police? Is that how foreigners call the Militia?" The young Lord tilted his head at the strange word.

JusticeMan was not in the right mind to notice.

'Police...!'

Just hearing the word made his body tremble slightly. The countless overtimes and late nights. The fights with gangs, injuries, hospitalization... Looking back there was not one good memory.

However, JusticeMan only lived with a sense of justice, the profession of being an Inspector was the meaning of his life. So when he was forced into retirement with dishonor after the firing incident, it was as though the sky had come crumbling down. Was what we would call "the feeling of having become a somewhat useless failure of society?"

But...There is a person who needed him. And it was the young Lord who was in an official position that needed him for the public order. Although it was just a game, JusticeMan felt like he finally found a place where he belonged.

"I'll do it! Please let me do this!"

"Aah, calm down. It's not something perfectly settled yet."

"Yes?"

"Even if we're calling it Militia, it's still an organization where I delegate my authority and can have governmental authority. So of course, you need the qualification that goes with it, so it can be accepted by the citizens and the nobles."

"I-is that how it is? Then what should I do?" JusticeMan asked restlessly.

“You’ve already proven you can manage against monsters. The rest is to make a solid result that can be approved by anyone, and it just so happens that I have a good solution to prove your competence.”

The young Lord passed over a leaflet. It was a promotional flyer for the Selibrid’s arena in the capital of the Schudenberg Kingdom.

“There are always matches there. In addition, every time one wins, one gets points. And when one gets over a certain number of points, they can have their names on the news distributed every month. It doesn’t matter either if it’s in team or solo tournament. You just have to raise your points enough to get your name on the newspaper. Do you get it?”

In conclusion, anyone who gets their name published in the newspaper will be acknowledged.

‘Arena... Police...!’ JusticeMan looked at the flyer with blazing eyes.

This really was a rare opportunity. Judo was the meaning of JusticeMan’s life, along with his job as an Inspector. However, the judo tournament became a dream within a dream when he received a leg injury. But in New World, it was more real than reality; Martial Arts tournaments existed. He could once again let his burning passion loose.

“Huhu... huhuhu.”

Laughter leaked out of his clamped lips. The young Lord looked at him worriedly after seeing his weird reaction.

“H-hey, are you okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine. No, I’m great. I’ll leave as soon as I’m ready. No matter what monster stands in my way, I will get to Selibrid and return after raising up the Jackson region’s prestige.”

JusticeMan gripped the flyer and left the place.

“A Militia?”

The parole group asked him back with a dumb expression after JusticeMan had explained them. But it was only for a short moment.

They started to show the same symptom as JuscticeMan and started to grin.

“Does that mean... we are going to become policemen?”

“That’s right. Police is the meaning of justice! I think it is a stage absolutely required for your society rehabilitating program. Is there anybody against it?”

At JusticeMan’s question, they started to look at each other.

Branded as criminals, they would get cold regards anywhere they’d go. But they didn’t committed crimes for their own pleasure. They committed crimes in order to eat and live but they always had, in a corner of their hearts, a wish to become a more prideful and helpful person. Because of that, they received the JucticeMan’s Society Rehabilitation Training. But to skip over every courses and to be able to become a policeman... it was a dream one could not realize even if they were to die and reborn once more!

Although it was only a game, New World was a game so real that it could replace real life. NPCs were no different from real people in regards to how they speak and think. To be able to become a policeman such a world. There was no reason to hate it.

“No!” The parole group answered unanimously.

Then JuscticeMan and the parole members prepared to depart right away. The day after, as soon as Roco logged on, they left and headed toward Selibrid, the capital of Schudenberg Kingdom.

“The goal is to top the individual and the team tournament!”

“OUUUU!”

Red Man

Kurururu!

There was a deafening honk.

Following Sarah, we reached the Brown rock area within 30 minutes.

Ark's party reached the bottom of a waterfall pouring down from distant heights. It was an area of darkened stone around Giran; with such excessive heights that Ark had never even been there. They took a break to view the stunning scenery but some of the view was blocked by the ruins.

While Ark was looking around, Sarah pointed to one side. At the back of the falls was a small space that one person might be able to pass through.

When just looking at it straight on, the mist from the water makes the passage impossible to see.

Sarah thrust a hand in and showed that the space was larger than it seems. Inside the entrance a bunch of moss was attached to it.

[Unidentified thieves hideout Inside the Brown Rocky area are ruins that have been abandoned a long time ago. It looks like one of the places that are often abandoned. However, traces of people can be found at several different locations. This remains clear that a dangerous group are hiding somewhere within the ruins. If you are going to explore the ruins, proceed with extreme caution.]

-You have found an undiscovered dungeon. As a new discover, you can gain an additional 700 experience and 30 Fame if you register in the Hall of Fame. Would you like to register?

Ark obviously refused registration and entered.

" This place was a hidden dungeon!"

He's come to the front of the falls before but never found a dungeon.

It was hidden in a place that people wouldn't have imagined.

Of course, this was not the only dungeon. So far, Ark has been in numerous areas with hidden dungeons.

'When I first started the game, I would have missed them '

When Ark first entered New World, he wasn't interested in everything.

He would overlook a suspicious forest or rock. Even a waterfall suddenly appeared in a rocky area then he would've just ignored it.

It is a long game, if you only relied on information that was already discovered that you would be unable to proceed much further.

This was caused by the excessive need to level up.

"But in New World there is a lot of information that is yet unknown.

And that is what you have to figure out by yourself. In the future, I should pay more attention to my surroundings.'

Finishing his self-criticism, Ark turned to Sid and said.

"Sid please set up camp here and wait patiently with Sarah."

"Yes,"

Sid answered and pulled out firewood to create a campfire.

Then Sarah pulled Sid's sleeves and asked.

-Sid-oppa is not fighting?

"Eh? I am a merchant..... "

-Being hit would hurt more

Sarah's sneaked a glance at Sid and then looked down.

"Eueu.....Should have chosen a warrior. . ."

That struck a blow and Sid once again regretted his career choice.

Leaving the two behind, Ark entered the dungeon. The roaring of the waterfall shook the dungeon.

The noise of the waterfall was close enough that it created static around the ears. In addition, every step he took he could feel the tension!

Ark stealthily entered the mouth of the tunnel.

‘That reminds me. ‘

“Dedric, surveillance”.

“Roger, master”

Ark advanced carefully with Dedric ahead of him. However, the dungeon was smaller than he thought. One passage consisted of a circular shape. Besides, no matter how much he looked for a thief, he didn't even see a mouse.

‘What the? Sarah saw the thieves drag her father here. What was going on? ‘

If so, only one answer remained, there was a secret passage somewhere.

Therefore Ark used the skill Eyes of the Cat to observe the area around him. And after a few moments, he found some bloodstains on the ground.

The blood stains were quite new.....

‘This is it! ‘

It was clear that Sarah's father was dragged by the thieves and shed some blood.

This means that if he followed the blood trail then he will find the secret passage, Ark reasoned.

The blood stains were sparsely scattered at areas with dead ends.

They were kind enough to show where the secret passage was by splattering a few drops of blood on the walls.

"Is this where the switch is? "

Ark peered at the walls and the fall but no matter how meticulously he looked, he could not find the switch. 10 tedious minutes had passed when suddenly the familiar sounds of the waterfall changed.

Ark instinctively pressed his ear to the wall.

"It really.....is boring"

"How longthis wait?"

"Any other way?It's an order.....While activities stay hidden..... "

"Che,They're surprisingly cowardly... ..Why should we listen to them? "

"He.....what skills do you haveif you offend him... .. "

"And thenHere tooDo you know "

"Aaa.....That manwe paid compensation that.....words? "

"Now you can harvest soonIf everything goes well get big profit "

"Huhuhu, indeed....."

"AlthoughI heard rumoursNowadays, the surrounding robbersthere is a hunter? "

"Aaaa.....HeardNo party.it was said to be alone? "

"A pretty strong guylooks like...It's unrelated to us.. .. "

"Damnby such a personand wantI wishbefore I die of boredom "

Because of the falls the sound was broken but information doesn't really matter to me.

The important thing is that there are thieves inside the secret

passage!

“Okay, Dedric, Skull, lurk back around the corner”

Ark commanded in a small voice and they moved to position. And attacked the wall with his sword.

A deafening bang, and the walls vibrated. He couldn't even scratch the walls but that didn't matter. Because he hadn't even thought of trying to break the wall.

“Eh? What.....Sound? ”

“I heard outside ... something collapsed.....did?”

“Damn ...if entrance collapsesannoying”

“For the time being.....I'll go out”

With a mechanical sound, the wall pushed outwards and rose up.

‘What the? Everything's fine? ”

“So what was that sound before?”

“Did the stone roll away from the falls or something?”

The 3 thieves appeared and looked around through the secret door.

Ark who had hidden himself using 'stealth' was watching from close by. He came out and quickly approached them, stabbing the thieves with the sword.

-Critical Hit! Backstab effect has increase damage by 200%. The thief will be stunned for 10 seconds.

The vitality of the thieves was reduced by 30% as the quickly hid himself again...

“What, what?”

“The enemy!”

Two thieves panicked and pulled out a sword However, Ark's actions was several times faster.

“Snake, nerve paralysis poison!”

Snake had eaten a poisonous plant and spouted black venom.

The venom flew across the small space and hit the neck of the thieves. And the voice of the loudest thief suddenly stopped.

That tactic was one that they had used and successfully mastered on other thieves.

When using paralysis poison, you can attack the throat and paralyze the vocal cords. When that happens, if the enemy are not organized thieves then their communication will weaken.

“Now, Dedric, Skull! Plan B-1! ‘

Ark who was hidden in the corner called out a command.

While Ark took care of one enemy and drew their attention, the two pets began the operation, which had a 70-30 offense and defense ratio used to stop the enemy and blocking the enemy’s retreat was plan B-1D.

Additionally, the airborne ratio was 50:50 for plan B-2, 20:30 for B-3 and to stop attacking and stop the enemy from retreating was plan B-4. Through countless attacks against thieves, the experienced Dedric and Skull skillfully avoided the thieves’ attack.

Meanwhile, Ark violently attacked a thief who stumbled from the onslaught. Once the enemy’s organizational skills had been destroyed, they were no match for Ark.

Hunting a user that was a thief was far more difficult than fighting a group of thieves. Their level was 100!

On the other hand, he was only level 85 but the dungeon allowed limited room for the thieves to move. His 30% dark attribute bonus also guaranteed that his stats added up to around level 110. At the same time his skill proficiency increased by 30% and was surprisingly effective.

He also used his Eyes of the Cat skill to search for any weaknesses.

A kick quickly took care of the stumbling thief and attacked the throat of the middle bandit who had been hit with the paralysis poison to stop communication, causing him to fall into critical condition. Once he fell, the final thief opened his mouth and ran away.

Are they trying to request help?

‘Don’t miss? ‘

Ark turned and threw something at the legs running away.

Due to the poison the thief’s legs became paralyzed and he fell down.

The chances for a double critical hit activated immediately!

Even if he couldn’t see it the results were clear.

“Well, this was a fairly decent battle.”

When he checked only 30% of his health was shaved off.

But he would have to be careful because he wasn’t sure how many thieves were hiding. ”

Ark used Eyes of the Cat and activated ‘Stealth’ while hiding in the secret passageway.

There were also long tunnels that connected from the passage.

Within a few minutes some roads that lead back to a main square room appeared. The square was lined with balconies, each flanked by two thieves standing guard.

The square.

There was no way to avoid being seen from the balconies on both sides and it was impossible to get away undetected. However, that didn’t matter to Ark as he has the skill ‘stealth.’

‘The stairs to go up the balcony can’t be seen from here. Then are there more stairs to go up inside the balcony? I better find the stairs to go up where I can remain undetected. ‘

Ark silently crossed the square.

Although he had 'Stealth' activated, he was still quite nervous when he entered the vicinity of the guards. And just as he was about to cross the square, a situation that had never happened before occurred.

He happened to step on something on the ground.

-A trap has been triggered. Critical Hit! You have received 200 damage.

'Bleed' status. 10 hp will be consumed every 5 seconds for one minute.

He never expected traps.

So far he's never fought against an opponent who used traps, but the problem was not the trap.

The attack had cause him to enter a battle state and the 'Stealth' ability was deactivated. At the moment, the eyes of every thief were concentrated on Ark.

"Intruder!"

"How did you get here?"

"Whatever it doesn't matter! Kill him!"

Two people at a time deliberately lifted their bows, for a total of 4 people.

The arrows simultaneously flew from different directions. The situation was one where he couldn't predict and avoid the arrows. However, Ark did not panic. He had experienced this with countless other bandit groups.

There was no reason to rush and get upset.

"Dedric, Skull! Plan B-4! "

"The right wing. Ok!"

Crackle!

Dedric and Skull used all their evasive power to avoid the arrows and destroy two.

Then, Ark grasped his sword tightly and concentrated on the remaining arrows flying towards him. Just as the arrows were four feet away from him, he turned and swung his sword.

He pushed forward while simultaneously hitting the arrow with his sword... At the moment it struck, he managed to counter attack and successfully pulled off Riposte.

He managed to attack a thief faster than the arrows could be shot.

“Gwak, how, the arrow ...!”

The thieves burst out a shocked cry.

After being backed into a corner by the Silver Arrow group, he relentlessly polished the activation rate of his Riposte skill. Thanks to this training, there was a 70% chance that Riposte would activate and parry the arrows.

Once the arrow had been deflected, Riposte was useful in dealing the first blow. If an arrow hits there is a high possibility that an abnormal status will be inflicted. And it's the same for thieves too. If two thieves were hit with arrows, they might get paralysis or slow etc.

In other words, the robbers were also in danger of being hit by the arrows. There was also Dedric and Skull to decrease the burden on Ark.

For Ark, the limit of a flying arrow was two feet.

This was a small enough number that he could use Riposte. When Ark deflected as many as five arrows, the thief's health was decreased by at least 40%. However, it was not a 100% chance.

If Riposte failed to activate then the penalty was numbness of the body.

When the arrow hits, his health was slowly decreased until it was almost 50%.

” There are four people left. In his state, the success rate of riposte was down. If this goes on for longer than I am at a disadvantage. ‘

Then, while he was flying around and evading arrows, Dedric noticed something and exclaimed.

“The switch is here!”

“Huh? That guy!”

“Hihihi, he discovered the proper design. What is this? It’s like, what? ”

Clink, Kurururung!

With a smile, Dedric avoided the thieves and the arrows and took out the switch. With a sound, the balcony lowered to the ground like an elevator. The machine was built to act separately from the stairs.

“Well done Dedric!”

An eerie light shone in Ark’s eyes.

A muffled scream was heard as Ark pulled his dagger from the thief standing in front of him. And the NPC archers were no match for a dagger wielding Ark.

Ark immediately finished the four archers on the ground.

‘Hyuu.....Nevertheless the party quest was quite difficult.

The thieves were high level and had the geographical advantage. If it hadn’t been for his experience hunting bandit groups, Ark would have probably been the one lying on the ground.

‘Maybe it was fortunate that I discovered this place late. ‘

Ark used food to restore his health and Mana to 100% before moving to the stairs.

He walked more cautiously than the first time he entered.

” I never thought there would be traps in the cave’

The biggest problem is that it is a trap.

Fortunately the damage done by the trap was minimal. However, he cannot guarantee that the next trap he encounters would be at the same level. Even just an alarm ringing through the cave could cause serious problems.

However, even if Ark found a trap it would be difficult to deactivate it.

The trap-related skills belong to professions like Archers or Explorers who search through ruins.

In New World, it was impossible to get everything for free. However, for those who don't have the required professions the success rate is less than 10%. Therefore the party shape for dungeons requires the right combination of professions.

‘What if? He couldn't avoid the traps ‘

Ark began to get worried.

It was then that Skull came forward and stumbled on an idea.

Skull had complete loyalty!

But when Snake evolved, Skull was utilized less. Skull was only used when Ark picked him up to throw or biting ankles.

Although he had a lot of stamina and strength due to food, he had no arms and legs to attack.

Because of that, in recent times Skull had become quite depressed.

Skull could not recognize the expression on his master's face.

Ark thought that this was really a difficult situation.

“What happened to Skull?”

Crackle!

Skull was bravely prepared and rolled stumbling forward. He rolled forward a few feet until there was a snapping sound and a rain of arrows shot from the walls.

However, the people who installed the traps never would have thought that a skull would be the one activating it.

Of course the arrows were aimed at a human height and shape.

“Yes! There is that method!!”

Crackle! Crackle!

The skull proudly stumbled forwards.

“Okay, Skull. You will put out the traps. ”

After that, Skull always rolled 10 meters in front of him to check for traps.

Of course, arrows shot out or a sword was swung and there was even items falling from the sky. However, Skull had high stamina and survived all the traps. In addition, Ark did not have to worry about an alarm when a trap was triggered.

Even if a number of traps were triggered, he did not enter a battle state.

Therefore, he used ‘Stealth’ and just hid from any thieves. On the other hand, Skull could simply be unsummoned to deceive the thieves.

‘What the? Why did the traps activate? ’

“There’s no one around?”

“Damn, did a rodent touch it or something?”

The thieves floated around the perimeter for several minutes before returning to their positions. Therefore, Ark found a way to cope with similar dungeons.

The dungeon has a relatively simple structure.

A long passage with open up to a large room with archers. There were also 3-4 thieves waiting in the room.

The large room had various combinations of thieves, but Ark had already figured out the combinations. He properly activated the machine then went on and defeated the enemies.

He passed through 10 or more room.

Then unusually the normal long passage ended before two huge doors.

‘This is the boss’s room? ‘

It was different from the traps. He knew that if he opened the doors then enemies would appear.

Ark checked his equipment and carefully opened the door.

Although the sound of the waterfall echoed loudly in the dungeon, the creaking sound of the unusually large doors opening was clearly audible.

“What the hell!”

A sharp sound was heard from the side where a variety of tools were scattered.

The first thing he saw was the black robe covering the body. However, it was not a human NPC or a humanoid monster...the face that was revealed between the hood was surprisingly that of a reptile.

At the same time, a warning message flashed before his eyes.

-The Boss monster ‘ Mysterious Conjurer Kirk’ has appeared.

The yellow eyes like a snake rolled around and stared at Ark.

“You are the bounty hunter? No, you shouldn’t have taken the reward.....Well it doesn’t matter. Anyone that comes here won’t be allows to leave alive!

Kirk was also a level 100 thief. However, a boss monster is never

an opponent that can be ignored.

Also a level +E difficulty boss monster could be compared to Adelaine. However, Ark had already defeated Adelaine a while ago.

Ark snorted and grinned.

“That is not something that you will decide.”

“Impertinent, how dare a human talk like that?”

Flash-!

Kirk chanted a spell and 3-4 light rays emerged.

It was a low-level magic energy bolt that was learned when you changed professions to magician.

While a warrior used a sword, it was the primary magic attack spell for magicians. However, if it is a couple of shots flying at the same time then he couldn't ignore it.

Ark rolled to the ground to avoid the damage. He also used Riposte to deflect the magic.

Putt putt POW!

“Ugh, this, unbelievable!”

Kirk wobbled and retreated.

‘That’s it. Riposte also works on magic! So there was a way for him to win! ’

“Dedric, Skull! Plan A-2! ”

He commanded as Ark, Dedric and Skull spread in three directions. They maintained a certain distance while Kirk's gaze moved wildly between them. Naturally the attacks came flying at Ark who used Riposte as much as possible to parry and counter attack.

Kirk began to use more powerful spells. However, the more powerful the spell is the longer it takes for the magic to cast.

The ball shaped fireball magic was easier to successful Riposte than

the energy bolts.

Double bang!

When the fireball was repelled back to Kirk, his health decreased by 10%. Even if he was a boss monster, the trait of a magician was its low defense.

"I was nervous because it was the same level boss as Adelaine but he's not so hard. No, is it because I've become stronger? Anyway this degree of difficulty should be no problem! "

With his confidence boosted, Ark's concentration also increased and he returned even more magic.

However, there was something Ark hadn't considered.

The boss monster's racial special skill. After around 5 minutes, Kirk's health had been reduced to 50%.

When his attack magic did not hit, Kirk spat out curses with a harsh voice and started to chant a long spell.

"God dammit, human prepare to be immobilized!"

"Dedric, Skull! Prepare to stop him from finishing the spell.

Ark had felt something sinister and shouted.

However, before Dedric and Skull could interrupt, Kirk's magic had been completed.

"Mimicry!"

At the moment, Kirk's appearance changed and he disappeared.

Ark looked carefully at the surroundings.

Suddenly the figure had vanished. Ark could use 'stealth' but this appeared to be a different skill. Because 'stealth' could not be used in battle. In addition, the Eyes of the Cat were a skill that could see anything that was hidden through level magic, but it could not find any traces of Kirk. Kirk could also use magic even while he was hidden.

“The crystalized rock crystals arise!”

He heard Kirk’s voice from coming from an unexpected place.

Then all of a sudden, the ground rose up and golems the size of humans formed. They were approximately level 50 but there were enough of them to fill the room.

The golems came out and the situation immediately changed.

Kwa Kwa Kwa bang, bang!

The golems surrounded Ark from all directions and attacked.

Since they were only level 50 they didn’t do a lot of damage. However, that was different for his level 40 summons. Although they tried to avoid all the attacks, every time they were hit than health was drained. He never expected such magic from Kirk.

‘Damn, what kind of technology is this? ‘

Ark struck a golem which was replaced by another one.

Ark was suffering from a situation where the enemy couldn’t be seen.

The last time was when the squid shot out black ink underwater. The only way he made a fatal blow was by looking at the flow of the current and following it. However, he couldn’t use that method with Kirk.

There were more than 20 golems running around the way and there was no way to look for traces of Kirk.

Kwajik!

The situation couldn’t continue for much longer as first Skull was stepped on by golems before Dedric who was surrounded by golems disappeared as well. All the attention turned to Ark who received additional damage and was soon in a critical state.

‘I was wrong, I can’t win like this! ‘

Ark hurriedly turned and tried to exit the room.

“Kukukuk, did you think I would miss that? Go loyal servants!”

The golems obeyed and pursued him out of the room. Kirk hid between the golems and his voice was heard chanting a spell.

Ark turned and stared.

‘Riposte! ‘

Ark’s goal was to strike all the golems with his counterattack.

The terrain in front of the room was a narrow passage. In addition, the opponent was a medium sized golem.

The golem who was hit with Riposte flew backwards into the crowded area and collided with the golems behind it.

Strike!

The entangled golems fell like dominoes.

“Uhh, this bastard ...!”

And Kirk who was hiding somewhere between the golems had his magic cancelled.

Meanwhile, ark ran frantically down the passage. After he ran away for 1 minute then the battle state disappeared.

Ark immediately hid himself with ‘stealth.’

“Oh damn ...! Where is this guy hiding? Golem, sweep through the surrounding area. He must still be lurking around here somewhere! ”

After a brief period of time, the voice of Kirk was heard among the golems. However, he still did not have a way to attack when Kirk is in a mimic state.

Ark had returned to the secret passage using ‘stealth.’ When he checked the info window, it was not a joke.

The durability of all his armour was at the lowest point due to the durability and strength of the golems. Even if he used the magic restoration spell to repair the equipment, the maximum durability

would still be reduced.

With tears in his eyes, Ark had to use the repair box which he normally avoided using due to low stock and cost.

But the problem isn't repairing his equipment.

'What is an alternative method? '

Before he had to run away. However, the situation from before wasn't good. He was already using mimicry and then he summoned golems. On the other hand, Ark had also lost Dedric and Skull. The results meant they had to fight again.

'Damn it, even if he doesn't have golems there is still the problem of mimicry '

The biggest problem was that Kirk had special racial skill mimicry.

If he keeps fighting in the invisible state than there is no way to attack him.

'When it was underwater there was still a way of attacking '

He was thinking about his experience fighting underwater when an idea sprang to his head.

Black ink!

Why had he never thought of that?

That right, if they are invisible then you should make it so that they can be seen! '

Ark stood up and went to the entrance of the dungeon. At the entrance, Sld was dozing against the wall while Sarah peered with worried eyes at the dungeon.

When you're dead then you can nap comfortably.....

"Eh? Ark-nim! Have you finished?"

"No, the boss was stronger than I thought."

Ark spoke bluntly in a curt voice and Sarah gave him a concerned

look.

“It’s okay. I’ll do everything I can to save your father. ”

Ark said with a smile while Sid looked worried.

“Sid, I’ll need your help to defeat the boss.”

“Yes? But I’m a ”

“I’m not asking you to fight. That thing? Only that will be given”

Ark said with a smile.

“You fool, you came back to die!”

When Ark entered the secret passage, Kirk’s voice was heard. And the golems flocked to him.

In a moment, Ark hit a golem with riposte and sent it flying in the direction of the audible voice.

“Kukukuk. No matter how much you rack your brains it’s not use. If you can’t see me then you can’t catch me!”

Kirk had already fled several meters away from where he was laughing. Then a cold smile spread on Ark’s face.

“Then I just have to look”

Ark’s hand moved quickly.

Ark removed a big package from his bag and threw it in the air. And swinging his sword, he burst the package causing colourful liquids to fly everywhere.

At that time Kirk gave an embarrassed scream.

“Dye!”

The item splashing all over the place was very colourful liquid dyes.

Ark had collected the dye using Sid’s sewing skills. And by blowing it in the air. The dye scattered in many directions.

As a result, the deserted dungeon underwent a home renovation with various colours splattered all over like a rainbow.

“Ugh, this is unbelievable!”

The not so agile Kirk couldn't avoid all the dye and looked like a rainbow lizard.

Ark lifted his sword and smiled.

“Pretty good? So nowlet's fight fair and square? ”

“Golems kill him!”

“Seems the lizard can't guess the situation”

Ark quickly narrowed the distance using Riposte.

Then the golem was hit and forced back to the wall with Kirk. Due to that golem, Kirk was a difficult goal for Ark.

This was because it could hide among the golems without being seen. However, when mimicry was broken the situation changed.

“Snake, nerve paralysis poison!”

Ark swung his poison coated sword at Kirk's neck. Thanks to the vocal cord paralysis, Kirk couldn't chant his magic. In addition, he couldn't give orders to the golems so their actions became unorganized.

Kirk was on the defensive and in a hurry ran away. However, Ark used Riposte on the golem and aimed it to hit Kirk.

With his vocal cords barely unparalyzed, Kirk angrily shouted.

“Fools! Every golem is stupid! ”

“Oi, oi, your character is the worst. Your summonses are risking their lives to fight for you. You should value them.

Although Ark did summon his pets to feed them horrible food.

After a few minutes of fighting, Kirk was in critical condition.

“Rain, come and nourish me! Let’s leave. Humans! Acceleration! ”

Kirk cast a spell of acceleration and headed towards the rear. Although Ark hurriedly rushed through the golems, the acceleration had doubled Kirk’s speed and he was already around the corner.

There was a waterfall outside the dungeon.

If he washes the dye off at the waterfall then the situation will not change.

“Damn childish lizard who can’t die without causing problems,”

Ark cursed and chased after Kirk.

Meanwhile, Kirk was running towards the entrance of the dungeon.

“Hik, what is that?”

Sid was standing at the entrance with an uneasy look when he shrieked as a rainbow coloured lizard came running out and pushed him out of the way.

“Get out of the way, Hobbit!”

Kirk ran while frantically chanting magic. And just trying to shoot a huge fireball, he flinched and fell forward.

“What, what?”

Ark followed with an evil smile on his face.

“What a fool! Did he think I wouldn’t have any countermeasures?”

“No, no waya trap?”

“I learned from you.”

Although to be exact, it wasn’t a trap.

Due to their profession, Ark and Sid couldn’t install traps successfully.

However, a certain freedom of action was possible in New World. So what they came up with was a needle using Sid’s sewing

profession!

Before Ark entered the dungeon, he laid out a series of needles coated with Snake's venom on the ground at the entrance.

It wasn't a high level trap but Ark took advantage of the fact that Kirk would have to run through the entrance barefoot.

"Do it, no way! I with a needle.....!"

"It doesn't look good if you're too persistent. Just simply accept your death"

"Don't make me laugh! I'm the great "

With his two stiff legs, Kirk quickly tried to chant a spell.

However, wielding his sword Ark was several times faster.

"Take this, Dark blade!"

There was an audible sound as the sound penetrated Kirk's chest.

The mimicry faded away and his original features returned as his body slowly disappeared.

-Your level has risen.

When Kirk disappeared, a welcome message popped up stating that he was level 86.

He could also see the cross shape on Sid's head, a sign that he had levelled up.

Sid was too far away to receive the party experience from the thieves in the dungeon. Thanks to that, Ark was able to receive 100% of the additional experience received for killing thieves in a party.

By taking advantage of this fact during his battles against the previous bandit groups, he was able to raise 7 levels in 9 days. However, Kirk died in front of Sid so the experience would be equally distributed.

‘Well, in this situation you deserve the experience but ‘

“I finally finished. And Sid you performed well by deceiving the fellow.”

Ark said as he crouched beside Sid who was on the ground. Then Sid stood up and with a face brimming with tears replied.

“It’s really scary!”

“What is, this ... ‘

Was the person who reached level 60 as a merchant a game novice? He wondered about the real status of Sid. But anyway the boss was defeated thanks to Sid’s help. Ark gave Sid a pat and excitedly examined the items dropped from the boss.

Dark robe (Magic) Armour type: Robe Defense power: 20 Durability: 4/40 Weight: 10 User restriction: Level 70 or more A mysterious magic robe made of silk, magic spirit is imbued in the silk to help calm the mind. A calm spirit can increase concentration substantially and help the magic unfold smoothly. {Option: Magic success rate + 20%, Magic casting speed + 20%}

-The thief’s key The Winning Necklace: Level 70 Quest starting item A necklace made of a material that vaguely detects magic. You can check the quest commissioned by the Magic Institute.

The boss monster had dropped one equipment item.

It’s for magic use only but it has good options that should make it sell fairly well.

‘I bet the key is related to Sarah’s quest but this necklace... ..? ‘

Ark stared at the Winning Necklace.

The necklace material detects magic and the glass heart beads were sealed and protected in the same material. In addition, it was a quest starting item.

In other words, if someone had defeated this dungeon and found the quest item then they could bring it to the magic society and receive

the same quest Ark had.

‘Yes and if he had originally found this dungeon first then he could’ve swept through the dungeon and recieved the quest. By doing the Event Quest, he earned a high level of friendship with the Magic Institute and therefore did the quest in the wrong order. ‘

In other words, this was the original intention behind the bandit groups. Ark considered this with a frown.

“But wait, this is a quest starting item? So somewhere in the dungeon is the Heartsoul Bead? Because the boss dropped a quest starting item for the Heartsoul Bead, it means that he is entering the starting phase of the quest.....’

Maybe the Magic Institute’s quest was longer than Ark thought.

Ark summarized the dungeon and returned to the boss’ room with Sld and Sarah.

In the room there was a different secret passage attached.

By following the route, it eventually led past a pool to the prison.

More than 10 people were trapped inside the prison.

When Ark used the key to open a door, Sarah ran to a middle aged man who had tears brimming in his eyes when he saw here.

He was Sarah’s father.

“You’re still alive, so everything’s great”

Sid was thrilled by the sight.

“Rain, out of my way!”

“Eek?”

Some unexpected developments occurred.

The middle-aged man pushed Sarah to the side and ran towards a bush. He was not the only one.

The prisoners that were not seen by Ark and his companions

seemed crazy as they also rushed to the bush by the pool and ate the grass. And they seemed lightheaded as they sat down and stared at something spellbound.

The same thing happened to the middle-aged man. Sarah was too embarrassed to show any expression on her face.

“Ah, Ark-nim?”

Sid looked at him puzzled.

Ark looked at them for a while before approaching the bush they were scattered around.

The key for Ark was the bizarre shape of the plants that were growing. Their strange behaviour was probably related to the plants.

He used ingredient identification on some of the plants and opened up the skill's information window.

Nurunma Leaf (Ingredient) A plant that grows in the special environment of the island. The leaves have an anaesthesia effect and can be refined to tablets to create a superior remedy. But at the same time it contains strong addictive and hallucinogenic ingredients in large quantities. The final drug like effect relies on the purification process. When just the leaf is eaten, in the past warriors just it as a stimulant however once it became an addiction then their guard was easy to break. Due to the severe effects, the production and distribution of this stimulant was banned across every continent.

“This is a drug as expected”

“A drug?”

“Yes, somehow all these people are addicted to drugs.”

Ark nodded and murmured.

Now a picture of the situation was drawn in his head.

The reason why the thieves remained concealed in the ruins and didn't move for 1 year.

Someone had probably told them that the Nurunma plant grew in these ruins.

The thieves began to grow it in order to start drug production and gain a big profit.

“They probably kidnapped travellers and locked them in the jail to be used as an effective drug trail. And Sarah’s father too... ..”

“.....!”

During the conversation between the two, Sarah’s face turned pale and terrified.

Sarah’s father had been kidnapped at little over two days ago in game time, and two days ago he was fine but now he’s a drug addict.

Sarah cried at the reality that her father was just one middle aged man seeing hallucinations.

Then Sid who could not overlook a crying face asked.

“Ah, Ark-nim?” Isn’t there a way? At this rate...”

“Certainly, if left alone then it could be a big problem.”

Ark replied, scratching his head.

This situation was really difficult. He had defeated a group of thieves and in the end rescued Sarah’s father.

But the middle aged man who should have given him his reward was instead a saliva dripping man addicted to drugs. In addition, the quest for the Magic Institute required him in his normal condition.

I don’t know whether this will work but I have no choice but to try it’

“Everybody please be steady. The pleasure that you’re feeling now is not right. It is the temptation of the devil that will lead you to eventually ruin your body and your mind. Please steady your heart and resist the temptation. You can do it”

Ark used his nursing skill.

However, there was no reaction from the addicts.

They were too immersed in their hallucinations that Ark's voice was not even audible to them. And after a while, the effects of the Nurunman leaves wore off and moving their bodies like a zombie, they stood up to grab more leaves.

“Stop! Wake up! ”

“.....!”

Sid and Sarah tried to stop them but it was no use.

The addicts were furiously beating each other up to get to the Nurunma leaves. The surprising thing to Ark was that their resilience. Even when they were knocked down, they just got up again like they could feel no pain

Even if they only had 1% health left, they still crawled on the ground in order to put the Nurunman leaf in their mouth. If he left then the situation would just repeat itself until all the plants in the ruins were gone.

‘Damn, is this why drug addiction is so frightening? However he could not have them killing each other....looking at the situation maybe it is better to put them back in their prison?’

Suddenly a thought flashed in Ark's head.

‘If so, this might be the best method.....! ‘

Ark immediately took out his pot and cooked a dish.

While the addicts were eating the Nurunman leaves, he was just leisurely cooking and Sid and Sarah shared a puzzled and absurd look.

But they couldn't ignore the sight and soon 15 portions of food were produced that gave off a strange smell.

“Ok Sid, Sarah, catch the people and feed them this food using force if necessary!”

“Yes? But what...? ”

“I’ll give you an explanation later after you quickly feed them!”

Ark shouted and caught 1 addict, pressing the food to his mouth. He struck the struggling addict, forcing his mouth open and shoving the food in, with Sid and Sarah immediately following. The effect was immediate, the addicts who ate the food staggered and vomited out the Nurunma leaves.

“Ugh, ugh, uweeeeek!”

An addict who ate another Nurunma leaf vomited again.

‘It is like I thought! ‘

Ark’s eyes twinkled.

Ark had made the ‘Appetite Killing Stew.’

It was a stew that tastes so bad that it is impossible to eat any other food for 2 hours or they would throw up. If you tried to eat food by force then it would be thrown up and it also had the additional bonus of decreasing the effects of the eaten food.

‘The Nurunma leaves also counts as consumed food. Eating it poisons you and causes hallucinations. In other words, in New World drug addiction can be seen as a food effect ‘

When the Nurunman leaves have been eaten and thrown up, it is also possible for the Appetite Killing Stew to weaken the drug addiction effect.....or so Ark thought.

It was a hit.

After eating and vomiting the Nurunma leaves dozens of times, the pupils of the drug addicts started to clear up.

It was only a slight change but now there was hope.

‘Ok, from now on it is a battle of patience! ‘

The opponents are drug addicts. However, they wouldn’t recover easily even if it was a game.

Ark made food and steadily fed it to them as well as using his

Nursing skill on the addicts whenever possible.

It lasted over 6 hours.

By that time, Sarah had failed to sleep properly for more than two days and the NPC slept against the wall along with Sid. Ark too wanted to close his eyes and faint from the exhaustion.

However, Ark clenched his mouth and with red eyes continued making food for 15 people while firing off his nursing skill randomly.

‘The quest is almost complete. What is sleep? ‘

The time limit was almost over and he just wanted to finish the quest as soon as possible!

And his obsession finally evoked a miracle.

“You can overcome the temptation of the devil if you will it. Win for yourselves and for the ones waiting for you. Right now is the time to show your willingness for the ones you love.

How many times? Due to the exhaustion it was hard to even count how many times he had used the Nursing skill.

A blue light emerged from his body. It hung down from the addict’s face to reveal the shadows that had melted away.

The Miracle Nursing was successful Without sparing your body, you devoted yourself to their care and saved many from a fate of despair. A sick person does not only suffer from disease and injury. People addicted to drugs and tempted by the pleasure are not able to escape with their own strength. They are also sick and suffering. Even so, they do not know that they are sick. Nursing people who don’t know that they are sick is no easy task. No matter what, the only remedy that can save them is tenacity and patience. Without taking your eyes off the time limit, you poured infinite care and affection on them with amazing patience. Although penetrating the heart with words is important, truly caring for the sick requires a steady patience. Now the sick will learn from your patience and win against the temptation of the Nurunma leaves.

- * Due to the success of miracle nursing, all stats are increase by 1.
- * The Affection stat increased by 10.
- * Fame increased by 50.
- * Alignment towards Good increased by 50.

The Miracle Nursing was a success and you have acquired the title 'Committed Caretaker.'Fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many patients* As a title bonus, all stats increase by 1*Fame increased by 50

'I, I did it! '

With an exhausted face, Ark sat down with a thud.

At that time, Sid and Sarah raised their head to the light. After waking up from his hallucinations, the middle-aged man gazed at Sarah and stuttered.

"Oh.....Oh, Sarah, Sarah! Thank goodness! "

Sarah opened her mouth before running to join the middle aged man in a tight hug while crying.

Sid watched the reunion with tears in his eyes.

"Ah, Ark-nim" You really did it! "

Ark silently nodded his head.

Ark had originally only done it to complete the quest, but looking at Sarah's face he felt a sense of accomplishment.

The heart with which a parent regards their child or the child their parents is still the same no matter if they are a person or a NPC. He thought back to when he was treating the addicts with cold eyes until he saw Sarah sleeping with tears streaming down her face.

The Nursing skill didn't rely on the skill level or the number of uses. For disease stricken NPCs, caring for them sincerely and compassionately is required for Nursing to succeed. Maybe his change of heart was the reason why Miracle Nursing succeeded.

‘If it wasn’t for Sarah then the miracle nursing probably wouldn’t have succeeded. ‘

That said, however, it did succeed.

Anyway, now he would be able to complete the quest to rescue her father. He explained the general situation. Hanson approached Ark.

“You are Ark and Sid? I really thank you. You rescued my daughter and you even saved me. I don’t know how to express my gratitude.”

” Obviously with a reward.... ‘

Ark swallowed the words that came to his mind.

“It was a natural thing. Anyway I’m just relieved that it turned out to alright”

“Oo! A man like you still exists in this barren world. But I can’t feel comfortable if I just accept your help. I want to give you something but I don’t have it at the moment.....”

Hanson had been searching all through his pockets and bag.

‘Please think! There must be something! Please look for it! ‘

Ark’s cheers showed an effect.

After a while Hanson remembered the leather pouch attached to his waist and lifted it.

“I’m sorry I only have something like this. It is only one as well. But fortunately for me it is a special talent. It is tips for making a map. Or if you’re carrying this leather pouch, other people with a knack for it will tell you their tips to making maps. This would be useful for a foreigner like you. ”

You can select your reward.1. Cartography (Skill Initiation)Map can be made using Cartographer Hanson’s skills.If the user you learnt the skill has a pen and paper, they will automatically draw a place down. Also, villages, the geography and any major information about a dungeon visited are automatically recorded.When a map showing the terrain and information of each area or dungeon is

100% completed, a paper map can be created. This map scroll will be able to be sold to other players or NPC general stores. However, once sold the map information disappears.² Hanson's leather pouch

It can hold 25% of the capacity of a basic bag

‘ Hoo., so I can choose the reward? ‘

Ark confirmed the information with shining eyes.

He had looked at Hanson and didn't have big expectations. However, which reward would be more useful? In big cities a magic bag with 1/4 of the capacity of a basic bag was sold for 200 gold! Therefore he could earn 200 gold with that reward.

” People are always going to be lacking bags ‘

Ark swallowed his excess saliva with a gulp.

However, what captured Ark's attention was the cartography skill. The basic map given to a user does not register the terrain of a dungeon. In complicated dungeons, his usual method was to familiarize himself by wandering around.

However, if he had the cartography skill he wouldn't have to waste time wandering over the same routes. In addition, when you complete it 100% you can sell the maps. Of course the more complicated and challenging dungeon maps would be sold at a more expensive price.

Bags might be coveted but they are not useful in games and therefore cannot be compared, because the cartography skill could also earn him money.

‘Yes, money can buy items but rare skills. It cannot be compared’

After Ark made a decision he looked at Sid. As expected Sid was also drooling over the cartography skill.

Indeed, if registered to a map the town's information would be useful to merchants. It would not be easy to concede it to Ark.

“Sid because you are a merchant you’ll need more bags of course”

“Yes? No, I’m..... ”

“It’s ok. I’ll just choose the first option. I’ll have what’s left. ”

Ark smiled as he spoke causing Sid to flinch. He was laughing but Sid noticed an unidentified light in his eyes.

“Don’t be burdened. I didn’t do that much to finish this request, just fought against thieves and almost died! Sid was also sleeping when I was busy treating the addicts’ suffering throughout the night. But don’t be nervous and take what you want. Hahaha, It’s between me and Sid. Right? So please choose the better option. This is the bag of course”

Whenever Ark spoke, Sid felt small wounds puncturing him. And after staring at Ark for a while, he blew a sigh and gave an awkward smile.

“Oh, that’s right, what, justI need a bag”

“I knew it”

So Ark conceded the bad (?) which Sid received and was very happy (?) and it was done. And Ark learned the cartography skill from Hanson and a message window popped up.

-‘Rescue Sarah’s dad! ‘The quest has been completed.-Your level has risen.

Even though the quest difficulty was +E, completion of the quest caused his level to rise.

Once Ark had completed the quest he asked.

“Have you maybe seen anything special about this place?”

“Something special?”

“Yes, it wouldn’t be anything big. Something between the size of a ball and a fist? Well, that would be the approximate size. And because it would have protection there might be a sinister aura

coming from it. Are you reminded of anything? ”

“Well?”

After thinking for a while, Hanson opened his mouth.

“Oh, that reminds me. When I first came here, I saw something suspicious. Some round objects that were contained in an iron box, wrapped in a black cloth inscribed with funny characters I haven’t seen before. I also felt fear to the degree that my body kept on trembling. At the time, I thought I was frightened because I had just been caught by the thieves. But now thinking back, that strange feeling seemed to be coming from that stuff.

“That’s it! Where is it now?”

“The man with red hair took it.”

“The man with red hair?”

“Yes, he also radiated an ominous aura. A red aura covered his body and he also had red hair. The thieves’ boss also used an honorific word for him. I heard the spirit but not the details. He was also the one to give me to the thieves. Your stupid man got caught infiltrating. Tell them to be more careful”

The situation fit. Hanson’s words caused Ark to remember the thieves’ conversation in the secret passage that Ark eavesdropped on.

In the middle of the thieves’ neutral words they said ‘he.’ Perhaps the person they were referring to was the man with red hair. And the thief who got caught outside was the one that had infiltrated Giran last time.

“Do you know where he went?”

“Let’s see.....He went north ofBrandt mountainsbeyond the Angora Cliffs... ..Ah, yes Kairote. That’s right. If it is near the Angora Cliffs in the Brandt Mountains then the only place it could be was Cairo. No doubt, he was a cartographer”

“Cairo?”

Ark looked at Sid with a slightly surprised face.

Prior to meeting Sid, he had never heard of Cairo.

It was a lawless city where chaotic users gathered. However, Ark had been unable to figure out the location of Cairo.

He had heard that chaotic users in Cairo automatically received event quests. Of course, Ark did not want to become chaotic just to find out the location of Cairo.

“Do you happen to know the location of Cairo?”

“Of course. I couldn’t call myself a cartographer if I didn’t know the location of a city. If you’ll let me display the location on the map”

Hanson nodded and a map window automatically opened.

It was open to Giran’s northern area and a red dot pointed to the middle of the Brandt Mountains.

”Ok, I’ve collected all of the required information now. Now all that’s left is to report back to the Magic Institute.

“Well, let’s get out of here.”

Dungeons frustrated Sid because they were not familiar to him.

But there were still people in the prison and Hanson’s face still signs of hesitation. Ark tilted his head and asked.

“Which reminds meWhy are the people still like that? They don’t seem pleased...it’s like they’re not even aware that they have been saved”

“That’s probably”

Hanson explained with a sigh.

The people in the prison were people who wandered the continent or were kidnapped like Hanson. Unlike Hanson who had only been addicted for two days, most of these people have been addicted for years and lost most of their memory.

“When you are looking at a few minutes a day without the day
...Although the symptoms are different for everyone, some are so severe that they can't even remember their own name. So they are frightened of where to go after they leave here. If it was just a little bit later, I would have been just like them too. I would have even failed to recognize my daughter..... ”

Just imagining the fearful thought, Hanson hugged Sarah harder.

“Bastards!”

Sid clenched his fist in anger.

Well, yes but he still looked cute

However, compared to Sid's fury, Ark's eyes glittered.

‘ Ho-Oh! Then these people are little lost sheep? ‘

Ark's ability to connect his quests and maximize profits was triggered.

Ark's tongue seemed as smooth as oil.

“That's a shame. They shouldn't be abandoned just before they suffered such a horrible thing. But it is fortunate. There is a place called Lancel Village that knows me. It is a good place where the courageous people always greet a new neighbour. Even if you are a person with lost memories, the people of the pioneer village would be delight to welcome you. So let's take them there? ”

“Lancel! It is still there?”

Hanson the cartographer stared with surprised eyes.

Ark roughly explained what happened to Lancel and Hanson nodded.

“I see. Nevertheless you are not an average person. Yes, in this situation I better take them to Lancel Village. Now you don't have to worry anymore. I will take responsibility for bringing them to Lancel Village. Although the body is not in the best condition, as a cartographer I use magic to avoid the monsters just like a normal magician.

“Yes that would be great. Tell them that I sent you to Lancel Village. Somebody called Galen will look after them. ”

“I see”

Hanson nodded and a quest updated.

Find New Settlers ‘ quest has been updated. You rescued these poor people who were caught by thieves. And referred those who lost their memories to Lancel, the pioneer village. Of course, Lancel requires a lot of manpower and will welcome them as residents wholeheartedly. Like a newborn baby, they cannot remember anything. However, they will remember that you have found them a new home. They decided to respect your intention and be reborn as a resident of Lancel. {New settlers found: 25% complete}

Because they lost their memories they were not counted as settlers with special abilities. However, the achievement still increased by 10%.

He was getting closer to completing the quest. Ark summed up the situation and left the party leaving the dungeon to Sld.

Ark remained in the dungeon because there was still work to be done.

‘These are all the drug ingredients?’

The remaining Ark looked at the Nurunma leaves and laughed.

The thieves had secretly cultivated rare plants!

Ark’s keen senses smelled the scent of money. Of course, the leaves of the Nurunma plant were now useless.

Even if it is a drug, it would still make an excellent ingredient to make a superior remedy. He wouldn’t be able to sell it at stores in cities. Even if the NPC bought it then he would just be dragged to the guards and arrested.

” But what if the laws don’t apply to the city? ‘

He had already heard about Cairo through Hanson.

After meeting the Magic Institute, the quest would probably lead him to the lawless city of Cairo, where prohibited items from the continent would probably be sold.

'Drugs would be a little concerning but '

Ark had encountered chaotic players many times. Chaotic NPCs and users ran wild in Cairo, so he felt no remorse selling Nurunma leaves there.

And wouldn't it become a treatment pill if refined well?

If they determined that the drug was a remedy, then the NPC shops in Cairo would take the lot. After that Ark is not responsible for it.

Although this was slightly different, the Korean's favourite seasoning pepper was first recognized as a poison.

According to the Japanese, when the Japanese invasion was defeated, people tried to destroy the plants. However, their forefathers were clever and used the peppers to develop a famous food culture worldwide.

After all, that's not important. What are important are the intentions of the people who utilize it.

'As long as I write that the seasoning can be poisonous! '

Armed with that thought, Ark used his extraction skill and collected the Nurunma leaves.

After he had finished collecting the Nurunma leaves in bundles of 200, he had a total of 1600! Even if one sells for 10 silver then he would still receive 160 gold.

Even if he fell down a well, Ark would never leave empty-handed.

After exiting the dungeon, Sid and Hanson's companions gathered.

When Sarah approached to give a farewell greeting, she bent and kissed his cheek. And Ark blushed as red as a beetroot.

-Really thank you

It was a sudden surprise but it didn't feel bad.

Sid waited with an expectant expression.

However, Sarah turned away with a flick of her tongue and left with Hanson.

Sid blankly stared with dumb surprise before raising his voice angrily at Ark.

“Ark, you too!”

The Lawless city of Kairote

“Draconian clan?”

Shannen from the Magic Institute asked in surprise after hearing your report.

“Yes, it looked like it was a lizard-like species”

“I never thought the Draconian clan would be involved with the Heartsoul Bead. However if he used mimicry he might have been able to steal the Heartsoul Bead. ”

“What kind of species is the Draconian anyway?”

“They areNo, it's not. It's still too early to come to conclusions when you are still unsure. I'm sorry but for the moment can you keep quiet about the Draconian' involvement “.

“That's not a difficult job but”

Actually he had no interest in the lizard.

“The problem is the Heartsoul Bead.”

Shannen began to talk with a serious expression.

“I was never sure what those who stole the Heartsoul Bead knew about it. But based on your story, they seem to have a purpose for stealing the Heartsoul Bead. If so, I'm afraid the problem is more serious than I thought”

“There are a lot of ways it can be misused.”

Shannen reached out his sweaty palms and grasped Ark's hands.

“Please. You're the only one I can rely on. The Merchant Guild and Warrior Guild have already begun to suspect the situation. We have no way to chase after the Red Man because if caught the Magic Institute's position in society will be damaged. In addition, the

protection around the relic has been damaged therefore the situation is unknown. ”

“I see what you’re saying.”

Ark nodded and replied.

“I never thought about abandoning a task once I have started it. Fortunately, the cartographer gave me a clue to the whereabouts of the Red Man so before it is too late I will find the Heartsoul Bead. ”

The reason for Ark was of course the reward.

From Shannen’s reaction to the quest he could smell the scent of money.

It could be a huge disaster if the situation is prolonged? If you resolve such a problem then it would be extremely profitable.

But was that all? Since the beginning of quest, he received a great deal of experience from being in a party. The Nurunman leaf was only one of his rewards!

Yes, it was a quest that laid golden eggs!

And Shannen did not even realise the reason behind his acceptance.

“After Jackson, how could I not believe in you?”

After Shannen spoke a new message window popped up.

Quest updated. Find the Heartsoul Bead = Find the Heartsoul Bead
II You found further clues to the Heartsoul Bead in the ruins where unidentified robbers were hiding. The mysterious Red Man associated with the thieves seems to have taken the Heartsoul Bead towards Cairo. The key to all the events lies with the Red Man. After collecting more information from him, bring back the Heartsoul Bead.

Difficulty level: C

‘Anyway, that’s the first checkpoint passed. Is that the end of the boring bounty hunting? ‘

It was actually quite profitable that it was a shame to end it.

However, he had to give it up to gain even more compensation.

Ark left the Magic Institute and put some things in order in Giran. The first place he visited was the garrison.

During the period where he destroyed 18 groups of thieves, he did not have time to drop by Giran to receive the bounty money.

“What brings you here?”

“I came to receive the prize money.”

“Do you have the necessary evidence?”

“Yes, of course.”

Tuk, Tuk, Tuk, Tuk

Ark continued to pull out tokens from his bag and piled them on the desk.

After the 3-4, the NPC officials stared with their mouths open until the 10th token. After he finally pulled out all 18 tokens they stared with amazement.

“This is, this is all?”

“Yes, it’s all the tokens. Please confirm it.”

Ark laughed and smiled at the NPC officials as they said.

“It’s amazing. It has been less than a month since I put up most of these bountiesBut all these thieves have been destroyed within a month?”

“Why wouldn’t it?”

“Ah, no. Is there such a thing? ”

After he checked the tokens against a ledger, the NPC handed him a thick money bag.

The bag contained a whopping 254 gold!

He had frantically hunted bandit groups without visiting the village for 9 days.

Of course, he had to practice hunting for five days before the real hunting so the actual investment time was a fortnight. However, excluding the profit from japtem, a 254 gold bounty was a huge income.

In addition, his hunter rank rose to rank C in record time.

However there is a limit to hunting bounties alone.

Ark could catch a lot of thief companies because other users weren't interested in them. Not surprisingly, the phenomenon was limited to some areas.

When a thief company is exterminated and a scheduled time passed then the group would appear again, however the time scheduled for thieves was different from the general monsters.

It was a necessary method to balance the game.

The eighteen cases were only possible for Ark because a large amount of bandit groups settled around a commercial city and the other players generally avoided hunting thief companies. Indeed, when Ark visited the bulletin board there were only three new bounties. Two of them were ones that Ark had cancelled because he didn't have the token.

After Ark collected the bounty, he turned into Giran Square. Sid had also come to the square to organize and sell his japtem. After calculating it in his head, Ark had reserve budget of 1000 gold.

'The gold in reserve could be changed into cash in case of an emergency. Now he didn't have to worry about money after more! '

After he finished counting, he gloatingly asked Sid.

"Now, for the time being I'm stopping bounty hunting. Sid what are you going to do?"

"Arc-nim are you going to Cairo?"

“Yes,”

“So I’ll come along”

Sid said with shining eyes.

So even after making him work so much, he still doesn’t know Ark’s true colours?

However, Sid had his own reasons.

“With me? But that is a dangerous place for a merchant”

“I don’t have anything to lose anyway.”

Sid said with a heart-warming smile.

“And I have to go anyway.”

“What is it?”

“Ohuhuhuhu, a windfall. Actually a little while ago I stopped at a store to sell some japtem and I got a quest that was from dedicated professional merchants. The merchant want to study items that are only sold in Cairo. After delivering each special item to the required merchant for research, I would have 150 gold to write off my remaining debt. It seems to be a quest that is only given to merchants with Cairo’s location marked on their map.”

“But you have to be a chaotic user to buy exclusive items from Cairo.....?”

To enter may cost more than 150 gold.

Then Sid grinned and lifted a piece of paper.

“It’s a draft issued by the merchant. But it can’t be used outside of a Cairo store”

That is to say Sid’s only intention was to carry stuff.

“Items that are usually sold in Cairo are difficult to find in an ordinary village. This was more than a little gold. Until now, any money I made went to paying off my debt but not this time. But if I buy the

right item then I might be able to resell it for a greater price.”

“Well, that’s fine if you’re sure... ..”

“Yes then please bring me there.”

Sid said while hopping and running.

Frankly, Ark also wanted Sid to come along.

Silently marching for 20 hours a day was possible thanks to Sid. Also, he had a cool character and signed a contract to give Ark his share of the profit from anything he sold. However, Ark had a crucial reason for liking Sid.

As a hobbit, he had access to 6 bags...with the pouch he received from Hanson that was 7 bags available! Sid was just a bag to Ark after all.

‘Cairo is a lawless city. He should have his poisonous skill equipped ready to use at any time. If so, having Sid along would also help. Ayu, my lovely bag. ‘

“Okay.” If it’s Sid then you’re always welcome.

“Then let’s leave immediately!”

Sid swung both of his arms as he walked.

Therefore he continued to travel together with the hobbit merchant with a bad credit rating.

” This was a deposit,! ‘

Hyun-woo looked at his bank account with thrilled eyes.

At the end of the Event Quest, he put up the Fire Slayer for auction and the winning bid was just deposited.

In fact, the auction was closed for a while. However, the person who deposited the money received an unavoidable computer error leaving him anxious until it was confirmed that the money was now properly deposited.

The deposit amount was a whopping 11,160,000 won!

The highest bid was 12,000,000 won with 7% going to the auction commission fee. This meant that 840,000 won went to the auction fee but the expense was worth it.

1-1 trade with users could be a popular place for a scam. Hyun-woo also fell victim to a fraud a couple of years ago when trying to buy a 100,000 won item.

A 12,000,000 won item was worth so much more that if he fell victim to a fraud he would vomit blood and die.

‘Well, I just have to think of it like a tax and in some cases if you use the auction then you can receive a higher price. I got 11,160,000 won anyway. And the Dark Robe I got yesterday sold for 900,000 won so tomorrow I should receive 870,000 won. ‘

When combined with the money in his account, he would have around 14,000,000 won.

Every day the prices go up even more but it should be enough to pay two or three months' worth of hospital bills without having to worry about money.

Hyun-woo gave a heart-warming smile at the bank statement.

‘Oh, today I have to go to the hospital with uncle Gwon Hwa-rang? ‘

Hyun-woo remembered the phone call he answered this morning.

“Speaking of Uncle Gwon Hwa-rang, it's been awhile since I've visited his house. Oh that's right, isn't today the day he normally visits his probation members? Because today was the first day they would meet directly since the lump sum came in ‘

Gwon Hwa-rang had bought a house for the rehabilitation members to live together almost a year ago.

Hyun-woo bought food with a few bills in his pocket while grinding his teeth. He paid for three whole chickens and after dinner drinks.

The total was 55,000 won. Paying 2000 won for seaweed rolls

three times a day was an extravagant amount for Hyun-woo.

However, he made an exception for Gwon Hwa-rang and the probation members. Spending that much But it was a crowd so he should not scrimp.

Gwon Hwa-rang's place was 30 minutes away by bus.

"Who is it?"

A voice was heard after he pressed the bell.

And the man appeared!

Hyun-Woo used to be a juvenile delinquent and he had a fairly discipline mind and body. However, he became breathless at the sight of the man that appeared.

A bear-like man with tattoos from his wrist to his neck. It was like he found himself in front of a boss monster, with a warning message spontaneously appearing in his head.

The guy scanned him up and down and said.

'What the? You have chicken? "

"Aaa.....I'm here to see Uncle Gwon Hwa-rang?"

"Nag? You know Gwon? "

"Yes, I'm Hyun-woo. We had an appointment today "

"Oh! Oh!"

He scratched his head roughly as his eyes opened in surprise.

"It's you! You're Ark! "

"Yes, that is, yes?"

"Ah! Man why did you hesitate? It's me, number 1405. Remember? "

"Number 1405? Then you are that uncle ... ".

"Yes, Yes! I received a lot of help that day. Well, you do look

exactly like your game character. I'm sorry, I don't have very keen eyes. Come in “.

Number 1405 grabbed his arm and just pulled him into the house.

When he unconsciously entered the house, his company immediately raised his voice.

“Hey, Ark is here!”

Not long after,Hyun-woo felt like he had entered a safari park and had been thrown as a toy.

His first impression of all the guys that rushed out of a room was that they were tougher than rock. Frankly, Hyun-woo considered the group of thieves cute compared to these guys. 10 similar men gathered and surrounded him! It was such a situation then he sat down with a sweaty back.

‘Uncle Gwon Hwa-rang says kid, kid.....Looking around where is this kid? ‘

“Gwon had to go out a little bit because of urgent business. He wants you to wait a little bit. It's like that. And when he goes somewhere he doesn't bring a cell phone with him.....”

The man with a horrifying knife scar on his face said with a smile. Hyun-woo almost said ‘I'm sorry I'll buy a cell phone immediately.’

I'm number 1401. Kang Yoo-jin. But did you buy us food?”

Kang Yoo-jin looked at the chicken set in Hyun-woo's hands.

“Yes,”

After he answered the chicken turned to bone.

It didn't even take 11 minutes. Scary. Are they going to eat me as well? Did he come for nothing?’

Hyun-woo rolled his eyes nervously. The last of the chicken wings was eaten by number 1405, called Ma Chorung who suddenly asked.

“By the way, have you gone anywhere with Roco?”

“Yes? We only went to a cafe together?”

The group burst into laughter at Hyun-woo’s answer.

“You’re completely a nerd.”

“I’m saying you like her.”

“Ohuhuhu. So of course you would have kissed?”

“Aak, Don’t say that! I’m just a friend that’s a man....uuk!”

“Hey, hey! Don’t you know saying that is a crime?”

The conversation broke down with the guys chattering to each other. Hyun-woo who was listening blankly shook his head.

“Well there’s nothing between me and Hye-sun. She is just a close younger sibling.....”

“What?”

The guys’ voices stopped suddenly. They began sending doubtful looks at each other and whispering.

Beside him Kang Yoo-jin blew out a sigh and shook his head.

“Let’s stop it at that. I’m embarrassed for everyone. Anyway....Roco is really serious. It’s like comparing trees and stone.....”

“Yes? Ah, you mean me?”

“No, I have no intention of becoming nosy. Anyway Hyun-woo, no, it is easier to call you Ark. Is that ok? If possible please relax and sit down a little bit more comfortably. This is not a punishment. So why is your form so awkward?”

Hyun-woo then realised that he was sitting on his knees. Hyun-Woo coughed and sat down cross-legged as Yoo-jin smiled and said.

“Please don’t be so anxious. Our appearance might be like beasts, but we’re not bad guys”

Ma Chorung interrupted with a single word.

“To be frank, we were bad guys.”

“I’m not arguing that. “Um, that is clear.

“Then. We don’t particularly hate guys like you”

“Yes? Guys like me? ”

“Yes, so you see

Ma Chorung opened his mouth to talk but was prevented by Kang Yoo-jin who said.

“The intention is just like we said. Rather, it was better. In the game, our goals are the same. The new world was more complicated than I thought so if I meet an expert than I’ll ask them about New World.

“Yes, I’m ok with that.”

It was a topic that he knew so Hyun-woo nodded.

Frankly, Hyun-woo’s reaction to the word ex-convict was different from most peoples who would have blinders on.

If they are ex-convicts then they are criminals. It was a cruel and cold-hearted way to think but natural for outgoing people.

So because of these special people, Hyun-wooregarded them with a completely different expression.

However, with such a conversation, his original thoughts disappeared.

In particular, when he was first introduced to number 1401. Kang Yoo-jin seemed like a hard person thanks to his scar but he was more thoughtful than an ordinary person.

The framework is something he disagreed with? He could hear the weight of every behaviour through his voice. The other people were the same as well. Though their outer appearance was tough, when talking about the game their eyes lit up like children.

Hyun-woo felt a sense of surprise at the difference between their appearance and behaviour.

Hyun-woo used the moment to talk seriously with ordinary people who enjoyed the game just as much as he did. After his mind was eased, the conversation became more fun. The difference between how Hyun-woo played the game and how they just enjoyed it was interesting.

“Autonomy from the government?”

Hyun-woo listened to the news about Jackson.

“”Yes, it was thanks to Gwon. The condition was he would have to go to the Capital and earn enough points in the arena in front of the nobility. Well, we like it. Because fighting against monsters has been getting boring. ”

Hyun-Woo also meant to see the arena someday. But he never thought the Gwon Hwa-rang would get there first.

It also seemed that the sentence was passed after Hyun-woo had a word with the young Lord.....The strong point of New World was that the words or conduct of a third party could impact it so much that it affects other users. Their common interest led to a more lively conversation.

And Hyun-Woo also joked around and engaged in the conversation.

The skills that they learnt were particularly interesting.

All the unique skills in reality- including violence-could be acquired as their profession. Although they promised to follow the rehabilitation program, that program was not enough to seal off their skills. And New World was a game where they could apply those skills.

“Huhuhu, although the money was initially low in Harun Village, we used our skills to get things cheaper. Therefore, the ‘intimidation’ skill was acquired. You can use the ‘intimidation’ skill at any shop to get items for 10% cheaper! However, it does lower the intimacy with the owners.”

It was the skill that the person called 1402 favoured as a former bond collector.

Then number 1406 who was a former pickpocket scoffed.

“Is that something to be proud of? I have the ‘Pickpocket’ skill where I am able to steal one item from a monster in critical condition. That’s better than blackmailing NPCs.”

“Noisy!” Stop talking about the stingy pickpocket skill! Intimidation can also deal with monsters. Do you see how sometimes it flinches? That’s because I intimidated it”

“Huhuhu, that’s trivial. Intimidation? Pickpocket? You have to live a new life but in the end nothing has changed in that cycle. Look at me. The skill ‘Wine Lovers’ gives an extra 20 points to intimacy with female NPCs. Love and Peace? This skill is much better”

“Ha, is the fact that you hit your wife also applied to the game? If you’re like me, the ‘Fraud’ is a much better skill because it allows me to sell items for 15% more even though I’m not a merchant.”

The gentle number 1401, Kang Yoo-jin also spoke up.

‘Ha, New World really has a lot of interesting skills. Even if you have the same profession, depending on the skills you pick it is possible to raise an entirely different character.

It is embodied in the fact that a technique learned in reality is a skill in the game. In reality, some techniques shouldn’t transfer over. Some techniques you should feel ashamed about. And again, even if you don’t use the technique in the game it is still usable.

We assume the other users’ skills are wonderful as well and envy them.

It was one of the reasons people are attracted to New World. And it wasn’t possible for Hyun-woo to feel a sense of distance from them anymore.

This is why common interests are so important.

‘Oh, that reminds me.....’

Hyun-woo suddenly remembered the new Survival Cooking skill he learnt in Giran. It was a special advanced technique that could create a medley of food with special effects.

Foods that could increase charm, voicewhen cooking it is impossible to guess what effect the dish would have.

But listening to the ex-convicts talk, he thought that the food might be related to certain skill.

The dish to increase charm could be used with the 'wine lovers' skill and the dish to increase the voice could be used with 'Intimidation' to increase the menace in the voice.

Hyun-woo's idea interested the probationary members.

"Ara? There are also items that could give effects like that?"

"Haven't you looked at the auction?"

"The food is stuck because of the expiration date. When it isn't special and the expiration date is short then it is difficult for an auction to sell it. There isn't a special food related category in the auction"

"I see"

"There's a lot of food with unknown effects, it could increase agility or strength but there are also poisonous foods that could give absurd effects."

"Hey, that's fascinating?"

"Well it would be a lot of help when you are a spectator."

"Then I'll make plenty. Fortunately food created with an advanced skill has a longer use by date. By at the moment I have no time to go to the capital thanks to my quest. Is it possible for you to come to Cairo?"

"Cairo?" That's where you're stuck? I've never heard of it?"

"It is very difficult to find the information from other places. It is the lawless city of Cairo.

The ex-convicts eyes shined when they heard the lawless city part.

“A lawless city? Then it is like the Harlem district? Hooo, I certainly have to go there? ”

“Ok, before going to the capital we’ll try to drop by Cairo.”

“So let me explain my approximate location.”

“Okay, I understand.”

“Huhuhu, it is easy to understand why you’re a high level user.”

“I give my best regards. Ark.”

A probationary member said with a smirk.

After that, Hyun-woo would be different and New World would tremble in time with them.

After 1 hour had passed, Gwon Hwa-rang returned.

Hyun-woo stood up to go to the hospital although he felt regret. A probationary member went with him outside.

“Ark, next time call before you come. We will prepare chicken.”

Kang Yoo-jin said, patting Hyun-woo’s shoulders.

“And.....If things are difficult then tell us. We might not be the best but we’ll stand with you.

If there’s anything we can do to support each other than we should. ”

“Yes,”

Hyun-woo parted from them without any specific ideas.

So he took a car to the hospital where he met with Gwon Hwa-rang.

“How was the meeting? Did they seem like nice guys? ”

“Yes, though I was a little bit scared in the beginning”

“The fact is that I had really wanted you to meet the guys.”

“Yes? Why? Which reminds me, didn’t Ma Chorong also to say that?”

Gwon Hwa-rang gave a bittersweet smile and muttered.

“Some might have a different view no matter their appearances. Among them he had not wanted to be a criminal. But circumstances were unavoidable and he was forced to live on the streets. And soon was forced to live without a soul and eventually had a criminal record. It is not a good conversation to inquire about the details of their pain. ”

“

“Of course, now I don’t regret it. I think everyone thinks deeply about how their life might have been different. So you have to think about what you’re proud of. Your parentsHum-hum, in difficult circumstances you have to use your own strength to make sure you don’t fall on a bad path.”

‘Is that so? I hope that guy Chorong doesn’t hate someone like me in the end. ”

Hyun-woo was ashamed for thinking they were a different race from him, even for a short while.

“If they didn’t have Uncle Gwon Hwa-rang

“Anyway. So I can’t give up on those guys. Because it is difficult to know how to get out from the wrong bog using your own strength. To be honest, that’s why I left today. Many guys would realise it when they look at you struggling to live rightly in a difficult situation. I want to teach that to them through you and New World. Sorry I didn’t tell you in advance.”

Gwon Hwa-rang spoke as cigarette smoke blew from his mouth out the car window.

Hyun-woo looked at the side of Gwon Hwa-rang’s face for a while.

That appearance.

It was the face that Hyun-woo had seen when he first met Gwon

Hwa-rang.

The mass media portrayed him as a criminal when he used his gun to shoot a violent offender, but he was truly sorry and wanted to help somehow.....It was Gwon Hwa-rang's true power which Hyun-woo respected.

"It's okay." I enjoyed it. And I like the older brothers."

"I'm glad"

"By the wayIs this an operation to introduce me in advance because I might become an adopted son?"

Unsteadily, the car shook for a while.

But Gwon Hwa-rang pretended ignorance and continued smoking.

A secret smile spread on Hyun-woo's mouth as he leaned back in his seat.

On that day, Hyun-Woo gained 10 older ex-convict brothers.

'Does this also increase the level? '

"Is that place Cairo?"

Ark looked at the city's silhouette that was revealed over the ridges.

From the side, Sid muttered about his taste.

"There, so would it be possible to rest soon?"

"Yes, this time I'm going to bath properly."

Ark unfolded the map and nodded.

"It is good news."

Sid collapsed with a thud in that position.

They had arrived at Cairo four days after leaving Giran.

Indeed, it was four days of continuous, fierce hardship.

And the suffering began with Ark's one word.

“In order to save time let’s go straight to Cairo.”

Although Hansen the cartographer clearly indicated Cairo’s location, the map of the surrounding areas was not clear. Finding the proper way to get there from Giran could be time-consuming. Therefore, Ark decided that the quickest way to get to Cairo was to go in the direction with the shortest distance.

.....It was a mistake.

The area between Giran and Cairo was a bit unclear.

There was a dense jungle where the exit wasn’t visible.

He didn’t expect the high level hunting ground infested with strange monsters over level 100.

With the darkness bonus applied at night, he could somehow deal with the monsters but during the day this did not apply. In addition, there were gaping crevasses in places like the valley floor and a swamp that was like a maze, making it easy to get lost. It was a miracle that they had managed to escape the jungle alive.

Sid looked at Ark with sunken eyes.

‘Fortunately, they had found some ruins hidden in the jungle, and raise their intimacy with an NPC from the Migu Migu Clan.....without him, I’d be dead.’

The situation had become more difficult thanks Ark’s character which he stuck fearfully to!

The difficult situation meant that Ark didn’t sleep for more than 2 hours a day. Thanks to that, even Sid was dragged out. In addition, restless creatures chasing you can also increase tension. Of course the tremendous fatigue and lack of sleep decreased their health until they fell into a critical state.

I’d rather be dead, how many times had he thought that?

The entered the jungle straight away after Giran. Of course the final resurrection place was Giran..... He could use dying in the jungle as an excuse to rest in Giran but.....

He noticed that when Ark fought in battles, he always protected Sid. Of course, even Sid knew that it wasn't a statement of the friendship. It would be difficult to collect a lot of japtem with 6 bags gone.

After that, the two of them who had passed such a hell eventually reached Kairote.

Just looking at the distant Cairo caused tears to rise.

'You did it, Sid! You did! Great job, Sid! You're cool, Sid!'

"What happened?"

"Oh, no. Dust just entered my eye....."

Sid wiped his blurry eyes with his sleeves.

"Now, let's go. We need to organize our stuff and get some rest."

"Yes!"

At the end of his words, Sid let out a wide grin and nodded.

The two of them soon went up along the ridges.

Cairo was located on top of the ridge, just like the city of Machu Picchu shown in a documentary. The size of the silhouette shown in the dim moonlight was roughly the size of the Jackson manor.

Growing vine the ground was thick vines that surrounded the city like a wall.

Unless displayed on the map, Cairo was difficult to find due to the thick vines making it seem like a forest.

Cairo's entrance was guarded by NPCs.

Unlike other cities, these guards were dressed like bandits.

Ark and Sid gazed at the magical sight of the vines surrounding them as they reached the entrance. The guards frowned darkly and interrupted them.

"Wait! What, you guys?"

“Yes? Did you just enter the city?”

“Bah! Go out! This isn’t a place where every youngster can enter! ”

“What do you mean?”

“Didn’t you hear me say leave?”

“If you make me say it again, I’m going to show you how to walk away with a bitter taste!

The guard NPCs roughly pushed them together.

It was a tense atmosphere. They couldn’t cause problems with the NPCs as soon as they reached Cairo. Eventually Ark and Sid left with puzzled faces.

“Why are they doing this? The NPC stops users from even entering the town? ”

Of course, sometimes there are guards that press users at general villages. However, it is applicable only to the chaotic user. As he was thinking, Ark realised that he forgot something.

“Ah, this was a city for chaotic users!”

“Oh, right. I had heard that only chaotic players could enter Cairo.”

Sid seemed to have the same thought as he stated in a frustrated voice.

“What do we do? We came so far.....”

“It’s not that way”

A shallow smile spread on Ark’s face.

‘Huhuhu, I had collected something a while ago and forgot about it.....I didn’t think it would be used for this. Of course I made sure to collect it even when its purpose was unclear. Because you don’t know when or where you’ll need it. ”

“Snake, [Lie] scroll!”

Snake spat out the red scroll.

After Sid checked the scroll his eyes widened and he raised his voice.

“Eh? That, that is! ”

“I had taken away the scroll from Leo previously.”

Ark said with a smile. In fact, it was an item that every time his bags ran out of space he thought about selling. However, trying to sell the special item he got after all that hard work was uncomfortablewhat a relief.

“Now, where to use it once?”

Ark used the scroll to edit his character info.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good+200	
Fame	1635	Level	90
Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of All, Jackson's Hero	
Health	1745	Mana	1355 (+100)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	234 (+ 5)
Agility	264 (+ 17)	Stamina	334
Wisdom	33	Intelligence	262
Luck	44	Flexibility	26
Art of Communication	23	Affection	55 (+ 10)
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		53	

Equipment item effects

Black Bear Mouse Leather Armour: Agility + 2, Frost Resistance + 20
Cat Paws: Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%
Crystal Golem's Head: Mana + 100
Norad Boots: movement speed + 10%, avoidance rate + 5%
Adelaine's Necklace: Def + 40, Affection + 10
Resurrecting Spirit: Strength + 5, Mana Recovery + 5%

* All abilities will increase by 30% in the dark* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (15 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)* Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

{Lie} scroll, using this scroll, the player's level and alignment, and one stat can be randomly controlled. However, the level and state must extend beyond 10 up or down.{Duration: 1 hour}

"Level increase by 10, alignment chaotic."

Ark's current level had increased to 90 after 3 days in the forest. The Lie scroll adjusted it upwards to level 100. And he became a chaotic player and his name was turned red. With other users walking back and forth, it was difficult to raise his level.

It was the reason he deliberately chose night time.

"Now there's only one of this scroll"

"What about me.....?"

"I'll enter Cairo and buy lots of scrolls. I'll also gather information if I can. And Sid will lurk where appropriate. Don't be recognized as something else by a chaotic user or you'll be in danger."

"Then I'll do that. Please. "

Reassured, Sid nodded.

Ark gave a faint smile.

"I'll take out the price of the scroll from the japtem charges."

After trusting the wrong person, the Sid who went all the way to Cairo to find a way to live should elicit sympathy, but that was non-existent in Ark. Of course, it was that guy.

Sid pasted a strange smile on his face and nodded.

"Yes, ha ha! Of course."

"Then, I'm going. Be very good at hiding and take care of yourself. "

Ark looked at Sid like he was a body with 6 bags again. As expected, after he reached the entrance and his name was shown the attitude of the NPCs changed.

“Ara? You’re the guy from a little while ago? ”

“Well?” Yes.....”

After scanning up and down, the NPC laughed wildly.

“Kukuku, the fragrant smell of blood is emanating from your body. Meanwhile where is your young friend?”

“Around. That hobbit, was visibly appetizing....But are you done?”
Huhuhu, you’re a bad guy who betrayed the guy who accompanied you here. But I much prefer the hypocrisy over the good guy guise. And this place is not a paradise for the faithful. Ok, if you have thrown off the mask of hypocrisy then you are welcome. ”

His intimacy with the guard quickly rose.

Ark wanted to use the chance to gain additional information.

“Perhaps, did a redheaded man come here?”

“A redheaded man? Hmm, let’s see? It is a difficult question to answer. This is a place where hundreds of people come in and out in one day. And most would be wearing a hat.”

“Then has anything strange happened in the last few days.....”

“There’s no such thing? Well, the lawless city is always a problem, but there wasn’t anything that was particularly strange. Although these days the vines that protect the city have withered a little bit, but that’s all. Did you want to know something like that?”

“Indeed. I understand.”

“Let me know anytime you need help, I’ll give it to you.”

“I’ll only give it to you. A foreigner has to protect his life.”

The NPC guards chuckled and said.

Ark ignored them and entered Cairo.

He couldn't feel secure in the city. Cairo was a lawless city. There were guard NPCs, but here if a fight broke out between the users then the NPC would not pay attention.

They maintain minimal security. The NPC only acts when Cairo is attacked.

It is the 'crime promotion' area.

Of course, if they kept fighting then every chaotic user would be mentally and physically tired. Therefore, to some extent there were tacit rules. But that had nothing to do with the Ark who just stepped into Cairo.

Of coursethere was flashing here and there as he walked along a wide road.

The chaotic users hiding in the alley here and there used [Insight] to confirm Ark's level. In addition, some users also applied for a party. The purpose of this wasn't to form a party, but was to determine if Ark could be a colleague.

"Sheesh, it's a high level."

"He's also in a party. If I touch him, it'd be tiring."

"A novice should have entered so we could educate them a little bit."

Now the users who were gawking from a nearby alley stealthily withdrew.

Due to New World's system, it was less likely for chaotic players to be high level.

It took a colossal amount of time and money to get rid of the chaotic status, and the loss would be too big if they died.

At a low level, gaining a chaotic status to steal had a low risk rate and benefits, but as the level increases that risk would increase exponentially.

Because of that, the users in Cairo were mainly level 30-40. They

wouldn't dare attack Ark who had become level 100 thanks to the [Lie] scroll.

'The first checkpoint has been passed.'

Ark was finally able to relax and find a shopping centre.

In Cairo it wasn't only the outer walls, the exteriors of every building was also enveloped in vines. Thankfully, the buildings were not like other cities and had distorted shapes. In addition, the city was fairly complex and it as difficult to find his way. How far did he walk? Ark had finally discovered a strange place.

In the central part of the city, there was a wide gaping hole with a diameter of about 10 meters.

Access beware!A long time ago during the warring States period, the monarch who had ruled for 1 year ordered that the hole be built. At that time, the 1 year ruler swore to fill the hole with the invaders' bodies. It was thus named 'hell.' But soon afterwards the war ended and the vow was not fulfilled.At the time, there was no documentation about how deep the hole was. However, the deep fury of the 1 year monarch was estimated to reach several hundred meters.If you fall then there is a 100% chance of death. Only does who want to commit suicide are allowed to dive

It is the corpse disposal arena in the centre of the city

The history was as bloody as expected, appropriate for a lawless city.

'Ah, this is not the time.'

Ark who was watching the hole with his mouth open, turned his head away.

If possible, he wanted to explore Cairo some more so now was not the time. He was also worried about Sid waiting outside and the [Lie] scroll also had a time limit.

His top priority was to quickly locate a shopping centre.

Ark had been running down a back alley to quickly look for a

shopping centre. However moments before stepping foot in a mall, he realised that there was something wrong.

‘This, thisWhich reminds me, isn’t it night-time?’

Even the mistake was tight.

Ark had chosen night time to enter Cairo because he received the dark attribute bonus. But he hadn’t considered the original purpose. In New World, NPCs also close their shops during the evening to sleep. And now, of course, all the stores were closed because it was night.

‘Damn! In New World, it was now dawn which arrives at 5am. The stores open at 8 a.m. so he has to wait 3 more hours?’

The duration of his scroll was limited.

Would the duration end before the store’s doors open?

It’s obvious that he would get attacked by NPC guards if they saw him.

But was that all? When a guard NPC shows up, other chaotic users would also enter! If he uses ‘Stealth’ then it is possible to escape but without the scroll he won’t be able to buy items from the store, and he also wouldn’t be able to collect information about the red man.

‘In the end, I came here only to end up sucking fingers.’

Of course, he could become chaotic but he wanted to avoid that as much as possible.

Once you become chaotic then the alignment and fame is reduced by 30%. But it doesn’t stop there? At level 90, to lose the chaotic status he must surrender to the guards and be locked up in prison for 9 days in real time and a fine of 90 gold.

It was certainly a reckless penalty!

‘No! There must be another way?’

Ark desperately ran around the shopping centres.

That's when he found his light of salvation in the form of a store.

A dim light shone from a small grocery store nestled in a small alley. The doors were closed but it was possible that the NPC was still inside?

Tapping at the door, Ark jumped up and shouted.

"Are you here?"

"At this time, what kind of child are you?"

"Oh, I'm fortunate that you're here. I have to buy some stuff. "

"We're closed. Because it's troublesome, go away! "

"There is an urgent situation. Please open the door as a small favour! "

"I told you I won't trade!"

However, Ark believed this store was his open option.

He did not stop knocking until the door eventually flew open and a furious man's face emerged.

"Leave me alone! You don't have to go crazy just before daylight!"

"I'm really sorry. I told you it was a really urgent matter. Please give me a moment to buy a few things. It will only take a short time. Please."

Ark lowered his head and begged and the man's face slightly softened. He scratched his head and blew out a sigh before shaking his head.

"Look I don't like to say no to someone desperate. Of course, I would like to engage in the business of a businessman too. But this matter is also not about you. I also can't afford your patronage. Even though I want to I can't.

"Yes? Can't afford to patronize? What does that mean? "

"Come on, get inside the store. Because of this, do you

understand?”

The shop owner indicated with an irritated expression.

The inside of the store was a mess. The shelves and miscellaneous items were smashed and the walls and floors had broken items all over the place. Just looking at the situation, he could tell that there was a serious problem.

“Can I help with anything?”

“What?” What did you say?”

“I asked if you needed any help”

Ark who was used to being friendly with NPCs automatically answered.

If someone is good, then they may receive thanks. Because there was never any loss, the system had become ingrained as a habit.

Then the shop owner looked at him with a befuddled look.

“Why would you do that? Was it a mistake...? ”

“Ah, no.

The shop owner was surprised as he shook his head.

“It’s because I haven’t heard those words in so long. Also you’re a foreigner? The foreigners who often shop here don’t bother with anyone else’s’ problems. Of course, most of the murders are committed by criminals.....”

‘Oh, which reminds me of something in Cairo?’

Chaotic players don’t bother building intimacy with quest NPCs. That was not the main concern of chaotic players.

Their main concern and interest is how many users they can PK and gain items before losing the chaotic status. Therefore, none of them would have had any interest in the NPC’s circumstances.

Ark immediately grasped the situation and answered.

“It is difficult to tell the difference in this place, but I am not like them. Also I have never done anything that I was ashamed about. It was because of circumstances that couldn’t be avoided that a crime was committed. And after my business here ends then I will surrender and be judged in a legitimate court of law.”

Ark was heartfelt (?) Needless to say, the shop owner nodded.

“No, I understand. There would often be such a friend.”

“Now would it be okay to explain the situation to me? I was thinking that solving other peoples’ difficulties was my fate. I have the body of a criminal now but isn’t it possible to see past that just this once.”

“Whew, but”.

The shop owner was worried about something and talked seriously.

“Just by looking you can understand, but a thief entered the store last night.”

“The thief?”

“Yes, in fact, this is not the first time. Surprisingly, just this shop has been visited at least three times in the last fortnight. Replacing the lock was ineffective. They don’t steal anything but I would rather they did. Every time they visit they would destroy the shop. Now I’m tired of it. Until now, I’ve somehow tried to hold on butNow I’ve already given up. AnywayNo, I know how to clean up the store and leave this place. ”

“Aren’t there any guards here? Didn’t you tell them? ”

Ark tilted his head to one side.

Users don’t involve guard NPCs with their problems, but the shop owner was a NPC. The NPC didn’t try to engage their help? If they have no restraint, then it is possible for chaotic users to do those kinds of things when dealing with the store.

“That,Hung, it was a whole bunch of nonsense. This is my problem I don’t need other people’s help. All right, now anyway? Because I can’t engage in business, please forget it and leave.”

“Ha, but

“Now!”

The shop owner suddenly changed. And stepped closer to Ark and looked suspiciously into Ark’s eyes.

“Now, you’re really.....?”

“Yes?”

“This, unbelievable! The scent of blood has disappeared from your body? Then surely the [Lie]! ”

‘ Whoops! ‘

Ark’s heart suddenly fell.

The duration of the scroll had finished because he was delayed running around Cairo. And in front of an NPC. In Cairo, even the NPC was chaotic.

It was similar to thieves in Giran being tired of the hunt.

If the shop owner let the NPC guard know then he was screwed.

However, you also can’t kill the NPC. If he became wanted as a NPC killer in Cairo then he would have to give up the quest from the Magic Institute.

“I, I.....”

Ark was embarrassed and tried to diffuse the situation somehow.

Suddenly, the shop owner grabbed Ark’s arm. He closed the door and observed outside from a small side door. After confirming that there was no one around, the shop owner blew out a sigh of relief.

“That was close. I was wondering if someone had noticed ... ”

“You’re not accusing me?”

“Accuse? Huhuhu, great. What is good about deliberately plotting against you? In addition, you must have a reason to use a scroll to come here.”

“Thank you,”

The shop owner looked at Ark as he decided something and opened his mouth.

“It is difficult to say, but perhaps you’ll give me some help?”

“Of course I would like to help. But just before..... ”

“It’s a matter that I didn’t want to ask of a criminal. But if you’re not a criminal then the circumstances are different. And if you managed to visit here through your own power then you must have considerable skills, enough that I might be able to give you a favour.

Ark eyes shone brightly.

A NPC quest! The quest was one that could only be given if a non-chaotic player came to Kairote. It was a development that couldn’t be imagined.

“As a matter of fact. I know the criminal who entered the store. If you exit the town and climb the south hill there is an unemployed bum called Lorenzo who lives at the cabin.”

The shop owner said.

‘If you punish him severely and recover the stolen goods, then you’ll be properly compensated. That’s it for now....but I’ll tell you what? If you recover any items, then I’ll offer a 40% discount on the price. Anyway, I am going to put everything in order as I leave so I should probably reduce the baggage. How is it?”

‘Ohu!’

In Ark’s eyes gold powder fell.

He didn’t know how much stuff had been stolen, but since it had been stolen five times then it wouldn’t be a small amount. Of course if he sold the items he received with a 40% discount at another city then he could get considerable profit.

Sid had also come to Cairo with that purpose.

“Are there any other gangs?”

“No, as far as I know he lives by himself.”

“Good! But before that ...You see that I urgently need the [Lie] scroll. Is it possible to save me in regards to that?”

“Don’t worry. I always have a few [Lie] scrolls.

The shop owner pulled out three protruded scrolls.

“Thank you. So I will immediately go and recover your things.”

“Now, wait a minute”

At that time, the shop owner hurriedly grabbed Ark’s hands.

“Don’t misunderstand. I’d love to punish him a little. But nothing beyond that.”

“Yes? But what...? ”

“No, I meanAnyway the thing is stealing is scandalous but it did not harm me directly. If he dies due to somebody I sent then how can I calm down? I just want my things returned. So just keep that in mind. Under no circumstances should you kill him. Understood? If you do not keep the promise I won’t forgive you”

“.....I understand.”

Although he didn’t understand the shop owner’s attitude, Ark nodded.

As soon as he did, the quest window popped up.

The worries of shop owner WolkosuYou have met the shop owner Wolkosu in Cairo. He has angrily continued to put up with a thief who ruined his store for a fortnight. Unlike the other foreigners in Cairo, he has asked just you to solve this case. You have to punish the thief and recover the goods.{However, if the rogue is injured with a sword then the quest will automatically fail. If the quest is not finished by the end of the month, a vindictive Wolkosu will believe you did not keep the promise and file a complaint to the NPC}Difficulty level: E

Dark Brotherhood

‘Here?’

20 minutes after he left Cairo and walked up the hill, a cabin appeared.

He used ‘Stealth’ to observe through a window.

As expected, the NPC named Lorenzo was chaotic. Level 80. Although it was a high level for other people, he couldn’t compare to Ark who was level 90 and receives a bonus attribute in the dark. Quest difficulty E.

It took 90 levels to perform one difficulty up.

However, it wasn’t a simple quest where he could rush in blindly.

It usually required killing the target to receive a key that would open a warehouse and retrieve the goods. However, he couldn’t kill Lorenzo and he couldn’t even use a sword. In other words, he had to find out the whereabouts of the goods first.

‘I had previously encountered thieves in the ruins..... ‘

After surveying the structure of the cabin, Ark said to Sid.

“As expected, there is a back entrance. If one is backed into a corner they may escape through the back entrance. Therefore Sid will block the back door. If blocked by a body on the outside then there is no particular danger.”

“Yes, I understand.”

Sid answered in a tense voice and went back.

‘Now, this fellow recently held poison.’

If you block the escape of a level 80 NPC then they would have nothing to build a strategy. Intimidating for the time being and if that

doesn't work then a little bit of violence is okay.

Ark immediately kicked the door and entered the cabin. Lorenzo who was surprised, tried to stand up.

"You, who are you?"

"I will not speak for long. Where are you hiding the stolen goods? "

"The stolen goods? What are you talking about? "

"It is useless to feign ignorance. I already know. Just tell me obediently before you get hurt."

"What, what?" Thief? Who said such a silly thing?"

"Who is it? -Wolkosu. Wouldn't you know who Wolkosu is even if I didn't explain it?

It was at that time. At the mention of Wolkosu, Lorenzo's forehead violently twitched. Then his eyes anxiously shook as he sighed.

"Wolkosu.....!"

Lorenzo ground his molars together and growled.

"I don't know what inspired such nonsense but I didn't steal anything! Go back! If you don't return then I'll beat you to death.

"Oh, a beating to death?

Ark laughed and nodded his head.

"That's the most welcome sound I ever heard. Let's see if you can give it a try. "

"This child!"

Lorenzo kicked the chair and rushed at him.

He tried to use the distraction of the chair to attack. It was a familiar method that other thieves used to fight. However for juvenile delinquents who walked a dark road, it was a method that Ark was tired of. That much was not enough to give an element of surprise.

Ark caught the chair and kicked sideways. The next moment his fist shot out in rapid succession in a flash. Ark's specialty was continuous critical hits!

"Kuooooak!"

He delivered blows to the chest, waist and side, after being hit with three critical attacks Lorenzo moaned and withdrew.

Although Ark did not use his sword for attack and defense at the same time he did have his gloves, the Cat Paws. Due to the growth system of the Cat Paws, his offensive power was currently 9~15 (+8.9)

In some ways, it was better than a sword. In addition, Ark had also learned Sword-Hand Combat and Hand-to-Hand Combat, so he had no reason to be penalized by the absence of a sword.

Lorenzo's health was quickly reduced to 30%.

"Ugh, this, unbelievable!"

Lorenzo ground his teeth together and rushed again.

"Ha ha ha, copper!"

But once Dedric and Skull joined the fight, Lorenzo immediately retreated to the corner again. Ark continuously rained punches and kicks on him!

Lorenzo soon developed bruises all over his body. And finally he turned and a punch hit his temple, sending him flying through to the other side of the wall.

"Now, little by little did you want to confess?"

"Damn it, no way!"

"I see you want to lose your soul."

Ark drew back his fist and directed it to Lorenzo's face, which instantly turned pale.

Lorenzo had already lost 70% of his health. While Ark only lost 10%

at most. In the first place, he was fighting in a game. Finally, Lorenzo threw a water bottle and turned his body around.

He tried to open the back door butLorenzo's face became perplexed. Sid had already blocked the other side of the door so it was stuck and wouldn't open.

"What, what the?" What the hell is this? "

"Hu hu hu, What a fool! Did he think I wouldn't have any countermeasures?"

"Rain, eat this!

Lorenzo lifted the sword hanging on the wall beside him. However, Ark moved much faster than him.

Pok!

Ark kicked Lorenzo's stomach.

Without any mistakes, he accurately hit a vital spot on the underbelly and gained a critical hit!

Lorenzo was stunned and fell back.

Ark who was waiting for the chance immediately shouted.

"Snake, tie him up!"

Saek saek!

Snake flicked his tongue and firmly tied up both of Lorenzo's arms. Thus, the fight with Lorenzo was easily settled with that.

With one step, Ark approached the struggling Lorenzo and asked.

"Okay, now where should your excrement and the popular soybean paste go? Just as it is in your mouth? Or will you confess? For your information, I wouldn't mind beating you up some more."

"Dammit, I told you from the beginning! I did not steal it!"

"Don't make me laugh. So without any evidence you have been accused as a thief? If you did something suspicious then obviously

you would be considered a criminal! ”

“Sheesh, what do you know? That old man didn’t know what he was talking about! ”

“Even if you die, you’re not going to confess?”

“There’s nothing to confess!”

“Not possible”

Ark’s eyes became chilly.

Dedric looked at Lorenzo and clicked his tongue.

“Tsk tsk, poor guy, he just dug his own grave.”

Dedric knew from experience what would happen when Ark looked like that.

As expected.....When Lorenzo’s health recovered a little bit, Ark showed his true colours. In the past, Dedric was tamed using the same method as he stepped on Lorenzo.

With a stupid face, Lorenzo freaked out about the kicks and let out a cry of distress.

“Keuak! This bastard! What are you doing! ”

However, Ark didn’t even blink.

In the past, the only way to tame someone rude was with a whip!

Additionally, Ark’s character was that once he starts something, he sees it through to the end.

Ark continued stepping on Lorenzo’s face until he was in a critical condition. Then he waited awhile for health to recover, stepped and wait, how many times did he repeat it.....

“Ark-nim, you done yet.....Huk!”

Sid stuck his head through the back door and screamed.

New World was a virtual reality game where a sense of realism

overflows.

Not even 10 minutes had passed since Ark refused to let the violently beaten Lorenzo die and it looked like a violent scene from an 18+ rated movie.

“Oh, Ark-nim. Isn’t this too severe?”

“Hell no. I haven’t even started yet.”

Ark answered with a grin and Sid’s face turned white in terror.

However, Lorenzo did not submit.

Rather, the more violent Ark became then the more profanities escaped from his mouth.

“Dwe, eat this! Just kill me already!”

“Hehehe, Master. Then how about an extreme method?”

At that time, the cunning fellow Dedric treacherously smiled and approached. A cold smile spread at the corners of Ark’s mouth.

“Hmm, well that’s okay? As expected you have a bad side as well.”

“Huhuhu, this is due to master’s virtue.”

Dedric chattered.

.....Was that praise, or an insult?

Anyway, Ark listened to Dedric’s advice and stopped the violence. Instead, he placed a pot and ingredients on the table and began survival cooking.

After a while, the sweet smell of food filled the room.

“Eek? No, what are you doing? Stop it! ”

Ark held Lorenzo’s jaw wide open and poured food into his mouth. Lorenzo collapsed to the ground screaming and began to spasm.

‘Fragrant Poison Soup ‘ which activated the paralysis effect.

“You.....This, you bastard! Such.....a thing.....”

Lorenzo sweated and stuttered with a paralyzed tongue. It was a soup with a terrible taste and next Ark fed him the horrible salad, waste-flavoured jello etc. But that was only the beginning.

The true horror was the spicy seafood chowder medley.

Using the medley skill, there was a low probability of terrible food being produced.

And the taste was so ‘shocking’ that neither the taste nor effect could be compared with a general survival cooking dish. As it did not decrease the health at all, it was possible to annoy all five senses to the limit

It was closer to being a biological weapon than a food.

The medley of chowder was made in such great numbers that just the sight was enough to make him tremble in fear. And the devil-like food entered Lorenzo’s mouth immediately. Every time he ate it, Lorenzo jumped and spasmed like a fish.

A new concept of using food to torture!

“Ugh, I can’t bear to watch!”

Dedric turned his head away with a horror stricken face.

To Sid who hadn’t experienced the horrors of the food, it seemed like a joke but.....

“Stop! Please help me! I will say, I’ll talk, please I’ll speak! I’ll do anything as long as you stop it with the food!”

After he cooked the fifth food, Lorenzo screamed and surrendered.

It was the inevitable result. Just eating the food caused such a threat to his life that Ark developed the Indomitable Body skill, and to Dedric it was so horrifying that he developed speech in order to stop eating the food.

It reached a level that humans would not be able to eat.

Ark stopped the hand motions for cooking and grinned.

“So, I’m glad that you stopped fighting.”

“Now, cruel bastard.....How could someone in the guise of a human make such horrible food.....!”

‘What?

“Oh, no! No, no!”

“Well, that’s it. Then let’s get to the main subject. Where’s the stuff?”

“I’ll say it again I didn’t steal anything!”

“Ah, is that so? Are you still hungry?”

Ark picked up the pot of food and Lorenzo immediately cried out in a wronged voice.

“And please wait! Really. I really didn’t. But I can guess the fellows who stole it. It’s that guy.

“Aren’t you prevaricating?”

“Please believe me. The fact is that I was also a victim. They robbed the General Store and now they’re trying to frame me for it. ”

“Ah, Ark-nim” Try not to believe his words.”

Sid noticed his face and interrupted.

“But the context fits. Why would stealing things from the General Store be a problem for you? ”

“That’s actually”

Lorenzo hesitated to answer Ark but eventually desperately replied.

“I’m actually...Wolkosu’s adopted son.”

“What?” Adopted son?”

After Lorenzo lost his parents when he was young, he lived with his uncle who managed a store in Selebrid who entrusted him to

Wolkosu.

Wolkosu was not friendly in nature.

Lorenzo worked the difficult night to dawn shift and if he made a little mistake then he would be punished.

Lorenzo decided that he would become a runaway.

He began living on the streets for several years and Lorenzo became a full fledged delinquent.

Then one day, Lorenzo was caught in another gang's dispute and accidentally killed a man. So Lorenzo became chaotic and was pursued by guards before he managed to hide to reach Wolkosu in Selebrid.

He was going to threaten Wolkosu to give him some escape funds.

However, when he was listening at the store, he overheard the cashier say something amazing.

Wolkosu asked about the people trying to extort money from Lorenzo and paid them back one by one in a month. And the fact that Lorenzo wasn't caught by the guards during that month was also due to Wolkosu.

"I never knew. My fatherHe was clumsy at expressing affection. I didn't understand that I was loved. If I knew earlier I wouldn't have done such stupid things"

Lorenzo said with a slightly shaky voice.

Lorenzo shrugged his shoulders and left the store.

With help, he barely managed to avoid the bounty hunters and guards and came to Cairo. He built a cabin outside Cairo to live in and swore to no longer do any bad things. And it was long after that he came.

"Although I forgot for a while"My dad suddenly opened a store in Cairo. My father had never committed a crime. He obviously used the [Lie] scroll to disguise himself as a criminal and conduct

business.

Lorenzo ground his teeth tightly.

Wolkosu had many reasons to set up a shop in Cairo. Of coursethe main one was Lorenzo.

Lorenzo wept after he realised Wolkosu's heart. However, once the relationship was twisted it did not come loose easily. While thinking about how hard that month must have been on Wolkosu, he didn't even dare beg forgiveness.

"I stayed here so I wouldn't both my father. Once when he was free he visited the store and violence occurred. I was told to get lost.....Although I wanted to beg for forgiveness.....I couldn't bear it. After hurting him for over 10 years, was it even possible to be forgiven? I.....thought it was best for my father to abandon me. Perhaps that's why my father thought I stole things. "

"Then who stole the stuff?"

"They are subordinates of the older brother I followed in the past."

"What?" The older brother's subordinates? "

"Yes, I left the organization before I realised my mistake and came here. However, they pursued me to Cairo a while ago. They wanted me to work for a large robbery group. Of course I refused. Then the guys said that they wouldn't leave my father alone if I didn't listen.

From that, Ark found all the answers to his questions.

The reason the shop owner Wolkosu had a large order of the [Lie] scroll. It was for his own use.

It was also the reason why Ark received the quest after he became non-chaotic. Because the shop owner did not trust criminals. It also explained why he did not report to the NPC guard and why he warned him not to harm Lorenzo.....it wasn't necessary to speak.

'It was really a third-rate drama scenario'

In the end, the main culprit was the boss of the group of thieves. When he thought about it anger surged immediately.

“Hukhukhuk, it was like that. I understand. He is like a father, although I can’t really understand.”

Sid had become too immersed and a tear slid down his face as he spoke.

Although not to the same degree, Ark also felt uncomfortable.

After Ark met the ex-convicts, his views had changed.

People in unavoidable circumstances can walk down a path of darkness. They also have their own drama. He shouldn’t blindly judge them for their crimes.

Lorenzo also made an effort to put his life of crime behind him and live a new life.

Although he was once a delinquent, if his older brother had listened then shouldn’t he have celebrated his new start? Instead, he decided to threaten Lorenzo’s father?

Even among NPCs, there are dirty and lousy guys.

Although not clearly shown, everything that exists in reality also exists in the game.

“Actually, I heard that after they chased me to Cairo they robbed the general store several times, including last night. If I don’t answer within a week then I don’t know what they’ll do to my father to threaten me. If that fellow..... ”

Lorenzo ground his back teeth together.

“So? What should be done? ”

“I can’t stand it anymore.”

“Let’s catch them and beat them up?”

“That’s not the only way.”

At that time, Sid asked in a worried voice.

“But what if they have a lot of guys?”

“Heh, it’ll happen anyway because of me. I must live in order to negotiate.”

“Okay.” Snake, untie.”

Ark placed Snake back around his waist.

“Come on, if we’re decided then it’s better to finish this quickly.”

“What?” You surely? ”

Ark said in a blunt voice.

“It’s not guaranteed that you’re telling the truth. You might just flee. So I have to follow and confirm whether you’re telling the truth or not. And I also promised the shop owner that I could recover his things, so I can’t just leave it in the hands of the criminals. ”

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

Sid shouted with a thrilled face. Lorenzo also looked at him with incredulous eyes.

‘Please do not look like that with red cheeks. Because there was no possibility of him returning with the quest unsolved.’

On the other hand, Dedric muttered with a nasty look at Ark.

“Sheesh, there he goes again. Master’s acting again.....”

Lorenzo looked at Ark for a while before clenching his teeth.

“To say thank you ...I don’t want to”

“It isn’t necessary. I’m not helping for free”

It was at that time. Dududung, the quest information window popped up.

Quest has been updated.Shop owner Wolkosu’s distress= Clear
Lorenzo’s nameYou discovered that Lorenzo was the shop owner

Wolkosu's adopted son.

The events that occurred in the last fortnight at the General store are the work of his old companions trying to involve him in a bandit group. Accompany Lorenzo to the hideaway, determine if it is the truth or a lie and recover the stolen goods (Warning, if Lorenzo dies on the way then the quest will fail).

Difficulty level: D

'I found the correct shape'

Ark grinned and laughed.

Suddenly, there was an unexpected message.

-Andel used a [Feather of whispering] to whisper.

'What the? Andel? '

Ark had a bewildered expression.

Although he had forgotten about him for a while, Ark never thought that Andel would attempt to whisper him. After contemplating for a bit, he shook his head.

If he authorized the whisper, it was easy enough to imagine the contents. In the end, he had a nasty feeling. In addition, he did not want to engage in a fight with Andel at the moment.

"Refuse whisper"

Ark lightly ignored the whisper.

At that time, Ark did not realise one simple thing.

A whisper can only reach people in the same area.

"I've found him. Ark! "

A hazy smile spread at Andel's mouth.

He had accompanied the assassins dispatched by the Assassin's guild for the last fortnight.

After Andel joined the assassins in Selebrid, they immediately left for Giran. Ark received the Event Quest from the Magic Institute, so he reasoned that Ark would have to return to Giran. But by that time Ark had already joined Sid so there was no reason for him to keep returning to Giran.

Thanks to that, Andel and the assassins never discovered Ark's whereabouts. After that, the only plan Andel could come up with after wandering around Giran was to use the [Feather of Whispering].

But it was only possible to whisper within a certain range. In other words, it doesn't matter if the opponent refuses the whisper, as long as the [Feather of Whispering] worked than if was proof that he wasn't far from Ark.

And once he entered the vicinity of Cairo, the [Feather of Whispering] immediately worked.

"That guy is somewhere around here."

At Andel's words, the three assassins dispatched by the Dark Brother nodded.

"There aren't a lot of villages in Brandt Mountains. There are many places he could be."

"OK, then let's keep a certain distance and move using [Trace].

The assassins scattered with the scroll.

[Trace] was a scroll that can determine the location of the target if they were within a 1km radius.

Once the vicinity was confirmed, then locating Ark would only be a matter of time using the scroll.

'Ark, it's the end for you!'

Flames of vengeance burned in Andel's eyes.

'He touched the wrong person? No matter what, I'll return the favour. If I can't pass the company examination then you won't be

able to either. I'll catch you're ankle and pull you down with me. No, even if I have to spend millions of won, I'll connect to New World again! You poor sod!'

"How many people would there be?"

"It would be six or seven people."

Lorenzo replied in a tense voice.

After leaving Sid at the cabin, Ark and Lorenzo returned to Cairo.

The hideout of the thieves threatening Lorenzo was located deep in the alleys of Cairo. Although Lorenzo believed there were only six or seven people, the building size made it capable of hiding at least 20.

"I feel like the quest is becoming even longer.....Well, it's not that bad.'

The thieves are all inferior to Lorenzo.

Lorenzo was a level 80 rogue, while the others were down around level 60~70. If you compared them to Ark who was 20 levels higher and had fought thieves in Giran, then it shouldn't be that difficult. He thought that the quest would probably be solved in 10 minutes.

'Once the quest is complete than I can start my get rich quick scheme.'

The General Store had been robbed three times.

If so, there were quite a lot of items stolen. He could purchase all the items at 40% off the original price.

Ark currently had 1000 gold. The Nurunma leaves were also expected to add a large amount so he should have around 1,600 gold. Once the quest was solved, Ark would invest his money in purchasing items.

'They could fill Sid's bags with all the items and leave.... '

In the case of a general item that isn't a special commodity, a store would buy it for 50% of its purchase price.

However, he could sell it for 80% of its price to users who need the item. And when it is an item that couldn't be obtained from a local store, it is possible to add more value and sell it at 120% of its purchase price.

Using simple maths, if he have 1000 gold and I buy items for 60% and sell it at 120% then there would be a profit of 600 gold.

Some conditions to receive quests could be difficult, but if done successfully then you could sell items at other cities and gain a huge benefit.

'Huhuhu, good thing that Sid came along.'

Of course, Ark had no intention of selling the item directly.

It was a bag full of items worth 1000 gold, and he had no time to do business with other users.

He was prepared to leave the annoying part to Sid. Even though 10~20% of the profit would be given away, he would still make more than 500 gold without wasting time.

'Once the quest is completed then it is certain that I will make a profit.'

As soon as he arrived in Cairo, he received this excellent quest!

The only thing on his mind was Lorenzo.

If Lorenzo dies, then he would earn Wolkosu's wrath which would make it difficult to stay in Cairo. So the point of this quest was to protect Lorenzo rather than kill the thieves.

"Lorenzo, you're in the back."

"Ha, but"

"You are not allowed to be injured. If you're injured here, how sad would your father be? You shouldn't let the father who came here for you be sad. You know what I mean.....even if I don't say it?"

He was different from the Ark who threatened to kill him with food. However, thinking about profit was enough for Ark's character to

change. Anyway Lorenzo was just a simple NPC so he blew out a sigh and nodded.

“Thank you so much. I’ll be careful.”

“Well done”

As soon as Ark received the promise, he tried to open the door.

All of a sudden, there was a flashing light and huge damage occurred.

-Using the element of surprise, you received a critical hit from the assassin’s skill. Damage 200X3

“Huk, what, what the?” Assassination? ‘

In an instant, 600 points of his health disappeared.

Ark was surprised and instantly withdrew.

Blurry forms emerged from the surroundings.

The company had their faces hidden in black hoods like a ninja. The first thing he thought of when he saw their features were Shambala.

The ‘Stealth’ and ‘Assassination’ skill was Shambala’s main attacks, but it wasn’t Shambala.

Shortly after, two people dressed the same appeared from both sides of the house.

The red hand stamped on the top of the hood gave off a creepy feeling.

“Lorenzo”?

“Mo, I don’t know. I’ve never seen such dangerous guys? ”

Lorenzo also shook his head in bewilderment.

At that time, the masked man muttered in a low voice.

“It would be impossible for that delinquent to know us.”

“What are you guys? What do you want? ”

“We’re the dark brotherhood.”

“The, the Dark Brothers! Surely you guys.....the Assassination Guild.....!”

Blood instantly drained from Lorenzo’s face.

Living in Selebrid, Lorenzo had heard rumours of the Dark Brothers. However, Ark looked confused and still didn’t understand

“Assassination Guild? Why would the guild try to assassinate me?”

The assassin then made a derisive noise.

“Kukukuk, this fellow is still slow to understand the situation.”

“Eh? Yes, you?”

“I’m happy to see you again. Yes, it was quite difficult trying to find you. ”

Andel.....!’

Ark muttered with a surprised voice.

The face of the assassin at the back was none other than Andel.

“Yes.....Have you recovered your senses yet?”

“The one who has to notice is you. Did you think I would let you take pleasure from messing with me?”

“Let’s do this to the end?”

“That’s the most welcome sound I ever head. Let’s finally finish it.”

“You bastard!”

When Ark lifted his sword, the three assassins in front blocked it.

“What the?”

“Didn’t you hear? I hired assassins from the Dark Brother organization. ”

“When I was in Selebrid, I heard a rumour about them. They are a secret organization composed of the most elite assassins. They specialize in the murder of foreigners. They have such excellent skills that they charge an extravagant commission fee. What kind of grudge do you have against you..... ”

Lorenzo murmured in a small voice.

NPCs that specialize in hunting users?

What ridiculous thing is he talking about?

This unexpected problem could be quite serious. If they specialize in killing users then their levels should be quite high. In addition, they must be armed with the professional skills for PVP.

‘Damn you, of all things this place..... ‘

Ark gave a frustrated face and the assassins suddenly attacked.

Chae Chang! Kakakak!

Ark immediately evaded and counter attacked.

If it was an ordinary monster, then considerable damaged would have been dealt. But the assassin avoided the attack using a strange movement to step back. AndThat was the opening bell for the fight.

“Kill him!”

The 3 assassins cleverly used a pincer attack to push Ark back. Ark was pressed by the sword attacks coming from all directions.

“Dedric, Skull! Plan B-1! ‘

Dedric and Skull each rushed to 1 assassin. Their airborne attacks used a 7: 3 ratio of attack and defense. Meanwhile, Ark was fighting the remaining assassin 1 on 1.

They split their attack between the pets and Ark.

‘Oh my god, level 120! ‘

Ark groaned after he checked their level using Eyes of the Cat.

Ark's current level was 90 and with the dark attribute bonus he reached level 120. However, the assassins' default level was 120. The assassins' would also receive a dark attribute bonus. In the end, he concluded that the difference was at least 10 levels.

Indeed, the assassins are the type to show off their skills.

Ark continued evading while countering the ghost sword.

However, who was Ark?

Ark was also armed with the specialized PVP skills of a Dark Walker.

Ark quickly changed his strategy and kicked out in conjunction with Snake's poisonous attack. He fought the assassin with an enthusiasm like he would die any minute, and the assassin soon knelt to the ground after a blow.

'Double critical chance!'

Ark used the opportunity to narrow the distance and swung his sword. However, a sharp metallic sound rang out and Ark was pushed back.

The other two assassins blocked his blow from either side of Ark. His summons was unable to impede the enemies like they normally would due to their numbers. Therefore, Ark's health went down to 50%.

"Sheesh, it's more difficult than I thought.'

"Snake, recovery potion!"

Ark retreated a few steps and pulled out a potion.

No, as soon as he tried to drink. The assassin quickly pulled out a scroll. At the key moment he was about to drink the potion, a sound was heard.

Ark surfaced in front of a red warning message.

{Null recovery} scroll was activated. You can't use any items while you're in battle. {Duration: 30 minutes}

'No recovery?'

The reason that he didn't lose hope after discovering that the enemies were level 120 was because he had quite a lot of recovery potions saved.

While his opponent couldn't drink a potion due to being bothered by Snake, Ark safely could. When dealing with other users, this was the pattern Ark used to win. Thanks to that, he could engage in battles with higher level users without worrying.

However, now the situation was reversed due to one scroll.

He didn't have time to be surprised as the assassin shoved their swords at his chest.

"Huhuhu, why do you think I faced you alone? I know all the foreigner's battle strategy already.

Meanwhile, the assassin retreated and leisurely drank a potion. The situation continued a couple of times, with the assassins always keeping their health at 80%. However, without the recovery potion Ark's health decreased to 40%.

'Damn, that bastard! '

Ark glared at Andel standing a distance away.

Andel did not participate in the battle. If he interrupt the battle than he would become chaotic and he didn't see a reason for that.

Meanwhile, the assassins began to strengthen their attacks.

"Master, Master! Any more.....!"

Tadak! Tadak!

To make matters worse, Dedric and Skull were also gasping for help.

The abilities of his summons were mid-level 40 at best.

Until now, there were two reasons that they could deal with high level monsters.

As the battle goes on, most of the monsters focus on Ark rather than his summons. Therefore, the pets were not subjected to concentrated attacks. And the second reason was that Ark could direct different plans depending on the circumstances.

However, the assassins were different from normal monsters.

When it was necessary, they would focus their attacks on the summons. In addition, Ark who was being helplessly pushed back couldn't even afford to direct his summons. The pets who didn't receive any support instantly reached a critical condition.

"I can't lose the summons here! "

"Dedric, Skull! Plan B-4! "

"I'm sorry. Master! "

The situation was even worse with the summons disappearing.

The 3 assassins surrounded Ark and attacked with their swords. Then, Lorenzo who had anxiously watched as Ark went on the defensive yelled out and rushed in.

"Hey, bastards!"

But Lorenzo couldn't even damage the black robed assassins. Instead, he received a sound thrashing and was soon in critical condition.

"You should've been quiet if you wanted to live a few more minutes. Foolish fellow! "

The annoyed assassin casually threw his sword at the nuisance.

'Oh, no! '

The surprised Ark quickly rushed in front of Lorenzo.

Although he wielded a sword, the dirk quickly penetrated his chest.

-Critical Hit 200 Damage!

Ark stumbled as his health fell to a critical condition.

“YouWhy did you go so far..... ”

Lorenzo appeared puzzled.

There was no moral obligation or money at risk for Ark to jump in front of Lorenzo. The reason was that he hadn't finished his quest and if Lorenzo died it would become difficult.

How could he give up a quest worth 400~600 gold when he could still salvage it?

Even if he died in this place, he would never give up gold. Even if the situation was enough to make him anxious, Ark didn't show it. If he died, then to the NPC he would seem like a messenger of justice.

“I promised Wolkosu. You can't be injured, you have to live and somehow reconcile with your father.

“You!”

He looked at Ark with an impressed face.

“There's no time to be chatting. We have to get out of here. Follow me!”

When an assassin tried to kill Lorenzo, the situation became more serious. Turning his body, Ark avoided the assassin and gained time for a retreat.

Then, another assassin took out a scroll and shouted.

“Scroll [Magnetic] target Ark!”

At the same time, Ark's body experienced a huge attraction and was dragged towards the assassin.

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

“Don't look back, run! I'll come along soon!”

Ark resisted the pulling force with his full strength and shouted.

Lorenzo glanced at him with unsure eyes before clenching his teeth and turning away.

At that moment, Ark turned his body and rushed at the assassin. The acceleration caused by Ark's rush added to the effects of the [Magnetic] scroll caused the assassin to flinch and be hit.

That moment was a chance for Ark.

"The chain skill Riposte!"

Ark shouted and used the Riposte skill to deflect the attacks back at the assassins. They turned to a solid mass and fell down.

At the same time, the strong suction disappeared.

"Now!"

When Ark and Lorenzo ran away, Andel raised his voice and shouted.

"What are you doing? These guys! "

"Ouch, who knew he would use such a technique."

"Don't worry though. Once the Dark Brother catches a game, they never miss."

The assassins took out another scroll and used it.

{Trace} scroll, track the target. The location of the target can be determined if they are within a 1 km distance. {Duration: 30 minutes}
{Battle off disabled} scroll was activated. Even if the opponent is far away, the battle state isn't released. {Duration: 30 minutes}

'Oh my God! '

Ark's face was haggard.

The talk of a professional assassin always seemed to be excessive advertisement.

Ark thought the battle state could be released which was why he ran more than 200 meters away. So the [Null Recovery] effect could be

cancelled. Also, if he hid his body using 'Stealth' he would have an opportunity to sneak back and attack Andel.

However, just before he turned the corner two more scrolls were activated.

The assassin used [Trace] and [Battle off disabled]. Whether Andel knew Ark's plan or not, the use of those two scrolls ruined it.

It means that all of Ark's weak points were identified.

"It was a special scroll prepared in Kairote, just for him..... '

Sid had mentioned the effects of the special scrolls the other day. But he did not realise that it would have such an enormous effect.

It did no direct damage but if utilized well according to the situation, then it could mean the difference between winning and losing.

If there was time, he would study the effects of the scrolls more seriously but at the moment he did not want to back down.

'When pursued by a group, it is time for some countermeasures.'

"We can't stop it. Let's split up."

"Yes?" Ha, but"

"Think about it, you won't be any help to me. And the target of their [Trace] is me. When we scatter, they won't chase after you."

"But until I pay back life debt, I can't just run away like this."

"It's not for you."

"What?"

"Sid remained in your cabin. If you were to be damaged by the assassins' attacks, there would be no one left to protect Sid as a foreigner in Kairote. It is a request. The only one I can trust is you. Please protect Sid."

"Khuk.....I understand."

While he was conflicted, Lorenzo eventually nodded.

The fact that he wouldn't be any help against those guys and Ark knew it too.

"As soon as possible. Go before they detect us."

"Come back alive"

"Don't worry."

Ark briefly replied before running through the dark backstreets.

He was separated from Lorenzo. If the quest fails then the worst situation was avoidable.

'It is important to last 30 minutes'

Ark ran in an alley, thinking hard.

There was nothing Ark could do about the scroll combo he was under. No, honestly even without the scroll, he couldn't guarantee the odds against three assassins.

So far, the NPC thieves he had faced were classified as general monsters. Their intelligence was quite high which made the battle more difficult, but it was nothing compared to a user.

However, if the same monster had a combat attribute than that would be a different situation.

The Sylphid Knights of Jackson was a good example of this. Their combat method and skills was used faster than a user. And the same goes for assassins.

In the first place, the NPC that specializes in hunting users would have superior fighting skills than the Sylphid Knights.

It was the 3 worse NPCs to fight. In addition, there was also Andel. He stayed back because he didn't want to become chaotic, but if the assassins started losing then he would probably interfere.

'No matter how much he thought about it, there was no way to win.'

However, it was also impossible to get away.

[Null recovery], [Trace], [Battle off disabled].

The scroll combo he was under meant that any method of escape was blocked.

The situation had become gloomier.

‘Damn it, that bastard Andel! If such a method wasn’t used.’

It would be easy. If he used the same method than he had confidence that he would win. He wouldn’t have ignored it if he was Andel. However, Ark had never even considered it.

Andel had a lot more knowledge about New World than Arc! He was also friends with Alan who had enormous funds and resources available.

If he was only dealing with one person, but Andel took advantage of the assassin game system and scrolls. So Ark was confused about how to come up with a counter attack.

‘This is why I was reluctant to associate with players.....

He didn’t want to make enemies or even associate with friends.

But from the start, it went wrong and he eventually ended up in this situation.

“Over here!”

Suddenly, a black shape fell from the roof and blocked him.

The Dark Brother assassin!

Ark turned around and flinched as the other assassins fell behind and beside him.

With the [Trace] scroll tracking his movements, it was like Ark was dancing in the palms of Buddha, and the complicated maze of alleys made it easy to surround him.

‘In the end am I prepared to die? ‘

When you die, your stats drop by 6 points. Your experience also

drops 30%. At level 90, 30% wasn't a small amount.

He would have to hunt for 12 hours around the clock to gain back the experience.

But he was even angrier at the thought of Andel being the one to cause his death.

Of course, Andel came rushing forward to see Ark's end.

"Kukukuk, look at this spectacle. Even though you made an excellent gesture at the end."

"Bah, this is your best? After this encounter I will not forgive you. Understand? I'll attack again and this time I'll really strip you naked. I promise. I'll chase you all across the continent until you're naked!"

"You're a really stupid fellow. Do you still not grasp the situation? "

"What?"

"You will be the one stripped naked, not me. Stupid! Hey, begin."

At Andel's command, the 3 assassins all took out scrolls at the same time and activated it.

"[Seize] scroll. Target Ark!"

Ark looked at the scrolls on the hands of the black assassins. A red warning message then flashed.

[{Seize} scroll activated.

When the designated target dies, there is a 50% chance that an equipped item will drop.

{Duration: 30 minutes}}

"What, what?"

Ark's face turned white and terrified.

50% chance to drop equipped items? There was also such a scroll?

Furthermore, the same scroll was used three times.

While the scroll had a cool down, the assassins could use it repeatedly. And there were 3 assassins.

If 3 people use it at the same time, then the effect will stack up three times. In the end the odds of dropping equipment was 150%. While the probability never existed to this degree, if he was unlucky then he would drop 3 items at once.

Currently if he lost any of his items, it would be difficult to get them again. In the worst case scenario, Lancel's Sword would drop which would cost him \$30

'What's moreOn the subject why are these NPCs recklessly using scrolls! '

Ark glared at them with absurd eyes but there was something Ark didn't know.

The more powerful scrolls in battle had a value of more than 30 gold for one. In other words, the assassins used 210 gold just on scrolls.

300 gold was used to hire the assassins and 210 gold to buy the scrolls.

All the scrolls were privately financed by Alan and Andel and then given to the assassins.

Let's go capitalism!

Just like in reality, money was also important to the game.

"You are unlucky. You don't know what might have happened if it was another place, but this was the lawless city of Kairote. There are no active restrictions on assassins. In addition, would you make a resurrection place before Cairo?"

"Let's see?"

Ark coolly shot back, but inside his heart fell.

Andel seemed to guess his predicament as he smirked.

"Heh, just like a masterpiece! After all, there isn't a village near Cairo. It is impossible for you to have made anywhere else a

resurrection point. And this is a place where the guards don't move if users are attacked. No, here they are more hostile to normal players than chaotic players. If you are resurrected in a non-chaotic state then you would also have to flee the town. Well, even if you escape the town the result would still be the same. Kik kik, are you finally seeing sense? Who will be the one stripped naked?"

Every word impaled him.

If he was in an ordinary village, there was no risk of a non-chaotic player being killed repeatedly. However, this was the chaotic city of Cairo, where they were adverse to non-chaotic users. That's why they had to be careful that the resurrection place was updated.

However, Ark hid his unease and replied sarcastically.

"Do you think I'm a fool? Do you think I would renew the resurrection point at a crazy place like this? "

"Bah, it doesn't matter, just kill him!"

The assassins rushed at Andel's command.

The first scroll was triggered and 15 minutes had finally passed.

The remaining time was 15 minutes, but he was still in a battle state and the assassins would not stop pursuing him.

While he was running away, it was fortunate that his health recovered to 30%.

The assassins quickly attacked Ark from three directions.

If he focused on just one of them it would be detrimental. After 1 minute he quickly fell to a critical condition.

'I made a mistake; there is no way to beat these guys! '

Ark glared at Andel with cold eyes.

'He's convinced that I updated the resurrection place here. When I die the most logical thing to do is stay dead. I'm not bound for death! If just one NPC died then they wouldn't recover quickly enough. Then I'll hide using 'stealth' and run away in the meantime.'

That was the best plan at the moment. In addition, if the fired assassin made a mistake then even Andel won't be able to sleep easily.

‘An adventure! ‘

“Blessing of the Sea Spirit!”

When the special effects of Adelaine's Necklace were activated, blue waves appeared and surrounded him. At the same time, defense increased by 40% and 500 mana was restored.

At the same time, Ark opened a bag and pulled out a stack of old swords. Andel pushed one of the assassins and rushed forward.

Take this, Blade Storm!

When he activated the skill, cracks like spider webs spread on the swords. With an intense glare, he swung the sword at Andel.

Blessing of the Sea Spirit was followed by Blade Storm In his critical condition, Adrenaline was activated. This is was Ark's powerful deadly combo.

When the assassins belatedly noticed Ark's intent, they threw a dagger. But the 40% increase in defense meant that Ark's health didn't really decline. With any luck, he would still be able to take down the level 60 Andel.

Looking at the swirling sword debris, Ark was convinced.

However, at the moment Andel lightly laughed.

He pulled out one more scroll, activated it and disappeared only to appear a few meters away.

‘What, [Warp].....!’

The swirling blade storm disappeared into the air. Ark's eyes narrowed in despair.

His deadly combo which used all his energy failed because of a scroll. For a while he was discouraged until he felt the pain. The assassins had thrown two daggers which plunged into his back.

Ark stumbled and leaned on a railing.

He looked down and saw the mouth of the hole spread out infinitely.

It was the hell that you wouldn't be able to survive once you fell in. Andel had chased him across Cairo right to the edge of hell.

When Andel used [warp], he rushed right to the edge of a place Ark guaranteed was hell. If Blade Storm was used just one step closer, he would've stepped off the edge into hell.

No, Ark's fate had already been decided.

"So you're also here!"

The assassins had been throwing the dagger again.

Ark swung his sword at the daggers but one still became stuck in his shoulder.

Ark flinched and retreated while a number of thoughts crossed his mind.

"There is no way for me to survive in this state anyway! "

And if he died and dropped an item then it would end up in Andel's hands. Even if he didn't want to die it couldn't be helped.

'I'd rather have the items lost forever than end up with Andel! '

Ark ground his teeth together and asked.

Even if he withstood it, there is a 100% chance he'll die. However, what if he fell into hell? It's clear that he was going to die. But at least it wouldn't be because of Andel. The items dropped also wouldn't end up with Andel And maybe even

There may be a possibility of 0.01%.

There was no choice.

Ark immediately turned and jumped on the railing.

Daggers just barely missed his neck as he fell and also flew overhead. And at his feet spread an endless abyss.....!

At the end of Hell

‘.....What now? ‘

He fell at an enormous speed through a dark space.

It felt like he was being drawn somewhere. He couldn't even fathom how long he had been falling or how much further there was to fall. However, one thing is certain. The longer it took to reach the bottom, the more the damage would exponentially increase. If the flow did not appear within a few minutes.....

‘My remaining health was 150, even if I use the Racial Special Skill of the Cat Knight, I would still die. ‘But after that was the problem.

The hell was in the Cairo region, but he didn't know if the depths exceeded 1 kilometre or if the effects of the scrolls had disappeared.

However, the [Seize] scroll used just before falling didn't designate an area or distance limitation.

If he died, then he must be prepared to lose 1~2 of his equipped items.

It would be a fatal blow. But that wasn't really the issue he was worried about.

‘Andel.....!’

He had not considered his spirit.

Andel hired assassin with a few hundred gold. He also came forward and chased after Ark directly.

He gave up on questing and levelling up.

His intention to become the best in New World had changed to getting revenge on Ark.

‘As long as he is convinced that my resurrection place is Cairo, then he would guard it even for the few days until I revive. ‘

Andel was such a person. He wouldn't be able to sleep and guard the resurrection point 24 hours a day. But when the assassins also guarded in shifts then there would be no gaps for Ark to revive.

Eventually Ark would have to log in or lose access to his items and there was a high probability that he would be PKed.

The NPCs in the lawless city of Cairo won't lift a finger to help users.

In this situation, rules don't exist.

‘Am I really going to end up like this?’

When he thought about it, his chest fluttered uneasily.

It is nonsense. How far have I raised Ark?

Am I really not going to be able to play the game anymore because of Andel?

New World might just be a game, but to Ark it was his reality and life. Ark was able to eat rice every day and pay for his mother's medical bills thanks to New World.

‘I just found it. I desperately found it. A way that I could live. And a place I want to live. I can't give up. I would never give it up just because of Andel’

He made up his mind about what he wanted to do.

He had to show his guts.

Because that was the only thing Ark had.

‘I have to live! To protect yourself from Andel, you have no choice but to live, think Ark! Think of ways to survive! It's not real. Nothing is impossible in New World. If you don't give up then there must be a way to survive! ‘

Ark desperately rolled his head.

Meanwhile, Ark had been falling and could finally see the ground.

He was approaching pillars that rose from the ground. At the bottom of the hell, there appeared to be some monster fangs.

A spark suddenly occurred in Ark's mind.

'Hell's fangs! Ok, maybe! '

Ark struggled to maintain his posture in thin air.

And he clenched his sword and concentrated with both eyes.

'The chances are only fleeting! If I'm 0.1 seconds too late or early then I'm screwed! '

The sight of the ground where he could hit his head felt even more terrifying. His body would break like a tomato unless he had the right timing. However, Ark clenched his teeth together and opened his eyes wider. And just as the bottom approached!

'Riposte!'

Ka ka ka kak! Jja Jjang!

With his full power, Ark swung his sword.

He pushed at the stone pillar with his sword.

At the moment, all his power was concentrated on Ark's arm and shoulders. Checking the distance of the stone pillar approaching at high speed wasn't much different from an offensive from an enemy. When he struck with Riposte, he gambled that a counterattack would occur.

The special effect of Riposte was to push the opponent back 10 meters, but if opponent was too strong than the shock would be returned to Ark. Using Einstein's principle of relativity the results were easily predicted.

Bump!

Ark's body stopped in the air, as the brakes were jammed.

At the same time, the damage caused by the fall was annulled for the moment.

Ark didn't miss the opportunity and kicked the stone pillar with his foot. And using the elasticity of his body, he avoided the stone pillar and broke his fall.

A violent impact shook his shoulders and back.

-Cat Knight's ability to alleviate the damage of falling by as much as 50%. Using your flexibility, the damage of the fall was reduced by 30%.

'It's a success! '

Ark teared up at the sight of the message.

It was worth every moment he spent fighting thieves and levelling up Riposte until he formed blisters on his hand. It was a desperate moment where he only had 0.1 second to use Riposte before being smashed into a stone pillar. Using the special ability of the Cat Knight, he only received 50 damage.

It was worth it to dig up this heroic achievement!

However, before he could celebrate a red light appeared in succession.

-You were attacked by Blood Sucking Leeches 5 damage!

"What, what the?"

Ark said in surprise.

In the area surrounding Ark were red fist-sized leeches. Some of them were already attached to his body and sucking blood.

Using his sword, Ark was able to kill three or four of them but more took their place.

In an instant, his health was sucked out until he only had 30 left.

"Damn it! Did I survive all that just to be killed by leeches? Spirit of the Cat!

Nyahhhh!

Ark's pupils' glowed gold as the form of a large black cat appeared.

He revealed sharp fangs and he stared at them and the leeches instantly stiffened. All the gnawing leeches sucking his blood also stiffened and fell off.

The floor was covered with leeches.

The Spirit of the Cat caused paralysis which lasts for 1 minute!

'1 minute to kill all the leeches. And his skills used mana. I only have 30 health left which means I'm screwed once the paralysis wears off. I have to get out of here for the time being'

Ark used Eyes of the Cat to search for a way out.

Then Ark saw a dark hole which could barely fit one person on the side of the room. There was no line. Ark stepped on leeches as he headed towards the hole. Fortunately, the leeches didn't chase after him.

Ark entered the whole and looked for a little more space. The hole was longer than he thought.

He crawled along the whole for a couple of minutes before his arms slipped. Like a slide at a swimming pool, the floor suddenly sloped and dropped somewhere.

Suddenly a message window appeared in front of Ark.

"Ah, huh?"

Hell's Underground Labyrinth
You've discovered the underground labyrinth that emits a terrible odour in the depths of Cairo
Perhaps this labyrinth has existed even before Cairo was built.

It is unclear what the purpose for building it was. But as it was underneath Cairo, all the filth and corpses naturally entered the labyrinth

Due to all the filth dumped from Cairo, the labyrinth changed to a

stench filled one capable of covering a further deformity

-You have found an undiscovered dungeon. When you register with the Hall of Fame, you can gain 1000 experience and 70 Fame. Would you like to register?

“The [Trace] scroll has stopped reacting.”

“Tired”

“That guy was stronger than I thought.”

The assassins flocked to the edge of the abyss.

It was hard to even fathom the depth to the bottom of the hell. Once you fall there was a 100% chance of dying. No, even if he survived there was no way of getting back up. He would have no choice but to die and resurrect.....

“He fell into the hell so that it wouldn’t be possible to pick up his equipment.”

“I don’t care about that. It is trivial because he was dressed shabbily and his items wasn’t worth spending all that gold on scrolls. I just wanted to make that guy a beggar. ”

“Well, then I don’t careFor the time being, is it done?”

“Not yet”

Andel said with a cool smile.

“This is just the beginning. When I think of that fellow, it isn’t possible to just leave it like this. That fellow has to pay me back for everything. Even when he is stripped naked and all his stats reduced to zero! I’ll kill him a hundred times more.

Andel said forcefully as he turned around.

“It is certain that he will return to Cairo. Because I expect you to guard the resurrection point, you won’t be able to return immediately. But he is a candidate so he might not connect for a while. From now on, be patient. That noob also did it to me for

several days....Even if it takes several months, we have to kill and kill again until he finally loses access.

Andel led the assassins towards the quartermaster.

A person's grudge was a scary thing.

"Refuse registration."

Ark naturally rose to his feet.

Andel would be looking for him for payback.

There was no reason to do foolish things for information.

'The bottom of the hell was connected to a dungeon..... '

Ark removed the filth from his body and looked around. The complex pathway was made of dark brown bricks intricately linked together. Hell's underground labyrinth was its original name but it was now the sewage system for Cairo. Rotten water reached the ankle and a bad stench wafted from the mountains of filth scattered all over. It was a situation that was horrible for the eyes and the nose.

The realistic scenario meant he actually had to think about it.

'Okay, what now '

Of course, the most urgent problem was to recover his health from its current state of 30 points. Ark made food and thought for a while as it recovered his health.

For the time being, he had survived. The worst situation where he wouldn't be able to connect to the game anymore was avoided. However, it was too early to rejoice due to the ambiguous situation.

The first time he came to Cairo and saw the information about the hell, it said that there was no record of anyone escaping the hell after they fell in.

However, Ark thought positively.

'To be more precise, the place I am now is not the hell.

It is a hidden Dungeon. There wouldn't be a dungeon with no exit. Yes, for the time being I'll secure an exit.'

He'll look for a way out to get revenge on Andel and then explore the dungeoneither way his first priority was to secure his own safety.

Now, 'not dying' is the most important thing.

'The fact that it is a labyrinth dungeon means that it would definitely contain monsters.'

"Summon Demon, Dedric!"

As soon as his spiritual power was restored, he summoned Dedric.

A dim light shone and Dedric appeared with his nose crinkled and frowned.

"Phew, master. You're alive. Ugh, this place is.....? "

"The situation is like this. Anyway, it is urgent to find the exit from here. Please navigate around and search for it. Also notify me immediately if monsters appear."

"Kuu.....Seems to be going by the nose. I got it."

Dedric chose a path and flew along it.

But Dedric returned 2 minutes later and shook his head.

"There is no visible exit around here. And the terrain is too complex for me to find my way back. "

"Any monsters?"

"Not that I see"

"Really? Strange. There should be some....."

Burst!

Ark had taken one step forward down a passage. When suddenly something popped out of the ground under him and grabbed his ankles.

“What, what the?”

Ark flinched and looked down at the water where rotten hands were holding his ankle. Ark swung his sword and hastily stepped back.

It was then that an audible noise was heard.

It was a sleeping monster made of bones that gradually raised its' body. The rotting flesh was attached to the bones of the monster.....where there was nothing there before, there was now 6 monsters surrounding Ark.

‘Polluted skeleton?’

It was level 110!

Dalgurak, ttadadak, dalgeurak!

The heads of the six skeletons turned around and focused on Ark. After a moment, flame spewed from their eyes as a defense mechanism as they rushed at him with a rusted long sword.

“Oh damn! Snake, nerve paralysis poison! ”

Ssak ssak ssak!

Ark wielded his sword and twisted it.

Five skeletons instantly met a critical hit and were pushed back. However, the skeletons weren't paralyzed.

Their flesh was rotting off the bone. Of course there wouldn't be nerves to paralyze. Furthermore, the Polluted Skeletons were skeletons who had been transformed by pollutants.

The beginner's deadly poison that Snake produces is just like water to them.

Rather, the poisonous effect restored health.

‘Poison absorption characteristic? Why do I meet monsters immune to poison at this time? ‘

However, that was not the end of the problem.

-You received a blow from the Polluted Skeleton. 130 damage!

'Tetanus' Reaction is slowed and you will receive 10 damage every 5 seconds for 1 minute.

All of the skeletons wielded their weapons.

He was unlucky. There were all kinds of germs in their dirty swords, which meant there was a high probability of getting tetanus.

Tetanus stunned the body and made it heavier. This made it difficult to evade the attacks of the skeleton however that wasn't the only thing.

'.....So far, I have only been relying on poison? '

After he received the serpent poison skill, it certainly made battles easier.

He could use the poison in combination with kicks since most opponents were stunned.

In particular, Ark frequently used the poison nerve paralysis. It was a poison which paralyses the arm and legs and made it easier to disable an opponent quickly. Therefore, Ark had unknowingly relied on it during battle to slow the monsters.

That was one of the reasons he wasn't able to respond to the movements of the assassins. Professional assassins would have immunity to most of the racial special skills held by users.

He used the combo skill of Sword-Hand combat with Riposte. The success rate of the same poison was also quite low.

'Yes, I've been far too complacent. I've relied too much on those skills. It made the battle easier but lowered his actual battle skills. Skills such as Eyes of the Cat and poison are important, but honing the basic skills is also important in fighting enemies. I'll focus on my Sword-Hand combat skill! '

Yes, that is the basis of the game.

Warriors Sword Mastery, Magicians magic and Archer's

archery.....The most important thing to fully hone your skills is to properly utilize the jobs primary weapon! In Ark's case, that consisted of Sword-Hand combat.

'Wake up Ark! Now is not the time to let your attention wander!'

His aim was to take revenge with the enemies blade appears. It was something he knew as a novice. You don't know when something basic could be useful.

'I'm not playing around!'

Ark bit his lips so tightly that it started bleeding.

The brain moves the body.

It is natural for the movement to change when the mind changes!

If you don't have a resolute mind then your reactions are slower, but when your mind is resolute then change quickly occurs. It was disrespectful to say that a battle doesn't rely on your mind.

'If the opponent is open then you have to figure out the flow of the battlefield!'

Ark quickly widened his view of the battlefield.

Now he had to tackle the skeleton wielding a sword and looked at the movements of the skeletons with skin.

"Dedric, the rear! Plan D-2! "

Dedric flew to the rear of the skeletons while Ark quickly attacked.

Ark went forward without looking back and forth.

The skeleton wielded his sword. Ark instantly twisted and shoved his sword in the lower back.

Counter attack!

The skeleton stepped back shocked.

Then two skeletons wielding swords attacked from both sides.

Ark had already identified their movements and expected the attack. Ark lowered his body to the ground and did a sweeping low kick.

The low kick was not a technique seen in normal taekwondo moves.

Ark saw the move in a Martial Arts film and integrated it into his kicks.

The skeletons were hit by the kick and fell down.

They were light because they were only bones and collapsed easily. He then kicked the skeletons until they were disassembled piece by piece.

‘That’s three of them killed! ‘

Ark turned to find his next opponent.

Ttadak, ttadadadak, tadadak!

“What, what the?”

The many bones began to get stuck together like a magnet. Minus the broken and cracked bones, the others joined together until they formed perfect skeletons.

Their vitality was also 100%. It was an unexpected situation.

‘Sheesh, it’s not enough to knock them apart, I have to destroy all their bones?’

Ark swung his sword again.

However, unlike before it was meaningless to attack the gaps in the bones. He focused each blow on a single region in order to destroy it. So he could avoid having the skeleton’s body reassembled again.

Thanks to that, the battle lengthened considerably. But after he used his Spiritual Power to summon skull and distribute the attacks, it took around 15 minutes to destroy all the skeletons.

After they finally finished off the skeletons with the help of Skull, Dedric shook his head.

“It’s tragic.....a quarrel within the same family.”

Ttak ttak ttak!

Skull chewed on a shattered bone.

Although the battle ended safely, Ark couldn’t feel relieved.

‘This dungeon ...The degree of difficulty is higher than I thought’

The level of the skeletons was 110, but Ark was around 120 thanks to the dark attribute bonus.

If he was just dealing with six skeletons then there were no significant problems. However, no matter how insignificant the opponent there was still a possibility of death. Additionally, if he was hit once then he would also receive tetanus. But was that all? If he got distracted even for a short time, then the skeletons would reassemble and his health would fall until he was in a critical condition.

‘Although he won against six skeletons, against eight he couldn’t be sure of his chances.’

That was the problem.

In the other dungeons, he could use Dedric to scout the place first and if it was too dangerous then he could avoid it. However, these guys suddenly appeared from the ground to grab his ankles. That means he wouldn’t know their number until they appear.

‘I don’t know when I would be attacked by surprise so managing my health is the most critical thing. And I have to move as carefully as possible so that the skeletons don’t react. If a skeleton appears to fight, I’ll just retreat.’

Ark grabbed the items from the skeletons and carefully walked forward step by step. How far did he walk? Just as he turned the corner, his foot sank and he fell into the water. He was sucked in by this huge force and dragged somewhere else.

‘This is, what is this? ‘

A message floated in front of the confused Ark.

You fell into the wormhole. Hell's underground labyrinth is complicated like a spider web with wormholes everywhere. If you fall into one you will be taken by force to another location

Peng!

A sound was made as Ark forcefully stopped next to a drain.

He raised his body and looked around. However, the place was completely different from the area he was in before. Suddenly he heard Dedric's voice in his ear.

"Ma.....Master? How? Where? "

"Dedric! Are you alright?"

"Master.....you're alive! All of a suddensurprisingly disappeared."

Ark was spiritually connected to Dedric so they could communicate within a fixed distance. However the distance must be quite fair, since the reception was falling.

"You don't know where I am?"

".....I don't know, I guess....No"

I understand."

Ark sighed and cancelled Dedric and Skull's summoning. However, his spiritual power hadn't recovered enough to summon them again. So he was there without any summons and he had to wait until his spiritual power recovered.

"Damn, who knew this dungeon had such dangerous and complex wormholes? This damn dungeon..... "

Ark started grumbling.

Suddenly something fell with a patter over his shoulder.

Ark moved his hand where sticky mucus was stuck.

“What is this? Ugh! Is it filth? In some ways, I feel really bad.....Huk! ”

Ark raised his eyes and let out a muffled scream without thinking.

On the ceiling was a giant gelatinous mass of objects. Viscous slime fell and the translucent monster moved its body! Ark had no time to move as the gaze of the monster turned to him and a red light flashed.

-You have suffered damage from the acidic digestive juices of the Polluted Poison Slime. 50 damage!

“S, slime?”

The scream did not come from his mouth.

The slime completely surrounded Ark and covered his nose and mouth. Every time, it did crazy damage and his health rapidly decreased.

Ark frantically struggled and pushed at the slime until he managed to escape. He turned and saw the passageway blocked by the giant wriggling slime body.

The Polluted Slime was level 130.

“Slime?” That’s a slime? ‘

Ark of course knew about slimes.

It was a monster that was often seen in the early stages of most online games. But the slimes that Ark knew weren’t this ugly. They were plump and fluffy..... you know?

It was more like a mascot that receives the users’ love than a mascot. However, the slime in front of him was something that no user would be interested in. It wasn’t cute and the stench was enough to make him feel sick.

Meanwhile, it extended its body and wrapped one piece around Ark’s arm. Red light flashed and acid damage occurred.

The blow only did 50 damage, but his health was being steadily drained. The acid properties also damaged the durability of his equipment as well as his health. Ark caught and removed the slime from his arm.

‘The whole body is the digestive system? Then quickly!’

Ark swung his sword like lightning.

And then..... Slippery!

-Your attack missed!

The sword was impractical to attack the slime and it just slipped off its body.

Confused, Ark stepped backwards and used Eyes of the Cat. Then a red point pointed to the centre of the slime’s body. If he had not seen it, he wouldn’t have known there was a shape like an eyeball there.

‘That is probably the nucleus of the slime.’

Physical attacks would do nothing unless he hit the nucleus. Ark had hunted monsters with the same characteristics on the seabed underwater. It was the jelly fish that wielded a large number of tentacles!

Like the slime, it also received little damage until he attacked the mouth of the jellyfish, and then large damage occurred.

‘But the slime was huge enough to fill the drain pipe. How would my sword even reach the nucleus in the centre? ‘

It sprayed mucus at him and Ark avoiding it while swearing.

Physical damage doesn’t work because it was immune to normal attacks. Perhaps it wouldn’t be a difficult opponent if he was a magician.

‘Is there a way to get rid of that mucous? ‘

That is the key!

A certain skill flashed through Ark's head.

'Yes, that's the technique! '

"Snake, the most useless sword!"

Snake spat out the sword of Schnauzer and Ark grabbed it.

"Blade Storm!"

Arc used blade storm to destroy the sword and a devastating storm developed from its debris.

As expected, all the fragments bounced off the slime.

But Ark's target wasn't the damage from the debris. The fragments created a powerful vortex!

When the tremendous pressure exerted itself on the mucous, the slime became smaller and thinner because of the pressure.

The distance remaining between the nucleus was just 30cm!

It was enough for him to drive his sword through!

"Take this, Dark blade!"

Ark shot forward like an arrow and used Dark Blade.

The sword penetrated the nucleus of the slime. In an instant, 60% of its health was gone. And the slime trembled and the mucous thickened again. However, Ark could gather more mana by turning off anything he didn't need. Once again, he used the Blade Storm and Dark Blade combo to shave off the remaining health of the slime.

Kkuooooo! Peppeng!

A huge amount of slime exploded all over the place.

Thanks to that his body was covered in slime, but it did no further damage to him.

-Your level has risen.

“I did it!”

Ark blew out a sigh and sat with a flop.

The slime that was occupying the passage disappeared and Ark was finally able to look around properly.

The wormhole led him to a completely different place. Before the wormhole, the passage was made of broken bricks but this place was full of tree roots.

Ark recovered his stamina and moved along the path.

After walking a few minutes, he came across a rusty iron door.

‘Is it the exit? ‘

Ark ran to the iron doors.

But no matter how he looked at it, he couldn’t see a keyhole or door handle.

‘Is it a dead end?’

Ark turned with a disappointed face.

But his fingers touched a rusted part which got stuck and once he pulled it away, a section of unevenness crumbled. When he turned back again, it seemed like some designs were carved underneath the rust.

Just in case, he shook off the rest of the rust.

Ark narrowed his eyes at the pattern that was being gradually revealed.

‘Ara? This pattern is from the other dayOh, that’s right! ‘

The design in which 3 triangles are overlapped!

Ark had seen the same design last time. It was the pattern that the Elder Meow Hassan showed him. It was the time when the Meow still traded. They were the residents who lived in the Underground World. He had forgotten about it because couldn’t believe the symbol

was here of all places!

Ark busily moved his hand until all the rust was gone.

There were small letters carved to reveal a sentence.

It was carved in unintelligible characters. However, Ark knew how to decipher such characters.

When he touched the characters, a pale light was emitted from his hand and the contents were deciphered right in front of him.

This place was sealed in accordance with the ancient vow.

Those who don't know this place can't enter.

A person with purpose could wake me up.

A person who makes the pilgrimage here with pride and speaks my name with respect will be able to cross.....

'Entrance to the Underground World' was discovered You have discovered information hidden in an Ancient Relic. You've found the entrance to the Underground World hidden in the dark and gloomy labyrinth of the underground hell. However, the entrance is firmly locked by an ancient vow. The terms of the Covenant states that to pass you need wisdom and humble pride. You need to find a way through the doors using clues hidden in the underground labyrinth.

Information on the ancient relic 'Entrance to the Underground World' is acquired.

{Knowledge of Ancient Relics +15, Intelligence +5 and Fame increases by 30}

'The Entrance to the Underground World.....!'

He felt like he had been hit in the back of the head.

In fact, Ark hadn't guessed that the Underground World wouldn't be that far from Giran. According to Hassan, the agent representing the residents of the underground world came from the north-west.

The Meow's temple and shrine was also in the north-west.

Furthermore, the residents of the underground world had traded with numerous commercial cities, that there would surely be problems living near a large commercial city like Giran. However, the entrance exists in the Brandt Mountains underneath Cairo.

‘Come to think of it.....’

Suddenly he remembered the name of the place where he fell.

Hell's underground labyrinth. Hell is the word for abyss in Buddhist terminology. In general, however it could also mean a subterranean world.

Apparently, the word hell itself was a clue for the underground world. It was a pretty ridiculous hint.

‘I found the entrance while under the condition of not being able to die.’

Thus Ark's purpose became clear.

If a person fell into the hell and died then they would just revive. However, Ark was worried that there wouldn't be an exit. However, if the entrance leads to another world then even a child couldn't mistake it.

The inhabitants of the underground world used to participate in trade.

In other words, there was a way for them to go outside. It is unknown if there is an exit in the underground labyrinth, but it is pretty clear that an exit exists somewhere in the other world. If he entered the underground world then all his problems would be solved for the time being!

‘And besides, there might be the second piece of the Three Marvels in the underground world! ‘

Ark's eyes lit up.

Finding the Three Marvels was important to Ark.

The Three Marvels was the source of a Dark Walker's power. He would get another skill and ability just like when he previously found the sculpture.

If that happened, his abilities would increase by leaps and bounds.

It now became even more urgent for Ark.

Andel was still waiting for him at the resurrection point in Cairo. At the moment, the circumstances meant that he had to hide but if he found the piece of the Three Marvels then that situation would change. In some cases, it may be possible for him to not only escape the crisis but also gain revenge.

'No, I will certainly get revenge. This is the place where I chose to live. I'm not playing the game for fun unlike you. I'll make him think twice about touching me!'

That argument motivated him to survive even more.

Ark earnestly began exploring the dungeon.

However, Hell's underground labyrinth was truly complicated and deserved the name labyrinth. Not only did it have complicated stairs leading to the 2nd floor, but the 3rd floor seemed like it was stuck in a three dimensional puzzle. It was not easy to remember the path after he passed it once.

Then Ark remembered a forgotten skill.

'I didn't realise that it would be this useful.'

Ark had learnt new cartography skills.

Using the cartography skills he learnt in the past from Hanson, the dungeon was automatically recorded. Thanks to checking the map, Ark slowly explored the geography of the dungeon. Of course, exploring a dungeon was not a relaxing situation.

Ttadak, ttadadak!

If he was even a little bit careless then skeletons would attack. They could be as little as four or as many as ten!

Thanks to that, every time Ark finished a battle he had to cook some dishes and eat.

It was fortunate that he was able to avoid the big slime through reconnaissance.

The slime gave a large amount of experience, but if he did not use blade storm then there was no way for him to win. This meant that every time he fought he consumed two swords. However, there was no reason to fight and waste his two bags of japtm. There were tricks that he used to make hunting a full day in the labyrinth easier. If he met a slime or was surrounded by more than seven skeletons, Ark would quickly escape through a nearby wormhole.

The labyrinth had invisible wormholes laid all over the place.

Once he used a wormhole, the position would automatically be updated on the map and he could take advantage of it to use [Warp], just like a scroll.

It was the way that he wanted to live, so the maze was a quite useful hunting ground. The skeletons gave large experience and the item drop rate was also high.

In addition, the labyrinth was the waste disposal site for Cairo. So the labyrinth had piles of junk scattered all over the place, just like Gallic's stomach.

Sometimes a useable item would appear.

Although in quite a few cases, if it went 'boom' then poison gas would spread but

'Aside from the stench, this wouldn't be a bad place to live.'

No, it wasn't bad. It was actually rather good

However, Ark's purpose was not to level up or gain items. It was to find out how to enter the underground world.

However, he had explored 70% of the dungeon and he still had no clue on how to enter the underground world.

It was recorded that the clue to solve the riddle was hidden in the dungeon, but he had looked around and the clue wasn't visible.

'It is a big deal. I'm beginning to feel the limits..... '

Ark looked at his bag with a worried expression.

After fighting with the skeletons, he always ends up with low health. Of course every time he finished he ate food but the ingredients were starting to run out.

In the first place he used many of the ingredients to make too much food for the ex-convicts, so he didn't have that much remaining.

Of course, even the labyrinth contained ingredients. However, the only things available in the filth infested labyrinth were the skeleton bones and random slime. He had tested it and none of the food Ark made could be eaten.

That wasn't the only problem.

The item drop rate was high, which meant that it used up a lot of bag space. He had only spent 24 hours in the maze.

Ark's bag was full and although he equipped Snake's Item storage skill, 90% of that inventory was filled with items from other regions.

'Setting aside items, food was one of the highest priorities. If I run out of food then there is a high possibility that I will die'

Ark sighed in frustration and looked at a small hole in the ground.

It was a drain found in the middle of the maze.

The fact that water did not fill up the maze was due to these multiple drains. If so, perhaps it was linked to the outside. However, their diameter was 10cm at the most so he couldn't even get his head through.

'It is even impossible for a Hobbit to exit using this.'

Ark was getting up when he froze.

Suddenly a brilliant idea popped into his head.

‘Oh, yes! That wayIt might be possible! ‘

The Mystery of the Labyrinth

After Ark fell into the hell, the night and day had changed four times. In reality, that would be over 32 hours.

In the meantime, Andel and the assassins did not leave the resurrection place.

In some cases chaotic players who revived there sent them strange looks, but Andel did not pay them any attention.

Nevertheless, Andel quite enjoyed those times.

“That bastard Ark finally revealed that he is just a coward. He should be quite irritated by now? If a candidate was unable to connect for more than a day.....they would connect and check out the situation. But it is impossible. Once you caught my eye, you’re dead.”

However, Andel was only human and he wouldn’t risk his life for revenge. When it was time to eat a meal he ate and slept.

After a satisfying 40 hours, Andel eventually logged out of his unit and stretched while yawning.

“I’m not going to be here for a day. Okay?”

“Of course.”

Next to him the assassin nodded.

The assassins were camped in front of the quartermaster and were alternating between sleeping and guarding. At one time there were always two people awake, so it would be no problem if Ark suddenly revived.

“Usually the request is only for a month, but if you request it then we will guard this place for a year until it is complete.”

“Okay, I’ll believe you.”

Andel gave a satisfied look and cut the connection.

“When I see the technology of the foreigners, it sure is weird.”

An assassin muttered as Andel disappeared from sight.

However, NPCs can't really worry. The system does not allow for curiosity in the NPC.

After Andel disappeared, the assassins went back to staring at the resurrection point.

Gawking gawking

At that time, there were people staring from the woods.

He carefully looked at the assassins before running through the forest.

The small feet squeezed his body between tall trees as he looked back. He looked around restlessly and repeated the pattern.

It was like a breathtaking (?) scene from a spy movie as he arrived at the cabin on the hill.

“Whoa, a broke into a sweat at what I found.”

After he entered the cabin, the small figure took off his hood.

The visage of the small figure was that of the hobbit, Sid.

During the time that Ark was falling into the hell, Lorenzo fled to the cabin unharmed.

After explaining the situation to Sid, they were waiting for Ark to contact them at the cabin.

The anxious Lorenzo quickly approached.

“So? Do you have any news about older brother?”

Ark had gone with Lorenzo to kill the thieves and had protected him when the assassin threw a dagger at Lorenzo. Of course, it was because of the quest.

However, as a NPC Lorenzo was naive and felt that he owed a considerable debt to Ark.

Since that day, Lorenzo had referred to Ark as his older brother.

Sid shook his head with a dark countenance.

“Not yet. No one has seen Ark in Cairo.”

“After retreating, did he get defeated by those guys?”

“Well I think so.”

“Damn! Because of me.....!”

Lorenzo exploded with rage as he hit the desk. He suddenly asked.

“But they’re using a strange technique. After a serious injury they could teleport to the Quartermaster. As older brother is a foreigner would he also be able to do that?”

“That’s the problem.....”

Sid replied ambiguously with a pained face.

Andel and the assassins were waiting for Ark at the resurrection place.

That meant that Ark was certainly dead.

It was impossible to wait at the Quartermaster for a person who wasn’t dead. Perhaps Ark did not revive because he guessed such a situation.

‘He was called Andel? I don’t know what the relationship is between him and Ark-nim but it must be bad. It was such that he even waited at the resurrection point. Does that mean he will quit the game?’

Sid couldn’t tell if Ark had done the same thing to Andel.

In any case, their interaction wasn’t very good.

With Andel and the assassins guarding the quartermaster, Ark couldn’t even connect to the game. And Sid had no way of knowing how long it would last.

‘I wish I had Ark’s phone number so it would be a little better.....’

Sid sighed in frustration.

Thump, thump, thump!

Suddenly sounds were heard from the door, banging into something.

The surprised Sid and Lorenzo exchanged nervous glances.

‘Is it them? Did those guys follow us back here?’

Lorenzo who imagined the worst approached the door and lifted his sword.

“I can’t do it. Sid please escape to the back door while I try to block them.

“Ha, but

“There’s no time to argue. Listen to what I have to say? I owe my life to big brother. He asked me for a favour and I don’t want to break it. Because I care about the fellow, please hurry while I buy time.”

Lorenzo spoke in a low voice during the touching scene.

All of a sudden, an object entered through the bottom of the door. It was a shadow that was creeping forward. Lorenzo quickly raised his sword while Sid raised his hands and shouted.

“Wait! It.....! ”

Saek saek saek!

At the sight of the object, Sid lifted his voice in welcome. It was the surprisingly long tongue of Ark’s belt.....No, it was a snake.

Lorenzo looked at Sid, embarrassed.

“What, what! This snake is?”

“It’s not just a snake. This snake is Ark’s pet.”

“What?” Older brother’s? In addition to the bat and skull?”

“Yes! And if this snake is back.....that mean Ark-nim is out there!”

Sid hugged the snake.

Snake expressed his happiness by twining around Sid's body- but the hobbit was too short- and climbed on top of the table. And he started vomiting out items from his mouth.

After a long time. Items were stacked on top of the table.

Snake began squirming his body and making a weird shape.

What is it doing? Sid stared blankly before he realised.

“It's a letter! It must be a message from Ark-nim!”

Sid took out a piece of paper and pen and wrote down what the snake produced.

For Sid.

Sid. I am alive for the time being.

Due to the circumstance, for the time being I won't be able to go there. So I will send Snake on my behalf in the future.

Snake will give you items to organize and please send any required items to me through Snake.

I need food and potions from the store and well as repair boxes.

Also please send paper and a pen.

“.....So I have to organize the items and sell the japtermAs expected from Ark-nim.....!”

Sid muttered with a tired expression.

Then. That was the solution that Ark came up with for his worries about japterm.

Ark finally found an exit through a small drain that led to the outside.

It was 10cm in diameter, and although many snakes wouldn't be able to pass through Ark had an insane idea. Therefore he placed all the

items he needed to sell in Snake and sent it to the cabin where Sid was hiding with Lorenzo.

“Anyway that’s it. It’s all done. If Ark-nim is alive then you don’t have to worry about assassins for the time being. Bah, morons. So even if it takes a while wait for me there……. ”

Sid collected the items from Snake while he was moved to tears and had to wipe his runny nose.

Then he put the hood back on and sneaked into Cairo using the [Lie] scroll. He organized the japtem and came back with Ark’s required items which Snake swallowed.

“Snake, be careful!”

Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake nodded and with eyes filled with duty, crawled to the ground.

“Park So-mi ssi”

“Yes,”

Hyun-woo requested after being asked by the reception. He was approached by the staff who extended a statement

“This is the full 5,210,000 won. Would you like to pay it with a card?”

“Eh, 5,210,000 won?”

Ark asked again with a surprised expression.

“Up until last month, it was just over 4,500,000 won?”

“The expenses went up a little this month. Didn’t you see the letter of information?”

The staff held out the letter of information.

He read the list that the hospital typed that showed the treatment for each patient.

But the bottom line was that the hospital bills were raised due to

inflation. Finally, the hospital was also succumbing to the inflation surge.

In fact, the talk about raising hospital bills occurred a few months ago.

However, public opinion had been blocking it.

‘The dangers of health care privatization are revealed.’

”Is the patient sealed to a chair? ‘

A current events program was broadcasted every day, and the parent organizations for the opposition against hospital privatization was shown as well.

But in the end it was decided to raise the hospital bills.

Although, frankly Hyun-woo did not expect the hospital costs to stay the same. Whether it is a game or reality, everything relies on power.

The hospital had a vested interest while the people who opposed raising hospital bills were mostly poor.

Isn't it clear which group would win when the two of them clashed? The government which was supposed to stand with the people decided in the end to privatize health care and turn a blind eye to the common people.

.....When was it?

It was the same story when the government first talked about privatizing public enterprises.

The people of the Republic of Korea aren't stupid.

Of course, there was many invested in opposing the privatization and more than 100,000 participated in protests by lighting a candle.

Although he didn't participate in the protests, the majority of ordinary people supported them. It was clearly a public sentiment. But the government was unshaken and did not side with public sentiment.

Rather, they presented the candlelight protests as violent demonstrations and used it to push privatization.

Of course, the Government pushed it but the problem was also caused by people who didn't carewas?

It is quite common for the public sentiment to change quickly.

It was a suitable word. But the public sentiment doesn't mean much to people with money and power. It did not mean the poor. It was a sad world for people who aren't favoured.

For people like Hyun-woo, they have no power and no choice but to live with the climbing costs.

"How much?"

Hyun-Woo sighed as the staff replied with an irate expression.

"5,210,000 won?"

'Damn it, selling the Fire Slayer would barely cover this month's bills.'

When he first checked his account it felt like he was walking on clouds.

However, after paying for a variety of utilities as well as rent, food and medical bills his original balance of 14,000,000 won went down to 5,000,000 won. Well, he did have a surplus of ten million won.

'Ok, this month is black'

Hyun-woo tried to soothe himself as he headed to the 2nd floor.

When he arrived at the 2nd floor rehabilitation centre, he immediately saw his mother through the glass windows. When he saw her with the professional therapists taking one step forward, his depressed mood became much better.

'She's already doing walking practice! '

On the other hand, it increased his motivation to work harder to make money.

“That.....that’s right. Money is important.

The good reason for the Government privatizing health care was to improve the quality of the medical services.

Fortunately, that promise was kept.

Under private management, the healthcare service definitely improved. At the state-of-the-art rehabilitation centre, his mother received one on one treatment with a profession therapist in accordance with management. From exercise to eating.

Thanks to that, his mother’s illness was rapidly taking a turn for the better.

And unless Hyun-woo fell behind in the hospital bills, then such care would continue.

Hyun-woo still remembered the hospital scene from a while ago.

Because the hospital bill wasn’t paid in advance, an old man was kicked out from the hospital.....

‘Something like that can’t happen to my mother.’

Hyun-woo thought with clench teeth.

He wanted his mother to have confidence to live a whole life. But he had to shoulder his mum’s responsibility.

That thought was stronger than anything else in his head. He wanted her to devote herself to the treatment without worrying. It was Hyun-woo’s only wish.

His mother laughed as she saw Hyun-woo from inside the glass window. Hyun-woo waved his hand as he lost his stiff expression.

Rehabilitation was so difficult that a healthy person wouldn’t be able to imagine.

Yet his mother never once said it was difficult.

Hyun-Woo was actually the one that suffered most at the thought.

‘No, I don’t have it that hard.’

Hyun-woo wasn’t suffering at all compared to his mother.

‘Yes, now I can laugh in front of my mother because of New World. New World is the last remaining hope for me. New World is something I can never give up on. Not even what Andel or Alan think.....even if I have to crawl from the bottom up because of them, it isn’t possible for me to give up! If you disturb me then I’ll crawl up and step on you! I’ll show you the spirit of a poor person.’

Hyun-woo sat on a couch in the clinic and came up with an idea.

‘To do this, I need to quickly find a way through the entrance of the underground world..... ‘

Three days had passed since Hyun-woo entered the underground labyrinth. There was some trouble at first but now he has adapted and his level rose to 93. If it wasn’t for the stench then it would be a pretty decent hunting ground.

‘But, it isn’t money.’

That’s a problem.

So far, Hyun-woo had gained an average of 20~30 gold per day.

But he needed to earn a lot more if Hyun-woo wanted to earn the minimum necessary to maintain his life.

However, the items from the underground labyrinth could contribute to that.

The item drop rate is high even for a skeleton that doesn’t appear frequently and takes a while to hunt. In addition, he couldn’t ignore the outgoing money he spends on food and repair boxes.

‘Although I have a surplus in my bank account right now, it will become more difficult in the future. I also have to search the underground world for the fragment of the Three Marvels.....’

However, he still hadn’t found the clues to enter that world.

He had already explored the 1, 2, and 3rd floors of the labyrinth.

However, the completion rate of the map using the cartography skill was 99.9%. He couldn't enter that space because the iron doors are blocking it.

'What is the alternative? As for the riddle? '

Ark sighed and took out a memo pad from his pocket. On the notes were maps drawn of the underground hell.

It was a maze of intertwined pathways. He had found dozens of hidden wormholes during the investigation but he still hadn't even guessed the answer to the riddle. In addition, there was no possibility of a hidden passageway because the map's completion rate was 99.9%.

"Did you wait long?"

"Oh, mother!"

At that time, the door to the therapy room opened and his mother came out with the nurse.

Hyun-woo stood up and sat his mother on the couch.

His mother wiped off the sweat as she laughed.

"But what were you thinking so hard about? Are you studying something these days?"

"Oh, no. Just....."

"What is it? Let's see."

His mother nodded as she browsed through the notes.

"Ah, the dot-line puzzles you do when you're bored."

"Yes? Dot-line puzzle? "

"Yes, if you draw a line between the two points then the puzzle will be complete. Isn't that it? I did them quite often in the past.....ho ho ho, when we were dating your father sometimes made me those puzzles. He did the thing by hiding a heart pattern. Looks like its hand-drawn? Still, the person giving such puzzles must be spoiling

you. Somehow, it is good to see.”

Hyun-woo looked at the map with puzzled eyes.

Dot-line puzzle? “Was that visible?”

He tried to visualize it as he listened to his mother’s speech.

Hyun-woo drew almost the entire map of the underground labyrinth and he had also marked the location of the wormholes with a dot. It would form a picture.

“Ara? Just as it is?”

Without thinking, Ark tilted his head as he connected a point with another point. Ark felt something strange so he laid the maps of the 1st to 3rd floor over each other and poked through the wormhole with a felt pen.

So, if you drill holes through all the wormholes on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd floors then a figure will be made?

It is none other thanthe three triangles overlapping shown on the iron doors!

At the moment, a single thought flashed through Hyun-woo’s head.

-This place was sealed in accordance with the ancient vow.

If you can’t understand these words, there is no possibility of passing through to where I sleep.

A person with purpose could wake me up.

A person who makes the pilgrimage here with pride and speaks my name with respect will be able to cross.....

Those words were written on the iron doors.

Those who don’t know this place can’t enter.

‘The first hint means that I must learn the terrain of the labyrinth completely.’

Hyun-Woo had thought of this so he drew a map and carried it

around as he studied it. However, the second and third questions on the riddle were still unanswered. But unexpectedly his mother had unravelled that.

‘A person with a purpose. That means if I want to enter the underground world, Ark has to say this! If I intentionally say this as I walk the labyrinth, a route might be discovered. And I have to speak as I pilgrimage along the markings! ‘

The markings were the wormholes that littered the underground labyrinth.

‘ Pil, if I intentionally make the pilgrimage and express at the end of the wormhole then it might become clear! No, I can’t think beyond that. Oh god, it was so simple yet I was unaware for three days.

Now Hyun-woo could confidently entered New World. Nevertheless, he had lost three days contemplating the mystery and he also wasted time playing Tetris and Go stop with his mother.

Once you become familiar with the game, it was a trap.

After being too used to the game, he made every problem associated with the game and made it more difficult than it was. However, his mother doesn’t know about New World. Just as she said, it’s just what it looks like.

The original puzzle for those searching for an answer was not visible to the corporation.

Hyun-woo grasped his mother’s hands and shouted.

“Mother! Mother has saved Ark!”

“What?” What do you mean, all of a sudden? Who is Ark? One of you foreign looking friends?”

“There is such a person. It is my alter ego. ”

Alter ego? You, no waydid you get a girlfriend or something?”

“No, it’s more precious than a girlfriend. Ark.”

Hyun-woo answered with a laugh.

“Now, let’s get started?”

After coming back from the hospital, Ark immediately connected with the game.

A dim light spread as the familiar dirty landscape of the labyrinth appeared.

“Are you feeling fine, master?”

Dedric asked with a dubious expression once he was summoned.

Dedric, do you want to get out of here soon?”

“What?” If we can leave, but ”

“Huhuhu, do not worry. We’ll leave soon.”

Ark said confidently and opened his map window.

Before connecting, he had already thought about where to start from.

‘It is clockwise from the far right end. I was told to express respect and make a pilgrimage so I have to move in the right direction. If that doesn’t work then try again from the opposite direction.’

Ark immediately smashed the skull of a skeleton and ran across the underground labyrinth. He was already tired of fighting skeletons. But he also didn’t want anything new.

When a wormhole appeared while Ark was battling, he used Riposte and jumped down the hole. No matter how many skeletons appeared, if you jump down the wormhole then the chase was removed and battle ended.

‘Now it is imperative to confirm the answer to the riddle! ‘

When he jumped down the wormhole, he immediately moved to a new area.

He unfolded his map and using his cartography skills confirmed that if you connect a wormhole to another one with a straight line then the location corresponded to the middle part. The probability that it was

the correct answer increased.

‘The next wormhole is about 20 meters from here.’

Ark immediately moved to the next wormhole and plunged. He did this about 20 times, before Ark finally returned to the original wormhole he plunged through. Unfortunately, all the filth had accumulated on Ark’s body that he arrived with a bad stench. His summons was the same.

In trying not to repeat the same mistakes, he grabbed Dedric and Skull when he entered the wormhole so they were also filthy.

“What the hell are you doing? Are you crazy? Why do you keep on plunging into dirty water?”

“You’re noisy, without fail this will surely be the last time!”

Before Dedric could speak, Ark plunged into the first wormhole again.

It was at that time. When he jumped into the wormhole he heard a whirring sound and something felt different from the previous times.

Until now, the time it takes to go through the wormhole is a maximum of 10 seconds but this time felt longer. Up, down, sidewayshe was sucked in until it suddenly dropped him somewhere.

Kwajik, warururu!

Ark cried out as he fell to the bottom but quickly sat up and checked his surroundings.

‘As expected, this is the first time I’ve seen this!’

At that time, a bright sound rang out and a message window popped up.

-You have completed ‘Hell’s underground labyrinth.’

{Knowledge of Ancient Relics +15, Intelligence +10 and Fame increased by 30}

-You have completed the map of ‘Hell’s underground Labyrinth ‘ with

a perfect 100% completion rate.

Painting a map of the underground labyrinth is now possible.

{Experience + 1000}

Ark was now sure that he had found the correct answer.

The place where Ark fell was a huge cavern.

It was a hidden room in the underground labyrinth with a huge amount of bones and skeletons piled up. It was an impossible place to find even when he was exploring every corner of the sewers! When he looked to the back, he saw that he was on the other side of the iron doors.

He had finally passed through those doors.

‘Somewhere here will be the entrance to the underground world! ‘

Ark stood up and scanned around. The cave mouth was wide open on the right side.

‘I wonder what kind of species lives in such a horrible place? Ara? But what is this?’

Ark’s excitement subsided as he explored the cave. There was still one unexpected hurdle remaining.

The cave entrance was blocked by a thick steel door. Fortunately, next to the iron door was a lever like stick that could open the door depending on its use, but the tip of the lever was broken.

”I can’t pull this lever. So what is the alternative way? ‘

Ark made a frustrated face.

Dudududu, ttadak, ttadadak!

Suddenly, the floor started to shake like there was an earthquake.

At the same time, a black object rose from the ground and started attracting the bones together until an object was formed. And in the blink of an eye it snowballed to a huge size.

There was a huge chunk of skulls and bones moving through the air.

“Ugh, more bones?”

Dedric gave a cry of distress as a warning message appeared.

-The boss monster ‘Kraken’ has appeared!

‘Boss monster! ‘

He reflexively used Eyes of the Cat to display its information.

It was a level 150 boss monster!

While Ark was so puzzled at the situation that he couldn’t think, something elongated sprung from the Kraken’s body.

Hundreds of bones were attached to form a giant scythe! Ark felt an eerie aura as he rolled across the floor to the pile of bones.

It was formed from bone fragments all over the place.

‘Damn, I never thought there would be a boss monster here when I finally solved the riddle. But I didn’t come here to die. Anyway, this plan of desperation means I either strike first or die.

Ark drew his sword and rushed to the kraken.

“Dark blade!”

Double bang!

The violent roar of smashed bones was heard everywhere. The kraken was pushed and stumbled backwards. The shape reflected the Kraken’s nature.

Kuo oooo!

The kraken trembled and lifted all the bones connected to his arm up.

Scythe, spear, swordit assembled weapons of all shapes made out of bone and shot them towards Ark. The attack approached at the same time from four or five different directions!

But Ark had experienced that attack countless times when fighting against the skeletons.

Once again there was no reason to panic.

‘It has returned!’

Ark rotated his body with his right foot and stabbed with his sword.

Putt putt POW!

The counter hit the spot where the kraken’s arms were still growing.

Because it was made of bone, when hit with the counter it shattered and fell to the ground without force. Of course, Ark was hit three or four times but he only lost 150 health.

‘Okay, this guy. The damage of the boss wasn’t that strong.

By the way, the speed was surprisingly slow and easily crushed. Although the level was high, the difficulty was on the low side. I could easily win! ‘

“Dedric, Skull! Plan B! ”

The opponent was a boss monster.

You don’t need to use a complex operation.

The two summons moved to the different sides to keep the kraken’s attention on them while Ark launched a counterattack.

He struck a flying arm, destroyed it and counter attacked many times. It didn’t take long for Ark to realise that there was something strange about the assault.

‘What, this guy? ‘

Although he hit it a number of times, the kraken did not lose any vitality.

Not only that. Because the fight wasn’t that difficult he forgot for a while and after using Eyes of the Cat, he realised that no weakness was indicated.

‘What happened? Why is there no damage?’

There was something strange. However, Ark avoided the Kraken’s offensive and just continued attacking for the time being.

In fact, there was no other way. So after a few minutes of violent attacks, there was a gap in the bones which showed a black shape.

A red dot on the black shape indicated the place to bombard with attacks.

Now Ark was able to understand the situation.

‘I see. This guy is like the jellyfish and the slime. The bones were a suit of armour and if I remove all the bones at the gap then I can attack! This won’t be so difficult!’

Ark narrowed the distance and used Dark Blade on the black stone.

No, as soon as he tried the Kraken turned its body around. At the same time, it released an intense gust of air and Ark was pushed back several meters. Thanks to that, the Dark Blade missed.

However, to Ark it was ludicrous as he snorted.

“The bones that grow move pretty slowly but when its weakness is exposed then it moves pretty fast. But to no avail. Because I’ll continue to attack until every bone disappears!”

However, that was Ark’s mistake.

Just as Ark was swinging his sword, the floor vibrated and the bones floated in the air. And like the first time, it was attracted like a magnet to the kraken.

Because it grew some bones, the bone armour was even thicker than before. In addition, the attacking bones were many times thicker and its speed had also increased.

Soeeeeeee! Double bang!

“What, what’s this ...!”

Ark avoided the attack by rolling on the ground while looking

confused.

He had struggled for 10 minutes only for the situation to repeat itself. He destroyed the bone armour with his sword and then the kraken would quickly reform it. And the number of repeats also made the kraken bigger and stronger.

“This is ridiculous! How are you supposed to win against this guy?”

Profanities burst from Ark’s mouth.

Indeed, the bones were joined together. If the kraken was able to keep on infinitely grow the bones, did he have to fight and turn all those bones to powder? Even if Ark disagreed with the fight, in these conditions it would take 3 nights, ten four days than 5 nights and 6 days to fight for an unknown outcome.

‘There is a limit to avoidance. When the nucleus is shown, a storm is summoned and pushes you back so there is no way to approach. When it is such a shape then even Blade Storm wouldn’t be useful. But there might be a strategy. Is there a way to get to the nucleus without activating the storm?’

Ark who was desperately thinking suddenly thought of Skull.

‘Come to think of it.....’

In fact, Ark couldn’t grasp where Skull was.

Because there were bones rolling around, it was hard to distinguish between the bones and skulls.

Unlike Dedric whose attacks were unsuccessful, Skull’s attacks had hit several times. In other words, even the kraken couldn’t distinguish between the bones and skeletons.

Then an idea came to Ark’s head.

‘Bone? Skull? Oh I see, I see. There is a reason for me to approach!’

At that thought, Ark stepped forward and swung his sword before withdrawing.

He confirmed that his remaining mana was only 300. A dangerous number.

“Blessing of the Sea Spirit!”

Ark activated Adelaine’s Necklace which increased defense by 40% and restored 500 mana.

Now his remaining mana was 800! It was enough to take the risk.

‘When using Blade Storm, it is fast but I don’t know how long it may take from now on.’ So now is the time to conserve mana! ‘

“Dedric, you too! Cancel summon!”

“What? Why?”

Dedric sent him a bewildered look.

Ark who had reduced mana consumption to a minimum went back to attacking.

He shattered the bones with his sword and the scattered all over the place.

“Dark blade!”

Ark narrowed the distance without delay and shot off a Dark Blade at the body of the kraken.

A violent roar burst out of the bone armour as it split in half. Eventually, the appearance of the kraken was shown between the split bones. He figured that rotating the kraken’s body was a normal process to produce a storm.

That moment was a chance for Ark which he aimed at straight away!

“It is now! Skull, cancel summon and resummon!”

While Ark was caught in the storm, Skull was summoned to his hand.

Ark held his posture by concentrating power in his left foot before throwing Skull with all his strength. And shortly after the storm the kraken repaired his bone armour again and Ark approached.

As the kraken started forming a sword, it flinched.

At the same time, the 100% vitality of the kraken was finally reduced by 1%.

‘It’s a success! ‘

Ark clenched his fist and cried out.

This was the strategy that Ark was aiming for.

The kraken will continue to repair the bone armour.

The ingredients were the pile of stacked bones and skulls. If so, wasn’t Ark’s summon made of the same material?

Therefore, Ark delivered a big blow and the moment the kraken tried to repair his bone armour, Skull was thrown at the nucleus of the kraken. And the stupid kraken couldn’t discern between skulls and used it to make the armour.

Skull was attached right next to the nucleus!

Therefore, the kraken was being attacked from inside his bone armour. Skull’s damage wasn’t very high but if it bit from the inside then it still dealt damage. Plus the kraken had similar characteristics to the Jellyfish and slime as the nucleus has low defense.

After Skull bit the nucleus, the kraken’s health was visibly reduced. There was no way to stop Skull’s attack inside the kraken.

The armour used to protect itself is now biting and tearing.

‘Now my remaining mana is 600. The only Skull consumes mana then it should last for 10 minutes. I have no choice but to wish that Skull kills the kraken during that time!’

Kuo oooo!

The kraken roared from the painful attacks all over the place.

However, Ark had to abandon his attacks and just concentrate on avoidance. In addition, the kraken glimpsed the incoming damage and just attacked harder.

The kraken was revealing a much faster time than expected.

In just 5 minutes.

From Skull's onslaught, the kraken was already in a critical condition.

The kraken couldn't maintain the bony armour covering his body, and it fell to the floor as he began to lose power. And the view showed the sight of Skull crazily biting the black nucleus.

"Got it, thank you. Skull, now back off"

Ttadak! Ttak ttak ttak!

Skull, whose mouth was full biting the flesh of the kraken, got off and spat it out.

At the same time, Ark poured the rest of his mana into his sword for his last attack.

"Dark blade!"

The sword disappeared into darkness and suddenly appeared in front of the kraken.

Intense sound effects showed there was a critical hit.

Kuo oooo!

The health finally reached zero and the kraken started convulsing before exploding in a storm of light. The storm scattered the bones in every direction.

-Your level has risen.

"Skull! Yes we won thanks to you!"

Ttak ttak ttak! Ttak, ttak ttak ttak!

Skull looked towards the sky.

.....It was laughing.

Ark turned his head and stroked the skull. It was a weird fellow, but still a boss monster.

It dropped a lot of booty. As expected, where the kraken had disappeared was a black sword plunged into the ground.

“Eh? This, this is! ”

Ark’s mouth opened as he confirmed the information.

Saw blade (Cursed)

A long time ago, the spines of the bodies dumped in hell was used to make this sword. The kraken which rules the underground labyrinth absorbed it into its body where a strong curse was applied.

{The stats cannot be determined until the curse is released}

It wasn’t an ordinary weapon.

It was made out of a person’s sharpened spinal bones. But somehow it was a good shape.

The reason for Ark’s surprise was the curse on the item. Curse weapons, Lancel’s sword which made Dedric evolve was also a cursed weapon.

“Purification Restoration!”

Ark immediately used the skill and watched in anticipation.

[Saw blade (Magic Sword)Weapon type: One-handed sword

Durability: 70

Attack: 23~25

Weight: 25

User restriction: Dark Attribute

Level: 80

In the past, the one year old Monarch who built Cairo used the spinal bones of those who opposed him to make this sword. At the time, it was ambushed by a group of barbarians and abandoned at

the bottom of the hell in Cairo, where it was imbued by an immortal spirit with a mysterious power. Unfortunately, it was absorbed by the kraken where a grudge was formed and it suffered for a long time.

If someone killed the kraken and liberated the soul of the sword than he would be thankful to you.]

-The special effect of this magic sword once a day: The master of the Magic Sword can summon 'Warwick' once a day.

"As expected, it is a magic sword!"

He naturally cheered.

Ever since Dedric evolved underwater using Lancel's Sword, Ark had frantically been searching for information on the magic sword.

Because the bat evolved, he was able to experience how much Dedric changed. However, he still couldn't find information on magic swords.

And he did not have any expectations to find a magic sword in this place.....!

Saw blade, it was a cool name.

'Could the Saw Blade evolve Skull instead of Dedric?'

If possible, he hoped so.

Dedric who was already evolved now had a high utilization rate.

On the other hand, thanks to the stats, skills and ability to walk of Skull, its utilization was gradually disappearing. In the old days you could use it as a shield, now the monsters were higher level that Skull couldn't really last against them.

'I'll experiment immediately. What kind of guy will appear?'

"Snap!"

A muffled sound was suddenly heard from his waist.

While Ark had been investigating the sword, Snake had automatically started peering at other items and seemed to have found something.

Something seemed to be shining from the Kraken's bone gap. Snake extended its tongue to receive praise from Ark. At that moment Snake's tongue got stuck.

"Kkaek, kkaek kkaek kkaek!"

"Ara? Snake! Are you ok?"

Ark started tugging at Snake's tongue.

Then the bones scattered and something was pulled out.

It is.....

"What, what the?" This is?"

Ark muttered with a foolish expression.

Underground world

-Summon Warwick from the Magic Sword.

The sword which was formed from a person's spine began to vibrate and hum. After a moment, the sword fell from his hand.

"Eh?"What, what the?"

The sword was stuck vertically into the ground and rotating in thin air.

Oduduk, Oduduk, Crunch!

An eerie sound rang out and the sword started to change.

Bones like a saw tooth started to extend out from both sides of the sword. The extended bones started swelling up and move from side to side, top to bottom until they joined together like a complicated cubic puzzle. It was similar to the robot transformation scenes frequently seen in animated cartoons.

The result was the same as well.

The sword formed a black torso with wild hair, and decorated with armour made from the metal parts of the saw blade and an old sword. After seeing the transformation scene with his own eyes, he couldn't understand how the blade could transform itself into that figure. Well, the transformed robots on cartoons were also the same but

Anyway, the Saw Blade transformed into a level 60 Skeleton Knight.

'The explanation for the Saw Blade said that the spine came from someone abandoned in hell.'

He had seen many things travelling in New World.

The marvellous special effects weren't amazing anymore. But to transform with such a method. He felt caught off guard.

Ark stared with dumb surprise.

When the skeleton knight Warwick raised his body, a deep blue flame burned in his hollow eye sockets. The flames moved as he turned his head and gazed at Ark.

‘Is this guy also someone with no manners?’

Ark recalled the first time he met the owner of the Magic Sword, Dunphil. However, Warwick was a completely different type from Dunphil.

Warwick opened his jawbone and began to talk.

“Foreigner.....You krakendefeated it?”

“So?”

Warwick abruptly knelt down and bowed.

“To you.....I express my thanks and respect.”

“What?”

“My name is WarwickAt one time I respectfully swore my allegiance to the monarchI fought with barbarians and became an Honourable Knight. However, after I unintentionally diedan evil spirit captured my soul on the Hills of Dawn and sealed me to this sword so that I was unable to leave.”

“Hills of Dawn?”

Ark was puzzled as he belatedly noticed the meaning.

It was a name that he had occasionally seen in the history books of New World.

”Is it the Hills of Dawn in Valhalla?’

It was common sense! Valhalla was the palace of the dead in Norse Mythology. A warrior who died honourably in battle would receive an invitation to the Holy Land by the supreme god Odin. They would train their skills and wait there until the Final Battle, Ragnarok.

New World was a fantasy game with different myths applied in each region from all over the world. And in the Northern continent, a lot of the myths applied were about the Nordic World.

Getting back to the back, Warwick had wanted to get directly to the afterlife but had been captured by the Kraken.

Warwick showed regret in his eyes as he continued talking.

“From then on, for hundreds of years.....my spirit was corrupted and I became a devil.....my honour had been disgraced. It was a nightmarish time. To end the nightmare.....you have delivered the light of salvation. You naturally have my thanks.”

Unlike the other guy, Warwick was unexpectedly polite.

Ark's face became elated as he scratched his head.

“Well, since you've told me your thanks.....”

“I know”

Warwick nodded and produced a body.

“You've released the curse from the magic sword.....Now you have the power to summon me.....The reason why you summoned me is easily understood.....And I too.....I was waiting for this!”

“You were waiting?”

“I've already been to the Hills of Dawnthat invitation was also corrupted.However, meeting a truly honourable opponent has fired up my soul like in the pastIf you can duelMy soul can be savedAnd my strength and experience can be a foundation for you.....It would be delightful! Nowwho will be my opponent.....Who are you? Of course, if your summon defeated the Kraken.....His abilities must be better than expected! Ooohmy fighting spirit is kindled!”

Warwick couldn't hide his excitement and shouted, shaking his sword.

His bones came alive at the subject.

“Now, I’m readymy fighting spiritcall them before I disappear!”

“It has already been summoned?”

“What?”

Warwick scanned the place with baffled eyes. His burning gaze found Dedric standing to one side.

“Certainly.....I can feel the spirit of the Netherworld on this child.....but.....it is difficult! Even though I am corrupted.....this body is an honourable knight! How can I against a young child.....wield my sword?”

“What the? A child? Hey, dude! How old are you?”

Dedric who had changed into the form of a young child said angrily.

At that time, Ark pointed to Skull rolling along the floor.

“Do not worry about it, Warwick. Your opponent is here”

Warwick’s gaze followed Ark’s fingertips. And witnessed Skull looking proud at receiving Ark’s nomination.

Seems likean embarrassing and awkward silence flowed.

Warwick looked stunned as he peeked at Skull and then looked at Ark.

A joke? His glowing eyes seemed to ask.

When Ark shook his head, the normally polite Warwick shouted.

“I’ve been polite to you. But now you’re insulting me!”

“I’m sorry but this is the situation. So can’t you try and fight?”

“I can’t endure it anymore, not matter how much you’ve saved me!”

Warwick threatened with his sword as he approached Ark. At that moment, Skull jumped and crashed into Warwick.

Warwick flinched and retreated. Skull had roughly interrupted him. He had a rarely seen angry countenance.

Warwick looked at Skull with surprised eyes.

He did this for a while as some form of dialogue seemed to pass between the both of them, before Warwick sighed and nodded.

“Right.....that was what happened? I’m sorryalthough only the skull remained.....you are also a warrior who knows honour.....I only looked at the surface and ignored you.....I apologize.”

Clack clack clack!

After he was told that, Skull naturally held up his chin.

However, Warwick shook his head.

“Your fighting spirit and courageis fully realized.....but I still can’t accept the duel.....after looking at me you will notice.....for now, you’re still lacking too much.....unless the difference is filled up.....I will never accept a duel with you.”

Clack clack clack!

“You can say it as many times as you like, the answer is still the same.....my heart won’t burn against a weak opponent.....it isn’t possible to go to the Hills of Dawn with such a duel.....summon me again.....if you improve your skills enough to fight me.”

Skull seemed shocked as he closed his mouth.

Warwick sighed and looked at Ark.

“I am indebted to you.....However, no matter how many times you summon me.....I cannot fight an opponent that doesn’t stir meyour pet also.....and you wouldn’t want to win in a dishonourable way.”

“No, I suppose not?”

Ark quickly replied.

Dishonour? Are you joking?

After all if Skull wins then he can evolve.

Also if the fight against Warwick wasn't difficult, then he would be thankful. However, Warwick was more rigid than he imagined.

"I wish? Fu.....For a while I thought you were going to insinuate the ideahowever, I was excessive.....that the guy who beat the Kraken would have such thoughts.....I apologize after all.....that is why I cannot accept this duelthen....."

"No, there seemed to be some misunderstanding.....I'm not someone as out of touch as you think. Good, that's good? Hey, Hey! Are you listening? Ya! I said wait."

However, before Ark could speak Warwick had already transformed back into a blade.

Dedric snorted and muttered.

"He isn't a funny guy"

Ditto.

He never imagined that the owner of the magic sword would refuse to duel.

The owners of the magic sword really come in different types.

Ark sighed and picked up the Saw Blade.

Anyway, since he could only summon once in a 24 hour period, there was no way to resummon him. And even if he summoned Warwick again, the result would be the same with him refusing to duel.

'Then again, the present Skull would have no chance of beating the level 60 opponent.....'

Currently, the average level of his summons was around 45. However, the average level was higher because of Dedric. In fact, Skull was still around level 40. Moreover, he has no offensive skills. He wasn't in a state where he could fight Warwick and win.

‘Maybe it was better that he had refused the duel.’

In Skull had died, then he would also be unable to summon him for a 24 hour period. Therefore he would not be able to fight for 24 hours and would experience no growth. He summoned Warwick in order to see his stats, and he determined that there was no reason to duel.

‘For the time being, I have to think a little bit more.’

Although it was disappointing, Ark soothed himself and snatched the sword.

The damage of the Saw Blade was higher than Lancel’s Sword. However if he considered the attack bonus when fighting with Dedric the owner of the Magic Sword then Lancel’s Sword was more useful.

“Eh? What the?” Skull, what’s wrong?”

Ark had been about to move when Skull pulled at the hem of his clothes. Ark squatted down puzzled as Dedric muttered.

“Ooh, really? Really? Ha, those words? I’m good”

“What do you mean?”

“Ohehehe, Master. Skull asked when you would create a new dish to feed him that would unconditionally change him? Whatever you’re making would soothe him.”

“What? Skull, really?”

Skull nodded his head.

Ark also knew the feeling.

In fact, Ark was worried that Skull would be depressed after the duel wasn’t accepted. However in contrast to his worry, enthusiasm seemed to overflow from Skull. Although Skull had now lost all memories of the past as well as his body, he was also an honourable warrior.

Perhaps the conversation he had with Warwick was about that

content. He must have felt the desire to win fairly after remembering his days as a warrior. In the past, Dedric would eat like crazy in order to get vengeance on Dunphil. However, Skull was a warrior who wanted to eat food for his and Ark's honour. The magic sword played a motivating role in inspiring the growth of his summons. And that will make his pet grow several times stronger.

"Okay, Skull. Then you'll need to be prepared for even harder training in the future."

Once he outlined the situation, Ark crossed the bone room.

The room where the Kraken was located had a side blocked by a huge iron door.

The residents of the Underground World had carved this sentence on the iron doors.

But the lever to open the door was broken. However, just after Ark defeated the Kraken. He figured out how to open the door.

"Snake, the ectoplasm glue!"

At Ark's order, Snake opened its mouth and spat something out.

It was LPG gas cylinders with green slime twitching inside the transparent tubes. After the kraken disappeared, this was the item that Snake found among the piles of bones and items.

[Spirit Body Glue (Special)]It was glue made out of ectoplasm capable of sticking body and spirit together.From a long time ago, numerous bodies had been abandoned in the hell. The souls of the dead bodies in the labyrinth were collected by the evil spirit, which mixed the impurities together to form the ectoplasm. The instinct to stick to the ectoplasm was very strong. Also, once the ectoplasm was touched it recognises the body and you would be unable to get away.

The ectoplasm would stick to each other and form a huge lump, which would spread into its surroundings and corrupt everything. That was the result of the corruption from the Kraken. However, now that the nucleus of the Kraken had disappeared, the souls of

the people have become simple ectoplasm again.

When the ectoplasm is used, any object would be able to stick to it. In essence there is no limit on the size and length of the spiritual body. In addition, once an object is joined it won't fall off unless it is destroyed. Using it as a joke was prohibited! Someone might have to live their whole lives with the hands or feet attached.

{The number of uses: 5 times}}

That is to say mixing fallen souls together would create an adhesive like glue.

-I'm lonely and bored. Isn't there anything to be attached to?

-Woo-ssi, what are you looking at? Sometime to stick to?

-Hahaha, I'm glue. Put me on everything!

After shaking the tubes, voices mumbling could be heard.

Ark looked at the tube with a strange expression. Even if it was a fantasy game, using ectoplasm as a glue was like a horror movie.....

Furthermore, if the adhesive was shaken even a little bit then it would endlessly complain. It is an item which your common sense wasn't sure if it should laugh or be afraid.

'Where on earth would such a thing be used?'

When he first checked the item, he wasn't able to think of a use for it. Jeez, even though glue could be used everywhere, why did he find such a strange item at this time.

But after a while, Ark could quickly see why.

The exit of the bone room was the broken lever.

'Aha, so if I hadn't defeated the Kraken then I wouldn't have been able to open the door.'

Ark approached the level with a bone of a suitable size. And he

opened the tube containing some murmuring voices and let it flow out.

-Uoooh, It's outside!

-Awesome. Stick! Let's stick!

After the bone was applied to the lever, the viscous liquid flowed over and stuck it together.

It was one performance. Once stuck together, the bone and lever looked like it had originally been like that. The ectoplasm was also satisfied and didn't mutter anymore.

'Now I finally

Ark glanced nervously at the iron door.

Only one thing left to do now!

Just open the iron doors to the Underground World. It was a new world no one had seen yet, just like the Undersea world!

He wondered if there was a mountain of treasure beyond the iron doors. Or a legendary unknown monster. Ark checked his equipment before pulling the lever.

He organized the items in his bag and repaired the equipment whose durability fell beforehand. And last but not least, he scrupulously checked his character information window.

"Stat window"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good+200	
Fame	1695	Level	95
Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of All, Jackson's Hero	
Health	1925	Mana	1520 (+100)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	232 (+ 5)

Agility	282 (+ 15)	Stamina	362
Wisdom	31	Intelligence	275
Luck	42	Flexibility	27
Art of Communication	23	Affection	55 (+ 10)
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics	83		

Equipment item effects

Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified. Cat Paws: Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10% Crystal Golem's Head: Mana + 100

Norad Boots: movement speed + 10%, avoidance rate + 5%

Adelaine's Necklace: Def + 40, Affection + 10

Resurrecting Spirit: Strength + 5, Mana Recovery + 5%

* All abilities will increase by 30% in the dark* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (15 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)* Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

After hunting the Kraken, his level increase by 2 to 95!

"Okay!"

Ark took a deep breath and pulled the lever.

Kkurururu, with a ponderous sound, the iron doors were pushed out and rose up.

At the same time, Ark's mouth opened absent-mindedly.

"What, what the?" This is the subterranean world? "

An incredible spectacle unfolded in front of him.

The place where Ark had entered was on top of a mountain of great height.

Mountain, yes, it was a mountain.

In Cairo, he had fallen through thousands of metres before hitting the ground. From there, he had descended tens of metres through the underground labyrinth until he had reached the iron doors.....yet there was a huge mountain of extravagant height.

“What on earth is going on?”

Ark looked around with a perplexed gaze.

At the base of the mountain, a dense forest and deep ravine stretched to the horizon. There was nothing different about the landscape compared to the Brandt Mountains.

“Jeez, did I make a mistake? Even the stars in the sky.....Ara? The stars are close.....? ”

Ark looked up at the sky puzzled.

The dark night sky was clear and there were numerous stars floating like jewels. But strangely, he felt as if he could stretch out his hands and catch the stars at any minute. No, it was not just a feeling. The stars were really not far away.

“Strange? Dedric, check it out”

“Ah, okay.”

Dedric flapped his wings and flew away. And after a few minutes, he grabbed a star.

“This is.....it’s not a star? Stones, shiny stones!”

“Shining stone? Then the shine from the ceiling was because of ores?”

“Yes, everywhere else is also covered with these stones.”

Ark’s mouth widened. There was no longer any room for doubt.

The ceiling was so thick that an ore mine had developed. It was clear that Ark had correctly found the Underground World. But there was another reason Ark was surprised. Ark had misunderstood the extravagant amount of ore as stars!

Low-grade ore could be used to produce various kinds of jewellery.

One finger-sized ore was worth approximately 20-40 silver.

‘But when it is a big ore like that.....!’

Ark swallowed his saliva and asked.

“De-Dedric. Is it possible to take it out?”

“Ugh, no. It is unbelievably hard. I can’t even move it.”

Of course, it doesn’t matter how hidden the area is if he couldn’t deplete it for jewellery. Even if Ark could fly with a pickaxe, he wouldn’t be able to remove the ore. It was a one-of-a-kind jewellery, but stuck to the landscape.

‘I have to walk past it even though it is such a huge chunk of money.....’

Ark stared at the ore with bloodshot eyes before eventually turning away. Walking away from the sight in the sky felt like digestive juices causing a sore stomach.

‘Anyway, this place is apparently the Underground World. If so, a fragment of the Three Marvels is hidden somewhere here. And there would also be the residents of the underground world, the beastmen. Guess I have to find them first.’

Ark checked his equipment again before heading down the slope. The area was underground and dark, but the ores embedded in the ceiling made it brighter than general dungeons. He continued heading down the steep slope to where the forest stretched out. When he entered, the forest immediately captured Ark’s gaze. In the forest, the trees and plants were something that he had never even seen outside. It was probably isolated from the world for a long time so a unique ecosystem developed. That is why fruits that

couldn't even be imagined were scattered around the rivers.

“Whoa! Look, master! The fruit thrown around!”

Dedric curiously tackled the strange fruit attached structure.

After he finished exploring the underground labyrinth, his stores of ingredients was running low. In addition, seeing an ingredient for the first time means that new dishes could be prepared.

Ark rushed to gather the fruit. However, as soon as it fell from the tree, a sound was heard and the fruit broke.

-Harvesting failed.

After many failed attempts, he had only managed to pick one fruit. And after ingredient identification failed twice, he finally managed to obtain information about the food.

[Bao Fruit (Food)The Bao Fruit is a special plant that only grows in the Underground World. Because the size is different and it is a very sensitive plant, advanced foraging skill is required. When picked, it can be used in a dish or as a magic ingredient and if it is dried and powdered then it can be used as a spice.]

His foraging and ingredient identification skills were intermediate level.

Even so, the fact that it was so difficult to pick meant that it was a high level ingredient. Indeed, after he managed to pick one, his skills rose by 1. Of course, some of his ingredients couldn't be used anymore because it became stale, to the extent that if he left ingredients lying around it would spoil.

The ingredient level would also mean higher food effects? Such ingredients were scattered around the area. Ouhahaha. It is a paradise for Survival Cooking!’

The fruit as a fruit, herb as an herb, poisonous plant as poisonous.....

Even if it was poisonous, Ark's style of cooking was to not throw any

ingredients away. Ark slowly gazed at the ingredients and crazily collected it. It was to the extent that he forgot the reason why he came to the Underground World in the first place. How far did he walk?

By the time his empty bags were filled with ingredients.....

A bush to the side began to shake and the sound of a person was audible.

Ark reflexively held his breath.

He had been in the underground world for 30 minutes. He would've been relieved at the sight of a common wolf. But there was no monster. Soon two monsters appeared in the bush behind him. It was the first time he had seen such a monster.

It was a cricket like monster with 2 legs that smashed the branches as it walked. And the monster was wound around its body like a plant was riding the cricket monster.

"Enemy? Eyes of the Cat"

After checking the information with Eyes of the Cat, Ark took a deep breath.

'Kanggeul? Level.....Huk, 150?'

"Aid! Kara! By the nose!"

When the monster riding it shouted, the Kanggeul attacked Ark. When a thorny branch hit him, he instantly lost 300 health. There was also a strong bleeding effect which made him lose more health.

'Oh my god, the first monster I encountered here was a level 150 monster!'

Ark's current level was 94. With his dark attribute bonus he reached level 120. However, no matter his ability or level Ark was a strong opponent. Especially if he used a pre-emptive strike.

Ark quickly judged the situation.

'The risk in this fight is too big.'

Even more than usual, Ark could not die here.

He hadn't updated the resurrection place yet. If he died, he would have no choice but to resurrect in the place where Andel was waiting.

Is such a risk worth fighting against a level 150 monster?

"Dedric, Skull. Emergency plan D. Buy some time while I run away!"

"Sheesh, master. Should I let it hit once?"

"Shut up! There is no time to be playing around."

Ark shouted and turned his body.

Then Dedric and Skull stood on both sides, blocking the Kanggeul. If there were two opponents, the use of plan D in this case meant at least an 80% chance of escaping. This was because monsters usually looked to the front to attack. But.....!

"Chic! Chic! Woo-ramba!"

The one riding Kanggeul had noticed him and grabbed wildly at the reins while shouting. And the cricket's body flew into the sky. And it flew 10 metres until it was in front of Ark.

A sharp spear rushed in front of him.

"Pant, what is this ...!"

Ark rolled to the floor to avoid damage from the spear.

"Master, this isn't our fault!"

"Shut up and move! The C-3! Do everything you can to stop this guy!"

Ark raised his voice angrily.

The mobility of the cricket Kanggeul was unthinkable.

He knew that crickets could jump up several times their height. With the trees and bushes in the way, it wouldn't be easy to escape this guy. But he still had his summons to even the odds.

‘Yes, the pets should take care of one opponent. I have no choice but to see the game through.’

Quick decision! A rapid assessment of the situation led to an action.

“Ok, let’s see where it is attached. That vine child will be begging! Snake, sword! No, the best cheap sword!”

Ark was looking for a cheap sword.

Due to Ark’s training, Snake could now determine the value of items and pulled out a battered sword. As soon as he caught the sword in his hand, he prepared to unbeatable skill.

“Blade Storm!”

The battered sword shattered to pieces and struck Kanggeul. However, Ark’s habit of thinking about profit or loss in a crisis only worsened the situation. The sword shattered into dozens of pieces at best. Each fragment only did 5 damage. The damage dealt by dozens of pieces could have been done with one Dark Blade. Blade storm used flashy special effects and took out a little bit of nature and struck Kanggeul for no reason.

-Critical Hit 500 damage! You are Bleeding and will receive 10 damage every 10 seconds for 1 minute.

For a short time after he used the skill, he was defenceless.

Ark received a critical hit and was in a bleeding state. Thanks to that, his health was quickly reduced by 40%.

“Eat this!

Profanities once again emerged from his chest after a long time. He swallowed tears of blood and pulled out a pretty decent sword. It was worth a surprising 1 gold!

“Batarat! The offensive of ten thousand won!”

It was like a stretched out scene where he realised that money was just as important in the game as it was in society.

Once money was involved, the special effects were different. When the sword shattered, it was with a loud boom and violent crack that spread out.

And a tornado like storm was raised and attacked Kanggeul.

A little while ago, Kanggeul had laughed at the same attack. But right now, it couldn't be compared. The power of a 1~2 thousand won attack and a ten thousand won attack couldn't be the same.

It was the power of cash!

A roaring sound was heard as Kanggeul's vitality was reduced by 40%. And there was a double critical chance as the cricket fell down and Ark moved quickly.

"Damn, what kind of money do you think I'm made of? Snakes, deadly poison!"

The sword glowed green from the poisonous effects as he used Dark Blade. The deadly poison damage was also added to the damage that occurred from ignoring the defense. Kanggeul stumbled back and hurriedly lifted a spear.

However, Ark's fury was terrifying. When he ran up with bloody tears, Kanggeul was astonished. And in his madness, he laid down a flurry of continuous attacks.

"Ma-Master! You're alive!"

Dedric and Skull were struggling behind him.

It was a daunting opponent for two summons that were only level 45. In addition to the cricket's mobility, if it wasn't for the combination with the enemy opponent then it might have defeated already.

Ark's eyes burned red.

"I'm going to get as much experience as I can!"

His ten thousand won anger was indeed terrifying.

Ark shrieked and ran at Kanggeul who was on the defensive. And

using the A-2 plan, which was a concentrated wave of attacks with his summons, the opponent was eventually in a critical condition.

“The grudge of money is scary!”

Ark swung his sword and made a finishing attack.

At the moment, Kanggeul shrieked and tried to escape into the sky by jumping over the trees.

“There! Dedric, stop it!”

“Okay!”

Dedric opened his wings and flew into the sky. But unlike what he thought, Kanggeul did not run away. Been on a thick branch River is an abrupt and say pause began bustling atmosphere. Kanggeul perched on a thick branch and started talking.

“Eric, I, Noraness!”

“Pant, Master!”

Dedric was astonished and stumbled back.

Crunch, wadeudeuk! Kwajak!

The forest moved. No, to be precise it was the wood.

A big tree several metres in diameter slowly rose up and was it approaching Ark? And in the darkness, a few strands of ivy whipped out.

He reflexively stopped it with his sword but his health was still decreased. At the same time, Ark’s face lost colour.

He stuck up his chin breathlessly. The monster that appeared before Ark was a giant tree. It was like the ancient spirits of the tree that occasionally appeared in fantasy movies.

But this monster appeared many times more terrible and threatening. Dozens of vines hung from the old tree trunk and swayed in every direction as it threatened Ark.

Plant Golem.....It was a monster that was a whopping level 250.

“It’s a fraud!”

It wasn’t even a boss monster but a general monster that was level 250?

‘Was it a mistake to come?’

Ark began to wonder if something was wrong.

It was a situation that anyone who played online games would have experienced. The experience where you adventure all over the place and then accidentally enter a high level area.

In that case, if the user meets an enemy with ridiculously high level and stats, they would be forced to turn tail and run or lie down and die. Of course, Ark often experienced this in other games. This was such a situation. Before he entered the Underground World, he had fought the level 100 skeletons in the underground labyrinth.

The slime was level 130 which suggests that it was an intermediate boss. But as soon as he entered the Underground World, he met a level 250 monster?

It was not an ordinary monster. It was the same degree of difficulty as a tentacle wielding monster!

“What the hell! I only came through the iron gates yet what is with this absurd level difference?”

Ark swore as he attacked the vines flying everywhere.

Even while he did this, his health which was at 20% declined and he fell into critical condition.

‘No! Even when my health was 100%, I wouldn’t be able to beat the Plant Golem!’

“Skull, Dedric. D-4 plan!”

“Damn you, I understand!”

At Ark’s order, his summons scattered in different directions. Dedric

and Skull would attract the monster's attention until Ark was out of the combat zoneIf possible, he had not wanted to use this strategy.

After Skull and Dedric overcame danger and attacked like in the plan, he turned tail and ran away. Then the Plant Golem shrieked and chased after the skull and bat.

Meanwhile under the adrenaline effect activated by his critical condition, Ark did his best to run away.

How much time had passed? Suddenly red light flashed and he received damage.

-Skull has been forcefully recalled to the Netherworld. You have received 50% of the Familiar's Health as damage.

Skull who wasn't agile was the first to be killed by the Plant Golem. And not even 1 minute later, Dedric was forcefully recalled as well. If he hadn't run away and drank a potion, he would have died from the damage. However, the situation was still worse. Because his pets had died faster than expected, his battle state still hadn't gone away.

'I can't afford to die so I just have to run away as much as possible.'

It was a mistake to pay attention to the money.

Fortunately, Kanggeul and the Golem still hadn't discovered Ark. However, with the cricket's mobility it was only a matter of time. There was no way to escape once he was noticed.

'Did I come here just to die?'

Ark was desperate as he heard Kanggeul behind him. As he turned his head to check, something tugged at his feet. At the same time, his body was pulled through the ground and it was dark.

"What, what the?"

"Shhh!"

Ark turned perplexed, when something stepped in front of him.

At the same time, he heard the voice of the cricket right above him. The footsteps of Kanggeul and the Plant Golem passed over his head a few times before eventually disappearing when they couldn't find Ark.

Ark let out a breath as the battle state disappeared. Then he heard a voice from behind him.

"You are a foreigner?"

"I.....eh? Your appearance.....perhaps are you....."

"Heheh, that's right. I'm a Beast"

In the dark, the chubby boy replied with a grin.

Yes, the boy was not an ordinary person.

He was a NPC that resembled a beast. However, his appearance was different from the Mermaid or Meow clan he had met previously.

The boy had dark circles around the eyes with a ringed belly that popped out. And swaying from his hips was a short round tail with stripes along it.

As soon as he saw it an animal popped into his head.

"Raccoon?"

Take control of the raccoons

“Right? Right? Foreigner?”

Ark gave an awkward smile and nodded. The raccoon boy excitedly beat the ground with his tail.

“I see! Wow I’ve never seen a foreigner before.”

Ark had also never seen a talking raccoon.

“But you.....?”

“I’m from a raccoon warrior clan, Popo”

Popo proudly replied. Well he looked more like a big, warm friendly mascot than a warrior, but Ark nodded anyway.

Raccoon clan.....Ark realised that they were the residents of the Underground World.

Needless to say, he had been very tense and imagined them as a violent group of Beasts. However, what he ultimately found was a chubby raccoon. He felt vaguely disappointed, even though one of his objectives was to find the Beast residents.

“I am Ark.”

“Eung, you’re called Ark.”

Popo nodded with an excited look.

“In fact, I really like the foreigners.”

“What? You’ve seen foreigners other than me?”

“No, never. But I speak to a lot of adults. The foreigners are not content to live in one place and travel around the continent fighting against a large number of monsters. It is really great! It sounds like a manly life! One day I want to live just like that. Unlike the other

adults in this place, I'm not going to hide down here my entire life."

Popo sounded like a countryman who wanted to visit Seoul.

"Arc-hyung too? Did you enter the Underground world to track down that tree monster?"

".....That could be a possibility."

"I knew it."

Ark roughly nodded. Of course, Ark's purpose was not only to fight monsters. The most important thing was to find the Three Marvels as well as a way outside. However, even if he told such an important thing to Popo, the little raccoon was unlikely to be much help.

'I must find the village of raccoons in order to collect information.'

So Ark thought that he would ask Popo to guide him to the village.

Popo struggled for a short time before nodding his head.

"Ok, I'll show you. But if other people catch you it could be dangerous."

"What? Why?"

"That.....I'll gradually tell you. Once you wear this."

Popo passed him clothes made of woven twigs.

It was a cloak with a hood and other similar forms of clothing.

When Ark wore the woven clothes, Popo immediately shoved grass into his lower back. With his face hidden by a hood and a plump stomach, at first glance he could be mistaken for a raccoon.

The disguised Ark followed Popo out of the cave. After 10 minutes had passed, Popo pointed in front of him and said.

"Here's our town"

It was a large underground space.

Enormous torches were placed in many areas around the cavern with NPCs crowded around it.

They were all beasts, with their appearance resembling a raccoon, therefore a raccoon clan.

The village of raccoons was rustic, unlike the mermaids who preferred flashy splendour.

Scattered around the rock walls were raccoon houses nestled in caves. Most of the caves were of considerable size however there were no colourful decorations.

On the other hand, the market was large enough to account for more than half of the village. There was a large range of workshops and shops line up on both sides of the market.

Ark remembered what he heard from the Meow Elder Hassan.

‘Which reminds me, didn’t the beasts of the Underground World have good craftsmanship? Where would he see the rest of it?’

Ark curiously glanced at items displayed in front of workshops.

Just like in Nodelesse, the items crafted by the raccoon clan were made of materials he had never seen before. The high performance design and craftsmanship was worthy of its name.

[Rainbow Rings (Magic)Item type: RingUser restriction: Level 70The ring with 7 of the most beautiful gems in the world inlaid.It’s even more special with the powers of the seven gems are amplified.
{Rock, Light, Flower, Water, Earth, Wind, Mind. Resistance to these 7 properties +10}Price: 2,400L]

[Sarita’s Boomerang (Magic)Weapon type: Throwing weaponDurability: 50/50Attack: 15~25Weight: 10User restriction: Level 100A giant bird that only lives in the underground world. The Sarita Boomerang was made from its bones. It is a throwing weapon that will return to the owner’s hand after dealing a blow against the enemy.A precise processing technique was used to hollow Sarita’s bones. When it flies through the wind, a sharp high frequency occurs. If you have low resistance, then there is a high

probability that the high frequency would cause Fear.

{If the level is lower than the users, there is 20% probability of causing Fear}

Price: 3,500L]

‘As expected, the prices are horrible.’

If you look at the experience of selling items in the hidden village, their performance was amazing. Just like the mermaid tribes, the village was also true to the raccoon family.

All of the properties of resistance in the ornaments were hard to even find in items outside. The same goes for throwing weapons. It was mainly warriors who used throwing weapons, but the supplies would eventually run out. However, Sarita’s Boomerang was a throwing weapon that you could infinitely use.

There were items that a magician or warrior would freak out about if they saw.

However, the price was far above the performance of the item. Just like the mermaid tribes, the raccoon clan who was cut off from the outside had their own form of currency. Right, LFor the first time, Ark spoke about the ores that he saw when he entered the Underground World.

“The raccoon clan would occasionally use ore that fell from the sky to obtain more money. The ore debris is a material that is used in many craftsmanship, so it is a necessity for the raccoon clan.”

It was Popo’s explanation.

‘3,500L.....Because it was between 20 ~40 silver for one ore. In terms of gold it was worth 700 to 1,400 gold!’

When converted to gold, it was a colossal price.

Even if Ark used all the money in his bag, it would only be possible to buy one of the expensive items. The shops selling food and ingredients were also the same thing, with high prices.

‘Damn, it is just like a pie in the sky.’

At that time, an idea came to Ark’s head.

‘That’s right. The mermaid tribe and raccoon clan were all Beast races that were cut off from the outside world. Then just like the mermaids, the raccoons won’t understand outside items either!’

Couldn’t he sell his japtem to the raccoons at an expensive price just like he did with the mermaids? To confirm his idea, Ark quickly pulled out some items from his bag and showed them to Popo. However, Popo’s reaction was not impressed.

“The efficiency of that item is zero. The raccoons will not take things like this. I have sharp eyes because we are the race of craftsmen after all. And we can go outside to obtain these things.”

A disappointing answer was returned.

Then Ark noticed something weird in Popo’s answer.

“Go outside? So there is a method to go outside from here?”

“Of course. The raccoon family has continued to live by trading with humans. However, when we go outside we obviously have to hide our identities before engaging in trade. So gold is also used, but the L currency is the only one that satisfies the raccoon clan so get rid of any idea of using gold. Or your true identity would be discovered.’

“No, no. It’s not thatI just want to ask if trade with the outside world is not hostile then why all the trouble. Why am I not allowed to be discovered as a foreigner?”

“That.....in the past, a problem occurred in Subarutalp.”

Popo hesitated for a while before he sighed and replied.

The raccoon clan said that Subarutalp was in the depths of the Underground World. The original Norse mythology states that the black elves live in the underground world.

Subarutalp was as big as the outside world. The raccoon world in Norse mythology contained the holy water, with Yggdrasil in the

centre dividing the the world into 10 villages, with each living peacefully.

“But then ‘he’ came and Yggdrasil changed.”

“He?”

Popo ground his teeth together and nodded.

“Yes, a human with red hair came here ten days ago.”

“A redheaded man!”

At the moment, Ark felt as though cold water had been poured on him.

The man with red hair. Using a group of thieves, he had stolen the Heartsoul Bead from Giran before heading to Cairo. Ark never imagined that he would head to the Underground World one step ahead. He couldn’t understand how he came to the Underground World and ran into a quest related NPC.

Ark had been the first person to discover the underground labyrinth and its contents. If the opponent was a NPC, then coming to the Underground World without leaving a trace wouldn’t be difficult.

‘Then the Heartsoul Bead is related to the Underground World?’

Everything was complicated and entwined.

If so, what is the purpose of the red man.....?

Popo’s following words were even more shocking.

“He said he was the Truthseeker.”

“What? Truthseeker?”

“Eung, the raccoon clan is not human but the Truthseeker was our friend. Any raccoon family would happily meet him. And according to an ancient vow, we guided the Truthseeker to Yggdrasil.”

“An ancient vow?”

“A long time ago, the adults of the raccoon clan made a vow with the

Hero Maban that when the hero returned to the Underground World, we would guide him to Yggdrasil to receive a test.”

“So? He got the test?”

Ark asked Popo who hastily shook his head.

“I don’t know. But not long after he left something terrible happened. A red light rose from where Yggdrasil was and our wooden statue of Yggdrasil started attacking us. And every raccoon clan was attacked by Yggdrasil..... It changed them into monsters that would attack their own people.”

“Monster?”

“Originally, there were no monsters living in Subarutalp.”

What does that means?

Ark looked doubtful before asking again.

“Then.....what about the monster that attacked me?”

At Ark’s question, Pope angrily snapped.

“That’s right, Yggdrasil caught a raccoon clan. The raccoon clan caught by Yggdrasil changed into a Kanggeul or a Plant Golem. And it started to attack villages at random. I also lived in the village with those guys.....”

‘Oh my god, was this the disaster Shannon was worried about?’

Now pieces of information were connected.

The man who stole the Heartsoul Bead from the Magic Institute of Giran would no doubt be the same red man. In other words, the Red man’s destination was not Cairo but the Underground World.

Shannon had warned that the Heartsoul Bead had an ominous power that could cause disasters. That’s right. The fact that Ark met monsters with such absurd levels was because of that.

Ark confirmed his idea with the quest information window.

[Quest has been updated. Find the Heartsoul Bead II= Find the Heartsoul Bead III **You have** tracked the trail of the Red Man to the Underground World. And you have obtained a clue about the Red Man from the inhabitants of the Underground World. Not long after the Red Man came to the Underground World, its patron Yggdrasil went on a crazy rampage. The Underground World which was once peaceful had become a dangerous place filled with monsters, with everyone in the Underground World suffering. No doubt this would be related to the Red Man who stole the Heartsoul Bead. You have to combine these clues and find the Heartsoul Bead. {Difficulty level: C+}]

Ark's jaw dropped after checking the information window.

The combination of all the clues for the Heartsoul Bead seemed to lead to Yggdrasil. And Yggdrasil was the culprit that threatened the Underground World by changing raccoon clans into monsters. Of course, there would be Kanggeul around level 150 and Plant Golems around level 250 roaming the place.

With Ark's current power he couldn't even head to Yggdrasil while taking them out.

Degree of difficulty C+! The difficulty for the Event Quest was C++, which was the highest level of difficulty that Ark had ever gotten.

Even if he could organize an attack, he didn't know if it would be possible with that level of difficulty.

'And besides this quest I also have to find the Three Marvels.'

He couldn't think. The raccoons had a vow with the Hero Maban that when the Truthseeker came, they would escort him to Yggdrasil to receive a test.

It is likely that Yggdrasil's test would give a fragment of the Three Marvels to the Truthseeker. Eventually the piece of the Three Marvels in the subterranean world should enter his hands.

'Damn, do I have to be an alternative to the Red Man?'

Anger welled up in Ark.

If it hadn't been for that fellow, it might have been easier for Ark to receive the Three Marvels. However, because he turned up with the Heartsoul Bead the difficulty level dramatically increased? Of course, he wouldn't have found the Underground World if it wasn't for that guy.....

'Anyway, now I can't complete the quest at this level.'

Ark sighed before he remembered something and asked.

"You said that you traded with humans? So, that's to say you can go outside? When this place became so dangerous, didn't you think to flee outside or ask for help from the humans?"

"The only path to the outside world is inside Yggdrasil."

Popo's answer made Ark despair.

For the time being he knew the location of the Underground World. And he had hoped for a lucky way to go outside. Ark had thought that he could go outside and raise his levels before coming back in.

However, if the path was associated with Yggdrasil didn't that mean he couldn't leave?

"The adults are all cowards!"

Then, all of a sudden Popo spoke in an incensed voice.

"The other villages have already been swallowed up by Yggdrasil. Together with thousands of kin. The raccoon village where I lived had also been abandoned. This is the only place left. Nevertheless, the adults are not willing to fight anyone. They blocked the entrance but I was able to stealthily dig a tunnel. Knowing this situation, it would eventually reach here too!"

The village that Popo had lived in was close to Yggdrasil. Because it was only a step away from Yggdrasil, Popo was the only raccoon remaining.

"But I'm different from the adults. I'm going to fight even if alone. Will Hyung as well? Because Hyung is different from the cowardly raccoon

adults and a brave foreigner! Will Hyung fight with me? Just like when you fought the Kanggeul earlier?”

Ark began to realise why Popo tried to show a good impression since they first met.

“Of course I have to fight. But.....”

Ark took a moment to answer.

Excitement showed in Popo as a raccoon was pushed to the left.

The raccoon clan suddenly staggered back as he grabbed his chest.

“Eh? What’s up with that? Ajusshi, are you okay?”

“Yuck, keuuuuk, kueaaaa!”

Popo stared with surprised as the other raccoon’s body starting spasming. After a while, vines sprang out from the body and completely covered it.

“Kanggeul!”

In an instant, a raccoon had changed into a monster.

The raccoon clans that had gathered in the market screamed and fled everywhere. Popo also stepped back with a scream. However, Kanggeul’s body wound dozens of stems around Popo and hoisted him up.

“Ah, Ark-hyung!”

“Holy shit!”

Ark pulled out his sword.

Boooom, Ark swung his sword like lightning at the vines. Then Ark changed his target to Kanggeul.

The vines poured out continuously. Ark quickly rotated his body for continuous kicks and damaged the vines.

“Grrrr, Kkago, Namiru!”

Kanggeul was stunned and retreated.

Kanggeul's level was 150, but it was only one opponent.

In addition, there were no crickets and no weapons. And unlike the vines of the Plant Golem, the attack and speed of Kanggeul was not intimidating.

'This opponent is not that difficult!'

Ark damaged a vine using Dark Blade before running forward and cornering it with kicks. After 5 minutes. Kanggeul fell into a critical condition and tried to retreat. However, Ark's movements were several times faster.

"Don't miss!"

Ark ran and threw his body forward.

And quickly followed with a double sidekick! He hit the back of the head with his foot and Kanggeul fell to the ground. At the same time, Ark swung his sword down to get a double critical chance, causing Kanggeul to lose all its health.

"Am-amazing!"

"He defeated Kanggeul all by himself!"

After he defeated Kanggeul, the raccoon clans gathered and buzzed around Ark who had shown incredible skill. However, the raccoon clan quickly withdrew, surprised.

"Foreigner!"

"How did a foreigner get here?"

In the wake of the shouting voices, Ark's oops was covered.

As a result of his fight with Kanggeul, the clothes made of twigs that Popo had given him were torn.

Ark didn't know what to do and wore an embarrassed expression as he was surrounded by a group of raccoons clad in leather armour.

They looked between Kanggeul and Ark with surprised eyes.

“That.....”

Without saying anything, the raccoon soldiers lifted up their spears.

“Don’t move! You’re under arrest!”

“Damn, let me go!”

“Do not move!”

“What did Ark-hyung do wrong?”

Popo swore and struggled.

At that time, an old raccoon on the opposite side angrily shouted.

“Be quiet!”

Popo flinched and looked down dejected.

‘I guess that old raccoon is the elder of this village.’

Ark looked around in silence.

Ark and Popo were dragged by the raccoon soldiers from the market to a large cave.

It seemed to be the Town Hall. Around 10 elderly raccoons were gathered inside the cave. Among them the oldest raccoon stared at Popo with angry eyes.

“I specifically told you that you weren’t to go out there.....not only did you disobey me but you also brought a human along? Do you know what you’ve done? This town could be in danger because of you!”

“Haeng!”

“Do you still not understand? Why Subarutalp changed? It is because they believed the human. That human brought disaster here! This guy will also do the same! ”

“Ark-hyung is different. He defeated Kanggeul!”

“Stupid! He is probably a friend of the Truthseeker called to betray us further. How can you believe everything this guy says? He managed to come here after it had been hidden for hundreds of years. It is clear that he has some other purpose. Everyone, immediately confine Popo and the human while we decide their punishment!”

“Yes, they need to be punished!”

The other raccoons shouted with their tails beating the ground.

“He is not the Truthseeker.”

It was then that Ark opened his mouth.

The eyes of the elders widened.

“What? What are you saying?”

“I’ll say it again. The red haired man isn’t the Truthseeker. He tricked all of you.”

“What do you know…….”

“How did you recognise the Truthseeker?”

Ark interrupted the elders.

“To become the Truthseeker, you must first kill the Black Bear Mouse and be acknowledged by the Meow, the descendants of Hero Maban. However, in the past hundreds of years only one person has been recognised as the Truthseeker by the Meow. And, of course the Truthseeker was not the man with red hair.”

“How do you happen to know this?”

“Of course I would know. For the past hundreds of year, I was the only Truthseeker recognised by the Meow.”

“Wha-What!”

The elders burst out with a surprised expression.

“Ah, Ark-hyung?”

Popo couldn't believe it and looked stupidly at Ark. He was not the only one. The raccoons gathered in the Town Hall looked at his other and muttered. However, it seemed that the elders couldn't believe as they shook their head.

"Unbelievable! Even if he isn't the Truthseeker you might be lying as well, how can we tell? Where is the evidence that you are the Truthseeker?"

"This is the evidence. Elders, could you examine this?"

Ark pulled out a small carved stone from his bag.

Elder narrowed their eyes and sat down while staring at the stone.

"St.....Star Fragment"

Yes. Ark had found one of the Three Marvels in the underwater world. It was a Star Fragment.

It was an item that was nearly impossible to get in his hands.

"Do you acknowledge it?"

Ark was confirmed as the elders nodded.

Then Popo pushed the soldiers as he shouted.

"Hyung! Ark-hyung is really the Truthseeker! Elder grandfather, see? Ark-hyung is the Truthseeker! A friend of the Beasts, he is the hero that inherited Hero Maban's will!"

"Is that so?"

The elders touched their foreheads with their hands as they blew out a sigh of relief. And looked at Ark with weary eyes as they muttered.

"We recognise that you are the Truthseeker. But that doesn't change anything. Obviously in the past we made a vow with Hero Maban. However, it is too late. Yggdrasil is already corrupted and we don't know if we can even survive, let alone fulfil the vow. Therefore we won't charge you with the crime of infiltrating the village without permission. But with Yggdrasil corrupted, you can't leave here.

Nothing has changed.”

“What are you saying? Don’t you understand? Ark-hyung is the Truthseeker! Now is the time that we must stand up and fight for Subarutalp to be peaceful again!”

“Shut up! We’re not children!”

The elders shouted at Popo who flinched and stepped back.

He wasn’t easily scared.

Popo couldn’t believe the elders and kept on shooting them looks as he said.

“The other villages are already gone. And no matter how much you hide, eventually you’ll be noticed. Elder grandfather knows it as well! Kanggeul showed up at the market. That means they’ve learnt how to come here.”

“Umm.....”

A heavy silence filled the Town Hall at Popo’s words.

So far, the raccoon clans in the surroundings muttered with low voices.

“ButThis situation started from Yggdrasil. Yggdrasil..... is our patron. If we fight Yggdrasil it would be impossible to win.”

“Besides Kanggeul and Plant Golem are also our own people..... we would be killing them too.....”

“Lies!”

Popo yelled wildly.

“Tell me honestly. You’re just too scared to fight. Cowards! So go ahead! Just continue hiding until Kanggeul and Plant Golem finds the town! But I’m different! I will fight even if I die!”

Popo pushed the raccoon soldiers and left the Town Hall.

“Why are you just standing there? What are you doing? Catch him!”

Two raccoon soldiers hurriedly chased after Popo.

Ark silently looked at the sight in front of him. He had wanted to intervene but had no idea how. But thanks to Popo he was able to understand the general situation. At the same time, he now knew what he had to do.

‘That’s right, it’s not only my problem!’

Ark realised that he had taken something for granted.

It was common sense that a quest was a structure only for the user.

However, there was no reason to think that.

‘New World is not an old RPG game.’

When considering the games in the olden days, it was really astonishing.

Those games often used the scenario of the Devil being resurrected at the end. If the Devil was resurrected then the world would end. Even so, he had met a number of NPCs in the game, even the NPCs that were formerly heroes couldn’t participate in the game directly.

‘What if?’

‘Please help me.’

But they would do absolutely nothing and just talk.

And it was natural for them to leave the fate of the world in the hero’s hands.

The NPC could actively move but not through artificial intelligence, instead the NPC’s behaviour was computed using a CPU that calculated its performance.

However, New World was the perfect game of the future. The game allowed infinite degrees of freedom for the user. And that degree of freedom was also relevant to the NPCs.

Of course, although it is not a user, the NPC could also think for itself and have the freedom to act. Just like when Jackson’s Lord

gave privileges to the ex-convicts on Ark's advice.

'This is the key to solve this quest.'

If the Underground World is destroyed, then that would also be bad for Ark. He would lose the three marvels and also the way to solve the quest.

But anyway, Ark was a user.

It was possible to look for other ways. But not for the raccoon clan. The raccoons think of the game as reality where they either live or die because of the destruction of the Underground World. It dampened their will to fight.

'If I try to do it alone, I won't be able to handle Yggdrasil. But it might be possible to win if I can incite the raccoon clans to fight together.'

Ark came to that conclusion.

He had already identified in Jackson that users could fight together with NPCs.

'Yes, for sure. This is the only solution.'

Ark looked at the atmosphere and slowly opened his mouth.

"To be honest I agree with Popo."

"What?"

"I've listened to Popo talk. The other towns in the Underground World have already been attacked and annihilated. And even if the subterranean world is wide, it is limited. No matter how much you hide you will eventually be found and when that happens, you'll be involved just like Popo said. "

"We know that. We also know there's no chance."

An elder said a nervous voice.

"Since we were born, we are a species that hasn't had to fight. Do you know why we live in the Underground World? In order to avoid

conflicts. We're just a race that knows how to make things."

"But"

"It is done. I don't want to talk about the problem."

No matter how many times Ark tried to talk to them, the elders did not want to hear it.

After all Ark had just entered the village of raccoons. In addition, their relations had been hostile until just now. Fortunately, the misunderstanding was resolved and the relationship wasn't hostile anymore however their intimacy was still low.

It would be impossible to incite the raccoons to fight with a few words. There was also the risk that intimacy would fall instead.

'Let's withdraw and find another method.'

"Ark-hyung....."

Popo approached from the side as he exited the Town Hall.

He had made a gesture to run away and hide around here.

"You see? Wasn't it like I said? The adults are all cowards. They make excuses but in the end they don't have the courage to fight the monsters, unlike a foreigner. But Hyung is different? The Truthseeker is the one that receives Hero Maban's will. Will you fight against the monsters?"

Tears were heard in Popo's suddenly young voice.

Ark looked at him in surprise as Popo wiped his eyes with his sleeve and said.

"They're dead. Dad, Mum.....everything.....I.....cannot remember anything.....I know. The village where I lived was the first to be attacked. Obviously my mum and dad are dead or they have become a Kanggeul. But I will never die like that. I will find the exact cause of the corruption and regain my village. Hyung.....will you help me?"

A feeble ache revived in Ark's chest.

He had forgotten.

Popo had lost his parents merely 10 days ago.

Why hadn't he noticed? NPCs are also alive.

At least that's what Ark thought. And who doesn't understand the grief of losing a parent?

Ark was like that as well. When he lost his father and his mother was hospitalized, Ark couldn't cry. He had forced down his grief but going on a nightlife spree. He was grieving, but he was so sad that he couldn't feel the grief at all.

Ark kneeled down beside Popo and stroked his head.

"Yes, I will help. But no matter how I try, it is impossible for with my strength alone. You actually know that don't you?"

Popo swallowed his tears and nodded.

"So I'll have to convince any raccoon clan. The adults will understand if I talk calmly. If that doesn't help.....then you and I will join forces and find a way. So just believe and trust in me for the time being."

"Thank you, Hyung."

Ark laughed and lightly patted Popo's body.

He also felt like a brother.

"Now, that we've said that....."

Once Ark calmed Popo down, they organized the situation in a deserted alley.

He easily spoke to Popo, but he actually thought it was hopeless.

The raccoons were different from the other beast species that he had met. By default, the Meow and Mermaid species were warriors.

In the same situation, even if Ark tried to stop them the Meow and

mermaids would raise their arms and go out.

However, the raccoons were craftsmen and were afraid to fight.

‘The most likely way to incite them is to raise my intimacy.....’

The problem was how to raise intimacy.

In the past, the mermaid species was completely isolated from the way so when he sold them some outside items, their intimacy quickly rose. However, even though the raccoons were isolated, there could secretly trade with humans on the outside world. He didn’t look at his japtm.

He also used survival cooking with the mermaid clan.

Tasty food was somewhat effective but unlike the mermaids, the raccoon clans were used to fire and would not freak out about it.

When they ate something once or twice then they would quickly tire of it.

The other way to raise intimacy with to complete quests. But it was impossible to receive a bunch of quests from the raccoons in this situation.

‘But what other methods could be used to raise intimacy.....’

Suddenly a brilliant idea popped into his head.

‘Only? What about food? The foodperhaps.....No, it is the only way. I have no choice but to try it, even if it is a hit or miss.’

Ark quickly took out his pot and placed ingredients in.

And he mixed up the ingredients to create new dishes. As always, one dish was barely a success after dozens of failures. Ark put the successful dish in a pouch for the time and immediately made a new dish.

He spent the whole day cooking.

Although he was dozing halfway through, his hands mechanically combined new ingredients. Suddenly, a loud sound battered his

eardrums.

Kwadang, delgureok, bugulbugul!

The half-asleep Ark quickly lifted his head. Inside the pot, a black liquid was bubbling like crazy.

“What, what the?” What’s up with that? Why is this?”

Ssak ssak ssak!

Then Snake flicked its tongue and licked the floor.

“Eek? Don’t tell me I just shoved in the pot.....? ”

Ark quickly woke up as he turned his head.

Next to him was a pile of ingredients and japtem intertwined. He had laid out the ingredients to make a dish. Apparently.....he thought only ingredients had been taken out. However, he had mixed in a few japtem in his sleep. And while he was dreaming, he had unknowingly put a few japtem into the pot.

“What the? What on earth did I put?”

Ark hurriedly opened his bag and checked the list of japtem.

All of the five weapons are there.....armour items as well.....other japtem also roughly correct but the number.....what did I put in? Eh? Which reminds meHuck, don’t tell me?’

Ark rummaged around and belatedly found what items were missing. The ‘Essence of shining slime’ that he had obtained from the Polluted Slimes in the underground labyrinth.

[Essence of Shining Slime (Ingredient)The Polluted Slime only exists in very special environments. Although the slime ecology is still unknown, only one in a thousand would produce these special crystals in their body. These crystals have a unique magic that would make Magicians and artisans drool over the expensive material item. You can use the essence of slime as a magic reagent or you can use it to create magic items.]

Although you couldn't tell from the explanation, but it would've been a large source of money for him.

Because he was unable to send it to Sid, he left it packed on one side of his bag.....only now he placed it in the pot while he was sleeping. It wasn't an ingredient but a general item! The result was so unstable it seemed like the pot was having stomach trouble.

"I can't believe I made this mistake while sleeping!"

'No, I don't know whether the essence of slime had completely melted yet.'

Ark picked up the pot. And just before he flipped it over! Suddenly there was a belch and thick smoke rings rose from the pot.

Ark flinched and looked down stupidly into the pot. The bubbling black liquid that was overflowing had just disappeared like a lie. And black lumps like jelly fell into the pot.

"Wha, What is this?"

Ark picked up the jello with a bewildered expression.

At the same time, a message window popped up.

[You have found a hidden Survival Cooking dish. In New World, there are monsters that have survived for a long time and built up a lot of experience. A monster with these attributes and experience sometimes forms an 'essence.' Essences are sometimes used as an advanced ingredient in the production of various general items, but it also has another hidden use. One of the uses is making a Survival Cooking dish with it. When combined with several herbs in survival cooking, the essence can be formed into a jelly dish. When mixing them with other unusual ingredients then jello with special properties can be made. An advanced survival cooking chef would be able to **instinctively** grab the materials required to make it.]

['Slime's Immortality Pill' Recipe Essence of Glowing Slime Jelly 1/1

Unicorn horns 0/1

Corrupted Fairy Wings 0/100

The roots of a Mandragora that has received moonlight 0/100

Tooth of a hook bat 0/100]

Ark looked at the information window with a stupid look. For a while he couldn't understand what had happened.

'A hidden survival cooking dish?'

It was a result from a mistake he made in his sleep.

The problem was that he hadn't determined if the result was good or not. Until the result was complete, he wouldn't have any information about the slime inner edge.

However, Ark's advantage was his optimistic personality. After he contemplated, Ark determined that it was a good thing.

'This means I can't get rid of the slime essence for the time being. And I'm tied. From unwritten game rules, it should provide a huge benefit in the game! And because the materials required to complete it seem fairly difficult, the result should be beyond my expectation. Uhehehe, Yes, that's right. It's obviously an extravagant prize!'

Ark placed the slime jelly in his bag and smirked.

Survival cooking was involuntarily learnt in the novice town, and he had learnt the skill with the idea that he could save money by using it to cook rice and eat cheaply, however the skill had more uses than that. It was fun to think of what other methods there could be later on.

It was a mistake that happened while he was asleep, but if the result was this sort of thing then it was welcome at any time.

He had discovered information that other people didn't know yet. It will soon be connected with huge profit.

'I would love to see the complete recipe now, but because the materials aren't things that you could just ask or look for, it can keep for the time being. Okay, it is a good atmosphere. Should I make an effort and cook more new dishes?'

Ark had an excited expression and immediately began to make a new dish. And finally 24 hours had passed and he could summon his pets again.

With a serious expression, Ark summoned Skull.

“Skull, are you prepared?”

Clack....Clack clack clack!

Skull moved back and forth as he made his resolution.

Then Ark started feeding Skull the dishes that he had made.

Skull fainted straight away with dark rings that looked like he struggled with over drinking on the docks. However, the food also had a positive effect and raised his ability. However, it wasn't what Ark was hoping for.

‘It's great to see, but this is not the effect that I wanted.’

Ark shook his head and made him eat another dish.

Eventually the food made of new combinations of ingredients had almost disappeared.

“This is it!”

Once again, the positive effect of the food raised Skull's stats. Thanks to that, Skull's stats were raised by 7 and he instantly reached level 47. However, that was not the reason that Ark had cheered at Skull. It was due to the additional effects of Skull eating cookies.

‘This is it! This one is the key to the quest!’

Ark created a bunch of cookies with delight. And he put it all in a leather pouch and headed towards the Town Hall.

“What is going on? If you have something to say about earlier.”

As soon as Ark entered, the elder welcomed him with a troubled expression. However, Ark had a friendly smile as he approached.

“No. I have a different request today. Sometimes I go out and come to think of it, I experienced a new situation when I was there. When I find a new place, the elders always offer me a glass of water. So today, I have prepared cookies to apologize for my previous mistakes.

“Cookie? There’s no need. Please leave.”

The elder said coldly. However, Ark didn’t listen and took out the leather pouch.

“Eh, why are you so shy? There’s no need between comrades. Just have a taste. I made elaborate cookies.”

Ark opened the leather pouch and a sweet scent drifted around the Town Hall.

The seductive scent was made using a large variety of different spices!

“If you think it is necessary? Hurry, and take it out!”

The elder made an effort to turn his head and look away. However, Ark was convinced that he had caught the elders in a trap. His nose was twitching and his tail swinging up and down without stopping.

‘Huhuhu, in the end he is still just a raccoon.’

They can’t hide their beastly instincts.

“Come, come! Stop what you’re doing for the time being and just eat.”

“Heh, that’s truenowhere else to be so yes”

The Elder couldn’t pretend and took one cookie.

Ark’s eyes flashed.

‘It took It took. A raccoon is snagged!’

That was Ark’s plan.

Once he ate one, the elder tried to shove as much as possible into

his mouths. The other elderly raccoons in the Town Hall also did the same. Although they had no interest in the cookies at first, they wanted to eat it after seeing him cramming a bunch in his mouth with both hands.

An elder exclaimed as he was buried in cookie powder.

“Yes, the cooking skill is amazing. In my lifetime, this is the first time I’ve tasted such delicious cookies. More, anymore?”

“Of course there is enough.”

‘Game over.’

Ark handled the leather pouch with an evil smile. Within a few minutes the leather pouch had been emptied and the elders had satisfied looks on their faces.

“Okay, it’s really brilliant. Are you going to make it again?”

“It’s now!”

Ark then exposed his true colours.

“Of course. But before that.....I’d like to talk about the earlier topic?”

“What we were talking about earlier?”

“Yes, I’ve been thinking about it. I also think that the elders’ idea is a bit wrong. Of course I understand your view. After a lifetime of making things, of course you’re going to be afraid to fight monsters.”

“I am afraid? You mean someone else!”

The elders shook the table and shouted.

“There’s nothing to be afraid of, it’s just a little monster. Our talent isn’t just making things. Instead, we can arm ourselves with excellent armour and weapons. When mobilized, we can deal with any number of creatures.”

“Yeah!”

The other elderly raccoons also beat their tails on the ground as they shouted in unison. He fixed an expression on his face that seemed like he couldn't understand anything and muttered.

"Then why are we hiding in a place like this?"

"That's right. Why the hell would we think that the monsters are scary."

"Our patron Yggdrasil turned evil because of a curse. Isn't now the time that we should get up?"

"Yes, the time has revealed itself. Arm the residents immediately, we must release Yggdrasil from its curse. It is not the time to be hiding."

He noticed that the attitudes of the raccoons had undergone a 180 degree change.

'The effect of the medicine was accepted.'

A satisfied smile appeared at the corners of Ark's mouth.

The reason why they changed was because of the cookies Ark had fed them.

The raccoons couldn't fight because they didn't have enough courage. Because they knew that the monsters would eventually reach the village, they couldn't bring themselves to fight. That's when Ark thought about one of his ingredients.

The Nurunma leaves that he found in the thieves' lair.

The Nurunma leaf was a drug, but a long time ago it was also used to stimulate warriors. Therefore, if he cooked the Nurunma leaves it might have the same effect. With that crazy thought, Ark combined a variety of ingredients with the Nurunma leaves to create new dishes. Then he used Skull to confirm that it was the food that he wanted.

[The Warrior's CookiesThe Nurunma leaves are the main ingredients in this cookie. If a person without excitement eats the cookie, they will feel a desire to fight. Also they won't lose their fighting spirit even if they are injured. The excitement gradually decreases with every battle the person enters. However, when the effect

disappears, the subject will be in a weakened state for a long period of time due to withdrawal effects.{Fraud +100, In battle it decreases by 1 every 2 minutes}{However when the effect disappears, for 4 hours resistance -50%, which is recovered when eating a cookie.}]

Thanks to that, the elders' morale was raised and once the taste goes away they would blame it on drugs.

"Come on, let's quickly prepare the residents for action."

"Then I'll gather all the inhabitants."

Ark left the town hall and conveyed the gathering orders to the residents. Of course, he didn't forget to distribute a bag of cookies as a gift.

The raccoons took the cookies without any suspicion. And soon became racoons that were addicted to the stimulant.

Therefore, the situation was easily solved.

".....Therefore, we should take back Subarutalp with our own hands! Come on, get up. Kinsmen arise!"

"Ooh oh oh oh!"

The elder's speech delivered the taste to the crowd. The crowd of 300 raccoons gave a shout of joy and aligned themselves with the taste. And started war preparations at an absurd speed.

Popo looked at Ark with a strange expression.

"Ah, Ark-hyung. How on earth....."

"Sincerity is said to be a way to connect with people."

Ark grinned and stroked Popo's head.

Ark continued smiling wickedly at the steady progress. However, this degree of wickedness was only the tip of the iceberg. When they finished the war preparations, the elders and residents flocked to Ark.

“However you. Is it possible for you to make more cookies?”

I feel like eating a cookie for some reason.”

“Oh, you mean this? Well, there is still an excess.....”

Ark shook the bag containing the cookies before taking one out. Then the raccoons forgot and followed the cookie with the eyes and mouth drooling. He shook it lightly for the poisonous effect to activate. Then Ark put it back in the bag and said.

“By the way. Before I do, isn’t there a problem to be addressed?”

“What, what is it?”

“Once the troops are gatheredyou’re not going to just randomly and recklessly attack the monsters are you? Doesn’t someone have to command the troops? I’d say I have the experience necessary to lead the troops.”

“Oh, that? Then I’ll leave commanding to you.”

As if it was troublesome, the Elder transferred the command immediately.

This is why drugs are horrible. Once you are addicted you could even sell your daughter for drugs. Of course, it wasn’t so much the cookies that were addictive. But anyway, the only person with combat experience was Ark. Even if he thought about it calmly, the right person to be commander was Ark.

Ark was satisfied as he grinned and nodded.

“I understand. Although I am insufficient, I will lead the raccoon clans.

“Yes, yes, so a cookie

“It is 1L for a bag.”

“What? One bag costs money?”

“Oh, it’s because I don’t have that many ingredients. This means that I can’t make it indefinitely. And now I can only create one bag at

a time. But if the elder doesn't want to buy this then I will be forced to sell it to someone else."

"Ah, no! 1L did you say? Here it is."

The surprised elder pulled out an ore and calculated quickly.

The number of Nurunma leaves used to make a bag of Warrior's cookies was one. He also used other ingredients and spices but those were readily available in the raccoon village. In the end, the actual cost of the ingredients was one Nurunma leaf. Ark calculated that it was approximately 10 silver for one leaf.

By selling the cookies for 1L, the ore was worth at least 20 silver which meant that his profits would double.

After all, it was a drug. No matter how lawless the city, he was worried about finding a proper place to sell it. But now additional money was received so it was a windfall!

All this because he mixed a drug's effect into a cookie!

Of course, more addictive cookies would raise the price from now on. However, when it came to money it couldn't be sold recklessly. Ark only prepared 1,600 Nurunma leaves. He had to steadily supply 300 raccoons while they were fighting.

Sort of.....it was possible to call him a clever demon.

'Huhuhu whenever I see Nurunma leaves, I can just smell money drifting off them.

Ark smiled with satisfaction as a new information window showed up.

[You used excellent communication and clever tricks to discover the 'Lore' quest.

The Lore quest exists in several areas in New World.If it isn't possible to receive a quest in the normal way, a Lore quest occurs when special conditions are satisfied. The quest rewards given for Lore quests are different from those given for general quests, as it is an important key to understanding the legends and history of New

World. However, if unsuccessful you may be subject to a substantial penalty.

{Wisdom + 10, Art of Communication + 10}

[Reclaim the peace in the Underground World!]

After a lot of trouble you have finally entered Subarutalp, a world hidden in the depths of the earth. However, the Underground World wasn't a peaceful place like you imagined. Currently, the Underground World and its residents the raccoons are on the verge of annihilation. As the Truthseeker, you are obliged to help the Beast residents. Fortunately, you managed to convince them to put in an effort and reclaim the peace of the Underground World together. You must lead a group of raccoons to Yggdrasil to get rid of its curse and bring back peace to the Underground World. You will also find the Three Marvels that you are searching for once you deal with the curse on Yggdrasil.

{Difficulty: ☆ ☆ ☆ Quest is limited to: Dark Walker}

"As expected, the correct answer was to persuade the raccoons."

Ark checked the quest information related to the Three Marvels and was convinced that his choice was right. In the end, the goal was the same but he had to look for the Heartsoul Bead as well as the Three Marvels.

Of course these two objectives were registered as different quests.

"But a Lore Quest? Is the degree of difficulty special? What the hell does it mean?"

While Ark was thinking, an elder had studied his face and asked.

"So what should we do?"

"For the time being....."

Ark replied with a wide grin.

"It has to be training."

In the afternoon of the same day, Ark gathered 300 raccoons together to commence training.

The Warrior's cookie was limited. If he wanted them to battle without losing moral, there was no time to waste. However when he gathered the raccoons together, a sigh naturally flowed out.

The Kanggeul was level 150, but the average level for a raccoon was level 70. In addition, they had never been in battle before and didn't even know how to hold their weapons properly. But Ark soon shook his head.

'It's not. The most important thing is not the individual's level but group combat. How quickly and accurately the commander can lead them is the key.'

He had already experienced the importance of commanders in Jackson. First, he had to arrange the army regulations and then show that the ability of the commander was 100%.

Therefore, Ark dealt with them severely from the first day.

"There, the raccoon that was gossiping come out!"

Ark pointed to one of the foot soldier raccoons.

And after he made a horrible soup medley, fed him the awful food.

Ark who was in command also switched the cookies sold to a distribution system. Because there were limited resources, he must appropriately manage the quantity dispensed. Thanks to that the raccoons were always struggling with cookies. Ark was holding the cookies, so of course there wouldn't be any raccoons that would disobey him. Also soldiers who performed well would have the right to buy more cookies. Ark introduced a reward and punishment system that a raccoon would feign death at Ark's words.

A perfect dictatorship was born.

Ark seized the raccoons and separated them into branches of service based on their quality. The elders had said that the raccoon species didn't understand battle at all but Ark soon shook off that

notion. Of course, there was no battle related skill for the raccoons. However, he was able to take advantage of the NPCs by applying the characteristics of craftsmen to battle. When the father of all the races created the species, they had something in mind. It goes without saying that equipment plays an important role in battle. In particular, Ark paid attention to the portable artillery weapons. The cannon had a slow charging speed but its range and power far exceeded that of an arrow. An additional bonus was also applied when used against a large monster, which increased the offensive power by 10 times. The problem was the price of the bullet for the cannon as it was 1L or 20 silver. However, Ark didn't care. Anyway, the military funding came from the pockets of the raccoons.

‘Until now, I couldn't have such weapons.....’

If he thought about the outside then he wasn't motivated.

Anyway, the raccoon clan that produced weapons and armour all boasted considerable abilities. Unfortunately, the ingredient supply wasn't satisfactory because they had been hiding. Therefore, they couldn't produce a significant number of equipment items.

‘I guess I have to divide the branches of service based on the equipment available.’

“OK, from now on I'm going to divide the branches of service. The first group will be lieutenants.”

Ark pointed towards the group of raccoons that had a higher level and stamina. And ordered them to be given the best armour and weapons. That number was approximately 120.

The 2nd group was chosen based on their high agility. They were given armour with high defense and artillery. And the 3rd and last group was the rear support engineers who took exclusive responsibility for cave destruction using the raccoon only racial skill.

‘Wasn't it quite fascinating to equip NPCs with items?’

The elder raccoon NPC supplied a war chest that was quite generous. It was public money that Ark couldn't take because who knew when he would have to buy an item necessary for battle.

So the raccoons were clearly divided. Without sleeping, Ark began to train the raccoons in the different divisions. As practice gradually continued, the raccoons rushed back and forth as they followed the training system. After 6 days had passed in game time and it was the second day in reality, practice finally finished. Ark gathered the soldiers around him and began to speak.

“Everyone had suffered. Maybe there would be some who said bad things about me. However, the trouble hasn’t left. Hopefully you guys remember this as we head to Yggdrasil to rescue your kinsmen and regain peace. In addition, it is common sense that training harder would reduce casualties in battle. It is my duty to ensure that you are ready for it, even if I had to push you.”

It was sincere. There was no chance of doing this quest twice.

If the raccoon troops were wiped out then his quest for the Heartsoul Bead and the Three Marvels would fail. He had to achieve his goal even if it meant using the raccoon troops.

“Now, the serious training has ended. The only thing left is to reclaim the peace of Subarutalp with our own hands. For the sake of the raccoon clans!”

“Ah Ah Ah!”

For the sake of the raccoon clans!”

The simple raccoons fell for his scam and cheered hundreds of times.

Now that all the preparation was done. The only thing left was to march forward! Just as Ark was about to pass on the marching orders.

Diririri. Diririri.

A familiar sound was heard in the distance. He wasn’t hearing it from New World. He heard his phone ring tone from outside the game unit.

‘What the? Who would call me at this time?’

In reality, it was past 12 in the evening.

Among the people he knew, none would call at this time. Ark was going to ignore it but he needed to feel relaxed to play so he unplugged the connection.

“Wait a moment!”

The eager raccoon troops were left scratching their heads awkwardly as he left.

Rehabilitation stage

“Hyun-Woo?”

A familiar voice was heard in the receiver.

“Eh? Uncle Gwon Hwa-rang?”

“Yes, it’s me.”

“Did something happen? Why are you calling at this hour?”

“I’m near Cairo.....”

“Yes?”

For a while, Hyun-woo couldn’t understand Gwon Hwa-rang’s words.

He had been called just as he was about to fight alongside the raccoons and all his thoughts were focused on that.

Therefore he had forgotten about the appointment he made with Gwon Hwa-rang a couple of days ago.

“We were supposed to meet in Cairo.”

“Yes? Ah, ahI did. I mean, I was there for a while.”

“Tsk, young fellow.”

“You didn’t get in touch with me for a while so I forgot.”

5 days had passed since Hyun-woo met the ex-convicts. 5 days was a fortnight in the game. Even if they travelled in a straight line from Jackson to Cairo, it would still take some time.

“Hey, you don’t say.”

Gwon Hwa-rang sighed and explained the situation.

In fact, when Hyun-woo had stopped by Gwon Hwa-rang’s house.

Gwon Hwa-rang and the other probationary members had already been heading towards the capital.

To time, only 4 of them went to meet Hyun-woo in Cairo.

However, there was a problem that they hadn't considered.

At that time, the average level of the rehabilitation members was at best 35. However the stretch of forest before Cairo produced a lot of level 100 monsters.

They didn't know anything and just entered the forest where they were smashed.

"Oh, Yes. I had not thought to warn you.

Of course, if you go the roundabout way, even for a level 35 there shouldn't be that much difficulty.

Because a lot of low-level players also came to Cairo. However the ex-convicts who had obtained the location of Cairo from Ark, just moved straight forward in ignorance.

"What do we do? The hyungs are sorry."

"I'm sorry took any dead?"

Gwon Hwa-rang chuckled. The rehabilitation members aren't trying to live through the game like Ark was.

People were playing it purely to enjoy the game. But to Gwon Hwa-rang who was caught up in the game because it made him feel free, inwardly it was quite frustrating.

All of a sudden monsters had appeared in the jungle and it was so dense it seemed like a new world.

They were high level monsters but the rehabilitation members just cheered.

'I also wanted to see the Amazon so this is like my dream being achieved.

'No, this is Jurassic Park.'

‘I never thought I could see dinosaurs directly. This is a hundred times more fun!’

But although they cheered, their abilities were not enough to get through the jungle.

In the end, at Gwon Hwa-rang’s request, the rest of the ex-convicts joined them. And invaded the jungle while attacking like crazy.

If it was any other party, they would have quickly given up on hunting in the jungle early on.

But the rehabilitation members didn’t care, no matter how strong the opponent was. No, instead the stronger the opponent was, the more the desire to knock it down burned inside them.

Roco also joined the attack.

When Roco left for her part time job they would set up camps and wait until she returned to continue hunting, and after this repeated for four days they finally arrived near Cairo.

“Kukuku, now I.....when I killed the Allosaurus I received a lot of bonus experience. Thanks to that, I went crazy for a few days. Besides, after I helped rescue the Migu Migu clan I received a bunch of strange items.”

Gwon Hwa-rang told his story with a proud voice.

Like most people playing the game.

Gwon Hwa-rang now seemed like a fully-fledged gamer.

Even though he crossed the same jungle as them, their game experience was different.

Although Ark was higher level than them, with Sid there were only two people so he didn’t dare touch the intermediate boss monster, Allosaurus

But the number of people in their group was 12.

Also recovery was possible because they had Roco and the passionate will to fight was flowing in every one of them.

The Allosaurus was a monster that was blocking the way into the wilderness that consisted of fallen trees and wheat.

Although Hyun-woo also met the Migu Migu, they didn't give him any quests.

'Is the quest only given to parties with a certain number of players?

In New World, the quest scenarios always changed depending on the time and situation. Therefore, he listened with interest to Gwon Hwa-rang's story even though he had crossed the same area.

"By the way....."

Hyun-woo who had listened for a while spoke in a pained voice.

"Actually, I can't go and meet Uncle at the moment."

"Huh? What do you mean? Did you already go to a different area?"

"That's not.....there are circumstances where I can't go outside to meet you."

"Hum, I don't know what's going on but it seems a bit difficult. The guys were so excited to see you they were cheering like little kids.....in the game it's been a long time since we've met. Well, if that is the situation then there's nothing we can do. So how long should we wait? "

"But it is possible to give you the food immediately."

"What? How?"

"Please wait outside Cairo for the moment."

"Outside?"

"Yes. When you reach Cairo you'll understand. Cairo is only for chaotic players. So if you are interested just wait outside and I'll give you the food through somebody I know. He is a hobbit merchant named Sid. And did you collect a lot of japtem in the jungle? He'll also organize and sell it for you."

"Okay, I understand." Then tell him to meet me at the bear rock near

Cairo.

“Yes.”

Hyun-woo hung up and connected to New World again.

Bang!

“What the?”

Flames blew from someone’s mouth as they slammed the table. He was sitting in front of the hobbit who freaked out and hunched his shoulder.

The scene seemed like the little suspect was being questioned by detectives in an interrogation room. It was reasonable.

The one who had yelled was the former detective, Justiceman.

And the hobbit sitting in front of the group was none other than Sid.

“Is that the reason why Ark couldn’t come and meet us?”

“Tru, it is true.....”

Sid restlessly said. Then the rehabilitation members lined up against the wall growled.

“This is the real issue isn’t it?”

“This, after a long time this really got me fired up.”

“How dare they touch our dongsaeng?”

“That organization will be forced to taste bitterness.”

‘Uhh, what on earth? Ark-nim being who he is, how does he even know these people?’

Sid turned pale as more threats emerged.

Those who played the game would feel a certain sense of realism.

Interestingly, if you look at a character’s alignment it would seem like you were looking at their real natures.

Should he point that out? But a conversation would interrupt the subtle mood in the room.

Judging from Sid's experience, the rehabilitation members weren't 'ordinary' people. Furthermore, he could tell that there was offensive power just from the impression of their faces.

At the same time, the impression they gave caused Sid's heart to beat so fast it felt like it would burst out of his chest.

Sid had a worried expression.

Even Lorenzo who was a delinquent avoided the eyes of the ex-convicts and pretended ignorance. The violent atmosphere of the rehabilitation company reached such an extent that he shrunk and retreated to the NPC.

That.....it was because it was Ark that Justiceman that the rehabilitation company got so angry.

A little while ago, the atmosphere was okay at Bear Rock. Justiceman and the ex-convicts had a good impression of Sid because of his cute looks, and it was a relief for Sid who had been hiding a while to meet reliable users.

However, after he confessed the whole story about Ark and Andel, the atmosphere went through a 180 degree change.

Anger welled inside Justiceman and the ex-convicts until they were spewing out profanities.

"I know Andel. He was the one that was hit by Alan."

JusticeMan growled in a low voice.

"I knew that he didn't get along with Ark....."

"But defending the Quartermaster so Ark can't revive is going too far. Why the hell would he do such a thing?"

Roco also muttered in an angry voice. Although Ark thought number 1405 was the most calm, he was actually the violent former boss of an organization.....Bul-kkun clenched his fist as he asked what

was known.

“There’s no water. Because he’s a bad guy.”

The rehabilitation members were simple. It wasn’t a matter of learning more. Violence was a key part of the world for them. The distinction between good and evil was clear in their world. The inner circumstances were irrelevant. If someone bothered them, they were a bad guy.

It was a clear and simple way of thinking. Justiceman and the rehabilitation group were generous to villains.

However, to the fellows who touched their side there would be no forgiveness. The police were also committed to that idea.

“Hyung-nim, do you know?”

Number 1401 looked at the others with serious eyes. Number 1401 was a former con artist in the rehabilitation group called Jjak-tung.

“It’s not an issue that we can let him get away with.

“Um.....”

JusticeMan nodded with a serious face.

Justiceman, Roco and the rehabilitation members knew about Ark’s situation. Ark was not simply playing the game for enjoyment. He joined the test for Global Exos to find a way to live.

For Ark, the costs of living expenses and hospital bills came from New World.

Yes for them it was a simple game but for Ark, New World was reality.

In fact Justiceman, Roco and the other members previously wanted to play the game with Ark. However, Ark had a distinct purpose. However they were unable to bring it up, and now this fellow came along and bothered Ark?

“Ark. He didn’t say anything when I called.....”

“Well he probably didn’t want to worry us too much.”

He wilfully pretended not to know.

They were mistaken. In fact, Ark had completely forgotten about Andel.

His memories were of the ☆ ☆ ☆ and + C quests from the Underground World.

He poured all his spirit into training the raccoon clan.

The training occurred for 5 days and thanks to this he had already forgotten that Andel was waiting for him at the Quartermaster. Sort of.....when looked at from someone else’s point of view, Andel seemed more pathetic.

However, the rehabilitation group didn’t know that fact.

“Kuk, Ark is also human.”

“When he acts like that, I feel like I want to help him even more.”

“Naturally. When it is like this, we should help out?”

“Oppa, I will also help!”

“Heh, when the Prince is in a crisis, even the Princess helps out.”

“Let go, let go!”

A rehabilitation member had grabbed Roco in a headlock while she kicked him.

“It’s not that simple. Do we know why Ark didn’t talk to us?”

“He didn’t want to trouble us.....”

“So, there might be a reason why he didn’t want worry us.”

“Eh?”

They asked again absentmindedly. At that time, JusticeMan folded his arm and said.

“Jjak-tung is correct. Hey, former hoodlum.”

“Yes? Yes? Me?”

Lorenzo was surprised suddenly and replied.

“Would you say that Ark had a hard time when he fought against those guys?”

“Yes, the Dark Brothers’ profession is assassinating foreigners. Even 1 of them was too much for Hyung-nim to handle.”

JusticeMan nodded and said.

“It is like that. Jjak-tung, you saw Ark fighting in the Event Quest, so you would understand that he’s not an ordinary guy. Our levels aren’t even a comparison. But if he had trouble with one assassin then their levels must be equivalent to his. Even the user is sticking to those three. Do you understand?”

“Ark determined that we wouldn’t be able to win. But after listening to Lorenzo’s words, we actually do stand a chance.

In the jungle Justiceman, Roco and the rehabilitation group had significantly raised their levels.

They had fought through a dense jungle against monsters over level 100, so it was a natural result.

Thanks to that, Justiceman had long since surpassed level 60, while others had reached level 60 a few days ago.

Recovery was also possible as Roco was level 40.....It was a party of 12 with formidable power.

However, their opponents were three assassins level 120.

“In the words of Jjak-tung. In reality we would unconditionally win. But this is a game. It is hard to win with such a huge level difference.

Our offensive power and defense is too different.

The level difference between us and Ark who fought the assassin 1 on 1 is approximately 2 times as big.

If it was just one or two of us, we wouldn't stand a chance against the four guys including Andel."

JusticeMan was now a gamer.

JusticeMan pushed down his past definition of unconditional evil, and now understood the difference between ability and level in the game.

If it was just skills, JusticeMan was confident that no one could push him. But in the game if a level 10 attacked a level 100 with a sword, he wouldn't even do any damage.

On the other hand, if the level 100 attacked then the level 10 would certainly die. It was an impossible match.

The only way for a low-level to win against a high-level was to have overwhelming numbers.

However with 14 against 4, it couldn't really be called overwhelming numbers.

"If we die here, then we'll just be giving Ark more baggage."

"If it continues like this, he might end up saying why?"

"We have to look for a way."

JusticeMan thought for a while before he looked at Sid and asked.

"Sid?"

"Yes."

"What was he doing before Ark encountered those guys?"

"That....."

Sid looked at Lorenzo and spoke about the former circumstances.

The General Store owner's quest which involved Lorenzo. After they heard the quest contents, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members had warm smiles on their faces.

"That guy Ark.....he was doing such quests?"

The ends of Justiceman's mouth rose.

JusticeMan was a former detective and had seen that situation many times.

The former hoodlum couldn't escape the demands of the organization and would become a criminal again.....

Thanks to the sense of realism, JusticeMan easily accepted Lorenzo's situation.

The rehabilitation members who had experience the situation directly didn't speak.

However, they accepted Lorenzo like he was one of them.

"Lorenzo, I guess your mind was troubled as well."

"Yes? No.....just....."

"By the way, Ark also....."

If a pretty guy does something good, the law looks prettier.

Although it was a quest in the game, the fact that he was trying to help Lorenzo wash his hands of the organization only made the rehabilitation group's respect for Ark grow even more.

Then after Jjak-tung considered something for a while, he opened his mouth and began to talk.

"Hyung-nim, there may be a way."

"What?"

"Ark's work was urgent, but isn't it possible to do something for Lorenzo?"

"Hum, yes. That is what we need to do."

"Then how about finishing the two things together?"

Jjak-tung spoke to JusticeMan about something secretly.

Then liveliness entered Justiceman's eyes.

“Ohu, that sounds good! Hey, Sid? Ark’s quest, can we also do it?”

“Yes? Then.....Please invite me to the party.”

After Sid joined JusticeMan’s party, he fiddled with the system window. And after a while, the quest information window flashed in front of JusticeMan.

-Sid-nim’s party has requested to share the ongoing quest <Clear Lorenzo’s name>. If you allow it you will share the reward but if the quest fails then you will receive a penalty. Are you sure that you want to share?

“Oh, fortunately it is a quest that is able to be shared.”

“It is decided so let’s complete it immediately.”

“What do you say?”

The rehabilitation members all replied to the question with decisive voices.

“Rehabilitation!”

“Yes?”

“Lorenzo you might get annoyed with those guys. But in the end, they are your hyungs so you should listen to their commands. We have to do everything we can to help someone change his heart just like Lorenzo. We were also given such a chance. Therefore, I am going to rehabilitate them. And make them join the side of justice.”

JusticeMan smiled and said.

“Of course once they joined the side of justice, they would have to prove themselves. For example, catching an assassin without shedding blood.....”

It was the plan that Jjak-tung suggested.

Despite their numbers, the people that bullied Lorenzo didn’t have a level higher than 60. The first hooligans would be lured in and forced to change sides. Then, the numbers of the rehabilitation group would

double by 2.

14 against 4 would become 28 against 4.

Even if there was a large level difference, if they had 7 times the number then it was enough to try!

“Very good”

“Now it’s time to do the right thing.”

New World was a part of the rehabilitation program for the ex-convicts.

Their social adaptation program was justice!

At last, they hit their goal for the quest.

“7 people are headed to the appointed place.

Lorenzo said in a low voice.

JusticeMan nodded and looked at the old building.

“Ok, approximately 10 people remain in the hideaway.”

After they came up with the plan in the cabin, JusticeMan entered Cairo using the [Lie] scroll.

JusticeMan acted for the group. When he was a detective in South Korea, Justiceman was used to jumping into a group of armed criminals under orders from above.

Of course, every criminal was too scared to relax in their own homes.....at least JusticeMan lived like that.

But that did not mean that JusticeMan never relaxed his body.

No matter how outstanding his skills, no superman was invincible.

In addition, sometimes detectives spent years battling gangs in the field.

It didn’t matter if he was alone.

He also had a responsibility to command other first line officers.

Because of him, the south piled up tactical knowledge, he was also a part of a special task unit that looked for countermeasures for terrorism and also served as a training instructor in South America, where it just built on his legend.

And the hero of that legend used his ability in the game.

‘The gangsters in the hideout are level 60-70.’

On the other hand, the average level of the rehabilitation members was late 50s.

If the difference between users was 10 levels, the chances were slim. However, if the opponents were NPC then it was likely that JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members would win.

‘The problem is how many of these guys there are.’

The number of hooligans was around 17-20 people.

On the other hand, including JusticeMan, Roco, Lorenzo and Sid, the rehabilitation side only had 14 people. There was a 10 level difference plus they were outnumbered so it was difficult.

Furthermore, JusticeMan’s objective was not just to win. He wanted to subdue them without killing, in order to rehabilitate them. And needless to say, the difficult thing was capturing rather than killing.

‘There is no way to increase our numbers. If it is like that, there is one method. I’m going to reduce the numbers of those guys.’

That was the conclusion JusticeMan reached.

“The purpose of these guys is to force Lorenzo back into the gang. The others might not understand, but they would have no choice but to move if Lorenzo called them.”

A few minutes later, Lorenzo’s letter arrived at the hideout.

I will return to the organization.

But before that, there is a problem so please meet me at the cabin.

And not long after, 7 gangsters headed towards the appointment place. Those remaining inside were just 10 people. He was sure that they could subdue those numbers.

“Okay, before the other guys notice and return. Let’s get started! ”

“Hummm, how would you like to practice justice?”

“Think about it before going out.”

“Ya, get extensions.”

The rehabilitation members took out their weapons with eerie smiles.

Iron pipe, sashimi knife, chain ...If it appeared in gangster movies then they had it.

They had obtained it from the restricted area in Jackson, the rotting bogs.

Well, the form wasn’t special but the members were used to such weapons so they held it steadily.

Furthermore, it was also a magic weapon.

The iron pipes increased attack speed, the sashimi knife increased the probability of a critical hit and the chain had a side effect that caused stuns.

And as a bonus, Sid had the effect of inflicting fear.

‘As expected, these people are ordinary.’

Now the rehabilitation group were carrying crowbars to the fight the gangsters just like it was seen in a movie. No, the actual situation wasn’t that different.

Double bang!

When he kicked the door and entered the building, the delinquents inside turned their head to look at it.

The door roughly shook and scattered dust.....it showed JusticeMan in the background laughing.

“You guys, arrest them all.”

“Eh? Arrest?”

“What did you say? That old person?”

The gangsters said in an amazed voice.

“Ah.....Embarrassing. Hyung-nim should get a better grip of the atmosphere. Was now the time to recite those lines?”

JusticeMan was sullenly pushed back as another member stepped forward.

When a former leader of an organization stepped forward, the atmosphere was different.

Suddenly he growled in a deep voice.

“Kneel down. We will receive it as your surrender.”

Indeed, the experience of the person was clearly shown in their choice of words. There was an immediate response from the gangsters.

“What, what the?”

“Hey, it’s a raid! Get them!”

“Fearless scum, pull out their tongues!”

The hoodlums in charge got up.

However, the movements of the parole group were a few times faster.

“Ha ha ha! How stupid do they have to be to think they could win against justice?”

And the table fell with a crash. They jumped over the chairs flying from all directions and swung their sashimi knives at the gangsters.

It truly unfolded like a scene from a gangster movie.

Also as expected, the hooligans were slightly stronger than the

rehabilitation members. However, thanks to Lorenzo and JusticeMan helping out, the situation was easily controlled.

Lorenzo was level 80 and could fight to opponents sufficiently by himself.

On the other hand, JusticeMan was able to help with his absurd stats, since he was armed with the deceptive stat of Justice.

That stat doesn't do anything when fighting solo, but in a group battle it had absolute power.

However, the user that had a decisive influence on the outcome. Minstrel Roco!

When Roco earnestly joined the battle, the odds quickly shifted to the side of the rehabilitation group.

In the early stages, the minstrel was a job that most would want to quit since it was useless.

The minstrel had low damage and defense so they couldn't solo, while most parties weren't looking for weaker recovery or secondary magic.

There was also a penalty applied to the minstrel for not being battle affiliated, so the experience they received in battle was similar to a merchant's.

They couldn't fight and their growth rate was low.

It was an occupation which didn't really seem like one.

However, Roco always had an affection for musical instruments so raised her minstrel with love.

Anyway, Roco had never played solo.

When she entered the game, she immediately met JusticeMan and the parole group.

Instead of fighting against a fearsome monster, Roco had more fun using her magic to save her oppa.

And recently, the Minstrel passed level 40.

She gained a skill that no one expected.

[This skill can only be learnt after the Minstrel satisfied certain conditions.<Condition: Minstrel level 40, Artistry stat 150, Intermediate skills in three types of musical instruments>Gentle Reverberation (Beginner, passive): You have been deeply worried about real music for a long time. You have handled numerous instruments and listened to their beautiful voices with your heart. Therefore, it has increased your understanding of music. Your music will now develop the same depth and power. The gentle music will dwell in the soul and heart of those who listen to it, and a reverberation will remain long after the performance ends. Even if other music is played, this gentle reverberation will not disappear but rather improve the effects of the music.<If the same kind of music is played continuously, 3 buffs can be piled up due to the synergy with gentle reverberation. The duration is subject to the duration of the final performance>]

If it was good, without stopping.

That was Roco up to now. However, after the level 40 skill the situation changed.

The effect of Gentle Reverberation was terrific.

“It became one strong wind that split the grassy plains.....”

In order to raise attack speed and movement speed, Roco would sing the ‘Song of the Gale.’ The ‘Song of the Gale’ only raised the speed by 5%. The magician’s skill that raised speed by 10% was far more attractive. However Gentle Reverberation allows buffs to be stacked three times, which changes the situation.

‘When ‘Song of the Gale’ is stacked three times, it increases speed by 15%! In addition, the duration of the minstrel’s song was much longer than the acceleration magic of a magician.

The same applied to the ‘Song of Life’ which is used to restore health.

For 3 minutes, health was recovered by 200 but now 'Song of Life' recovered 600 health recovered in 3 minutes. If health was recovered in a fixed duration, the effect was stronger than recovery magic.

Although the slow growth was a weak point, the results could be favourably compared to a magician's magic. The minstrel who had no exclusive boards dedicated to them in information sites, and the users who did choose minstrel received a cold shoulder from other players and because it was lonely, cancelled their profession.

However the laws of the game descended, just like in a legend.....

The weak and troubled character in the beginning would change into a formidable character. We don't have to tell you what games are people who know that we talk about grunge.

It was a fact that everyone who played games should know, even if they don't speak it out loud.

Although a hoodlum noticed Roco's participation and rushed forward, the parole members wouldn't let him attack their mascot.

"Does this child think we're going to let him touch our cutie with their dirty hands?"

The hoodlum quickly collapsed under the attack of 3~4 rehabilitation members. The violence continued for 10 minutes.

Eventually there was an overwhelming victory for JusticeMan.

Although there were 3 who resisted to the end and died, the rest were in a critical condition. JusticeMan and one of the guys took turns to stun them.

"Once you put all these guys together, tie them up."

"Yes!"

Number 1402, also known as Fixer used his racial special skill 'Bound' to tie them up and threw them into a room. With the situation settled, the 7 hoodlums who went out had returned.

“Damn, that Lorenzo! He screwed us.....! Eh? What are you doing here?”

“Us?”

“Justice!”

The parole group shouted in unison.

Pepepek! Gwadang! Snap! Crunch!

Soon, the faces of the rest of the hoodlums were crushed.

Once again, 1 warrior died but 14 hooligans were captured.

“Now, let’s cut to the chase?”

JusticeMan entered the room with the hooligans and started the ‘rehabilitation’ operation.

“Well, Lorenzo has told me about every one of you.”

JusticeMan coughed and opened his mouth.

“Every day squeezing someone and threatening them, and even threatening a fellow colleague who wants to live more sincerely for money.....! You guys are really the same. Nonetheless, I don’t think your foundation is bad. Anyone can make mistakes for survival and once you choose the wrong path it is difficult to go back. But life is long. Although you might think it is too late, it is still early. Now, this is an opportunity. Do you want to be reborn as a new man and wash your hands clean?”

“Sheesh, you’re playing.”

“I don’t know what you’re doing but don’t think it would end like this.”

“When you meet Hyung-nim you’ll understand.....huhuhu, Lorenzo. The same goes for you, too. Yes, you’re going to be buried alive along with the old man.”

He had given them sincere advice, but where was the expected reaction? A thick vein popped on JusticeMan’s forehead.

“Yes, is this friendly atmosphere to your liking? Jjak-tung.”

“Yes! Hey, the guy who talked just now.”

Jjak-tung gave a satisfied smile as he pulled out the hoodlum.

The hooligans stiffened with tension. Looking at the atmosphere, anyone would imagine that some violence was about to occur. However, their faces soon oddly changed.

“Open your mouth!”

Jjak-tung forcefully opened his mouth and ladled food in, and began feeding the hoodlum.

What on earth was he doing?

A gag? Is he being gagged?

The hooligans all laughed with a silly expression. But at that moment, a bloodcurdling scream emerged from the mouth of the hoodlum eating the food. A different hooligan who ate the food reacted the same way.

“What, what the?”

“Poison?”

The hoodlums looked at each other with confused eyes. The only ones who could explain just trembled hollowly once they ate the food.

Without knowing what the poison was, they were certain that it was something incredibly horrifying. And Lorenzo who had experienced it before, could only shudder as he imagined it.

The food being fed to the hoodlums was Ark’s special medley.

JusticeMan had ordered it after he asked Lorenzo for any prior information, such as the effectiveness of the chowder medley.

The gangsters were frozen at the unknown torture.

“Now, it is an atmosphere where I can talk.”

JusticeMan laughed in satisfaction before speaking again.

“Everybody close your eyes and look back at the past. See what manner of life it was. The method to start a new life is surprisingly simple. You have to regret any mistakes and make amends. Then I’m sure a new life would unfold in front of you. Then you’ll be living for justice. Now, the definition of justice is.....”

What followed was JusticeMan’s theory course on justice.

The hooligans listened with an annoyed expression, but they endured it. But that was just the beginning. The course finished after 10 minutes before someone else said.

“.....Ashamed of justice. Then how would you practice justice and live? Although the way that you guys live your life is dire, if you open your eyes to justice then you are already walking along the path to being reborn. Now, Jjak-tung. You begin!”

“Yes, I understand.”

Jjak-tung stood on the podium with a small uncomfortable face.

“Eh, so I’m number 1401, called Jjak-tung. In order to not be like an android production number, when I was young I was determined to be an artist. However when I was six, my mother passed away and my father started drinking..... ”

Jjak-tung’s biography began to flow out.

It was about a kid who walked on a dark path and participated in an enormous fraud of an organization which cherished ambition friendship and betrayal.

Finally prison life caused him to fall to the bottom, and one couldn’t hear the epic tale without bursting into tears. However, it was too long.

3 hours ...in the game, the story was told for a whole 9 hours. However, the hooligans strained their ears and listened eagerly. They weren’t impressed.

But if they dozed off for a short time, then a chowder medley was

immediately shoved into their mouth.

“Strange.”

“Come on, applause!”

Loud applause shook the room.

It finally came to an end. Although the hooligans tears flowed like they were upset it ended, it was a trick.

At the end of Jjak-tung’s speech without any breaks, number 1402’s speech ‘I’m so alive’ followed.

It was followed by the ‘If I’m stuck’ speech by number 1403. ‘The prison’s bean rice’ was the topic for number 1404.....the speeches was to achieve the original goal but by the time it reached the end of number 1406’s speech, two days had passed in reality.

In the game it was six days.

Of course, the rehabilitation members had a good sleep but if the hoodlums dared doze off they would be met with the chowder medley. This occurred so many times that they now had bloodshot eyes.

“Come on, now it is number 1407.”

“Wa-wait a minute!”

The hooligans cried out in surprise.

“We’ve had enough.”

“That’s right.” Uhh. What have we done.....I regret it so much that I just want to commit suicide!”

“Now we have washed our hands and became new men.”

“Yes, we do not need to hear anymore.” We only live for justice! ”

“So please stop now.....”

The hoodlums with red bloodshot eyes cried and tearfully begged.

“Hum.....You regret it right? You will live for justice?”

“Yes, of course.”

“So one question remains.”

JusticeMan scratched his beard and opened his mouth.

“The people who tried to kill a good fellow are around here. How do we deal with these guys? If you guys give a hint to the assassins then we won’t consider you rehabilitated and feed you more grub.

“The bad guys should have justice withdrawn from them!”

“Who should do it?”

“Yes? Ah, of course it must be us!”

“Do you also know whether it is dangerous?”

“Justice is willing to spare no lives!”

The hooligans shouted like they were recruits in a cult.

It was sincere.

They had stayed awake in dark rooms, listening to the speech of the rehabilitation members for 6 days.

The hoodlums were completely brainwashed.

And frankly, after being tortured and hearing the speech they were probably happy about the possibility of fighting and dying.

JusticeMan was revived.....he looked at the brainwashed hooligans with a pleased smile.

“Okay. Then let’s go practice justice?”

“Justice!”

The hoodlum’s eyes turned round and round.

[Chaotic NPC ‘Rehabilitation’ was complete. Punishing the guilty was an easy task. However, you will need a lot of time and effort to convince them to repent for their sins. The people who cherish life and not begrudge them of that life will receive a reward.

<Rehabilitation Bonus: Rehabilitated NPC X 5000 Alignment experience: Good +50>]

During the rehabilitation of the gangsters, JusticeMan had sent a few people to monitor Andel and the assassins.

And received the information that the 3 assassins slept in shifts.

The rehabilitation group had 14 people and that number increased to 28 people, but the assassins were level 120.

If they attacked from the front then they should expect to receive considerable damage.

In addition, the situation might become more difficult if they used scrolls.

‘It would be better to receive less damage. Anyway, it isn’t necessary to take risks.

JusticeMan decided to defeat each assassin.

The first opponent was the assassin sleeping in the camp close by. You couldn’t build a campsite adjacent to the village. Because of that, the assassin was sleeping quite a distance away from the Quartermaster.

“Ja, can we really do a sudden attack?”

“It’s a little cowardly to attack a sleeping person.....”

A hoodlum asked with a worried expression. But JusticeMan replied without hesitation.

“It’s okay. We don’t have to choose the methods and means of true justice.”

“That, that is what you’re doing?”

“That’s right.”

In fact, even in reality a detective would attack sleeping criminals. There was no reason to feel uncomfortable.

JusticeMan's party surrounded the assassins.

The distance was quickly narrowed and the assassin was attacked from various sides.

The sleeping assassin received a critical hit and woke up.

"Huck, yes, you.....what!"

"Noisy!"

"Now, the group!"

"Ah ah ah, justice!"

Like a dog, the group listened to JusticeMan and attacked. Nevertheless the level 120 assassin was powerful.

Although he received a critical hit while sleeping, his health only decreased by 15%.

His basic stamina and defense was high level.

On the other hand when the assassin attacked, the hooligans each lost 25% health and each hit was likely to be a critical hit.

At level 50~60, it felt like they were facing a boss monster.

However, even if the level difference was 2 times as much, it was 28 against 1. In other words, the assassin had to defend against 28 attacks coming at once.

-The attack failed.

As the level difference was so huge, half the attacks missed. But Roco played the 'Song of Focus' and increased the hit rate of their attacks by 60%.

In other words, if JusticeMan's party swung simultaneously at least 16 attacks would hit. The assassin fell to a critical condition and took out a scroll.

Number 1406, also known as Yapsab was waiting for a chance and it was at that time.

“Pickpocket!”

-You have stolen the warp scroll from the assassin.

Yapsab’s hands moved like lightning and quickly stole the scroll from the assassin.

“What is this……..!”

The assassin looked stupidly at his empty hands.

At that moment JusticeMan who had withdrawn, released the battle state. At the same time, he applied his justice stat.

JusticeMan’s various stats rose in leaps and bounds.

Eventually, the assassin was a victim of the group and fell to the ground.

The assassin disappeared leaving behind black leather armour.

It was a high quality armour as it was dropped by a level 120 NPC. As a result, the group played rock paper scissors over the armour.

“Huhuhu, only a man of my size could wear it.”

The one who won the popular armour laughed at the others clenched their fists.

“We’ve dealt with one guy. All that’s remaining is Andel and the two assassins!”

“Now I’m sure that we will be able to handle two assassins And Andel wouldn’t be high level yet. 2 people should be enough to handle Andel while the others take care of the assassins.”

“Okay, let’s go!”

JusticeMan led his remaining followers to the Quartermaster. On the other hand, Andel and the assassins were still waiting near the Quartermaster. Ten days of real time had already passed since Ark fell into the hell. Although the wait was horrible, Andel endured it by spending time in reality. Although the assassins were cooperative at first, after ten days had passed and then a month the assassins

began to show dissatisfaction.

“Are you certain that the guy will return here?”

“For sure. He must be quite impatient by now. Just wait”

“But we can’t wait aimlessly around without a commitment?”

“You made a contract.” Are you going to take the 300 gold and then complain?”

“Sheesh, at this rate we’ll grow old and die first.”

The assassin murmured with an annoyed voice. JusticeMan and his group then arrived at the Quartermaster’s. When they heard people approaching, Andel turned around indifferently and say JusticeMan.

“Eh? You were with that child Ark.....?”

“If you remember my face, then I don’t have to tell you why you’ll get hurt?”

“That child Ark.....why he didn’t come here.....did he ask you for help?”

“Jeez, I’d say so. Crush them!”

“Ah ah ah, justice!”

“Stop them! We can’t let them snatch the Quartermaster away from us!”

Andel shouted and quickly pulled out his sword and shield.

“Rehabilitated group, take the guy on the right. The rest take the left side. I’ll take Andel.”

JusticeMan commanded and shot forward.

However, Andel kept running away and it took time for JusticeMan to do any damage.

Although Andel had stopped levelling in the mid-60s, he used money to arm himself with high level warrior gear.

He ran around trying to escape and prayed that the assassins would take care of the situation. He ran away trying to escape and prayed that the assassins would take care of the situation.

However, the battle situation didn't turn out like Andel expected.

First, the assassins were handled by the rehabilitation group that was supported by Roco.

With their hit rate increased to the maximum, the assassin could not handle their strikes and collapsed. The hooligans joined in and concentrated on the remaining assassin.

The assassin blindly used a scroll but his opponents numbered 28 people. Since the scroll could only be applied to one person at most, it was meaningless.

The scrolls could reverse the balance of a fight or even give an advantage.

However, it wasn't possible to last against that many guys and soon he was collapsed on the ground. When the assassin was killed, the rehabilitation group immediately surrounded Andel.

"Now, it is time for you to die!"

"Eat this, you lousy bastard!"

Andel clenched his teeth and hurled profanities.

"You shouldn't say those words."

"Let's leave!"

Andel took out a scroll and shouted.

At the same time, Yapsab ran up and used a skill.

However, the pickpocket skill only worked on opponents in critical condition. The skill came back as a failure.

Andel used the [Warp] scroll and disappeared.

JusticeMan tried to grab his collar just as he disappeared and fell to

the ground.

“Damn, rat-like child!”

“.....The solution is settled for the moment.”

“Yes, but we cannot guarantee that this guy has given up. Since we don’t know when Ark will return, we’ll have to take turns guarding it. The rest will stay at the cabin or hunt.”

“What about the Lorenzo related quest? I got the keys to the warehouse.....”

“Well when Ark returns we’ll complete it together. Anyway, because of that Andel fellow we’ll have to spend some time here. And it’s good that useable hunting grounds are nearby.”

“Okay. Now, you guys wait here while the rest of you will return to the cabin.”

And JusticeMan recaptured the quartermaster’s place just like that.

In addition, they also gained the items the assassins dropped as a bonus.

After that, JusticeMan left 2 sentries there and became immersed in hunting while using the cabin as a central point.

Of course, he dragged along the delinquents as well.

One of the ways they could contribute to humanity was to kill monsters.

The path to true rehabilitation was distant and steep.

“Damn, those guys.....!”

At that time, Andel who had used [Warp] to run away had returned to Cairo.

‘I never thought that Ark would call his colleagues here. But they made a big mistake. I don’t know why Ark in this situation still hasn’t come back. The opportunity is still there. Even if it takes hundreds of gold, I’m going to make everyone a beggar along with Ark!’

Andel logged out and picked up the phone.

“Alan? It’s me.”

“What’s going on? Do you know what time it is right now?”

An irritated voice was heard over the telephone.

“There’s no time. The situation has hit a roadblock.”

“What?”

“The assassins have been killed.”

“At his level, Ark shouldn’t have the ability to beat them!”

“It’s not Ark.”

Andel was prepared and explained the situation. And in a resolute voice, he added.

“I need your help. Ark is also your enemy.”

“Damn.....I told you. I cannot lose my fame with the guild.”

“You do not need to come. The levels of these guys were only around level 60. Just send me more assassins. I’ll transfer 5 million won to your account right now. If it isn’t enough then I’ll send you more money later.

“5 million won? Isn’t that too unreasonable? Isn’t your new car in need of tuning?”

“It does not matter. I’ll just get it off my father. Rather, those children.....I’m going to keep on stepping on them.”

“.....I understand. The additional payment is unnecessary. Please step on Ark because I feel the same. I don’t care if there is a lack in money. Instead, please clearly step on Ark. Would you do that?

“Naturally. Even if I have to sell the car, I’ll completely step on Ark!”

It was the subject of those humans who were flush with money.

Andel was an example of the pathetic bourgeois that was common in

the world.

“Yes, this is the service.”

A voice within the company was heard over the telephone.

“It’s Lee Myung Ban

“Oh, what brought Doryun-nim here?”

“I was looking for a person?”

“We don’t specialize in that? As you know..... ”

“I only know their ID in the game New World. But the guy recently took the entrance examination for Global Exos. He is using the ID Ark, can you do it? ”

“Well. In such circumstances, I cannot guarantee that we can figure it out. As you know, it is difficult to hack into a virtual reality game and Global Exos has very good security.....”

“You can do it. Can’t you? If not then simply say.”

“I will try it.”

“Ok, so I’ll send the deposit sometime tomorrow.”

Andel.....Lee Myung Ban hang up the phone and gnashed his teeth.

“You’ll see soon. If you’re not in the game then I’ll hire a solver to find you and beat you up in real life!”

Reality PK, it once was social issue which caused blood to be spilled.

March, Raccoon Troop!

“Wah ah ah!”

Bang bang double bang!

A dark valley was filled with roaring and shouting.

Several hundred people congregated with their swords, the sound of their swords and shields echoing in the ear.

Subarutalp.....a battle situation was occurring with the raccoon clan facing off against the monsters underground.

A few nights ago, Ark had finished the training of the raccoons and they set off. At first, a small reconnaissance unit wander around and built up hands on experience.

Even small forces were formidable against the level 150 Kanggeul. With 300 raccoons fighting against the Kanggeul, there were around 20 casualties. However, the more they fought the more experience they gained. Even if a small amount of raccoons were sacrificed, Ark also grew a little bit. And soon they would be able to take down the Plant Golems.

“Let’s do it!”

“First we must attack and finish off the Plant Golem!”

So far, the level 250 Plant Golem had been considered an impregnable enemy by the raccoons. However, after beating their enemies the raccoon clans began to gain confidence. And their levels rose as they continued beating strong enemies. In New World, NPCs who gained experience would also level up.

However, there was one notable change that he paid attention to. After the battle ended, the raccoons noticed something and muttered.

“Well, I use this trick for the sword.”

“That’s right, I also understand how to use a shield now.”

“Is this a more effective way to use the cannon?”

If a raccoon used a weapon, a related skill was generated by the user.

The attack power for the sword and shield as well as their defensive powers went up. They received destructive skills for the artillery cannon, or an engineer would receive skills to increase the performance of profession items such as potions.

He realized that NPCs could also learn new skills.

Of course, it wasn’t the raccoon group wasn’t the only reason that he grew. The current commander of the raccoons was Ark, in New the commander also receives a bonus to all experience. Thanks to the bonus experience, Ark’s levelling speed increased. Of course, being commander didn’t only have good points.

The raccoon clan NPCs such as the craftsman NPC were also eating the Warrior’s cookies.

Well, thanks to the scam it decreased their understanding of tactics. Therefore Ark had to give orders one by one in groups of ten.

‘Crazy, the 300 raccoons are so stupid that they have to move one by one.....’

In the beginning, there was no spirit.

However, he had gradually become used to tactics and came up with a new interpretation. In the past, Ark had read JusticeMan’s manual many times. But since Ark never went to the military, it was difficult for him to understand. After leading 300 soldiers and directly experiencing through trial and error, it began to make more sense.

‘There is a limit to how much I can learn with just Uncle JusticeMan’s book.’

Ark came up with new tactics that could be applied to the raccoons.

And when the same action is repeated his understanding would deepen, that was the system of New World!

[You have learnt a new skill. Tactics (Beginner, passive): You have led the troops and gained a deep understanding of tactics based on your experience. In large-scale battles, it is important to pay attention to tactics. Excellent tactics would cause the situation to become more favourable to you and your allies. You will also learn how to lead your troops more effectively.

If your troops are made of 100% NPCs, you will be able to apply additional tactics.

<Allies morale, offensive power and defensive power +10, Strategy accomplishment rate +5>

* Beginner additional tactics

Unconditional assault: Order the troops to immediately attack one target.

Unconditional retreat: Order the troops to immediately retreat from combat.]

‘This is the tactical skill that Uncle JusticeMan was talking about!’

However, some of the strategies contained in JusticeMan’s manual were different to the ones Ark used.

Meanwhile JusticeMan was on Tactics III.

On the other hand, Ark only wrote down the new tactics he learnt during the day as well as his bonus tactics.

It was the inevitable result.

JusticeMan had an entire lifetime of tactical related work therefore Ark couldn’t possible have the same understanding.

However, even though Ark primarily played solo he was not satisfied learning just one skill. They were skills that were necessary now. When the skill was used, it was felt by the movements of the

raccoons which seemed to grow.

If the user's tactical skill was used then it could buff their troops. Other users could move with care.

However, this mission required the competence of the NPCs which means that the effects applied by the commander could vary the movement instead.

The effect was revealed in the current battle in the Valley of Darkness. Dozens of Kanggeul with lined up with the axes raised.

"They're throwing weapons! Lieutenants, gather your power and defend it!"

When Ark raised his voice, the lieutenants immediately lifted their shields.

The axes flew out of the dark and hit the raised shields.

In the old days, if Ark raised his voice then the raccoons were slow to respond. Some raccoons even ran forward straight into an axe. However, after the tactical skill was used that rarely occurred.

"No, the Nazis, no!"

When their surprise failed, the Kanggeul shrieked and ran wild.

The twenty crickets that had climbed to attack the rear of the raccoons froze.

"2nd division artillery, Plan A-3! Intercept the crickets!"

Ark commanded the artillery who immediately turned their cannon. Ark used the same tactics to command the raccoons as the ones he used on his summons. Plan A-3 was a tactic where his summons would attack on Ark's order. When plan A-3 was applied to the artillerymen, they would launch an artillery barrage at the target.

"Kueeeek!"

The cricket and its rider were forced to the ground.

Ark ordered them to narrow the distance for a double critical

chance.

“1st division lieutenant, plan A-2 surround the Kanggeul and attack in waves!”

Again, the movements of the 120 lieutenants flowed as they changed formation and attacked the defenceless Kanggeul.

The other Kanggeul rushed to the rear to rescue their colleagues. Ark switched to the B-3 plan with a ratio of 30:70 attack and defense to block the attack. And he switched to the B-1 plan and rushed forward as the Kanggeul began to weakly withdraw.

“Huhuhu, they’re not the previous raccoons anymore. Now they respond to Ark like soldiers!”

Like someone possessed, Ark controlled the battlefield using tactics and combat. At first the raccoon units moved together, but after fighting the Kanggeul, he became familiar with giving orders to different troops. Such a thing was possible because of Dedric.

“Master, should the raccoons on the right side start fighting?”

“Well, tell them it’s changed to the D-1 plan. And make the 3 engineers at the back support them! How is the left side?”

“There is a setback.”

“Plan A-1. Tell them to settle the siege quickly and then help the right side.”

“Understood. I’ll visit them now.”

With the battle situation examined, Dedric took to the sky to deliver the messages. Thanks to that, he could freely use different tactics in battle. So the raccoons were clearing the Kanggeul in the valley.

However, Ark had to pay attention to things other than the combat.

“Snake, it’s now. Swallow it!”

Ssak ssak ssak!

Ark commanded Snake as he threw it from his waist.

When he thought about a way to send Snake to Sid, Ark realised that there was a very easy method of utilizing Snake.

So, the ability to swallow items and spit it out when curled around his waist was a feature that he could utilize.

At Ark's command, Snake swallowed all the items on the battlefield at a tremendous rate. The item drop during the battle wasn't high. Therefore, Ark was determined not to abandon even one piece of japtem. Even if he had to sacrifice the raccoon soldiers to pick up the item.....

Was it too horrible? You're welcome!

The raccoons or the japtem that will belong to Ark when the quest ends.

Is it necessary to think about which is more important?

Ark's biggest purpose to play the game was money!

When it comes to making money, Ark could push his conscience down at any time.

Ark would survey the battlefield and if he spotted any raccoon trying to pick up an item he would immediately shout at them.

"Hey, that 1 person there! What are you doing? Do you want to die? If you have time to pick up an item then swing your sword!"

Flicker.

So the raccoons would flinch away while Snake quickly swallowed the item.

Soeeeeeeek! Double bang!

Then, suddenly a giant vine flew through the darkness. At the same time, his side formation collapsed with a loud roaring sound. Ark and the raccoons headed towards that side.

"Plant Golem!"

"It appeared!"

From the other side of the valley, a huge presence was approaching.

A Plant Golem that was 10 meters tall was approaching. Its level was 250!

The raccoons to the right of the Plant Golem's vine instantly lost 40% of the health and fell to the ground.

"1st lieutenant division, Unconditional Retreat!"

Ark activated his additional tactical skill.

The additional tactical skill was applied to the troops without Dedric having to convey the orders.

Then the raccoons shouted and dispersed like ants. When the formation collapsed, the Plant Golem didn't know who to chase after so it stayed still.

Then, someone behind Ark shouted.

"Ark-hyung!"

He turned around and saw that Popo had shouted.

"This is ready."

"Okay, Dedric, inform the whole army. We're going with plan A-4."

"Hey, raccoons! Plan A-4!"

Dedric shouted as he flew in the air. And the scattered soldiers retreated to one side.

When the target was narrowed to one side, the Kanggeul and Plant Golem immediately pursued it. They chased after the soldiers for a while until the earth started shaking. At the same time, the chasing monsters fell through a hole that appeared in the ground.

'It's a success!'

Popo yelled and jumped out. Popo was responsible for destroying the land along with the engineers of the 3rd division, so when the Kanggeul ran about nothing would happen but once the Plant Golem

who was 10 times heavier stepped on the ground it would collapse. Therefore, the Kanggeul and Plant Golems who were lying intertwined on the ground was a bridge for the raccoons to climb on. The Plant Golem who was stuck halfway in the ground gave a shriek.

Of course, Ark wasn't just calmly watching.

"Now! 2nd artillery division, A-2 plan!"

The artillerymen turned their cannons and fired wildly.

The A-2 plan was one to get rid of the weakness in its slow reloading speed.

In the past, a rifle unit of Napoleon's used the strategy of dividing into groups and then alternating firing. The continuous cannon attack fired and exploded into the Plant Golem's body. It was a large monster, so there was additional damage when caused the Plant Golem's health to be noticeably reduced. Meanwhile, the engineers eagerly used potions to treat the seriously injured.

"Master, recovery of the 1st division is finished."

"Ok, let's finish this. The unconditional assault!"

"Wha Ah Ah Ah! Attack!"

Ark used his additional tactical skill again. Then all the raccoon soldiers brandished their weapons and gathered at the Plant Golem. Swords and axes attacked the Plant Golem while there were flashes as the cannons continuously fired at it. The engineers also frantically poured potion after potion.

"Keu Ah Ah Ah!"

The Plant Golem finally collapsed with a cry of distress.

Over 60 Kanggeul and a Plant Golem had been defeated. If you think about how they used to struggle against a Kanggeul, it was a big development.

-Your level has risen.

When the battle was over, the amount of experience was added with the commander's bonus. 5% of the total experience. The experience of a level 150 and 250 monster was a considerable amount.

Thanks to that, Ark steadily went up a level every time a battle ended. After this battle, his level again rose by one until finally.....!

“Stat Window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good+200	
Fame	1695	Level	100
Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of All, Jackson's Hero	
Health	1855	Mana	1570 (+100)
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	232 (+ 5)
Agility	262 (+ 15)	Stamina	362
Wisdom	41	Intelligence	305
Luck	42	Flexibility	32
Art of Communication	33	Affection	55 (+ 10)
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		83	

Equipment item effects

Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified. Cat Paws: Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10% Crystal Golem's Head: Mana + 100

Improved Norad Boots: Movement Speed + 15%, Evasion + 10%

Veil of Fire: Fire resistance + 50%

Adelaine's Necklace: Def + 40, Affection + 10

Resurrecting Spirit: Strength + 5, Mana Recovery + 5%

* All abilities will increase by 30% in the dark* You have the ability to

hide in the darkness (15 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)* Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

‘I finally reached level 100!’

.....He thought back to just 30 hours before.

At level 100, not much changed.

However, like most people Ark liked a tight number. Once he confirmed that he reached level 100, he felt a sense of satisfaction.

And it only took 30 hours to gain 6 levels.

There more the number of advancing enemies increased, the faster his level up speed became.

Thanks to that, his levelling up speed was even faster than when he did the Event Quest in Jackson.

“Ark-hyung, we did it. Now we’ve occupied the Valley of Darkness.

“Mmm”

Ark nodded and used his cartography skill.

At first, it seemed black until 1/3rd of the space brightened and was opened. In the Underground World, there were 14 raccoon villages.

Among them, 13 had already been corrupted by Yggdrasil.

However, Ark had led the raccoon troops over a period of four days.

They had marched into and occupied 6 of the opponents’ strategic camps.

It was reclaimed.

And regaining the villages meant that they were moving closer to Yggdrasil.

Ark led the raccoon troops into the newly reclaimed town. Like the other villages, blackened wood had been turned to ruins underneath a tangle of vines. And it clung to tree trunks or nearby clusters of buildings.

They were now familiar objects.

“Division 3, get rid of the cocoons!”

“Yes, Commander!”

Ark gave a command and the engineers immediately left to get rid of the cocoon of vines. They scratched it roughly with their claws and when it was peeled back a raccoon fell out.

They were the raccoons fed to the Plant Golem. The raccoon was put in the cocoons by the Plant Golem and goes through a transformation into the Kanggeul. If the raccoon undergoes a transformation then the Plant Golem is accepted by Yggdrasil.

Fortunately, in this village there weren't many that had transformed to Kanggeul. When treated with a purification potion, most returned to their original form.

Of course, those raccoons were recruited into the army using the Warrior's cookies and relegated to the back for training where they were transformed into warriors. This means that every time they occupied a village, they were decreasing the enemy's forces while increasing their own.

However, if they don't occupy a village then those cocoons could transform into Kanggeul and then hit them from behind. This was the first reason why a town should be taken over.

The closer they get to Yggdrasil, the number of casualties increases while the number of Kanggeul and Plant Golems also increases.

And the second reason why the town should be occupied.....

“Popo, what was the specialty of this village?”

“This town had many craftsmen who created cannons. These cannons had a longer range, making the projectile damage even

stronger.”

“How many of the cannon craftsmen can we rescue?”

“Around 10 people.”

“There are 70 people in the artillery division. Assign seven to each person.”

“When you only focus on recovery, it’s not going to take long.”

“Popo, tell the third division to rush the recovery of the cannon craftsmen. And when the craftsmen recovery, ask them how long it would take to upgrade the cannons.”

“Understood!”

Popo hopped away and ran across the town.

The battle of the Underground World was similar to the classic arcade game three O.

Ark’s initial power was the 300 raccoon soldiers and common equipment. However if he won a battle and occupied a town then things were different. When he entered a village, although the casualties increased, by purifying the raccoons confined to the cocoons then his numbers once again increased.

But there’s even more. The original craftsmen NPC who originally owned artisan workshops were still present in each village.

When he recaptured a town specializing in leather items, the raccoons were able to contribute leather armour to the troops. And if they were armed with better swords then sword damage would increase. One village offered a special potion that would increase the damage.

Therefore depending on the specialization of each village retaken, it was possible to repair, upgrade or even replace equipment. Of course, a lot of the military funding was provided by the war chest of the raccoon elders.

‘As Popo said, it is possible to increase the range and damage of

the cannons.'

Artillery was a core part of the raccoon troops.

If it was upgraded, the damage of the raccoons would rise by leaps and bounds. The standard of upgrading was also rising as he approached Yggdrasil.

'I was worried the first time I walked into a village.....'

As expected, nothing was impossible in New World.

'The march of the raccoon troops has risen recently.'

If he was doing it alone, the quest would be impossible but with just one change all his problems were solved. Raccoon troops! Thanks to them, monsters over level 200 were being subdued and Ark was gradually occupying the Underground World.

"Fortunately, I also got some pretty useable items....."

Ark gave a heart-warming look at his equipment window.

Ark had changed 2 of his equipment at the leatherworking village he stopped at not long ago.

[Veil of Fire (Magic) Armour type: Mantle Defense power: 20

Durability: 67/80

Weight: 5

Use restriction: Level 90 and higher

A mantle made from the scale of the Fire Draconian. This mantle made from hardened scales is strong enough to deflect a decent weapon. In addition, it contains the characteristic high fire resistance common to fire draconians living in lava.

<Option: Fire resistance +50>]

[Improved Norad Boots (Magical) Armour type: Leather
Shoes Defense power: 40

Durability: 36/50

Weight: 5

User restriction: Level 60

Good quality footwear made using skin from the Great Worm. The Great Worm is an ancient monster that only lives in special environments. The epidermis is piled up in swamps or volcanoes or even in the stomach to avoid being harmed.

<Option: Movement Speed +15%, Evasion +10%>

<Special Option: You will not receive a penalty if damaged on the ground>]

It was another harvest obtained from the Underground World.

‘I never thought I would be satisfied leading raccoons.’

When Ark first entered the leatherworking village, there was a NPC called Norad.

Ark had heard the name Norad somewhere before. After a long time he finally remembered. Ark remembered it was in the description of the boots he picked up from Jackson.

A long time ago the armour maker that had disappeared, Norad!

“Yes, my grandfather made this. Every generation of my clan has inherited the name Norad.

After he showed him the shoes, Norad nodded.

Then, some materials surfaced to Ark’s head. There were materials that he didn’t trust to other users and kept locked in his bag.

The scale from the fire draconian and the skin from the great worm. After he showed the materials to Norad, a mantle was made from the scale while the Great Worm skin was used to modify the Norad Boots.

The performance was the highest quality.

‘Even though the processing fee was 500L, when it is this degree of performance then it was profitable business!’

He gained ore through the steady sale of cookies. After looking at the distribution sales he increased the price by 100% to 2L but the cookies still sold instantly. Furthermore, the japtem in his bag from the battlefield also sold at a higher price in the subterranean world and ore piled up in his bag.

‘Huhuhu, The war of the underground one is one that I quite like? At the rate everyone is defeating the monsters in the underground world, it wouldn’t be a dream to reach level 120 within the week!’

It was difficult to find a light representative hunting ground. And how many days had he invested into training the raccoons?

Once Ark started, he wasn’t going to pull back. So even though he could just head straight to Yggdrasil, he travelled around in circles to recapture the towns. All for the purpose of making a fortune!

“If you can find the source of Yggdrasil’s corruption and fix it then everything will return to normal. Therefore is it necessary to reclaim all the villages instead of advancing?”

Sometimes an elder would also start protesting.

However, if he gave them a bag of cookies then everything was fine.

When Ark called him with a whistle, Popo returned.

“Arc-hyung, it will take half a day to upgrade the cannons.”

‘Half a day.....so about 2 hours in real time?’

This was one thing he didn’t like about the Underground World. When a town is occupied, it is good that the troops increase and equipment was upgraded, but until all the tasks were complete then it wasted a lot of time.

Ark didn’t want to rest because the time it would eat up was too valuable in gaining experience. Although the time was precious, he also couldn’t abandon increasing his troops or upgrading.

'It can't be the soul's bane.'

"Popo, I'll be along for a while so tell me when the preparations are complete."

"Eh eh? Again? Where are you always going? Come play with me."

"Hyung is busy. Please play by yourself."

Ark lightly poked Popo who grumbled and headed towards the outskirts of the village.

"This is the patella?"

Ark took a hollow bone with joints.

"It fits perfectly. SoBecause the pelvis is F, this would be number F-4."

Ark labelled the patella F-4 with a pen before putting it back in the bag and picking another bone. He looked carefully and carved a number and repeated the work.

He had been doing it for a few nights and at the bottom of the bag, bones with different sorts of numbers were recorded and piled up.

How much time had passed?

After a while, Ark found a bone as small as a pebble. Soon it was mixed with the other bones and joined together like a puzzle as Ark stated with a confident voice.

"Okay, this is definitely the 3rd cervical vertebrae. Now everything is gathered!"

Ark threw away the remaining bones and summoned Skull.

"Skull, now everything has been equipped!"

Clack, clack clack clack!

Skull moved back and forth, thrilled.

Now he was ready. Only half was left.

It had been a week since he entered the Underground World.....in the meantime, Ark hadn't forgotten about Skull. In order to defeat Warwick the owner of the Saw Blade and finish the evolution of Skull, summoning him in the Underground World was the optimal condition for his growth.

First there was an excess of ingredients all around.

Ark collected the ingredients and every time he arrived at a village when the raccoon troops advanced, he would instantly cook a new dish. And of course, Skull was dedicated to verifying the dish. He ate the food with enthusiasm and within a few days, Skull was already level 60.

Ark immediately summoned Warwick and challenged him to a duel.

"For sure.....it became better than before.....good.....the duel is accepted."

The stats were accepted by the stubborn Warwick and he consented to the duel.

However, the result was a total failure!

Unlike the excited Dedric, Skull's battle unfolded calmly. Still, Warwick's health was only at 50% before Skull got forcefully recalled.

'Well that is a problem.'

24 hours later, Ark sighed as he looked at the grumpy Skull rolling about.

Ark also knew the reason for Skull's defeat.

The crucial difference between Warwick and Skull was that Skull had no limbs.

The battle understanding of Skull was quite high.

Because it had trained with Ark many times. However, the only movement Skull could do without limbs was rolling and jumping forward for a head butt. Such simple attacks weren't going to defeat

Warwick.

When he took part in operations with Ark and Dedric, it was able to accomplish its role, but when 1-1 with a goblin it was more difficult.

‘Even if Skull was level 70, he wouldn’t stand a chance of winning against Warwick.’

Now Ark began to seriously explore ways to defeat Warwick. Then, a scene suddenly came to Ark’s mind.

‘Polluted Skeleton!’

In the underground labyrinth, he had fought against Polluted Skeletons. Even if they were broken once, they had the special ability to use the surrounding bones and reform themselves. Skull’s body was a skeleton. Then wouldn’t it be possible to make arms and legs for Skull in the same way?

Ark immediately went back to the underground labyrinth and collected the surrounding bones. But when the bones were collected, it wasn’t possible to know which bone went where.

Ark discussed with JusticeMan about this issue, who handed him a judo textbook.

Since judo specialized in joints, the textbook had an appendix with illustrations of the bones in the human body. Since then, Ark had sorted through the bones and now everything was ready. It was a body created with blood and sweat!

It was to the extent that he was now able to close his eyes and draw the bones of the human body. When he placed the bones according to the numbers written on them, a plausible skeleton was formed.

The only part left was the head.

“Skull, get ready.”

When Skull was placed on area of the head, like a transformation robot the skeleton was complete. But now there was an important task.

The skeleton couldn't be a body just by lining up the bones. It must be firmly attached and able to move to Skull's will.

'What can make it successful?'

Snake, Spirit Body Glue!"

Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake opened its mouth and spat out the Spirit Body Glue.

Ark had first thought of this plan the moment the description called it a spirit body glue.

He could attach the bones and Skull with the glue. Moreover, it was not a simple adhesive. The spirit was set to the body using the ectoplasm, and then the ectoplasm could be used like nerves to move the body according to Skull's will.

'The only way to know is to try.'

Ark attached all the bones using the Spirit Body Glue. And after attaching Skull, he retreated.

"Skull, everything now depends on you. How is it? Can you move?"

There was no response from Skull.

He concentrated on all the nerves in his new body.

How much time had passed? Ududuk, the finger bone moved with a strange noise. Then the wrist and arm lifted up.

'There is a reaction!'

Skull tried to raise his body by pushing his hands against the ground.

Ark even forgot to breathe as he looked at the skeleton.

Geppeto the maker of Pinocchio would probably understand how he was feeling.

"Skull, you can do it. Think about the body you had before! Then you'll remember how it feels!"

Ark nursed him using the sentiment of a father.

At that moment, Skull clenched himself and stood the body up.

“It was successful!”

Clack....Clack clack clack!

Skull looked at his arms and legs with a strange attention.

And once he starting moving his body, he adapted immediately.

Skull moved his body regained after hundreds of years like a newborn foal, and became so familiar with it that he was able to run and roll on the ground. He did this for a moment, before Skull looked at Ark with a gaze that seemed to want something.

He desired a rematch against Warwick.

“Okay, now the condition is the same. If the conditions are the same then there is no reason for you to be defeated. You are different from Dedric as you don’t speak. In the meantime, don’t forget experience when you fought with me.”

Ark gave simple advice before summoning Warwick.

When he saw the changed Skull, Warwick spoke with a surprised voice.

“That body.....right.....we have met great masters.....yes, if you have a body then this body should be more satisfactory.....no more words are necessary.....come, warrior!”

Soon the two skeletons clashed violently.

Unprecedentedly, Warwick pulled out a shield and rushed forward.

Until now, there was no way that Skull could deal with such a simple attack. But now he was not the past Skull. Skull quickly withdrew to the side and stretched his arm.

Unlike Warwick, Skull did not have a weapon.

His summons couldn’t wear equipment. Therefore, a finger bone

was changed beforehand by Ark to compensate for this weakness. Fortunately, there was a little attack bonus attack to the considerable damage received and Warwick retreated.

“Ack.....certainly.....it is different from before.”

Warwick happily muttered.

In fact, Ark didn't have big expectations for this duel.

Even though he only had bones left, Warwick still remembered the memories of his life. In addition, he was armed with a sword and shield. On the other hand, Skull who had no memory of his past before he was beheaded had only gained a new body.

‘Well in order to get acquainted with the new body, some fighting experience would be nice to see.

That was Ark's honest thoughts.

However, Ark was a good way off the mark.

‘That kid Skull.....!’

Ark looked at Skull with bemused eyes.

It seemed as though Skull was using the same movement as Ark. Using evasive action to avoid the enemy's attack, then countering through the gap were all specialties of Ark.

Even the manoeuvre of stepping to the side and kicking.....he mimicked all of Ark's attacking techniques.

Of course, in terms of completion it didn't compare to Ark. However, Ark had perfectly trained Skull in his battle techniques.

With movements exactly the same as his, the existence was different.

He felt like he was watching his child or student.

“Indeed.....after defeating the Kraken.....You will be able to summon the answer!”

Warwick's exclamation clearly praised Ark.

"Go, skull!"

Ark clenched his fist tightly and shouted. The longer the battle was the more familiar Skull became with his movements.

Although it seemed a bit early, when confronting each other they were almost at the same level.

However, Warwick was also getting stronger while Skull's movements were gradually getting better. After 10 minutes.....!

Skull's health was at 20% while Warwick had 25% of his health left!

After both sides clashed again, their health dropped by 10%.

"It is great! For a sense of honour.....I will put everything into the next blow."

Warwick shouted and raised his sword.

Skull felt the desperate resolution and stepped back.

He stepped back and moved behind Warwick. There was a tense silence like the static that rose from the end of a needle.....

"It's now!"

Ark, who was Skull's master instinctively, read the timing.

Skull narrowed the distance and quickly struck with his hand. The technique to read the perfect timing to attack needed to be learnt by the body.

However, Warwick who was also experienced in combat read Skull's movements. Warwick's sword quickly moved from side to side.

Rattle, rattle!

Warwick struck and hit Skull's hands like lightning.

And ripped the chest open with his sword.

"A brave attack.....But this time.....it is my victory!"

Ark's eyes shone.

"Skull, now!"

Clack clack clack! Clack clack clack!

At the same time, Skull's scapula split open and a sharp bone rose. It rose up through Warwick's side. Into Warwick's eyes.....flames erupted as he received a critical hit.

"This.....My goodness.....How.....!"

"I assembled Skull's body. It wasn't impossible to give the body an unexpected weapon."

Ark said with a smile.

Yes, there was a sharp bone hidden behind the scapula. It was a bone that wasn't originally for humans.

However, when the bony part was assembled he installed something unique because Ark wanted a secret weapon.

It was a risk to determine whether Skull could utilize a bone that wasn't originally human. However, in a desperate situation Skull showed a strong will and exceeded Ark's expectations.

Warwick understood the situation and nodded.

"Right.....with the master who believed in his summons.....he rewarded the summons.....hu hu hu, you and your master.....are beautiful.....I will hand over my power.....with the power.....serve your master."

Warwick said one final thing.

"Already.....it is possible for me to go to the hills.....thank you.....blessings for your future....."

Warwick lifted his head as his body slowly crumbled. A message window popped up in front of Ark.

[The player's summon 'Nameless Dead Man's Skull' has defeated 'Warwick.' You can now fuse the summon to evolve it. Please

choose one familiar to be the main. The Familiar created by the fusion evolution will have the main Familiar's stats with the auxiliary Familiar's stats after consideration.]

It was a no-brainer.

Warwick was a knight with a good balance between offense and defense.

However, Skull had received Ark's training and a body that was specially made. Warwick was a subject that couldn't even be compared to Skull.

"Main, Nameless Dead Man's Skull. Secondary Warwick."

At the end of the decision, Skull's body was enveloped in light.

The body of Skull began changing inside the light. The light also became more intense to look at. Warwick had an old sword and shield, with ragged chain armour affixed to his body.

[The Familiar's fusion evolution has successfully finished. After fusing with 'Warwick,' Nameless Dead Man's Skull had become a Skeleton Knight. With the mighty will to control the whole Netherworld, he has received the name 'Deimos'. Therefore, Deimos has earned a low-ranking noble status in the Netherworld and has gained the right to bear an artifact. The Saw Blade is now Deimos' artifact.

<By owning the artifact, Deimos can use an additional skill>]

Deimos A resident of the Netherworld who has inherited the spirit of Warwick and promoted to an Undead Knight. As a knight, honour is his strongest value and he swears absolute loyalty to his owner. However, if his master engages in dishonourable behaviour, his loyalty can be decreased.

Race	Undead	Inclination	Dark
Ranking		Lower Class	
Health	870 (+ 200)	Loyalty	270 (+ 200)
Strength	96 (+ 15)	Agility	63 (+ 15)
Wisdom	38 (+5)	Intelligence	59 (+5)

Luck

35 (+15)

* Deimos hobby is 'Bone collector.'* Learned the nature of the 'sword'.<Sword: Deimos can transform into the Saw Blade. The transformed blade has two different uses, as a sword and as a whip. If you want to use as a whip, although it is possible to attack multiple enemies at the same time, damage is reduced by 30%. Spiritual Power consumption: 100>

'Deimos?'

Ark knew about Deimos.

Among the two moons of Mars, one was the master and the other the vassal.

In other words, this means Ark's familiar contained one of two shapes. His stats had also grown.

'His stats were raised by 65~70 points.'

His elevated stats were similar to Dedric. The unusual thing was that his health and loyalty increased tremendously. His health had increased to 1070! His body was compatible to be a bread. Also, his loyalty rose so he didn't have worry about disobedience like Dedric.

Rather his return as a bread would probably make him even more eager to serve Ark.

'But what is this 'bone collector' hobby?'

Ark looked at the information window and shook his head.

Deimos' eyes suddenly lit up and he run to the remains of Warwick's body.

He searched through the bones until he found a rib with no flaws.

"Ara? Deimos, what are you doing?"

Clack clack clack! Clack clack clack!

Deimos pointed towards the ribs and touched it.

It's not Morse code.....Ark couldn't possibly understand so he

summoned Dedric. He explained that he needed Dedric as an interpreter and they communicate for a while before Dedric said with a strange look.

“Master, this guy is surprisingly cheeky?”

“What?”

“The master went to all that difficulty to make my body. But it is not especially pleasing. The master has difficulty with his sense of beauty. I’m insincere yet he says such bad things? A bad one? Isn’t it?”

Clack clack clack!

Then Deimos grabbed Dedric and shook him.

“Uhh, this child! Just because he happens to have a body he dares.....snap! Ah, I understand. Please don’t pull my wings. Should I convey what you said? Ouuuk, don’t shake me while I’m upside down! Unlike a bat, my hobby isn’t being upside down. I have motion sickness! I understand! Keuk, Master. I was being abused. This guy says that.....the bones collected by Master aren’t good. So it is difficult to exert his power?”

Ark was convinced by Dedric’s words.

Ark also knew that. When he collected the bones from the underground labyrinth, they were useable but most of them were dull or cracked. Although a body was made using such bones, he had no confidence in their performance.

“Well, I wanted to make it out of good bones too.....”

Uduk, Pakak!

Ark breathed out a sigh.

Would Deimos suddenly pull out one of his ribs? He didn’t mind injuring himself?

Ark looked at Deimos who seemed to understand as he shook his head.

He picked up the bone from Warwick and placed it in a vacant spot.

Curiously, Warwick and Deimos' ribs had become a perfect fit.

After he assembled the rib, Deimos skipped and jumped delightedly.

Suddenly a message window appeared in front of Ark.

[Deimos 'bone collector' skills have reassembled the ribs. You will be able to summon a skeleton with an intense love for bones. The bones you used to make the body was shabby. This is reflected in the dissatisfaction of Deimos, who found himself with the ability to reconstruct his body. He will search for bones that meet the special criteria according to Deimos and readjust his body. In addition, it has a low probability of improving the abilities of the blade.

<Warwick's 5th rib: Defense +10, Luck -5>

<The Blade: Maximum Durability +10>]

"What kind....."

A bizarre skill to change the bones.

It was a strange situation, but the effect caused some surprise.

Once a bone was changed, the ability also rose.

There was also a penalty but he didn't pay much regard to it as it only decrease luck by 5.

Of course he could also use the bones of monsters so there was another way to raise the stats other than food.

'If this kind of thing occurs in the future, Deimos may be able to grow even faster than Dedric!'

The body he went through much difficulty to create was going to be changed. It wasn't a pleasant feeling, although Ark was a utilitarianism person. If there was a benefit then it was fine.

"Okay, Deimos. Bone collecting, I like it."

The one unfortunate thing was that it wasn't possible to use the Saw Blade and Deimos at the same time. The characteristic of Warwick that Deimos inherited was his ability to transform into the Saw Blade.

'I can use the saw blade as a whip?'

The best thing to do was to try it out himself in order to understand it.

"Skull.....No, Deimos. Sword!"

Ark commanded Deimos who folded his body and turned into the Saw Blade.

He swung it but not much changed. But it had a metal object running along the handle. It was just like a switch. Ark pressed the metal object and swung in the opposite direction.

Cheolkek, Chwarararak, Double bang!

"What, what the?"

Ark freaked out. The moment he swung the sword, the vertebrae bone extended like an elastic cord and hit the tree 5 metres in front. Ark was stunned for a while before swinging it to the opposite side, towards the rocks. The distance was approximately 6 metres. But the sword blade extended and directly hit the rocks.

"This is great.....Awesome!"

Whenever he swung the sword, it extended!

Ark wielded the sword with enthusiasm. While swinging his sword, he discovered the range to be approximately 7 metres.

It wasn't so great compared to the distance of long-range weapons. However, if he could attack an enemy 7 metres away with his sword then it was a different story. And that wasn't all.

Pak, Pak, Pak, Pak, double bang!

Ark lined up branches and they were each cut off in order.

In addition to long distances, he could hit multiple enemies at once! Unfortunately, the damage was reduced by 30% but if utilized correctly it could be used to tremendous effect. In addition, it wasn't hard to use the whip.

If he set a goal and swung the sword then it would probably hit.

"This is a weapon!"

It was worth the many days he spent troubled while reading about the human bones. So Ark was glad that it could help him.

Kkurururu, Bang! Kwa Kwa Kwa bang!

He felt the change and stood up. Suddenly the earth shook as the underground world erupted. And thick cracks began to split the road.

"Eh? What, what the?"

When his foot collapsed underneath him, Ark hurriedly threw his body and rolled across the ground. He turned his head back to see the split ground.

"What is happening?"

"Ark-hyung!"

At that time, Popo ran from the village with a desperate face.

"Popo, what is happening?"

"I, I don't know. The elder is looking for Hyung!"

The Fallen Yggdrasil

Notes:

- In previous chapters I've translated the main artillery as cannon. This is the translated word that always shows up. However, instead of the big heavy cannon that shoot cannonballs, I think the author actually means a musket that shoots bullets when using the term cannon. However, I will keep the term cannon but just keep in mind that it is more like a gun than an actual cannon.
 - In this chapter, there is a page missing from the raws so there will be a bit missing but I will mark it when it appears.
-

“Earthquake!”

“Gather everyone in the square!”

When he entered the town, the raccoon soldiers were running around in confusion. Ark ordered some troops leaders to calm the turmoil and went to see the elders.

The elders' face was pale like they had been sick.

“Ah, Ark!”

“What happened?”

“Nídhöggur isThe cause of this earthquake was certainly Nídhöggur.”

“Nídhöggur? What is that? Calm down and tell me.”

“It is the wicked malevolent deity we fear the most, the fallen dragon that lives in the deepest place in Subarutalp! And in the dark century.....it was one of the six followers of the Lord of Darkness.”

“Yes?”

Ark asked again with a stupid face.

Dark century? Deity? Fallen Dragon? What are they talking about?

Wasn't the problem that needed to be fixed Yggdrasil?

When Ark made an expression like he didn't understand, the elders trembled and explained.

Once again, the Northern continent followed Norse mythology. And a dragon called Nídhöggur was also featured in Norse mythology.

Nídhöggur was described in the Norse mythology.

Even deeper underneath Subarutalp, the Underground world, there exists a frozen land of darkness and fog called Niflheim.

Niflheim was often called hell. Nídhöggur started eating away at Yggdrasil's roots, and it was the dragon that ate the corpses in hell.

Ark already knew that part thanks to his common sense.

“In the Dark Century, this was the place where the 7 heroes and Nídhöggur fought a fierce battle. And at the end of a long battle, they were finally able to defeat hell's army led by Nídhöggur. However, the 7 heroes weren't able to completely defeat Nídhöggur. Therefore, as a temporary solution the 7 heroes borrowed Yggdrasil's power and seal Nídhöggur and his army from Niflheim into Yggdrasil.

“So when Yggdrasil became corrupted.....”

“He waited for Yggdrasil to become weak and then weakened the seal in order to break out!

The elder held his head and made a sign to ward off evil.

“Didn't I say so? We should've reached Yggdrasil faster!”

“But in this situation you never told me a single thing.”

“It is taboo to speak of it for the raccoon clans.”

The elders countered.

“The raccoon clans made a promise with the 7 heroes. The raccoons must isolate Subarutalp from the outside world as a way to keep the secret of the seal containing Nídhöggur.”

“7 heroes?”

“Yes, so this place was deceptively hidden.....”

The Elder revealed the amazing secret.

The Underground World wasn't originally isolated from the outside world.

According to the vow between the 7 heroes and the raccoon clans, they blocked the entrance using the underground labyrinth.

Then the one year monarch who built Cairo was a descendant of the 7 heroes. At that time, the barbarians were gradually approaching the underground labyrinth, so in order to repel their approach the monarch mobilized his soldiers and built Cairo in order to prevent the secret of the sealing from escaping. However, after a few hundred years the will of the monarch disappeared and Cairo became a simple lawless city.

‘Then the reason the other beast species didn't know about the location of the raccoons was because of this?’

Once again, there were many existences buried in New World.

If there were such things in other games. The whole situation was set up. There was an underground world just like there was an underwater city. However, New World was different.

The underwater city and underground world demonstrates that there must be a purpose in order to reach it.

The same goes for monsters. There were many reasons for making monsters that inhabit different areas. Legends of the past or traditions had a high possibility of being used as a historical event. And all of that results in a single scenario.

The Dark Century.....!

At that moment, Ark's head was spinning fiercely.

'The Heartsoul Bead disappeared and then Nídhöggur's seal weakened. If so, that might be the purpose of the Red Man in the first place.

Once again, Ark wondered about the red haired NPC.

So far, he had thought that the Red Man was simply a NPC related to the quest. However, the problem wasn't so simple if he has anything to do with Nídhöggur.

This scenario was likely to play a huge role in the prophecy that predicts that the Lord of Darkness and the 7 heroes would return.

'Maybe what happened in Jackson and the resurrection of Valderas was also related to the Red Man.'

Everything must fall in place to find all the clues.

Such as not knowing how Valderas resurrected himself. If someone had resurrected Valderas intentionally. Then the timing seemed to fit.

The Heartsoul Bead was stolen from the Magic Institute a year ago, but it was after the Event Quest finished that the Red Man disappeared with the Heartsoul Bead.

The time in between.....

The Red Man must have been orchestrating the events that happened in Jackson.

'If my guess is true.....The Red Man is the main NPC that holds the key to all the scenarios in New World!'

A spark flew in Ark's head while he was thinking.

'Perhaps.....perhaps.....!'

It was the condition to pass the Global Exos test.

He didn't know whether the condition was a quest or unknown event

scenario. However, the Red Man was an NPC that might influence the fate of New World!

Maybe figuring out the clues was the key to passing the test to enter Global Exos.

No, if Ark's reasoning was no doubt correct. Then even if it wasn't the answer requested by Global Exos, if he managed to clear the quest then there was no doubt a strong impression would be given.

'It is New World after all and everything is related to the Dark Century and the seven heroes.' 'Yes, it's clear the passing the company's entrance examination was entangled in the legend scenario!'

He had finally found a clue.

This was the answer to Global Exos!

'Even though there was a report sent about the Jackson Event Quest, there was no reaction which seems strange.....it must have been just a clue. It is Global Exos after all. They must be careful with the scenarios to avoid unscrupulous people joining the company.....'

A clear view of the future increased his mood.

Have the other candidates found any clues like this? Of course, in order to choose more people Global Exos might have other clues. But anyway, Ark had managed to find a clue so it became a little clearer what he had to do.

'I have to stop the resurrection of Nídhöggur for the time being. Because if I don't solve this then there is no meaning in finding the clue. When completing a quest like this, I must do it clearly so that points will be piled up neatly.'

Ark asked with an urgent voice.

"What would happen if Nídhöggur is resurrected?"

"DoomRuin! The Nídhöggur from the Dark Century almost drove the entire Northern Continent to death. It was only when the Lord of

Darkness appeared and the dragon submitted to them that the Northern Continent was saved. But now, there is no Lord of Darkness to restrain him. If he wakes up.....the Underground World along with the Northern continent would become a land of the dead in just a few months.”

“How do we stop the resurrection?”

“Before the seal breaks, you have no choice but to return Yggdrasil to its original state.”

“There is no time to delay anymore.”

Ark nodded and murmured.

Dududung, the quest information window popped up.

[Quest has been updated.

Reclaim the Peace of the Underground World! = Prevent the resurrection of Nídhöggur!

You have discovered the secret hidden in Subarutalp.

Nídhöggur, the dragon that almost led the Northern continent to destruction is sealed underneath Subarutalp. But when Yggdrasil became corrupted, the seal weakened and if Nídhöggur is resurrected then he will lead his hellish army again.

If Nídhöggur is restored then the entire Northern continent will be engulfed in a huge disaster.

The only way to prevent the resurrection of Nídhöggur is to rescue and restore Yggdrasil. Lead your raccoon soldiers to Yggdrasil and restore it before the seal breaks.

The current rate of seal destruction: 30%

<Difficulty: ☆ ☆ ☆ Quest is limited to: Dark Walker>]

Bang bang double bang!

“1st division retreat! 2nd artillery division, support the 1st division!”

Flames were burning as the artillerymen covered the first division's retreat. A variety of flames flew through the air and exploded from the body of the Plant Golem.

"3rd division engineers, restore the 1st division using potions!"

Meanwhile, the engineers who had dug tunnels came up through one and applied potions. The first division who had their health restored once again went to face the Plant Golem and had their health decreased again.

"There is no time to rest. Go back to the potions and recover your health. As quickly as possible!"

Ark shouted at his raccoon troops.

Since the quest updated, Ark literally pushed forward like a tank. Thanks to Nídhöggur, he found out that the Red Man held the key to passing the entrance examination.

However, the situation was worse. The quest had a time limit before the seal would be destroyed. If the limited time was over then the quest would fail. And the Underground world would perish.

<Prevent the resurrection of Nídhöggur!> if the quest failed then the one he spent a long time on <Find the Heartsoul Bead> was also likely to fail.

But the biggest problem was not the failure of the quest. He could get one of the Three Marvels from Yggdrasil.

It was a major item required for 2 quests and his profession at the same time. Of course, the Three Marvels was the only way to upgrade his profession.....he was lucky to have found a fragment of it in the Underground world. There was no guarantee that he would be able to find the clues again if he started from the beginning.

It also wasn't possible to give up on the company entrance examination.

'In the end, everything is hanging on this quest.'

Ark didn't stop to reclaim the town.

Upgrading the troops and equipment required a minimum of 2 hours. He had to skip stopping in towns to save time.

By the rate of destruction of the seal wasn't indicated in time, it made him even more impatient.

'It is lucky that even the monsters are confused.'

Ark looked around at the shaken Underground world.

The earthquake was still continuing to move forward.

It was a natural result of Nídhöggur trying to break the seal. There was a deafening sound before the rocks rose and the ground cracked open. As a result of that, the earth in the forest where the battle was occurring sank down.

"Aaaaah, help me!"

"The crack is coming. The damage!"

Fortunately, the raccoon troops didn't receive considerable damage.

However, that also happened to monsters. The monsters would fall into the sudden crack or would have to avoid most of the raccoon troops. And at that time, Popo manifested a strange ability.

"Arc-hyung, this is dangerous. We have to turn to the right."

Wherever Popo said, a crack was likely to appear. How on earth did he know that, was something that thought at first.

However, the situation repeated several times so Ark trusted Popo with the direction of the march. And they marched for three hours without distraction.

"Yggdrasil!"

The leading soldiers shouted.

"That is the number of worlds that appears in Norse mythology.....!"

Ark looked at the huge tree on top of the hill with a sigh.

At the heart of the jungle, the towering tree on the hilltop looked like a giant that was bearing the weight of the ceiling. With roots that extended everywhere, it was the patron of the raccoons, Yggdrasil.

There were numerous Kanggeul and Plant Golem's running around the vicinity of the hill.

'There is only one chance. If the troops are defeated then there is no way to return and try again.'

There was no time to rush blindly.

"Dedric, tell the heavy troops of the 1st division to use plan A-4 and lure the enemy. The 2nd artillery division will wait on standby to begin plan A-1 of concentrated attacks. The 3rd engineers will back up the 1st division. You will concentrate on watching the movements of the monsters from the sky and if anything changes then tell me immediately."

"I understand."

When it was busy he would return.

Ark had commanded the raccoon force and suppressed his impatience. He took advantage of Popo's ability to predict changes of terrain in advance, in order to keep the Kanggeul and Plant Golems separate and enabled their attacks to be concentrated.

The raccoon soldiers also found the situation urgent and became more aggressive.

They spent 2 hours hunting around 20 Plant Golems and hundreds of Kanggeul. Numerous crosses floated over the heads of the raccoons as they levelled up like crazy.

Ark reached level 108 and his tactical skill increased considerably.

At that time, Dedric flew back.

"Master, the clean-up is now close to finishing. There are no monsters around Yggdrasil."

‘Okay, the amount that I can raise my level and skills has become limited. The preparation is sufficient. The game hangs on this!’

Ark immediately gathered the raccoons and sold them the Warrior’s cookies. The ravenous soldiers ate the cookies wildly with shaking shoulders.

The raccoons that had their moral raised to 100% weren’t afraid of death at all.

“This way!”

Popo pointed from the front.

A few kilometres around the bottom Yggdrasil, there was a break that looked like a giant cave.

The gap was so huge that 100 people could enter and line up in rank. Ark stationed the soldiers too injured to march at the front of the entrance.

“I hate it; I want to fight with my hyung as well!”

“The front is going to be many times more dangerous than it is now. I won’t have the capacity to protect you.”

“I don’t need the protection. I am from a warrior raccoon clan that fought to the death! I’ll just enter by myself!”

“.....I understand. Then don’t fall from my side. Got it?”

“Yes, I’ll protect Hyung!”

Popo brandished a twisted dagger.

Ark sighed.

He really didn’t want to take him, if possible. However, Popo was a soldier and there was no time to argue with him.

-The current rate of seal destruction: 68%

‘It’s not enough.’

Ark checked the information window and immediately ordered them

to march.

“Charge. It is right in front of your eyes!”

Ark led his troops into the interior of Yggdrasil.

The light of the ore didn't reach inside and it was difficult to even see an inch in front of him. Besides, somewhere in the darkness a mist was pumped out that clogged up his breath.

To make matters worse, the interior was complicated like a maze.

In some places, thick tree branches tangled together to block a route. Ark looked back at the elder and asked.

“Elder-nim?”

“I don't know. When I went, it wasn't this dark or complicated.”

“Did it transform? I can't do it. Dedric, go first and examine the terrain.”

Ark commanded and Dedric flew away and searched around.

However, he soon returned and shook his head.

“No, it is too complicated and I don't know where I am.”

“Unbelievable. 1st division soldiers march forward and find the way.”

“Yes!”

After a few minutes of searching through the darkness.....

Swaeeeeek, Double bang!

“What, what is that sound?”

“An attack. Aa-avoid! Incoming!”

“Keuak!”

In the darkness, a huge object flew and attacked the troops. When he used Eyes of the Cat, he saw that it was a huge thick vine. Yggdrasil used its inner wall of vines to attack indiscriminately.

“Do not panic and maintain formation. 1st division form a circle and protect the troops, 2nd artillery division use plan A-3 to barrage the vine! 3rd engineer division, dedicate yourself to helping the wounded.”

It was a fearsome attack that flew in the dark!

Although it was a situation that would cause fear, the moral of the raccoon troops was already 100%.

Thanks to that, the fearless raccoons calmly followed Ark's command.

Flashes from the cannons firing penetrated the darkness. 3~4 vines were destroyed under a chain of explosions.

However, another vine took their place along the floor.

“Arc-hyung, fighting the vines won't do anything.”

Popo jumped back and forth as he shouted.

“The vines are Yggdrasil itself. If you destroy the vines then they'll just be replaced! We must hurry to seek the core of Yggdrasil and remove the source of corruption!”

“I know!”

Ark shouted in an irate voice.

He could guess that much just by looking. But was it as easy as he said? How would he move the troops that are battered from all sides by the vines?

At that time, something appeared like lightning inside Ark's head.

“Yes, that's it!”

Ark immediately packed Lancel's sword into his bag and replaced it with 'sword' which was Deimos transformed into a blade.

Saw bladealthough the damage was better, Lancel's sword had several bonuses which meant more damage. However, this time was different. It was a time when a special effect was more

important than damage.

“Snake, return all items to the bag! If you run out of space then discard the japtem!”

Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake quickly climbed Ark's body and entered the bag. And uncontrollably spat out items.

Items were also quickly thrown out of the bag. Tears gathered as even in this situation, Ark didn't want to give up 1 copper. But there was no time to think about it.

“Snake, paralysis poison!”

When Snake climbed back out, Ark immediately made it eat a poisonous plant and shouted.

Snake which produced poison inside its body spewed out venom.

“Go!”

Once the sword was poisoned, he switched on the whip. Ark who had done all that in a few seconds twisted his sword, and swung the saw blade at the vines.

Chwarararak, the sword attacked like a fan and hit all the vines within a radius of 7 metres. The number of times the poison could be used was five times, but if he used the sword like a whip to strike five times, the number of uses disappeared. And it took 3 seconds for the 6 vines that were struck to fall paralyzed to the ground. Although he attacked a lot at the same time, the probability of all the enemies being poisoned was low.

However, if he used a poisonous herb the probability increases.

“Continue, create the poison!”

Ark made Snake eat the poison nonstop. And he jumped crazily all over the place and wielded his sword. Soon all 20 vines that had attacked the raccoon troops fell to the ground paralyzed. Ark restrained the raccoons from attacking the vines and shouted.

“It is not necessary to attack the vine. Anyway, it can’t catch up to us!”

He arranged the raccoon troops after defeating the vines and advanced. However, as they entered the maze became even more complicated. In the end, it was difficult to distinguish where they were and they became even more disoriented.

In the meantime, some of the raccoons died from the offensive of the vines. In the beginning he had 300 people, but only 200 entered Yggdrasil and that number was now reduced to 150 people in the interior of Yggdrasil.

‘Damn, I keep losing more troops.....’

It won’t make removing the corruption from Yggdrasil any easier.

The boss would be even more difficult. Thanks to the difficulty level of C+, it was important to preserve all his raccoon troops. But honestly in this state, he couldn’t even guarantee that he could find the nucleus of Yggdrasil.

-The current rate of seal destruction: 80%.

He closed his mouth as it began to dry up.

Meanwhile, he turned a corner.

All of a sudden he felt a feeble shake from the bag.

‘What? This is.....Star Fragment?’

Once he opened the bag, he saw a feeble light shining from the Star Fragment of the Three Marvels. The Elder’s eyes widened and he muttered as Ark took out the shining Star Fragment.

“A Star Fragment! That’s right, you had a Star Fragment!”

“What do you mean?”

“At the centre of Yggdrasil is another of the Three Marvels. And according to legend, the pieces of the Three Marvels would recognise each other if they were within a certain distance.”

That stupid raccoon! Only telling him this information now?

Ark swallowed the profanities that were rising up his throat.

He cleared his thoughts as now wasn't the time to be angry.

Woong Woong Woong, he moved the star fragment back and forth until the light became stronger. And he felt like a child being pulled to one side by a force.

'This way!'

Ark judged the situation and immediately shouted.

"Concentrate your power on defense! Don't worry about anything else and just follow behind me. Unfortunately, I have no time to concern myself with stragglers. The life and death of the continent as well as the Underground World is concerned in this battle. At whatever cost, I have to prevent the resurrection of Nídhöggur!"

"Ooh oh oh oh!"

Ark shouted while running at a furious pace without looking back.

The raccoon soldiers in the lead prevent vine attacks using their shields. He didn't know how many people died from the attack since there was no time to turn his head. If he stopped to help them while surrounded by vines, it would eat up time again.

"Ack, don't pay any regard to us!"

He heard a praiseworthy sound caused by drugs.

Of course, Ark didn't even look back as he continued running. And at a crossroad he would go depending on where the light from the Star Fragment shone stronger. For 10 minutes, he ran like crazy while striking vines.....

Suddenly he heard water and saw a bright ambient light.

"Hyung, we did it! This is the heart of Yggdrasil!"

Popo jumped and shouted.

Ark and the raccoon troops had arrived at a huge cavern. In the centre, there was a giant bud that rose from the ground. A crystal ball the size of a fist was lodged. But the flesh surrounding the area where the crystal was stuck seemed to swell up.

Dugun, dugun, dugun.....

The odd flesh twitched like it was breathing. And with every pulse, he could feel a black sinister aura.

He was able to determine the circumstances with a glance.

‘The Heartsoul Bead is causing Yggdrasil to be corrupted!’

“1st division soldiers, 2nd artillery division! Concentrate your attack on the crystal ball!”

“Wha ah ah ah ah ah!”

The soldiers ran forward holding their swords. However, it was the artillery that attacked the crystal ball first. The artillerymen aimed the cannon and pulled the trigger. 50 sparks flew from the muzzle as lit up the darkness as it flew through the air.

Just as it was about to hit!

The leaves at the back suddenly rose and protected the crystal ball. And every bullet disappeared under the leaves. At the same time, the defensive vines attacked the troops as well.

“Kuaaaak!”

The heavy troops became disordered as they fell to the side.

A red warning message appeared in front of Ark.

-Boss monster ‘Awakened Heartsoul Bead’ has appeared!

[*A page is missing from the raws]

Cocoons hung along the wall.

The size of the cocoons was ten times the size of the ones he saw when reclaiming the dungeon. Then when some twitching, the

cocoon split in half. Then something slowly crept out.....!

“Plant Golem!”

A giant body covered with bark tore the cocoon. It slowly emerged like a scene from a horror movie.

‘Oh my God.....if all the cocoons hatch.....!’

There would be around 100 Plant Golems swarming the cavern. They had difficulty fighting a dozen Plant Golems, if they were surrounded by one hundred then they would need all their concentration to survive.

“Switch attack! 1st division, stop the Plant Golem. 2nd artillery division, attack the cocoons!”

When Ark raised his voice, 50 bullets started firing at the cocoons immediately. Just like the famous classic RTS game Stark O, maybe the cocoons defense was really strong?

Sure enough. The defensive power of the cocoon was unimaginable.

After hitting one 100 feet up, the cocoon barely exploded and the dead body of the unfinished Plant Golem fell. And meanwhile three Plant Golems had finished hatching and emerged.

‘Unbelievable. The degree of difficulty for this boss.....’

Even if he concentrated his power, he wasn’t sure if he could break the crystal within the time limit.

If they tried to avoid the vine’s attacks, the rest of the Plant Golems would hatch! And until the artillerymen finished attacking the cocoons, there was no way for the heavy troops to attack. He only had 150 troops but even if he had 300~400, it wouldn’t be enough.

-The current rate of seal destruction: 86%

‘Jeez, what is with this hospitality? How am I supposed to defeat this boss? If I want to defeat it within the time limit, I’ll have to completely destroy the petals!’

It was really endless. If one cocoon was destroyed then another one

would rise. However, if he didn't pay the vines any attention then it would attack and deal damage. He was being pushed back. He couldn't seem to grasp the feeling of control of the situation.

Ark swung his blade coated with paralysis poison at the vines in order to gain more time. However, after 10 seconds the paralysis wore off and the situation was the same.

'I can't waste time on the vines but they keep on thickening.....can I tie it up?'

A thought suddenly sparked in Ark's head.

'That's right, it might lead there.....No, I think this is definitely correct. I can block all the vines and Plant Golem at once! There's no other way!'

Ark made a decision and immediately commanded.

"1st division soldiers attack and attack the back of the bud! 2nd division artillerymen, concentrate your attacks on the cocoons of the Plant Golems. 3 division, hand out potions that will increase damage!"

"But how do we prevent attacks from the vine....."

Popo gasped.

"Leave that to me! Transformation off!"

At that moment, the sword changed back into Deimos.

"Deimos, protect me."

Clack clack! Clack clack clack!

"Snake, Spirit Body Glue!"

Snake opened its mouth and spat out the glue.

"Now the rest is ours! Dedric, use your full power and attract the vines this way!"

"Eek? It that really okay?"

Don't speak and just do it!"

"Hung, I don't understand so I'll just do it. Hey over here! The stupid vine!"

Dedric opened his wings and soared. He flew through the air at an incredible pace while avoiding the vines' attacks. Dozens of vines huffed as they chased after Dedric. And after a moment, it glimpsed him and the vines changed their direction towards Ark.

"Well done!"

Ark had quickly thrown the glue in front of his body.

-.....Woeeoeoeo, I shall stick them all!

Green slimeThe ectoplasm gave a strange sound and sprung out.

The ectoplasm hit the entwined vines and stuck them to the ground. They only became even more tangled as they tried to escape.

'It's a success!'

Ark waved the ectoplasm as he jumped all over the place.

When Dedric attracted the vines, he brandished the ectoplasm. And the slime increased and wound around the vines. The entangled vines became stuck to the ground.

The number of times the spirit body glue could be used was a maximum of five.

He had already used it twice so there were three times left. However, once used there was no limit to the time it would stay stuck. The material was the ectoplasm which increased the affinity with the spirit. And once glued, it would never break before falling.

Double bang!

Deimos stopped the surprise attack.

Thanks to the fusion with Warwick, Deimos had 1000 health. And thanks to the shield, his defense dramatically increased.

“Dedric, I’ve finished cleaning up here. Lead the other vines towards this place!”

So the ectoplasm spread and attacked dozens of vine stems to the walls and floors.

“Ha ha ha! How about that, wood bastard!”

As Ark had already used it, he even used the ectoplasm to glue the cocoons shut.

When the Plant Golem tore it to escape, there would be a perfect blockade. However, when he finished gluing everything one hour had already been wasted. But the vines and cocoons were glued together and couldn’t attack anymore.

‘This.....once I’ve tried it out, it was an extravagant item!’

Ark marvelled at the efficiency of the spirit body glue.

It was used to repair the lever and open the door as well as build a new skeleton body.

And now it was used to attack a boss that had a difficulty of C+.

At first he wasn’t sure what to do with it, but now that he’s tried it out it was an object with limitless utilization.

‘Sheesh, this is so good. I can only use it two more times so I shouldn’t waste it.’

He had a chance to win now thanks to the spirit body glue.

The only thing left is.....

“Okay, one more thing to eliminate! Unconditional Assault!”

Ark used his tactical skill to make the raccoon troops attack one target.

The 1st division swung their swords at the bud while the artillery fired like crazy. The engineers even threw an explosive potion.

The 150 raccoon troops poured all their firepower on the target.

The leaves gradually withered and twisted off one by one. And finally, all the leaves fell off to reveal the crystal ball.

Even without the protection of the leaves, the crystal ball had a lot of health. But after a few minutes, the health fell down to 2%.

Then a brilliant idea shone in Ark's eyes.

"The whole army, unconditional retreat!"

"Eh eh?"

The raccoon troops were perplexed by Ark's order.

Why was he calling a retreat with victory right in front of his eyes? However, since the additional tactic's orders were absolute, the raccoons discretely dispersed.

"Now. Blade Storm!"

Ark took out a sword and used his skill.

The special effect of the Blade Storm was displayed. The sword broke into many pieces and whirled around like a storm. And the bunch of sword fragments was drawn to the crystal ball.

The hundreds of fragments did X 5 damage!

Inside the crystal ball, something scrambled before there was a popping sound.

And the black aura stopped flowing from the crystal ball. The crystal ball lost its power and fell away from the bud.

-Your level has risen!

-Your level has risen!

-Your level has risen!

The message windows popped up simultaneously.

'One, two, three.....eight, eight times!'

After he defeated the awakened Heartsoul Bead, he levelled up 8

times!

Ark had commanded unconditional retreat at the last moment in order to get all the experience. It was a level 400 boss monster!

It was a huge chunk of experience. I thought of sharing the experience with the raccoons was something he couldn't even fathom.

One piece of common sense, there was a limit on experience gain in New World. If he completed the quest and boss monster in several steps, his levels would rise but the experience wouldn't apply 100%.

The first time the level rose he would get 100%, the second time 90% would be applied, the third time 80%.....and so on.

In other words, no matter how much experience the boss gave or how difficult the quest completed, at a high level it was impossible to raise more than 10 levels at one time.

But even with such a penalty applied, he still gained 8 levels! It was astronomical experience.

'Wuhahaha, I level up 8 levels at once!'

Now that they grasped the situation, the raccoon soldiers had bitter looks on their faces.

"Dirty....."

"Dang. Tick."

However, they didn't dare say such words under Ark's eyes.

Well, anyway the Underground World was saved so the raccoons should be satisfied.

"You did it! Ark-hyung accomplished it! Subarutalp is saved!"

Popo tears fell as he glanced around.

"Yes, I made a promise. Hyung has never broken his promises."

Ark rubbed Popo's head when suddenly.

[Heartsoul Bead

Handle with care! The Heartsoul Bead is a crystal ball filled with ancient magic and a curse. An ordinary person who touches the Heartsoul Bead will lose their soul to the Devil. But now it has lost its magic and is just plain beads.]

‘As expected, it was the Heartsoul Bead.’

Ark picked it up and sighed. There was a lot of talk but this situation was finally neatly arranged.

“Okay, it has ended. Everyone went through a lot of trouble.”

Koo-Kung!

Ark had opened his mouth to praise the raccoon troops.

When with a sudden roar, the whole place started shaking. Popo saw the buds of the tree start breaking and threw his body.

“Ah, Ark-hyung! Danger.....Ack!”

Ark had been pushed to the floor by Popo. And reflexively lifted his head as his breath returned.

“Po, Popo!”

A crack had spread across the floor like a spider web from the shock of the bud. And protruding from the gap was a black shape that impaled Popo. Popo had lost 90% of his health and his body was flashing red.

Ark hurriedly rushed to Popo.

Wuuuuuu!

Then, an eerie ringing came from under the crack.

Ark’s face hardened as he turned his head.

Underneath the crack was a cavern where the end couldn’t be seen. And climbing up the rocks along the walls were black shapes. The monster’s whole body burned from the heat, but what was even

more terrifying was the enormous existence at the centre of the black form.

The deep red eyes of a dragon were visible in the tattered body. From a dozen metres down, the huge body started climbing up.

It was a scene like the devil was rising from Hell.

It looked horrible, but after looking at the dragon's information he had a more realistic fear.

The Immortal General Nídhöggur. Level 500!

It was the nightmare of the Northern continent that was sealed by the 7 heroes!

His breath got stuck in his jaw.

‘Oh my God!’

“What on earth is happening? The Heartsoul Bead was destroyed so why is Nídhöggur still resurrecting?”

“I never considered it!

The elder flopped down in a panic.

“What? What do you mean?”

“Nídhöggur had been sealed using the divine power of Yggdrasil.....but in order to break the Heartsoul Bead in this battle.....Yggdrasil received too much damage.....therefore it lost the power required to maintain the seal.....”

“That.....!”

Double bang!

Once again, a roar was heard and the cracks widened even further. Some of the dead people wearing gear began to emerge from the gap.

“Raccoon troops, steady! Attack, attack!”

The surprised raccoon troops began hurling attacks. The dead were

bombarded and pushed back into the crack. But it was only a temporary measure.

Rocks. There were hundreds and thousands of dead souls from Niflheim! Nídhöggur offered them the ability to climb out of the crack.....

‘Heck, I haven’t come this far just to give up!’

Ark cursed. Now, the only reliable thing was the spirit body glue! Ark filled the crack with glue. After he did, the crack became quiet for a while. But it was only temporary, as with another shock a new crack opened.

The crack spread out and was right next to the old one.

Eventually Ark burst out screaming.

“No. Even if I try to close up the crack, it’s no use. ReallyWill it end like this?”

“It’s over. Everything is done!”

Raccoon troops abandoned formation and flopped down with a desperate moan. At that time, Popo’s body that was in a critical condition fell.

“Keuuuk, Ah.....Arc-hyung!”

“Po, Popo!”

Ark and Popo hugged.

Something green and sparkly spewed from Popo’s eyes.

-The current rate of seal destruction: 97%

“Pant!”

At the same time, screams emerged from the Planning Department of the Global Exos Company.

“Wha, What it this?”

Kim Gwon-tae looked at the monitor with bloodshot eyes. The

formerly fine monitor suddenly changed as uncontrollably data started appearing. It was like he suffered from hack like symptoms, but he had already experienced this phenomenon once.

“An Event Quest?”

When an Event Quest appears in New World, it was necessary to update the data in the main system. Kim Gwon-tae jumped and flinched as he heard Ha Myung-woo’s voice coming from the side.

“Event Quest?” “What do you mean?”

“The enormous amount of data! There is no doubt. Somewhere, an Event Quest is about to start. The security level.....Huk!”

After he checked the data on the laptop, Kim Gwon-tae let out a muffled scream.

And murmured in a trembling voice.

“B.....The Event Quest has a B difficulty.”

What nonsense is this? When it is a B difficulty, doesn’t the average user have to be level 300 in order for it to start? But the average level of the users hasn’t even reached 100 yet.”

“Ha, but it is true. “The Event Quest has a security level of B!”

“Oh damn! Has the main system gone crazy and discarded the security rating?”

“If only.....”

Ha Myung-woo moaned and beat at this desk.

“Where is this going to happen?”

“The place where the data is being gathered appears to be near the Brandt Mountain range. But that place has no town.....For now I can’t tell what will trigger the quest.”

“Stop! All the employees set aside your work! We have to do whatever we can to stop it! If a class B Event Quest is activated now, it will throw off the balance of the game! Understood? Even if

you have to take an axe to the main computer, stop it!”

Kim Gwon-tae shook his head helplessly.

“But all the outside interference codes have already been blocked.”

“Then do I just have to sit here and watch stupidly again?”

“Well.....oh?”

While he was watching the scrolling data, Kim Gwon-tae’s eyes narrowed like a hawk.

He lifted a telephone and turned to Ha Myung-woo.

“What is it?”

“The data is somewhat abnormal.”

“What do you mean?”

“When the Event Quest was activated, another data showed up.”

“Another data? Explain it in a language I would understand!”

Ha Myung-woo threw the phone and looked at the monitor.

Kim Gwon-tae explained, pointing to some data coming up on the monitor.

“Here and here and here, this is not quest-related data. Rather the data appears to be a confrontation with the program that started the event quest. So you see.....if I used a metaphor, I would call it an antivirus program.”

“Vaccine? A program that catches viruses?”

“Yes, if the computer is infected with a virus, won’t the vaccine program run automatically? It is similar to such a program. Now the data is automatically moving and blocking the event quest related programs.”

“You mean the event quest might not be triggered?”

“If this program is perfect.”

“Perfect?”

Ha Myung-woo wrinkled his forehead as he frowned.

But Kim Gwon-tae searched through a thick booklet and found what he was looking for. And when one page was compared to the computer monitor, he nodded.

“Yes, when it is perfect the event quest won’t be triggered. Any outside interference is blocked but since this program lurked in the interior, it doesn’t seem affected. But this program is missing an important source”

“What is that?”

Kim Gwon-tae sighed and shook his head.

“I don’t know. But even if I do, there is no way to interfere from the outside. The only way to settle it in the game is to defeat the boss.....it seems to.....act like a human and ignore the war between the data.

The reality was that the next generation of lost myths and legends were breathing in a virtual reality game called New World.

It was a world unknown even to its operators.

The Dark Piece

“What are you doing? Miners! Dedric, Deimos, quickly bring the miners!”

Ark shouted at the lifeless raccoon soldiers. Popo’s health was rapidly decreasing.

Popo lifted his trembling hands.

“Ah, Ark-hyung.....”

Ark shouted as he grasped Popo’s hands.

“Yes, I’m here. Hold on and wait. This wound will heal quickly enough.”

“Hyung.....did we fail? Eventually.....to stop the plans of evil people.....isn’t it possible?”

“It’s not over yet!”

“Master, I’ve brought the engineers.”

Then Dedric and Deimos appeared, dragging one behind them.

When the engineer poured a potion, Popo’s health was instantly restored. But the symptom where his health constantly decreased didn’t improve. No, instead it seemed to be accelerating.

The confused engineer poured a detoxification potion to try and cleanse it out but the result was the same.

“Mum.....Dad.....Sobbing. Subarutalp is.....”

Popo was in a delirious mental state and burst into tears.

“Damn, what is happening to you?”

He had thought everything was resolved just a few moments ago.

But in a short time, the situation immediately became worse. The raccoon troops fell into a state of panic and lost their souls and the seal destruction was still continuing. And now Popo who he thought of as a little brother was dying. There are so many things happening at once that it wasn't possible to contain them all.

'Let's try to save Popo.'

Surprisingly, the thing that Ark chose was Popo.

And of course, it was not the result of logical judgement.

He knew that it was only a NPC. And once the seal was broken it would be difficult for Ark and the raccoon troops to survive as well as Popo. If he used a rational judgement, he would have decided to move the raccoon troops and figure out a way to stop the seal from being destroyed.

But.....he couldn't let Popo die in front of him.

It was an emotional judgment, not a logical one.

.....That is a human.

There was nobody that would sacrifice their life for world peace.

But there were a lot of people who would sacrifice their life for a person they held affection for.

Even if he was good at simple maths, it was one that was full of contradiction. But affection wasn't a matter that could be calculated using pros and cons.

"Popo, stay with me. You're not going to die. I will not let you do so."

Ark grabbed Popo's hand and used his nursing skill.

At that moment, a phenomenon he was unable to understand took place in the vicinity of Ark. The shared time was stopped. The shaking ground and trembling raccoons, even the dust floating in the air.....everything went perfectly still.

'What, what the?'

Flash-!

Ark turned around as the green light emanating from Popo's eyes became more intense. And on one side of the wall, a picture was drawn like a projector screen. It was an image that was stuck in places like the noise in old film.

An image of Yggdrasil, holding up the ceiling of the underground world with its giant trees showed.

In the vicinity of the town, smoke rose and showed raccoon families living peacefully. It was showing a comforting image from the mind. In the video, Popo was visibly laughing while holding the hands of his parents.

At that moment, a close up appearance shed light.

'Author.....Red Man?'

The face was masked but he was recognizable at a glance.

The man had red eyes, red hair and a red aura. He wielded a red sword and made the raccoon village a sea of blood. Overwhelmed raccoons fell one after another. Among those, Popo's parents barely hid Popo. The Red Man had killed all the raccoon families and came to the interior of Yggdrasil. Yggdrasil used all its strength but was not able to resist him. The Red Man proposed something to Yggdrasil. However, Yggdrasil refused and the Red Man aimed at Yggdrasil with his sword.

Then, one raccoon attacked the Red Man from the side. It was Popo who had to hide and watch his parents' deaths. For vengeance, he had grabbed a dagger and ran after the Red Man. However, Popo collapsed bleeding with one blow.

Yggdrasil was protecting its own spirit was a defense boundary. However, the death of his clan had disturbed the defense enchantment.

The Red Man did not miss the opening.

He allowed Popo to chase him for the sake of this moment! The Red

Man squeezed the Heartsoul Bead and tore through the enchantment. And the Heartsoul Bead had powerful magic that was swallowed by Yggdrasil.

A humiliating defeat!

However, even in that desperate moment Yggdrasil didn't give up. Using the last of its strength, Popo was warped to a safe place.

This was an arrangement to protect the ancient vow.

.....The video ended there.

At the same time, the brilliance in Popo's eyes disappeared and the time that had stopped restarted again.

Suddenly, Ark heard Popo's voice in his ear.

"Ark-hyung."

"Popo.....what is it?"

"I think it's all over now."

There was a light of conviction in Popo's eyes.

"I already died then."

"Died?"

"Because a part of my living body came from Yggdrasil."

".....!"

"Yggdrasil already knew then. It couldn't stop the Red Man with its powers. Before being hit with the magic, a part of its spirit moved to me. In order to find the saviour that would stop that guy's ambitions.....it knows now."

Popo looked at Ark with new eyes.

"Yggdrasil's awaited saviour was the descendant of Hero Maban.....it was Ark-hyung. Then he told me to bring him here to Yggdrasil. Now it is my turn."

“Your turn.....?”

Ark asked with a worried voice.

Popo nodded with a pale smile.

“You know. The power of Yggdrasil is necessary to protect the seal. Now, I’ll give back the power that Yggdrasil gave me. It should be enough to prevent the resurrection of Nídhöggur.”

Popo pushed Ark and slowly raised his body.

And he approached the place where the seal was located with weak steps.

Ark looked at his form and tried to talk many times, but only closed his mouth. He would like to ask but was afraid of the answer. Popo lowered his head to the seal for a while and murmured in a low voice.

“I wanted to live a little bit more.”

“.....!”

“I met hyung and discovered the outside world.....I would like to hear more things. This world.....and hyung.....what adventures hyung had.....how he lived.....I wanted to know. And if possible.....If it is possible to say.....”

Tears fell from Popo’s eyes.

“Now, wait a minute! Wait, there has to be another way!”

When Ark raised his voice, it surprised him.

His partner was a NPC. The NPC would clear up the situation.

Normally, it would be welcomed with open arms. But it wasn’t possible to do that.

He didn’t see any other way. But.....this was different. He didn’t want it settled in such a way. It was a NPC but he didn’t want the NPC to disappear forever.

However, Popo shook his head.

“I’m sorry. Hyung.....The promise to go to the outside world together.....I can’t keep it.”

Flash-!

An enormous light emerged from Popo’s body. Like a metal of metal put into a flame, it was red before it started turning white.

-The current rate of seal destruction: 99%, 98%, 97%.....

The number that had continuously ascended started going down.

Once it spontaneously recovered, the magic was drawn down to a huge circle on the ground.

“Popo.....!”

The devastated Ark looked at Popo with blurry eyes. That was when almost all the cracks returned to its original state.

Suddenly a deafening cry came from the ground as flames emerged. Popo’s health was reduced to 50%.

“Ugh!”

“Giggling, impertinent raccoon child! This body is an emperor of Niflheim. At best you will just be sealing me again!”

It sounded like a voice was coming out from hell!

It was Nídhöggur.

After Nídhöggur attacked Popo with the flames of hell, the seal’s destruction rate started climbing again.

“The hundreds of years. If you thought I’ve would leave politely after being sealed for hundreds of years then you miscalculated. Before Yggdrasil fuses with you, you will die without a trace from the fires of hell.”

“No.....I stop.....I’m.....I.....Underground World and Ark-hyung.....I’m going to save you!”

“Impertinent!”

“Ah ah ah ah ack!”

When the fire became stronger, Popo’s health decreased even more. However, clenched his teeth lightly and endured.

“I.....I’m going to.....I am from a clan of raccoon warriors.....support.....I’ll do!”

“Kukuku, you dare defy me?”

Once again, the explosive flames became stronger!

“Yes, Popo. You can do it.”

“M-Master!”

Ark plunged into the flames.

At the same time, he felt a shock as he immediately lost some health. Ark only felt a degree of the impact, as an NPC Popo would truly feel the pain as the flames burned him. Even so, Popo had not given up.

He was a little boy who had stomachached such pain.

If so, it was time to show the will of Ark who was a user!

Ark took off his mantle and used it to block the hole where the flame was emerging. And he closed the lid with his own body.

The mantle which had 50% fire resistance properties, the Veil of Fire. When he switched to a Dark Walker, he gained a 50% resistance to the dark. Fortunately fire and darkness, with the two properties the damage of the fire in the darkness fell by 50%. And 50% of it was all Ark.

“Ah, Ark-hyung.....!”

Popo flinched and stiffened as he watched Ark.

As he looked at Ark, tears flowed down his face.

“Popo, do it. Please do! Discard that dragon and throw it back into

hell! You can do it! No, it is only possible if it is you. Remember when we first met and you said you wanted to live like a hot foreigner? No, the foreigners aren't so hot, you're a few times hotter. This situation is too hot. Damn, do you understand? Popo, when you try you're a guy that can do anything. And.....if possible, live. You're going to live. Become the hero that seals that worm in hell and live."

Ark continuously used his nursing skill.

He had no choice but to scream out all his feelings.

At the moment, Ark saw a mysterious light pour out.

The light seemed to dance in the darkness around Popo's body before descending. Popo's mental power went down to the bottom of the flames before ascending.

"Goodbye, Hyung....."

A smile formed around Popo's mouth.

However, in a short moment Popo was enveloped by an even stronger light. At the same time, the destruction rate of the seal went down at an incredible rate. Until finally!

-The current rate of seal destruction: 0%

The seal was fully recovered.

Chwararak, crunch, double bang!

Suddenly huge thick branches stretched out. The branches intertwined together into several layers and formed a ball and chain on the seal.

Then the crack disappeared and a magic circle finished appearing.

"Kuaaak, this, unbelievable! No.....!"

Nídhöggur's voice faded as he was sealed. AndPopo changed into light and scattered.

[The Miracle Nursing was successful. True nursing is careful

exchanges with your partner. Caregivers are not therapists. Although you can heal the patient's wounds, you can't stop death. However, if it was what they truly wanted. You can infuse courage and understanding into them.

You understood Popo's behaviour, who had the courage to sacrifice himself. And you learnt about the sacrifice's courage by yourself. You understood your partner's true sacrifice and respected his intentions. You didn't want to lose Popo, but you did your best to respect his intentions and fulfil his wish.

The true sacrifice of Popo and your sacrifice for each other formed a great rapport that moved Yggdrasil.

Yggdrasil will shed everything about Popo and he will be born again into a new existence. If you want to meet Popo again, grow as you meet the millions of foreigners.

- * Due to the success of miracle nursing, all stats increase by 1.
- * Affection increases by 10.
- * Fame increases by 50.
- * Increased the alignment to good by 50.]

[You have acquired the title 'Caregiver of Sacrifice' from the success of Miracle Nursing. Fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many patients.* As a title bonus, all stats increase by 1.*Fame increases by 50]

Suddenly a dim light fell into Ark's hands as a crowd gathered around him.

[Yggdrasil's seed. A soul crystal created with the power of Yggdrasil. This seed contains the soul of the boy hero who sacrificed himself to save Subarutalp. It is Yggdrasil's soul and if planted in an appropriate place then roots would take hold and a new Yggdrasil would grow.]

-Foreigner.....

A ringing sound appeared in Ark's head.

He flinched and looked up as a hologram appeared of a man that was Yggdrasil's representative. It was in the form of a Buddhist priest with a white beard hanging down to his chest.

"You?"

-I am Yggdrasil, the ancient worlds that are already forgotten as well as Popo. Foreigner, first I would like to show respect to you. I have already seen all your achievements through Popo's eyes. If it weren't for you, I would've never been able to stop the resurrection of Nídhöggur. And Popo would've had no choice but to face death in vain.

"Death in vain? Then Popo?"

Yggdrasil looked at Ark with gentle eyes and nodded.

-Popo's death was inevitable. But at the last moment, a miracle surpassing the magic occurred. It was the result of your affection towards Popo and his towards you. Hope is really the mysterious power of life.

"Then Popo is still alive?"

-Thanks to the miracle, Popo has received permission to live again from the powers that govern the world. That seed is my alter ego, and Popo. In accordance with Popo, I give that seed to you. Please find a new land with hope and plant the seed. It is the seed of a new era and Popo will finally be able to see the wide world.

Ark looked at the seed with bemused eyes.

-Ark-hyung!

He heard Popo's voice from the seed.

And a little image rose up from the seed.

"Po, Popo?"

-Ah, it's really embarrassing.

With an embarrassed expression, Popo scratched his head.

-Well, it is like you heard. Now I can accompany you like this. Please look after me in the future as well.

“Ha, ha ha ha, ha ha ha.”

Ark was taken aback and laughed as he sat down against the tree.

That’s right. He often forgot, but it was a virtual reality game.

If you truly want something to happen then it wasn’t impossible.

“It has ended.”

“Ended? What do you mean?”

“Event quest.....it has been cancelled halfway through.”

Kim Gwon-tae looked at the monitor with a soulless expression.

Just a few moments ago the monitor had a crazy amount of data. But now only a few pieces of data came up.

It looked like it had been engaged in a long war and was now cleaning up.

“I can understand that by looking at the monitor!”

Ha Myung-woo shouted in a raspy voice.

“What I want to hear is why? The class B event quest started and now it just suddenly cancelled. Even if something is stopped, don’t I still need reports?”

“I’m really sorry. There is no way to figure it out now.”

“Hell, that fellow is really tedious.”

“I agree. We might be fed up with him but.”

Kim Gwon-tae blew out a huge sigh.

He started computer related work 10 years ago, but it was the first time he was ignored by the computer.

The operator doesn't have to lift a finger to run the game. It even rejected the operator's interference. It moved depending on the program that seemed alive, and that was often a fearful idea.

'Can such a game even exist?'

He had a sudden urge to blow up the main system to stop this thing.

However, New World's main systems worth was equivalent to the budget of a small nation. If New World was blown up, the whole world would shake. Because the service had started, he had no choice but to go all the way.

"I can guess one thing....."

After a while, Kim Gwon-tae spoke in a cautious voice.

"The whole process that started the B class event was something likely to be caused by artificial errors. And some sort of restoration program was operated to block it. This means that two programs that oppose each other coexist in New World."

"But.....artificial? Contradiction? What does that mean?"

"The two programs running at the same time in its basic form is perfect. If the first program is invoked followed by the triggered program then that means is not just triggered by system errors. It is clear that someone must have built the program with a specific purpose. Do you understand? The two programs were made by two people with conflicting thoughts."

At the moment, Ha Myung-woo's eyes went back to him.

His turned head seemed to say that he wanted Kim Gwon-tae to make it simpler.

"Either way, one of them would be related to the main programmer Park Woo-seong. But who is the 3rd person? He created a program to counteract Park Woo-seong's?"

"It's like that."

"Ok, let's put it in order. We don't know who was the one that

started the event quest and who stopped it.....and we don't know who would be favourable to Global Exos. Right? But looking at the circumstances, their performance must be equivalent to that of Park Woo-seong. Am I wrong?"

"No, that's right."

Ha Myung-woo's eyes narrowed.

The reason why operators trembled was because of Park Woo-seong's genius.

Even if he searched the world, there was nobody that could match him. But now there was a person that planted a program that could oppose Park Woo-seong.

If they were able to find him then he might have the key that Ha Myung-woo was looking for.

"Ok, then send an email to the developers to find 'him.' If the material is identified then track down his location. I don't care how much money it takes."

".....And in this case, you got another one."

"Something?"

"Don't forget that intentional or not.....No, I think there is a 90% chance it was intentional."

Kim Gwon-tae organized the data files while muttering.

"The anti-program that solved this problem wasn't perfect. Although it is an amazing program, like I said earlier there are several layers of code missing. It is too blatant that they couldn't have missed it by mistake. Instead, there was an indirect variable."

"Indirect variable?"

"User"

Kim Gwon-tae pulled the data file onto the monitor and spoke.

It was a summary of the anti-program from a little while ago.

“Please look. Do you see the most important keyword? This is part of the indirect variable. Here there are some of the choices being presented, depending on your choice, the rest of the program was to act like as if the quest branched out. And the indirect variables are only accessible inside the game.”

“You mean this event was stopped by a user?”

“That’s right.”

“It looks like clues have been solved.”

Contrary to expectations, Kim Gwon-tae was very surprised. Ha Myung-woo thought of something and said.

“I guess you know better than I. Before Park Woo-seong covers up his traces, send a mail to headquarters.”

“Park Woo-seong directly?”

“Yes, the content of the mail should be a challenge to the user. The user isn’t a part of Global Exos. But it isn’t accepted so seriously at headquarters. When develops put out new games, it is common for them to judge the results. But Park Woo-seong immediately disappeared without a trace, and there was a huge lock on New World.

Now he realised that the problem was serious.

Therefore, he left the contents of the email for Park Woo-seong to identify.

Eventually, the conclusion reached by the headquarters was that Park Woo-seong hid a clue inside the game to unlock it.

It was the reason that Ha Myung-woo used the company entrance examination as a pretext to drag users in. The conditions of the company examination meant that millions of users should stick to the game. And they worked out a plan to dig up the secrets of the game through the regular reports.

“In the end, the millions of users will hand you the key?”

“I was a little sceptical at first but now I’m convinced. And this user is the person I desire. The users that can participate in the system.....the information they have is needed. The user’s gaming system, if we know this then we could possibly undo Park Woo-seong’s lock. What are the coordinates where this incident happened?”

“Near Brandt Mountains.”

“All personnel should focus on that area and monitor its surroundings. Alternatively, examine if anything has happened in Cairo. If there was an event quest, then obviously something big has preceded it. And find out the identity of the user who stopped it.”

“I understand.”

Ha Myung-woo commanded who immediately passed the information down to the monitoring agents.

However the incident happened in the Underground World, thousands of metres underneath Cairo. The monitor personnel who wandered the Brandt Mountains couldn’t have known that.

However there was a chance that Kim Gwon-tae and Ha Myung-woo could figure it out. If they had paid a little bit more attention to their selected examinee’s reports.

However as soon as Hyun-woo’s reports arrived, it was instantly sent off to the shredder. It was bad luck for both Hyun-woo and Ha Myung-woo.

At that time, New World was entering a new era.

New World’s main scenario proceeded over time. In New World, the scenario was divided so the contents of <Episode I: Foreigner’s appearance> was in progress. However after a few years of game time, it would automatically change to Episode 2.

-The main system requires a data update for Episode II.

<Episode II: Pioneering age of the Foreigner>

“What decision?”

“Yes, I think we’ll like it just as it is.....what I mean is that it is too hard to say yes.”

“That’s right.”

Ark nodded.

Nídhöggur was once again sealed and the peace of the Underground World restored. Ark had organized the survivors and led them back to the closest village.

First by changing the taste of the Warrior’s cookies, the raccoons returned to their original state.

Fortunately, there are a lot of other herbs he could blend with the cookies that made the addiction not as strong.

‘Appetite Killing Stew’ was fed to them and they were quickly restored.

The raccoons then realised that they had been addicted. But it wasn’t regarded as a big problem.

Because if he hadn’t done so then the Underground World would have perished. However, his intimacy with them couldn’t help falling a little bit.

‘Well since I won’t come to the Underground World again, it doesn’t really matter.....’

However, there were still a few problems that remained.

Once Yggdrasil regained its power, the Underground World returned to its original state. The Kanggeul and Plant Golems changed back into raccoons. The problem was just that. They still had the memories of their time as a monster.

“What we have done so far.....”

“Alas, I.....I.....”

The raccoons suffered from killing their own species with their own hands.

In addition, the raccoon troops also killed a lot of Kanggeul and Plant Golems. They remembered that they had killed each other. Even if they were controlled by an irresistible force, it wasn't easy to pretend like nothing had happened.

To solve that problem, the Elder had a meeting with representatives of several villages. And he wanted the raccoons that had been turned into monsters to leave the Underground World.

The Elder was embarrassed, but Ark thought about it in a positive way.

"There are too many raccoons to be isolated and it isn't possible to live together and not confront them. So this is an opportunity to widen their field of view. When the heart is settled after living apart for several years then they can come back and talk about it."

"But how would they live if they have no knowledge of the outside world....."

The elders muttered in a concerned voice.

Then a brilliant idea shone in Ark's eyes.

That's right. Ark called up a concerned heart. He quietly looked at the raccoons that were to be expelled standing to one side.

"Do not worry."

"Is there anything you can do?"

"There is a way but it is far.....but I know a pioneering village. Lancel Village is a great place that is happy to accept anyone as a resident."

"But we are a beast species."

"Yes, it is fine. The Meow is already living there."

"Meow? Huh, the Meow didn't like socializing with people....."

"It is a great place to live. It is also a pioneering town so it would welcome anyone skilful like the raccoons are. The raccoon clan would prefer a place that requires good artisans right?"

“Yes, it is as you said.”

The elders nodded and replied.

And he went over to communicate the plans to leave to the raccoons.

“If the Truthseeker recommends it then we would like to go there.”

Ark talked to 70 raccoons and they accepted immediately.

[‘Find New Settlers’ quest has been updated. You have made the raccoon clans who can’t stay in the Underground World any longer move to Lancel Village. The raccoon species are naturally born with high dexterity. If they move to Lancel Village, than the village would grow faster and become richer.<New settlers found: 60% complete>]

[You have found new settlers with special skills. With the migration of the raccoon clan, the commerce of the town will increase by 50%. However, since the nature of the raccoons means they are reluctant to communicate with outsiders, the unity of the town has temporarily decreased by 30%. If it drops below 50%, it may cause the residents to leave the town.<If you invite a settler with a special ability, trade, safety, and the food situation values will increase. Depending on the values, you will be able to receive a bonus reward upon quest completion>]

“So now the problem is all resolved.”

Ark smiled and looked at the elders with a coy look. Of course, the law was there should be compensation for his effort.

‘Well, I remember receiving a promise of compensation, so if they are grateful but don’t stop to wipe the mouth then it could be considered a betrayal.’

Ark blatantly used his eyes to pressure the elders. The elder who belatedly understood his meaning nodded.

“Ah ah, yes. In fact, I have something I had thought to give to you.”

“Right.”

Ark grinned as the elder looked through his bag with a burdened expression.

“This has been handed down to the raccoon clan.....I thought you might like it. Anyway receive this as a token of my sincerity.”

The Elder extended one crude leather helmet.

[Raccoon Pith (Magic) Armour type: Leather Helmet Defense power: 60 Durability: 50/50

Weight: 5

User restriction: Dark Walker profession, Level 80 and over

It is a helmet that has been passed down from generation to generation in the raccoon clan.

The ancient raccoons made it from the material of a mysterious species that enables it to transform the user's form. Ever since Subarutalp was isolated, the outside world has forgotten the ability. However, the power passed down from the ancient raccoons was still used.

The raccoons used the ability of the helmet to trade with the outside world while hiding their identity.

<Option: Agility +10, Wisdom +10>

<Special option: Transformation is possible once a day. Duration is unlimited. However, once the transformation is released you have to wait 24 hours before you can transform again>]

-Quest 'Prevent the resurrection of Voltaire and the Immortal Legion' has been completed.

The quest had automatically been completed once he received the quest item.

However, Ark had a little look of disappointment.

‘Ara? What? There's no experience?’

Because none of the quests received in the underground world were easy to complete. Besides, the completion of the quest wasn't even mentioned in the information board.

He had expected to gain 3~4 levels when the quest was completed. However, there was no experience at all?

Then, the sound of the information window popped up.

[‘Victory Quest’ has been completed. The completion of the Victory quest has accumulated 3☆ information window. In New World, a ☆ is a decoration provided for the player who has achieved a historical and great achievement which has an influence on the world. The player who receives a ☆ would be a legend in that area. In addition, the accumulation of a certain number of ☆’s would receive a very special reward.

Currently owned ☆ (3)]

There was something mediocre about the message since it didn't even give experience. Frankly, he wasn't satisfied. But are there other ways to add stars in the system?

‘Hah.....However, no matter what I solved the quest but the only reward is one old pith? No, it's still possible an incredible reward would be given later. And the difficulty of the quest compared to the not so great looking helmet.....well, as long as I got the necessary thing.’

.....If he didn't, he didn't know if he could endure it.

In fact, the performance of the helmet was slightly vague.

Ark was still using the Crystal Golem's Head that he obtained early on. Of course, he found a few more helmets. It had superior defense, but he needed options with mana.

The Raccoon's Pith also had a mana up option.

However, its defense was 20 points higher than the Crystal Golem's. Also, his summon demon skill used a lot of mana and that would increase even more.

‘Yes, the Crystal Golem’s Head usage limit is too low now. If I sell it later for an appropriate price, it probably wouldn’t be popular. And now I need more agility than mana.’

Ark was satisfied to some degree and put on the Raccoon’s Pith.

But the Raccoon’s Pitch had an unexpected bonus that Ark hadn’t considered.

[The set items’ effect has been applied. New World has a number of items that are closely related to each other throughout history. The items are associated with a famous event or legendary hero and so on. Once you have a certain number of these sets of items, an additional bonus will appear.* Currently equipped set items:

<King> {Raccoon’s Pith} {Cat Paws} {Guardian Mermaid Armour}
{??} {??}

Equipped with three items from the set <King> and the effect of the set will be applied.

<Wild Ability: Strength, Agility, Stamina +10. Defense +20>]

‘Set items effect!’

Ark’s eyes widened.

The bonus added from the set items was enormous. It indicated that when Ark equipped the set his strength, agility and stamina increased by 10, while his defense also increased by 20.

‘In addition, there are still two more items. If I can find everything and complete the King set.....?’

He couldn’t even guess how much bonuses would be added.

‘Set items.....they were often seen in other games, but I didn’t know New World had them. So far, he had never heard such information.....after all, it is only when you possess at least 3 of the set that you can tell? Does that mean I now have to be careful when I sell an item?’

It was difficult because the items looked different from the other

ones in the set.

However, he could get a significant amount of money if he sold it on the auction.

Every one of Ark's thoughts was about making money.

"Thank you,"

"Huh? Well, it is lucky that you like it."

"Then I'll take this and go. Since I am meeting Yggdrasil, I'll say goodbye in advance."

"I see."

Ark turned to the elders and bowed.

And outside the Town Hall, hundreds of raccoons had gathered.

When Ark came out, they lined the road.

"Serve, Hut!"

The soldiers raised swords while the artillerymen pointed their guns at the sky. Finally, each leader saluted Ark while the cannons fired simultaneously in the air.

At the same time, colourful fireworks appeared in the dark sky of the Underground World. It was like a spectacular Olympics opening ceremony!

"Ark commander, Hooray!"

"Well, you have worked hard and we achieved such peace thanks to you. As a group, the raccoons are thankful to you. Anytime you want, we are willing to lend our strength to you. We have learned how to muster courage thanks to you."

The Elder hit Ark's shoulders as he spoke.

Ark looked at the raccoon soldiers with deep emotions in his eyes. In the words of the Elder. They were actively conscripted and trained by Ark, and he had fought together with the NPCs.

How much did it mean?

He also felt affection for the soldiers of Jackson.

‘That’s right.....Now the Underground World is at peace I have to say goodbye.’

Ark looked at them one by one as he left the town.

And after a while, he went to find Yggdrasil. Once inside Yggdrasil, Ark saw that the inside had already been turned into a shrine.

The vines weren’t seen and small lights floated around like it was daylight. And everything Yggdrasil willed it, the tree trunks would split and a new path formed.

Thanks to that, Ark could arrive at the centre in a straight line.

-Welcome. Have you finished saying goodbye?

Yggdrasil welcomed Ark in the form of the Buddhist priest.

“Yes.”

-Now the only thing left is your original purpose for coming here.

“I heard that I had to undergo a test to receive the Three Marvels.”

Yggdrasil lightly asked with a smile.

-Do you know what piece of the Three Marvels is here?

“I haven’t heard it yet. The raccoon elders also don’t know.....”

-The Three Marvels that I kept is the ‘Dark Piece.’

“Dark Piece?”

Yggdrasil nodded.

-As the name suggests, the artifact contains the powers of darkness. According to legend, the piece fell off the Lord of Darkness but I don’t know whether that is true or not. Anyway, it is the most dangerous piece among the Three Marvels. In the past, even the Truthseeker had trouble controlling its power. There was a

possibility of being inadvertently misled by the powers of darkness and straying from the path. Therefore, a test must be passed before receiving the Dark Piece.

Yggdrasil sent him a soft look.

-But you have already proved everything you needed to in a moment of desperation, the courage to embrace the dark without losing your courage and overcome the hardships. Because of the previous vow with Hero Maban, I will give you the Dark Piece.

Yggdrasil gripped his fist tightly. When he opened his hand, there was a stone sculpture emitting a black strength. His Knowledge of Ancient Relics needed to be 50 to confirm the item. However, Ark's Knowledge of Ancient Relics was at 83.

Taking the piece automatically opened the information window.

-Your Knowledge of Ancient Relics has confirmed 'The fragment of stone filled with an ancient power.'

[Fragment of stone filled with ancient power (Dark Piece)The Dark Piece pulsates with an aura of deep darkness.The Dark Piece is the reason you will feel the touch of a deadly temptation. Making this your own power won't be an easy task. But I hope that you find a strong will and courage in the darkness to make it a part of you.Using Knowledge of Ancient Relics, you have confirmed that it is one of the Three Marvels that Hero Maban used in the Dark Century.

Hero Maban has left his power inside the Three Marvels for later. If the Truthseeker obtains the Three Marvels, it is possible to obtain Hero Maban's power.

*The owner of the Dark Piece can use Hero Maban's techniques.

<Experience +30,000. Knowledge of Ancient Relics +15. Intelligence 10, Fame has increased by 20>]

[New Profession-specific skill.The gift of darkness II (Beginner, passive): The power of the Dark Walker in the dark is slightly increased. All abilities are increased by 40%. The duration of

‘Stealth’ is raised to 20 minutes. However, this skill cannot be raised.]

[New Profession-specific skill. The Dark Dance (Beginner, active): The second half of Hero Maban’s power increases your vision in the dark. By hiding yourself in the darkness, you can use quick movements to make the enemy’s attack collapse. The player’s success rate depends on the level of the skill. The higher the skill, the more damage received would be reduced and in some cases, you can even reflect the enemy’s attacks. <Mana consumption: 300>]

[New chain skill has been registered.* Currently available chain skill- Dark Strike (Dark dance + Dark Blade) Evade enemy attacks and counterattack with a critical hit.

<Chain skill success: 50% chance to give the enemy a 200% critical hit>

<Chain skill failure: There will be a 50% chance that Dark Dance is released and a critical hit received.>]

Once again, pleasure has come at the end of suffering.

By completing the quest to reclaim the peace of the Underground World, he has received the second piece of the Three Marvels. As soon as he sealed up Nídhöggur, compensation started flowing out.

In particular, the main purpose of the Dark Walker was to find the Three Marvels so the compensation was tremendous.

First was the Gift of Darkness II. Since he had already received the Gift of Darkness, it was somewhat expected. But a 40% increase in abilities in the dark.....! Isn’t that like being level 140 when he was level 100?

It was his new skill Dark Dance that was unexpected.

When he read the information, his expectation was different.

Unlike other professions, Ark didn’t have a good evasion skill yet. He wished for it but there was a reason he didn’t like it. The

problem was that Dark Dance consumed mana.

‘If I use it once then it consumes 300 mana?’

It also does not damage, so he would waste 300 mana just for teleportation.....! If he used 100% of his mana, he could only use the skill four times? In addition, a chain skill was created with the Dark Dance skill.

‘Dark Strike.....I don’t know how effective that technique is since it uses 400 mana in one go. I could use Blade Storm once with that mana.’

Blade Storm was his strongest attack that consumes a sword instead. On the other hand, Dark Strike only increased the damage of his critical strike.

The Dark Strike was also risky so he would rather use Blade Storm once and lose a sword.

‘Well, I still increased my skills so it isn’t too bad.’

Ark decided to be satisfied with it. After all, he had achieved the purpose of coming to this world.

“But the way can I ask you something?”

-Speak.

“Do you know the location of the remaining Three Marvel?”

Ark recalled the description of Yggdrasil from Norse mythology. Yggdrasil was the symbol of wisdom rooted in nine different worlds.

Of course, there was no guarantee that the number of worlds in the myth and in the depth of the earth was the same. Especially since it existed in ancient times and met Hero Maban, it may give him a clue.

However, Yggdrasil shook his head.

-I have spread my roots through most of the northern continent for a long time. So I see a lot of things. The rumours I heard about the location of the Three Marvels was from a long time ago. Maybe.....it is in a world that you don’t know about.

“Another world? Then has it been destroyed?”

Yggdrasil laughed at Ark’s question.

-No, it’s completely different. The middle earth is the world that you know. If spoken in our language, Midgard is just one of the nine worlds. In other words, humans exist in a world on this system. The Lord of Darkness and his followers lived on a different system.

“Then I would find the remaining Three Marvels in a different system?”

-I don’t know either. However you are the Truthseeker, didn’t you come here in accordance with the guidance of a greater will that governs everything? If you try, it might be possible to detect its presence.

‘Do I have to go back from the beginning?’

Ark sighed. At that time, Yggdrasil spoke again.

-This is a bit of grandmotherly advice but.....be careful.

“Yes?”

-The Red Man weighs on my heart. Nídhöggur has been sealed in this place for hundreds of years, with the secret only being told to a few people. His reason for trying to resurrect Nídhöggur is unknown.....but if my guess is correct.....

Yggdrasil murmured and sighed.

-His purpose might wake up the darkness.

“What on earth is the darkness? A person? A malevolent deity?”

-Darkness.....it is. The existence that every being on the continent fears that would bring disaster. Nothing more and nothing less. And if the purpose of the Red Man is really to wake the darkness.....his biggest goal is directly linked to the heritage of the 7 heroes. So pay attention and don’t overlook him.

“I will keep that in mind.”

-Then this is it. Now, you should go back. To the place that requires you.....

Yggdrasil approached him and stroked Ark's head. Then Ark's body was engulfed in light.

Small particles of light rose up in the heart of Yggdrasil and followed the passage. He followed the capillary of moving water along the stem until in his range of vision, a blue sky appeared.

His adventure of commanding the raccoons in the Underground World had finally ended.

Diririri, diririri.

At that time, his phone ringtone was audible from far away.

Underdog takes one more step

The sound of metal colliding with each other was heard.

The battle had been going on for quite a while and a few people had already collapsed. It was the rehabilitation group and delinquents. But even those who hadn't collapsed didn't have a lot of health left. Not even Roco's 'Song of Life' could compensate for the health being lost.

The people who were attacking them were NPCs in black clothes, assassins from the Dark Brother organization.

"Hu hu hu, did you think I would just give up?"

The person watching from the back let out a brutal laugh. They indicated towards the assassins from the Dark Brother.

A few nights ago Andel who had escaped, followed JusticeMan in Kairote.

Of course, it was in order to watch the movements of JusticeMan's party. He took over the Quartermaster's, so Ark would resurrect soon. Then Andel shadowed them secretly in case they moved to another area. However, Ark didn't resurrect even after a couple of days.

'That Ark, did something happen to him in reality?

Andel thought of a plan that would solve everything in one scoop and it was sweet. He hoped to find Ark and beat him up in the real world. Because he never imagined that they would defend the Quartermaster for so long.

However, was there a reason Ark didn't resurrect after sleeping for a few days?

Have to dig out the reason.....

‘Heck, I really don’t like that guy.’

Andel ground his teeth together. If JusticeMan and his party didn’t leave Cairo, that means that Ark would resurrect here.

In other words, it was an opportunity to get revenge!

‘You’ll see soon, Ark and Justiceman. I’ll return the favour 10 times, no 20 times.’

Andel hid around the Quartermaster in Cairo hoping for revenge.

And.....Finally, the time for revenge had come. Alan contacted the Dark Brother again and an additional 15 assassins were dispatched.

It wasn’t free, of course. The money required to hire 15 people was 1,500 gold. Just like hiring mercenaries, even the assassin guild required compensation. In the end, if he combined the first sum of 300 gold then 1,800 gold was spent.

In cash, it was 18 million won.

Even if it was Andel, that was still a large amount for him.

‘Damn, when I think about the lecture I had to go through to scrape that money.....But if I can kill Ark and those guys then I don’t care. I’ll kill them again and again until I’m satisfied!’

Andel had completely forgotten the purpose of the game.

Only revenge! For that he would willingly sacrifice everything.

‘If Ark resurrects and runs away while I’m fighting those guys then it would be more difficult.’

Andel left one assassin at the Quartermaster’s and led the rest to the cabin.

JusticeMan’s party consisted of 14 delinquents and the rehabilitation group. In total, it was 28 people.

However, their average level was not more than 60. Even if they had hunted around Cairo, only a few had risen to level 70.

On the other hand, Andel had 14 assassins that were level 120.

‘If I don’t want to lose this then I have to use this much power.’

In addition, the new assassins sent were more cautious than before.

“We are assassins. We kill the opponents while suffering little damage.”

The assassins waited for the evening.

They received a bonus 10% to their stats in the dark. In addition, one of the main weapons of the character with a dark attribute was ‘Stealth’ and ‘Assassination.’

“Those delinquents won’t be a problem. However, the group of foreigners with strong organizational abilities would be more complicated.”

The assassins hid themselves using ‘stealth’ and waited outside the cabin door. And surprised 3 of the rehabilitation members when they exited. Using their assassination skill, they dealt 300% damage! With 14 level 120 assassins concentrating their attacks on them, the 3 rehabilitation members didn’t even have time to scream before they collapsed.

“The enemy!”

A delinquent came too late to help the rehabilitation members.

As soon as the battle began, it was under the control of the assassins as they issued orders. The assassins activated their scrolls and cornered them. 7 delinquents collapsed instantly while numbers 1408 and 1409 of the rehabilitation group also died.

“Ack, what the hell.....!”

“Ha ha ha, it looks good. Cheeky children!”

Andel giggled as they kept dying.

Now there were only 7 delinquents, JusticeMan and 6 rehabilitation members left.

If they excluded Lorenzo, Sid and Roco then it was only 15 people. And they also only had 50% health left.

Two assassins also died, but the health of the remaining assassins was above 70%.

“I’m going to make you beggars along with Ark!”

When an NPC dies once, the delinquents couldn’t revive.

Of course, the rehabilitation members could revive but it wouldn’t have an impact on the outcome. The law of New World was that if a user died from an NPC, then they would be immediately revived at the Quartermaster.

However, if they died in a group battle then it was different. The resurrection would be stopped until the battle was completely finished. The system was to make sure they couldn’t resurrect themselves and fight in the area near the Quartermaster. In other words, once the rehabilitation members died then they couldn’t interrupt the battle.

‘When the battle ends, all of us can’t revive at the same time.’

At the Quartermaster, it was only possible for them to revive 1 at a time.

The users would be resurrected at the Quartermaster’s depending on their time of death. If all the rehabilitation members died and they defended the Quartermaster’s against resurrection, then it was possible to beat them. Andel didn’t pay any attention even if the assassins’ numbers decreased.

‘This battle can only end with a winning conclusion.’

And now, the goal was right around the corner. Andel smirked and laughed as JusticeMan’s party pushed in vain.

“These children, so fast!”

“Damn it, my skills can’t even reach them.....”

“Ack, being hit two or three times is punishing. These guys are

incredibly strong.”

Even if JusticeMan used his justice stat, he still couldn't fight against the assassins 1 on 1. In addition, there were too many opponents that he couldn't exit the battle state.

In the end, he had no choice but to fight them face on. But their agility difference was so large that most of the times he attacked, a MISS warning would show. Then there would undoubtedly be a counter attack.

“JusticeMan ajusshi!”

Roco hurriedly used the ‘Song of Life.’

Roco's voice was heard softly over the sound of the lute. Then JusticeMan's health that was at the very bottom quickly restored. If it wasn't for Roco then the battle probably would've been over a long time ago.

When the battle had started, the assassins prohibited the use of potions using the [No recovery] scroll. However, a limit of the [No recovery] scroll was that it had no effect on a Minstrel's song.

“Che, this girl again.....!”

Andel shouted with a hard countenance.

“What are you doing? Kill her first!”

Andel yelled at the assassins.

“Stop!”

“I won't allow one finger to touch Roco!”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members stood blocking the assassins. However, it wasn't enough and the health of JusticeMan and his party quickly decreased.

Some also fell to the ground as they were stunned.

“Ajusshi! Oppa!”

Roco screamed in a tearful voice.

She had been hunting with JusticeMan's party for two months. In the time when she couldn't battle, they had always helped her. Instead of colleagues, they were now liker her uncle and older brothers. Even though it was a game, they were still stabbed by a sword and collapsed. It was the assassins hired by Andel.....

She felt regret as tears started falling. The assassins who had stunned JusticeMan then rushed at Roco.

"It is the end. Minstrel!"

"Ack!"

The blade advanced underneath her nose. Roco didn't even think about counter attacking and just raised her arm to protect her head. It was at that time. Something clear flew across the space.

Kka kkak, kakakak! Tong!

A violent clash resonated through the air.

Following the sound, the assassin was thrown back with a pop. Roco was suddenly surprised and raised her head with eyes that were 2 times larger. The person who used 'Stealth' in front of her was a user.

Wearing leather armour with a bone sword.....it was Ark.

"Ah, Ark oppa?"

"Was I a little bit late?"

A smile spread on Ark's mouth.

"Ark? It is Ark?"

All eyes focused on her as Roco spoke.

Ark-nim!"

"Ark hyung, welcome back!"

Sid and Lorenzo spoke with tears in their eyes.

Andel also looked at Ark with a shocked face. There was a reason he was surprised that Ark showed up. In preparation, he had left an assassin stationed at the Quartermaster's. Ark didn't even make contact with the assassin and appeared here. Unless.....?

"Yes, you.....Didn't you definitely die at that time?"

"Who said that? I'm afraid I didn't die by your hands"

"But certainly in the hell....."

"Ah, it took some time to come out from there."

"No way!"

"You should wait before judging whether it's possible or not.....your opinion seems to be quite different. Don't you know that determination can make many things happen?"

"Determination?"

"I told you. I would strip you naked."

Ark said with a smile.

Andel retorted like he was bored.

"You think that the situation would change just because you disappeared?"

And realisation showed on JusticeMan and his party's faces.

That's right. They had forgotten when Ark appeared, but there were still 12 assassins left that were level 120. On the other hand, JusticeMan had 15 people with an average level of 60~70. And their health wasn't even 50%. Even if it was Ark, 1 person wouldn't change the situation.

"Kukuku, stupid. You're going to be sorry you didn't run away when you had the opportunity."

"I have good manners unlike you."

However, Ark was still composed.

“I forgot to tell you, I brought a few friends with me from down there.”

“What? Friends?”

“Yes, they should be arriving around now.....”

“Master!”

Dedric’s voice was heard from behind him. Andel reflexively turned his head and his face stiffened.

“W-what, what is that?”

Behind Ark, the ground around the cabin started shaking as small forms started appearing. They numbered nearly 100 people! They were hooded so it wasn’t possible to examine them closely.....three or four whiskers protruding from the nose was exposed on the side underneath the hood.

That’s right, it was the raccoon inhabitants of the Underground World.

Ark had received a call as he was leaving the Underground World.

The phone call was from number 1407 who had died early. Andel had brought 14 assassins to raid the cabin.

Ark was troubled as he contemplated. If there were 14 assassins, then they should succeed in defeating JusticeMan’s party. But even if Ark showed up, the results would be the same. Then the raccoon troops appeared in Ark’s mind.

‘Yes, they can appear in Cairo through Yggdrasil!’

Ark immediately called Yggdrasil through Popo’s seeds.

Popo was spiritually connected to Yggdrasil and could communicate with it. Ark explained the situation to Yggdrasil and asked for assistance from the elders.

His request for support was received, and the 2nd artillery division was sent to assist their former commander. Meanwhile, Ark left Dedric to prepare for the battle and rushed to the cabin.

“Let me introduce my new friends.”

Ark smiled at Andel.

“Say it again. The headcount from a little ago was.....”

“This, this child.....What are you doing? Kill them!”

Andel shouted at them to attack. The 12 assassins rushed forward with their swords. Level 120. It was definitely an amazing level. But who were the artillerymen of the raccoon troops? The troops who had undergone Ark’s spartan training and defeated monsters that were level 150 and 250.

At the moment, dozens of the raccoon troop watching from the forest grabbed their weapons. And.....clink, clink, the cannon was armed with swift movements and then fired in unison.

Bang bang double bang!

The ensuing scene would cause the heart to race.

Colourful fireworks exploded from everywhere.

The assassins were no different from the falling autumn leaves. Every time they were hit with a bombardment of ammo, their health quickly declined.

9 assassins died from this simple method while the rest scattered messily.

JusticeMan and his group just looked on with a bemused expression.

“This, this is ridiculous!”

Andel raised his voice as 9 assassins immediately died from the attack. Then Ark raised his voice to stop the bombardment and spoke.

“I’ll give you a chance.”

“What?”

“3 assassins remain. That was the number that you used to chase

me in the past. The others will step back and watch as I duel with the assassins. And whatever the result, how about I forget about our bad relationship?”

Ark watched Andel as he spoke.

“Honestly.....annoying. Because I know people like you don't like giving up, and I also won't be able to do anything as long as you're chasing me. So let's conclude it with this battle.

Andel rolled his eyes and asked with a doubtful look.

“How can I believe that?”

“JusticeMan ajusshi.”

When Ark turned his head and asked, JusticeMan instantly nodded.

“It there is such a condition then there is no reason for me to interfere. I understand. We won't cut in.”

“Now, how about it? Only your choice is left.”

Andel considered for a while before nodding.

“It is good. The assassins.....I won't cause any trouble.”

“Then shall we begin?”

A laugh emerged from Andel's mouth.

“This stupid person is still the same. Has he already forgotten facing the same numbers not long ago?”

“That memory.....I remember it very clearly.”

Ark stared at Andel with a cold look as he replied.

“Then you should already know what will happen! Go, kill him!”

Andel ordered the assassins who immediately took out a scroll.

[No recovery], [Impossible to release battle state], [Seize]. It was the same combo of scrolls that forced Ark down the hell. The assassins used the scrolls to prevent any possibility before rushing

in.

The sword attack from three directions!

Then Ark's eyes started shining.

'Now, is the opportunity to get revenge for my previous defeat!'

It was when Ark had an overwhelming advantage that he applied for a duel.

The abrupt desire for victory spread in Ark.

So far, when the 3 assassins had rushed him then he was helpless. Ark would never admit such a powerless defeat. He would not be satisfied if the conditions weren't the same.

And another reason was to confirm what he had obtained from the Underground World. He wanted to see how much his skill proficiency had been raised by the Three Marvels, not just look at the skill level. If he won against the 3 assassins under the same conditions, then it would be solid evidence.

'I can win. No, I have to win!'

"Dark Dance!"

Ark lowered his upper body as he used his new skill.

Suddenly, the area was dyed with darkness. In the middle, 3 red imprints were seen brandishing swords. The image seemed like an infrared mode in spy movies.

Ark who had tried out the skill for the first time, was puzzled for a little bit.

'What the? I thought the Dark Dance was just a skill that raised the evasion rate?'

And at that moment he heard the sound of a flying sword.

A red footprint also appeared on the ground in front of him. It seemed like the commentary he saw in martial arts textbooks about footwork.

‘Then I should move following the footprints?’

Ark laid a foot on the red footprint carved on the ground. The footprint disappeared before a new one appeared in front of it. The more times he stepped on it, the faster the footprint disappeared. Although it was initially easy to follow along, over time he had to concentrate in order to keep up with the speed of the footprints.

However, the effect was indeed amazing.

Su su suk, sa sa sak!

He just walked along the footprints.

While concentrating on the footprints, he could barely see the movements of the assassins. However, Ark’s body moved like the wind and avoided all attacks.

“Oh my god!”

When Ark avoided the damage and emerged from the other side, the assassins were surprised.

But it was Ark that surprised them.

‘This Dark Dance……!’

It was expected that the evasion rate and defense would increase during the period.

However, it wasn’t an easy technique to use.

The Dark Dance was similar to the dancing games that were in style a long time ago. In other words, different patterns of footwork would appear on the ground depending on the situation and the amount of damage avoided depended on how well he did.

The first time he used it, he made around 40% mistakes.

The damage received from the 3 assassins’ attacks was only 250 damage. It meant that damage became invalid nearly 50% of the time, even taking his defensive powers into consideration!

‘If the percentage of completion increases then I might not receive

any damage?’

But there’s even more. The Dark Dance didn’t require the use of his hands.

This time, he focused on following the footsteps. However, once he became familiar with the Dark Dance then he could also attack.

Of course, it wasn’t as simple as it sounds.

If he focused on attacking, then the completion percentage of Dark Dance would fall. It was also possible to receive unexpected damage. In addition, if the completion rate dropped below 30% then the penalty of receiving a critical hit would dramatically increase.

‘Am I looking at a double-edged sword? But if I could attack while keeping the completion rate above 50%, there would be tremendous side effects. First, I should get used to the pattern!’

Ark continuously used Dark Dance. The pattern of the footprint would change depending on the circumstance. It was natural. Because the same attack wasn’t always used. However, after a few repetitions he gradually got used to the pattern.

The attack was avoided using the minimal movement while grasping any chance for a counter attack. When looking at the principles, it wasn’t that different from what Ark had previously done.

“What, what the hell is this guy?”

“These movements……..!”

The assassins spoke in a confused voice after the next attack also missed. After he used the fourth Dark Dance, his completion rate went up to 60%.

Ark then began fighting back.

“Dark blade!”

He used the Dark Dance and Dark Blade chain skill, Dark Strike!

Ark’s sword instantaneously spread out like the rib of a fan and struck the assassin’s neck. Dark Blade ignored the defense and

struck a critical hit. Using Dark Strike, an additional 200% damage was also added.

The assassin's health decline to 30% with one strike.

"No way!"

Andel sucked in a breath at the enormous damage.

"Ha, what the? Did you think that I wasted my time during the ten days?"

This was the reason that Ark had applied for a duel. During his time in the Underground World, Ark had raised his level. When the 3 assassins had pushed him, he was only level 90.

However during the underground labyrinth he increased his level by 5, and after he commanded the raccoon troops in the fight against Yggdrasil then he gained 21 levels. Ark's current level was 116!

But was that all? After receiving the Dark Piece, his dark attribute bonus was raised to 40%. In terms of his stats, he was around level 162. He also had new equipment and set item effects. They only knew the fighting pattern of Ark before he fell into the hell. It was like an entirely different existence.

On the other hand, the assassins were level 120. With the dark attribute, they would be level 132. Even if they were professional assassins, if the level difference was 32 levels.....

Bang!

"Cough.....! This guy's replacement....."

The assassin who received Ark's concentrated attack collapsed.

From 3 against 1 the situation changed to the much simpler 2 against 1.

Ark used his remaining 400 points of mana to attack using Dark Strike.

Under his shower of attacks, one more assassin quickly collapsed. Now there was only one assassin remaining, but Ark's mana was

completely gone and his health was down to 30%.

On the other hand, the 1 remaining assassin had 80% health.

‘From now on, it is a skills game!’

Ark used his Sword-Hand combat in a desperate struggle against the assassin. With the level difference, he overwhelmed the assassin with just the use of his Sword-Hand combat.

Kka kkak, Tong!

Ark blocked the assassin’s sword and used riposte.

Ark struck the assassin hard with the counter attack and the assassin was sent flying through the air.

At the same time as he landed, Ark attacked him with a shower of kicks.

The assassin was also formidable. Using the last of his power, he swung the sword and pushed Ark into a critical condition. But at the same time, he got hit on the head by Ark and died.

“Hyuu, I won.”

Ark blew out a breath.

He had defeated three level 120 assassins by himself!

“He, He won!”

“Ark hyung won!”

“Wah ah ah!”

The rehabilitation members, Lorenzo and the raccoon troops cheered from the vicinity of the cabin. But the cheer changed into a scream in the next moment.

“Huh? He, he………! ”

“Ark, it’s dangerous!”

When he finished fighting against the last assassin, Andel who had

been watching vigilantly for a chance attacked Ark. Currently, Ark's health was only 180 points. If a strike landed then it would become a critical hit due to his state.

No, it certainly looked that way.

But just before Andel's sword reached Ark's neck.

The light abruptly turned off in front of Ark.

"What.....Sk-skeleton?"

A skeleton holding a sword and a shield had blocked Andel's attack.

While Andel was confused, Ark turned his head and laughed.

"I know how guys like you think."

In the first place, Ark hadn't expected Andel to keep his promise. No, he hoped that he wouldn't.

He wanted to test out the skills he obtained in the Underground World and he knew that Andel wouldn't accept the result of the duel. He had marked him as an enemy until the end.

Therefore Ark deliberately left a gap for Andel in his critical condition. After he guessed the timing, he released Deimos from his transformation into the Saw Blade.

Andel was caught in Ark's trap!

"So now the promise is broken?"

"You bastard, why did you believe me in the first place?"

"This fellow is absurd. You still say things like that in this situation?"

"Damn, you'll see. No matter what it takes, I'll force you into hell!"

Andel said as he took out a scroll.

It was the [Warp] scroll which had become Andel's specialty.

"Oh, that, that guy again.....!"

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members moved a little bit.

Ark only smiled as he took out a scroll and activated it.

“Scroll [Magnetic] target Andel!”

At the same time, Andel’s body blurred before he was forcibly pulled to Ark.

“What? What the?”

“Didn’t I tell you? I didn’t only play.”

Ark clicked his tongue and muttered while feigning pity.

When he exited from the Underground World, Ark didn’t wait for the raccoon troops and immediately began battle preparations.

The thing that Ark regretted the most from being attacked by Andel was not learning how to properly use scrolls in battle. When Ark recaptured villages in the Underground World, he immediately gathered information about the scrolls from the specialist in each village.

One interesting thing he learnt about was the [Magnetic] scroll. Although it would drag the target forward, there was another use for [Magnetic].

If the timing of [Magnetic] was used in conjunction with [Warp], then the effect of [Warp] would disappear.

The reason why [Magnetic] was rated higher than the [Warp] scroll was because of this hidden function.

It was the so-called resistance of the scroll.

Therefore, in order to oppose or eliminate the effect, there must be a counter attack.

This was the true advantage of scroll utilization.

“You said I’ll see? Is it time now?”

Ark laughed as he approached the frightened Andel. However, in that

moment he responded in a desperate voice.

“Heung, just kill me then. I have used the [Lie] scroll. Since I’m not chaotic, then you would become chaotic if you attack me. Your level is over 100 so can you take such a penalty? At best, all the NPCs would be ordered to kill you. And after I die, I would receive no problems from the NPC. You didn’t receive the archipelago, he he he.”

“.....That disgusting bastard.”

JusticeMan murmured in an outraged voice.

‘Does he think we would be afraid of something like that?’

“Ark, you don’t have to take part. We’ll kill this guy.”

“Please wait. Hyung-nim.”

Ark leisurely took out another scroll. When he triggered it, the shape of a huge sword formed over Andel’s head. When the sword struck Andel, his health was immediately reduced by 50%.

“Cough, no way this is.....?”

“[Sword of Truth]!”

Sid burst out with excitement.

[Sword of Truth].....It was a scroll that only activated when the opponent used the [Lie] scroll. It dealt powerful damage as well as eliminating the effect of the [Lie] scroll. In addition, it also changed the alignment to chaotic for a period of time.

In other words, there would be no problem killing Andel.

“Ohu, that’s nice.”

“Now it means I have unlimited chances to kill you?”

The rehabilitation members surrounded Andel as they cracked their knuckles.

However, Ark shook his head.

“Not yet.”

“What?”

“Hyung-nim, don’t you have a lot piled up? Please receive this.”

Ark handed the rehabilitation members a few scrolls.

After reading the brief description, the rehabilitation members’ eyes shone brighter than ever.

“Oh, Ark. If it is you then it is done.”

“Hu hu hu, rather at this point we’re really sorry.”

“Still, we can’t help it. Because it is our policy to step on someone who tries to step on us.”

“Of course. We understand that much. Because he was the one that picked a fight first. We don’t have to be fair.”

“What, what are you doing.....!”

Andel murmured in an uneasy voice.

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group, Ark and even Roco just tore the scrolls with a smile.

– [Peek] scroll was invoked. When the user’s bag is targeted, it is possible to peek at an item.

– [Robbery] scroll was invoked. It is possible to designate an item from the target’s bag. When the user dies, there is a 100% chance of the designated item dropping. Duplicated items are treated as one item.

The scrolls were applied non-stop to Andel.

He had bought in bulk various scrolls to give to the assassins, which could be used at any time to make gold, and he just left it in his bag along with equipment.....the aim of the [Robbery] scroll was to get any items that would make money.

But that was just the beginning.

“Didn’t I tell you? I would keep on attacking you until you lose everything.”

– [Seize] scroll was invoked. When the designated target dies, there is a 50% chance that an equipped item will drop.

Ark and the rehabilitation members used the [Seize] scroll four times.

As Andel was chaotic, after his death the probability of dropping his equipment items would dramatically increase. After using [Seize] four times, he didn’t even have to see the results.

“B-Bastard……..!”

“Ara? What was that? From now on, it’s just the beginning”

– [Misfortune] scroll was activated. The luck of the designated target temporarily becomes 0. The probability of dropping equipment items in various situations would be maximized. If a chaotic player dies in this unfortunate stat, their stat reduction would increase by 2, making them lose 4 stats.

Ark spoke with a pleasant smile.

“After losing the battle, I’m going to step on you once again. That’s my theory.”

With a scared look, Andel died.

“Ugh, Master! This woman, stop this woman!”

Dedric screamed before fleeing.

After refreshingly stepping on Andel, Ark joined JusticeMan and the rehabilitation company who he finally met after a long time. And after Dedric transformed himself into his child form, he found himself being chased after by Roco with great affection (?).

“Ho ho ho, he is……..It’s great to see you.”

“It’s not good, not good!”

“Don’t do that, come play with noona.”

“Who is this noona? I told you, I’m 300 years old!”

“Kkal kkal kkal! Understood, understood. You’re a 300 year old child. Happy?”

“I’m not a child!”

Dedric shouted with a painful cry.

However, Roco didn’t hear and just hugged Dedric tighter. Then Deimos suddenly showed up at her side.

“Oh? You are.....Skull?”

Deimos was glad and quickly nodded his head. Unlike Dedric, Roco had spent quite a few friendly days with Deimos. However, Roco’s forehead furrowed as she muttered something.

“You.....look slightly creepy.”

Ddang! At Roco’s words, Skull was shocked as he showed a sulky expression. After he changed, it was the form he wanted to be proud of. However, in just a moment.

Clatter, clatter.

Deimos turned around and clung to Andel’s body.

Deimos’ eyes flashed for a moment as he fumbled around.

And like a psychic healer, he put his hand through Andel’s shoulder. And then surprisingly, his bloody hands emerged holding a scapula.

‘Don’t tell me that he can also collect bones from a user?’

When Ark thought about it, it was a big hit.

Deimos immediately changed his scapula to Andel’s.

[Deimos has used his ‘bone collecting’ skill to reassemble the scapula. If he changes bones with a user, their stats and abilities are exchanged.<Deimos: Strength +5, Stamina +5, Wisdom -5, Intelligence -5><Andel: Strength -5, Stamina -5, Wisdom +5,

Intelligence +5>]

Andel was a warrior in the game. Because of the bone exchange, his strength and stamina was reduced while Deimos' was increased. Andel was really unlucky.

Deimos changed the shape of his scapula to his favourite.

He smiled as he tinkered with his new shoulder. No, it seemed like he was smiling but he was obviously laughing.

He laughed sneakily.

'Although it's good that his stats rose.....it really is like a horror movie.'

Aa, Deimoswhat is your real character?

The skull that used to roll cutely across the ground couldn't be seen anywhere now. It was a good thing that his stats climbed thanks to bone collecting, but the way he acquired other bones was really creepy.

The rehabilitation group stared in amazement at Deimos' bizarre behaviour. Ark also had a similar expression, and had to explain the situation with a smile.

"Ha ha, don't worry. This guy has a strange hobby these days.

And among such surroundings, the rehabilitation members had managed to finish resurrecting. Then the leader of the raccoon artillerymen saluted Ark and said.

"Commander, we should go."

"Well, thank you. Give my regards to the elders."

"Yes! Let's go!"

The artillerymen saluted before returning to the designated place. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group looked at the raccoons with amazement before asking.

"What? Did the raccoons escape from the zoo in a group?"

“They are my friends from the Underground World.”

“Underground World?”

Ark explained the last few days to a curious JusticeMan. JusticeMan breathed out a sigh with an amazed face.

“It sounds like a fascinating place, damn, if we knew beforehand we would have entered too.....

“I’m sorry. But I didn’t have a way to enter the Underground World. And ajusshi and hyung-nims wouldn’t have been able to survive the bottom.”

“That’s right”

“Ah! There is someone I would like to introduce.”

Ark took out small seeds from his bag.

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members stared as a small figure emerged from the seeds. It was Popo, the hero of the raccoon clan. Popo scratched his head at the attention of the foreigners before greeting them.

-He he, Hello? I am a Popo, Ark hyung’s brother.

“Aw!”

Then Roco who was harassing Dedric came running over.

“Woo.....! Cu.....Cute. It’s a finger sized raccoon.....”

-Ah, Roco noona? Ark hyung talked about you a lot.

“What? R-really? What did he say?”

-That he had a pretty girl as a sister. You really are pretty, just like I heard. Can I call you noona from now on?

Popo was better at flattery than he thought.

“Ho ho ho, you’re sweet. It is in the eye of the beholder.....my younger siblings aren’t like that. Yes, please call me noona. If you are Ark oppa’s brother then you’re also mine. Popo did you say?”

Can we talk for a short while? Tell me in a little bit more detail about what Ark oppa said about me.”

Roco carried the seeds to a place a short distance away.

“Che!”

Then Dedric who had been abandoned kicked a rock that landed beside Skull. Although he complained, he indirectly enjoyed Roco’s attention. If he really hated it, he would’ve changed into a bat and ran away.....

“I’m living quite happily.”

The raccoon boy was sociable. Roco who was interested in Ark, abandoned his two summons.....the form that she was interested in was quite different in other’s eyes.

“What.....that’s right.”

“By the way, what do you think that Andel guy will do?”

“Just let it go. For the time being, he won’t connect for a while.”

“But what if he tries to bother you again?”

“Right. But I wouldn’t mind. Here in the chaotic city it would be a difficult situation, but the other areas won’t have such a penalty against resurrection. So if he attacks me once, then I would be able to return it twice as much. But it’s also not easy.”

“Although, you don’t have to worry about your skills based on what we saw before.”

“Well Andel might hire more assassins again before connecting. Although Lorenzo and the delinquents would receive help from the guard NPCs, we are different. So I think we should leave Cairo before there is more trouble.”

“That’s good. Our time is more precious than that guy.”

“But I have some things to finish first.”

Ark’s pupils turned gold after a long time. He had already forgotten

about Andel and turned into a money-making mode.

“Sid. Can you please arrange all of this.”

Ark handed Sid all the japtem he obtained in the Underground World.

“Pant, this, this is!”

Sid’s eyes widened at the huge pile of japtem. But it wasn’t because of the japtem. It was due to the ore, the currency of the Underground World. All of the 1,600 Nurunma leaves he obtained from the thief hideout had been used to make the Warrior cookies and sold to the raccoon troops.

First 1L. But soon the price was raised to 2L because he was running out of ingredients. Fortunately, the raccoons were already addicted and had no choice but to buy the cookies at the higher price. Thanks to that, Ark managed to get 2,400 ores!

Even if 500 L was used to pay for item forging, there was still approximately 1,900 ores in his bag.

“Where did you get so many ores.....?”

Ark who hadn’t showed up for a while finally appeared with amazing items.

Sid still couldn’t understand the strange user that was Ark.

“No, you expect me to organize everything here? But if we sell it in Giran, we can’t get a 20% higher price.”

“I don’t care. Just sort it out. And change all the items robbed from Andel into gold except for the scrolls from Cairo. You should bring Jjak-tung so you don’t make any mistakes.”

“I understand.”

Soon Sid and Jjak-tung headed to Cairo carrying the items.

The reason why he sent Jjak-tung was to take advantage of his ‘Fraud’ skill. Thanks to Ark, Sid had raised his sale skills but it wasn’t possible to sell any more items once he received a profit of more than 15%. On the other hand, if Jjak-tung’s ‘Fraud’ skill was

used, then he could receive an unconditional 15% profit.

“Okay, now let’s finish life in Cairo.”

Ark led the rehabilitation group and headed towards Cairo. It was in order to complete the [Clear Lorenzo’s name] quest that had been postponed. Earlier, JusticeMan had handed him the warehouse key before they headed back to Wolkosu with his supplies. Then, he made him sit down while Lorenzo explained the circumstances.

“.....That was what happened.”

“I see.....I’ve just blindly doubted you without even knowing....I’m sorry.”

Wolkosu said to his son in a regretful voice. Lorenzo seemed tearful as he shook his head.

“No. It was my fault this whole thing started. Father, I’m sorry.”

“Father? Now I am your father?”

“Yes, father. I’m sorry for not calling you that in the meantime.”

“I got it. So stop saying such things. Being confronted with your faults must have been hard on you. I never thought I would have children so I raised you sternly, without unconditional love. That must have been really painful for you and I didn’t know. No, let’s stop. I’ll forget your past. If you’ve decided to become a new man then it is done.

“Father!”

Wolkosu and Lorenzo wept as they hugged each other.

The rehabilitation members had tears in their eyes as they looked at the two NPCs. Although they were NPCs, Lorenzo’s path seemed to overlap with that of the rehabilitation group.

“Hyung-nim, justice is really a good thing.”

“Hum, yes.”

JusticeMan nodded with a satisfied expression.

However, there were no tears in Ark's eyes.

"Now, Wolkosu ajusshi. Let's slowly do the calculation."

"Calculation?"

"Why is it like this? Did you already forget the promise?"

"Promise.....Ah, it's not like that. He he he, why would I forget? Yes, I do remember. Didn't I promise to sell you anything from the items recovered for a 40% discounted price? Okay, if you need anything then tell me. I'll do anything for the man who recovered my son. Since I'm a person who also runs a big business in the capital. I'm a second generation. Even if other stores want them, I will save it for you."

"Ah, father. What a moment! That....."

At the moment, Lorenzo was shocked and blocked Wolkosu's mouth. However, it was already too late. By the end of Wolkosu's words, Ark's eyes flashed as he drove the nail in.

"Without a doubt you promised. You clearly said that even if the items were wanted elsewhere, you would save it for me?"

"Eh? T-that's right. Why? What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Not at all. So let's start the business."

Ark laid his purse on the counter as he smiled. Wolkosu's face then became terrified.

The embroidered purse on the counter contained an unimaginable amount of money.

"5.....5, 500 gold?"

Ark laughed and nodded his head.

Yes, in the short time here Ark had gathered 5,500 gold.

When Ark first came to Cairo, he only had 1,000 gold. When he was in the Underground, without stopping he sent items back to Sid to sell which earned him 300 gold.

However, the largest part of his illicit funds was selling drugs to the raccoons. The way to earn money was as bad as expected. When the ore was sold by Sid using his skills, he earned 30 gold for one piece of ore. The total price was 570 gold.

Thanks to that, Ark's total gold was 1,870.

But was that all? There were also the items collected from Andel. Scrolls were sold in Cairo, so they were removed as there was no reason to sell it.....however the rest of the equipment items and consumables sold for 500 gold. Thus, he ended up earning 2,370 gold.

Of course, Ark's plans didn't end here.

'I have to maximally make money!'

"JusticeMan ajusshi, hyung-nims." I'll guarantee it. Once I buy it and sell it to other users, then the profit from this business would be 50%.

"Certainly....."

After hearing Ark's explanation and calculating in their heads, they nodded.

When buying an item, it is clear that the profit would be guaranteed. There was nobody who would say no to such deals just to save money.

"Okay, everyone will invest as well."

"Except I don't know what the outcome would be once the group splits their earnings."

"Even if you only have a few thousand gold, it would be enough for a business transaction....."

"Can't help it. Still it is lucky that everyone can come."

"Hu hu hu, you're the blessing for the group. You're the person that earns money the best."

The rehabilitation group said with a heart-warming smile as they

began collecting the gold. They were only level 60 but they weren't poor. After all, the rehabilitation members were formerly a part of the dark professions. Even if it was only a game, they still used their former skills to earn a little bit of money.

Since the beginning of the game, people could buy gold from the auction house. With their purses being emptied, 4000 gold was exceeded immediately. However, Ark wasn't investing all that money.

Ark advised them to use 2000 gold to buy equipment.

"Hyung-nim, now is the chance to change equipment. In the Underground World, there are a lot of items that are difficult to find. The price is expensive but I can guarantee its performance."

The rehabilitation members were moved by the flattery and quickly parted with 2,000 gold.

Ark grabbed the money bag and immediately returned to the Underground World through Yggdrasil.

Ark was the hero who had rescued the Underground World from a crisis.

Therefore, intimacy was at its best. In the Underground World, he got a discount of 30% off any items he bought.

"Wow, this isn't a joke?"

"Doesn't this dagger have additional damage when thrusting?"

The rehabilitation members saw the items Ark returned with and cheered.

They were items from the village of craftsmen, where the price to performance ratio was at its finest. The performance was also rare for mid-priced items.

The drops from the assassins were moderately split up and after the items were equipped, their damage and defense was upgraded.

However, upgrading the rehabilitation members wasn't the only reason why Ark suggested changing equipment. Ark noted the

pleased members before saying in a quiet voice.

“Jjak-tung hyung, in fact I got a little discount for solving the quest. So there was a little bit of change left over.....”

“Then you can have it, as a tip.”

“Yes, I had trouble with it. Even if it is outside money given, I need it.”

“Just pack it without saying anything. Child, because you are too good to mask it.”

As expected, even though they were former hoodlums, the rehabilitation members were big hearted. This was also the reason why he didn't include Sid with his selling skills. Because he had accumulated a history of part time jobs, Ark perfectly grasped the nature of the rehabilitation members.

“Wow hyung-nim, thanks a lot!”

“Child, such a thing.....Us hyung-nims won't begrudge such a sum. By the way, how much change was left?

“600 gold.”

“Eek? “600 gold?”

The rehabilitation members let out a booming laugh. As Ark had no trading skills, they thought he would receive a 5% discount and have 100 gold left.

If they knew that the change left over was 600 gold, the rehabilitation members wouldn't have been able to talk about it so easily.

However, the bus had already left. Since the rehabilitation members lived with honour, they couldn't take back their words.

That was also one of Ark's motives!

“Hyung nims are really generous.”

“Ha ha ha. That, it's not like that. Our generosity is only a little bit

big.”

“But 600 gold.....”

The rehabilitation members broke into a cold sweat as they trembled while bluffing. Therefore, 600 gold was added to Ark’s fortune of 3,000 gold.

The 2,000 gold from the rehabilitation members also remained. If they included Sid and Roco then there was a total of 5,500 gold.

“You, you’re going to buy all the items using this money?”

“Yes, did you assume that I wouldn’t have enough for everything?”

“Even though all the other stores would buy these items.....”

“A promise is a promise.....”

“You are really.....”

Wolkosu eventually sighed and nodded.

“All right. I will discount it, but you really seem like you’ve chosen the wrong profession. You would’ve succeeded as a merchant. Because you wouldn’t shed tears over friendship.”

“Thank you for the compliment.”

“Ha ha ha! Okay, I’ll gladly arrange things.”

Wolkosu burst out laughing.

As a trader he had lost, but as a father he had regained his son. Therefore, the question of profit or loss wasn’t a problem.

Wolkosu willingly handed all the items recovered in the warehouse to Ark. They were expensive items only sold in Cairo and none could be found in any other stores. The value of the scrolls was also expensive, so he bought 10 sets of them first before Sid’s 6 bags and his 1 spare bag was so full it looked like it would explode.

“Ah, Ark-nim.” The bags are overflowing.”

Sid shook it with a happy face at the thought of all the profit.

“Sid-nim. Contract.”

“Yes? Oh, yes!”

Sid wrote the contract with trembling hands.

[Merchant’s agreement.

<Agreement: Item resale of the current party. The contract takes effect from the time the items are transferred to Sid in Cairo. All proceeds from the sale of the items must be distributed by Sid according to their respective shares.>]

It was a sale agreement worth 5,500 gold!

No matter what, he would never entrust it to Sid without a contract. But now Ark trusted Sid 100%.

“I can’t believe I really wrote a 5,500 gold contract.”

Sid confirmed the contract with tears in his eyes.

In accordance with the share of the proceeds, Ark would receive 58%, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members 30%, Roco 5% and Sid 7%. Roco and Sid’s original investment wasn’t that much.

Sid had only concentrated on raising his skills, so his profit he made so far wasn’t that much.

And Roco was only a bonus mascot so her gold investment was small.

When dealing with a few thousand units of gold, 5% wasn’t a small amount.

5% of 5,500 gold was 275 gold. Since the expected sale profit was 40%, that meant that it was a profit of 385 gold.

Even if Sid only received 7%, that was still 577 gold. It would be enough to pay off his debt and recover his money as a merchant.

In addition, merchants also raised their characters by trading. If he traded with other users outside of a store, his skills would raise and he would obtain experience.

40% of the profits on all items meant that he would receive a large amount of experience. The penalty received by the silk market slump wasn't a problem anymore.

"It is worth playing the role of Ark-nim's bag for the meantime!"

His feelings of grief quickly withered.

Ark made a warm expression and asked Wolkosu.

"But ajusshi, what will you do now?"

"I.....Because I couldn't return to the capital, I had to stay here. But I want to make arrangements to return to the capital.

"That's right."

"You were worried about the crowd that this guy used to hang with showing up....."

"Do not worry."

JusticeMan moved forward and said.

"We can settle that problem since we're heading to the capital anyway."

"Is it really possible to do that?"

"Of course. I already asked the delinquents about the location of their other hyungs that tried to bully you."

"But why would you guys go so far? You might even lose your life."

Wolkosu looked at him with worried eyes, while JusticeMan laughed and shook his head.

"Ha ha ha. How can I achieve justice if I'm always worried about preserving my life?"

"That's right." The reason why we came here was also for justice."

"In addition, only delinquents can reason with other delinquents."

"That's why I have to teach them the true duty of delinquents."

The rehabilitation members emphasized in unison.

“Thank you, I really appreciate it!”

“Well, it’s the least we could do after you suffered a loss to your sales.”

JusticeMan said absent-mindedly.

JusticeMan joined Ark who was organizing everything he obtained in Cairo outside.

“So now the destination is determined.”

“Yes, since it was our destination from the beginning.

“Can I accompany you?”

At that time, Sid rolled his eyes and interrupted.

“Sid-nim?”

“Yes, the items from Cairo would be more expensive in the capital than Giran. And the capital has more high level users that can afford it.

When organizing the gold, it isn’t 100 or 200 gold but 5,500. Even with a 1% profit you would earn 55 gold! However, the capital should make the profits rapidly increase which would make us happy. If I’m with the rehabilitation group then it won’t be so dangerous.

“I would like that. Because I also want to go to the capital.”

“You too?”

“Yes, I also have to stop there.

Ark nodded and replied.

Finally, the group left the area of Cairo.

It was time to move to a new area. And Ark still remembered the promise to meet Shambala at the arena in the capital.

He was involved in events that he never considered and was delayed

but he still remembered.

“But I have to visit Giran and report my quest to the Institute of Magic.

“Well, since Giran has a gateway it shouldn’t be a problem. I understand.”

“So we set off together.”

At the end of Ark’s words, Roco was glad.

“Is this the first time that everyone has travelled together?”

“Yes, well, how lovely that you and Ark get to go together just like you wished.

“Jjak-tung oppa!”

Roco shouted with a red face.

Fortunately, Ark’s face was also red for no reason. A refreshing wind blew from somewhere.

‘It’s good. I’m glad that I am able to laugh with people who are like family.’

Experiencing a spar

Ark and JusticeMan's party left Cairo. They were headed towards the capital of Schudenberg Kingdom, Selebrid. This was because some time ago, a spokesman announced the full content.

"Attention all citizens of Schudenberg. Finally Bristania, the Sinius Principality and the Kingdom of Bavaria are no longer at war. The three countries have signed an armistice. This long war has fortunately ended peacefully with no confrontations!"

"Wah ah ah!"

The NPCs and users cheered at the unexpected news. There were three human kingdoms present in New World. The relationship between the Bristania, Sinius and Schudenberg kingdoms were poor. Because Schudenberg and the three kingdoms bordered each other, it wasn't easy for users to cross the borders. While the NPCs in New World thought of it like a cold war state, it made the users uncomfortable. Other users and even friends started in the other kingdoms but they could not meet. In addition, most of the border area had been designated as off limits. However, the Armistice Agreement was signed. This meant that you could adventure in more areas. The spokesman raised his hand to calm the crowd and spoke again.

"We'll inform you of the gist of the Armistice Agreement. People are free to trade with everyone in the Three Kingdoms. If you cross the border to trade, you must be granted eligibility and a special tariff of 5% applied."

After he spoke for a long time about the boring contents of the agreement, he stopped and paused for a bit.

"But this is the most important information of the Armistice Agreement. So far, the border region of the three regions has been prohibited from battle. The three powers have declared a vast area

of frontier to be cleared.”

“Frontier?”

“That’s right.” Everything in this area would be opened to all foreigners.”

The users’ opened their mouths as the spokesman’s explanation continued. This was an easier summary of the spokesman’s words. The official name of the triangular border region of the three kingdoms was Nagaran. Not too long ago, a minor skirmish developed between the three armies resting at the border. However many events have occurred in recent years, such as the Jackson event quest and other incidents all over New World, so they came to the conclusion that the war should end. The Armistice Agreement was signed after soldiers from all three armies retreated from Nagaran. As a result, there was a large area that was left empty. The kings of the three kingdoms thought about how they should use this blank area. Because once the soldiers left, there would be a lot of space. They finally came up with the solution of foreigners. The foreigners were strangers who pursued their own lives free of the calculation and interest of the three kingdoms. The reason that Nagaran was opened to foreigners was simple. When many foreigners occupied Nagaran, their powers and interests was judged to become a military buffer zone. In addition, if foreigners occupied the land and poured money into it, then the three kingdoms would also profit. The leaders were quite satisfied with the good idea.

However, even if they were called Kings they were still NPCs. They believed that they had thought of it themselves, but it was a scenario that had been prepared for New World.

<Episode II: Pioneering age of the foreigners> had begun.

“If you’re a part of an outstanding warrior guild, then you will be given the chance to occupy a castle. In addition, the foreigners that occupy a castle would receive a formal Barony from the three Kings!”

Following that, the spokesman explained the rules of the siege. The rules on how to occupy a castle were simple. In the upper part of

Nagaran, something called the Throne of Governance existed. If the first user that sits on the throne is a guild leader then they will become Lord of the castle. They also had to maintain their status for three days in the game, which was 24 hours in real time, while fending off attacks from other guilds. If successful, the Lord can activate the castle's defences which operate within a certain sphere of influence. The state of being a Lord wasn't permanent. The user that occupies the castle has to accept another challenge at least once a week. When they are defeated, the three kingdoms would deprive them of their power. They also had to pour money into developing their castle when they couldn't know if they could keep it.

Anyway, a buzz started among the users after the spokesman's announcement.

They could be an owner of a castle! This was a huge event. It wasn't a funny game anymore. If someone went back through the past Korean games that were unprecedented hits, owning a castle was seen for the first time in the game O. Occupying a castle would provide huge wealth and honour to a guild. It was to the extent that after ruling for 1 year, they would be able to own a house. How much more would the money increase in New World, which was a new generation of game. The possible benefits obtained would be terrific. And the spokesman even explained this. Once someone becomes a Lord, they are given the right to implement and collect a tax. If they intend it, they could even confiscate a user's assets. Of course, it was also easy to rule with tyranny and then have to protect the seat from other users. But anyway, for that area, the authority of the Lord was close to infinity.

'I can't consider it when I have to pay attention to Ark.'

Alan gripped his fist tightly. Alan had just received a call from Andel.

He had used 1,500 gold to buy 15 assassins and sent them after Ark. His plan didn't go so well. How the hell was he accompanied by 15 assassins level 120 and still not finish Ark? In addition to all the items wasted, he came whining to him.

'Stupid bastard!'

It was difficult to find the Dark Brother and commission a job. Alan risked his fame points and he also invested a lot of money so far. After he hired 15 people, his fame points dropped a lot. But wasn't the result more helpful to Ark? Of course, a good reason for that was Andel. He also never thought that the rehabilitation group would interfere or the appearance of a NPC. But nevertheless, the decisive problem was Andel's stupidity.

New world wasn't that simple online game that Andel thought it was. The assassins would move better under proper directions from the client. In other words, if the client doesn't move properly than the assassins couldn't exert their power. The user's level wasn't the most important thing.

'As expected, I shouldn't have trusted him!'

Andel had become the reason for his investment loss. Even when he died, Andel didn't admit it but his skills were inferior to Ark's.

'Even the organization couldn't deal with Ark and his teamwork. And with the presence of the NPC troops then it had become more difficult. He must be stepped on before he passes the company's entrance examination. If possible, I have to find him before it is too late.....'

Then Alan shook his head.

"No. I can't miss this opportunity because of Ark.'

In fact, Alan already knew the information about <Episode II: Pioneering age of the Foreigners> beforehand. In reality or the game, there is nowhere that is impervious to bribes. The Holy Knight Alan was one of the few users that could access the cathedral. The action of the Three Kingdoms was heard through a NPC with high intimacy at the cathedral that he bribed.

"They have already decided to open Nagaran to the foreigners. But if you went ahead then the cathedral would later support you. Do you understand?"

Not long ago, a bishop in the cathedral had called him and secretly told him that. Although it was open to foreigners, the NPCs with

authority also desired power over that area. Because they couldn't do it directly, they would have to align with the user who has control over Nagaran. The three biggest guilds and the royal families were probably making similar moves. Since then Alan had stopped all work and focused on building his guild. While the entrance examination wasn't important to Andel, Alan was different. He had a reason to join Global Exos. Therefore, Alan believed that occupying power in New World was enable him to pass the condition of the entrance examination.

'The system meant that it wasn't easy to occupy the castle, but once it is occupied the guild can establish a huge tax and raise its power. The opportunity is now. The users would soon flock to that area and stay up all night to siege the castle. I have to gather all my strength and move before a powerful guild occupies it.

Alan's eyes shone.

'Even if I didn't get anything out of it, the Dark Brother organization will still regard Ark's party as an enemy. Because 18 assassins were killed.....I'll leave Ark to them. And when I raise my power I can step on Ark anytime I want.'

Alan made a decision and immediately moved to the guild office. A week ago, he had invested a huge amount of money into the guild 'Dawn Blade.' Alan filled the majority of the guild with candidates from the exam. They were stronger and higher level than the users who just enjoyed the game. He secured them in order to occupy the castle. That alone should give a strong impression on the personnel from Global Exos. Alan looked at the beautiful elf magician waiting in the guild office and said.

"Lariette-nim, I've been waiting for you to arrive."

"Yes, I have heard."

"This announcement would certainly have a decisive influence on the company's entrance examination. And Lariette should receive a similar score to me as the guild's sub-master.

"Always.....I'm thankful."

“Please only follow me. Because I will certainly make you pass.”

“.....Yes.”

Lariette was burdened and softly replied while avoiding his gaze. Lariette clearly felt troubled by Alan’s sudden approach. Ever since the Jackson event.....

‘No way.....Don’t tell me it’s because of Ark?’

Men also had intuition when it came to women. Lariette clearly had a good impression of Ark. When the idea entered his head, Alan angrily furrowed his forehead and didn’t speak for a moment.

‘Yes, you’re not that different from other girls. Once I’ve got everything in the world then you’ll be begging for my affection. Yes, everything revolves around me in this world. It isn’t possible to leave me until I’m dissatisfied.’

Alan’s mantle flapped as he turned around.

“Gather all the members of the Dawn Blade guild.”

The beauty that was responsible for Global Exos reception desk let out a sigh. She was also taking the company’s examination under the name of Lariette.

However, she was sighing more often these days.

‘Alan’s becoming increasingly more oppressive. Initially he was a kind and friendly person.....’

Of course, passing the examination was her reason for playing the game. But that wasn’t her only purpose. She was one of those users with a pure mind who wanted to just enjoy New World. That was the reason she was with Alan, who played the game more actively than anyone else. She could afford to play the game with Alan, who was an attractive colleague. But since then Alan had changed. Her colleague had suddenly become overly domineering.

When someone came to be an examinee, he had a system that passed over. Then he would use his power to control their general funds. On the other hand, if they didn’t listen to him then they would

be kicked from the guild. He seemed to play the game just thinking about how to obtain a high score in the entrance exam. What had made Alan so impatient? It was something she couldn't understand.

'Among all my colleagues, the recent evaluation of Alan isn't very good. People should be gathering to enjoy the game. The two thousand people that gathered.....this wasn't how I wanted the game to be like.....'

"Hey, pretty girl. Why is your expression so dark?"

At that time, one guy who was waiting approached and spoke.

When she looked up she saw that it was someone from the planning department of Global Exos, Ho Myung-hwan.

"Ah, it's nothing."

"If such a pretty girl sitting at the desk has a gloomy face then my motivation will drop."

"It's not a big deal."

When Kang Mi-su attempted a smile, Ho Myung-hwan handed her coffee before talking again.

"If you're worrying about the company's entrance examination then it isn't necessary. You have a friend called Alan yes? The Planning Department is already paying attention to Alan. His evaluation is quite high and as his partner yours is as well. If you keep it up then you'll surely pass."

"Thank you."

"You don't have to thank me."

Ho Myung-Hwan scratched his head before walking away with a cool laugh.

At that time, Kang Mi-su remembered something and asked.

"Do you happen to know anything about Ark-nim?"

Ark?"

Ho Myung-Hwan sounded puzzled.

“I’ve never heard of him? You know him?”

“Yes, a little bit.....”

“Hmm, I know every Id that the Planning Department is paying attention to.....I’ve never heard of him so it is possible that he hasn’t been playing an active part in the game.”

“But I heard that he made a considerable achievement in the event quest?”

Kang Mi-su said with an expression that indicated she didn’t understand. Yes, apart from Alan most people also know Ark’s name. During the event quest, wasn’t he the user that was responsible for the success of the plan to blow up the scorch cannons? Therefore she couldn’t understand how the Planning Department couldn’t remember his Id. Kang Mi-su explained this to Ho Myung-hwan who tilted his head.

“Really? Strange. That is certainly enough to deserve attention.....There are 2000 candidates so someone might have missed it. I understand. I’ll check it again.”

“Please.”

“Oho, Miss Global Exos Kang Mi-su is asking after a guy. Do you have a man on your mind? I’m jealous.”

“It’s not like that.”

“Ha ha ha! Okay, okay. Don’t twist your face so much. Well I’ll look into it.”

Ho Myung-Hwan rattled off a joke before heading off. Kang Mi-su looked at his back with a complicated expression. Of all the people who was at the interview, Kim Hyun-woo.....No, Ark. Why did his name suddenly pop up? She honestly didn’t know. But Ark seemed to show a different form every time they met so she was nervous about his existence. Yes, I was just feeling nervous. That’s all it is.

“What is this? If you want to sleep then you should sleep at

night.....”

Hyun-Woo rubbed his swollen eyes as he listened to the complaints.

Then Gwon Hwa-rang farted and squeezed his head.

“This guy, what happened to the game? You were playing the game with me. The game connection suddenly died so I came to check on you but you were only sleeping?”

“I told you. I had so many things to do in the Underground World that I never slept much.”

“When I was your age, I stay up all night for over a week.”

“Were you a super robot that was designed by the country?”

“Anybody could do it. It’s just about their mentality.”

“So I must have a weak mentality since I keep falling asleep.”

Ark pouted his lips. Gwon Hwa-rang smiled and replied.

“Anyway, we had time to meet up before Hye-sung connects to the game again. Since there is still plenty of time for me to introduce someone to you. In fact, I’ve tried to introduce them before but it was difficult since they were busy.”

“Introduction? Is this like a group blind date?”

“Don’t speak nonsense and wait a moment. You have to come.”

A ringing sound was heard as one man entered the cafe and looked around. He was a 30 year old man around 170 cm tall. Wearing a sleeveless t-shirt, baggy shorts and dragging their slippers, they looked like third rate gangsters. He surveyed the cafe before approaching Gwon Hwa-rang and flopped down beside him. Hyun-woo moved as he looked at Gwon Hwa-rang. Gwon Hwa-rang was an ex-detective. While doing that, he met and associated closely with the rehabilitation members, but there were many others that felt different. When Gwon Hwa-rang walked passed, there were many delinquents that complained. After seeing his appearance, Hyun-woo could understand their feelings. Fortunately, Gwon Hwa-rang

remembered to welcome him.

“Why are you so late?”

“Aigoo, Hyung-nim. Didn’t I join hyung-nim just like you asked? Once you gave up being a detective your fate improved. Since the early evening, those young guys have been writing in that notebook, so should I call the National Police Agency to take them away?”

“Stop playing. The police will only stop the hoodlums when you aren’t able to anymore.”

“I bet the profit is better for the police.”

The company smiled and answered as they looked at Hyun-woo.

“Is that your friend?”

“Yes, ah! This is Hyun-woo. Greet him. He was a junior at an athletic university. This is Lee Myung-ryong. Before he was a detective, he was a delinquent.

“Good to see you. I’m Lee Myung-ryong. As you’ve heard, I used to be a delinquent before being a detective.

Lee Myung-ryong smiled and extended his hand.

It felt like holding a stone which was to be expected since looked like a hoodlum.

“I’m Kim Hyun-woo.”

Hyun-woo shook his hand before looking at Gwon Hwa-rang. But why would he interrupt his sleep just to introduce a policeman.

“Hyun-Woo, you said that lately you’ve been constantly exercising?”

“Yes I do it for 2 hours in the morning.

“Yes, that’s why your skills are a lot more proficient in the game. But there is a limit to just exercising. Because the National Police Agency he works for is near your house, you can train at the NPA gym now.”

“Yes? But

Hyun-woo said with a puzzled expression. Certainly it felt like his movements didn't change that much these days. There was obviously a limit to exercising alone. Well, after exercising his physical strength also increased so that might be enough for an ordinary person. However, Hyun-woo applied taekwondo to the game. So he had a greedy desire to increase his skills even more. But why was it suddenly the NPA gym? Since he never heard about it in advance, Hyun-woo looked at Lee Myung-ryong with confused eyes. Lee Myung-ryong's face tightened as he played no regard to Gwon Hwa-rang.

“It's not a burden. At the NPA many civilians come and go just like a normal gym. There is also a guy who was once a member of the taekwondo national team. Although his nature might be dirty, you can learn taekwondo directly. Have you heard of the representative who had to step down because of violent incidents?”

“Are you going senile? How can you say such a thing in front of the kids?”

“Anyway, it won't be a problem to use the gymnasium? I'll stop coming if anyway at the NPA gym says something.”

“Jeez, it won't be a problem. But as your hyung-nim, you should know that the NPA gym is a lot different from your normal neighbourhood gym. It doesn't matter what your character is or if you are a friend of hyung-nim's, if you play around then we won't take it lightly.....”

Lee Myung-ryong looked at Hyun-woo with doubtful eyes.

“Kukuku, you haven't heard. Although he comes from an athletic university and looks trivial, he is a surprisingly adept pupil. In the old days, didn't I tell you about a guy who landed a spin kick on my jaw? He is that guy.”

“Ho-oh, that friend? The one who was on the streets looking for a fight?”

“Fight? Don't be ridiculous. Really. That was a long time ago. It

was to such a degree that I would be frightened by his approach. When compared to now, it was truly a different person. It was like a cage.”

“Ah, ajusshi!”

Hyun-woo shouted angrily with a red face.

It was the event where he flew at Detective Gwon Hwa-rang who made even terrorist organizations tremble and kicked his jaw! It was something he would never forget. Shortly after his father’s traffic accident, Gwon Hwa-rang had visited Hyun-woo who was wandering for a while. His mother wanted to talk to him. That was Gwon Hwa-rang’s first words.

However, before he could finish the words Hyun-woo sharply turned around and kicked Gwon Hwa-rang in the jaw. Any other victim would think of a lawyer to get some compensation.

Gwon Hwa-rang just turned as he stumbled. However, after a moment Gwon Hwa-rang just laughed with a pleasant expression.

.....Hyun-woo remembered it from here. After that, he fainted while being beaten into the ground and woke up in front of the intensive care unit where his mother was lying. He honestly didn’t know if the tears he shed then were tears of penance or because of the pain he was in.

‘Was that the first time since I was born that someone made me faint because of the blood thirst? Was that why I was afraid to approach?’

When Hyun-woo stared at him in dissatisfaction, Gwon Hwa-rang pretended ignorance and just looked away. Suddenly, he felt sharp eyes on him. It was Lee Myung-ryong, who was styled as a third rate delinquent.

“Ho-oh, this guy was the one who kicked hyung-nim’s chin?”

“No, it was just an accident. Ajusshi was just compliant.”

“He just received it? This guy? Is that a joke?”

Lee Myung-Ryong's mouth lifted as he nodded.

"Okay, stand up. The gymnasium is empty so I have to see it for myself."

"Yes? But I really....."

"What guy would whine so much? Follow me!"

Like most delinquents, Lee Myung-ryong had a straightforward nature. Hyun-woo was eventually dragged with violence to the police gym. When he first arrived, he thought it was quite a nice gym. It was stocked with different types of exercise equipment and the changing rooms and shower facilities were also cutting edge. Hyun-Woo looked around with amazed eyes when Lee Myung-ryong spotted a locker and threw a uniform at him. Lee Myung-ryong then changed into a uniform.

"Try it on. The size should mostly fit."

"Yes?"

"Is the child just going to come here and then leave tastelessly? If you're a martial artist then you should join. Ah, you might be surprised but it is a prohibited matter in this gym. Even a guest can't do it. It isn't done. If you do then it is the death penalty! So hurry up and quickly change."

The South Korean detective had trampled on his human rights. Therefore, Hyun-woo changed into the uniform and quickly stood up while looking at Lee Myung-ryong. Next to him, Gwon Hwa-rang was just looking from a distance away. Lee Myung-ryong scratched his chin and said.

"The NPA gym doesn't have any rules or anything like fouls. Two people fight, and if one person is knocked out and can't continue any more than the battle ends. If you understand.....Begin!"

Lee Myung-ryong who had narrowed the distance suddenly popped up like a ball. In a flash, his foot tried to sweep him onto the floor. Hyun-woo was frightened and quickly backed up a few steps. However, before he could get in a blow Lee Myung-ryong changed

his posture and aimed for the temple. He was reflexively able to bend his upper body in order to avoid Lee Myung-ryong's attack who quickly moved a few meters away. His movement was like a demon's.

"Ho-oh, you are okay. It is enough to see the form, just like hyung-nim said."

His attack failed twice but Lee Myung-ryong said it in a pleasant voice. In fact, Hyun-Woo was also amazed. Lee Myung-ryong's kick was at a level of speed similar to pro wrestling. Hyun-Woo who had a little bit of instruction in taekwondo couldn't even be compared. It might have been a coincidence, but he also avoided the subsequent attack on the chin. And Hyun-woo was able to use his form to avoid the attacks twice.

'The movements learnt in New World can also be applied to reality!'

He had no idea until this day. Ark used the evasion techniques that were useful in New World. Not only were techniques in real life passed onto the game, but the game also teaches techniques that could be used in reality! The instincts learnt in the game and reality was mixed. But in fact, it was an obvious result. In a virtual reality game, the user's brain was used to move the characters. Although different brain waves were amplified by the computer, it was no different from the way your body moves in reality. What interested him was the fact that skills from the game could be used.

'I thought I would get hit by Lee Myung-ryong's attacks after I was unable to avoid the Kanggeul's vine attacks. But I avoided the Kanggeul's attacks on unstable ground. If the strong opponent was on a mat then it would be easier to avoid.'

Hyun-woo kicked the mats a couple of times and nodded. Anyway the sparring had begun. He had to try his best to win since it already started! Hyun-woo started do some steps while breathing clearly. Increased tempo, increased tempo, until Hyun-woo suddenly accelerated and suddenly kicked forward.

"Look at this guy. He attacked immediately without looking? Contrary to what he looks like, he's quite good!"

Lee Myung-ryong kicked lightly while swapping between his left and right foot. But that was the movement that Hyun-woo aimed for. Hyun-woo gave a sharp cry and he rotated and stabbed forward with his feet. He felt a heavy weight passing to his toes.

‘Success!’

Hyun-woo turned as he felt an exhilarating feeling. At that moment he stumbled and his eyes widened as he looked at Lee Myung-ryong. Sweat suddenly slid down his spine.

Lee Myung-ryong had stopped the foot by blocking with his thick forearm. However, that wasn’t the reason sweat was flowing. He had never been impressed by ordinary people, but something was flickering in Lee Myung-ryong’s eyes. It was difficult to express in words what the feeling was. It felt like his body was being cut by a sharp knife! Hyun-woo knew from experience. A really scary man wasn’t a man who had a muscular body. The voice also doesn’t have to be loud. Immediately.....the person had poison in his eyes. It was the eyes of a person who had chosen and experienced more violence and pandemonium in their lives. It was often present in the eyes of military personnel.

‘Dangerous!’

At the same time, a warning message popped into his head. Hyun-woo immediately retreated as he took a couple of steps back. And he didn’t move. It was the instinctive behaviour herbivores used to escape from a predator. However, Lee Myung-ryong rushed in before he could move his body into the ready position. It really was like a predator rushing forward!

“.....!”

Was it 20 years ago?

It was the K-1 period where martial arts contests bloomed. However, it received criticism and soon degenerated into a spectacle but as a result the UFC greatly advanced the development of martial arts. A line of clear victory or defeat was drawn which focused less on the spirit and mind and more on a systematic and scientific

method. That's right. Martial arts greatly developed using that period as a foundation. However, that was only the technical side. They used that time period as the foundation for the development of withdrawal. Dangerous techniques were banned from mixed martial arts competitions.....in other words it was the most effective technique in practicing. However, he didn't learn from a gym that taught those practical skills. It wasn't easy for him to tell which techniques weren't supposed to be used. Therefore, the martial arts appeared like the canines of a large predator. However, in modern times there weren't many places to learn actual practical techniques left. Among them, the police SWAT team learned it directly while battling life and death during the day and the night. And Lee Myung-ryong was the head of the SWAT team! Unlike a game, Hyun-woo was experiencing taekwondo where real blood spilled. The technique was an excessive standard move. But the anomaly was that too perfect techniques came pouring out.

Furthermore, each one aimed at the jugular so it felt strange that he survived the attacks! When he blocked with his arm, it felt like the bone was being hit by a hammer.

'If it hits a vital spot then I'll die!'

It was the bloody attack that naturally made sure that death would be associated with it.

But that woke up Hyun-woo's stubborn character.

'If I don't stop him then it isn't possible to end this!'

Hyun-woo ground his teeth together and put power into his shaky legs. Strike! The opportunity for Hyun-woo to attack only came once. Hyun-woo kicked his feet and struck like a hurricane while he had the chance. And when Lee Myung-ryong began the movements to use a sidekick, he quickly moved his feet.

"Dark Dance!"

It was the footwork from the Dark Dance that he learned not too long ago. When Ark's movement became complicated, Lee Myung-ryong showed the intention to rush forward. Meanwhile, Hyun-woo

avoided Lee Myung-ryong's attacks and sprung forward like a rubber ball. He expended all his power on a knee kick!

Lee Myung-ryong's eyes flinched. The footwork he used wasn't present in taekwondo so he couldn't anticipate it. However, he lived in a world where unexpected situations could become a bloody violent battlefield. Lee Myung-ryong called off the movement by stopping his body and falling towards the floor with both arms thrust out. Then his body twisted and he kicked out. Another name for it was the windmill! Lee Myung-Ryong's heels smacked Hyun-woo's chest. Hyun-woo was thrown to the floor.

"Heok!"

It felt like one of his ribs was cracking under the shock. Gwon Hwarang who was watching from the side jumped up.

"Hyun-Woo! You bastard, you're insane!"

Like an afterthought, a look of whoops flashed on Lee Myung-ryong's face.

"S-sorry. I unconsciously went too far.....are you alright?"

"Yes, it's bearable."

Hyun-woo took a deep breath and stood up. His chest hurt but the feeling was quite refreshing. Sparring.....How long has it been since he tasted this sensation? In addition, Lee Myung-ryong's skills were a few levels above the instructors that had previously taught Hyun-woo. No, it felt much stronger than the martial artists who fought on the TV. Hyun-woo knew that such an opportunity to spar with someone so like that wasn't common. Moreover, he would sincerely try to hurt his opponents.....Hyun-woo grinned as he wiped at the sweat on his forehead.

"With you be teaching the technique for that windmill? I never saw that on TV. Let's start again."

"Oho, look at this guy."

Lee Myung-ryong eagerly shook his shoulders but flinched as he

saw the angry face of Gwon Hwa-rang. Then he sighed and shook his head.

“No, that’s it for today. Even if you can stand it for the moment, it will hurt quite a lot tomorrow. Grab a poultice and put it on the swollen area before leaving. And don’t forget to come to the gym when it is time to exercise, I’ll be here from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m.

“Yes? Then you’re going to directly teach me?

“Yes, so go have a shower and leave for the time being.

“Yes!”

Hyun-woo nodded and bowed before heading to the locker room with an excited expression. Lee Myung-ryong looked at Hyun-woo’s back before saying in a serious voice.

“Hyung-nim, did you say that he stopped training for 5-6 years?”

“That’s what I heard.”

“His age is twenty-two?

“Yes.”

Lee Myung-ryong laughed at Gwon Hwa-rang’s answer.

“Kkukkukuk, he’s the real deal. Just like hyung-nim said, it may be possible.”

“When I brought him to you. I had forgotten this but his skills had become better from what I saw before he played the virtual reality game. I didn’t know if you would take him.....It was to the extent that I didn’t even know. He was raised well.”

“Leave. I will positively raise him.

Gwon Hwa-rang and Lee Myung-ryong laughed as they faced each other. There was a look of mischief in their eyes. When he exited the gym, Gwon Hwa-rang had a car waiting.

“Come in. I’ll take you.”

“My house is only a few stops away isn’t it?”

“Stop talking nonsense and enter.

Gwon Hwa-rang forcefully pushed Hyun-woo into the car.

The spare with Lee Myung-ryong seemed to have taken more out of him than he thought. Even if it wasn’t so, Hyun-woo who had been dragged out while sleeping because tired and slept for a moment. But when he opened his eyes at Gwon Hwa-rang’s voice, had he arrived at the wrong place?

“Ara? Where is this place?”

“Get down. Someone you know will be appearing soon.

“Yes? But what...? ”

“So I’m going.”

Hyun-Woo was left astounded as Gwon Hwa-rang drove away.

‘What on earth? Meeting someone I know?’

“Eh? Hyun-Woo oppa?”

At that moment, Hyun-woo hadn’t known what to do.

Suddenly, a woman stopped in front of the convenience store with an awestruck expression. It was a familiar voice.....Jung Hye-Sun. He remembered that she told him she attended night classes to get into university when they were working part time at the convenience store. Hyun-woo hadn’t known where it was, but Gwon Hwa-rang was probably aware. That was probably why he dropped Hyun-woo off and suddenly disappeared.

‘Damn, I thought it was a raccoon but instead it was a bear?’

“What are you doing here? It can’t be.....did you come to meet me?”

“Ah, well.....”

Hyun-woo scratched his head as he opened his mouth. Hyun-Woo

wasn't a bear. Even though he never said it, he didn't want Jung Hye-sun to think that. Of course, he didn't hate Jung Hye-sun. He just wanted their relationship to continue as siblings. However, if he told the truth in such a situation then he wasn't a man.

"Are you hungry?" Rice.....did you want some?

Hyun-Woo opened his mouth as Jung Hye-sun looked embarrassed. But he quickly smiled and opened.

"Oppa shouts?"

"The limit is 6000 won.

"8,000 won. I know a good tonkatsu place in the neighbourhood.

"Um, okay. I'll shout you coffee from the vending machine."

"Hohoho. I understand. I'll let the house branch fade instead. The road at night is beautiful and scary isn't it?"

Jung Hye-sun used the opportunity to grab Hyun-woo's arm. Using the element of surprise, this guy.....he felt like a woman in a movie. This may be a little bit dangerous.

The Evil Silrion Arena

‘Huumm, it is very vague.

Ark sighed as he messed around with a dark red key. Travelling with JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group, Roco and Sid took longer than expected. Roco took a break when she had to work at her part time job. When Roco wasn't there, the party had to stop to set up a camp while Ark concentrated on hunting, but with Roco they could just ignore the monsters and head straight to Selebrid. The party was finally able to reach Giran on the third day. While Roco was away, Ark reported to the Giran Institute of Magic.

“Hopefully I’m not too late.”

Shannen welcomed Ark with a face that indicated he had been suffering a lot.

“Yes, did you find what was requested?”

“The Heartsoul Bead was found.”

“Ooh, is that true?”

“But there is a little problem.”

“A problem? What’s the matter?”

“The Heartsoul Bead broke so the magic is gone.”

Ark explained the situation calmly. He encountered the monsters that had been changed thanks to the beads and it broke during the fight.....he didn't tell them that through the raccoon clan's sacrifice, Nídhöggur was sealed underneath Subarutalp. The reason was that Yggdrasil had asked him to keep it a secret to preserve the stability of the Northern Continent.

Shannen blew out a sigh and looked depressed.

“.....If that was the situation then it can't be helped.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, it is better to control it before its influence spreads even wider. I hope you don’t mind that the Magic Institute will take care of the rest.”

Shannen shook his head in case Ark tried to reject it.

He had done everything to search for the Heartsoul Bead so that there would be no political problems. The Magic Institute was worried about those ‘facts.’ Nobody knows how the Heartsoul Bead could affect the continent. In the end, the Magic Institute taking responsibility for any disaster caused by the Heartsoul Bead was avoided. However, if the Heartsoul Bead broke then it was a different matter. The Magic Institute was partly responsible for the loss thanks to improper care. But at least they could avoid any of the predictions of the disasters that would have occurred.

“We will bear responsibility for not managing the Heartsoul Bead properly. But the problem for the Magic Institute is the power that had disappeared. For the moment, we will make up an excuse for why we can’t show the bead to the royals and the other guilds.....anyway good job. My eyes were definitely correct.”

“I hope I didn’t betray your expectations.”

“Of course, rewards and achievements would follow.”

Ark was glad as Shannen continued talking. It was a linked quest that had the difficulty of the quest increased to +C. When the quest was completed, he immediately gained 4 levels. The dissatisfied feeling when he didn’t receive any experience for the Lore Quest was quickly solved. However, Ark wasn’t satisfied with just that. First the Heartsoul Bead made him search for a group of thieves, before leading him to Kairote and then the Underground World, with a total time of one month spent on it. He didn’t go through all that trouble just to increase his level. Ark stared with greedy eyes as he waited for Shannen’s next words.

‘Maybe I can gain access to the Magic Institute’s treasure house once again.’

However, Shannen's only reward was an old key.

[The Dimensional Key of Magaro (Special)A long time ago, the genius alchemist Magaro left this behind as his legacy. Magaro was a genius that could be counted on the fingers of one hand, despite the long history of the Magic Institute. He was well known for his unique ideas and eccentricities as well as his genius. In his later years, the challenge that the genius was interested in was the organisms that lived in other dimensions. Magaro vanished while hiding the materials he kept at the Magic Institute to study. After that, no one knew his whereabouts. The fact that no one knew whether he was dead or alive was more painful. However, the key was delivered to the Magic Institute under the name of Magaro several years later.]

“What is this?”

“Why, didn't you previously tell me that you were interested in the biology of your creature?”

It was the time when he was looking for a way to end Snake's metamorphosis. Of course, the problem was solved and Ark forgot that he had even asked the question. But it seemed like Shannen didn't forget.

“After that, I looked for materials in the library but couldn't find anything. Then I remembered about the key. In fact, the Magic Institute doesn't really have a lot of information related to biodiversity. When Magaro went missing a long time ago, he took all the books related to that subject. If you seek out his laboratory then you can gain the knowledge that you wanted to know.”

“But.....”

Was this a joke? He almost died and suffered to complete the +C rank difficulty quest and the only reward was information about creature biology? Ark made a dissatisfied expression and began to open his mouth.

“It is not just a book. Magaro lived in the prosperous time when magic was flourishing. Yet he was still one of the top five alchemists

on the continent. In particular, he was a genius at inventing new ideas. The scrolls and magic sold at the Magic Institute were all made from ideas that he produced. Obviously there would be amazing magical knowledge piled up in his laboratory.”

Ark quickly closed his mouth. He could smell money from Shannen’s words. He had no interest in acquiring different knowledge. But if the legacy of the genius magician in his laboratory was still intact. Who knows what might be in there? With any luck, he could find new magical items or learn a new skill.

“Where is the laboratory?”

“Do you remember how I said Magaro went missing?”

Shannen shook his head and added.

“After that, the Magic Institute gathered many magicians and tried to visit the laboratory.” But after decades of finding no traces, it was abandoned. Even the key has been forgotten by now. Along with the legacy he left behind.”

“

“I wasn’t the only one who decided to give you this key. It is the key to the laboratory where all of Magaro’s research was kept. Although the location hasn’t been discovered yet, it is an important asset to the Magic Institute. It wasn’t easy for my heart to give it to a foreigner.”

“What do you mean?”

“At a meeting of the Magic Institute, Grand Master decided to give you the key. The Grand Master decided that if you solved the robbery case then you would be given Magaro’s key.”

Shannen was the president of the Magic Institute’s branch in Schudenberg, while it had a separate rank for the highest magicians. The chief of the Magic Institute in Bristol was a Grand Master.

“I don’t understand. I’ve never even met the Grand Master. If the key

is so important then why are you giving it to me?”

“The magicians have faith in you as a person. They wouldn’t have decided to leave such a thing in the hands of a trivial person otherwise. Why waste thousands of warriors searching for it when you could use just one.”

Isn’t that a separate thing? Ark did not believe those words. People should work for it themselves if they wanted something. However, in mediaeval times thoughts like Shannen’s were common. It was similar to when Arthur became a king after he pulled out the sword from the stone. And New World was based on the medieval times. He could understand Shannen’s rationale on a theoretical basis. Anyway, his words were like the language of a shopkeeper who would say things like ‘these clothes fit you perfectly,’ so Ark nodded his head.

“So this key will give me a clue?”

“Nobody knows. But you are already managed to do impossible things twice. You created a miracle in Jackson and managed to regain the Heartsoul Bead with just a small clue. So we judged that you would be able to handle it and entrust the key to you.”

Then Ark found himself offended from a part of Shannen’s words. Shannen ‘gave’ the key to him a while ago but now it was only ‘entrusted.’ Although the difference was small, he trusted his intuition.

“This compensation isn’t so simple is it?”

Ark asked with narrowed eyes at the smile on Shannen’s lips.

“You’re insightful as expected. That’s right, the key is the compensation for settling my request, as commissioned by the Grand Master of the Magic Institute.”

“Commission?”

“Yes, after the genius Magaro disappeared the Magic Institute lost all access to his research. It is a legacy that the Magic Institute can’t give up on. So I want to ask you to please look for the laboratory. Of course, I don’t know how difficult the work will be. No, definitely not.

Although it might be hard to believe, but trust in your talent and development. Therefore, we'll recognize your right to all the goods in the laboratory. How is it?" Will you try?"

Shannen offered him another linked quest. An alchemist was a profession that could create scrolls and various magical items. If it was a genius alchemist, then it could be assumed that there would be many items piled up in his laboratory. If the Magic Institute gave him all the rights to it.....

'It is a quest with a huge reward!'

"I understand. It might take a while but I'll do it."

Ark nodded and soon the quest was registered.

[Genius Alchemist's laboratory. Shannen has told you about a genius alchemist that went missing a long time ago. He has asked you to find Magaro's laboratory. When he disappeared a long time ago, he left no clues to his whereabouts. This is expected to be a difficult quest. However, if you manage to find the laboratory you will receive the absolute trust of the Magic Institute and receive appropriate compensation.<Difficulty: ???>

<Quest restriction: Friendship with the Magic Institute is more than 200 points>]

When he completed the Heartsoul Bead quest, his friendship with the Magic Institute went up by 100 points. When he rescued the crew of the event quest, his friendship points were raised by 50 for each crew member. Thanks to the 200 points, he received the quest for the genius alchemist's laboratory.

'If a friendship of 200 is needed for the quest then I'll definitely receive compensation.'

"And that Red Man you previously spoke about."

"Yes, did you find anything?"

Ark fixed his posture and asked again. The Red Man, an unidentified NPC who tried to use the Heartsoul Bead to revive Nídhöggur. It was probably the most important NPC for the Global Exos entrance examination.....the unknown person. However, he was unable to find any clues in the Underground World. Before leaving for Cairo, he had asked the Magic Institute about the Red Man but they had no answers.

“Even the Magic Institute’s information network couldn’t discover anything about his identity.”

‘Of course, it wouldn’t be that easy to obtain information about him.’

While Ark was disappointed, Shannen said something else.

“But the Magic Institute also wants to discover how the Red Man is connected. Although I’ve said it before, for some reason there is an ominous feeling. We’ll continue to collect information using the Magic Institute’s networks. Perhaps we will come into contact with some new information.”

He had received the Magic Institute’s promise of cooperation. And Yggdrasil even offered to use its roots that stretched throughout the continent to look for the whereabouts of the Red Man.

He had a huge information network at hand.

‘When it is to this degree, my information isn’t delayed compared to other users who rely on organizations. It was even a possibility of finding the way to pass the entrance examination faster than other users.’

“While you are looking for the Red Man or Magaro’s laboratory, occasionally send me a progress report. We will set up a transfer mailbox in your name.”

-Ark has established a ‘transfer mailbox.’

It will become more comfortable to receive and send mail and items.

An unforeseen bonus was added. Ark had considered establishing a transfer mailbox. However, it was postponed because it require 50

gold to register.

‘If I had wasted money to establish it I would’ve cried.

Anyhow, just like that Ark got a new quest. Before leaving the Magic Institute, he was suddenly reminded of something and asked.

“Do you have any information about the flora and fauna that inhabit the continent?”

“We have a few materials I think. Do you need it?”

“Yes, I think it would certainly help.”

“Really? But the Magic Institute prohibits any material being taken out.....all right. Therefore you can browse and mail a copy to yourself. Therefore you can browse and mail a copy to yourself.”

“Thank you.”

Ark bowed and exited the Magic Institute. He required data on flora and fauna because of the ‘Shining Slime Essence’ recipe he created in the Underground World. Therefore he had the idea to use the wide information network of the Magic Institute. Anyway after he joined his colleagues again to head to Selebrid, he couldn’t help feeling somewhat tricked. It was a laboratory that the Magic Institute had stopped searching for. And the only clue was the key. He also didn’t know what to do or where to go.

‘Damn. What the? What if he failed to find the lab after all? It would mean that completing the +C rank quest was useless because all he received was the key.....’

“Oppa, what are you doing?”

Then, Roco’s voice was heard from in front of him. Ark quickly woke up from his thoughts and made Snake eat the key and then shook his head.

“Eung? Forget about it.”

“Do you know how many times I called? Were you zoning out again?”

“No, I was just having other thoughts.....but why?”

“Didn’t you see the system window?”

“The system window?”

“We arrived at Selebrid.”

At Roco’s voice, Ark belatedly looked at the system window.

The map information that was previously in the eastern area had changed to Selebrid.

“JusticeMan ajusshi and the oppas are waiting. Come quickly.”

Without even waiting for an answer, Roco pulled him by his arm. Just.....after being tricked by JusticeMan, he had reluctantly been forced to have a date with Roco. She had become casual with Ark, which was why she was able to interlock their arms. But deep down, Roco’s attention didn’t feel unpleasant. He was dragged by Roco to the hills to the south where the rehabilitation group was waiting.

“Ark-nim. We’ve finally arrived. This is Selebrid.”

Sid pointed down with an overwhelmed face.

Ark cried out without thinking.

“Ah.....!”

At the heart of the forest at the bottom of the hill, a huge fort city stretched out. Selebrid.....Indeed, the capital of the Schudenberg kingdom was on a different scale.

Huge white walls reached a height that was 3~4 times that of a commercial city. It was neatly organized into different compartments, with the market, auction house, cathedral, guild office and various other buildings showing a colourful appearance. But above all, the beautiful streamlined shape of the city was what attracted Ark’s attention. It was at the moment that he truly felt like he arrived in the Schudenberg kingdom.

“.....We’ve finally arrived.”

It was only one week after they left Cairo.

“Everybody make sure to meet here again after 1 hour.”

The party was scattered in front of Selebrid’s gate.

“Oppa, I have to go to my part-time job. I’ll log on at 11 o’clock this evening.

“Ark-nim, I have report my merchant exclusive quest that I received in Giran.”

Roco logged out while Sid walked to the business district with a jangling noise. JusticeMan led the rehabilitation group to the tavern. The tavern was the place that multiple players used to gather information from NPCs. It was to gather more information about the thieves threatening Lorenzo.

‘I still have some time before the promise to meet Shambala. In the meantime, what should I do in Selebrid?’

In fact, Ark and Shambala had never clearly made an appointment. When Shambala left Jackson, he had one-sidedly left a note to meet at the arena. That was nearly a month ago. Yet Shambala talked about the next month. October hadn’t ended but he had arrived after 29 days. Ark had established the transfer mailbox. Then he made sure the NPC confirmed that Shambala was registered. Fortunately, Shambala was registered as a customer of this mailbox. Ark immediately sent a letter to Shambala. The content was that they would meet at the front gates of Selebrid on the afternoon of the 29th.

‘There was no reply so it is possible that he may have left for other areas.....’

Ark spent some time looking around.

-Wow, great. Look at those buildings. The people here must be freezing!

Popo exclaimed with shining eyes. He had only lived in the Underground World, so the appearance of Selebrid was an amazing

sight for him. In fact, Ark was the same. Selebrid was a different area where level 50~70 players gathered compared to Giran. There were thousands of users, but there were many above level 80 and even above level 100. His eyeballs rolled back. Until now, he had been hunting around Giran so Ark couldn't imagine seeing so many users that were level 100.

'It isn't easy to get past level 100.'

The region also had NPCs that sold high level items. The types and number of stores were less than Giran's, but each sold only high level restricted items! The armour sets that could be sold at the best value in Giran were only sold at the intermediate level in Selebrid. The items on sale by the users were also at least level 80.

"Ara? That's the shoulder!"

Ark stopped walking in front of a flea market stand. Among the armour sets, there were also pieces that could be worn on the shoulders. However, the shoulder items were still not common in New World. The NPC had insufficient awareness so the shoulder piece wasn't treated well, and the drop rate from monsters was also atrocious. In addition, the lowest restriction on wearing it was level 80. It wasn't even possible to see it in Giran. But there was quite a lot of high level shoulder armour gathered.

'Leather shoulder blade. The option was quite good, with a defense of 25.'

When he saw the new equippable item, he automatically swallowed saliva.

'The price is 300 gold. That is quite expensive but it would be a good defensive armour to have.....'

But now Ark was broke. He had used all his money investing in items from Cairo, so he only had a few gold left in his wallet.

'Well, after Sid finishes clearing out all the items then gold would come rushing in again. Until then, there is no time for shopping. It is almost time for the appointment so let's go back to the gate.'

Ark guessed the time and returned to the gate. The gate was crowding with thousands of people coming and going. Then someone tapped his shoulder and after he turned his head, there was a user wearing a black mask.

“Hey, you’re late.”

“Shambala!”

Ark grinned widely and shouted.

Fortunately, he had checked his mailbox.

“You left it until the last day of the month.....isn’t that terrible?”

“I’m sorry, I was a little busy.”

“Although you went to all that trouble, I’m afraid it might be for nothing?”

“Why? Do you have other business?”

“No, it’s not.....”

Shambala scratched his head.

“Actually, I’ve already signed up for another tournament.”

The reason that Ark and Shambala arranged to meet in Selebrid wasn’t simply to look or talk to each other. It was only to compete, because they wanted to see each other’s skills in front of spectators. However, Shambala had already applied for another match before he checked the mailbox.

“Another fight?”

“Yes, the fight is starting tomorrow.”

“When it is finished then we can have a drink.”

“But it doesn’t finish with just one battle, it is a tournament system this time. The progress of the games would take over three days in real time. And if I cancel the tournament application then I can’t apply for another fight.”

“I can’t participate in this contest?”

“It is possible. But this fight won’t be fair.”

“Fair?”

“The game I’m participating in is 2 against 1.”

Shambala and Ark thought for a moment. The reason why Ark wanted to meet Shambala was to formally fight against him. That was also true for Shambala as well. However, Ark already found more meaning in meeting Shambala than he previously had. A proverb was handed down in martial arts. If one practices one hundred times more than they thought, then a single encounter was ten times better than that practice. It was indeed the truth. Sometimes the instructors of martial arts would teach mental training, and people would go home claiming it was a waste of time. It was all silly talk. What are martial arts? In the end, the thing being honoured was the techniques. If you looked at history for the period where martial arts were flourishing, was it the Warring States Period? But that context doesn’t fit as recently people claimed that it was the technique that beat the opponent. So he’d rather train his body and mind a thousand times than just rely on technique. A former member of the taekwondo national team and current SWAT team leader, it was at Lee Myung-ryong’s insistence that Ark master both.

.....Well, after a while he waited for the next words.

Anyway, the key to building martial arts skills was practice. That was the reason Ark was looking forward to sparring with Shambala. Shambala was proficient in Kung Fu. By sparring him, he would obtain more than if he just fought ordinary monsters or users. Just a few nights ago he had received severe training from Lee Myung-ryong. It was common that if he spent one day practicing, he would have to lie down for the next few days.....it was so severe that after the first 2~3 times, Ark was frightened to visit the gym. However, suffering through such training instilled confidence in Ark. Ark had wanted to test the results though Shambala.

‘Three days.....it wasn’t a short time, but it was a special

opportunity.'

Ark nodded and replied.

"I can't complain since I was very late. Okay, I'll wait. If we don't take this opportunity then who knows when the next chance would be."

"What will you do in the meantime?"

"I will probably just go hunting in this area."

While he was thinking, Shambala opened his mouth and said something else.

"Instead of exiting the city, why don't you try the tournament?"

"The tournament?"

"Yes, you should become familiar with the arena. Is it your first time? Contestants who are unfamiliar with the arena would tend to lose in their first exhibition match. That would make it difficult when you fight against me. If I fully explain it then it would become too long.....Now, you should come with me to look at it.

Shambala suddenly pulled Ark. After crossing the busy streets of Selebrid for 10 minutes, they finally arrived at a large amphitheatre that looked just like a roman colosseum. The field was quite popular as there were huge crowds flocked around the area. Shambala made his way through the crowd as he explained.

"This is Selebrid Arena, the evil Silrion."

"There are quite a lot of people."

"Naturally. In one day, dozens of fights are held on the evil Silrion stage. And every competition has prizes that you can't get anywhere else, and sometimes the supplementary prize will give rare items. In order to get the jackpot, it depends more on your luck and skill than your hunting ability."

It wasn't just a simple match. The Evil Silrion arena was a speculative market that combined the odds of gambling. While the

fight of user against user was unable to be manipulated, monster against user or NPC against user were ways for the spectators to make money. And just like horse racing, the dividend was determined and the prize money was given based on that. Because of odds were high, users and NPCs in the Evil Silrion arena instantly became celebrities.

“Now, it’s here. It is better than me explaining it a hundred times. The procedure is simple. Before you go out for a match, you should determine the compensation and prizes. However, each match has different rules so you should read the explanations, then after you select a tournament then you should hand in an application form to the NPC.”

Ark looked at the flyers that Shambala was pointing to.

He carefully read all the rules for the Evil Silrion arena on the flyers.

The first match held in the Evil Silrion was divided into two. The match ends after a single fight and among the players that won, a gambling system was used to determine the final winner of the prize. It was a single match against an NPC or PVP and those users who obtained certain qualifications could apply. However, for the PVP single match there was no prize.

Of course, in addition to PK, there was also the PVP duel system. However, the duel wouldn’t be fair because it didn’t account for the level difference. On the other hand, the Evil Silrion match was a fair fight because it was subject to level restrictions. In addition, even though there is no reward for the fight, they could accumulate ‘honour’ points which could be used to appeal to various NPCs. If their honour accumulates then it would also affect their quest system. The single match was also used for pure fun and games. But the tournament that most users were excited to join was the one where NPCs participates with a large number of users. The tournament was divided into solo, pair, party and guild and prizes or rare items were given as supplementary prizes. It was the tournament that was connected to enjoyable gambling.

The 231st tournament individual match.Participation restriction:

Level 70 ~ 75 Warriors.

Game system: Items prohibited.

Winner's prize and Supplementary prize: 100 gold and a Glory gauntlet.

Registration date: Closed competition! Currently in progress.

The 147th Party Tournament. Participation restriction: Level cap of 50, limited to 10~12 people.

Game system: Items prohibited and level equalized (All participants fixed at level 50).

Winner's prize and Supplementary prize: 500 gold, Rare vision (random)

Registration date: Deadline imminent! On the 31st at 5 p.m.

'Hum, it is fairly decent?'

Ark glanced at the leaflets with curiosity. Attached to the leaflet was a picture of the supplementary prize. There wasn't a detailed explanation, but just looking at the item it could be seen that it was an item of considerable standard.

'But since the reward is the supplementary prize, it won't be so easy?'

The number of people who usually participated in a tournament was 100. Using the tournament system, there were at least seven chances to win. While the tournament was ranked high among most levelling systems, the winning average wasn't high. The outcome depended on your real skills. Such a condition meant that winning over 100 people wasn't an easy task.

'The basic rule of the Evil Silrion. After a user applies for a match, they can't apply for another one for 72 hours. If there wasn't such a restriction, I would blindly apply for every match.'

"How is it? Is that a tournament that you would like to fight in?"

Shambala asked from beside him.

“Let’s see, I’m still not sure yet. I have to look around a little more.”

Ark shook his head and turned to the other flyers. Then, Ark looked at a tournament flyer that attracted his interest.

“Ara? Surely it can’t be.....?”

Ark pushed people out of the way as he ran towards the flyer.

The 186th Pairs tournament. Participation restriction: Level 100 restriction. Must be 2 people.

Game system: Consumption items prohibited (However, skill relevant items are excluded). Level equalization (All participants fixed at level 100).

Winner’s prize and Supplementary prize: 200 gold, Magaro’s secret map.

Registration date: Deadline imminent! 6 p.m. today.

‘Magaro’s secret map!’

Ark was surprised to the extent that goose bumps rose on his body. Magaro! A few days ago he had received the <Genius Alchemist’s Laboratory> quest from the Magic Institute and wasn’t that where the name was discussed? But now that name was on a secret map.....?

‘Magaro might have written the map and indicated the location of the hidden laboratory!’

Shannen had given him the key and said that fate would guide him to the clues. Of course, those words were certainly true. Although it was a bit vague, this was a part of the common game system used in other games. In other words, specific quests are created only after clues that relate to the quest appear. There was also only one quest item made as a measure to prevent it from disappearing. Ark had also expected this quest to proceed that way. If he had the key, then he was sure to have a chance encounter with the clue. But this

opportunity wasn't perfect. In New World, it wasn't possible to complete a quest just by relaxing and thinking that because it is a game, things would happen. They would have to devise the method and personally go look for the clue. In the end they might finally catch a clue. That would determine the success or failure of the quest. But in a place like this, he had never expected to find a clue in this way.

"What happened suddenly? Did you find a favourite supplementary prize or something? Eh? What the?"

Shambala turned to the flyer with an awestruck expression.

"You.....no way, you're interested in that supplementary prize?"

Ark nodded. Then after looking around, Shambala pulled Ark somewhere else. Shambala stopped at an area a little bit away from the Evil Silrion and spoke in a low voice.

"What is the reason that you need that supplementary prize? What the?"

"I cannot say anything more. Just that it has to do with a quest that I received."

"Quest? So, you're also associated with the genius alchemist?"

"How do you know?"

Shambala scratched his head.

"Sheesh, this is getting complicated. Okay, let's just lay it out there."

"Okay."

"In fact, I got a genius alchemist related quest."

"Where? From the NPC of the Magic Institute?"

"Magic Institute? No, I got it from a quest item."

Shambala pulled a book out of his bag.

At various points on the old book cover, someone had written 'the

Diary of Magaro.'

"After I had no contact with you the other day, I left Selebrid. The supplementary prize I desired was taken so I had no business anymore. I hunted the undead at an ancient burial site for several days and received this. At first, I thought it was a common history book but when I picked it up the status was confirmed. After using the identifying skill, this came out."

"The information?"

"I don't know, there were a bunch of ciphers written. I only understand this part."

Shambala turned to the final chapter.

After a lifetime of dedicated work, the problem I've been studying has finally entered the last stage. I seek the infinite knowledge of the world's secrets. Now I will open the last door of the secret. However, these days I feel anxious. There are many moments where it feels like someone is staring at me from the darkness with eerie eyes. It is probably just superstition.....anyway, I will never abandon my research. I will also convey the secret that I found to people. If I cannot return then this diary would be prepared. This diary contains everything that I have found. However, it is not complete. Now you will need to find another clue to figure out where the connection will be.

'A connecting place!'

There is no doubt that it refers to Magaro's laboratory.

"When I read this part, the <Mysterious Diary> quest was started. Magaro was a genius alchemist who wrote this, so I was thinking that the hiding place would probably be in a rare location. Therefore, while searching for information about Magaro's hidden map in Selebrid, I took part in a few fights. Perhaps the magician's lair on the map will contain the cipher to decipher the text in the diary."

Shambala looked at Ark.

"I explained what I found. Now it is your turn. What is the information

that you know?”

“.....I got a Magaro related quest from the Magic Institute.”

“What? The Magic Institute?”

“Yes, the information that I have fits your reasoning. I still don’t know everything yet. But I can say with certainty that the diary and map alone would not complete the quest. Snake, Magaro’s Dimensional Key!”

A long black snake spat out a key.

“This is Magaro’s dimensional key that I received from the Magic Institute. After examining the information, I can guess that all three items, the key, diary and map must be gathered to find the laboratory.

“Damn it, we must obtain the map don’t we?”

Shambala’s face contorted as he became upset. The situation had strangely twined together. But the Magaro related quest couldn’t be shared. Of course it was possible to share the items, but only one person could complete the quest and of the three items necessary, 2 were already split between Shambala and Ark. If one of the two people don’t give up, it would be impossible for both of them to complete the quest. Shambala thought for a while before peeking at him.

“I would be fine if you had it.....although it is not that close between, say us?”

“I’m sad.”

“If you make your snake eat it, then even if I kill you then I wouldn’t be able to receive it.”

“I also won’t die politely.”

Ark grinned and replied.

Then Shambala nodded his head and made a suggestion for compromise.

“Okay, so it is simple. Here’s the deal, it is urgent that we get our hands on Magaro’s secret map. Because even if we quarrel among ourselves, it would be no use if it enters someone else’s hands. Do you agree? But I cannot guarantee that you would win. But if you and I join hands then it is different from talking.”

“Join hands?”

“Yes, there is still time remaining until the tournament starts. And to ensure fairness, the mechanism means that you can change partners before a match.”

“But your partner?”

“Those guys don’t need to concern you. The application deadline was running out so I just dragged some junior that I knew. However, you would have a much higher winning percentage than him. I, since then I have recognized your skills. I assure you that you can also believe in my abilities. If I pair with you, then we’ll surely be able to win.”

“Thank you.”

Shambala’s proposal was quite convincing. Ark had experience with fighting many users at the same time. However, not many users showed the same skills as Shambala. Ark too. When it was the same level, then Ark had confidence that he wouldn’t be defeated by anyone.

With such a pair! Winning was a certainty.

“Okay, you and I will become a pair and win fairly.....What’s next?”

“The situation is simple. Once you obtain the secret map, you will have all you need to put the clues together. The remaining problem is that there is a clue that you and I would have to share. The simple solution is that you and I should fight.

“Then the person who wins takes everything?”

“That’s right.”

Shambala nodded with challenging eyes. Ark faced Shambala with

his mouth closed. If he had received such a proposal in Jackson, it would have been difficult for him to accept. When he calmly compared it, the battle power that Shambala showed at that time was a level above Ark. However, Ark had grown a lot more confident. In addition, a few days ago he had met his master Lee Myung-ryong. Like the earth at the end of a drought, it would suck in water quickly. The same goes for Ark. After he met his teacher, his skills were only going upwards.

'I will use the remaining time for training and only log in on the third day when the tournament starts.....there is also a chance against Shambala!'

Even if the circumstances weren't in his favour, there was no way he could reject it.

As long as Shambala was holding Magaro's diary, there was no way to obtain it other than killing him. With Andel it was a revengeful situation, but Ark didn't want his relationship with Shambala to be like that. In addition, even if he attacked Shambala viciously then it would lead to the same thing. If so, he would rather accept the offer to team up and win fairly.

"Okay, let's do so."

"Great decision. Then follow me."

Shambala and Ark headed back to the Evil Silrion. And Shambala made his junior give up and replaced it with a new member application.

"Do you want to replace the member for the 186th Pairs Tournament?"

"Yes, my name is Shambala and the replacing member is Ark."

"Of course, Shambala has finished the qualification verification process.....now let's check Ark."

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good+250	
Fame	1875	Level	123

Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of All, Jackson's Hero	
Health	2065 (+50)	Mana	1930
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	274 (+15)
Agility	314 (+15)	Stamina	404 (+10)
Wisdom	43 (+10)	Intelligence	367
Luck	44	Flexibility	35
Art of Communication	33	Affection	55 (+ 10)
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		98	

Equipment item effects

Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified. Cat Paws: Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10% Raccoon's Pith: Agility +10, Wisdom +10* <King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20 Improved Norad Boots: Movement speed + 15%, Evasion + 10%

Adelaine's Necklace: Def + 40, Affection + 10

Resurrecting Spirit: Strength + 5, Mana Recovery + 5%

* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)* Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

When Ark had exited the Underground World he was level 116, after the Heartsoul Bead quest he was level 120 and when he travelled with the rehabilitation group, he obtained an additional 3 levels and became level 123.

The eligibility limit was level 100 which he passed easily.

“Your qualification is good enough. I will immediately put in the file that a contestant was replaced. Shambala and Ark are 14th. Therefore, you will fight in the seventh battle of the tournament. The tournament date is the day after tomorrow at 11: 00 a.m. so if you are 30 minutes late to the waiting room then you will be eliminated. Any other questions?”

“No.”

“Then I wish you luck.”

Shambala and Ark left the Evil Silrion. The day after tomorrow at 11 a.m. was tomorrow morning in reality. The time was sufficient. After he explained the situation to JusticeMan’s party, he stopped by the gym before sleeping and sighed in relief.

“I have to tell Captain Lee Myung-ryong to teach me as much skills as possible.

When he returned to the gate, the party had finished their business and gathered.

As soon as he saw Ark, JusticeMan shouted.

“Damn, it seems to be taking a lot longer to find the thieves than I thought.”

“Why?”

“I heard a rumour that the war near the border was finished so everyone would be returning. Thanks to that, the thieves have become too scared and are hiding. I have to look around for them for a while. While the arena is also important, our purpose is to rehabilitate these guys.”

The biggest problem for JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group was the realization of justice.

Sid had also found some work to do.

“I think I have to go to Nagaran.”

“Nagaran?”

“Yes, it is the name of the border region that an uncle told me just now. After completing the merchant quest, I received information about it. All the current player guilds are flocking to that area. There is an event that is taking place there? At any rate, the price of the potions during the guild fight should skyrocket tremendously.”

Although Sid could be trivial sometimes, he also thought with a merchant’s brain. Sid’s eyes flashed with determination as he said.

“Nagaran 50%.....no, I’ll be back with a 60% profit! Ouhuhuhu, don’t miss it. When I come back, we’re all going to be rich!”

“Ooh! We’ll be anticipating it Sid!”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members cheered. At that time, Shambala went forward and asked Sid.

“Are you a merchant?”

“Yes, but why?”

“How many days will the trade route take?”

“Nagaran is close but because of some business, it’ll take no more than 4 days.”

“Well that’s great. Can you take this instead and write a contract?”

The thing that Shambala proposed with the content of his appointment with Ark. Ark and Shambala did not have any time to check each other’s skills in the last month. Because they had to rely on the ability of the partner in the pairs tournament, even if they beat each other in a single match, they weren’t sure the item would be given. So, a contract would be drawn up which gave a third party the item beforehand, who would give it to the winner.

“The contract details that Ark’s item would be given to Sid. And whoever wins the single match will be given the item by Sid. If one of you refuses to fight, the remaining person would automatically be the winner, Ark, do you really have to do this?”

Of course. If Shambala hadn’t said anything then Ark would have. Therefore Ark and Shambala gave Sid the quest related items.

Therefore, the future of the party was decided. Sid headed down the trade route towards Nagaran, while the JusticeMan group headed south to search for the thieves.

But, there were also eyes watching them from an alley.

“They are the gang who killed our members.”

“Go contact headquarters.”

A person whose face was hidden by a black hood took out a document and vanished. On his chest was a red handprint, the Dark Brother organization. Their bad relationship hadn't ended yet. But it wasn't only NPCs spying on the party. Several users were secretly talking about Ark and Shambala in the alley opposite to the Dark Brother's.

“Are you certain about those guys?”

“Yes, a little while ago I definitely heard the word related to Magaro's legacy.”

“Then they already have the rest of the clues?”

“Sheesh, are you sure these guys are connected to the clues?”

“What if?”

“Because they are also participating in the tournament, I'll watch the situation a little bit more.”

The users said then secretly slipped away. So.....As soon as he arrived in the capital, the events surrounding Ark had begun. Of course, Ark didn't know any of that.

“Then I'll meet you before the tournament.”

“Manage your condition well. If you doze off while fighting.”

“Don't worry. I am used to controlling my condition.”

Ark exited the connection after arranging the appointed time with Shambala.

Then Hyun-woo who had returned from being Ark immediately left for the police gymnasium.

“Ha! I want to ask for strong training for several days?”

Lee Myung-ryong was so happy he couldn't express it in his face so he just nodded.

“Yes, since I am off duty today than it is no bother. First, do 200 push ups, now!

The spartan style training lasted for 4 hours. Hyun-woo's body went through such harassment that Lee Myung-ryong said.

“Kukuku, it should be like this every day. I'm creating a Superman.”

“Can't I be satisfied with Batman?”

“If you're a man, then it's Superman.”

Hyun-woo felt the need to cry. However, Hyun-woo clenched his teeth and stomachached it. Now it was the beginning. It was forwarded by three days then there was no time to rest. Shambala was strong. When the pairs tournament ended, there was an even stronger opponent that he had to test his skills against. Hyun-woo was starving and fainted straight away after leaving the shower. When he woke up, 8 hours had suddenly passed.

‘Huck, isn't the tournament starting in 30 minutes?

In a hurry, Hyun-woo went to the unit and connected to New World. In reality, the game.....as Hyun-woo became Ark, he heard Shambala shouting in his ear.

“Damn, why are you only coming in now? The time limit to register is tight!”

“I'm sorry. I guess I was too tired to hear the alarm.

“Please be careful next time. Because there is not time, let's go immediately.

Shambala pulled Ark as they ran towards the Evil Silrion arena. At this time, neither of them could imagine the events that would occur.

And from the Evil Silrion in Selebrid to Sid who had left for Nagaran.....the event with a lot of entangled interests began to surround Ark.

Ark's eventful adventures would begin now.

Dark Wolf

“Unbelievable.”

Shambala said coldly as he stepped through the busy crowds. From the time he had met Shambala outside the stadium until now.....a frown had continued to crease his forehead. Annoyance was buried in his glances and voice. Because he had slept in, he was late for the time of the appointment. He had made a mistake. He had really committed a sin to die for. But he wasn't so late that they missed the match so wasn't it too much to keep being angry? Ark thought with pouted lips.

“I know and I'm sorry. I said I was sorry.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Aren't you mad that I'm late? I'll be careful next time so let's just stop it here.”

Shambala stopped walking and stared at him.

“That's right, it would be better to be careful about what you say. After all, there is no second time. Because I will stick a knife if you do it a second time in the tournament.”

It was not a joke. He had forgotten for a while, but originally he had met Shambala when he stabbed Ark in the back moments after he reconnected. After he didn't like it, he was a user that could sneak up to someone and stab them while laughing. He had managed to become friendly with such a bloody guy. No, had they become familiar?

“Yes, yes. Aren't you certain? Please leave it alone now.”

“Do you want to play?”

“I understand, I don't want to be stuck with a petulant partner who would stab me with a knife.”

Ark muttered with a laugh. Shambala gave him a sharp look before breathing out a sigh.

“You’re really.....well, I got it. It is better to relax before a match rather than being tense. Because this tournament might be more difficult than expected.”

“Huh? More difficult?”

“Like I said before, the number of people who usually participate in an Evil Silrion tournament are around 200 people. But in this tournament.....there is something weird. From what I heard, the number of people who applied is at least 5 times more. That means around 1,000 people.

“1,000 people? Then even if 1 match has 2 people, that’s 500 matches?”

Ark’s mouth widened. However, Shambala shook his head and said.

“The number’s not significant.”

“There’s only one thing that increases when there is a number of entrants.”

“I guess. But although there have been a number of times when many people have showed up, they just increased the number of tournaments. If more than 100 people apply, than the tournament would be extended to 2~3 tournaments.

Well, he tried to think about that. It was a tournament method where half the number was expected to fail. So if 100 people applied than the tournament would continue until there was one winner. However, if over 500 people signed up than it would be extended to more tournaments.

“The problem is not the number of tournaments, but the level of the players.”

Shambala emphasized in a serious voice.

“In fact, I think this tournament is insignificant. Are you listening? Since the border of the Three Kingdoms was opened not too long

ago, guilds have been flocking to Nagaran. Therefore the users with high odds of winning in the Evil Silrion probably belonged to guilds. Therefore, the number of participants in this tournament with mediocre skills would be low.”

“Then all the players with skilled capabilities have gathered?”

“That’s right, the names on the application list are names that are known by everyone. Therefore, some abstained and were probably hoping to apply for a different one, but 1,000 people still remain. Can you approximately guess what I mean?”

The name of the participants in the Evil Silrion weren’t disclosed until the final registration. When the users weren’t confident in their skills, they resigned after the application list was revealed. The reason was simple. In the Evil Silrion, a system of ‘Victory Points’ existed. In other words the rank was decided by the number of victory points, just like in boxing. And of course, the higher the ranking, the more possible it was to receive suitable compensation. For example in the special tournament that had a supplementary prize, the reward was an item only sold at an exclusive store. Or there was also the right to purchase advanced game information at an affordable price.....the purpose of players coming to the Evil Silrion was to obtain those sorts of prizes. The reason Shambala originally joined the Evil Silrion was because of a job-related quest.

“Therefore, your score from the tournament could fall a lot. And if you resign after the first match begins, it is considered a loss and your points will fall. But if you resign after the registration list is announced, you won’t be able to apply for another tournament but your points won’t fall. If you subtract the players who aren’t confident in their skills from the attendance list, there would only be high level players left.”

“Say that again.”

Ark organized Shambala’s words.

“Because large guilds rushed to Nagaran, a lot of people joined the tournament hoping for huge profits. Were they thinking of saving money from this?”

Shambala nodded.

“But the list of top ranked players being announced still doesn’t explain where 200 people abstained. There are two reasons I can think of. The first one is that the ones who remained and are unconfident would join forces. And the second reason is.....they want the supplementary reward even at the risk of losing their points.”

“That’s right.”

“Is it rare for a treasure map to be given as an supplementary prize in the Evil Silrion?”

Ark asked Shambala who shook his head.

“That’s what I don’t understand. Treasure maps are a common supplementary prize in the Evil Silrion. And there hasn’t been anyone who received a jackpot using the treasure map, it is an unpopular prize. That’s why I don’t understand why so many people have gathered just for the supplementary prize.”

An idea came to Ark after he had been folding his arms for a while. Ark had bought treasure maps several times but never found anything. Treasure maps could lead to items.

But what treasure? And how many items would be in the chest? He had grown up watching a cartoon where those that sought treasure from maps found it after much difficult and death. But the moment they opened the thick treasure chest, their expectations would turn to despair. Inside the treasure chest was at most 3~4 old jars, which didn’t even sell for 3 gold at the shops. However, it was good for Ark in its own way. He knew that maps could lead to unexpectedly high items. But if the treasure map led to a ridiculously high level hunting ground and if he happened to find empty boxes at the end then there would be a lot of trouble. Even monsters level 300 could be disguised as a treasure chest, such as the time he was surprised by a mimic.....The words luck or unlucky were often used these days. Of course there was a chance of really big items being found, but the probability was too low to hang their dreams on it. So even if they found a treasure map, there was almost no one who would

invest their time and intentionally go look for it. But people have gathered for the tournament where the prize was a map.

“Rumours that Magaro’s map must lead to the location of wonderful treasure or information that it is a quest related item must have spread.”

“That’s what I think as well.”

“Yes, but it will definitely become a little troublesome.”

Ark sighed and murmured. But then he shook his head and added in a decisive voice.

“But nothing has changed. It doesn’t matter how many opponents there are, we’ll just have to do the same as we planned. To win, no?”

“Do you have confidence?”

“Are you unconfident? Do you want to quit?”

Ark smiled as he glanced at Shambala.

“If you are being courageous while ignorant.....anyway I’m good. Because it is better than a partner who is depressed from the start. And you’re right. We just have to win using whatever method possible. I won’t let them catch my ankle so easily.”

“No matter what, we’ll return the favour.”

<p>The Pairs Tournament will be held shortly so please register as soon as possible.If you do not register 10 minutes before the start then you will be automatically disqualified. Let me say it once again. The tournament will be held after 5 minutes. Participants please register.....</p>
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At that time, the voice of a NPC resonated everywhere through a magic loudspeaker.

“Let’s go, we still have to register.”

The front office of the management was crowded with people. In front of them was a large table showing the tournament. There was 5 minutes left until the final deadline. However, more than half was still unregistered. However once you've registered, your points would be slashed if you don't win. Therefore, the people were waiting until the last minute to confirm all their rivals and determine if they should participate or not.

'Are the people that have low quality equipment also hesitating to register?'

Ark looked at all the participants in his line of vision. Everyone met the minimum level requirement of 100. Just by skimming he could tell that some were powerful. In particular, it was the range of level of equipment they carried that made his mouth water. And it was the equipment that would play a crucial factor in the outcome. In the Evil Silrion, levels were insignificant in a fight. The reason is that the levels of all the participants are adjusted to the tournament level of 100. While it sounded like a fair rule, in fact it was quite the opposite. In the Evil Silrion, it was 'only' the level that was adjusted. However, it had no effect on skills and equipment. And if their skills and equipment was at the same level, then without a doubt they would be strong. Therefore, victory or defeat in the tournament was often decided by the efficiency of the skill level and the equipment. Of course, wouldn't a user with proficient skills and better equipment have a higher rating? Between a user who had just reached level 100 and a level 200 user with a rare sword, the difference was like a bamboo sword against a real sword. In a fight, the skill difference would also be important.

'The absolute standard inside a game is level and equipment.'

That was the absolute truth.

"Sheesh, look at those pathetic figures checking out the notices....."

Shambala looked scornful before turning to Ark.

“Anyway, we have never thought of resigning just because of our opponent. Let’s register and warm up before we are pushed. Because eyes would be concentrated on us when registering, please wear a mask for the time being.”

“Mask?”

Ark repeated incredulously. Then Shambala’s forehead wrinkled.

“You, don’t tell me.....didn’t prepare a mask?”

“What do you mean by a mask?”

“Oh my god, I never thought you would be this ignorant!”

Shambala shook his head with a tired look. Ark looked around with a face that showed he didn’t understand. Come to think of it, he had a strange feeling since he entered the office. It was strange when he came in, but he didn’t pay that much attention to it.

But when he listened to Shambala’s words, he figured out the identity of the mysterious feeling. Except for the authorities, everyone gathered at the office was wearing a mask. Now, Ark flinched and asked with a worried look.

“Ho, is a mask needed to fight in the tournament?”

“No, your appearance doesn’t matter so it is unrelated to that. But it is better to be prepared if possible. Especially in this tournament.....”

Shambala scratched his head.

“The rewards for the winner and supplementary prize are often mixed with rare items. There are a lot of people that would desire the item. You know what I mean? For example, there are a large number of defeated participants watching from among the spectators that would desire the items.”

“Ah, I see!”

Ark said with a flash. Why had he never thought about that? One of the reasons players would participate in a tournament even though it

wasted time was because they desired the supplementary prize. There were thousands of items among those cases.....which might be the goal of the user. No, it'll be the target. And an uneasy life would begin after the prize was awarded. Treasure calls for blood. It wasn't a word that was applied in reality.

"You must be really brave or ignorant.....didn't you even think about it a little bit? The people who appear in the Evil Silrion are experts in PVP. Unless it is 1 on 1. You might be able to hold out if they jump you. However if they are a member of a guild, there is a 100% chance that you would be jumped by a group. That is why everyone hides their face with a mask."

The brave and ignorant Ark raised an objection.

"But they would know my name anyway."

"You idiot, did you think about why the list of users who registered hasn't be shown yet? The final registration is where you make the decision to participate, but it is also the procedure to register the ring name of the contestants."

"Ring name?"

"Yes, it is another name that is only used in the Evil Silrion.

Understandably, why the fight starts then the crowd cannot interfere in any way. This means that there is no way to discover the information to use the scrolls or a variety of magic. So if you use a mask and a ring name, then your personal information would be thoroughly hidden. Once he had applied for the battle, he instantly disconnected so Ark didn't understand the situation.

"Unbelievable. The players who flocked to this tournament are interested in the supplementary prize.....so if you become the winner without covering your face, chaotic players would swarm like bees."

'That would be a problem.....'

Now Ark's face became serious. Why didn't he think about those things? It was not simply a matter of winning the prizes. Ark did not

want to attract the attention of other players by default. Wasn't that the reason why he didn't register new dungeons discovered in the Hall of Fame? And it wasn't just 1~2 people, wouldn't thousands of spectators would be crammed into the arena to watch the tournament? And they were aiming for the supplementary prize?

'I already had trouble with my bad relationship with Andel, but if I win and receive the secret map of Magaro.....?'

He could immediately imagine it. Shambala looked at the sandglass which showed the registration deadline and was annoyed.

"Are you indifferent about your appearance when registering? If you show your face when fighting then your true identity would be revealed. Hell, and there is no time to go and buy a mask because you were late.....you don't possibly have something that could cover your face do you?"

"Such a thing....."

Ark breathed out a sigh. Rattle rattle, an idea floated in his head.

'Yes, if I have that then it isn't necessary to use a mask!'

"Shambala, just wait. I'll be right back."

"What? Are you trying to buy it now? I told you, there's no time to go out."

"I'm not going to buy a mask. Just wait for 1 minute."

"Now, wait a minute! Hey, Ark!"

Ark left the office with Shambala's voice drifting behind him. Most of the participants were already gathered in the management office, so the hallway was quiet. After entering a deep corner, Ark looked around him.

'Okay, no one is around?'

"Transformation!"

A black aura emitted from the pith. The black paint felt like slime as it crept over Ark and covered him.

-The Raccoon's Pith's special option 'Transformation' has been activated.

Yes, Ark was wearing the magical helmet that he obtained from the Underground World! It was the Raccoon's Pith that allowed him to use the special 'transformation' that had been a part of the raccoon clan for ages.

'This is the first time I've just 'Transformation' since I got it.....'

Nevertheless, he somehow knew how to use it. The black slime covered Ark and a new window popped up. It looked like the race, gender and appearance setup that appeared when he first connected to the game.

'Should I make my completely different appearance look good? Anyway, the reality is that I don't really care. But having an outrageous impression while fighting isn't bad.'

There was no time to demonstrate an artistic sense. Ark gave a straight answer every time the menu came up and created a new character. A character that looked a little evil was created but that didn't matter. Once he finished the setup, the black slime started to change Ark's appearance. Ark changed and he looked at his unusual form. His face protruded out and his arms and legs were thick. He was over 30 cm tall and his hands were swollen like a balloon while his feet were as hard as rock.

'It was made roughly, but once seen it appears plausible?'

Ark nodded in satisfaction and went back to the office. Then he entered through the door.

"Huk, what, what the?"

One player unintentionally forced his head backwards and tried to hide as he passed. The following people turned their heads as well.

“What, what the? That man is?”

“No way.....it can't be a monster.....then that is a beast species?”

“No, it must be a joke. How can there be beasts in the capital of the Schudenberg kingdom?”

“Haven't you heard about the relaxed border restrictions?”

Everyone's eyes were concentrated on one man. The person who walked through the crowd as they parted for him like the Red Sea was Ark! He was twice the height of an average person and his chest and arms were twice the normal thickness, and every time he moved it was like his muscles were rocks. It was an overwhelming presence indeed! However, people weren't surprised because of that. His 2 metres tall muscular body was covered by black hair. But was that all? Right now, his pupils gleamed red like blood floated in it. Large fangs protruded out of his mouth as his eyes stuck out. The name that came to mind at his surprising appearance was Lycan.....also known as werewolves. However, it wasn't possible for a monster that was a werewolf to appear in the middle of Selebrid. If so, the answer must be a beast clan. Among them, the wolf tribe was the one that the user selected. However, the Wolf tribe only started in the Sinus Principality. Therefore, users in the Schudenberg Kingdom haven't seen anyone from the wolf clan yet.

‘Surprisingly, the mood isn't bad?’

Normally Ark didn't like the interest of other users. But feeling such interest when he was in disguise wasn't bad. At the attention of thousands of players, Ark started to laugh.

“Kkurururu”

It was an intimidating sound that emerged from his mouth. He thought it was an attractive smile, but the people looking at it didn't seem to think so. The faces of the users were stiff. Some female users were also avoiding his eyes.

‘Huhuhu, was my smile that powerful?’

When Ark changed appearance, the part of his brain with taste disappeared. Anyway, there was no time to be playing around. He looked around for Shambala who had also been staring at Ark with surprised eyes. Then he flinched and retreated as Ark approached.

“Kkururu, did you wait long? Let’s quickly finish registering.”

When he opened his mouth, a snarl naturally came out. Shambala tilted his head with a puzzled expression and asked.

“Are you.....?”

Shambala stuttered before he closed his mouth. Shambala was a veteran in the Evil Silrion. Even when he was confused, he didn’t reveal the original name in a place where the attention of users was concentrated on them. Ark noticed the situation and nodded.

“That’s right”

“Really.....you definitely have the ability to shock people. Although you only disappeared for a moment, you became this.....no, it doesn’t matter. I don’t know how you did it but I’ll hear it at a more convenient time once we finish the registration.

Shambala dragged Ark to the NPC. The NPC was also surprised by Ark’s appearance as a wolf species. When a smile stretched his face, it was an expression that caused intimidation. But after Ark’s information was confirmed, a sigh of relief was released.

“Uh, you have the right to participate. It doesn’t matter what form you use to participate since the entrants have freedom.....but it is really unique. Yes, registration has been finished. By the way, it seems like this is your first appearance. What ring name do you want? Please note that you cannot change the ring name once it is registered in the Evil Silrion.”

“Dark Wolf.”

His ring name had appeared when he confirmed his final appearance.

“Dark Wolf. Yes, it has been registered. And your partner.....Ah,

you're Blue Sword.

"Blue sword!"

At the NPC's words, mutters broke out among the users who were watching. The disturbance spread through the crowd like a fire.

"Isn't Blue Sword the hero of that rumour?"

"The powerhouse that went straight into the top 10 ranking in the individual match?"

"Isn't he the one who recorded 37 straight wins?"

"Damn it, he hadn't appeared in a tournament for a while....."

Unexpectedly, Shambala was a celebrity in the Evil Silrion. But indeed, it wasn't that impossible. Ark also knew Shambala's skills. In New World, there weren't that many people who could fight Shambala in a 1 on 1 match and win. Moreover, in the Evil Silrion users competed with the rule of level equalization. It was natural that Shambala was known to the public. But when the interest in Shambala rose, the interest in Ark fell immediately.

"Yes, the wolf probably isn't that big a deal compared to his appearance."

"That's right, because he is a trivial person compared to Blue Sword. There is no fair way of winning the pairs tournament with that."

"Then it is worth a try."

"If it was a solo match I would have no confidence but since it is a pairs one....."

The fact that he was acquaintances with Shambala made it worse. It seemed like he only accompanied him to allow Shambala to enter the tournament. Therefore those who knew his power disregarded Ark. Ark's frown steadily deepened causing Shambala to laugh and whisper.

"Are you actually listening to all this talk?"

"Kkururu, I don't care. The results will be seen soon anyway."

“That’s right. But be vigilant because the Evil Silrion tournament isn’t a game that you can be careless with.”

Ark was angry at Shambala’s words. When it was a 1 on 1 PVP, Ark was confident. Shambala hadn’t seen his skills since they met up again. However, Shambala was treating him like a newbie and it offended his pride. With a hot temper, Ark opened his mouth.

“Hmm, is that Blue Sword that great?”

Suddenly a voice mocked from the back of the room. Shambala turned his head and flinched as he frowned.

“You’re.....Jewel!”

The other participants flinched at Shambala’s voice and paid attention. The two people wore a magician and archer outfit. They were also covering their faces with a mask that was carved with a five star design. People wore masks and used ring names to disguise their actual appearance, but in the tournament it was the mask and ring name that allowed participants to recognize their opponents. Although equipment items would frequently change, it was rare for a mask to be replaced. Shambala also used the shape of the pattern engraved to figure out the masked opponent’s name. Jewel laughed and nodded.

“You remembered.”

“There’s no way I would forget.”

“I thought it was impossible when I heard the ring name Blue Sword, but it is you. Have you developed your skills while I was in a different area? Or are the other guys just pathetic?”

“.....”

Shambala glared silently. Then Jewel turned to look at the tournament table before talking sarcastically.

“Let’s see, did you say Blue Sword and Dark Wolf? The 14th match? So you would meet us in the finals. Lucky you. Fortunately, you can become runner ups.”

“Kkururu, these children, what are they talking about?”

Ark growled. Normally when someone changes shape, even the character would immediately change. But Shambala just pulled Ark’s arm and shook his head.

“Dark Wolf, it isn’t necessary for you to deal with them.”

Jewel laughed and nodded.

“A person with experience is slightly better. They know better after having me as an opponent.”

“.....Don’t think that I’m the same as before.”

“Of course. But I expect to have the same fun as before. Come to the finals with your developed skills. I would be happy to step on you this time as well.”

Jewel laughed before returning to his original spot.

“Damn, what was that just now? The five star design. Jewel has a five star pattern drawn on his mask.”

“Hell, a pioneer is participating.”

“There goes my win. I’m going to postpone my registration.”

The participants sighed before gradually disappearing. Ark was puzzled at the unfamiliar words and asked.

“What the? Why would everyone do that? And what is the pioneer thing?”

“They’re beta testers.”

Shambala said. Ark also knew the words beta tester. In the past, in order to check the various systems of the online game prior to commercialization, they would pick a handful of people for the closed beta test. And New World also had a beta test before commercialization as well. A pioneer was the name of the players who participated in the test. The beta testing period for New World was two months. Of course, the raised characters of the beta testers were deleted before commercialization. It was a measure of

fairness for the new users. However, they had a head start because their know-how and accumulated information couldn't be deleted. They commercialized their exclusive information and new users couldn't even compare to their speed of growth.

"After one month, the difference between the pioneers with commercialization and the other users was a difference of more than 40 levels. And of course, they monopolized all the early quests and rare items. But most of them started gathering in higher level hunting areas....."

"Have you fought with a pioneer?"

Shambala replied to Ark's question with an irritated voice.

"My record for the Evil Silrion is 37 wins and 2 losses. Of my 2 losses in the Evil Silrion, the first one was to Jewel."

"Are his skills that great?"

"His skills are competent but....."

Shambala sighed and shook his head.

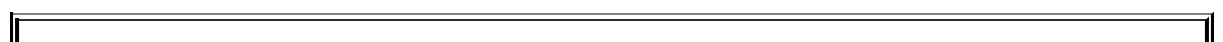
"The biggest problem is the difference in equipment. They're the ones with the most unique items. The level of basic attack and defense is completely different. There are also a lot of special options so you don't know which one would be used. That makes it a challenging opponent."

"These guys have suddenly reappeared? The situation has become more twisted."

Really, nothing could be easily solved. The participants had suddenly increased by several times and the pioneers unexpectedly showed up.....he didn't know what to do to make the situation better. But Shambala muttered with a motivated expression.

"It has worked out well. I won't have another weak encounter."

Shambala said it like that. Suddenly the horn rang and a broadcast was heard.



-That was the deadline for the final registration. The 186th Pairs Tournament will soon commence.

The determined expressions of the users waiting for the next match were seen, and there was a heavy atmosphere in the waiting room. And occasionally Ark would hear audible shouting and cries from the passageway, causing anxious eyes to flick to the wall with the tournament on the other side. Was this how athletes felt before they competed in a mixed martial arts fight? He had to just sit back and wait for the next fight even though his body was tense and sweaty. It was to the extent that he couldn't hear it when they broadcast his ring name in the hallway. He felt a strange feeling for the first time. Actually, Ark wasn't tense at all until the final registration. This was a game. It was just an event inside the game. That was what he thought. However when he entered the player anteroom, that immediately changed.

The determined expressions of the users waiting for the next match were seen, and there was a heavy atmosphere in the waiting room. And occasionally Ark would hear audible shouting and cries from the passageway, causing anxious eyes to flick to the wall with the tournament on the other side. Was this how athletes felt before they competed in a mixed martial arts fight? He had to just sit back and wait for the next fight even though his body was tense and sweaty. It was to the extent that he couldn't hear it when they broadcast his ring name in the hallway.

"What are you doing? Come out faster!"

It was only after Ark heard Shambala's voice that he stood in surprise. He walked stiffly down the hall, with his heart pounding faster.

Clink, Kkiiik!

The thick steel doors soon parted to the left and right. Ark exited through the doors onto the field with determined eyes. But all he did was look around. Although he had heard the report, he couldn't possibly imagine the real picture. His range of vision narrowed and it felt like he was in the dark. Then, all of a sudden he heard a sound

like lightning striking in the sky.

-Well, now it is the 7th match. This time, the players that will fight are the 13th team Justin and Dior against the 14th team Dark Wolf and Blue Sword.

Ark jumped and lifted his head. There were odd objects floating over the stadium. Dozens of eyeballs were linked to a round circular object. It was a magic seeing eye that gave commentary on the game. The echoing voice rang out onto the field from a mouth below it.

Please welcome and applaud the brave warriors!

When the announcer's introduction was over, the stadium was filled with loud cries. It wasn't for him so Ark timidly took a deep breath before withdrawing to the side. "Wah ah ah!"

The popularity of Shambala was unthinkable. In the Evil Silrion, most of the spectators who bet money on winning or losing would watch the tournament. They were naturally interested in the warriors with a high winning percentage, but the higher the chances of victory, the lower the profit would be. However, it is small odds so many people would bet. This meant that the players who would give profit were clear. But that wasn't the only reason for Shambala's popularity. Even though it was a martial arts game, the system of Evil Silrion meant that fighting depended on equipment and skills. However unlike the other users, Shambala was famous for showing powerful martial arts. Therefore, there were quite a few pure fans. They all rose from their seats and shouted at Shambala's appearance.

"Blue Sword, this time I also walked to you!"

"Take care of the hottest fight!"

"Blue Sword oppa, please look over here!"

Even placards saying the Oppa troops were seen. On the other hand, cynical comments flowed about Ark.

"Hey, Blue Sword. Did you take a dog to fight this time?"

“If you cause Blue Sword difficulty then I’ll grab your ankle!”

“Dark Wolf, don’t pay any attention to the nonsense shouted by the crowd.”

“Eh? Uh-huh.”

Ark carelessly answered but he couldn’t even understand what Shambala was talking about. The reason was that he couldn’t hear Shambala’s voice above the noise from the crowd.

It was reasonable. In fact, Ark had never been in front of so many people in his whole life. In school he spent time as the cleaning supervisor and even though he learnt taekwondo, he had never gone to a match. He never even had a dream of making announcements in front of other people. Therefore, he was surprisingly timid in the corner. Then Ark was suddenly dropped into the stadium where thousands of spectators gathered. Thanks to that, Ark felt a sense of tension so extreme it was almost like a panic attack. Ark hadn’t even been aware of his weakness and now he was here. During the event quest he had only led dozens of users while he commanded hundreds of raccoons in the Underground World. But most of them were NPCs, while the spectators were mainly users.

Even if the appearance was similar, the difference was huge.

‘It’s terrible.’

But since Shambala didn’t know that, an exclamation rose in his heart.

‘He’s changed into someone who acts from a Korean War veteran. And he doesn’t seem to hear my voice or the audience anymore. Is he concentrating to such a degree?’

Although he thought Ark was just concerned and nervous about his surroundings, the actual situation was different to what was in Shambala’s head. Because Shambala never even considered that Ark would have a panic attack. Meanwhile, the forms of two users were shown from the other side exit. Justin and Dior. Justin was a warrior armed in steel armour while Dior was a magician with a robe. They were a group that was quite strong in the Evil Silrion, so

they also received many cheers.

-Okay, now we will draw the lots!!

Soon the eyes of the circular object rolled round and round. And after a while, the pupils all changed to green.

-The swamp has been selected for this match in the tournament!
Then let's begin!

Ku-Kung!

At the same time, there was a roaring sound and the tournament changed to a completely different world. Green plants started forming while the swamp reached their ankles.

How had the entire stadium managed to be replaced? Well, he didn't even want to know. After all, it was a dynamic game in progress so strategies that planned for different terrains must be necessary. It was an interesting system, and it quickly released Ark from his mental state.

"What, what the? Where are we?"

Ark scratched his head and looked around surprised. He didn't understand why he was surrounded by lush forests with his ankle locked in a swamp. At that time, the voice of the magician was heard from the other side.

"Chain of delusion!"

Kkieeeeeek! There was an unearthly sound effect as a ghostly object flew off. The attack by the magician started the active fight commentary.

-The magician has used a long-ranged magic as a pre-emptive attack. When hit by the chain of delusion, they won't be able to move for a while. It is just a few seconds, but that could be deadly in a fighting tournament. But because it is a slow attack, the chances that it would hit are low. It is some kind of warning shot?

"Hung, the shape shown isn't that creative?"

Shambala laughed and quickly moved his body. The repeated movements were so light that it looked like he was warping. This was due to Shambala's evasion skill Blink! Shambala used the movement to avoid the magic attack while taking out his weapon. A blue aura was ejected from the dagger, which was the Saint Assassin profession weapon 'Black Frost Blade' that Ark previously had. Incidentally, Shambala had gotten the ring name Blue Sword from his dagger. Shambala's mouth had the same cold smile as the dagger.

"Huhuhu, trying to take care of us with such low grade magic.....eeek?"

The smile disappeared from Shambala's mouth. While he had avoided the attack, Ark was struggling against the chains of delusion wrapped around him.

"No, no-way that guy....."

It was then that Shambala noticed Ark's condition. However, it was already too late. When Ark hadn't expected a magic attack, Dior was delighted and called out a long order.

"It took! Well that guy was just a scarecrow. The cursed soul that was abandoned in a deep, dark place, come out and let your fury curse everything in your path!"

"That order.....Dior is a necromancer?"

Shambala urgently ran up to Dior. However it was a pairs match and Justin, Dior's partner, wasn't just watching. Justin immediately raised his shield and rushed Shambala. With an intense clash, Shambala was pushed back a few steps. Shambala's face was contorted with frustration.

'Hell! This child is strangely huge.....the warrior was doping!'

A warrior could dope themselves with a potion that would raise their stats. During this tournament, there was a rule that consumption items were prohibited. However, there was one blind spot. During the match you couldn't use a consumption potion but it was possible to use it before the match! Justin had drugged himself with a huge

amount just before the game started. He raised his stamina by 20% using the 'Troll Elixir,' his strength by 15 using 'Lion Power,' his attack and defense was raised by 30 thanks to 'Troll Leap,' for 5 minutes his health was restored by 10 every 20 seconds thanks to the 'Holy water of revival'.....if he was in the Olympics then he would be immediately disqualified for taking drugs. Thanks to such drugs, Justin's arena level of 100 was raised to around level 130~140. Indeed, the drug's power was awesome. Every time Justin wielded his sword, Shambala was pushed back a few metres. Meanwhile, Dior's spell was completed.

"Possession of Bing!

At the moment, a huge ghost hit Ark's form. His body stiffened before a message window popped up.

-You were hit with 'Possession of Bing.'

<For 3 minutes you will move according to the caster's will>

Ark tried to struggle against the flashing spirit. However, it was already too late and the voice of the magic eye was heard.

<p>-Ah, the Necromancer's skill Possession of Bing was completed! It is a magic that is hardly ever used these days. Because it was used in combination with Chains of Delusion, it couldn't be avoided. In the end, the Dark Wolf player is holding back Blue Sword just like everyone expected. Pathetic!</p>

"You black dog child, Blue Sword is losing because of you!"

The crowd erupted with swearing. However, in this situation it wasn't even possible to call 100. Under the Possession of Bing, Ark's body moved selfishly. He started to attack Shambala under Dior's control, just like a puppet. Thanks to the necromancer, Ark and the doped warrior, the fight had become 3 against 1. Shambala's health decreased as he was attacked by swords and magic from all directions.

"This stupid child!"

"I'm sorry."

“You’re saying sorry while trying to cut me?”

Shambala avoided Ark’s attack and started attacking again. He had felt like hiding inside a deep rat hole. However the situation wasn’t that bad. While his body was being moved around selfishly, Ark was able to not pay any attention and organize the surrounding circumstances.

“Shambala, hold on a little. I’ll somehow make up for Bing’s possession.”

“Bah, OK. This has to be seen to be believed, Width!

Shambala kicked the ground forcefully. At the moment, the muddy water of swamp flew up and obstructed the view. Shambala used Blink successively to gain some distance. While Ark was possessed by Bing, he gave up on attacking from the beginning and only concentrated on reducing the damage. However, even Shambala couldn’t avoid everything and his health was reduced to 40% by the time Bing’s possession finished.

“Have you finished being stupid?”

“I’m sorry. My spirit is steady now.

“I don’t want any of those thousand people to get the share of the prize.”

“That’s right.”

Ark glared at Dior while wiping his face of the mud that was covering it. His anger had been firmly pushed down during the 3 minutes and now it bubbled over.

Brilliant Debut

“Now I’m going to enjoy myself!”

“Do you think we look like beginners child? Chain of delusion!”

At that moment, Ark’s eyes lit up. Then he used Riposte! He sent the Chain of Delusion back with a violent noise.

“Ma-the magic bounced off the sword?”

Dior freaked out and hurriedly stepped back. However, Ark’s movement was several times faster. Ark simultaneously threw his body forward and kicked Dior in the chest. Dior stumbled and requested help from his partner.

“Ju-Justin!”

“Ah, I can’t. This Blue Sword guy.....is incredibly strong!”

In a 1 on 1 situation, Shambala was too much to deal with even when the warrior was doped with drugs. Then Dior bit his tooth and pulled something out from his bag.

“Hell, I can’t believe I have to use this in the first match.....”

Dior held up dozens of canine teeth. He sprinkled the fangs on the floor and twenty skeleton bodies rose armed with a sword and shield or a bow. The magic eye shouted with an intense voice.

-Oh, the Necromancer has used his special racial skill. If he gathers the canine teeth of the skeletons through hunting, then the technique would allow him to summon them. Surprisingly, he summoned twenty of them! If I have to give an additional explanation, the pairs tournament doesn’t allow the use of consumption items but any skill related items are the exception. While the Dark Wolf player showed some nice movement before, it probably isn’t easy to take care of that many in a swamp. Perhaps he might need the help of his colleague?

However, Shambala just continued attacking Justin without even turning his head. The magic eye murmured with a sigh.

-Ah, Blue Sword player. Even though partners can have some differences. Don't you think such behaviour isn't good for a pairs tournament? Anyway, the Dark Wolf player is in a crisis!

Dior also seemed to have the same idea as a light of mockery hovered around his mouth.

"Heh, you've been abandoned."

"Really? Who is the one that is thrown away?"

"Let's end it instantly. Skeleton unit. Attack!"

The skeleton archers fired arrows.

"Summon Deimos!"

Deimos showed up in front of Ark and shielded him. The magic eye shouted with a surprised voice.

-This is unexpected. This time, Blue Sword seems to have teamed up with a warrior who can summon. Ah.....But what is it? Is it a rag? He seems shabby compared to the skeletons that Dior has summoned. And in the end, it is only one skeleton. Is this a joke? It somehow seems like a final desperate struggle

However, it soon became ironic as the match immediately changed. Deimos was a skeleton with a really shabby exterior. But Deimos crushed all the arrows like he was a shield so all 10 arrows were stopped. He then ran up to five skeletons and engaged in close combat.

In general summoning, the summoned monster would have 60% of the player's level. But when summoning a unit like this, they only had 30%. In other words, Dior was level 100 so his summoned skeletons

were only level 30~40 at most. However, Deimos was different from the normal summons. His stats rose on their own without paying any attention to the level of the summoner. After Deimos fused with Warwick, at present he was level 70! Moreover, Ark's technique was different from Dior's disposable summons and battle experience was accumulated. Double bang, Snap, Crunch! The arms of the skeletons broke under Ark's and Deimos' onslaught.

"Okay, Deimos. It isn't necessary to pay any attention to the skeletons anymore. Now....."

Then Deimos' eye colour changed. He scanned the bodies of the skeletons and examined them with his eyes. The skeletons suddenly winced with an unknown anxiety. At that moment, Deimos suddenly rushed at the tooth. And he caught a bone from one of the skeletons who struggled before it was broken off. However, he didn't stop there and grabbed other parts of the body and broke them off. The skeleton soon changed into a pile of bones.

Clack clack clack!

Deimos turned his head with a dissatisfied look. Jump, the remaining skeletons were surprised and fled in different directions. From then on, Deimos started to chase them without listening to Ark's command. It had triggered Deimos' hobby of collecting bones.

'That guy again.....!'

Ark sighed.

This was not the first time. There were many times when Deimos was engrossed in his hobby of collecting bones. Once he found a monster with a favourite bone, he would continue to chase that monster until he got the bone in his hand. Well, in any case his stats were likely to go up because of the bones and Ark had never encountered a crisis because of it. The fact that he wouldn't follow the strategy wasn't the only problem. Sometimes he would just rush head first at the enemy without listening to Ark.

'The master should also be able to control his summons.....'

But he didn't know what he could summon as a replacement.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter if all the skeletons leave the battle state.’

Ark looked at Deimos who was still stupidly chasing after the skeletons. Then Dior’s voice was heard from the opposite side.

“I don’t understand how you can even summon a pet that doesn’t even listen to its master’s words. Okay, now is a chance. While a skeleton lures his summon, concentrate all your attacks on him!”

The skeleton archers simultaneously fired arrows at Ark.

-Oh, the skeleton archers are concentrating their attacks on Dark Wolf player. Even though he summoned a pet, it is pitiable that it is doing its own thing. Dark Wolf player is going to become a porcupine.....eh?
--

The announcer made a funny noise and held its breath. Depending on the level the speed, accuracy and power of an arrow would change. The arrows from the level 30~40 skeletons were nothing to Ark who had practice dealing with the thieves’ arrows at later levels.

Ark lowered his body and grabbed his sword. He was gambling on his counter attack chain skill, Riposte! Arrows that flew within five feet of him was quickly bounced off. Ark reflected the arrows back and they flew back towards Dior.

“S-stop! Stop him!”

Dior burst out in surprise. The fifteen skeletons left took out a dagger and surrounded Ark.

‘If I use Dark Dance then I can quickly escape and land a critical hit on Dior.....’

Ignoring the number of summons and making a concentrated attack on the necromancer. That was the basic tactic when dealing with a necromancer. Yes, some necromancers who summoned had no techniques to fight without their pets. He would rather take the risk and get rid of the necromancer with weak defense. However, Ark shook his head.

‘I was mistaken. This place is different from the other places that I

have fought at so far. Here I am just a beginner. Therefore, like a beginner I should learn how to fight here. If I want a positive outcome for this tournament, I must adapt to the situation.'

His first task was to adapt to the atmosphere of the Evil Silrion. The skeletons were the best opponents to practice against. Ark quickly looked around and examined the situation of the match. Deimos had finished examining four skeletons and was on his fifth one. Although his hobby of collecting bones was strange, he didn't require any help.

It also wasn't necessary to worry about Shambala. Although his health was only 40% due to the earlier damage, if he only compared the skill set than Justin was not an opponent for Shambala. Besides, as the match time became longer, the effects of Justin's potions gradually wore off which increased the pace of Shambala's attacks.

"As expected from the Blue Sword!"

Every time the flashy offensive of Shambala hit, the crowd would give an exclamation. Now the only thing left was Ark!

"Now, come!"

Ark's eyes gleamed as the skeleton's left hands rose. Then like a canine tooth, the dagger targeted his neck.

-Ah, Dark Wolf seems to be facing off against fifteen summoned skeletons alone without the help of his summon. Is he insane? That wasn't it. Did he become overconfident because he hit some arrows? If Dark Wolf loses here, then the balance of the match would collapse and it would become difficult for Blue Sword again.
--

'It is your mistake that you summoned skeletons.' The magic eye's condemnation was followed by the crowd's boos. But Ark had already ducked to the ground to avoid the dagger. He did a 360 degree sweep with his leg, causing the skeletons to fall to the ground. The sparkle of his sword shone and three or four skeletons

lost their heads immediately.

Ark knew the reason why Dior chose a skeleton unit. In PVP, a necromancer feared close combat the most. Most magicians hated close combat but it was even worse in a necromancer. They summoned troops in a unit because they had the worst defense among all the professions. Therefore the summoned troops as soon as the battle begins to be used as a shield. In particular, they preferred to summon a small number of skeletons.

When skeletons are summoned, they have abundant numbers and they won't die even if their arms and legs are broken. Even if they only have 1% of health left, their health could be recovered using the other skeletons. Their recovery ability is the necromancer's strongest shield. However, the weak point of the skeleton unit was their balance.

When a skeleton is smashed in the skull, they become paralyzed. While the strong points were its damage and re-assembly ability, it also had a fatal weakness.

Of course, it wasn't simple to crush the skull was receiving dozens of attacks. But Ark was the opponent. He had practiced dodging dozens of tentacles and learnt how to deal with aggressive monsters. Moreover, it was the skeleton that he was sick of dealing with in the underground labyrinth. Destroying level 30~40 skeletons was as simple as using taekwondo against a child. Ark dropped a skeleton to the ground using a kick and concentrated his attacks on that skeleton.

"Pant, S-summon recovery!"

Dior frantically used recovery magic. But even when the skeleton's health was restored, its skull would just be crushed again and it was unable to fight.

Snap! In just a few minutes, Ark broke the last skeleton's skull.

"This, unbelievable.....Chain of Delusion!"

Dior shouted with his hands stretched out. But in the end nothing came out of his palm. After summoning the skeletons and recovering

their health, he had no more mana left. A magician without mana wasn't so tough.

"Kkurururu"

Ark literally laughed like an animal. A vortex spun around as he kicked out his feet. Dior instantly lost 50% of his health.

"Ju-Justin!"

"Sheesh, I was trying to save this.....Berserker mode!"

When his partner was at risk, Justin immediately triggered his deadly skill. It was his racial special skill, Berserker mode! It recovered 30% of his health and was a morale skill which increased his offense and defense by 50% for 5 minutes. After the 5 minutes ended, he would be unable to move so it wasn't a skill that was often used. However in a tournament, 5 minutes was often enough time to obtain a decisive outcome. That is because the odds were high for warriors in the Evil Silrion.

"Pikyo!"

Justin swung his sword against Shambala's and pushed him back. At this time, Shambala's health was almost at the bottom. The overwhelming damage he received in the beginning was too large. Because he couldn't face the 50% increased attack power of Justin, he gave way.

-Atch, Blue Sword player, Justin has used the decisive moment to take out the better player. Then Dark Wolf player who is driving back Dior with receive the thrust of Justin's attack in the side. After that slump in the first few minutes, Dark Wolf player is again in a crisis. It is indeed a crisis!
--

Crisis was the magic eye's words. While Shambala was there, Ark never had to think about Justin. In fact, Ark also didn't have that much health left. Even though his level was superior, fighting against fifteen skeletons wasn't easy. In addition, Dior's attitude had changed to attack. If he receives an attack from the side, the centre would collapse and he would fall into a rigid state for a while.

'If I receive the concentrated attacks of Dior and Justin continuously then it would be dangerous!'

Ark's head thought at a frantic pace. Fortunately, the spiritual power that he used to summon Deimos was at 100% again. He could summon Dedric and have him use Dark Dash to avoid Justin's attacks. But Ark soon shook his head. He was reluctant to summon Dedric.

'Then.....'

"Release summon, summon Deimos!"

At that moment, Deimos who was piling up bones disappeared. And returned next to Ark. Deimos looked around with a confused face and discovered Justin who was rushing to attack. His eyes grew wider as he became stuck in the swamp.

'Bah, Master doesn't let me enjoy my hobby.'

"What, what the?"

Justin was confused as he unexpectedly crashed into Deimos. Justin had raised his sword too late and Ark was already gone. Ark was floating in the air. Ark's body jumped vertically into the air before it stopped and started spinning suddenly. It was an aerial spin kick which caused bursts of air. Justin was surprised and lifted his shield. But no matter how long he waiting, there was no shock wave on his shield.

"Eh? What, what the?"

Justin followed Ark's movements with a foolish expression. Although he thought it was flying to the side, Ark's leg suddenly soared up.

"A fake?"

Yes, the spin kick in the air was a trick. The real attack was when he fell down and did a windmill! Snap! His foot kicked out and hit Justin's forehead. It was a windmill kick with all his weight put behind it. And Ark used his Sword-Hand combat to increase the probability of the attack hitting since it was a technique with a high level of

difficulty. Justin was stunned by the attack and fell to his knees. Double critical chance!

“Dark blade!”

Ark used Dark Blade without any delay. Dark Blade which ignored the defense was a natural enemy of warriors which relied on high defense. As soon as damage from the double critical chance was added, Justin collapsed head first into the swamp and died from the critical hit. The inside of the stadium was as quiet as a dead mouse for a moment.

It was like watching a martial arts competition, where the opponent was overwhelmed with hard kicks. After a while, the magic eye frantically made a noise.

-Wh-what was that? That was a form of martial arts from a foreigner! Incredible! I thought Dark Wolf player was a summoner but he was instead a martial artist. Then why did he summon the trivial skeleton? Ah, such a thing doesn't matter. Anyway, it has become clear that Dark Wolf is not Blue Sword's sidekick!
--

“Un-unbelievable!”

At that time, Dior rushed to Ark with the remaining skeleton. At that moment Ark turned his body and there was an intense ringing sound.

“Blink, Light wave!”

Instantaneously, Shambala flew across the swamp towards Dior. When the mud which flew up into the sky fell down again, Shambala had already stabbed his dagger into Dior. When Dior collapsed, the skeletons turned into a powder. Shambala wiped off the mud with a shrug.

“I only did that so you could play an active part.”

“Wily guy”

A wry smile spread over Ark's mouth. It was then that Ark understood the whole situation.

It was Shambala's plan from the beginning. Even when Justin was doped with the drugs, he could've handled him faster. However, Shambala took his time. Then he also didn't stop Justin's final assault on purpose. Whether it was to make Ark adapt to the match or a test of his skills, Ark didn't know.....But from the beginning, the fight had progressed as Shambala intended. Indeed, he couldn't underestimate his 37 winning streak in the arena. Extravagant cheers continuously overflowed from the spectator seats. Unlike the first time, half the cheers were for Ark.

-Thus ends the 7th match in the tournament! The 14th team is the winner! It is Blue Sword with the reputation of 28 straight wins and his partner! In his debut match, Dark Wolf appeared like a comet and showed some surprising skills! Please clap your hands for the glorious winners!

“Wah ah ah!”

“Dark Wolf, why did you wander in the beginning when you're so good?”

“Blue Sword, Dark Wolf! The best. I lost money but you made some fans today!”

“Dark Wolf oppa, his fang is awesome!”

He also received a thunderous ovation. Clack clack clack! Clack clack clack! Deimos had finally managed to heave himself up from the ground. Had he remembered a memory from his former life? He unexpectedly liked the showmanship. Ark cancelled the summoning and Deimos returned to the Netherworld.

‘After evolving, his character has become a little strange.....’

When they returned to the waiting room, the management NPC approached.

“Congratulations to both of you. Since the number of participants had increased, your next match is expected to take place the day after tomorrow. You can relax for now.”

Suddenly a message window appeared in front of Ark.

You have won the first fight in the Evil Silrion.

Current record: 1 win<Victory bonus: Fame +10>

“Kuo oooo!”

The Deadman yelled and brandished a window. The Deadman was similar to undead monsters such as zombies, but unlike zombies they managed to keep their armour and weapons intact so they were equipped with much higher stats. Well, they were still no match for Ark.

The level of Deadman was 100. At that level, it already wasn't a match. In addition, his experience from the Evil Silrion was already in effect. After the degree and complexity of a user's movements, the movement of Deadman felt monotonous and slow. Ark avoided the window with flew at him and swung his sword. The Deadman who received the concentrated attack disappeared into a powder. And after the last one died, a heavy object bounced onto the ground.

Warrior's Transcripts

Item type: Leather Shoulder Blades

Defense power: 15

Durability: 13/50

Weight: 20

User restriction: Level 80 or more

The Forest of Souls is an area with a big war took place during the Dark Century. Numerous warriors who fought against the darkness were buried here with their armour. Hundreds of years have passed since then and most of the armour is already gone, but

sometimes armour with magical powers could be found. These armours add a special power to the monsters that inhabit the Forest of Souls.

<Option: Strength +3>

Ark's eyes lit up at the sight of the information window. Three days had already passed since his flash debut match in the Evil Silrion arena. The fact that it was a different world was all the same to Ark. The participants that Hyun-woo met were chaotic players of different levels. Unlike the chaotic players who targeted low level players to decrease their burden, these ones focused on raising their skill level and equipment. In addition, the specialized fields and hands on experience in the Evil Silrion were better than being chaotic. Those users were thoroughly prepared and not really creative. Of course, he learnt a lot from the quality of the battles. But the problem was that he couldn't earn a substantial income from it. Usually he would've already entered the final match after three days of game time. However, this time the number of participants was unprecedented so the schedule of the tournament was extended by several times. Even if the number of matches increased, at the most it only had one match per day. 1 day was barely 3 hours in reality. Even if it was possible to finish all the matches at that pace, it was still more than 8 hours in reality. And he didn't know how long it would take for the other games, so if the time was accelerated suddenly then he might have to play a match that wasn't in the schedule. Therefore, they couldn't go away while the tournament was in progress. Therefore most of the participants had no choice but to wait around. However, that was no problem for Ark. 'Yes! Shoulder Blades, finally!

There was at least 8 hours every night when the Evil Silrion would close its doors. If the fight ended quickly and another match scheduled then there would be an announcement at least 1 hour before. Even if he went hunting, as long as it was within a distance of 1 hour from Selebrid then it didn't matter.

Of course, when the schedule suddenly changed and he was in the hunting ground then there was no way to receive a notification. However, that was only for ordinary users.

“From today, you will live here. And fly swiftly to alert me if anything happens.”

“What? Are you asking me to sit here all day like a rock and listen to them talk?”

“If you ever doze off and delay trying to contact me.....you wouldn't be able to speak with all the dreadful things shoved in your mouth. I'll leave it to your imagination.”

After Ark used intimidation, Dedric was left behind at the Evil Silrion. Dedric complained of course but followed his orders without any resistance. As soon as Ark showed him a medley he created, Dedric quickly nodded with a haggard face.

When the distance was within 1 hour, even if the schedule changed then Ark could hunt to his heart's content.

‘Now, since I can't go too far from Selebrid then shouldn't I find the most efficient hunting ground? I need to find a hunting ground with decent experience and income but.....’

Shambala easily solved the problem. Shambala had been in Selebrid for a while and already discovered all the information about the surrounding hunting grounds. Shambala was glad that Ark was taking advantage of the free time to do some hunting. But he was worried about any changes to the tournament schedule. However, with the promise that Dedric would be stationed at the bulletin board, he told Ark all the information about the nearby hunting grounds.

“At any rate, you're also a guy who can't stand still. When I was in trouble in a difficult place and got lost, I found a suitable hunting ground. If you find any items that could be helpful in the tournament then that would be convenient.”

The place Shambala recommended was the Forest of Souls. There were two reasons why Shambala recommended it. One reason was that it was only 30 minutes away from Selebrid. With a 1 hour round

trip, he didn't have to worry about being late to the game.

And the second reason was.....

"You still haven't equipped any bracelets or shoulder blades?"

"Bracelet? Shoulder blades?"

"Selebrid is a kind of boundary spot. The bracelets and shoulder blades that aren't dropped in Giran start to show up. Even if it was dropped in Giran, the level has to be at least 80 so it is insignificant.....anyway, since bracelets and shoulder blades have a defense stat, they should be useful in the tournament."

"I can find it in the nearby hunting grounds?"

"You usually have to go a few hours away to the burial mound area, but I know that the Forest of Souls happens to drop some. Quite a lot of people have obtained bracelets and shoulder blades from the Deadman mob. But it is no joke as the drop rate is quite low."

Shambala said that he should try though. He probably thought that Ark would try for a few hours and then give up. After all, it normally took a few hours killing the same monster for an item with low drop rate to fall. Even if the information about the monster was known, it wasn't easy to find a good item. But Shambala didn't know Ark properly.

'New equipment item!'

Except for when there was a match, Ark lived in the Forest of Souls. And when he saw a Deadman, he desperately rushed up to it even though he was fighting other monsters.

However, the most that the Deadman dropped was a few japtem worth several silvers. The drop rate was so low that most would have considered stopping. Ark started to have doubts by the time that he hunted hundreds of them.

'Are the bracelets or shoulder blades really going to drop?'

Even though the information was authentic, he would rather shift to a higher level hunting ground to obtain more experience and better

japtem. But Ark soon shook his head.

‘No, it is a war of patience trying to find a useable item from a normal monster. Since others held on, I cannot give up until I get the same results as them. I have to hang in longer than others in order to get good items! Until luck follows then I have to hold on!’

Since then, Ark attacked the Deadman even more relentlessly. While he went back and forth between Selebrid, two days had passed and finally a desired item had dropped.

Amulet of Vitality (Magic)

Item type: Bracelet

Durability: 15/20

Weight: 10

User restriction: Level 80 or more

An old bracelet that was buried in the Forest of Souls.

After a long time, it is ragged and doesn't shine anymore but its magical powers still remain.

<Option: Health +50>

<Special Option: Vitality (Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds)>

It was the item obtained after hunting nearly a thousand of the Deadman for 2 days. Well, when looking at the stats it wasn't that great. Health +50. Ark's current health was 2000. If a high level monster hit him, it would do more than 50 damage. In such a situation, he didn't know if 50 extra health was significant. But of course it was better to have it then to have nothing. In addition, the special options meant that a small but steady amount of his health would be continuously restored! 'A bracelet!'

‘Two bracelets can be equipped at the same time. If I find another Amulet of Vitality that would mean +100 health and 10 health points being restored every 20 seconds! It is the jackpot!’

He wasn’t about to give up half way so Ark clung even more frantically to the hunt. Sometimes online gaming was strange. Items had a probability rate of dropping. Sometimes, the item would not drop even if you died and came back and sometimes they would drop straight away. He spent one more day hunting in the Forest of Souls before he found the shoulder blades.

‘Defense 15 and Strength 3.....the defense is on the low side, but the option is useable for beginners. It is trivial compared to the items being sold in Selebrid, but instead of spending 300 gold for slightly higher stats, this is the far better option. And better shoulder blades might drop in the future.’

Ark gave a warm smile and began to wear the shoulder blades. Halfway to his shoulder, he saw that it was rotting with a bad odour. If he was a user that paid attention to what he looked like, his face would have contorted but since he only cared about the added defense, Ark was happy and smiled.

‘I don’t care about my appearance. The important thing is the stats!’

Ark’s only value was usefulness. Ark attached the shoulder blades and checked out the stat window.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +250		
Fame	1965	Level	125
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of All, Jackson’s Hero		
Health	2115 (+100)	Mana	1930

Spiritual Power	100	Strength	274 (+18)
Agility	324(+25)	Stamina	414 (+10)
Wisdom	43(+10)	Intelligence	367
Luck	44	Flexibility	39
Art of Communication	33	Affection	77 (+10)
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		98	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10*			
<King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Improved Norad Boots (Shoes): Movement Speed + 15%, Evasion + 10%			
Veil of Fire (Mantle): Flame resistance + 50%			
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available			
Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%			
* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark			
* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)* Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.			
* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.			

Level 125. He had increased his level by 2 after hunting in the Forest of Souls for 3 days. It was quite good since he had to play in the matches as well as sometimes hunting. The experience for the Deadman was low but he hunted quite a lot of them. In addition, the monsters weren't strong so he didn't have to take a rest every time a battle ended. Thanks to not resting and just hunting, he obtained results beyond what he expected.

'Okay, while this experience is great for a short term plan.'

However unlike Ark, Deimos sighed with a sulky face. Clack clack, clack clack clack.....

Ark had been stubborn when hunting the Deadman. When the Deadman died, it turned to powder so Deimos couldn't enjoy his hobby of collecting bones. Therefore, Deimos didn't enjoy the situation. But while raising the ability of his summons was important, it was more important that Ark's abilities rose.

"Deimos, I don't have time for you to be sighing. Because Dedric isn't here you have to play his role as well. Hurry up! Until we can find another bracelet, there are no breaks."

Ark rushed the depressed Dedric and began hunting the Deadman again. When 30 minutes had passed, he heard alarm sounds in his ears.

'Pant, it is already this time.....!'

Ark swung his sword one more time before disappearing from the forest.

"Why isn't it straight?"

Lee Myung-ryong shouted as he stomped on the floor. Of course, Hyun-woo also wanted to do it properly. However, what could he do if his body didn't move fast enough to not get hit? While he wanted

to fly like a butterfly, his arms and legs wouldn't move the way he desired. Even though he could clearly see the opponent's attack, he couldn't even move an arm to block it. Pepepek, after a slow impact shocked him, he stopped for a while and shook his head. When Hyun-woo stopped, Lee Myung-ryong immediately raised his voice angrily.

"You idiot, how many times do I have to say it? When you are hit then don't step back but absorb the impact. Use your lower back! Remember to use your lower back in the future!"

Although it was easy to say.....how many people would remember it when being hit with a fist in the face? However, Hyun-woo clenched his teeth and summoned more power to his legs. It was because he knew from experience would kind of trouble there would be if he didn't follow Lee Myung-ryong's words.

'Damn, well since I'm going to die anyway, it doesn't matter what state I'm in when I die!'

"This is just like being a zombie."

Hyun-Woo rushed at the opponent like a bulldozer when the whistle blew. But at the same moment, Hyun-woo felt an intense blow to his side. Although he experienced it a lot, it was an attack that he couldn't really adapt to. The blow to his body caused his gut to twist in pain.

How is it? Is there a lot of tingling? This is a medicine for zombies."

Meanwhile, 1 more blow struck him on the other side. Immediately his legs started to tremble. However, Hyun-Woo didn't even have the right to lie down comfortably on the floor.

"30 seconds left, will you manage to hold up for 30 seconds? Do you want to lie down and get disliked?"

Hyun-woo heard Lee Myung-ryong say in a sparkling voice. So he drew in a deep breath and corrected his posture. The expression of the opponent who thought it had ended turned pale. After a brief moment, he contorted his lips and started the onslaught.

Straight, hook and upper cut! It was like shower of punches that wouldn't stop! However, Hyun-woo made his defense as hard as a turtle and withstood the attacks. But eventually, his arms lowered and he gradually lost power in his legs. And when both of his arms finally lowered, the fist of the opponent rushed towards Hyun-woo's face. The person that allowed him to escape the crisis was Lee Myung-ryong.

"Stop! The 3rd round has ended."

When Lee Myung-ryong's voice rang out, the fist immediately stopped. Then Hyun-woo let out a laugh and said.

"A leader is a leader, but you're terrible too. That was a really tough 3rd round to endure."

Hyun-woo sighed and flopped down to the ground. He laid down on the floor and stared at the ceiling of the gym. The after effect of being hit was that the ceiling seemed to shake left and right.

'Whew, I dug my own grave.....I really will either become a superman or die.....'

He thought about the remaining practice schedule that was still ahead of him. After he had arrived at Selebrid, Hyun-woo had asked Lee Myung-ryong to train him specifically for the matches in the Evil Silrion. In retrospect, he didn't know why he did such a reckless thing. Special training.....it was a grave that he personally dug for himself.

The system that Lee Myung-ryong used to train Hyun-woo made Ark's training of his summons seem a hundred times more humane.

"I'm making a Superman."

He had thought it was a joke. Of course not. Who would think those words were serious? However, some humans in the world don't know common sense. This Lee Myung-ryong.....

Recently, just listening to the name was enough to make him sweat. For the last three days, the training that Lee Myung-ryong was putting him was not something that most humans could digest. Gwon

Hwa-rang said that Lee Myung-ryong was a delinquent before he became a policeman, but he introduced them anyway. It seems that Lee Myung-ryong thought of himself as a mad scientist. And it was clear that he was determined to reshape Hyun-woo into an artificial man as much as possible. Otherwise, he wouldn't be able to devise such a non-humane training system.

The first day that Hyun-woo visited the gym Lee Myung-ryong just smiled and made him do exercises from the national gymnastics team.

"So let's start lightly shall we? Do one handed pushups on both sides 50 times."

"Yes? But I've never managed to do more than twenty pushups using one hand?"

Frankly, how many ordinary men in Korea would be able to do one handed pushups twenty times? He thought it was a great standard. But no sooner had he finished talking then his stomach was pushed down with a kick.

"Didn't I say this before? From the moment you entered here. The one thing that is prohibited."

"Ha, but....."

"Do you think my words are funny?"

Lee Myung-ryong smiled and spoke. He was one of the few humans who could beat a man with his smile.

"I knew a junior who was a short distance sprinter. That guy was able to run 100 metres in 11 seconds. But that wasn't enough to hand out a business card at a convention. Even when he almost died from the effort, he couldn't shorten it to 10 seconds and eventually gave up and became a policeman. So during the first dispatch, he was a newbie and forgot the strategies and found himself surrounded by delinquents while alone. Well, at first it was all right. The guys were trying to kill him with sashimi knives so of course the guy frantically ran away. Now, can you guess what happened?"

“As a track and field athlete, didn’t he get away unharmed?”

“That’s right, but the important thing is what happened next.”

“And then?”

“Since that day, he has been able to run it in 10 seconds.”

“Yes? How.....?”

Lee Myung-ryong replied in a tone that implied it wasn’t a big deal.

“Simple. From the beginning, that guy could run it in 10 seconds. He was built with those kinds of muscles. However, it was the case he couldn’t run it because he thought he couldn’t do it. Every time he ran, he thought that even though it was his best time, he still couldn’t do it. But after that incident, the thought that he had trapped himself with disappeared.”

“It’s a touching story. But what does that have to do with me?”

Hyun-Woo asked, feeling uneasy. As expected, the answer made him worried.

“It seems to me that you’re also a guy who could do that? How about it? Are you not proud?”

“What on earth.....what’s your basis for that?”

“The eyes in this body!”

Ah, it was like that? There is no reason for him to object.

However, the terrible thing was that Lee Myung-ryong really took it to heart and continued to make successive points. This mad scientist really believed he was a genius with a keen eye. Therefore, he was caught in the illusion that he might be able to remodel him until he became an artificial man. The even worse thing was that it wasn’t entirely absurd. Once he tried it, Hyun-woo was able to increase the number of his one-handed pushups. His best record was twenty-five times, that was his limit so far. However, when he was threatened by Lee Myung-ryong and felt desperate then it was possible for him to do fifty. The fear of violence temporarily suppressed the pain of his

body. But that was only a warm up exercise.

“Now, should we begin?”

Lee Myung-ryong called to the SWAT team member exercising to one side and said.

“This guy did amateur boxing during high school. He was within the top 10 in the nation so he should be suitable as your rival. The rule is 3 rounds of boxing!”

Hyun-woo’s face had a look of speculation. The pushups were to such an extent that he had cramps in his arm muscles. It wasn’t even taekwondo, but he was expected to spar in boxing using only his fist? Against a former boxer who was within the top 10 of the nation? He hoped it was a joke, but the word joke wasn’t even in Lee Myung-ryong’s vocabulary. Lee Myung-ryong fitted the gloves on him while cheering with warm words.

“If you give up then you will die.”

Of course, it couldn’t be a direct fight. Hyun-woo went through 3 rounds that were 3 minutes each. By the end of the 9 minutes, he had become flattened like a rice cake.

“Pathetic, being hit by such a trivial guy.....”

Lee Myung-ryong clicked his tongue like he had been presented with a menu. Then it was the abs and back exercises. 200 sit ups, 200 chin ups and 200 flank movements. He made him do upper and lower abs exercises 200 times.....the various abs exercises added up to one thousand times. Then another member of the SWAT team was summoned. They were the frontline members that defended the Republic of Korea. Since the job required stamina and skills, the various members could rival the athletes. The member who was summoned this time also had nice muscles. The degree of muscles was so much that Hyun-woo would be easily crushed by it.

“This guy used to have a career in amateur wrestling. He is slightly better than the earlier guy, since he won a bronze medal in a national competition. 3 rounds begin!”

It was really crazy. After making him go through a crazy abs workout, now he expected him to do wrestling? Against one of the nation's top wrestlers? Wasn't this just harassment? But he couldn't say anything at the sight of Lee Myung-ryong's cold eyes and started the spar. Of course, the result was that he became a rice cake. Lee Myung-ryong's training was always like this. Hyun-woo had heard that he was a taekwondo state representative so had guessed that his training would be an intensive course in taekwondo techniques. But Lee Myung-Ryong only trained him in taekwondo for 15 minutes. The rest was all training the basic physical strength and sparring. The spars against the athletes were also unrelated to taekwondo. But Lee Myung-ryong had a firm belief for that part.

"Do you want to exercise to show a nice kick in front of your girlfriend? Or do you want to become stronger?"

"To become stronger.....I'd like to."

"Then the taekwondo posture isn't necessary. Because you won't become strong with that type of practice. Strong training should be hands on experience. This situation is also going to get worse."

Anyway, the final stage of his training was leg exercises. After stretching his legs, the final boss Lee Myung-ryong emerged.

He was able to judge the situation with the boxer and wrestler to some extent. At least they were people. However, Lee Myung-ryong wasn't a person. Hyun-woo had to experience many times the hell that was his attacks, which battered him like a storm. There were times when he really thought that he was about to die. But Lee Myung-ryong just spoke with a smirk.

"The thing that people call the human body. It is surprisingly well made. It doesn't die easily. And once it is broken, it becomes even stronger."

The ideas of the mad scientist were always terrifying. Since then, he seemed to have adapted a little bit to the pain. And at that time, Hyun-woo realized that Lee Myung-ryong's training schedule wasn't something he had just guessed at and threw together.

'It is similar to taekwondo. Taekwondo uses kicks but the important thing isn't the strength in the legs. The movement of the upper body is more important. Boxing uses fist but that wasn't all it uses. The movement of the waist and legs is more important when punching.'

Although he wouldn't be able to spar against a boxer if he couldn't move his arms, Hyun-woo learned how to move his waist and the steps. It was the same for wrestling. Although it only seemed to rely on the waist, the proper techniques wouldn't be able to be used just relying only on waist power. If the power was in the lower back, he would be able to use techniques with natural posture. But even though he understood that with his head, his wrestling and boxing capabilities didn't increase. He had no choice but to become a rice cake as he learnt with his body.

"That's the guy? The pitiful guy that was taken by you?"

While Hyun-woo was sparring with the former wrestler again, one of the SWAT team members asked Lee Myung-ryong. Lee Myung-ryong smiled and nodded his head.

"Yes, he is working hard to be remodelled."

"Although it has been several days, he is holding up well. It seems he is able to digest quite a lot of physical strength exercises.....Are you trying to train him to make it stick in his mind? You are....."

"Stop saying unnecessary things....."

Lee Myung-ryong frowned at the words, causing the member to flinch. To the SWAT team members, Lee Myung-ryong was a frightening person.

"How is it? Do you see any talent?"

"Do you think I'm a psychic? That one look would let me know whether he has talent?"

"What the? Then do you have to practice with someone to tell their talent?"

“I don’t know how to see talent like you.” I don’t believe that, but there is one thing that I know.”

Lee Myung-ryong looked at Ark who was getting flattened on the mat and said in a low voice.

“It depends on whether that guy is able to endure or not.

‘The road to become a Superman is steep and far.’

Hyun-woo led his unsteady body out of the gymnasium. He exercised at the gym for 2 hours every day. The time that he trained with the team was similar to when he exercised alone. No, if it was increased any more than he would’ve surely died. Anyway, even if Hyun-woo made up his mind to concentrate on movements for longer, his stamina was limited.

When he exited the gym, he saw on the clock that it was 5 p.m. The next fight was at 9 p.m. so 4 hours still remained. If he connected immediately then he would be able to concentrate on hunting in the Forest of Souls for 3 hours. Hyun-woo soon changed his mind.

No, since teacher Lee Myung-ryong changed the training time there has been no opportunity to visit my mother. During a quest it is hectic so I would have no time to visit, so I should visit her when I train in the afternoon. No matter how important the game is I can’t neglect my mother.’

Hyun-woo immediately visited the hospital carrying a basket of fruit. After his mother finished her rehabilitation, her wheelchair came into the garden.

“These days the time seems to pass quickly.”

His mother said with a bright look. Although she should be tired since her rehabilitation just finished, she showed no signs of it. Hyun-Woo wanted to let her enjoy the time so she would forget the fatigue. After seeing his mother, he was sorry that he hadn’t visited in a

while.

“I’m sorry I haven’t been frequently visiting.”

“Don’t say such a silly thing.”

His mother shook her head.

“Do you think I’m a child? Even if you don’t say anything, I know you’ve been having a hard time. It is not necessary to come visit a sick person. I just.....want you to do what you want for a little while. Do you understand?”

“Then I’ll do that.”

“You’re not skipping meals?”

“Yes, I eat until I’m full.”

“But somehow I think you’ve become a little bit haggard. You also didn’t have those wounds before, perhaps.....?”

His mother said as she looked at Hyun-woo’s face. Even though he wore protective gear when sparring, there were times when his movements were rough and he received bruises. Although his face didn’t hurt, it probably looked like it did.

“I’m okay, please don’t think unnecessary things. It’s because these days I’ve started training again.”

Hyun-woo scratched his head with an embarrassed expression. Prepare rice to eat and be careful. At one time he would’ve only heard it as a boring lecture.

When he had gotten tired of his mother’s lecture, he became rebellious and acted out. However, that memory was painful now. When he had been unable to listen to the nagging anymore, he realized that the nagging was a precious part of his normal life. And hearing her say those words now warmed his heart.

“You lost weight. Are you eating your rice?”

Those were his mother’s first words upon waking up in the ICU. It seemed that all she could see was the form of a child who became

thin and wasn't able to lift a finger to help himself. That was his mother. It was his mother that Hyun-woo would love for his entire life.

"Yes, I listened to Detective Gwon's words. He said you were attending the police agency's gym. Although.....it is good for your health to exercise, you must be careful not to get injured. Well, Detective Gwon told me that his junior is looking after you so I don't have to worry....."

"Hmm, you're speaking quite freely about Detective Gwon. Did you want to see him more than me? Should I call? He would come like a knife if I called."

"This guy, what are you saying? Because I don't think he would go that far just for me....."

"Ohuhuhu, are you turning red? Is my mother going to take the name Gwon?"

"You're becoming cheekier."

"I should let ajusshi know."

Hyun-woo smirked as he looked for a suitable bench to sit down on. As soon as he sat down, his mother took out some apples.

"Do you want an apple? I'll cut it for you."

"No. I'll do it."

His mother shook her head and starting cutting the apples with her free hands. Although Hyun-woo was worried, he just watched and was surprised at her skilful hand movements.

It was because he understood his mother's sentiment. Whenever he saw that look, Hyun-woo was reminded of several years ago. His mother was often on the boundaries of life and death in the ICU.....the doctors at that time gave up on his mother. There's an 80% chance she will either die or become a vegetable, they said in a cruel voice. Hyun-woo didn't have the courage to watch his mother die so he threw himself into the nightlife. However, his mother's

status dramatically improved. It was from the time Gwon Hwa-rang dragged him to his mother and he spent the entire night beside her praying. The doctors called it a miracle. Hyun-Woo thought so too. But he now knew. It wasn't a miracle or a coincidence.

'Why is my home this poor?'

During his school days, Hyun-woo used to think that his house was quite poor. His other friends changed their cell phones whenever a new model came out, or would buy lots of clothes. There was also another friend who went to study abroad during junior high. On the other hand, Hyun-woo would buy new clothes every few months. He would buy clothes that cost 200,000 won at most.....why was he so poor? That was what he thought. But after the accident, Hyun-woo realized how young he was. At that time, Hyun-woo had to travel around to the houses of the victims' families to give compensation as well as pay for his mother's hospital bills. Even when Hyun-woo asked for help from his relatives, he only received cold, contemptuous looks in return. After they abandoned him, he sold some household furniture to try and make some money and discovered a bankbook in a cabinet. There were 5 bankbooks that combined added up to 100 million won. However, they weren't under his father or mother's name. It was the insurance and savings under Hyun-woo's name.

His father received a monthly salary of 4 million won, and he put half of it in a savings account under Hyun-woo's name for 10 years. For 10 years, his father and mother would wear old clothes while buying meat and new clothes for Hyun-woo.

'Do you know how guilty I feel?'

That day, Hyun-woo hugged the bankbooks to him and cried all night long. His parents were strong. This also caused the child to become strong. The reason his mother got up every day was because of that. At 17 years old, Hyun-woo realized that simple fact at last. The same was true for now as well. He didn't move his hand even when her fingers started shaking on the knife. It was something that he would've once considered useless stubbornness, but now Hyun-woo knew. Even though it might seem insignificant, it was an important

job that his mother wanted to do. And she finally recovered enough to directly cut the apples. The reason that his mother might be able to endure such a tough rehabilitation was because she wanted to do such trivial things. When he thought about that, his chest started throbbing. Hyun-woo erased the thought and quickly changed the subject.

“But is Gwon ajusshi stopping in frequently?”

“Is this guy hanging around just to tease his mum?”

“No. I haven’t seen him in a few days that’s why I’m asking.”

There had been no contact between Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members since they started searching for the thieves.

“Yes, he comes every other day. But your movements have changed a lot. Also your expression has brightened considerably.....I’ll wait and see how much you get injured before judging. What did you do to get that guy to favour you?”

“I have to be attentive even if I’m not your father.”

“I can’t hear anything.”

“Mother, that’s not the sound of a joke. I’m also not a child. It isn’t necessary to worry about me. Mother also knows what kind of person Detective Gwon is.

“You’re giving me that speech even though I’m considerably older.”

“My mother is still beautiful. That’s why Detective Gwon fell for the whole package.”

“Let’s stop talking about him.”

Hyun-woo spoke so seriously that his mother blushed and didn’t know what to do. She seemed like a young girl again and looked quite cute. Then, his mother suddenly asked him with a curious look.

“Why are you laughing about this?”

“Yes? What?”

“Your girlfriend. Aren’t you going to formally introduce her to your mother or are you just keeping her hidden?”

“A girlfriend? Eh, I don’t have one.”

“I’ve met her already so why are you lying?”

“Yes? Met?”

Hyun-woo asked with a stunned expression.

“I can’t believe she hasn’t told you yet. Your girlfriend visited the hospital room yesterday evening with some porridge. She looked very nice. Her name is Jung Hye-sun yes?”

“H, Hye-sung?”

Hyun-woo’s eyes widened. Jung Hye-sun approximately knew Hyun-woo’s circumstances. But he hadn’t said that his mother was hospitalized or told her the name of the hospital. However, it wasn’t difficult to know that it was Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation group who told her.

“Mother, since you haven’t been very forthcoming with mother.....mother was relieved.”

“Yes? You’re relieved?”

“You never wanted to discuss girls or any problems you had with them.”

“It’s not that. Hye-sung is just like a younger sister to me.”

His mother sent him a coy look and laughed.

“Originally I considered your dad as an oppa as well. Then we became your mother and father.”

“It really isn’t like that.”

“Ho ho ho, I understand. You don’t have to be embarrassed. Mother understands everything.”

“It’s the truth. Mother doesn’t understand.....”

“Then I’ll act like I don’t know. Let’s finish it here. There is an empty container in the hospital room so bring it with you when you leave. Understand? If Hyun-woo is good then mother will be okay. Fighting!”

His mother raised her clenched fist. She had made up her mind and was determined to misunderstand.

7 p.m. It was the time that Jung Hye-sun would start her part time job. Hyun-woo had made an appointment with her before walking to meet her. He had been at the meeting place for 30 minutes and was pacing up and down with a distant look.

“Wow, I’m impressed with Oppa. I wasn’t expecting you to call and ask to meet up.”

“My mother told me to return this.....”

Hyun-woo said as he extended his bag. It was the first time they had seen each other in reality after Gwon Hwa-rang tricked him into going on a date. Even though he called and asked to meet outside, he didn’t know what to say.....

“Eh? Did Oppa just come from the hospital?”

“How did you know about the hospital?”

Hyun-woo asked in a deliberately brusque voice. Then Jung Hye-sun shrank slightly and replied in a small voice.

“I heard from Gwon Hwa-rang ajusshi.”

Damn, it was just like he thought. That fox wearing the mask of a bear!

“Actually.....I said that I would go together with oppa but Gwon Hwa-rang said it wouldn’t be good for your mother’s heart if I didn’t go with the oppas who helped me prepare the porridge. Sorry. Are you angry?”

He didn't want to hear her apologize. No, quite the opposite.

Of course, it was a little bit taxing but the first thing he thought of when he heard his mother say Jung Hye-sun's name was thank you. After the accident, his relatives never visited so his mother was always alone. The only people that came to visit her were Gwon Hwa-rang and Hyun-woo. But now someone else has come. It was a person related to Hyun-woo.....Hyun-woo was secretly worried about his mother and welcomed other guests. Perhaps that was why he was in an exceptionally good mood today. Hyun-woo scratched his head before shaking it.

"No, I'm not upset. Although I am a little embarrassed."

"Yes? What?"

"That.....My mother fell ill. It isn't something to be proud about."

Hyun-woo had never thought about his mother while he was embarrassed. But many people had heard Hyun-woo's circumstances and sympathized. He didn't want that. Perhaps that was another reason he hadn't told Jung Hye-sun about his situation. But Jung Hye-sun hurriedly said.

"I don't care about such things. Actually, I thought Oppa was really wonderful after I heard about your mother. Really. My impression of Oppa just improves even more....."

Jung Hye-sun was surprised at her words and closed her mouth. Her voice rang loudly through the area. People passing by looked back startled while some couples giggled and whispered together. But it was Jung Hye-sun's reaction that was more interesting. He would've thought blushing was the normal reaction, but Jung Hye-sun just held her head up high and said.

"What are you looking at? Is my Oppa so wonderful?"

"Omo, what is with her?"

Although some women gave her amazed glances, Jung Hye-sun didn't even react. Hyun-woo was different and blushed as the eyes in the vicinity looked at him.

“Come on. Oppa.”

Jung Hye-sun took Hyun-woo’s arm and walked off.

“Ah, that was embarrassing.”

‘Was her original character like this?’

Hyun-woo was stunned for a short time. The Jung Hye-sun he knew was a timid girl who didn’t speak a lot, loved instruments and shed tears as the assistant section chief. Thanks to that, Hyun-woo had only thought of Jung Hye-sun as a little sister. But now he didn’t know if his impression was right. The Jung Hye-sun Hyun woo met outside was more active, tough.....and pretty.

‘This guy, what am I thinking?’

Her side profile of a raised lip and eyes were surprisingly pretty. However, there was no man who didn’t know that such a secret must be hidden. Technically, this was the first time that Hyun-woo had asked her out. Naturally, Jung Hye-sun paid attention to her outfit and make-up and was fairly nervous. There was a legend that said once women finished being made up, there was a 150% boost and women would become more daring than usual.

“Can I visit the hospital again?”

Jung Hye-sun suddenly threw a straight pitch! No matter how much Hyun-woo thought, it wasn’t a question that he could easily answer. It was an answer that he would normally refuse. However, under the effects of the 150% appearance boost, women were invincible. Hyun-woo nodded as he missed the timing to refuse.

“If mother is okay with it.....then I don’t care.

“I’m glad. I thought I would have to visit secretly if Oppa said no.”

“What?”

“Ho ho ho, nothing. Anyway, today Oppa has walked me to my part time job. The guy that I work together with often teases me. If I go with Oppa then it won’t be like that from now on.”

“Why don’t I meet with him? Do you know? He might be a surprisingly good guy.”

“What?”

Jung Hye-sun raised an eyebrow and stared.

“I’m kidding, kidding. Okay, I’ll escort you there.”

“Bah, I won’t bring a soup next time.”

Jung Hye-sun turned her head with an annoyed face. Usually it was more than this. After it was decided, Hyun-woo was dragged off to the convenience store.

“So I’ll take this and go. I have to be connected to the game in 1 hour.

“Yes.”

Jung Hye-sun confirmed and blew out a sigh at Hyun-woo’s receding appearance.

‘Just like Jjak-tung oppa said. Hyun-woo oppa is weak to an aggressive woman.’

That’s right, Jung Hye-sung visiting the hospital with porridge and her bold behaviour on the road with Hyun-woo was all a part of Jjak-tung’s plan. Jung Hye-sung had a smile of victory on her mouth.

‘Ho ho ho, now I know how to catch Hyun-woo oppa.

The former criminal was terrifying. However, women were even more terrifying. Then a man secretly approached in the convenience store and asked.

“Hye-sun, who was that person just now?”

“That was my oppa that I previously told you about, isn’t he cool?”

Jung Hye-sun told the man bluntly who started to look uncomfortable.

“What does he do? I heard something about a match.....is he an

athlete?”

“No it is a mixed martial arts match.

The man’s face paled at Jung Hye-sun’s answer. And in the future, there was a firm line around Jung Hye-sung.

Hidden Power of the Rehabilitation Stage?

Chaotic NPC 'Rehabilitation' complete.

<Rehabilitation Bonus: Rehabilitated NPC x 5000 Experience and Alignment: Good +50>

-Your level has risen.

"Hyung-nim, we've finished rehabilitating all 30 people."

"Hu hu hu, the nearby neighbourhoods are also clear."

JusticeMan looked at the thieves with a heart-warming smile. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members had a rewarding day today, implementing social justice.

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were a single group. But thanks to them focusing on one thing, they often lost sight and the original goal and wandered off. It was the same even now. The reason that had left Jackson was to earn some fame at the Evil Silrion in order to become an autonomous police force. But their purpose changed once they met Lorenzo in Cairo. The purpose had changed to punishing the thieves that used to be Lorenzo's hyungs. There were a lot of thieves who had the idea to hide in the vicinity of Selebrid. JusticeMan didn't expect to discover them, since he didn't have enough hints to search around.

'Just like Ark said, to the NPCs this is the real world. In the long run, the users and NPCs in New World.....no, the user and NPC is different as the NPCs lives may be more precious. Still, since the thief was born as a thief, it wasn't fair for them to die!'

But if left alone, the thieves would live a dismal life until a user happens to pass by and kills them for experience. They weren't

monsters, they were NPCs that were similar to the village residents. Yet they were born as thieves just for the purpose of giving experience.

‘The only people that can help them is us.

JusticeMan mistakenly thought of himself as a saviour and burned with motivation.

‘If the rule of New World is that a thief was born to die, then I will change the rule!’

It was like the Roman emperor and the Lord, a dictator and a revolutionary warrior facing off against each other.....the Korean ex-detective had doubts about the system in New World and vowed to change it. This brought out unexpected results in the game system.

“Isn’t this a hundred times better than hunting?”

Jjak-tung asked after he confirmed the information window. JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and the thieves were all around level 70. If they hunted a level 70 thief, they would only gain 1000 experience. But once they rehabilitated him, they would receive 5000 experiences, which was five times as much.

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group was able to earn experience without killing the thieves. Thanks to that, JusticeMan was level 87. The rehabilitation members also had an average level of 70. But was that all? The NPCs of New World were simple. Thus, the inevitable result was that once the NPCs were confined, intimidated and tortured as well as being brainwashed by the rehabilitation group, there was a 100% success message and the thieves completely became new men.

“We’ve finally realised our mistakes.”

In fact, it wasn’t only the result of the system. The NPC thieves had also thought able about walking away. But the only thing in their memories was persecution and sorrow.

They wanted to stop being thieves, but they had never been treated

with hospitality by other NPCs and were only treated like thieves. Users would chase after them to earn some money and not even the guards who were NPCs like them would help. They weren't welcomed by users or NPCs. But it wasn't possible for them to be a monster.....that was the thieves' sad fate. But JusticeMan's party was different. Even though they were tortured, the thieves knew that the effect was for them. It was the first time that a user looked at them like they were NPCs, not experience or items! It was the earnest expression that they had never received in their whole lives.

"We will earnestly serve you for the rest of our lives....."

"I didn't realize that you wished for someone to scold you."

"Please call us Hyung-nim!"

"You are our saviours hyung-nims."

Rururu, Lalala.

If there was appropriate music, it would be like a touching scene from a movie. Thanks to that, JusticeMan's enthusiasm gauge was rising every day.

'This is it! This is it! If you have a large heart then you will be rewarded. That's the world that I want!'

Back in his criminal chasing days, how many times had he put a criminal in prison only for them to commit the crime again after they were released? Even if they were persuaded, how many criminals were stabbed with a knife and died because they tried to change? But this place was different. If they sincerely repented then they were seriously reformed. But was that all? Weren't they also rewarded with experience points. For the first time, JusticeMan felt that something was truly worthwhile.

"These guys, they finally recognized our sincerity!"

JusticeMan shouted as he hugged the thieves and cried.

"Hyung-nim!"

"Now you really are new men and you should live trying to help the

world.”

“Please lead us all the way!”

“Okay, from today you guys are my brothers! I’ll take responsibility for you until the end!”

Aaah, it was a really emotional scene that couldn’t be seen without tears.....however, there was a very serious problem.

“JusticeMan ajusshi!”

During the emotional scene, a fierce voice was heard. Jump! JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group flinched and swallowed their saliva. Even if dozens of thieves ran up to them with sashimi knives, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group didn’t even blink. But there was an existence that scared them. She was holding a lute and staring with sharp eyes, the ultimate weapon of the rehabilitation group Roco. JusticeMan smiled awkwardly and turned his head.

“Eh? Hahahah, Roco, you came?”

“What did I say before I left yesterday?”

“Eh.....you said.”

JusticeMan avoided her gaze and sent uneasy looks to the rehabilitation members. SOS! Rescue requested! But the rehabilitation members looked at the distant mountains and pretended ignorance.

“Hey, isn’t that mountain wonderful?”

“Indeed. We should climb it later.”

‘Those, those traitors.....!’

JusticeMan ground his teeth together as Roco approached.

“Did you decide to increase the guests staying in a person’s home for a while? Didn’t you?”

“That, I did do that. You sound so severe. It was needed.”

“You can’t help it if it’s for justice. Is that right?”

“That, yes. Justice! It’s for justice!”

JusticeMan nodded and said. However, he became silent as Roco said some cold words.

“Is justice going to feed them?”

“

Yes, that was a serious problem. Over the past few days, JusticeMan and his party had rehabilitated 100 thieves around Selebrid. Well, it was good up to that point. Aside from the experience, more than anything it was about contributing good to world peace. But the problem was that JusticeMan didn’t think about the overall situation. The thieves were chaotic NPCs. So naturally they couldn’t live in the town. But since they were rehabilitated and couldn’t steal any more, there was no way for them to make a living. JusticeMan hadn’t thought of the thieves’ situation. He accepted them all as colleagues and provided them room and food. He was apprehensive at first but they managed fine.

The rehabilitation group also had a lot of money and there weren’t that many thieves. When the thieves were rehabilitated, they also participated in future battles adding to the offensive power. However, after the numbers reached 50 and began moving to 100, they encountered a serious problem. The hardships of life!

If it was a dream then it would be possible to live, but New World was an entirely different situation! Of course, money was needed to live. At first, the rehabilitation party made the thieves recycle mouse, fish and shellfish. However, after the thieves increased to 100 people, it was normal to make them watch wheat bread all day. Although the rehabilitation members initially provided money, after two days they stopped. For 100 people, they needed at least 300 bread per day even if they didn’t battle. Of course, the rehabilitation group immediately ran out of money. However, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were poor with matters regarding economics. They were men who could only use power. It wasn’t a desirable condition and their satiety would soon decrease.....In addition,

they still had their old habits from living in the darkness, and even if they didn't have money to buy wheat bread, they would spend it on drinks and ladies. After a few days, it would be a situation where the rehabilitation group and the thieves would have to skip a meal after a battle. But if they thought about the penalty when satiety falls below 50%, it was just like committing suicide.

'Only Oppa still doesn't believe it!'

Roco had finally felt a sense of crisis.

'If we aren't prepared, everyone will starve and die!'

The economic crisis of the rehabilitation group made the girl's talent bloom. In reality, Roco was a girl from a respectable family. Until now, she hadn't suffered from following JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group, but this situation was different. Moreover, it wasn't possible to separate from the rehabilitation group since that would mean separating from Ark.

Even in the middle of a crisis, her mind was still on Ark.

'Even if dirt enters my eye, I will never ask Ark oppa for money! I must protect Oppa's assets!'

Roco made up her mind while thinking about Ark.

"JusticeMan ajusshi and oppa have no concept of economics. It is necessary for us to save our money. I will manage all of our money from now on. Everybody empty their purses."

Roco took control of their finances.

"Ha, but Roco, this....."

Of course, there was resistance at first. Heh, it was a strange resistance.

"Huk, Oppa doesn't believe in me? I'm just worried about oppa. I believe that I can do it. Are you not trusting your money with me because I'm a woman?"

"Ah, no. Does it seem that way?"

The rehabilitation members were surprised and quickly emptied their pockets. The rehabilitation group's weak point was a woman. Just like that, Roco seized control of the group's finances and gradually expanded her power.

"I like that you're rehabilitating the thieves. But what will you do after you've rehabilitated them? How will they survive? Bring the thieves along when monster hunting. But they need to obtain money from leather and meat! Because there will be no rice for those who don't fulfil their quota."

So JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members lead the thieves to hunt and obtain a rice meal. But there was one complaint. Roco holds all of the party's finances. In addition, if they didn't listen to what she had to say then she would threaten them with her ultimate weapon, tears. Anyway, Roco's housekeeping skills was superior to theirs.

Pickpocketing, wild animal meat, skinning leather and so on.....

The rehabilitation members could use their various skills to increase the profits from the hunt. Every time they used their skills, they would hide some of the meat. But if Roco was watching then leather would be skinned and meat sold and the pay divided.

In addition, they used fraud and intimidation to reduce spending as much money as possible. Under Roco's dictatorship, their financial conditions gradually improved. That was because Roco wasn't exploiting the rehabilitation members and the thieves.

"Because today's earnings were decent, we can eat meat instead of wheat bread."

Fortunately, JusticeMan's party could have meat soup with rice once every two days. But was that all? Apart from income, armour and weapons were also split between the thieves. It was inevitable. The thieves that accompanied JusticeMan were ignorant and would sometimes die while hunting.

"Why is it hard to hunt? A good armour would make it a little bit safer."

“Oh, give these to the thieves as a warm consideration.”

“A saint! This person is a saint!”

The thieves were especially thrilled as they had never received the warmth of a woman. Thanks to that, Roco had now established herself as the hidden power in the rehabilitation group. Roco even retained control over JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. But that was only when Roco was logged on. When Roco wasn't at her desk for even a short while, JusticeMan and the rest of the group got out of control. Without worrying about the budget, they would increase the number of rehabilitated thieves, which was the situation right now.

.....Roco sighed.

“I told you before leaving. All the money has gone into changing the thieves' armour. That's why I told you to take the other rehabilitation members and thieves hunting while I was gone.....at this rate, I don't know how all these men will survive. I will keep repeating it even if it makes me the bad person.”

“That is.....I'm sorry.”

JusticeMan patted her shoulder with a grumpy face.

“It isn't possible to keep on doing that. You must promise instead not to rehabilitate any more thieves from the capital. Until our livelihood improves a little bit, we're only going to concentrate on hunting.”

“We'll do as you said.”

JusticeMan replied, scratching his head with an embarrassed expression.

“In fact, the guys that we rehabilitated this time knows the location of the hyungs that we were looking for. Can't I rehabilitate just that guy? It would make it easier.”

“Ajusshi!”

Roco shouted, causing JusticeMan to flinch.

“Jeez, you know that thing is difficult. Understood.....If we move immediately then we’ll be able to return to Selebrid to watch Ark fight in the tournament. Ark is also spending a while in this map.....”

At the mention of Ark, Roco’s expression relaxed. After she pulled out her bag and checked the balance, she shook her head.

“Okay, I’ll allow it one more time.”

“I see. Understood!”

“Then please take off those clothes for the time being. Ayu, it smells. That was from one day? Jjak-tung oppa, please collect all the thieves clothes as well.”

“Huh? Understood. Hey you guys, take off your armour!”

Although she washed out her eyes, while looking after JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and the thieves, her housekeeping skills blossomed. Cooking, laundry, cleaning and so on.....

And in the online game, additional effects were added for those skills. Roco was especially skilled with laundry. If she washed any cloth or leather armour, its defense would increase by 5% for up to 4 hours. Of course, that was a side effect of her doing the laundry. Because it was a too realistic game, she had to do the laundry in order to get rid of the bad smells. Although she didn’t say anything, deep down it was hard for her to bear.

“At any rate, men are similar to children and women.”

Roco pouted as she headed to the stream with the laundry. A person tilted his head to the side and asked sullenly.

“By the way, doesn’t Roco seem exceptionally excited these days?”

“Huhuhu, I know why.”

Jjak-tung replied with a laugh.

“Roco is also a woman.”

At that time, Ark had an 8 game winning streak and was in the quarter-finals. Obviously, the fights became increasingly difficult. Even though he had some PVP experience, there was still a variety of professions Ark hadn't fought against yet. In his fights against Andel, Hargen and Leo, all of them were warriors. Since every profession has unique skills, he would get lost every time. In addition, the pairs match wasn't a simple 1 on 1 fight. That means he would have to deal with both opponents instead of just one. The combination of professions people could select in a multiple profession RPG game was a very important factor.

By themselves, a warrior would be able to face 5 monsters, but if they were joined by a cleric then they would be able to fight against fifteen or even twenty monsters. The charm of an RPG game wasn't '1+1=2,' but it was more exciting if it was times time that and reached 100. And there was a combination of professions that were most effective in a pairs match.

The combination of warrior and necromancer in the first fight was one of the most common. The warrior-priest, warrior-archer, magician-priest, magician-thief.....Due to the number of combinations, there were infinite strategies available and the users should research and develop their own strategies. One combination that was particularly hard to deal with was the combination of magician-magician they met in the top 16. The damage of the magician that was over level 100 was enormous. When their advanced fire magic, 30% of his health was lost with one blow. But the true threat with a magician-magician combination was the 'Willpower Exchange.'

'Willpower exchange' was the sharing of magic among the magicians. When 'Willpower exchange' was activated, mana could be shared among the magicians and the spell damage was also doubled. The horrible fire magic which decreased his health by 50% with one blow was created. Thanks to that, Ark and Shambala were in a critical condition.

If Ark tried to use 'Riposte' in a moment of crisis then he would just be completely roasted. On the other hand, the match became less tricky once Ark used his nursing skill.

Their main weapon was the mental-based magic. However, Ark used his nursing skill to increase their resistance to the mental magic and received a 'Heart of the Caretaker' bonus. The nursing skill had a surprisingly powerful effect on the match. When nursing was used, the strength and willpower of the receiver would rise. Although it didn't directly recover health, an increase in willpower would strengthen their natural resilience. When the resilience increased, it was similar to receiving an overall stat buff.

A combination that was even trickier was the warrior-warrior pair they fought in the next match. Just like Justin, they doped themselves just before entering the stadium. When looking at them, he instantly thought of the phrase 'money is power.' They spent dozens of gold on potions which they stacked up 3 times, and appeared in the tournament with huge bodies. In order to reach the top 8, they probably invested hundreds of gold. But after Ark had met the doped up warrior from the first round, he made his own preparations. The system allowed for Ark to use his survival cooking and raise his stats in the match. First of all, Ark and Shambala were good to each other. The two of them had a good impression of each other from the first time they met and that applied to when they fought together. It was like their hands and feet were well suited together. At first, Ark thought it was because Shambala had trained in martial arts just like him, but in the tournament he realized it wasn't so simple. He had met many people in the Evil Silrion who also learnt martial arts. Indeed, the tournament format tended to have higher odds for people who learnt martial arts. However, they didn't match well with Ark and Shambala.

Although they only learnt it later, but it was the influence from their two professions.

Dark Walker and Saint Assassin. They were two professions with similar skills and characteristics, and there were many times when their function strangely complemented each other.

For example.....

“Petrification of Blood!

Shambala used his ‘Petrification of Blood’ skill. When the skill was used, red spots would appear it was possible to stun the opponent for 20 seconds. But their defensive power at the time was at 500% so it wasn’t possible for him to do any damage. It was a skill that was used so that he could deal with a large number of enemies. However, the situation was different when Ark followed up with an attack.

“Dark blade!”

An attack that ignored defense and landed a critical hit! In the end, the 500% increase to defense was like a sandfish. They suffered continuous critical hits in their petrified state. Was it only that? Above all, the degree of harmony for the two of them was the best for basic skills. Ark learned Sword-Hand combat, which was a technique that took advantage of any gaps in the enemies attack. On the other hand, Shambala used Kung Fu which had the effect of creating a gap in the opponent’s attack. Their natural battle system was that Shambala would create a gap which Ark would take advantage of to attack.

Of course, it wasn’t easy to use this battle system in the Evil Silrion where the fight was always changing every moment. But using Shambala’s Kung Fu skills, it wasn’t difficulty to overcome those problems. In fact, Shambala’s standard was quite high and it wasn’t easy for Ark to follow in the early stages. As the fights continued, Ark gradually managed to match Shambala’s pace.

‘Honestly, I hate to admit it.....’

Lee Myung-ryong’s training showed no effect on the outside. But sparring with boxing, wrestling and taekwondo developed his ability to adapt to circumstances.

“Now, Ark!”

Shambala shouted as he stabbed the warrior with his dagger. Ark used Shambala like a stair case and flew forward. The warrior was

astonished and lifted his sword above his head. However, Ark stepped on the shield and landed behind him, turned and then kicked the warrior in the head.

“No way!”

The warrior stumbled as he received a critical hit. At the same time, Shambala’s and Ark’s eyes were glittering. Afterwards, Shambala attacked with a whirlwind.

Ark continued with a spin kick. Shambala’s attack had the possibility of stunning the opponent. Abnormal conditions could be caused by Ark’s kicks, but the probability was quite low. However, when the opponent was hit by two different attacks, the probabilities increased. Once they were trapped, it was impossible for them to escape. Thus, it was named ‘Whirlwind of Death.’ In the end, the warrior’s body shrivelled like a balloon because the doping effects disappeared and died.

The magic eye had been watching while holding his breath and finally shouted.

-They did it! Dark Wolf and Blue Sword! They defeated the favourites, who were like monsters thanks to the various medications, using surprising acrobatics and advanced to the top 4! As expected, the last winning combination was the Whirlwind of death!

“That’s it! I paid the expensive entrance fee to see that combo today!”

-Ohhh, Blue Sword was great, but the biggest event in this tournament right now is Dark Wolf. Who would have expected? Everybody is talking about the unknown Dark Wolf who appeared for the first time in this tournament! Combined with Blue Sword who has won several times in the solo tournaments, they have quickly broken through the top 8! There is a sold out crowd every time they have a match! Bravo!

“Wahahah!”

“Dark Wolf and Blue Sword are the best!”

Under thunderous applause, Ark and Shambala returned to the waiting room.

‘Huhuhu, this feeling is surprisingly good?’

Ark had a satisfied smile. The sound of thousands of spectators applauding was quite inspiring for his mood. At first, it was just frightening but after he adapted, it became exhilarating pleasure.

“You’re now quite a decent partner.”

“Grrrr, good? This much is perfect.”

“Don’t be too giddy. There are still two matches left.”

“Grrrrr, I know.”

“Anyway, the tournament has ended for today. Let’s separate for the rest of the day.’

“Grr? Where do you go so busily every day?”

“There is something I must discover in Selebrid. It’s information related to my profession so you don’t need to know the details. Anyway, don’t be late to the match tomorrow.”

Shambala said as he changed his mask and mantle in the waiting room. He changed his mask and mantle so that people wouldn’t recognize Shambala. Of course, since Ark could transform his face he didn’t have to worry about that. However, once he transformed he couldn’t reuse it for 24 hours. When they left the waiting room, they had to leave separately.

“Look, it’s Dark Wolf!”

“Wah, his force is really different!”

When Ark exited the Evil Silrion, people’s interest was immediately

concentrated on him. Normally, their attention would be a burden but at the moment, he had changed into a wolf form. If people continued to be interested in him while transformed then there was no need to be worried about his normal state. He didn't have to worry about other people's gaze while doing event quests.

'I'm also depending on it to compete safely in the Evil Silrion.'

Ark smile warmly. At first, he hadn't been happy about participating in the Evil Silrion since it didn't give any money or experience. However, as he continued fighting in the matches he discovered a unexpected effect.

'My skill proficiency increases several times faster!'

During a fight, his skill proficiency would go up considerably. When thinking about it, it was the inevitable result. In New World, skill proficiency wasn't affected by how much it was used. The important thing was how intensively it was used. Because of that, the skill always increased faster when fighting against a monster that he had met for the first time. When fighting something for the first time, he is always much more concentrated. However, no matter how difficult the monster, they would become easy after killing them several times. This was because they had a certain pattern of attack so the growth of his skills would slow down. In the Evil Silrion, he was always fighting opponents with new styles. In addition, his opponents weren't ordinary monsters.

They were users armed with a variety of skills, just like Ark! When he fought against someone of high standard, of course his skill would grow at a tremendous speed. Thanks to that, his Sword Mastery increased to the advanced level.

"Skill check!"

Sword-Hand Combat (Advanced, Passive 316/500):You have become an expert in Sword-Hand combat. You are able to use any kind of swordsmanship and the destructive power would also increase. You will receive additional damage on every type of sword as well as knuckles, and your evasion rate and critical hit probability would increase.
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<Overall combat power increases by 40%. When wearing a shield, the effects of Sword-Hand combat disappears.>

* Additional effects: Chance of a kick hitting a small monster 8%, medium monster 5% and 2% chance of causing an abnormal status on a large monster. When difficult techniques succeed, the probability of causing an abnormal status increases.

Increasing his basic skill raised his general attack power. Furthermore, the probability of triggering an abnormal state also increased. That was the reason that the Whirlwind of death was possible in the last match.

His adrenaline and counter attack skills also increased to the intermediate level. When adrenaline rose, his reaction rate in a critical condition also rose, and the chances of a successful counterattack also increased. Naturally, his chain skill Riposte became more powerful as well. It was even possible to succeed when the warrior was further than 10 metres away from him!

‘There is no other great place to raise my skills.’

Ark also experience situations where the skill growth would stop and that was useful information.

“Master, I’m here.”

Then, someone called from the side alley. It was Dedric who was transformed into a small boy with slicked back hair. Ark laughed as he approached Dedric.

“Grrrrrr, how was it? The odds are?”

“Because you’ve kept winning, the odds fell a little bit. This time it was 1.2. Here is 76 gold.”

“Kukuku, the upper limit is high and the earning is better than before.”

In fact, this was one of the reasons why Ark didn’t summon Dedric during the match.

It was a tournament where people could bet money on the pair that would win. Of course, the gambling part of the Evil Silrion had a few limitations in order to prevent fraud. First, users and NPCs could only bet on the user's victory when the match was a user versus a monster. This was intentional so that they wouldn't rig a game against the monster. And for the tournaments where it was user against user, there was an upper limit that existed when betting money. The first match 10 gold, second match 20 gold.....It also wasn't possible to double the amount of profits received. In addition, participants were unable to participate directly in the gambling. But Ark couldn't miss out on the chance to make money. Before the tournament started, Ark summoned Dedric in order to make money. Of course, he had every intention of winning the bets. In the first round, he scraped all his money together from selling japtem and bet 10 gold. The odds for the first round were 1.8. It was quite high. Shambala was a strong favourite even though Ark was unknown, and Justin and Dior were also well known names so the dividends were raised. Thanks to that he made 18 gold, and the odds in the second round was 1.5 so he made back 27 gold. The increased awareness of Ark meant that the odds kept on getting lower. But because the upper limit restriction rose, he could still earn money and he made at least 10 gold with every match. When there were two or three games a day, he earned an average of 20-30 gold.

'Although I'm not completely satisfied, the earnings are acceptable.'

'Where there is a will then there is money.'

That was Ark's motto. Ark laughed while holding the purse, and when he noticed Dedric asked.

"Master, you feel good right? Am I not a good person because of I made you money? So give me some money so I can buy food."

"Grrrrrrr, what the?"

Ark's countenance immediately stiffened. In Selebrid, there were thousands of street vendors where users gathered. Merchants who have learnt to cook would make tempting snacks and sell them. Although Dedric claimed to be 300 years old, his appearance was that of a young boy.

“Grrr, I don’t always make disgusting food!”

“Ugh, how is that food? It’s torture.”

“Noisy, the outer appearance is not the only thing plausible about food. Isn’t it known that food that is good for you tastes bitter? Instead of talking, you should eat the food I give you.”

“Sometimes I also want to eat tasty food! It’s unjust money! Since you came by the money unjustly, can’t it be used sometimes? I even went to the Evil Silrion and did some unfair gambling for you.”

“Grrrrrr! Unjust money?”

Ark snorted and said.

“What do you think all our money is used for? Your master has fought with blood, sweat and tears to make money. Don’t you know I did that in order for us to live and eat well? Do you know how money was used to make you grow well?”

“Sheesh, and now you want pocket money What about clothes? The cost of the ingredients also wasn’t free.”

“I bought expensive spices and ingredients and poured it into the food you ate.....doesn’t that also cost money? And I also wasted a lot of money and sweat educating you guys. Man, tears are obscuring my sight. Nevertheless, haven’t I still been earning money for you? Yet you want to make me a beggar?”

“Sheesh, is it that difficult for you to part with 5 copper?”

“When copper is gathered it becomes silver and then silver becomes gold.”

This was Ark’s unchanging view on life. In the real world, Ark would never spend money on anything except the minimum calories needed to survive. Even if the weather became chilly and the roadside stalls sent him tempting looks, Ark never succumbed to the temptation. But now his pet was trying to tempt him to part with money? Over food? Although he was frugal with his money, he was happy to buy a fruit basket for his mother.

“Then do you want me to make a similar food for you?”

“Whoa, it’s dirty and black. I won’t eat, don’t make me eat it! Damn, I met the wrong master!”

He got annoyed with Dedric and returned him to the Netherworld.

‘Hmm, is it time to discipline those guys again?’

Deimos had become distracted with bones while Dedric was openly rebellious.

‘Since I have a lot of time these days, should I discipline them?’

Ark was seriously contemplating it. Suddenly someone’s voice was heard from inside the alley.

“Are you really certain?”

“Don’t worry. This tournament is a joke for us.”

“Only two people are needed.”

The voice spoke from somewhere. Since it was a dark night, he was cautious. Ark hid his body using ‘Stealth’ and peeked inside the alley.

‘Are they.....?’

Inside the alley were users from the Evil Silrion. It was the user wearing the mask with a five star design. It was the two pioneers that were eager to fight Shambala. Three hooded people with large builds were confronting them. The three of them observed the surroundings before taking a large breath.

“Although we recruited players using our information network, all of them have fallen. Now you two are the only ones remaining.”

“I told you so from the beginning. Other people aren’t needed if we’re there. Thanks to that, the number of matches increased and thousands of hours wasted. You morons.”

“But.....”

“But if the identity of the secret map is correct, then we would have

the money to hire as much people as we want. You wouldn't be so eager for an ordinary treasure map. Did you obtain some useful information?"

"That, I can't tell you that. It is top secret information....."

After he was pressed, the person inside the hood used confused words. Then, the eyes of the pioneer Jewel narrowed.

"Well, that's okay. We aren't particularly interested. Only a beginner cares about treasure maps. But about that earlier price you promised."

"Yes? What is it? Didn't we already sign a contract with the NPC?"

"We did. But we did so thinking it wouldn't take that much time. You didn't believe us and hired more guys so it has taken twice as long. Naturally we should revise the agreement. Don't you think? After looking at the situation, I think it should be twice as much. An extra 1000 gold to the promised 500. So 1,500 gold in total."

"We don't have that type of money!"

One hooded person took a deep breath and exclaimed.

"If you don't like it then we can just cancel the agreement. And I'll search for other people to buy the map. Well, we could also search for the treasure directly."

"If you break the contract....."

The penalty of breaking a contract didn't only apply to the merchant who made it. If a contract was signed and received, then the penalty applied to everyone involved. But strangely, Jewel just laughed and said.

"We're pioneers. Do you think we're scared of something like that?"

".....It isn't useful to you. But 1000 gold is important for the person that would lose it."

"That's our requirement."

Jewel spoke in a firm tone. Of course, Jewel had no thoughts about

treasure hunting. But there was a reason the people that hired her wanted that specific item. Perhaps it had information about enormous profit or was related to a quest or profession. Therefore, she had no intention of transferring it obediently for the agreed upon price. Ark who was hiding also nodded.

‘Hmmm, Jewel knows how to make a deal.’

In this situation, it wasn’t possible to assume that Jewel was bad. Rather, the weakness that the hooded person showed was bad. Therefore, it was natural to attempt to get as much profit as possible. Anyway, the hooded users exchanged worried glances. But in the end they were forced to agree.

“Okay. 1,500 gold.”

“Good. Have it prepared for when the two matches end tomorrow.”

Jewel spoke in a satisfied look and disappeared out of the other side. The hooded figures immediately cursed.

“Sheesh, they’re like robbers, 1500 gold for one tournament!”

It’s times like these that I feel like I chose the wrong profession. Hyung-nim.”

“Although it’s regrettable, we have no other choice. We have to believe in those guys.”

“But it is 1,500 gold.....wouldn’t we be struggling as soon as we lose all that money?”

“You don’t have to worry.”

The man they called hyung-nim muttered in a low voice.

“This is the quest that a Grandmaster from one of the top guilds gave directly. The other day, I heard that one person who received a grandmaster quest took two months to complete it. The compensation he received was a rare skill and an additional 4,000 gold. In other words, the reward for this quest would be a minimum of 4,000 gold.”

The eyes of the rest of the hooded figures turned to gold. It was an obvious response. 4,000 gold! That was 40 million won!

“But for now we must sell our items and make 1,050 gold. Those guys don’t appear likely to help us without that.”

One hooded figure rummaged through their pockets before sighing.

“We still have time before the finals. We’ll find a way to raise the money in the meantime.”

“Hukhukhuk, does that mean an additional debt?”

“Don’t cry. It’s not good to become too indebted. But think of it as an investment. It is really lucky that I have received the Grandmaster’s quest. No matter what happens, we have to seize this opportunity to live. We’re betting everything on this.”

“Yes, I understand. But even if we obtain the supplementary prize, the other 2 items are in those guys hands. What is you plan?”

“Hu hu hu.”

The man called Hyung-nim wore a wily smile.

“That’s why this supplementary prize is especially important. If we are holding one of the three clues then those guys can’t find the treasure. It would become useless to them. Then, you offer them a deal for a sneak peek.”

“Would they easily accept the deal?”

“That’s our specialty. We’ll persuade them and have the contract be stamped with a seal. Well, we can also use other methods. The important thing is that we have one of the clues. If we don’t then there is no chance for us.”

“As expected of Hyung-nim!”

“Huhuhu, that’s right.

“Huhuhuhu. It’s like that.”

The hooded figures laughed sinisterly.

‘What the, this is?’

Ark stared blankly from directly behind them.....

Finals

‘How many quests does this item overlap with?’

Ark’s mind became complicated. When he received the <Genius Alchemist’s Laboratory> quest, he didn’t think it was that serious. He expected some decent compensation. He decided that it was only a little bit better than normal quests. But that wasn’t the case. Whenever there was a quest where a specific item was needed and there were no limitations on the number of that item, then there would be many people who have received the quest. If one restriction of the quest was friendship points, then the items couldn’t be shared. Several people would receive the quest and consequently most of them were bound to fail.

‘In order for me to receive the quest, it was necessary to have a lot of friendship points with the Magic Institute. Shambala received the quest from a quest item. As the items couldn’t be shared, one of them had to give up the quest. But there were also other people who received the quest?’

Furthermore, the place where they received the quest wasn’t ordinary. Last night, Ark shadowed the three people. But he soon lost them in a restricted area. The place where they went to was Midus, the merchant guild.

‘They said they received the quest from the Grandmaster. Then.....?’

The Grandmaster was probably from the Merchant Guild. Ark’s employer was also the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute. In other words two of the top three guilds, the Magic Institute and the Merchant Guild were involved. So let’s think about it. The NPCs of New World don’t move abruptly without any justification. This was the justification of the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute. Since Magaro was a member of the Magic Institute, the research materials that he left behind belonged to them. Therefore, it was

justifiable to regain it. Then what about the Grandmaster of the Merchant Guild? There was no obvious reason at the moment. However, he had a small idea. Magaro was a well-known genius alchemist. The research from his later years would therefore be worth a lot of money. Even if it wasn't directly used by the Merchant Guild, it was possible to use it in political negotiations with the Magic Institute. That was the rough idea that he immediately thought of.

'The three big guilds are political rivals. Naturally they would spy on and try to outmanoeuvre each other. And the movement of the Magic Institute was trying to discover Magaro's lost legacy. Then the Merchant Guild quickly took action. If so.....Shambala finding the diary might be 100% due to chance, but the appearance of the secret map in the Evil Silrion shows that it might not be a coincidence. The Merchant Guild is probably behind this tournament in order to discover the other users who have found clues.....'

Perhaps it wasn't only the Merchant Guild.

'While normally 100 people participate on average, this tournament had more than 1,000 applications. Many large guilds are also gathering to go to Nagaran.'

The hooded figures hired some players, but it was impossible for them to have hired 900 people. In that case, maybe other powers have intervened in the quest.

"Then out of the three guilds, the one with the highest chances of intervening is the Warrior Guild. The quest is probably something similar to bringing them the injury prize from this tournament.....if that is the case....."

The situation was becoming quite interesting. Of course, Ark wasn't interested in something like the three guilds' power struggle. He also wasn't didn't want to compete with other users for the quest. The point that Ark found interesting was that the Merchant Guild made its move following the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute's action. This meant that there was likely to be a huge reward!

'If the guy who received a quest from the Grandmaster was rewarded with 4,000 gold, then the compensation for this quest

would be at least that much!’

Without a doubt, it would be a large amount of money! Indeed, the hooded men were willing to pay 1,500 gold to Jewel for the secret map. Money was the most important thing to a merchant. If the rewards for the quest was uncertain, they wouldn’t have been willing to part with that amount of money. In other words, this quest was guaranteed to have a large profit!

‘I could get thousands of gold from one quest!’

Ark’s pupils turned to gold. If he did well then he might be rewarded with rare potions or scrolls as well as gold.

‘Huhuhu, unexpectedly I received some good information. I’m lucky that I transformed myself. While I can guess their real identities, they can’t guess mine. I have the upper hand.’

Ark hid the information from Shambala. Shambala still didn’t know how large this quest was. Since he had already received the quest, he only wanted to complete it if it was possible. However, if he knew about the huge reward then he might change his mind.

In the worst case, he might require more in exchange for the diary.

‘That’s not possible. This is my quest! My money!’

And Shambala couldn’t afford to listen to such talk. The semi-finals and finals were on the same day. 1 hour ago, Ark and Shambala had won in the semi-finals and now they were waiting for the next match in the waiting room.

In the meantime, Shambala sat down with crossed legs and closed his eyes. The posture of a person who learnt Kung Fu and was concentrating his mind was remarkable. Thanks to that, Ark was unable to breathe properly and sat a distance away. Then, a shout was heard along the suddenly loud passages.

-The opponents for the winners of the previous match, team 14 Blue Sword and Dark Wolf have been decided! It is team 89 who defeated their opponents in only 3 minutes with overwhelming skill!

Now the only match remaining is to determine the final winner. In 5 minutes, a special match will be held and then it will be the final match of the hotter than ever 186th Pairs tournament!

Shambala's eyes flashed in response to the televised announcement. His eyes moved to Ark. "As expected, the final opponents are the pioneers."

"Arc, this time we'll fight separately."

"Grr?"

"Among the pioneers, the magician Jewel is mine. I have to pay back my debt. With my own hands....."

"Is this because of what happened the other day?"

He had surprisingly childish parts to him. Ark asked with a smile. However, Shambala spoke seriously with no signs of a laugh.

"That's not the reason. Because this game was not the first time that I've seen the ID Jewel."

Once he looked in his eyes, Ark realized that there was another serious matter. If it was an NPC, they would kindly listen but if it was a user then they would question it closely. But if it didn't have anything to do with the quest or the money then he wasn't interested. When his 40 year old uncles would drink alcohol and recite history, he had no interest. Fortunately, Shambala didn't make a fuss with his story.

"Anyway, in this tournament let's go with individual combat. I think even Jewel intends to fight this way."

"Grrr, I also prefer it like that....."

Even though simple, a magician's magic could vary widely depending on the type they studied. Therefore, magic had the largest scope of study.

If someone prefers dealing elemental damage, they would become a sorcerer that has a lot of magic to deal with many opponents. There was also a wide variety of magical buffs but the one that was used by two or more magicians 'Willpower exchange' was particularly outstanding. That's why magicians favoured being in a party the most. Meanwhile, the Warlock was a dark magician that specialized in PVP. Warlocks had no magic to help in a party. Instead their buff or protective magic could only be used on themselves, and they were often clad in something to increase their damage. In New World, the warlock was the ultimate damage dealer.

"Grrr, are you sure you can beat her by yourself?"

"I honestly don't know."

Ark was slightly amazed at Shambala's answer. He thought that Shambala was confident about winning. Naturally, the pioneers were strong. But if it was the confident Shambala saying this, then his partner wasn't behaving boldly anymore.

"Are they that strong? The pioneers?"

"I fought them one month ago. I clearly remember the memory from that time and used it for image training. The amount of victories was 7 to 3. It wasn't unexpected for Jewel who had been fighting for a month. So at that point it was considered 5 to 5."

"Grrr, it's the case where I wouldn't be able to understand until I see it in person."

Shambala silently nodded.

"That's right. I haven't fought against a warlock yet. Therefore, individual combat might be easier than fighting together. Since I don't know how great the pioneers are, let's just go out and try it."

Then, after the special match ended the loudspeaker made an announcement again. The final match will begin in 10 minutes. After Ark heard the broadcast, he immediately took out his pot.

"The only thing I can do is prepare for some bleeding. Okay. Bleeding is released. Snake, please give me the materials for

‘Racing Cocktail, ‘Hot Syrup Cake’, and ‘Drink with refreshing taste.’

Ssak ssak ssak!

At Ark’s command, Snake spat out a handful of ingredients. It was quite annoying looking through his bag every time he wanted to make a dish. Therefore he made Snake remember each recipe off by heart, so that it could spit out the ingredients just from the name of the dish. Thanks to that, the time hunting for ingredients was reduced and he could grasp the different flavours of the dish.

‘What happens to the pets also depends on the master.’

The price of Snake’s effort was a simple stroke on the head sometimes. Anyway, it was already the final match. If they lost then all his efforts so far would be in vain.

Ark also used ingredients that weren’t easy to find in his dishes. The cocktail increases the reaction rate, the cake boosted power while the drinks boosted magical resistance and so on.....they were rare dishes without any side effects. Of course, it was less effective than the drugs that the warriors would dope themselves with. However, doping drugs were often only for warriors. Maybe because the effects of the drug were strong, but the warrior’s physical strength was needed to resist it completely. On the other hand, his dishes had no restriction on the professions and the duration was also longer than the drugs. And it was much cheaper. If Ark wanted to make a dish with a similar effect to the drugs then it would cost him 100 gold. Even so, the sight of a black wolf squatting down to cook was.....a little strange.

“Grrr, it’s done!”

Anyway, Ark instantly produced a buffet style meal. It was ten medicinal dishes that Ark had carefully selected.

“Shambala, I’ll do my best to help you with your revenge. So eat to your heart’s content.”

“Thank you.”

Shambala picked a dish and looked impressed before eating it. Ark’s

eyes flashed at the sight.

“I’m also a person. Because it’s hot, the price is half off. One dish is 5 gold.”

“.....”

Shambala coughed as he was caught and stared at Ark. Was he really trying to get money from this? His glowing eyes seemed to ask. Ark silently nodded his head.

“Catering is expensive you know? But that’s between you and me. Since I took of the labour costs, shouldn’t you be thankful?”

Shambala was at a loss for words.

Putt putt pow!

The tournament had spread out for a long time over six days and it was finally time for the final match. As expected for the finals, the stage and special effects was really different. When Ark and Shambala entered the stadium, colourful fireworks were lit up and the stadium had been divided into four arenas which had the attention of as many as 10,000 spectators. Because there were an unprecedented number of participants, users and NPCs flocked like bees. There were even VIP seats at the stadium, where the nobility NPC stood out.

-Now, they have come! The brave black wolf warrior who has heated up the Evil Silrion even though he is new, Dark Wolf! And the undisputed leader of the solo matches who won many times, Blue Sword! Please give a huge round of applause!

“Wah ah ah!”

“At last. Please give us an excellent show!”

“I bet 100 gold on you guys!”

The crowd screamed as they gained momentum.

--

-And confronting them are Jewel and Duke. Surprisingly, they were the first strangers to walk on this land and are known as the first foreigners, a pioneer. They also showed amazing ability and finished every match within 3 minutes. A fight with the rising newcomers against the pioneers! No one can expect what kind of match will occur when the old and new warriors clash.....Oh, as expected the odds are even at 1.5-1.5 each!

The pioneers Jewel and Duke were introduced by the magic eye and appeared on the opposite side.

-Now, these warriors who have defeated numerous enemies to reach the final match stand confronting each other. Do I need to say anything more? Let's start the match immediately. First, let's select the arena.....

The eyeballs of the magic eye rolled around. Its eyes turned silver and looked like a slot machine.

'Pandemonium!'

A vague smile spread on Ark's mouth. Pandemonium was an arena that he had already experienced. It was a place where the ancient ruins of the game were spread. It was laid out like a complicated labyrinth, making it difficult to remember the way. But the most extraordinary aspect of this fight was the roof. Roof.....That's right. Pandemonium was crafted like a dungeon!

'Luck has followed me.'

A battle in the darkness was something that Ark naturally desired. As a Dark Walker, Ark received a 40% boost to all his abilities in the darkness. Thanks to that, he was around level 140 without any special doping. It was also possible to use 'stealth' in this situation. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that this arena seemed especially crafted for Ark. In addition, Shambala was a Saint Assassin and assassins also received various bonuses in the dark that was equal to Ark's. Then Jewel muttered in the distance.

“If it’s Pandemonium.....do you remember fighting here in the past? That match where you became like a dust cloth?”

“Grr?”

Ark looked at Shambala in surprise after the unexpected words. Shambala muttered with an expression that looked like he was chewing poo.

“Jewel’s profession is a Dark Stalker among the warlocks. The bonus that she gets from the dark is just as good as ours. And there are many powerful spells that can be used only in the dark. The dungeon arena won’t give us any advantages.”

Damn, his excitement was quickly released.

“But it doesn’t matter. Since it’s like this, I can return the favour.”

When the arena was determined, the magic eye was so excited that its blood pressure immediately increased.

-Oh, as expected the warriors refuse to budge in this battle of nerves. However, it will be decided by who is stronger, not their words! So, begin!

“Go!”Bang bang double bang! The arena shook with loud vibrations. Pillars sprung up and the dark and massive ruins were created. Of course, the voice of the magic eye and the spectators couldn’t be heard any more from the interior. But those watching from outside the arena had no difficulties viewing the interior.

As soon as the match started, Shambala used Blink to reach Jewel.

“Huhuhu, this punk. Don’t be hasty. There’s no time limit so let’s do this slowly.”

Jewel laughed and scattered like fog as she flew to one side. It was the rare skill of the Dark Stalker that was only available in the darkness. It was Mist. The body changed into fog and it was a skill which increase speed and dramatically raised the evasion rate.

“Your opponent is me. The other guys don’t matter.”

“Ho oh, is this a 1 on 1 match? I have no reason to refuse. Warp!”

“Dark Wolf, I’ll leave Duke to you!”

Jewel used spatial movement magic to move Shambala to a different area. In order to use spatial magic, it required at least 7 circles of magic. It was barely even possible for magicians that used ‘Willpower exchange.’ The person who used such magic calmly was his opponent.

It meant that the lowest level possible was a level 160 magician. Additionally, what was even more important than the level was the type of magic used. Levels were insignificant to magicians.

‘When it is to that degree, it is impossible to guess whether Shambala would win or not.’

However, it wasn’t the time to be worried about Shambala. An arrow suddenly flew at him from the darkness.

‘Archer! Duke was an archer?’

Ark was surprised and avoided the attack by rolling his body.

‘As an opponent, archers aren’t that difficult!’

Ark stood up and held his position. After measuring the timing of Duke’s movements, he swung his sword like lightning. Riposte! The arrow returned to Duke at a faster speed than it had flown earlier. If he was good enough to enter the finals, then arrows of that degree were easily avoided. Ark expected Duke to dodge the arrow, and aimed for the moment when he would dodge. Then Duke’s lip stealthily raised.

“Nice move. Has your skill been trained to return this many arrows?”

Tu tu tu tung-!

Incredible rapid fire! Duke whipped out dozens of arrows and fired them at a dazzling speed. Ark managed to return 3~4 of the continuously firing arrows while the rest were flying at him. In a moment of carelessness, 1 arrow was driven into his shoulder.

“Ugh!”

-The arrow has caused a critical hit! 300 damage! Your attack speed will decrease by 10% for 30 seconds.
--

Even with his increased defense thanks to the dishes, he still received 300 damage.

The only penalty to long distance attacks was that the archer's attack speed was slow. However, Duke was faster than the sword. It couldn't be that high because of the archery skill level. He probably had various passive skills that would increase attack speed.

‘He is also a pioneer.....!’

However, Ark just tediously tried to face the archer. Luckily, there was a weak point to rapid fire. The speed was so quick that accuracy fell. The arrows flew over 10 feet, and only some of them got within 1 foot of Ark.

‘Then I don't have to be afraid of blind arrows!’

Ark stopped the arrows that reached him while using appropriate avoidance measures with the rest. And little by little he narrowed the distance between them using explosive acceleration. Duke realized and protested with an arrow! The chances of striking a critical hit was the timing.

‘Got it!’

It was at that time. Suddenly light emerged from Duke's shoes and he slid back a few metres. Thanks to that, Ark attacked in vain and was hit in the side by an arrow shot by Duke.

‘Ugh, that, that was.....!’

“Kukukuk. Magic shoes of this calibre can't be seen anymore.”

‘Shoes? You mean that just now was an item effect?’

Ark looked at Duke's shoes with surprised eyes. The reason that an archer wasn't able to fight directly with a warrior was their stance. Warriors could wield a sword from any position. However, archers

had to hold their position to draw the bow. Of course, it wasn't possible to do a proper attack when the warrior's sword was swinging at them.

However, Duke's shoes ignored that penalty. Gliding didn't move his feet, so he could still hold his stance and shoot while avoiding attacks. That's right. That was the scary point of the pioneers that Shambala pointed out straight away. While unusually high skills was a problem, the real worry was about their items. The pioneers had already hunted in the high-level areas in the early stages and selected all sorts of rare items. Duke smirked and shouted.

"The core of online gaming is the equipment."

Ark ground his teeth together. Of course he knew. Equipment was very important to online gaming. But Ark believed that it wasn't everything. If equipment was everything, wouldn't that mean that a person who started late wouldn't ever be able to catch up with them? He didn't ever want to admit that. That was why he carefully raised his skills from the bottom up and never skipped exercising every day. No, equipment wasn't everything in New World!

"Damn, Dark Dance!"

It was the skill that significantly increased his evasion rate! Ark stepped on the red footprints that floated on the ground and disappeared like a ghost. At the same time, Duke again used rapid fire. However, Ark swung his sword at all the arrows at an incredible pace. Duke began to look puzzled as his evasion movements continued.

Crunch, tu tu tu tung, bang, tu tu tu tung! Duke slid back with the magic shoes while using rapid fire. Ark moved like a ghost using Dark Dance and wielded his sword. He didn't even look up at the fighting magician that was randomly using warp.

He was able to understand the two locations using the sparkle of the sword and the arrow in the darkness. Naturally, Ark and Duke confirmed the opponents with their eyes and attacked. If he could intuitively grasp the path of the opponent, then he would be able to break through the barrage of attacks. And this was Ark's specialty.

“Ugh, this guy.”

Thanks to Dark Dance, Duke retreated with a groan. Ark attacked between arrows, so Duke was hit three or four times with the sword. However, Ark was the one confused. Even with the various dishes and a bunch of bonus darkness attribute stats, only 10% of Duke's health was decreased even though he was hit three or four times. Either his health was ridiculously high, or his armour was loaded with defensive stats. No, if he was a pioneer then both reasons were probably applicable. Still, he couldn't make any attacks with Dark Blade. But Ark soon braced himself.

‘If it's this much, then it is worth doing!’

“Hmm, a frontal confrontation is troublesome as expected. It's better to enjoy myself my way.”

Duke slipped around the corner and went into hiding. He was trying to use guerrilla warfare that the terrain was suited for. That was also Ark's specialty, but it was disadvantageous against an archer. If he was showered with arrows from a high place like a balcony, there was no way for him to avoid all of it.

“You must be quite concerned about me if you're trying to leave.”

Ark turned the corner. However, the figure of Duke did not appear. It was a large square so no matter how fast he was, he wouldn't have been able to hide himself in time. Then?

‘Don't tell me that Duke can also use Stealth?’

Tu tu tu tung!

It was at that time. There was a mechanical sound and countless arrows started falling from the sky.

-You have activated the Poison Arrow trap. 300 damage received. <Thanks to the acid poison, your health will reduce by 10 every 20 seconds for 2 minutes.>

“Hu hu hu, have you finally noticed?” “Tr-trap? If he can use stealth and traps then.....Ranger!”

His laughter was audible in the darkness. Learning stealth and archery, as well as tracking and using traps was one of the most difficult jobs in the archer profession, the Ranger! That was Duke's real profession.

Once Duke showed the characteristics of his profession, Ark was immediately backed into a corner. Duke would hide himself with 'Stealth' and when Ark got stuck in a trap then he would shoot arrows before running away again. Yet Ark couldn't follow blindly. That was because he would intentionally invite him into a trap. In the end, it wasn't possible to do it in this state. But there's even more. The weak point of 'Stealth' was that he couldn't move without Ark hearing the sound. But since the sound of the shoes sliding were light, Duke couldn't completely eliminate the sound of his footsteps. So Ark tried to capture the sound.....

Waeeng!

-A Siren's trap was activated.<Your ear has become paralyzed for 3 minutes and you can't hear any sounds from your surroundings anymore.>

Duke overwhelmed Ark in terms of equipment, skills and every other way. Because the level was fixed to 100, the difference was shown even more. Ark's clothes became wet and he steadily losing health. He also didn't have an effective way to discover the traps. The traps that Duke used didn't simply do damage. There were also traps that could bind and stun. If would take falling into just one dangerous trap for him to be defeated. Duke was a pioneer and had already found a way to overcome the weakness of 'Stealth.'

'I should have done everything I could in the beginning.....I took it too lightly.'

Ark also had a bag of tricks. His poisonous pet snake. However, if was a huge burden for him to use so early so he didn't. It was a mistake. He should've used it early to make the opponent's health decrease even more. He missed the timing, and now the circumstances meant that he couldn't use it easily.

'If I summon my pets now then they won't be any help. Deimos can't avoid the traps, and Dedric was vulnerable to arrows so he would just receive damage instead. And there is no chance to attack with Snake's poison.....'

He was contemplating for a moment before something flashed in Ark's head.

'Pets, poison! Okay, maybe.....!'

"Snake, Paralysis!"

Once his health was reduced to 60%, Ark finally pulled out a trick from his bag.

Ark coated his sword with Snake's poison and walked to the corner where Duke had disappeared, sticking closely to the wall. Then while Deimos was summoned, he hid using 'Stealth.'

"Summon Demon, Deimos. I can only believe in your defense!"

Clack clack clack!

Deimos rushed forward vigorously. Duke had laid out a bunch of traps around the corner.

There was a large roaring sound before visually frightening dust flames and smoke began to spread. Deimos had advanced using his body as a shield. It worked for a while before Deimos was bound in a trap and targeted by arrows.

"Did that stupid guy give up?"

Duke appeared at that time. In the passage shrouded by thick smoke, Deimos was easily mistaken as Ark.

"It's now. Dark Dance!"

Ark quickly rounded the corner and rushed at Duke. He poured a shower of kicks on him.

Duke who had been trying to shoot an arrow never expected the barrage of attacks. He confirmed that it was Deimos a step too late

and tried to run away but Ark had barely managed to catch him. Ark used Dark Dance to move around Duke while kicking and swinging his sword. His sword was stained with paralysis poison and his kick could also cause abnormal conditions! Meanwhile, Deimos had also managed to escape from the trap and went behind him to block Duke's attack.

'I have to end it here!'

But Duke's defense surpassed his imagination. Although he was attacked non-stop for 30 seconds, his health did not fall below 50%. But the paralysis condition was stacked up every time an attack hit and was also layered over with other abnormal conditions.

"Damn, this was expensive.....Warp trap!"

Duke installed a trap at his feet using quick hand movements. Then Duke activated the trap and disappeared before appearing 10 metres away. The moment they were in a desperate situation, the pioneer's experience showed its power once again. The warp trap was a trap that allowed him to move to an area where another trap was laid out. The user could also use the traps as a combo on himself. It was a method of escaping that couldn't have been imagined by Ark.

'But his health is already at 40%. I am more advantageous!'

"I will not forgive you!"

Duke protested and pulled out a bunch of arrows that flashed. It was the magic arrows that cost 40 silvers for 1. In addition, it was level 140. It was a high level archery skill where the arrow would explode once it connected with something. When it was shot, a huge explosion immediately occurred in the area. Rocks fell down as flames rose from all sides.

Clack clack, clack clack clack!

Suddenly, Deimos pushed Ark out of the way at a desperate moment. He received all the falling rock and fire damage! He was a pet that overflowed with loyalty. However, Ark wasn't thankful for the loyalty shown.

-Your pet 'Deimos' had been recalled to the Netherworld. You have received 50% of the Familiar's Health as damage.

The problem was that thanks to evolving in the Underground World, Deimos had 1000 health so Ark received 500 damage. He had put all that effort into making Duke's health 40% and now Ark's health was also 40%. Deimos' health was low from the traps so he was forcefully recalled with that last attack.

"Ugh, this, this guy.....!"

Duke had already hidden his body using 'Stealth.'

"Hu hu hu, now your shield has disappeared entirely. Rest assured however. He's not the only one I will kill. I'll slowly crush you."

Duke's voice was heard in the darkness. When he used it, the skill was useful but if it was on the other side then it was an annoying skill.

'Damn, I didn't realise a ranger was this difficult.'

Since then, the same situation was repeated. When he moved to avoid traps, magic arrows would fly from behind him. If he tried to focus on the arrows then a trap would be triggered. After all of that, Ark's health fell to 20%.

-Shambala has used the 'Trill' skill on you. Would you like to accept?

'Shambala? Maybe he managed to defeat Jewel? '

Ark accepted Trill with an expectant look.

-Ark, what is your situation?

-Honestly, not very good. You? Did you perhaps defeat Jewel?

-.....Wrong.

-What?

-That Jewel is even stronger than before. I was trapped in the

passages where she used magic I've never seen before. I've managed to reduce her health to 40% but I'm in a critical condition.

-.....Damn it! Are we going to lose to them after all?

Ark ground his teeth together. Even though it was a dark dungeon, it only acted as a penalty to them so far. This was because Jewel and Duke were also of the dark attribute. Even if they had the same dark attribute, their skills were entirely different. Ark and Shambala were close combat specialists. But they were professionals at 'hunting' with all the magic and traps. It was obvious that something like a maze of darkness would be beneficial for close combat and hunting.

-I'm sorry. I shouldn't have proposed an individual battle.

-.....

Ark was silent for a moment. Shambala was already half-way to giving up.

However, Ark had no intention of giving up. If he gave up here, then all his efforts in the last six days would've been worthless. And Magaro's secret map that might show the location of huge amounts of money would be given to the unidentified merchants.

The merchants knew the value of the map so he wouldn't be able to obtain it with money or intimidation. Of course, there was still Ark's fight with Duke remaining. However, if Shambala was defeated by Jewel then it would be useless. If Shambala was defeated by Jewel then Ark wouldn't be able to handle her as well as Duke.

'If Shambala dies then everything is finished. But Shambala is in a different area. In order to defeat Jewel and Duke, we must join forces.....'

At that time, a thought flashed through Ark's head.

-Shambhala, didn't we previously have a fight in this cave? It was made clear that the ruins were symmetrical. And there is only one pathway that joins both sides.

-So?

-That's it. Let's use it.

-Let's use it? How?

Shambala asked Ark who began to tell him the plan. Then Shambala thought for a while before replying.

-Certainly.....Yes, there is a possibility that it will work.

-We have no choice but to try it. We have to grasp the feeling, because timing is essential for this strategy. If one of us doesn't make it, or the timing is off by even 1 second then the whole thing will fail. Do you understand?

-I know. Then let's apply your strategy for the last match.

-Let's forward it to exactly 1 minute later, I'll see you there!

Once Ark disconnected the communication, he immediately triggered Adelaine's necklace.

It was a method of recovering mana in an emergency. However, this time Ark triggered the necklace for the 40% increase in defense option. With his defensive powers increased, Ark stepped on the traps that he had avoided previously. There was a ringing sound and Ark's body was tied to a tree trunk.

The Chain Trap was activated.<It isn't possible to move for 30 seconds.>
--

Once the trap worked, Duke immediately appeared and showered him in arrows. Even if he was chained up, he could still move his arm. Ark tried his best to hit all the arrows. However, his health quickly decreased from the rapid fire of the magic arrows. Even though his defense had increased by 40%, by the time the chains came loose he was in a critical condition."Ha ha ha, I finally caught you!"

"This bastard, you're planning to continue as a coward!"

Duke had immediately done a hit and run.

"Hu hu hu, what's the point of a frontal confrontation when you're

already in a critical condition? It's nonsense. But did you just intentionally step on a trap? Kukukuk, how stupid! Do you think that I'm so stupid that I wouldn't notice you have something planned? Rangers have to be vigilant until the end. You should taste the hell of the traps again!"

"Even if I die, I'll bring you with me! Summon release, resummon Dedric!"

Ark had been waiting for his spiritual power to recover to 100%.

"Ugh!"

Dedric appeared with a scream. Ark had summoned Dedric to the stadium. Ark had originally summoned Dedric to gamble on the matches in the stadium. Because he was outside, there was no way to communicate with him. However, when he summoned him in an emergency then his former shape was shown. Dedric had looked like a little boy holding the hand of his father, therefore a young boy holding a megaphone appeared in the arena. In addition to that, he had a large piece of bread stuffed in his mouth. While his master was fighting and almost dying, he was just having a snack!

"M-master! A kind ajusshi gave this to me. Really. I would never use the money from the dividends to buy food."

Dedric couldn't even think of a good excuse. It was like a fish was left to a cat.

Since he had earned quite a lot gambling in the Evil Silrion.....

Ark couldn't enter the gambling place as a participant. Therefore, he used Dedric as a smoke screen who ran around buying snacks with the money. Although he wanted to throw it away, now wasn't the time.

"Shut up and pursue that fellow immediately!"

"Then, this never happened....."

Damn, more time was being wasted thanks to his cheap tricks.

"I get it so hurry up before that guy gets away! If you lose him then

you'll die!"

"Allegiance! Hurray Master!"

Dedric turned into a bat and caught up with Duke. 'Stealth' couldn't be used if someone was looking at them. That was the trump card that Ark came up with. When Duke couldn't use 'Stealth,' he shot his arrows with a puzzled expression. But who was Dedric? In terms of his summons, he was the second in terms of combat ability!

"Heung, I'm not afraid of arrow! My master is more scary!"

Dedric used the pillars as shields and stared until his eyeballs popped out. Thanks to that, Duke couldn't use 'Stealth' and had no choice but to be chased by Ark. After a while, Ark measured the time and gave an order to Dedric.

"Dedric, block the passage to the left and drive that guy towards the right passage!"

"Okay!"

Dedric blocked the left passage and shouted at Duke with a loud voice.

"Shrimp! I'm going to capture you and eat you!"

"Ugh, that annoying bat!"

But Duke held his ground and didn't waste time arguing with Dedric. Ark was coming up behind him with a menacing expression. In fact, Ark was already in a critical condition. There was no reason for Duke to be afraid of him. However, the fact that Ark deliberately stepped into the trap made Duke feel anxious.

'That guy, he definitely has something. Perhaps he has an item capable of recovery magic.....'

Eventually, the psychological warfare won and he turned his body and headed down the right passage. Then, he heard Shambala's voice again through the use of Trill.

-Ark, I'm heading to that place!

-Okay. I'm also almost finished driving him there.

-Count it down. 3, 2, 1.....now! 6 o'clock at my back, 3 m above!

-Duke is at the front just around the corner!

Ark and Shambala shouted at the same time. Just before Duke turned the corner, Shambala popped out from the rock. That's right. In the Pandemonium arena, the left and right side structures were the same. Shambala and Ark were battling on separate sides. And there was a corner where the 2 caves connected that was broken by a sharp angle. Ark and Shambala had worked out a strategy to aggressively swap partners there.

"What, what the? How did these guys.....?"

Duke was puzzled and lifted an eyebrow. However, after Shambala turned the corner he had already used a deadly skill.

"Torpedo Sword!"

The dagger sparked with lightning and a vortex was formed around the dagger as it rushed towards Duke. It was the hidden profession, Saint Assassin! The destructive power was enormous. Duke fell into the critical condition and he also had the 'electric shock' status. Of course, Ark wasn't just watching. Taking advantage of Duke's paralysis, Ark jumped and used his strongest skill.

"Take this, Blade Storm!"

Ark always had decent swords in a bag or two. It was in order to use Blade Storm at the last moment. As soon as Ark had pulled out a black sword from the bag, he used Blade Storm in the air. He was following Shambala's directions of the target being 3 m up in the 6 o'clock direction!

Kwa ru ru rung!

The well-made sword was crushed to pieces and the fragments started to stir. At that moment, Jewel who was chasing Shambala appeared around the corner. Jewel was floating in the air with a translucent shield to protect herself. It was the protection magic

which caused certain amounts of damage to become invalid. But the protective shield was quickly destroyed by the powerful offensive of Blade Storm. Jewel was surrounded by a vortex of shield fragments and was forced to the ground.

“Ugh, what on earth is this.....?”

Jewel still couldn't grasp the situation.

“What is going on? You guys have become the targets!”

“Ugh, hell.....! You say that like it was a planned mission!”

“It is the end. Dark Blade!”

Ark ran up to Jewel and used Dark Blade.

“Damn, don't look down on me, Warp!”

When a magician and warrior battle became close combat, the warrior would be superior because the magician's magic would fail. The magician had to memorize a chant in order to use the magic. When the magic was invoked, it would appear in front of them and they would have to activate it. In dire situations, the magic reaction speed would naturally slow down and the magic would fail. The magician's magic would fail without the right words. But that didn't happen. Even when the situation was dire, Jewel was experienced enough to remember the chant and her warp succeeded. Jewel appeared 10 metres away using warp and immediately used mist magic to disappear.

“Dedric, after her!”

“There's no need. Leave it to me, Ark. I'll take care of it!”

Shambala shouted at Ark while he was wielding his sword. At the moment an amazing thing happened. The crowd couldn't understand what it saw, or Ark.....and maybe even Shambala couldn't imagine that such a perfect picture would be created. However, at the moment Ark understood Shambala completely and swung his sword at him. He didn't intend to do it but it suddenly flashed and separated. Then. Although they had forgotten for a while, Ark and

Shambala had a strange synergy with each other while fighting together.....this was because words couldn't describe it.

“Riposte!”

Ark made his Riposte hit Shambala's sword. The two swords clashing together caused sparks to fly! Ark's counter struck Shambala's chest. At the same time, the additional effect of Riposte kicked in. Shambala didn't fight it and instead added to the pushing force, propelling him even more powerfully into the sky. He surprisingly flew 15 metres and struck with his dagger while using Torpedo Sword. A ray like lightning burned through the darkness. And Shambala penetrated Jewel's body that fell to the ground. In her last moments, Jewel's laughter came flowing out.

“Ah ah ah ak! U-unbelievable.....I.....I.....to guys like you!!”

It was like the reaction of a boss monster. Anyway, Jewel was surrounded by blue sparks and disappeared. Ark turned around and quickly looked at Duke.

“Ugh!”

Duke was barely out of the electric shock state and only had 1% health left. When Jewel had died in vain, he immediately lost his fighting spirit. Duke jumped up and tried to run away. Ark smiled and gave an order to Dedric.

“Dedric, how much have you piled up?”

“Ohuhuhuhu, tormenting weak guys are my specialty. Leave it to me! Dark Dash!”

Dedric flew like the wind and struck Duke in the head. Duke received the ‘Darkness’ status and struggled as he fell down.

“This guy! This guy! How dare you shoot an arrow at the my master that I respect? And you even sent Deimos back to the Netherworld? Then let me return the favour to you!”

Thus, the pioneer Duke was stepped on so much by Dedric that he

died. Dedric who had controlled Duke trembled and reached out with both hands.

“Hehehe, Master. I handled the villain. Aren’t I pretty? Right?”

Dedric was really showing off. Shambala who was watching suddenly laughed.

“Kuk, hahaha, hahahaha. It really is fun fighting with you!”

Ark also let out a silly laugh. It was the toughest battle he ever had, and it was also the most exciting. When the two died, there was a ringing sound and Pandemonium suddenly disappeared. However, the crowd was so quiet that it was strange.

Then like a needle falling, a voice was heard.....

Like the crowd, the magic eye had been looking at the two of them with a bemused expression. Then like he suddenly woke up, the magic eye burst out with a loud noise.

-A, awesome! Blue Sword and Dark Wolf player! They were able to overcome the disadvantage in skills using strategies and the two opposing players were eventually defeated! It is this! The real beauty of the Evil Silrion arena! Ah, have you ever seen such a wonderful battle?Therefore, the winners of the 186th Pairs Tournament have been decided. With this tournament, he has the record of 49 straight matches, Blue Sword! And after his debut, Dark Wolf who made a shocking impact and won 12 straight matches.

Now the whole arena vibrated with shouts. Firecrackers burst in the night sky while the crowd stomped their feet and chanted Blue Sword and Dark Wolf. The users who bet on Jewel and Duke also generously cheered.”Wah ah ah!”

“That was more amazing than watching a real fight!”

“This fight was worth every penny, even if the admission fee was expensive!”

“The best. I had to watch that match no matter what!”

“Blue sword and Dark Wolf, this time you should become pros!”

“That’s right, you should play in more matches. I’ll get to see it every day!”

The stadium shook up and down.

Ark realized that 1,000 people had competed in this tournament and he had actually won.

Frenzied Night

Ark and Shambala raised a hand to acknowledge the cheers and returned to the waiting room.

“It was quite fun.”

“The next match won’t be as fun.”

Shambala replied with a slightly stiff expression. Yes, they’ve won the tournament as planned. And in the next match, Shambala would be his opponent. In order to obtain the three clues, the two of them need to have one final battle. So far, they’ve decided to join hands and feet and fight together. That wasn’t a good thing at all. However, Shambala soon lost the tension in his face and laughed.

“Well, for the moment let’s just rejoice. We’ve managed to beat the pioneers in the Evil Silrion that many people couldn’t manage to do. We’ve earned the right to be happy.”

At that time, an administrative NPC came to the waiting room.

“Blue Sword and Dark Wolf. Can you come to the VIP room right now?”

“The VIP room?”

“Yes, an honoured guest is eager to meet the two of you.”

Ark and Shambala tilted their heads and followed the NPC to the VIP room. It was a nice room overlooking the arena and when they entered, an NPC with a chubby belly spread out his arms and welcomed them. The large number of jewellery hanging on his body shook and rattled carelessly.

“Ooh, come come! The great warriors that brightened the Evil Silrion. I’m Voltaire, the main person in charge of the Evil Silrion. I can see that your maturity is truly overflowing!”

“What can I do for you?”

Shambala asked in a brusque voice. Shambala acted quite different from the way he normally treated NPCs. Voltaire winced, but quickly smiled and nodded.

“Ha ha ha, the warrior is showing a well-suited arrogance. It’s okay, I understand. Because you showed skills that are a match for your arrogance.”

Ark hadn’t said anything but he was also treated like gold.

“I was quite impressed when watching your match, the way an ordinary foreigner managed to defeat the pioneers! It was quite boring to watch the pathetic warriors that would give up when fighting the pioneers. But you refuse to do that and faced each other beautifully. It was the first time I had seen such an admirable match. Thanks to that, the reputation of the Evil Silrion will increase even more.”

Voltaire praised them until the saliva in his mouth became dry.

“Did you call us just to say that?”

Shambala showed signs of annoyance. And Voltaire asked in a coy voice with astute eyes.

“Have you ever thought about becoming an exclusive gladiator?”

“Exclusive gladiator?”

“Yes. There are many special gladiators under contract with the Evil Silrion and sometimes they would hold special matches. Of course, the prize money and supplementary prize given to the gladiator exclusive matches cannot even be compared to the ordinary tournament prizes. There is also a separate pay that is given every month. Anyone who knows about the Evil Silrion would covet the job. How about it?”

Once he finished talking, there was a ringing sound and two message windows popped up.

[[You have received the proposal to become an ‘Exclusive Gladiator’]]

from Voltaire, the moderator of the Evil Silrion.

In addition to their profession job, a player is also given an opportunity to choose a sub-occupation. You can receive a sub-profession from the senior NPC once you fulfil certain conditions. These sub-professions aren't related to your main profession. When choosing a sub-profession, it is possible to learn exclusive skills. However, if you choose to leave the sub-profession and pick another one then the exclusive skills will disappear.]

Become an Exclusive Gladiator in the Evil Silrion

Gladiators can be exclusively hired by the moderators of the Evil Silrion. Only warriors that display an excellent ability that charmed the crowd are able to choose this profession. If you become a gladiator, it is possible to receive many bonuses such as gladiator exclusive training facilities, stores and so on. They are also informed in advance of the schedule of all the tournaments as well as the prizes, and they are also automatically seeded and receive the right to start in the round of 16. There is also a monthly pay of 30 gold per month. A special bonus for special matches will also be paid. However, it is required to play at least one tournament per month.

Would you like to accept the offer of the sub-profession 'Exclusive Gladiator?'

"I refuse."

Shambala didn't even have to think about it as he replied. Voltaire sighed in disappointment and looked at Ark. He could improve his skills and earn quite a lot of money in the Evil Silrion. The conditions that Voltaire suggested were also pretty good. Aside from the salary, the other rights were quite plausible as well. However, there was a part that was quite worrisome. The provision that he would have to play at least one tournament once a month. Didn't that mean that he couldn't leave the vicinity of Selebrid? New World was quite

wide and there were a number of things to do. Ark was too young (?) to sit in one place.

“I’m also not going to become an exclusive gladiator.”

At the end, Ark also politely declined. Voltaire lowered his shoulders and sighed.

“Valuable. With your capacity, the reputation of the gladiators in the Evil Silrion would certainly grow.....but I can’t force you. Alright. Instead, I just want to see the wonderful sight of you two again. Please participate in a tournament again when you get the chance. Can you promise that?”

“Thank you. Although I have to decline the proposal due to various circumstances, I won’t forget the fact that a popular noble like Voltaire-nim thinks so deeply of me.”

Ark smiled his business smile and gently answered. Voltaire fidgeted with his ring and laughed. Thanks to Shambala’s indifferent attitude, Ark’s kindness seemed to shine even more.

“Oh, your modest character is a wonderful thing. I would love to see thousands of warriors like you! Ah, I suddenly remembered. Although I only promised the original compensation to the winner. Thanks to you two, the Evil Silrion was unusually prosperous for the last couple of days. As a repayment for that, it isn’t so great but here is a little souvenir I’ve prepared.”

When Voltaire reached out his hand, an administration immediately handed over a box that contained a thick leather bracelet.

Gladiator’s Honour (Unique, Locked)
Armour type: Leather Bracelet
Defense power: 15
Durability: 60/60
Weight: 10

User restriction: Level 100 or more

This is a symbol of honour that is given to gladiators that have fulfilled certain conditions in the Evil Silrion. It is a special compensation for the popular gladiators that have managed to draw a crowd of 10,000 spectators to the Evil Silrion. Although the Gladiator's bracelets are great, its value is more than just honour. Those who respect the honour of warriors will give you a lot of respect. The Gladiator's Honour will also have the name 'Ark' carved on the inside. This means that transferring the item to someone else is impossible.

In addition, there is no possibility of using magic or a scroll to break it.

<Option: Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%>

'U-unique bracelets! Recently, I've been quite lucky?'

It was an unexpectedly huge reward. That fact that Ark had gone through a lot of trouble in the Evil Silrion to only obtain one quest item had made him feel quite dissatisfied. But he never imagined that he would receive an item for mobilization a lot of spectators, not winning the tournament. In addition, it was a unique item!

The performance of the unique bracelet was enormous. It was rare that bracelets with a defense of 15 would also increase strength, stamina and agility by 10 points. But the first thing that caught his eye was the +5% of all sword-based skills option. Thanks to the 5% increase, it was possible to make his Sword-Hand Combat grow even faster. The only downside was that the item was character locked so it wasn't possible to sell it. But since it raised his Sword-Hand Combat growth, he wouldn't have wanted to sell it anyway. With the bracelet that he hunted in the Forest of Souls, he now had it on both arms. However, he didn't want to sell the Amulet of Vitality. Last night, the power boosted by 5 was barely enough to save him. Although it couldn't compare to the warrior's honour, it was also a useful item. Ark looked at the Warrior's honour on his right

arm.

‘Hu hu hu, I managed to obtain two bracelets and shoulder plates from this.’

However, he felt that he was lacking more. When he put it on, he felt like wearing it on both wrists. However, one of the bracelets was Shambala’s share.

‘Sheesh, if it wasn’t a locked item then I would try to obtain it somehow.....’

In front of items, friendship didn’t matter to Ark.

“Starting from today, a weekly magazine published by the Evil Silrion will be sent to your mailbox for free. And the offer to become an exclusive gladiator is still open so if you ever change your mind, come and see me. I’ll leave my door wide open for you!”

The NPC was offering quite a lot. Was it okay to receive the unique item and a free weekly newsletter? Furthermore, he could become an exclusive gladiator anytime he wanted to.

Ark sent ‘Hu hu hu, my social life is going to be like this’ with a look from his eyes. Then Shambala responded ‘Do you want to live?’ with his eyes.

“Well, take this and go. You can receive the victory cash prize and the supplementary prize at the management office.”

Voltaire smiled and shook hands with only Ark. He was quite a narrow minded guy for someone with a large bulk. Anyway, they finally went to the management office to receive their compensation.

-You have won the 186th Pairs Tournament.

Current record: 12 wins

<Tournament Winner Bonus: Fame +300, Experience + 20,000>

-You have received the prize money of 200 gold for the 186th Pairs Tournament.
--

-The supplementary prize for the 186th Pairs Tournament is Magaro's secret map.

There was a side alley next to the Evil Silrion. The hooded merchants A, B, C gnashed their teeth furiously. They had spent 24 hours crying thanks to Jewel and Duke's blackmail. They weren't poor merchants, but nevertheless 1,500 gold was a lot of money. Most of their money was tied up in trade investments, so the only cash they could move was 1,050 gold. Then they had to desperately find an extra 450 gold in 24 hours.

'We have to obtain it. This is a good investment!'

But it wasn't an easy task to find all that money. Eventually they had to sell off items piled up in warehouses for a much lower price than the market price. But they were still short 100 gold so they pledged their investments as collateral and borrowed money from high interest lenders. After all the blood and tears shed, they barely made 500 gold.....

"What the hell is this!"

Merchant A shook his fist and spat out curses.

"Those damn pioneers! They dared to bluff and raise the price only to fail! Those empty noisy cans! They should go to hell, those bastards!"

"We tried so hard to make the money that we even took out high interest loans....."

"Huk huk huk, now we're going to die."

The pioneers were beaten to death in the final match. Immediately after the fight, the pioneers vanished. Indeed, why would they face their partner unless forced? Thanks to those guys, they went through

all that suffering to make money and now they vanished like chickens. While he was crying, Merchant C muttered with a concerned face.

“Sniff, Hyung-nim. What do we do now? We received damage and even racked up a huge debt, but now the final clue is in their hands.”

“.....There is no other way.”

Merchant A was locked in thought for a moment before he said in a deliberate voice. Merchant B and C swallowed their spit and avoided his gaze.

“Hyung-nim, by the way.....”

“Mercenaries, should we hire mercenaries?”

“We have no choice. We are merchants after all. We shouldn’t just resign ourselves to these damages. If possible, I didn’t want to use a fearsome or vicious method.....but, Blue Sword and Dark Wolf asked for it.”

“But they are the tournament winners. Don’t you think they’re very strong?”

“Yes but they are only two people. Even including their colleagues that we saw at the main entrance, it’s only a few people. In addition, the levels of those 10 people don’t seem that high.”

Yes, although Ark was well hidden they were already aware that Dark Wolf and Ark was the same person. After listening to Ark’s and Shambala’s conversation, they had secretly followed them back to the main gate.

“Yes Hyung-nim! You’ve even grasped such a thing!”

While Merchant B and C raised their voices, Merchant A just shrugged.

“Hu hu hu, I didn’t make it this far as a merchant without raising my insight. Anyway, if we hire 10 level 120 mercenaries then that should be enough to take care of them. No matter how good Blue Sword and Dark Wolf is, they wouldn’t be able to defeat those number of

people.”

“Indeed. But our purpose isn’t to kill them but to retrieve the items.”

“Of course.”

Merchant A smiled and took out a few scrolls. Then Merchant B and C became frightened.

“H, Hyung-nim! That surely……!”

“I see you’ve figured it out. Yes, this is the rumoured chaotic scrolls [Peek] and [Robbery]. It is a fearsome item that allows someone to peek into the target’s bag and steal one designated item from them. Most merchants are afraid of these scrolls but I’m different. In some cases, they should be used. I happened upon these scrolls a while ago and kept them.”

“Oh oh, what wonderful foresight!”

“Ohu hu hu hu, are you surprised? I’m surprised. Because the chaotic scrolls are still items that only merchants know information about. I’ve never dreamed that I would use these scrolls. Recently there was a hobbit merchant that was hanging around Selebrid selling these scrolls. Although the market price was a little bit high…….”

Merchant A smacked his lips and murmured.

“Even if it is Blue Sword and Dark Wolf, they won’t be able to stop the scrolls. When they die, they will be robbed and any extra items can be sold as extra profit. I don’t want to kill, but if they hang onto it then it is the last resort. When threatened with the scroll then they should hand over the items.”

“As expected of Hyung-nim!”

“But don’t we need plenty of money to hire 20 mercenaries level 12?”

“You don’t have to worry.”

Merchant A replied.

“Selebrid is overflowing with tons of unemployed people.”

Unfortunately, it was an undeniable fact. In Selebrid, there were many users over level 100. However even though their levels are high, not all of them lived affluent lives. No, higher level users that had a profession other than merchant tended to be poor. Even though their health was higher, they needed deluxe wheat bread to recover it and the repair price for equipment was also no joke. The users who couldn't manage their finances were no different to beggars after their equipment completely breaks. Naturally, if they drank potions then hardships would only increase. That wasn't the only reason they were poor. In Selebrid, gambling thrived thanks to the Evil Silrion. And the simple warriors were weak to such temptation. They would waste all their savings in a pub binge or find a casino with high inflation until they lost so much that they were forced to mortgage their equipment. It was to the extent that with no money and no equipment, the level 100 users couldn't even go out hunting without dying. Probably, the rehabilitation group and Roco would end up in a similar situation. It was a miscalculation to think that a high level user would earn a lot of money like Ark. He had strict money management and would even run 1 kilometres to get an extra copper or go an extra 10 kilometres to cut the cost by 1 copper. Other users had no concept of such a method of saving. Anyway, the users that have become like beggars were desperate for jobs. A job where they would clearly be paid was even more of a blessing than hunting!

“Hire level 120 users but draw the line at 50 gold for 1 day.”

“But they might have to kill someone.”

“The final blow is limited to 2~3 people with the highest level. And when they become chaotic and enter the prison, we will pay compensation for the penalty. We still have the 1,500 gold we promised to the pioneers.”

“Oh oh, it is a perfect plan!”

“Isn't it? Hu hu hu, sometimes I'm afraid of the inside of my head as well.”

Merchant A rolled his eyes and said.

“Now, I don’t have the time. The fellow who obtains the clue can’t know that we are seeking treasure.

“I understand!”

Merchant B and C moved their short legs and disappeared into the alley.

“What now?”

At that time, Ark and Shambala faced unexpected problems. Ark and Shambala had won the Pairs Tournament so there was only one thing left to do. But before the decisive battle, they had to put the clues together first. However, Sid who had left at the beginning still hadn’t returned. He had sent a letter using the Magic Institute’s letterbox.

Ark-nim, this is taking longer than expected. You don’t have to be concerned because business is still fine.
--

That was the letter send to him from Sid. But there was no way to figure out why he was late from the contents of the letter.

“Maybe he forgot the items and had to return for it?”

However, Ark had no way to contact Sid straight away. Because Sid was a poor merchant so he didn’t have a transfer mailbox. Of course there was a way to send general mail, but general mail had to designate a village rather than a person. However, Ark didn’t even know the area that Sid was wandering around. An item was an item, but Sid was carrying thousands of gold so he was worried about him leaving behind schedule. But Ark shook his head.

‘It would take a lot of time to organize the items and turn it into 5,500 gold. There are a number of significant items. Yes, my hyungs and I

invested a lot of money, so even if it takes a long time, it is important to sell it at a suitable price.'

"What should we do Shambala? Sid doesn't seem to be returning for a while?"

Ark explained the truth to Shambala. Shambala looked thoughtful for a while before nodding.

"If you can't contact him then it's not possible. Since he also has to hold the items while conducting business. Then our fight will be postponed until Sid returns."

"I suppose. What else can we do?"

Ark nodded while looking at the secret map. In fact, Magaro's quest wouldn't be able to proceed even if Sid was back now. He never thought that there would be a restriction on the secret map.

[Magaro's Secret Map (Quest Starting Item)]

An old parchment with unknown letters and geometric symbols written on it. Although it shows tough terrain, it is difficult to guess the location just by looking at the map. It seems to require other clues in order to decipher the symbols and characters.

<Quest Progression Minimum Condition: One or more additional clues, Level 150 >]

'This is what Shannen means by the quest being difficult.'

Ark recalled Shannen's words. When he gave the quest, he added that it wouldn't be an easy one for Ark to complete. Although he didn't pay attention at the time, now it was a small hint. This was a virtual reality game, so naturally there would be a limit restriction on an NPC's request. If the minimum progression requirement for the quest was level 150, then if he had to guess then he would have to be level 160~180 before he could start it. However, Ark's current level was 127. Although his skills gained a lot of experience in the Evil Silrion, he could only raise his level by 4 in the Forest of Souls. In the end, he had to be 23 levels higher in order to continue the

quest. Shambala's situation wasn't too different from Ark's.

"Shambala, what are you going to do?"

"Let's see....."

"We can wait for Sid here, or I can gain 23 levels in some decent hunting grounds and meet up again later."

"I'll consider the problem a little bit more. I still have a job to do in this area. But I don't know how long it will take."

That was when someone started hitting the both of them.

"Hey, you've just won the martial arts tournament so why are you giving off a bad impression? I don't know what you guys are talking about but let me buy you a drink!"

Ark and Shambala jumped and turned around. He had turned off the transformation and Shambala had also changed his mask and cloak so they felt wary. However, Ark quickly solved the problem.

"JusticeMan ajusshi? How?"

"Ha ha ha, we heard that you were in the finals and ran here."

"Oppa, I've come as well."

Roco poked out her tongue and interrupted JusticeMan. But they weren't alone. The rehabilitation group was also gathered. They were one of the groups cheering in the stadium while wearing a cap and holding megaphones along with Dedric.

"Ark, I saw the match."

"Was it challenging? Also Shambala as well, they are indeed our younger siblings."

"He he he, thanks to betting on you we earned quite a bit of money."

"It was thrilling. To such an extent that we want to go and fight in a tournament right now."

The anticipation caused Bul-kkun's chest to rise as he took a deep

breath.

And then Jjak-tung said in a gentle voice.

“Easy. We have more important things right now.”

“Eum, I know.”

“Yes? Something more important? Weren’t you looking for the thief, Hyung-nim?”

“We already found that guy.”

Jjak-tung smile subtly and looked at Ark.

“While solving that job, we ran into a bigger problem. Well, let’s talk about that one later. Because you’ll soon know anyway. Hu hu hu, these hyungs will probably see it again.”

“Now it is time for alcohol! You won so of course you have to drink alcohol! Come on, Ark!”

His expression became light as he shouted. New World was so realistic that they could even get drunk in the game. Because it isn’t real liquor, it would break up over time but while they were drinking it would feel like the real thing. That was the main reason the taverns in New World were always busy. People could get drunk comfortably while drinking but there would be no hangovers. If someone drank then they would get the drunk ‘condition.’ In addition, the tavern atmosphere was quaint. The alcohol tasted good and sometimes a good looking minstrel would sing. Where else could a drinker find a better environment? Thanks to that, they would often dine in the taverns in New World. The rehabilitation company was also very fond of the liquor in New World. However, Ark didn’t like drinking that much. He couldn’t understand why people would spend a lot of money on drinks.

“No, I’m a little weak to alcohol..... ”

Ark tried to refuse the drinking party. Then he became frightened as the rehabilitation group surrounded Ark.

“Ark, you aren’t trying to say that you don’t like alcohol are you?”

“Hey, your character must be really dull.”

“Please speak clearly. Do you want to drink alcohol or break off our relationship?”

“Yes? Yes? But what.....?”

Ark was confused as the attitudes of the rehabilitation group suddenly changed. However, the rehabilitation group was serious. The atmosphere seemed like it would become really serious if he refused.

“I’ll take some. I’ll drink.”

“That’s it! Ark, you’re a man as expected!”

The rehabilitation members clenched their fists firmly and cheered. Then they looked pathetically at Roco and said.

“He he he, Roco. Drinks with Ark. Because it is a celebration party. It would be worthless not to drink today, yes?”

“Ugh, really.....I understand. But only for today. In the future there will be no broth.”

“Wow, that’s it! Drinks today!”

The rehabilitation members danced joyfully before grabbing Ark and Shambala and running to the tavern. The rehabilitation members couldn’t drink the favourite drinks for several days. Of course, it was because the dictator Roco was clutching the money tightly. So the rehabilitation members had been waiting for today with bloodshot eyes. They were convinced that Roco was likely to open the wallet strings for Ark’s celebration party. And their guess was right.

“At any rate, I couldn’t stop them.”

Roco checked the wallet and sighed. However, it was for Ark. She was willing to spend money for him.

“For the champions!”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation company lifted their glass with a happy expression. Although it had been a long time since he went to a tavern, he could hear a sound every time he drank. The reason was simple. Every time Ark drank alcohol, it was impossible to tell that Roco was accepting something from Ark underneath the table.

“Sheesh, I never thought that you would be the champion first.”

“Well, I only say the final match but it was wonderful. The audience was also hanging on to every move.”

“Yes, we contributed quite a lot to the pot for you in the final game. Because Roco was gambling, everyone bet to the upper limit.”

“Tonight we’ll drink until we’re satisfied!”

“Hey, bring 30 cups of beer here! When will the pork barbeque come out?”

If the rehabilitation group had a chance, they would drink away the whole bar. Nevertheless as the rehabilitation group had difficult pasts, their standards were different. There was yelling across the bar and some people were even getting up on the tables to dance. It was to the extent that someone could feel drunk from the atmosphere. When they started drinking, their behaviour when drunk immediately showed. When he became drunk, Jjak-tung’s attitude went through a 180 degree change.

“Hey, Ark.....Hiccup. You mean.....you know that we love? He he he, I’m really desirable. However, that.....don’t do it.....what.....it’s Roco. Eh, taken. What was I saying? Oh, so.....Because I think I do like you?”

Jjak-tung clung onto Ark and kept on repeating the same words. The bar was a part time career that was quite a tough opponent for Ark. Shambala was the only one that remained sullenly unchanged. Shambala was staring at a 1000 CC mug of beer on the table.

“Now, time for a one-shot again.”

When Bul-kkun emptied the beer mug, Shambala just glared silently at the empty mug. Shambala had a strong fighting spirit and rose to the provocation as he emptied a mug of 5,000 CC beer.

“Hu hu hu, you, do you like it? Let’s see who will give up first.”

“Drink! Drink! Drink!”

The rehabilitation members surrounding the two of them cheering while knocking on the table. Fortunately, the rehabilitation members didn’t talk about Roco becoming the leader.

“Hah, why is it noisy? Excuse me.”

“He he he, it’s okay. Isn’t a tavern the place where you drink and make noise?”

The tavern owner generously laughed and replied. However even if the NPC didn’t mind, it weighed on Roco’s mind as she took the tray.

“Give me that. I’ll take it.”

It was at that time that a problem occurred. When she carried the tray, in the eyes of the users Roco’s form became visible along with the NPC. A company of users froze and smirked as they noticed her.

“Hey, pretty lady?”

“Why don’t you sit here and I’ll give you some tips on drinking?”

“What?”

When Roco raised an eyebrow, the boys giggled.

“Ho oh, why do you look even more attractive when you’re angry?”

“A woman that prickly would have more passion at night.”

“Hu hu hu, the director knows a bit about women.”

If you go to a bar then there are humans just like this one. The humans which would unnecessarily tease a woman. New world was a place where many types of people gathered. But today they

picked the wrong opponent. The atmosphere of the rehabilitation group that was laughing instantly became chilly.

“Hey, you. What did you say just now?”

They lowered their glasses angrily. It wasn't enough. JusticeMan, Hae Gyeol-sa, Yapsab and even Jjak-tung stood up and glared at them. Although they lived a new life, they were rehabilitated children of the darkness. Even though they were in a game, their bloodthirsty impression was no joke. The director of the group of men stuttered.

“What, what the. Who are you? A gang?”

“Say one more word if you want to go scuba diving into cement off the coast of Incheon.”

“I don't know what you are but do you know who I am?”

“You've just decided your fate with your answer. As fish food.”

The guy flinched away frightened from their rage. However, it was a slow game. The users drinking alcohol in Selebrid were quite high level. Furthermore, the company numbered 10 people. Anyway, thanks to the rehabilitation members the atmosphere had become quite tense. However, the tavern owner just looked at it with a pained expression. Although he wanted to intervene, he didn't have the courage. However, his salvation was soon offered from an unexpected place.

“Oppas, please have some moderation!”

Roco banged on the rehabilitation group's table who instantly became like rabbits.

What is this? You're adults with advanced capabilities! Do you know how unsightly it is to start a fight in a bar? You also made the owner nervous.”

“Eh? W-we just.....”

“That's enough. Don't prolong it.”

Roco turned to JusticeMan who cleared his throat.

“Hmm hmm, yes, Roco is right. Well, the tavern isn’t the place for this. Let’s just drink.”

In the end, the rehabilitation members sat dejectedly in their seats. And the other company started chatting with tense faces.

“Sheesh, what the? They started trembling just because of a girl.”

“Right. It is unexpected for fellows that look like that.”

“Anyway, that is the problem these days. Those sort of guys just run wild. They would probably be forced into the corner of a room when playing a game. Those fools, the only ones that would probably understand them for the rest of their lives are their parents.”

“Just by looking at them, I can tell that they’re the type to play roughly.”

“They probably haven’t even stepped through the threshold of a university.”

“They’re probably punks or delinquents.”

Every time the guys in the company spoke, an angry vein would throb on the foreheads of the rehabilitation members. They were sticking pins into the painful parts of the rehabilitation members. Roco also felt the same. However, Roco ground her teeth and shook her head.

“It’s okay. Oppa, don’t bother with them.”

“Kyaak, what are you doing?”

Suddenly a sharp scream could be heard from one side of the tavern. The eyes of the rehabilitation group immediately looked over there. There are several female users over there chatting. Then one of the guys from the company went over there and stroked a body. Jjak-tung’s eyes flashed as he immediately grasped the situation.

“A lady is in a crisis!”

“If you’re a true South Korean man then you can’t enough such a thing!”

Bul-kkun stood up with a happy face. That's when Roco suddenly banged the table. They jumped and turned to see Roco staring angrily at them before she said.

"Those uncles, get them!"

That was enough to sort out the whole situation. The rehabilitation members shouted with joy before rushing towards the company of men. In fact, Ark had also been annoyed by their words earlier. Since he knew how the rehabilitation members' lives used to be, Ark couldn't forgive them for those words.

"Dark blade!"

Ark made a scene as he jumped over the table and used his special move. The director of the company screamed and rolled onto the ground. As he cursed and tried to pull out his sword, JusticeMan grabbed his throat and threw him. The company was definitely higher level than them. However, when it was a fight in a bar they were no match for the rehabilitation members. They were also attacked by surprise so they couldn't get their swords out in time. After a few moments, they were all stretched out bruised on the ground. Then the guy that was the director shouted.

"Th-these guys! This is Selebrid! Do you think you'll get away with killing us?"

That's a problem. A grey name was quickly restored but if they became chaotic then it was a much larger problem. It was at that time. Shambala sat up and murmured in a sleepy voice.

"Death's Agent....."

Death's Agent! It was the special skill of the Saint Assassin where they received permission for certain actions from the Death God, so even if he killed someone then he wouldn't become chaotic! Shambala looked at the ceiling while idling watching the director shout.

"I don't like these guys either. Ark, tell the hyungs to surround these guys. If others see then it would become difficult."

Ark and the rehabilitation members laughed as they turned and made a wall. That was because Death's Agent would be ineffective if seen by other NPCs or users. Soon, an awful ringing sound was heard and the guys became corpses. After Shambala took care of it, the rehabilitation members went back to eating and drinking like nothing had happened. After a while, the tavern owner approached with an appetizers.

"That lady bought these for you."

"Eh?"

The rehabilitation members looked over in surprise and saw the female user wink.

"You were cool, scary ajusshi."

"L-lady."

Bul-kkun trembled and muttered.

"I.....New world is very good."

Roco also felt pretty good and laughed as she said.

"Okay. Since the noisy ajusshi is in this state, let's drink all night."

"Oh oh oh, all night!"

"Yes! Roco!"

The rehabilitation members shouted and began to enthusiastically order alcohol. Ark was confused at the change in Roco that he never imagined. Then Roco stumbled as she moved back into place. Ark quickly caught her before she fell and held Roco's head.

"Hehehe, Ark oppa.....today you were pretty cool."

He could quickly smell the alcohol coming from her.

"Roco, how much alcohol did you drink?"

"Drink, I drank one earlier because I was upset about those guys oooooh."

Roco's tongue curled as she answered.

"Oppa, oppa, listen when I talk. Do you remember the guy at work I told you about before? That guy started teasing me again yesterday. I really dislike those kind of people. So I slapped him on the cheek. Hehehe, I did well right? If oppa saw me off every day then that wouldn't happen.....and I'll get to see oppa every day.....Roco is sad."

From the side, Shambala looked at Ark with sympathetic eyes.

"What a flashy brother, able to put her to sleep with one word.....Ark, I can roughly see your future."

"Damn, noisy,"

At that time, the noise from the drinking party inside the tavern was at its peak. The still in debt Merchants A, B and C were still on the corner of an alley, shivering from the cold wind. Just like reality, New World also had pretty cold nights.

"Ooh, Hyung-nim. It is cold."

Merchant C murmured with a tearful voice.

"Please hang in there. We don't know if they will go to another place. There must be eyes on them at all times."

"B-but.....cold.....cough!"

"Damn, wouldn't those guys be drunk and happy by now?"

Merchant B glared at the tavern.

"Huk, while we had to live on wheat bread to hire the mercenaries....."

Merchant C was close to tears as he chewed on a wheat bread.

“Don’t cry. Stop crying!”

Merchant A started to become angry. But he was the leader so he clenched his fist firmly with a resolute face.

“Although we are cold and hungry, in the end we will be the final winner. At the end of the quest, we will rent out an entire tavern and idle for many days. Then we can laugh freely at those guys. Okay? So for now just endure it. Although it is difficult, endure it.”

“Whimper, yes, Hyung-nim. But it is too cold.”

“My younger brothers. I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to be. It’s not Hyung-nim’s fault!”

“That’s right. Those guys are the bad ones!”

“Younger brothers!”

Hyung-nim!”

As the icy winds blew through a dark alley, it looked like Merchants A, B and C was re-enacting a drama. And in another alley, two pairs of eyes were also looking at the tavern.

“I found those guys. I’ll report it to the top.”

The masked man disappearing into the darkness was stamped with a red palm.

I'm a fan!

"Alan, is this really the way to do it?"

Andel yelled in an angry voice. Alan sighed in frustration.

"How many times do I have to say it? Now is not the time for me to do anything."

"It's not? What were you doing while I was in Cairo? I received the dog treatment. You know? The dog treatment, a dog! Ark treated me like that! That's what I'm saying. If I try to fight him, then I would just be stepped on again. They just carelessly talked in front of me like my presence was nothing!"

.....This was around the one hundredth time that he had heard it. Andel gradually became more fired up and spat out saliva as he talked wildly.

"Do you think I would casually accept such a thing? No, do you think that I would forget my promises of revenge?"

Alan had no interest in what Andel was saying. It was Andel that had a debt to clear with Ark, not Alan. If he thought about it closely, there was no reason for him to get revenge on Ark. He was just a nuisance to his eyes. But it seemed like he was becoming an obstacle. Since he hadn't received any decisive damage from Ark yet, it was just a gut feeling. If so, he would like to get rid of him as soon as possible. Ark had become a hated guy for no reason. But he lacked the motivation to chase him and postponed it for other important matters. At that moment, Andel was gnashing his teeth beside him. Alan would have to coax him in order to properly handle this annoying guy. It was only just that. However.....

'Honestly, I find you more annoying than Ark right now.'

Alan became irritated and gave a sharp sidelong glance towards Andel. Although Nagaran was peaceful today, he couldn't guarantee

what the battlefield would be like tomorrow. This time there was 12 castles opened in Nagaran. Thousands of users from the Schudenberg Kingdom, Sinius Principality and Bristania Kingdom flocked to Nagaran, but the number of guilds was only in the hundreds. Of course, they rushed into a prolonged war.

‘If I occupy the throne carelessly, there will be a concentrated attack from the guilds that were watching for an opportunity.’

Indeed, at the beginning someone carelessly took the throne and after 30 minutes of a concentrated attack, all the members were exterminated. Therefore, it became an achievement to even capture a castle in Nagaran. He noticed that most of the guilds in the same situation studied each other. They would then increase the supporters using secret dealings and one of the guilds would be expanded, and this would be repeated. Intrigue and betrayal! It’s standard was bloodier than reality because of the enormous profit concerned. But those skirmishes were also coming to an end. They either submitted to the power of another guild or they would join forces and begin earnestly building up their power to occupy a castle. And they also prepared a plan to keep the castle for a long time once they’ve occupied it. Of course, ‘Dawn Blade’ led by Alan was one of the main forces. The time for the decisive battle of Nagaran was about to begin!

‘All the necessary preparations are finished. Now all that’s left if the timing. Victory or defeat will be decided by when I move.’

The place Alan was targeting was Silvana in the southern part.

‘Among the 4 properties in the south, Silvana has the best location. The distance between the three kingdoms is short and it is also next to a beach, making it a good place to develop trade. When it became stable, Nagaran would definitely be the centre of trade in New World. If I can develop Silvana well then ‘Dawn Blade’ will definitely be the strongest guild!’

Alan prepared for it without hesitation. And when he was trying to march to Silvana to occupy it, that was when Andel visited.

‘He is a guy that doesn’t think.....!’

Andel just acted without thinking. There were several reasons that Alan had brought forces to Nagaran within a short time. Alan was smart. He was able to grasp situations quicker than other people and if there was friction with the other allied forces, he would either placate them or get rid of them. His covert support for growth was also useful. The Cathedral's bishop would conveniently receive a share of Silvana's profit if Alan occupied it in return for some covert help. The cathedral has sent 20 mercenaries to support 'Dawn Blade.' They also ensured that they were provided with a large amount of ammunition. However, the most influential factor in expansion was none other than his reputation. Alan was recognized as the Holy Knight! It was the storybook image of someone who hated injustice and would righteously pursue justice! That public image was surprisingly important. It could possibly be compared against the analogy of the Three Kingdoms? The same applies to New World. The image of Alan had been crafted so carefully that it had a large impact when placating other guilds. Some guilds even approached him intentionally to form an alliance.

'The most important thing to me is my righteous image.'

What would happen if it was known that Alan had hired assassins to take care of Ark?

.....It would likely spread and become a serious problem. That was why Alan couldn't blindly get rid of Andel.

'Andel right now is in a poisonous state. I don't want to say something cruel and make it even worse. But with the mobilization of Dawn Blade, Andel might not have any time to go look for Ark.....his head is like a pebble. How do I explain it to him so that he understands how important it is? Nevertheless, my plan doesn't work with this guy.'

Eventually, Alan headed out with Andel to where the ammunition was being procured. In the time it took to receive the military supplies, he tried to see if he could coax Andel. However, no matter the persuasion Andel was unshakable and refused to give up on catching Ark.

"That Ark is already over level 100. In addition, they seemed to have

made a lot of money before leaving Cairo. Are you just going to leave them alone?”

“I told you. The Dark Brother organization now has a hostile relationship with Ark. Even if we don’t do anything, they won’t leave him alone.”

“You don’t understand at all. Even if the Dark Brothers kill Ark dozens of times, if he quits the game then I won’t get my revenge. I won’t be satisfied until I beat him with my own hands!”

“Of course Ark requires direct handling. But right now there is more important matters.”

“Important? Ha! What is more important? Isn’t occupying a castle a game as well? What on earth should I understand. Yes, it’s just a game. Why are you so invested in this game? Isn’t it more important to step on that guy? Isn’t it?”

“

He let out a sigh. He’s not a child so what do should he say to make him understand? It was to the extent that he thought it would be easier to sit an ogre down and persuade it than Andel. When Alan turned his head, Andel immediately closed his mouth. The carriage carrying the two of them had finally arrived at the border of Nagaran.

“Eh? T-that guy.....!”

Andel swelled up like a ball and stuttered. As the carriage approached the border, the form of a hobbit merchant was seen humming and approaching. A smile spread on Andel’s mouth.

“That is the merchant that was in Cairo with Ark!”

“Hyu.....!”

Sid was sweating as he looked up at the clear blue sky. He had

walked non-stop for the first few hours on a steep mountain path. He was using a carriage but it wasn't an easy task. But the idea that it was difficult didn't hold at all.

"Hu hu hu hu."

Rather, whenever a heavy feeling appeared in the storage compartment then he would just laugh.

"This is what I have been wanting to do since I first came here....."

When he arrived at the border of Nagaran, he had experienced some deep emotions. One week had passed and the hours seemed long when it was short, or short when it was long. However, Sid was a merchant so it was evident what was the most rewarding time for him. After all, warriors and merchants were different. Discovering unexplored dungeons and fighting a boss monster before finding a legendary item deep underground. That was every warrior's fantasy. But a merchant's dream was finding a new trade route and making a large profit from it! During the week he headed towards Nagaran, Sid had such a dream.

'War is money!'

That was an undeniable law. In Nagaran there would be a bloody war between guilds! It was the best place for selling the various scrolls he bought from Cairo. But despair was waiting for Sid when he arrived at Nagaran. Nagaran was declared a war area. In other words, even if a user killed someone they wouldn't become chaotic. It was a very dangerous thing in a sense. Users could be killed without penalty. Unlike the [Robbery] scroll which was used to steal an item, the aims of the Kings of the Three Kingdoms was different and they intended for Nagaran to be a simple lawless area. No, that was certainly the case. Because of that, there were signposts at the Nagaran border to prevent people walking in without knowing. The kings of the Schudenberg, Bristania and Sinus Principality also forbid any scrolls from being used. If they used a scroll then it would be considered a rebellion against the royal families of the Three Kingdoms. Sid's mood became dark. The ratio of scrolls within his 7 bags was 90%.

‘Ark-nim is expecting a profit of more than 50%.....’

If it wasn't possible to use scrolls inside Nagaran, then it wouldn't be possible to receive a fair price for them. No, he didn't even know if he could sell them.

‘Ark-nim will kill me if I return after selling it for 60~70% of the listed price!’

Sid knew and was terrified of how obsessed Ark was with money. If he returned the 5,500 gold investment with a loss, then Sid would really be made to drink soup.

‘If Ark was in this situation, what would he do?’

Ark was a warrior, yet he earned more money than Sid. Even when the assassins forced him to fall into the hell, he was still obsessed with making money off the japtem. He would never give up in any situation where it was possible to make money. Sid was the only user who closely watched Ark's obsession with making money.

‘If it was Ark-nim then he would never give up! On the contrary, he would somehow use this situation to make even more money. Yes, that's it!’

When he finished thinking, an idea popped in Sid's head. <Episode II: Pioneering age of the Foreigners> had started.

The changes occurring in New World was not just Nagaran opening to the public. So far, only a handful of users had been able to qualify to travel between the borders open to everyone! However, the best way to move was Nagaran which had become a war zone. Even when Nagaran became stable, users had to move through a steep mountain path. In this situation, it was inevitable that problems would occur. Thus, in peacetime it would immediately become less desirable. Sid carried the luggage and immediately went to the villages near the border. The main customers for him were suspicious looking warriors. The chaotic scrolls could be sold to them for 100% of the market price. The reason was clear. In the absence of peace at the border, they would use the scrolls to try and rob the merchants crossing the border.

‘Hu hu hu hu, this is it!’

Sid began to catch the feeling. When the scrolls were sold, Sid immediately left to an adjoining village. It was easy to sell hundreds of robbery scrolls. Of course, the security in the region was at the worst case scenario. It was a state where merchants would be immediately fearful, with rumours of thieves waiting to rob them on the mountain paths. His customers were also those merchants. It was a rule that a place that sold knives would also sell shields. Cairo also had items that could stop various chaotic scrolls.

“A standard item to escape from a crisis! The [Warp] scroll. You can hire mercenaries confidently with [Sword of Truth], protect yourself from [Robbery] and [Seize] using the [Bag Protection] or [Equipment Protection] scrolls. From the [Elimination] scroll which removes one scroll effect, there is a bulk sale on all items for a safe trade route. Please use Sid’s stalls.”

Immediately merchants flocked like clouds.

“How much for a [Warp] scroll?”

“45 gold. If you buy it in a set of 10, I’ll will discount 10 gold.”

“Yes? Isn’t that 110% of the price in a store? If I buy it from the store, I can also get a discount of 30%.....”

“I went through a lot of risk to bring the scrolls from Cairo to here. I met with bandits along the way quite a few times. Since it is like that, I’m selling it for 110% of the price.

“But, it is 45 gold for one scroll.....”

“If you don’t have the cash right now then I also accept various potions. But the potions have to be 80% of the listed price. Because I can sell it again for a profit. As a merchant you should understand?”

One merchant to the side poked another one and whispered.

“There’s not much time left on the due date for trading. If a thief robs us then the quest will fail and we will lose a lot of credibility. ”

“Hyu.....I understand. 2 [Sword of Truth] and 2 [Warp] scrolls please.”

“Yep, here you go! Have a safe trip!”

Sid aimed for this. A merchant would understand the mindset of other merchants. After the borders were opened, many merchants received quests to transport exotic goods. But in order to complete the quest within a certain period, they had to cross the border.

‘Hu hu hu, I’ve learned this by following after Ark-nim.’

If they were going to spend money, once he has hooked them then he had to squeeze as much as possible out of them. When selling a missile to one side, he should turn right around and sell a missile defense system to the other side. Did it matter what kind of business it was as long as he made a profit? He had to do this if he wanted to engage in business. By selling a lot of knives, the price of the shields would jump up even more. Because of him, there were a lot of merchants who received damage. Sid’s life was tied up in this trade route. It wasn’t possible for him to look at other people’s circumstances when he was worried about eating the soup made from Ark’s pot.

‘I didn’t understand the world at all until now.’

So another unsuspecting merchant entered the path of darkness. No matter how much he wanted to keep sell the scrolls, timing was important in this business. Other merchants who smelled money would soon flock to the border with the scrolls. A market price slump for the scrolls was inevitable!

‘When it becomes less profitable, I will shake it off and leave. It is Ark-nim’s iron-set law.’

Ark had suddenly become a textbook. He bought items in Cairo at 60% of its price and now he was selling it at 100~110% of its price. Of course his experience and skill proficiency, as well as his income increased tremendously. Once the business became successful, Sid began to think even more. If he took advantage of the timing then it was possible to make even more profit! Sid determined that

expensive potions and tool boxes were worth investing in so he bought some without any hesitation. Once the scrolls were exchanged for consumables, the amount was enormous. He also spent a fortune on hiring NPC mercenaries and returned to the carriage. That was also a part of his calculations.

‘After Nagaran was opened, it became a public combat war. Since large amounts of guilds are in this area they require various potions and consumables, especially over time. It is a war of attrition. However, the winner is not determined by how much money they spend in a short amount of time. But if they did want to replenish supplies in the field, they would have to go all the way back to Selebrid.....I’m going to sell supplies near the entrance to Nagaran so even if it is a little bit expensive, it would save them time! Before other merchants attract them, I have to detain the customers!’

Sid was increasingly aware of his responsibility as a businessman. But since scrolls couldn’t be used in Nagaran, there was no security so if he died then he would lose items.

‘Since PK is allowed in Nagaran, this business is dangerous. PK is fun for the people that exploit it. If I die to such people and lose even one item.....’

Soup. Sid shuddered as a chill crawled up his spine.

‘Even if the profit was a little bit less, it is safer to set up trade at the entrance.’

Therefore Sid arrived at the entrance to Nagaran. He arrived just as a carriage containing a warrior was leaving to go buy supplies and decided to approach Sid.

“Are you a merchant? If you have any recovery potions or repair boxes can I order them in bulk?”

Sid looked the warrior up and down. Once he saw the equipment it wasn’t a joke. The shine of money was clearly visible! Sid clasped his hands together as he kept up a business smile.

“Yes, of course. Not only recovery potions but I also have many potions that would increase the stats. Because you’re my first

customer, I'll give you an excellent price. However, it's still a little bit higher than the fixed store price.....He he he, you understand right?"

Sid spread out catalogues showing the products available. The warrior asked with a surprised look.

"That's an amazing amount. Do you own such a big business by yourself?"

"He he he, 90% of it is the capital entrusted by other people."

Sid had a big mouth. There was a subtle smile on the mouth of the warrior.

"So it is like that. It works out just fine. Since the large guild competition is about to start there is no time to go to Selebrid, so it is lucky that I managed to meet a merchant with so many goods. If you don't mind 110% of the fixed price, I'd like to buy all your potions and repair boxes."

"Yes? Yes? 110% of the fixed store price?"

He calculated the astronomical amount on a calculator.

'Finally.....I finally have an opportunity for a colossal deal.....!'

Although merchants made the same amount of profit through many small deals, if they accomplish one huge deal then they would earn more fame and experience. If he sold items worth thousands of gold in one transaction then he couldn't even imagine the experience he would get! Sid's eyes stared at the warrior on the horse. The warrior smiled and said.

"However, our situation is that we can't receive the items at the moment. So let's set a time and date to receive the items. Because we have to prepare the gold as well. Please deliver the promised goods to this place tomorrow morning."

The warrior opened his map and designated one section. Sid flinched as he looked at the map. Although it wasn't far, the area was in Nagaran.

“Is that a problem?”

“Yes? Oh, no. But.....”

“I know what you’re worried about. But these days the outskirts are empty as most of the users have flocked to the area around the castles. While coming here I didn’t even see 1 user.”

“I understand. I’ll deliver it to the appointed place.”

Sid eventually accepted the offer. Although he was a little anxious, the number was too large for him to miss out on. The warrior nodded with a pleased face.

“If you’re able to provide this huge amount of supplies then you must be a rich merchant. If you’re managing the funds of other people then you must be quite reliable as well. It is fortunate that I met someone like Sid at the entrance to Nagaran. I was looking for reliable merchants. If it becomes necessary in the future, how about a long term deal? It might be more difficult but there would be no risk and we’ll pay for all the trouble.”

“I-I thank you.”

“I’m glad to hear it. Then should we create the contract?”

“Yes, of course. But what is your name.....”

“Alan, I’m Alan the leader of the Dawn Blade guild.”

The warrior.....Alan grinned and replied. Sid who didn’t participate in the event quest had never seen Alan.

The day after Ark’s companions had a wild night.....in reality it was only 4 hours later. The sunlight spilled through the dim window of the tavern. Although JusticeMan liked drinking all liquor, his didn’t enjoy drinking to death. However after Roco’s words in the middle, they couldn’t stop and began drinking even more furiously. Fortunately

after chatting outside for 1 hour, the chilly wind helped dissipate the alcohol. Roco's face contained one expression that they knew well.

"Now are you going to go to the Evil Silrion?"

"No, it has been postponed for the moment."

"Yes? We've also found the big brother that we were looking for."

"Then it's official."

JusticeMan tried to say something else before laughing.

"Okay, do you know what you're going to do?"

"No. Right now....."

"That's great. Then briefly come with me. I've got something to show you. I wanted to discuss it with you."

"Show me what?"

Ark tilted his head to the side while Jjak-tung interrupted with a smirk.

"Hu hu hu, the achievement we accomplished in the meanwhile. While you were winning, we weren't just playing around."

"Achievement?"

"If you look at it then you'll know. It isn't far so I'll leave it for the time being. You'll notice the details once you've arrived. Shambala, don't make me nag you and come as well!"

JusticeMan suddenly pulled Shambala along with Ark.

"Um, why is it so noisy at dawn? What kind of people....."

The murmuring was coming from an alley not far from where Ark's companions were. It looked like there were 3 homeless people wrapped in hoods. When Merchant A, B and C were keeping an eye on Ark, they literally fell asleep right there. The sleepy Merchant B made an annoyed noise and lifted his head at the noisy sounds of

Ark and his companions. He had a vacant expression for a short time before standing up in surprise.

“Eh? H-Hyung-nim! Hyung-nim! Wake up.”

Merchant A who was snoring through his nose opened his eyes tiredly. Merchant A rubbed at his swollen eyes with a frown.

“What the? What’s going on?”

“Those guys are moving.”

“What?”

Merchant A was suddenly wide awake and jumped up.

“Damn, they drank all night so why are they up this early? Hey, wake up!”

Merchant A kicked Merchant C and commanded him.

“Summon the mercenaries that you hired yesterday and tell them to come quickly. I’ll shadow them. As usual, communication is through the ‘Feather of Whispering’ and act quickly!”

Merchant B and C rushed down the alley on short legs. Merchant A also quickly packed his luggage and followed Ark.

‘As expected, you’re going after the treasure!’

Ark and his companions were collecting a huge amount of food from the market. The reason that so many users were buying food was because they were going on a long trip somewhere. Once they collected all the necessary clues, of course they would want to start treasure hunting. As expected, Ark and his companions immediately left Selebrid when they finished their shopping. Merchant A quickly whispered using the ‘Feather of Whispering.’

-Those guys have left Selebrid. How long until the mercenaries are gathered?

What? They’re not ready yet? Those children, standby until I give my order.....Anyway the warriors.....okay, sounds good. Once

the mercenaries are gathered then come to this location.

Like a spy movie, Merchant A secretly kept up secure communications while following Ark. After Ark's party left Selebrid, they ascended up the mountain path. But after a short time, the path they were walking on became lush greenery.

'Huck huck huck. I should've exercised a little bit more.....'

Merchant A had poor stamina. He was out of breath in less than 1 hour. Furthermore, as there was no path the merchant had to push aside thick bushes. He tripped over tree roots on the unfamiliar path and was out of breath in less than 1 hour. There was also no path for him to walk on so he had to walk through the forest. He tripped over roots on the unfamiliar path and got stuck on tree branches.

'This is that Dark Wolf's fault! In the future, I'll certainly seize the map and cause him despair!'

Merchant A was burning with revenge.....Honestly, if it wasn't for that than he wouldn't have been able to keep up. After following a small stream for a while, the lush forest eventually came to an end. Ark was communicating with the party as they arrived.

'Ohhhh, this is.....a golden opportunity!'

Merchant A's eyes were sparkling. Hidden inside the woods deep in the mountains. What else but a thief's hideout?

'There's no doubt. I've seen those flags planted above the wild plants at the Merchant's Guild. The group of thieves that everyone is super careful about around Selebrid! If so.....?'

He could only think of one thing, they were trying to suppress the group of thieves in order to go somewhere.

'The heavens are helping!'

He didn't know what was going on inside. It was probably a dreadful battle with a lot of blood spilt! It was the ideal chance to get rid of Ark. Now the odds of victory was 100%! Just then, Merchant B and C arrived with the 20 mercenaries.

“Huck huck huck, Hyung-nim. Those guys?”

“Hu hu hu, my younger brothers. The saying that the heavens would help those who help themselves is true. They know nothing and are trying to suppress the thieves here in the mountains.”

Merchant A smiled coldly and clenched his fist firmly.

“If we storm in then the situation will end simply. We have to hurry before Dark Wolf and Blue Sword are killed by the thieves and drop the clues. Quickly use the scrolls before that happens!”

“I understand. Everyone heard? Start immediately!”

“Rush!”

Merchant A, B and C boldly led the mercenaries in. But when they arrived, they felt something strange. The mountain was really quiet for being in the middle of a battle. Was that all? Laughter was even occasionally heard. Merchant B felt something strange and tried to stop. However, it didn't matter because Merchant A had already opened the door and shouted.

“Blue Sword, Dark Wolf! You guys.....eh?”

Merchant A trailed off with a bemused look. Hundreds of eyes had immediately turned to him when he opened the door. Of course, they should've been engaged in a bloody fight. However, there was nothing but Ark and the thieves staring at him.

“Eh, why.....why? Why aren't you fighting?”

“What the? Who are those guys?”

“Blue sword? Dark Wolf?”

The thieves scowled at the merchants and mercenaries with unpleasant eyes. Yes, it was the achievement that JusticeMan mentioned in Selebrid. He was talking about the thieves gathered here. JusticeMan randomly rehabilitated the thieves. And two days ago, he had found the older Hyung that he had been looking for. The older Hyung was a boss bandit named Wangnuni with a level of 150. Usually they would never dare fighting against him, but JusticeMan

had other forces. The thieves around Selebrid that he had rehabilitated! JusticeMan directed them at Wangnuni in waves and after a long bloody battle, Wangnuni eventually surrendered and was rehabilitated. Thus, the number of thieves now following JusticeMan was 300 people.

Merchant A, B, and C realized that there was something wrong.

“H, Hyung-nim?”

“Hiccup!”

Merchant A started sweating. Although the merchants were frozen, when Merchant C hiccupped he accidentally tore the scrolls. He had wanted to use [Robbery] on Ark. However, he didn't specify the target so a thief was hit by mistake. The thief hit was the older Hyung-nim, Wangnuni. Wangnuni looked at Merchant C with no expression and laughed.

“What the? Are you trying to squeeze me?”

“No, it's not.....”

Merchant A grasped the situation too late and tried to withdraw when JusticeMan smiled and said.

“Hey guys, what is it that I always stress?”

“I'll serve food and aid in one hand. I'll do a good thing once a day. And the villain that doesn't repent would be soaked!”

The 200 thieves replied coldly.

“Okay, lock the door.”

“Yep!”

The thieves suddenly walked to the door. Although the merchants and mercenaries tried to retreat, their path was blocked. The situation alarmed the mercenaries who eventually pulled out their swords.

“Damn! It's not possible! We're stuck!”

“It is Hyung-nim’s enemy! Get rid of all the litter!”

The thieves had been completely brainwashed by the torture of the chowder medley. JusticeMan had already become Wangnuni’s hyung. And when someone opposed their hyung, it was the thieves’ unwritten law that they would pay with their bodies. The thieves drew their swords and rushed in unison.

“Huck, Hyung-nim. Why on earth is it so different?”

“How should I know? We have no choice but to endure somehow!”

“Damn it, they will die. It should be around ten enemies for each person?”

The mercenaries cursed but it was too late for them to regret it. And soon a fierce battle took place.....if it could even be called a battle. The assassins were 30 levels higher than the thieves. However, the numbers was 15 times as much. 20 against 300. It couldn’t possibly be called a fight. Moreover, there was also Ark’s nursing skills as well as Roco’s music. As there were many people, the skills became more effective. The thieves who received various buffs through nursing and music yelled and crushed the hired warriors.

“Hmm, why is it so dull?”

Ark felt like the battle was too dull. Just yesterday he had engaged in a bloody war with his partner against the pioneers in the Evil Silrion.....Compared to that, the level 120 mercenaries felt boring. He wasn’t aware of it yet, but his experience with the Evil Silrion and Lee Myung-ryong had raised his standards to the highest level.

Then, a garbage bag was suddenly visible to the side. While the thieves had opened the door and beating the mercenaries, three garbage bags were stealthily moving away. When a thief passed them, they would stop and then move again. This pattern repeated until they managed to escape from the hideout.

‘What the, that is?’

Ark stared at the garbage bags escaping to the mountain and gave an amazed laugh. It was the three merchants. In order to escape, they had disguised themselves as garbage bags. Whether it was because the disguise was effective or it wasn't worth wasting time on, they somehow managed to survive the rough fight. Then Ark stabbed his sword tip firmly into the ground.

"Hey, you guys. Where do you think you're going?"

The garbage bags flinched and chattered.

"Hyung-nim! We were discovered."

"Huk huk huk, Hyung-nim. Are we going to die? I'm scared."

"Just calm down. My younger brothers. I have an idea."

Merchant A swallowed his saliva and suddenly stood up. They stripped off their robes and revealed their true identity. It was small bodied dwarf. However, perhaps because they were merchants but they didn't have the distinctive muscles of the dwarves. With a bulging stomach and trembling hands, they seemed more like the Three Little Pigs than dwarves. Merchant A suddenly grabbed Ark's hand and begged.

"Please don't kill us. Blue Sword and Dark Wolf!"

"What? Don't kill you?"

"Oh, the truth is, in fact.....we are.....fans! Yes, that's right. We are fans!"

"Fan? How did you know I was related to Dark Wolf?"

"That is.....we were interested. Yes, interested."

Merchant A nodded his head as he twisted his hands together.

"Your fight was so impressive that we wanted to find out more so we hide ourselves and watched. That's when we learned that you were Dark Wolf. Our respect was burning so much that we were chasing after you to ask if we could organize a fan club."

"Oh, really? That was why you've been chasing us?"

“Fan meeting! Will you have a fan meeting? That’s it. Ha ha ha, we weren’t told in advance anything about this fight. The work became twisted up.....because some strange fellows were mixed in among the fan club members. Anyway, as expected of Blue Sword and Dark Wolf. Though they looked quite strong, they weren’t a match for you. Ha ha ha, you are great.”

“H,Hyung-nim.....”

Merchant B and C looked at their hyung-nim with miserable eyes. It was truly absurd. Ark had already witnessed their meeting with Jewel in the alley. He knew that they were after Magaro’s clues. They had obviously hired mercenaries to steal the map from Ark. If he let them go, there was no guarantee that they wouldn’t try it again.

‘Thanks to the thieves, a crisis was averted. But if I was alone then the surprise attack would’ve robbed me of the map. I have to make them lose any will to try it again.’

Something flickered at the corner of Ark’s eyes.

‘This is a chance!’

A pair of eyes flashed in the darkness. A black mask was hiding the face while the body was wrapped in black clothes. The Red Palm symbol.....an assassin from the Dark Brother organization. Yes, it wasn’t only the merchants that shadowed Ark’s party. The Dark Brother had watched Ark since Selebrid and also chased after him. While the merchants were distracting Ark, he took advantage of it to advance to the rear and develop an elimination plan.

‘A mistake in judgement. Surely the thieves here are a part of Ark’s group. Chet, the merchants entering the mountains should of had the

element of surprise.....There's no helping it. With my power I cannot deal with more than 300 thugs. Although it is vexing, there should be another chance.....'

The assassin who was hiding outside assessed the situation and turned around without doing anything. Then there was an unexpectedly good fortune. The foolish merchants disguised themselves as rubbish bags and escaped to the mountain, and then Ark pursued them by himself. The rehabilitation members and the thieves were busy with the mercenaries and paid no attention to the outside.

'This is a great opportunity!'

The assassin pulled out a sword without hesitation. He was level 250. He was different from the ordinary assassins and was armed with a variety of skills; he was the super secret assassin from the Dark Brother. It wasn't possible to count the immense number of foreigners that had died by his hand. Although it wasn't possible to handle all his colleagues, Ark had displayed a careless amount of confidence and gone out by himself.

'Anyway, the goal of the Dark Brother organization is Ark. I don't care about the other guys. Okay, I can't give him time to escape to the hideout!'

The assassin made a deadly resolution and used all his buffs to increase his abilities. His damage was boosted using 'Sword Aura,' his traces were erased using 'Light Step,' 'Critical Hit' was used to maximize the chances of a critical strike and so on.....But his special moves were separate from that. The 'Blood Thrill' was a special skill that only an assassin of the Dark Brother could use. It was a fatal assassination skill which converted 50% of his health to offensive damage and that transfer meant that one blow was deadly! The moment the attack was successful, he would lose 50% of his health but now was the time to use all his power. Once he used the skill, his sword changed to a bloody red colour. The assassin approached like a ghost and struck Ark with a strong blow.

-You have received a critical hit from the surprise assassination

skill. There is also an addition damage of 250×3 thanks to the Blood Thrill skill.

The total damage is $\times 2$ and you have been stunned for 10 seconds.

Ark suddenly felt his spine tingle before he lost an absurd amount of health. Three times the damage of 250 was 750! With an additional double damage, he had lost 1,500 health with one blow. Ark's health instantly went down to 500. That wasn't all. He felt drunk as he was hit with the additional stun effect.

'What, what the?'

Ark freaked out and turned his body around. The masked man with a red palm symbol instantly caught his eye.

"You, you're from the Dark Brother? Don't tell me Andel.....?"

"Never, this is the will of the Dark Brother organization."

"What?"

"Did you think you would get away with killing people from the Dark Brother? You can never escape the hand of the Dark Brother. Although you can revive with the secret skill of the foreigners, you would have to buy a village to escape from the Dark Brother. Wouldn't that be more painful to a foreigner than dying?"

When the assassin showed up, the merchants who didn't know the situation immediately left with a puzzled expression.

"Hyung-nim. What happened back there?"

"How should I know? Anyway, hopefully that black guy can defeat Dark Wolf."

"Then.....?"

"If we see the chance then we'll use the scrolls! And I was negotiate with the black one....."

The merchants whispered together and looked at the two of them

with a sense of expectancy. However, Ark wasn't in a situation where he could worry about the ulterior motives of the merchants.

"Damn, you bastard.....!"

Thanks to the surprise attack, Ark had the injustice of losing a lot of health. And because he was stunned, his body felt heavy like a lead bag. When he was stunned, evasion, attacking and using his skills were all blocked. The duration was only 10 seconds, but when looking at the offensive power of the assassin that was plenty of time for three or four more attacks.

'Being careless for just a short moment can cause such a fatal failure.....'

Pepeng! He received another critical hit and lost 300 health.

The sword once again targeted Ark's neck. It was a 100% chance of death! The assassin's eyes shone with an eerie light as he became confident of his victory.

"It is the end!"

"Ark!"

A black shadow suddenly came running in at the desperate moment. And there was a shower of fists towards the assassin who was trying to deal the final blow. He aimed at Ark's neck but the sword suddenly became encased in solid stone.

'Petrification of Blood!'

Ark looked up in surprise at the person who had ran out. Shambala! Shambala had a passive skill to detect assassins. He had used the skill to check if there were any other mercenaries around and detected Ark and the assassin outside the hideout! And he used Petrification of Blood without confirming who the opponent was.

"Ark, it's your turn!"

Shambala shouted from one side. It was the pincer attack that they used countless times in the Evil Silrion. As soon as Ark was released from the stun, he used Dark Blade. While the defense was raised by

500% when Petrification of Blood was used, it meant nothing to Dark Blade which ignored all defense.

Putt putt putt peng, the violent critical hits flowed continuously.

However, the assassin was level 250. Even though 'Blood Thrill' consumed 50% of his health, after 3~4 critical hits he still had a lot of health left. Meanwhile, the assassin rushed towards Ark after Petrification of Blood wore off.

"Ugh, Ark, even if I die I'll take you to hell with me!"

"Holy shit!"

Profanities burst from Ark's mouth. He had thought it was possible to finish the fight before Petrification of Blood wore off. He only had 200 health left, but because of that he didn't feel the need to drink an expensive potion. Therefore he would die with one hit! His habit of trying to save money had caused a crisis again. However, Shambala unexpectedly stepped of front of him and blocked Ark. Although they weren't in the Evil Silrion anymore, he still had the unconscious habit of protecting Ark.

"Ark, Whirlwind of Death!"

Shambala shouted before pressing the assassin. It was the pincer technique that Ark and Shambala had developed in the Evil Silrion. The assassin was surrounded on both sides. And he was overwhelmed with a series of punches and kicks! The damage itself wasn't that high, but since an abnormal state was caused every time an attack hit, the assassin got slaughtered.

"Ugh, drat. But as long the Dark Brother organization exists, a 2nd and 3rd assassin will come after you....."

Eventually, the assassin muttered pathetically and collapsed. Ark looked away from the assassin. And he caught the merchants who jumped in surprise. He rolled his eyes before saying with a smile.

"Whoa, as expected of Dark Wolf and Blue Sword! Ha ha ha, I knew it was possible for you to win."

“ ”

Ark glared silently. Ark knew that they had been silently rooting for the assassin. If he died in this situation. Merchant A noticed with his keen senses and quickly pulled out a contract. After writing something down, he extended it towards Ark.

“In fact, this was what I was trying to give Dark Wolf when searching for you!”

“What is this?”

“So that Dark Wolf can concentrate on his matches, it is the support money donated by the fan club!”

“Donations?”

A Merchant's Agreement.

A person with this agreement will pay you 10 gold once a month (10 days) which you can receive at any branch of the Merchant's Guild. The merchant who drew up the contract will open an account at the Merchant's guild for the recipient, in order to settle the accounts.

This agreement will last until the contracted merchant is bankrupt or the written contract disappears.

<Recipient: Ark= Dark Wolf>

‘This is.....a debit card?’

Ark's eyes shone brightly as he read the contract.

‘These guys have other ulterior motives but.....’

In fact, killing the three little pigs had no apparent benefit. There was no guarantee that they would give up on the map after being killed. If they started developing a grudge like Andel's then it would become more annoying. If so, wouldn't pretending not to know and then reaping the profits be more beneficial?

But.....the amount of money was quite low if he was to

pretend.....

“How many fan club members are there?”

“Yes? Just.....the people who have come with us.....so 23 people.”

“So 23 people pay 10 gold every 10 days.....that’s 50 silver per day? Are you confused between donating and begging? Only that much money? You asked to give it first. But now you’re trying to patronize me? No, are you really a fan? Perhaps you have a different purpose? In that case.....”

Ark felt offended and glared. That was only enough for three hungry people to eat for a couple of days! Did they think they could catch him and have him immediately accept (?). Merchants B and C who felt the crisis looked at their brother with tears in their eyes. Merchant A was quick to revise the contract.

“Oh, I made a mistake. It was actually 20 gold.”

“.....”

Ark kept a meaningful silence and a dark cloud was cast on Merchant A’s face.

“3, 30 gold? -Uhh, of course. 40 gold! Any more would be too much for the fans.....”

Merchant A eventually muttered tearfully.

‘Sheesh, the atmosphere here is quite heavy.’

Ark struck them in the heart. Ark was the type that would suck out the bone marrow if he had the chance. Because he was instinctively aware of the opponent’s wallets. If he tried to squeeze any more money from those guys then they would probably just give up. In addition, if they became bankrupt then the contract would also disappear. If he left it alone, he would be able to suck out more money for a longer time.

‘40 gold every 10 days. It’s not a small amount of money.’

“Ah, you’re fans as expected. I cannot ignore the sincerity of my fans.”

Ark’s face went through a 180 degree change and the decision was made. The world was love and peace, but Ark understood that a person who cared about money could also be good.

“Do you accept?”

“Of course. But we are two people.”

“Yes?”

“Didn’t you say you were fans of Dark Wolf and Blue Sword? So the donations should be given fairly. Unless.....perhaps you aren’t our fans?”

Ark’s face gave an impression of frowning. Although Shambala didn’t know the situation, he would figure it out later. He didn’t like the idea of splitting 40 gold evenly. Merchant A had to whimper and make another contract again. Now Ark nodded with a friendly smile.

“Thank you. I should remember a nice fan like you. But don’t I need your name in order to memorize it? What is your name?”

“Yes? That is, we’re just.....a passing fan?”

“I’m a man who knows that I should also cherish a passing fan.”

“.....We’re Buksil, Sapjil and Ulmeok.”

“Yes, Buksil, Sapjil and Ulmeok. Okay, I’ll remember that. Ah, and.....if anyone figures out that I’m Dark Wolf, I’ll look at my fan club president first. Do you know what I mean?”

Ark pointed at the 300 thieves lined up behind him. He was politely threatening them to keep their mouths shut! Then they hastily left the mountain.

“Dark Wolf, I’m looking forward to your next match. Fighting!”

“Fighting!”

Thus the merchants left the mountains alive. Merchant C, Ulmeok

murmured in a tearful voice just like his name.

“Hyung-nim. What will happen to us now?”

“Hu hu hu, it’s okay.”

Buksil had a sinister smile on his face.

“Do you know why I was fearful and polite around him? That’s about it. You guys know about that contract? The merchant agreement states that he had to pick up the money at the Merchant’s Guild. What does that mean?”

“T-then.....?”

“Yes. Sooner or later they’ll put clues together and go to find the treasure. But since the income will arrive on a certain date, sooner or later they’ll have to withdraw the money. We can just sit back and watch their movements. In the meanwhile, we should think up a new strategy and at the last moment.....we’ll snatch the treasure. Our goal now is not the combination of clues. It is obtaining the treasure.”

“Oooh, it’s like the bears hiding until the money is found and then turning everything around. As expected of Hyung-nim. Just thinking about that moment!”

“But how long will it take?”

Then, Sapjil asked with an uneasy look.

“What if they don’t look for the treasure right away? One month is 10 days in real time. It is 40 gold every ten days so for the two of them it would be 80 gold, that’s 240 gold out of one month’s account. If they take 2 months it would be 480 golds, three months 720 gold.....”

Now Buksil’s face turned dark. He never even considered the money that would be spent. However, he soon vigorously shook his head.

“It’s fine. Those guys will certainly look for the treasure straight away.”

“But if they don’t find it within two or three months.....we will

become broke.”

“.....”

The merchants flinched and were silent for a moment. If Ark continued cleaning out money from their accounts, the merchants would become bankrupt. The NPCs from the Merchant Guild responsible for merchant accounts or leased warehouses would take all the gold contained in their bags. There would also be a huge penalty given to the credit and skills! While they had to give money to Ark, they had no intention of filing a bankruptcy report. If they stole the treasure and completed the Grandmaster’s quest, they calculated that the compensation was worth the possible penalty. However, that was if they managed to snatch the treasure. What if they became broke before that? They could see that without money, they would bitterly lose everything they’ve worked for.

“Let’s go earn money!”

Buksil cried out as they ran down the mountain.

“We underestimated the situation while we were cleaning up.”

JusticeMan muttered and scratched his head.

“What?”

“Well, as I said.”

JusticeMan spoke with a serious voice while folding his arms.

“Although the thieves have been rehabilitated.....these guys still

haven't fully become new men. No, even if they become a new person what will they do now? Their name is red....."

"Chaotic."

"Yes, that is a problem. If the chaotic status isn't removed, they won't be able to enter villages. So they can't sell anything, even if they hunt. If they can't pay the bills then they would probably be forced to become thieves again."

He was worried about how the NPC thieves would live. Other users might laugh if they heard, but JusticeMan considered it a serious problem.

"But according to the information that Jjak-tung discovered, there is a statute on the chaotic NPC. If they don't commit a crime, then over time their alignment would gradually return to neutral."

Ark also knew that information. When he asked Lorenzo about his future in Cairo, Lorenzo said that he didn't intend to stay in Cairo. If he visited a garrison in the city after becoming neutral, he would be able to get rid of the chaotic state with just a small bail. One of the reasons that Roco tightened the amount of money spent was to save some for the thieves' bail. Therefore, it was inevitable that the thieves would follow JusticeMan's party with a sincere heart!

"So I decided to thoroughly train them how to survive here on edible wild plants and so on.....but the Dark Brother organization knows about this place now? Even if they don't come back, they might inform the guards of Selebrid of this location."

JusticeMan scratched his beard. Sometimes Ark realized how kind he truly was and how rare it was in this world. Anyway, JusticeMan's heart was heavy so he complained to Ark. It was because of Ark that the Dark Brother discovered the hideout. He was responsible.

"The assassin that attacked is the problem. Only one guy has managed to track you so far, but more of them will probably come. Well, you managed to get away but if more come here then it would become a problem. If only there was a place to stay while avoiding the eyes of the guards and the Dark Brother.....but a village is

needed to train the 300 thieves to become people. Since they've stopped stealing, they have no choice but to enter a village for several living necessities."

Ark was worried about the same thing. His life had become entangled with the Dark Brother organization. The crisis was averted, but if the same situation was repeated then Ark would find it quite frustrating. Of course they couldn't follow Ark forever in the game, but he needed a place to hide and avoid the attentions of the Dark Brother for a while.

Once he heard the words a proper village, Ark's head reflexively went up.

"I know the right place."

"What? Where?"

"It is a small village in the Argus Mountains, where there are no guards and the villagers also don't like outsiders. In addition, there are many areas that haven't been explored yet. Ajusshi can probably hide the thieves there until the chaotic state is released."

"Ooh, there is such a place?"

"Yes, there is no guarantee that they will take 200 thieves in a chaotic state.....I'll try to somehow convince the village chief to meet them."

"Okay. Let's go there at once."

JusticeMan became motivated and looked towards the hills. As soon as Ark finished talking, they began moving around and making preparations for the thieves to travel. Meanwhile, Ark looked around for Shambala. Shambala was searching the body of the Dark Brother assassin.

"Shambala, I was thinking of going with ajusshi to the Argus Mountains. Did you want to come with us?"

"I.....might have some other business."

"Other business?"

“Yes, you called this guy a Dark Brother?”

Shambala pointed to the red palm mark on the assassin's mask. Then he pulled out the blue dagger and compared it to the mark.

“A red palm symbol!”

“Didn't I tell you before? In fact, I was looking for information on the Dark Brother in Selebrid. The dagger I had before the 'Black Frost Blade' was made by quenching it in the blood of 100 foreigners. It was a part of my job quest.”

The words seemed like something from a horror movie. However, Shambala said it without blinking an eye.

“The dagger quest connected to the quest about seeking information. Therefore I wandered Selebrid trying to find this information.....”

“Then?”

“Once I found a clue on the 'Dark Brother,' I'll have to go back to Selebrid. Anyway, we can't do anything without Sid and there is the level restriction. So let's separate for the moment. When you're level 150, let's meet up again in Selebrid. How is it?”

“Okay, send a letter after your business is done.”

“I'll do that. And.....it would be better for you to have this.”

Shambala passed him Magaro's secret map.

“It's only my gut feeling, but the difficulty for my current quest seems quite high. So please hold on to this for the time being. If you leave it in your snake, then I don't have to worry about it dropping.

“Okay, ah, I'll give this to you.”

Ark handed him 1 contract which had been squeezed from the merchants. Ark couldn't use it anyway since the recipient was Shambala. Shambala laughed when he looked through the contract.

“Those dwarves from before. As expected, you managed to squeeze money from them.”

“Well I thought about it and collected money from them. If you don’t want it then I can stop it.”

“Who would complain about money?”

Shambala returned to Selebrid holding the contract. Ark separated from Shambala who he had met after a while with an open heart. However, Shambala was Shambala and Ark was Ark! New World was large with a lot of things to do!

“Ark, we’re ready!”

“Yes, let’s set off. To the pioneer village of Lancel!”

Lancel Village

“Chief Kim, have you ever heard of a user called Ark?”

“Ark?”

Kim Gwon-tae asked puzzled.

“Who is that?”

“One of the candidates.”

“Let’s see? I’ve never heard that name? No matter how smart I am, I cannot remember the names of the 2000 candidates. But why? Did you find some useful information?”

“No. Someone just mentioned him. Did you ever look at his reports?”

That person who asked was Ho Myung-hwan from the planning department. Ho Myung-hwan had received the request a few days ago, when Kang Mi-su from the reception desk asked about Ark. He heard the information that Ark had showed a remarkable achievement in the event quest. However, that day was when the planning department was overturned. A new event quest in the Brandt Mountains was suddenly cancelled. Thanks to that he forgot for a while, until a chance meeting at lunchtime made him remember. Kim Gwon-tae looked at the monitor and spoke in a bored voice.

“Go and ask Cain-ssi in the reference room. Because Cain-ssi manages and prints out all the notable reports. If there’s anything valuable then it would be there.”

“I understand.”

Ho Myung-hwan went and visited the reference room. Cain who was in charge of the reference room was organizing the reports that had come in yesterday.

“Hey, Cain-ssi. It’s been a while. Have you received any reports from the user Ark?”

“Ark?”

Cain looked over the email list and nodded.

“Yes, it has come in.”

“Have you printed it?”

“Um.....this user is included in the automatic deletion group.”

“Automatic deletion?”

“Yes, the test reports have been coming in for a few months and apart from the top 20%, all the other reports are thrown away. Because it is difficult for Chief Kim and the boss to read all 2000 reports, some were excluded early on. So these days I don’t even print out the emails and just delete them immediately.”

“Why are we paying them a salary just to not read their reports?”

“Who knows with Section Chief Ha?”

“Anyway, are there any emails that haven’t been deleted yet?”

“You want me to take out a copy?”

“Yes, please give me a copy. As I have some spare time to read it.”

“There’s a reason why the deleted group isn’t seen.....”

Cain murmured that it was useless while printing out a report. Upon receiving the report, Ho Myung-hwan realized why it was on the dropouts list.

‘What is this? A kid would be able to write better than this.’

Ark’s report was really messed up. The second problem was the content. There was no basis for creating the report. The report should be well organized so that the reader could understand the information straight away. But instead of a neat summary, Ark’s report had jumbled sentences and context that made it difficult to

understand what the contents were. It was reasonable. Although Ark fabricated his educational background, he was actually only a high school graduate. Since he tried to quit several times, he barely graduated. He had never seen how to write a report. So he just wrote everything he experienced freely, like a diary. But was that all? Since he played the game for an average of 17 hours, he had no time to write the reports so he wrote it while sleepy. Naturally, even an elementary school student's writing on their homework would be better. On the other hand, Global Exos was a gathering of the elites. Ho Myung-hwan was a bright student who graduated from K university. Ark's report was practically impossible for him to read. However, he pushed through it and read the first page. Ho Myung-hwan realized something when reading the report.

‘What is this? The user on the dropout list is level 127?’

The level was enough to make Ho Myung-hwan surprised for the first time. The current candidates in the top category were level 130. Even the famous Holy Knight Alan was level 138. But one of the dropouts was level 127? However, the level wasn't the only thing in the report that made Ho Myung-hwan surprised. This time, the content of the report submitted by Ark was the match details in the Evil Silrion. More than 1,000 people participated in the tournament! Yet in the final match, he bet the pioneers and won the tournament. Like most of the planning office, Ho Myung-hwan was also a player in New World. Although he didn't have time to go see the match in the Evil Silrion, he heard about how great it was through the newsletter that the Evil Silrion published. It was natural. Beating 1000 participants and the pioneers was a big issue. Ho Myung-hwan quickly found a video posted by a user on the Internet. Thousands of spectators cheered as a dark wolf from the wolf clan kicked a warrior in the chest! The fight scenes left a strong impression on Ho Myung-hwan's heart.

‘Ark is the Dark Wolf from the rumours? Then how did he transform into a wolf?’

Ark's wolf form stimulated Ho Myung-hwan's curiosity. Since there was no reference to the Underground World in this report, there was no way for him to know the circumstances. Curiosity was something

that could make people go crazy.

‘No, the transformation isn’t that important. If he was able to win the Evil Silrion with a partner, then isn’t it a big problem that he isn’t on the list? Why did Section Chief Ha refuse this user?’

He couldn’t understand a single thing with his common sense.

‘Anyway, I can’t just ignore the problem and move on!’

As a member of Global Exos and a user in New World.....

The achievements of this user couldn’t be buried like this. Ark’s fight scene was powerful enough to evoke a such of responsibility in him. However, since the section chief of the planning department Ha Myung-woo had placed Ark on the dropouts list, there was no way for him to recover the other reports.

‘I’ll watch a little more for the time being. If there is any noteworthy content then I will show Section Chief Ha before it’s too late.’

Ho Myung-hwan returned to the reference room and immediately asked.

“Cain-ssi, when this friend’s report comes in please send to me. I’ll manage it from now on. Ah, have you also heard of a candidate called Shambala?”

“Wait a minute. Ah, here it is. Shambala is also a dropout.”

“That friend as well? I understand. Then please give me his reports too.”

“You’re not in charge?”

“No, the interest is just personal.”

“I understand.”

Ark’s employment activities was about to enter a new phase. He managed to avoid being eliminated or having his reports thrown in the shredder. But he would have to wait a little bit more to see if this was luck or misfortune.

“Almost there. We’ll see Lancel Village soon.”

Ark looked up and said.

It had been four days since they’ve left Selebrid with 300 thieves, and they had arrived two days earlier than expected. The reason was simple. They just had to walk in a straight line to reach Lancel from Selebrid. Of course, normal users wouldn’t even dare attempt this kind of trip. This was because the continent was complicated, with a mixture of low level and high level hunting grounds in the same area. However, there was 300 of them. What could possibly frighten them? Even if a large monster level 200 suddenly interrupted them, it would be no problem. No, the thieves would just pull out their knives while cheering wildly.

“That’s great. We’re tired of eating wheat bread!”

“Huhuhu, but isn’t it easy to cut 300 servings?”

“Ark-hyungnim can make his cooked beef!”

The 300 thieves swarmed around the meat. The meat from the level 200 Large Grizzly feed 300 people in no time. Even though the march was tough, cooking the meat from high level monsters caused his survival cooking skill to rapidly grow. But was that all? When 300 people searched a forest, it was easy to find ingredients. Thanks to that, quite a lot of ingredients from high level hunting grounds were gathered. However, the pleasant trip came to an end as they arrived at Lancel Village.

“Did you say this was the village?”

“Eh.....?”

Ark lifted his head and looked at the village in the distance. Lancel Village was not like Ark remembered. The size of the village had become quite different. There used to be 40 houses that had been

abandoned but now there were more than 100 houses lined up. The outskirts of the village was also lined with a fence that surrounded everything. Well, he sent migrants here so of course it would be extended. However, what he couldn't understand was the village's atmosphere. The buildings in the town will full of individuality. Some houses were built on top of trees while others were tucked into the ground. With the brightly coloured paint, it looked like a town from a children's storybook. He had travelled around New World and seen all sorts of villages, but it was the first time he had seen one like this.

'Did I go the wrong way?'

Ark was stunned and opened the map window to confirm it. Then he checked that it was Lancel Village several times before he was certain.

"Hmm, somehow it feels like a pleasant village."

"Yes, if possible I'd love to live in a place like this."

Fortunately, JusticeMan and the thieves seemed to like the strange village. Ark was in the lead as they entered Lancel Village. There were NPCs around that Ark recognized. They were the Meow warriors wearing worker outfits as well as the raccoon clan, who were sprouting beards from the side of their nose. In addition, there were also cartographer Hansen's companions that he had rescued from the thief lair.

"Oh, it is Ark! Ark!"

The first person (?) to run up was a Meow shaman.

"Hmm Hmm, am I right? Somehow you smell like Ark."

Jana approached closely with her tail waving behind her.

"Ara? Why are you here?"

"I was bored by myself. And it is more relaxed here."

"But you're the Shaman. Shouldn't you be keeping up the temple?"

"It does not matter. Well, it isn't stolen....."

Well.....whenever he sees the Meow, the word cat always enters his head. How indulgent are they that even their Shaman is just laying around eating? Jana forgot about the temple and displayed an interest in Ark. She shook her tail softly and twitched her nose, before suddenly rubbing against his body and making a sweet sound.

“Heung, have you changed and become even nicer since the last time I saw you? How is it? Is your answer to my offer from before still valid? After all this time you still don’t want to date me? I’ll treat you well. Because cats are kind.”

“What, what the?”

Roco jumped out with an uncomfortable look.

“What? What is with that attitude? Shaking your tail, don’t you feel any shame? No, what is your relationship with Ark oppa?”

“Ara? Who is this female? Ark, did you replace me with this new girl while we’re apart?”

“Eh.....so.....”

Ark had a bewildered expression as Jana rubbed against his body.

“Well, if you’re a man you should have one or two women. It’s okay. I understand. The Meow believe in polygamy.”

“P-polygamy? Am I crazy? What kind of era is this.....”

“Ah, it’s noisy, noisy. Ark shouldn’t have to put up with a sharp voice like that. I’ll show you the village.”

“Can’t you put his hand down?”

Roco shouted while pulling at his opposite arm. However, the unexpected ambush was suddenly stopped.

Slap, slap!

All of a sudden someone emerged from the crowd and pulled off the hands of the two girls. And then burrowed into Ark’s arms. It was Hanson’s daughter, Sarah. Ark was embarrassed by Sarah’s sudden

behaviour. But Roco and Jana was even more embarrassed than Ark.

“What is this? Oppa?”

“Sarah, can you please get out of the way?”

The two women jumped as Sarah became frightened and dug even deeper. In the end, Ark stood up and said.

“Stop. What am I, a celebrity? And Sarah is still a child. Come on Sarah.”

Ark wound up holding Sarah’s hand as he entered the village. However, Roco just looked. When Ark selected Sarah as the winner, a small smile spread on her mouth! At that moment she felt a woman’s intuition. That young child was an enemy!

‘I was thinking too easily!’

In fact, Roco had a slightly relaxed mood so far. Because Ark had never shown any interest in women, it wasn’t necessary for her to be impatient. If she acted too quickly she might incite his hatred instead. That was what she thought. Suddenly, two women appeared so her anxiety increased. Of course, Jana and Sarah were NPCs. However, if a man had women who looked like Japanese wooden dolls showing interest, it was female psychology to feel anxious.

‘Right, I can see that Ark oppa is a great guy. It is strange that he has had no girlfriends yet.’

Frankly, it wasn’t that strange. But everything was in the eye of the beholder.

‘Whether in reality or the game, I need to manage oppa strictly from now on.’

Roco made a serious resolution. And she caught up to Ark while having a desperate eye fight with Jana. But JusticeMan just laughed and murmured.

“Huhuhu, as expected, when competitors appear then love heats up.”

“Now we’ll be seeing even more.”

At that time, Hassan let out a huge laugh with her thick belly.

“Hahaha, it is indeed the Truthseeker. If you’re a descendant of Hero Maban then of course you’ll be popular with women.”

“You are?”

“I am the Meow elder, Hassan. I am the person who saw Ark’s potential with one look and entered him on the path of the Truthseeker. And who are you?”

“I am JusticeMan. Ark and I are very close. It is nice to meet you and I hope we become closer in the future.”

“Is that so? Mmmm, but have we met somewhere before? Somehow I feel like we’re really similar?”

“You too? I also feel that.”

“Huhuhu.”

“Huhuhuhu.”

JusticeMan and Hassan laughed together while covering their faces. Actually, their two faces were slightly similar. There are also people in the world who connect in such a way. Anyway, Ark finally arrived at the general store surrounded by the crowd. The temporary chief of Lancel Village was in charge of the store.

“Oh, Ark, it has been too long!”

Galen welcomed him with a wide smile.

“The town’s atmosphere has changed quite a lot.”

“Well, it is all because of you. The village has been safe thanks to the Meow warriors you sent. And using his knowledge of construction, Hansen has also helped rebuild the village. But the people you sent from the Brandt Mountains have really shined. They’re not very talkative but are excellent craftsmen. Thanks to them, the new houses built aren’t lacking and we are also able to begin trading. These days, immigrants have come because they’ve

heard the news.”

“I’m glad.”

“Well, there is still a long way to go before we can become the intermediary point between Giran and Jackson. I’m sorry but I’ll have to trouble you some more.”

It sounded like the <Find New Settlers> quest had been completed. Yet the quest achievement for Lancel Village was only 60%. The old depressed atmosphere had changed completely for it to be mistaken for other towns, and Galen can’t help but be satisfied. Therefore, customer satisfaction was at 100%. Ark thought for a moment before starting to talk.

“Today I came to ask for some help with a problem.”

“A problem? Are you talking about settlers?”

“Yes, I’ve brought 300 people who want to stay in this village.”

“300 people!”

Galen shouted with a bright look in his eyes.

“It must have been your plan to send people over slowly to tease me. Where do you gather so many people that want to immigrate here? There is nothing to discuss. Settlers are always welcome here.”

“But there is a little problem.”

Ark had a perplexed face and confessed the situation. The 300 settlers were in fact former thieves that still had the chaotic condition. Galen had a serious expression.

“.....I understand the situation. Yes, Lancel village certainly need more settlers. But if those people.....you know that we are just beginning to build the pioneer village? Moreover, my dream is to create an intermediary point between Giran and Jackson. If there are 300 criminals, who would visit such a town? In addition, the villagers.....”

Ark had expected Galen's reaction. That was the reason why Ark accompanied the thieves.

"Galen ajusshi."

Ark opened his eyes and looked sadly at Galen.

"It really is a pity. Have you already lost the original intention?"

"Original intention?"

"That's right. Wasn't this village founded by the great leader Lancel? He once spent his dark days slaughtering people, but didn't he change himself and decided to devote himself to the world by building this village. He dedicated his whole life to the village. The truly free village that he dreamed about! I was truly impressed when ajusshi said that he would reconstruct that village. That was why I decided to help ajusshi out."

"That, is that so....."

"Yes! I admit it. The people I've brought are thieves. They stole the luggage of innocent people and sometimes even took lives. But!"

Ark pointed towards JusticeMan with a passionate voice.

"The thieves have met a wonderful leader just like Lancel and have decided to live new lives too. But the world just treated them coldly. If they are treated coldly even here, what would Lancel think? If the people who have no place to go become thieves again, is that their fault? Can ajusshi really use Lancel's name if you say things like that? They are just hoping for an opportunity. It was for opportunities like this that Lancel decided to build the village!"

"Guys, I am crying."

"Ark-hyungnim.....!"

The impressed rehabilitation members and thieves had tears on the faces. The villagers looked at them with a little bit of compassion.

"Umm....."

When the atmosphere became strange, Galen let out a pained

groan. It was an emotional logic that couldn't be rebutted. Ark noticed that Galen was shaken and quickly drove in a wedge.

"I'm not asking you to accept them as a part of the village immediately. They also know that they can't be accepted right away. I'm just asking permission for them to be allowed near the village."

"They're not staying inside the village?"

"Yes, they said that they haven't washed off their sins yet. When you have a criminal as a resident, it would certainly cause trouble. Therefore they'll work eagerly to become a new person and enter the village openly, they said. Isn't that wonderful?"

Of course, it didn't have anything to do with Lancel Village. Lancel Village still didn't have any guards. However, it wasn't possible to allow chaotic NPCs into Lancel Village that had just started trading. In order to avoid the Dark Brother, they had to make it difficult to track them. Therefore, the rehabilitated thieves would live in an area near the village. They would wait there until the NPC's tendencies went back to neutral. However although he trusted the mental training, he didn't know how fast it would take to return to normal. JusticeMan was trying to make the rehabilitated company do all the work. The thieves would learn to adapt to society by watching from the side. New World was started with an initial goal and the results were consistent. In the end, Ark managed to persuade Galen.

"I see. Then I agree to your proposal."

With a ringing sound, two information windows appeared.

-Art of Communication has risen by 10.

'Find New Settlers' quest has been updated. You have decided to migrate a group of thieves with nowhere to go to Lancel Village. However, the chaotic thieves are not yet ready to live with the ordinary residents. Even when they are transformed into residents, they'll need a lot of time and effort. However, they have a lot of potential even though they have no knowledge about society. The investment of time and effort will certainly be rewarded.

<New Settlers Found: 60% complete (+30%)>

The thieves were not immediately added to the achievement for the finding settlers quest. The number would be added to the achievement once they returned to the neutral status. Then there was another message window.

You have settled people who don't have a special occupation.

The possible of thieves migrating to the village has risen by 70%. But suddenly a lot of the settlers food and material circumstances have decreased by 50%. In addition, unity has fallen by 30% due to their chaotic tendencies. If unity falls below 60% then there is a high possibility of the new settlers leaving, and in some cases even residents would leave the village.

<Their potential can apply to anything. If the thieves alignment becomes neutral and they gain knowledge and ability in commerce then the food situation should improve.>

He knew that the migration of the thieves meant that there would be a significant penalty. And the rehabilitated thieves were also unemployed. They were a blank slate that doesn't know anything. However in New World, NPCs that can learn new skills could be an advantage. The religious population could enlighten the thieves to create a priest. If the food situation was insufficient then they could learn to be farmers or cooks, or if the security was bad then they could train as guards. When he explained it to JusticeMan, he was surprised and jumped up excited.

"At one time I wanted to operate such facilities."

Galen was also supportive once he decided to accept the request.

"Since you are going to become a part of the village one day, I can't allow you to sleep on the streets."

Galen asked for Hanson's advice, who found an inconspicuous place not far from the village. And a group of raccoons built a simple

housing structure. In addition, he gave them the necessary food needed for the rehabilitation process. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were the training supervisors of the facility. Therefore, the Samcheong College of Education was created in New World.

“Yesterday we were rubbish. We should repay the residents of Lancel Village as soon as possible and become people that can contribute to the village.”

“Yes!”

“Rotten spirit comes from the rotten flesh! From today onwards, we’ll take your body and spirit apart and rebuild you!”

From then on, JusticeMan trained the thieves day and night. They ran up the mountains as stamina training and even joined the Meow in subjugating monsters. Sometimes they would visit the town where the raccoons taught them various disciplines. So after several days of training at the camp, the thieves started to gradually change.

[-The alignment of the thieves has risen by 5.]
--

JusticeMan’s education was certainly effective. Since the result of the training was shown with a number, JusticeMan became even more inspired. A positive result would cause a positive effect. The thieves became even more devoted to training and being polite to the residents. Thanks to that, the unity that had fallen 60% was recovering.

“That’s it. For now I don’t have to worry about this place.”

With the training spot occupied, Ark could finally rest. When Ark entered the village from the training camp, Galen immediately approached.

“There is something I would like to show you.”

Galen took Ark to a home located in the centre of the village. It was a newly built cabin that still had the fresh smell of timber.

“What is this house? Why is it newly built?”

Galen grinned and replied.

“It is your house.”

“Yes?”

“It is something that I had actually thought of before. I asked you to find some settlers, yet I honestly didn’t have any big expectations. But you never forgot about it and sent me great residents. You might not think so, but the residents already think of you as a member of Lancel Village. Then of course you should have a home. Therefore, the other day we built you a house. No matter where the wind takes you, we hope you won’t forget about Lancel Village. Think of this as an intermediate compensation for your previous efforts.”

When Galen handed him the keys, an information window popped up.

A cabin was registered under Ark’s name.

A player can own a variety of homes in New World. A player who possesses housing can qualify for a share in the village. The house can also have special options depending on its shape, size and affinity.

<Current House Rating: Grade 8 cabin>

* When resting inside the house, Health and Mana Regeneration +1000%

* When you rest for more than 1 hour at the house, for 2 hours Stamina and Mental Power +10%. *Small personal safe (It is possible to keep as many items as the player’s bag size.)

Ark looked around the spacious room with a puzzled face. Of course he knew that users could own houses in New World. But it was tough to obtain a house whether in the game or in reality. If someone wanted to buy a house in a village, there would have to have enormous intimacy with the mayor or Lord of the village. In addition, if the fame was low then it wasn’t possible to buy a house even with high intimacy points. But was that all? A user could only qualify to

buy a house after an enormous tax. If there wasn't a house for sale then they would have to wait until one became available, and then it would be sold for a premium price. Eventually, the money spent on a house was more than 6000 gold! If it was a commercial development in a city or a mansion, then the house prices would increase exponentially. Still, there were quite a lot of houses sold in New World. A house would provide various buffs as well as item storage, and if additional safes was bought from a store then the storage would increase. Not paying money to rent a warehouse from the Merchant Guild was every merchants dream. It wasn't strange if the speculative frenzy blew over. But he got such a house for free. Of course, it was a small village in the mountains but.....

In fact, Ark wasn't very interested in a house. He felt like a house was unnecessary since he would always be hunting in new areas and didn't want to travel back to the house. Then why did he feel a sense of affection for his house in Lancel Village?

'The people seemed to have tied a weight to my neck with this house preparation.'

Although his rented room in reality was shabby, it was a place where he felt comfortable. His desire to complete Galen's quest quickly rose.

"Even though people would murder for a house, I got one just like that. I got a house even though only half of the quest is completed.....Once the quest is complete then the reward is worth looking forward to!"

"Thank you. I will use it often."

Ark thanked Galen.

'That's it. I was planning to concentrate on hunting in this area anyway.'

So for now, Ark was residing in his new home.

'Levelling up is the most urgent business.'

While he was in the Evil Silrion, his skills gained lots of

experience. But the experience was only half of the growth. This was a game no matter how outstanding the skills. In order to apply those skills to battle, it should be supported by his level. In fact, so far he had only chased after quests. It could be admitted that he had neglected to raise his levels in the early stages of the game. Although it was good to level up and quest, there was no guarantee that his quest wouldn't lead him to an area out of his league. And one of the basics of online gaming was grinding!

'I have to reach level 150 to continue Magaro's quest. I have a house. In the meantime, I should hunt around here and raise my levels and skills!'

Of course, he wasn't planning to hunt blindly. Even if he was heading towards bare ground, Ark had no intention of leaving empty handed.

'Now I have to accomplish two tasks.'

The first was looking for a 'Sacred Soil.' When he arrived in Lancel Village, Ark received an unexpected call. Popo who had barely spoken in the meantime, vibrated and began to talk. No, to be more precise it was Popo's mother, Yggdrasil from the Underground World talking.

-Ark, I guess it's time.

"Yes? What do you mean?"

-Popo is in the seed state. The seeds should be planted in the ground at some point and grow branches. Because Popo wanted to see the world with you, I protected him with my own power but I can't do that forever."

It was the reason that Popo had become silent a while ago. Ark felt a sense of remorse as he listened to Popo's words.

"I have to plant Popo in a specific place?"

-Yes, because he is my alter ego he needs to grow some buds. If you plant him anywhere, he would absorb all the power from the earth and the area would become a wasteland.

“Then where should I plant him?”

I know through Popo that you two are in the Argus Mountains. The land forces that have strong presences like the Argus Mountains would have sacred soil from ancient times. The soil will provide Yggdrasil with the strength to grow. Please look for the Sacred Soil for Popo.

Sacred Soil

In order for the seeds of Yggdrasil to bud properly, the power of a strong earth is necessary. Only the mighty mountains like the Argus Mountains or the Brandt Mountains have the power necessary so you should seek the Sacred Soil there.

<Difficulty: ->

‘It is better to hunt when there is a definite goal.’

Ark willingly accepted the quest. It was a chance for him to explore the mountains. Once Ark accepted the quest, he took out a thick book and laid it out on the table. It was a copy of the Monster Book and Plant Encyclopedia that he requested from Shannen when he received the quest. Before he left Selebrid, he had dropped in at the Magic Institute to leave a note for Sid and copied the book. But it was not for free. The production cost of copying was 30 gold, but Ark paid for it with faded tears. Because he judged that it was worth it.

“Now, let’s see.....Recipe information!”

‘Slime’s Immortality Pill ‘ Recipe

Essence of Glowing Slime Jelly 1/1

Unicorn horns 0/1

Corrupted Fairy Wings 0/100

The roots of a Mandragora that has received moonlight 0/100

Tooth of a hook bat 0/1000

It was a recipe that he had accidentally discovered while using survival cooking. After looking through the information listed in the Monster Book and Plant Encyclopedia, he determined that most of the ingredients were available in the Argus Mountains. Another reason why Ark went to Lancel Village was to gather the ingredients. Because he had to explore every corner of the Argus Mountains anyway, Ark accepted the <Sacred Soil> quest.

‘Levelling up and questing, while finding everything for the Slime Inner Edge recipe!’

“Let’s see. The ingredient that I need most at the moment is the ‘Tooth of a Hook Bat’ and ‘The Roots of a Mandragora that has received moonlight’. This says that many hook bats are inhabiting a cave at the base of the Argus Mountains to the east. And the Mandragora.....it was distributed all over the Argus Mountains. ‘Because it’ll take a lot of time, I should move to the east while looking for it.’”

Ark decided to head straight to the hunting grounds. It was because it was tough staying in the same village with Roco, Jana and Sarah. Anyway, it was time for special hunting. Searching for ingredients and levelling up while questing! It had been a long time since Ark didn’t have to worry about any unnecessary things and just concentrate on hunting. As expected, the true charm of online gaming was hunting!

‘Relax the mind while keeping the arm comfortable!’

“Master, we can hunt comfortably without worrisome thoughts for a long time!”

Clack clack clack! Clack clack clack!

Since they haven’t been able to hunt for a long time, Deimos and Dedric also felt quite cheerful. This feeling. With his summons by his sides, Ark was dedicated to hunting in this area. It was Ark’s game style, the Dark Walker. The Argus Mountains was a huge area between Jackson and Giran. There were a lot of virgin territories that users haven’t explored yet. Since monsters of various levels

were mixed together, it wasn't an easy area for a beginner to carelessly hunt in. In addition, as their levels increased then users would've already left Giran for Selebrid. There was no reason to go into the Argus Mountains to search for high level monsters. However, with the Monster Book then Ark was able to find the necessary prey.

“Wooooooo!”

When he entered the eastern mountains, a crowd of steel maned beasts welcomed him. They were recorded in the Monster Book as level 100 monsters.

“They are suitable prey to hunt. Now, go! Dedric, Deimos!”

“Hahaha! It has been a long time, you dog head!”

Clack clack clack!

As his two summons went forward, Ark drew his sword and rushed after them. It was the sound that signalled grinding had started.

Grinding

Jijik, jijjik!

He took one step forward into the vicinity of the fire, which flashed to reveal red eyes. There was a scraping sound on the ground as well as the sound of flapping wings.....he felt a sense of something gathering above his head. The peculiar smell of the beast drifted to his nose.

‘They are really flocking endlessly.’

“Eyes of the Cat!”

Ark’s pupils changed to that of a cat. When he used the skill, the darkness cleared up and showed a surprising scene. It was a huge gaping cave. Inside the damp cave, there were an extraordinary amount of black forms with red pupils that were all focuses on Ark. They looked similar to humans at first glance. However, they were clearly not human. A sharp canine was revealed every time they opened their mouths. Their sharp nails scratched at the ground. Long arms were bent in strange angles from the shoulders. But more than anything, there was strange parts attached from their wrist to ankle. When they spread their arms, a thin film appeared and they flew into the sky. A bat! That’s right. The identity of those guys was a bat, a hook bat.

‘The first time I saw that form, I thought I would have a heart attack.’

While looking for the hook bat, Ark had entered the eastern region of the Argus Mountains several days ago. In the evening, he had been defeating random monsters and wandering the woods. He found a person sitting on a hill. He had a form which appeared to be around 10 years old. The boy sat in the chilly weather with his head buried in his cloak and didn’t move for a while.

‘Are there people in the mountains?’

Ark approached the hill quickly. The Argus Mountains were infested with all sorts of monsters. The NPC was a boy sitting in this place alone. He assumed that something was wrong. And the chances of the NPC leading to a quest were very high. Of course, Ark spoke in a friendly voice.

“What are you doing in a dangerous place like this?”

But the boy still did not turn his head away from the cloak. At that time, Dedric’s nose twitched and he cried out.

“Master, I’ve sensed something. It smells like blood.”

“You shouldn’t sleep in a place like this.....did you get hurt perhaps?”

Ark approached cautiously and touched the boy’s shoulder. No, the instant he touched him!

“Kiaaaaaaaaaak!”

Suddenly the boy turned his body and shrieked. It was a horrifying scream that sounded like a sharp knife was scraping glass! Even though Ark had experienced many things in New World, he almost had a heart attack. The features of the boy were clearly shown. However, it wasn’t a person. With pupils that were only a few centimetres, sharp fangs and wings on the arm, there was no way it was a human. The monster threw the stiff rabbit carcass it was holding in its hand and glared at Ark. It seemed to be having dinner. It was angry about being disturbed but after seeing Ark, it laughed and revealed its fangs. His form fit its dinner specifications.

‘Hook bat? This is a bat? Level.....’

His heart pounded but Ark regained his composure. When he checked with Eyes of the Cat, it was only level 90. In New World there were scary looking monsters, but no matter what they looked like their level was low. Ark was level 127. With his darkness attribute bonus, he was level 177 and the only weapon the level 90 monster had was its teeth. In other words, it was similar to a mosquito trying to eat its favourite food.

‘Impertinent guy, you’re only a level 90 monster yet you’re trying to eat me for dinner?’

Ark’s pupils became glossy. The following situation didn’t even need to be described. The hook bat was thrown into the pot along with a mixture of spices and the resulting dish surprised Ark.

‘If the hook bat is level 90 then it won’t be so hard to obtain the ingredients.’

After he had dinner, the real hook bat hunting began. However, hunting for hook bats wasn’t as easy as it sounded.

“There is one flying!”

Dedric exclaimed as he pointed towards a black object in the night sky. That was the biggest problem with hunting bats. It was difficult to chase them while they were flying in the sky. If he found a hook bat, he had no long distance attacks so he had no choice but to chase them aimlessly. If they were closer to the ground, then he could pull out his whip and initiate a fight.

“If this continues then I will never finish.”

When thinking about it, Ark became gloomy. In order to make ‘Slime’s Immortality Pill,’ he needed 1000 fangs from the hook bat. But it took a long time just to find one. Not only was it difficult to find one, but he had to chase them around until they descended low enough for him to catch it. In addition, hook bats didn’t drop their fangs every time. If he killed four then only one would drop.

“What is with this inefficient hunting?”

Eventually Ark changed his hunting methods. Ark returned to Lancel Village and bought a bow with tears in his eyes. Because he wasn’t an archer, he couldn’t use all of the offensive power of the bow. While he bought the cheapest bow and arrows, he still wasted 10 gold.

‘I can’t believe I had to waste my money on a bow! I hope it becomes useful.’

Ark regretted it as soon as the store sold it to him. However, as long as it's not inefficient then it should be fine.

'Yes, I just have to think of it as investing 10 gold!'

Ark picked up the bow and returned to the hunting ground. As soon as Dedric spotted a hook bat, he would shoot arrows straight away.

-Your attack missed!

Because he had no archery skills, the arrows wouldn't hit directly. It was fortunate that in once the arrow flew, the hook bats would immediately come down and attack Ark. At least he didn't need to blindly chase them anymore. Even so.....

'Huck huck huck, is the hook bat a monster that doesn't have a lot of numbers?'

Even though he had been hunting for 3~4 hours, he only managed to catch twenty hook bats. He had only found 6 fangs. Furthermore, it was a bat so there would be no activities during the daytime. Was this a prank? Then how would anyone ever manage to collect 1,000 teeth from the hook bat? Of course, he gained experience from hunting monsters while looking for the hook bat but he was annoyed because he couldn't collect the ingredients. It was surprisingly Dedric who gave him a clue to solving the problem.

"Master, there should be a place where they gather."

"What?"

"Although I'm alone because I've been independent from a young age, other bats love to stick together. Except when hunting, there should be one place where they gather."

He was alone because his independence was strong.....since there was no reason to bring up the past, he praised Dedric and asked.

"So where's the gathering place?"

"Well, I don't know. But if it is bats then wouldn't it be a cave?"

Why didn't Dedric tell him this before? He conveyed through a look in

his eyes. This guy who still needed to be hit for pocketing money from the Evil Silrion.....Ark watched him vigilantly, waiting for a chance to discipline him. Anyway, it would become a habit for Dedric if it isn't corrected now.

'There is a place where bats are gathered. If so, there is only one way to find out.'

Ark remembered the previous battles against the hook bats. The behaviour patterns of the hook bats were generally similar. After they attacked because of the arrows, once they fell into a critical condition then they would try to fly away. Of course, he knocked them down with the saw blade.....Anyway, a monster that falls into a critical condition and ran away, the intention was obvious. A safe place with colleagues available.

'Why did I never think of that until now?'

Ark immediately went to find a hook bat. Finally one was picked up by Dedric's radar. After Ark half killed it, he disarmed himself. There was a risk of it dying thanks to the high sword damage.

'Huhuhu, should I relieve some of my stress?'

Crunch, crunch, Ark cracked his knuckles and smiled creepily. After he disarmed himself, Ark approached the bat that shrieked and ran towards him. It was a huge mistake. He did a series of straight jabs that seemed like rapid gun fire. The hook bat received three or four punches to the face and staggered, bleeding from the nose. But that was just the beginning. Flying kick! Ark narrowed the distance and struck it in the jaw with his knee. When the hook bat was stunned thanks to the effect of his Sword-Hand Combat, Ark agilely jumped behind it like a cat. He grabbed the waist with both hands and dropped the bat. Since he trained at the NPA gym in boxing, wrestling and taekwondo, the techniques were connecting together. Although he learned systematically, he couldn't learn a wide variety of skills but Ark accepted that some skills were perfected enough to allow him to live. Every time he used a different technique, he crushed the hook bat's face. However, Ark didn't have any sympathy. He had built up a considerable amount of stress chasing after the bats. Nose ridge, eyes, he choose and only hit the sore

spots.....He controlled his power and reduced the damage while inflicting pain. The attack was relentless enough that even Dedric and Deimos flinched watching the brutal attack. In fact, it wasn't simply to relieve stress. Didn't he need to do as much as possible to make it run away to its mum? Eventually, the hook bat fell to a critical condition in 20 seconds.

Jijik, jijijijik! The hook bat spat out curses (?) before flying into the sky.

"Heh, Dedric. Chase it!"

"Yes, sir!"

Dedric remembered the past after seeing Ark's violence. He quickly turned himself into a bat and chased after the hook bat. After 5 minutes. Dedric guided Ark to a hidden dungeon.

A damp bat cave in the Argus Mountains.

You have discovered a wide cave that connects the Argus Mountains. In the dark space, there are flying creatures that flash its red pupils seeking new prey. The intense breathing for blood should tell you what a dangerous place this is. They moment you step one foot in there, you will become their prey.

It was a threatening message that he ignored. As expected, when he entered the cave there was a huge number of hook bats. It was a scene that could be used for the climax of a horror movie, but there would be no grotesque ending. Instead, Ark cheered and drew his sword.

"Hurray, a big profit!"

Ark invaded the dungeon for three days.

"Okay, let's start. Plan B-2!"

Ark commanded Dedric and Deimos who quickly obeyed. Deimos lifted his shield and stood in front of Ark, blocking him. Using the wall made by Deimos, Ark quickly fired off arrows. He only used it for

damage to raise the skill. Ark felt it was necessary to have a long distance attack in case he had to fight any flying monsters. Therefore, he used this time to reduce the rate of the attack missing. Even though he didn't learn the skill easily, it was necessary to have some ability with it. There were other reasons that he used the bow.

'I can't throw away an arrow!'

Ark had thought it would be a lengthy hunt so he bought five hundred arrows. Although it was a low quality, it still cost 10 silver for 100 arrows. 500 arrows was 50 silver. It was a small amount but for Ark who was afraid of spending even 1 copper, it was a huge amount. However, the price of wooden arrows was too cheap to sell back to the store. If he just threw it away then he wouldn't be able to sleep. He would rather shoot until he developed blisters and learnt one skill. When he shot around 400 arrows, a skill was created.

You have gained a new skill.

Archery (Beginner, Passive): the sound when the arrow feather grazes the rim of your ear has started to become audible. If you continue steadily using the bow and arrow, you will have a benevolent friend during battle. Unfortunately, you don't have what it takes to gain a deep understanding with the bow.

<Accuracy, Firing Speed +3%, Probability that it will hit +1%>

* You are able to use the stronger steel arrow.

It was a trivial skill compared to others. That was the substantial penalty as a melee user! Still, there would be situations when having the skill would make a difference. When he used the skill, there was a 90% chance of 1~2 arrows hitting. When he shot blindly at the level 90 monster using beginner's archery, he only did 10 damage at most.....

"Master, they are nearly gathered!"

Dedric stepped on a hook bat and yelled. There was another reason he was using the bows and arrows. The size of the interior of the cave was enormous, so unless a hook book came closely enough to

be seen it wasn't easy to attack. Therefore, Ark pulled the hook bats with the arrows and Dedric.

"Alright! Deimos, use a defensive stance to protect the back!"

Clack clack clack!

Ark packed the bow and drew out his sword.

Putt putt peng!

The hook bats came three or four at a time. The hook bats came flocking as a group. Soon, there were at least twenty to fifty gathered. When the difference between them was 70 levels, the situation was different. He could just enter the cave and deal with a few hook bats, but then he would have to repeat it a lot of times so he found a cheat to fulfil his goal. His strategy to deal with a lot of numbers was to use Deimos as a defensive shield at the rear while Dedric dealt with the sky.

Seusak, jjeojeong, tutung!

He accurately predicted that the hook bats would gather and attack from different directions. However, the effect of his level appeared immediately. When he was dealing with monsters of the same level, he had to concentrate while attacking to deal a critical hit. However with a 70 level difference, when he closed his eyes and swung his sword there was still a high probability of a critical hit. There was also a high probability of his kicks causing abnormal conditions. On the other hand, he didn't have to pay that much attention to the bat's offensive. Even if it was 50 attacks, approximately only ten of them would hit and with his high defense it only dealt 30 damage. So even if ten attacks hit, he would only lose 300 health. In this situation, his health was more than 2000 points and his defensive strength was also considerable. It was because of this that level was the absolute factor in games. Even if someone had a level 10 rare armour, the defense of a level 100 general item would be much higher. Therefore, no matter how good the item, it was difficult to win against a higher level user. Of course, Ark didn't quietly accept being attacked.

‘Those three are attacking on the right! These two from below!’

When the hook bat attacked with claws and toenails, a red line of attack was drawn around Ark. It would flash very briefly, but he used it to grasp the timing of the attack and use evasive measures. It was the ability to know the enemy’s attacks in advance. Last time, he gained additional effects for ‘Eyes of the Cat’ when it reached the advanced level.

Eyes of the Cat (Advanced, Active): Eyes of the Cat has reached advanced level and you are now able to determine even more information and weaknesses of the enemy. The advanced level also has an additional bonus where if you face the same enemy multiple times, you will be able to understand their style completely and see their attacks in advance.

<For 5 minutes + Night Vision, + Life Detection, + Weak Point Discovery, + Double Critical Chance and Mana Consumption: 100>

* Line designation: You’re ability to identify the weaknesses of the opponent has become sharper after training, and after a period of time you will be able to read their movements. If you are dealing with the same enemy multiple times, there is a 5% increase every 100 opponents of predicting the trajectory of the attack. However, the maximum value cannot exceed 70%.

When this technique was used for the first time, it wasn’t that significant. But 5% increase every 100 opponents. This meant that for every 100 opponents that he attacked, there would be a 5% increase in the probability of the trajectory showing. His movements were already better than expected. However when he found more than one thousand bats, the situation changed. There was a 50% chance to show the trajectory of the attack beforehand. With his general evasion before, no matter how good he was he still received slight damage. But with Line Designation, he could avoid attacks 100% while also causing damage. When the probability went up to 50%, he could ignore the attacks completely. It was also much easier to counterattack if he knew the attack trajectory beforehand.

‘Counter attack!’

Ark avoided the attack of the hook bat and quickly swung his sword. With a heavy echo, the hook bat was split in half.

‘It definitely has a different feeling from before!’

Ark knocked down the leading hook bats and shouted.

“Deimos, Dedric! Plan A-4!”

Deimos and Dedric split to the left and right and gathered the hook bats to one place.

“Hehehe, those dull guys. They think they could catch me with those skills? I’ll show them. The body in graceful flight!”

Dedric didn’t have high health compared to his other stats. However, his evasion techniques were outstanding because of his tricky character! He avoided the offensive of the bats using skill and dexterity and lured them. On the other hand, Deimos didn’t have Dedric’s speed or cunning but his strength and stamina were high.

Clack clack clack!

Deimos pushed the hook bat using the force of his shield. His two pets were like heaven and earth, but when they united together it was wonderful. When they pushed the bats to a dead end, Ark’s eyes started glittering.

“Now Snake, sword!”

Ssak ssak ssak!

As soon as Ark grasped the sword, he stepped forward and shouted.

“Blade storm!”

The sword was crushed to pieces and wound around the hook bats like a storm. The power was concentrated on the forty hook bats and they started to fall at a tremendous rate. The black debris spun like a whirlwind while dealing damage. Since the damage wasn’t focused on one bat, Blade Storm dealt around 40% damage to the health. The hook bats that had already lost a lot of health were

shredded to pieces.

“Okay, let’s go while it is still hot! Deimos, transform! Snake, create your deadly poison.

Deimos quickly turned into a sword that was stuck in the ground. When he drew it, Ark timed it to coincide with Snake applying poison. All the preparations were ready. The blade moved like a whip and all the hook bats were struck and bound together. This was the system that Ark used to hunt hook bats. Honestly, even if his health was double what it was, he wouldn’t have been able to deal with fifty level 90 monsters. His defense was high, but he wasn’t a warrior that could deal with a lot of opponents. It also wasn’t possible to avoid all 50 attacks. If he didn’t concentrate when fighting, there would be a lot of times when his health became really low. Therefore, Ark created a strategy to deal with a lot of enemies. Block the first offensive while driving them to a dead end. The ensuing Blade Storm would do a lot of damage then he would attack multiple enemies at the same time with his whip blade. He dealt damage to around a dozen of them every time he swung his whip. Combined with Blade Storm, they weren’t able to escape injury.

“Where are you trying to crawl to? Just die gently!”

If one or two managed to escape, Dedric would use Dark Dash to attack them. Therefore, the hook bats were split in two every time he swung the saw blade.

“The finishing touch. Blade Storm!”

Ark used Blade Storm again the moment it was convenient. The whirling sword debris again! Thirty hook bats died in an instant.

[[Your level has risen.]]

After he dealt with fifty hook bats, his level rose. Experience was the essence of hunting!

‘Huhuhu, it is better to sweep experience from a group.’

He gathered dozens of monsters together to hunt them at the same

time. Normally, it was a method that was monopolized by magicians that could use large area of effect magic. While they had a disadvantage in PVP, the reason that users would select magicians despite their low defense was because of this. Once they've experience the pleasure, it was impossible for them to return to hunting as warriors. However, Ark managed to hunt this way using the combination of Blade Storm and his whip blade. The result was unimaginable!

'My level is rising at a speed comparable to when I led the raccoon troops in the Underground World!'

He couldn't understand why users would hunt the other way.

"Good work. The outcome of this battle is announced."

"Aigoo, my joints and sinews. Every time I fight, my whole body starts throbbing. But I have to put up with it. Because it is Master's will. I'll work hard."

Dedric studied his face and flattered him with many compliments. After the cave was found, Ark began to slowly discipline his summons again. He brought back the system where the worst performer would be feed his cooking, depending on the battle results. But in fact, it was just a pretext to feed food to Dedric.

'Deimos can occasionally raise his stats through bone collecting. But Dedric has no other way except through food. Now that he has become impertinent, I'll make sure to keep on testing new food on him.'

Therefore, Ark kept feeding his cooking to Dedric. Thanks to that he learnt new dishes, Dedric stopped his bad habit and raised his stats.....there was a triple effect. But as it wasn't too urgent, he framed it as punishing the unskilful one. If he showed that he was punishing him too blatantly, Dedric's insubordination would only get worse.

'When Dedric's ability reaches Deimos again, I'll make sure to feed them appropriately depending on the situation.'

In the meantime, Ark who had raised his summons to level 90 was a

little comfortable.

“The both of you have done well this time. You may rest comfortably.”

Clack clack clack! Clack clack clack clack!

“Hehehe, as expected from the Master who I look up to.”

“Don’t play around and make sure to recover your health. Snake, pick up the items.”

Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake crawled to the ground and began to eagerly pick up the loot.

[-Snake has acquired ‘Teeth of the Hook Bat.’]

There was a pile of japtem where the fifty bat hooks were killed. There was the flesh of the hook bat that could be used as meat as well as leather that could be used as material.....A number of magic items had also dropped. Since they were level 90 monsters, the items dropped were around level 70~80 but those items were actually more popular at the auction site. This was because the average level of users in New World was currently around level 60~80.

[-Snake has acquired ‘Heavy Iron Sword.’]

Heavy Iron Sword (Magic)
Weapon type: Two-Handed Sword
Durability: 30/45
Attack: 17~23
Weight: 40
User restriction: Level 80 or higher with Warrior profession A sword made by smelting precious metal and iron. This is one the mass-produced goods produced at the smithy that is most popular among warriors. However, sometimes the mass-produced goods can produce a masterpiece. These swords perform better than the

mass-produced goods and can sometimes have special options.

<Option: Attack Speed +10%, Strength +7>

The hook bats gave more than expected.

‘It is quite useable? 800,000.....no, I can get 1 million won for it!’

Ark absent-mindedly packed the Heavy Iron Sword into his bag. However, at the moment Ark need the teeth from the hook bat to create his ‘Slime’s Immortality Pill.’ But even when Snake searched every corner, only 13 had dropped.

“Sheesh, the drop rate for it is really low.”

Many days passed where he only slept for 3 hours and minimized the break time in the game while only concentrating on hunting. He hunted as many as 5,000 hook bats! He had to return to Lancel Village countless times to sell the japtem. Meanwhile, Ark had risen 15 levels and he was now level 142. And 13 of those levels were from the hook bats in the cave. It was the result of using Blade Storm in succession while group hunting. Yet he had still only collected 950 teeth from the hook bats.

“50 more.....That means I have to hunt approximately seven hundred more? I’m sick of hunting bats so if I hurry, I might be able to finish it today.”

Ark continued hunting without any breaks.

“It has completely become rags.”

When he looked carefully at his armour, there was only 20 durability left. Every time he met a large number of enemies, his armour became tattered. Ark used Magic Restoration to repair his equipment neatly. Magic Restoration was not an advanced magic that made it possible for him to repair items without losing durability. When he needed to repair the Guardian Armour of the Merpeople, he no longer required the repair box.

‘The side effect of the skill rise is terrific.’

When his armour was beautifully repaired, the importance of the skill was once again seen. Ark repaired his equipment and recovered his health before entering the cave again. When visiting the cave, he discovered a cave that was much larger than it seemed from the outside. The mountains seemed to be split as there was a gap with cliffs on both sides. It meant that when he looked up, the sky would occasionally appear. The place was incredibly crowded with hook bats along the rock wall, so Ark had to come up with a new plan.

‘I’ve come this far into the dungeon.’

He might as well go to the end of the dungeon.

‘Who knows? There might also be a treasure chest?’

Ark fought with the hook bats before heading deeper. How far did he go? All of a sudden, the cave became really narrow before widening into something spacious. There was a stone pillar with fangs hanging from it!

‘Is this the end of the cave?’

Ark looked around and walked along the wall.

Kkiiiing.....

Then a strange sound rang abruptly from in front of him. It echoed around like a tuning fork. Ark reflexively looked in the direction the sound was coming from. There was a huge object hanging down from the ceiling. It was a huge black lump hanging, which made Ark feel anxious as he kept on watching it. The object suddenly twitched and revealed red eyes. As his gaze met those eyes, he felt out of breath.

‘Huck! That, that is.....a hook bat?’

“Kkieeeek!”

At the same time, the object shrieked and opened both wings. It was a huge hook bat that was at least 20 metres.

[-The boss monster ‘Terrifying Cave Grimwing’ has appeared!]

It wasn't a treasure chest waiting at the end but a boss monster.

'Sheesh, I never thought there would be a boss monster in a place like this!'

The figure flew down and shot like an arrow towards Ark. Ark rolled on the ground to avoid the attack before wielding his sword. However, Grimwing immediately opened its wings and hit the brakes before turning around. His back received damage.

-You have received a critical hit from Grimwing. 400 damage!

'Is this a joke?'

"Deimos, use your defense posture to protect the rear. Dedric, disturb that guy so he can't fly around selfishly!"

Deimos held his shield and stayed behind Ark. Dedric used Dark Dash to move around Grimwing. Thanks to his pets, Ark had room to recover. He was already tired of dealing with the disgusting hook bats. Even though it was huge, it was still a hook bat. Since it was an opponent that he had fought to some degree before, Ark calmly moved his summons around.

Counter attack!

Ark dealt damage while Dedric drove the Grimwing around. Grimwing was a monster with a peculiar ability to counterattack agilely, however Deimos received half of the attacks thanks to his defense stance. After 5 minutes of fighting, Grimwing had lost 30% of its health. Ark had lost 40% of his health but as he became used to Grimwing's movements, that gradually decreased.

'Okay, it was a little bit embarrassing at first but I can beat this monster!'

But it was still too early to be convinced of his victory. Grimwing suddenly flew upwards and shrieked. Something similar to a shock wave that wasn't visible swept Ark and his summons away. Ark flinched but received no damage. However.....

"Eh? Deimos? Dedric? What are you doing?"

Ark looked dumbly at his pets. Clack clack, clack clack clack! All of a sudden, Deimos ran to a dark space. In front of him, an absurd golden bone was floating. Since the golden bone showed up, Deimos couldn't hear or even see Ark. He just stared with spellbound eyes as he chased after the golden bone. Dedric was also not in a normal state.

"These children, I'll kill you all! Come back!"

Dedric chased after the bats in front of him cursing while using Dark Dash. However, the bats avoided Dedric while teasing him. They were probably the bats that had rejected Dedric in the Netherworld. Golden bones and bats..... With a flash, Ark realized what was happening.

'These things can't just suddenly show up in the cave. If so, this is.....Hallucinations!'

The shockwave that Grimwing blew!

The shock wave caused hallucinations instead of damage. However, Ark was a Dark Walker and had a 50% resistance to darkness, fear, confusion and seduction spells. Thanks to that he managed to avoid the hallucinations, but Dedric and Deimos were caught by it. After the two acted separately, Ark became naked.

"Kikikiki!"

Grimwing burst into laughter while threatening him by revealing its fangs. Then he was battered with attacks from every direction! In an instant, his health quickly decreased. Ark tried to counterattack but even though Grimwing was 20 metres big, it was as quick as a squirrel. Once he gave a critical hit, he quickly soared into the sky. Rapid acceleration and braking. Although only those two moves were repeated, Ark couldn't get the timing right for a counterattack.

'Damn, rapid acceleration and braking is one of the basics of boxing.....'

Since he practiced boxing at the gym, he shouldn't be this helpless. Ark tried to shoot an arrow, but it didn't show any effect since it was only beginner's archery.

‘If this happens then I must rely on a plan of desperation!’

Ark ground his teeth together and tried to rush towards Grimwing. He tried to guess the timing and swung his sword, but Grimwing easily avoided it by braking. And the moment it brandished its claw, Ark ran up to it. His chest tingled from the damage, but Ark just hugged the ankle tightly.

‘Try to attack me when I’m holding on to you like this!’

The wrestling he learned was not in vain. Even though Grimwing flew all over the place, Ark held on firmly and did not fall. Even though he couldn’t use his sword in that position, he could still inflict damage.

‘That’s it, now you’re screwed! Cough!’

Bang bang double bang!

It was at that time. Grimwing actually rushed into the wall.

‘This ignorant child!’

The wall shook and rocks began to fall. After Grimwing slammed into the wall, it lost 20% of its health while Ark fell into a critical condition. It was a crisis! Ark immediately got up and prepared for Grimwing’s offensive. However, there was no expected attack.

“Ara? What’s with that guy?”

“Kieeek! Kiek!”

However, this time Grimwing swept its arm in the wrong place.

‘I don’t understand but this is a chance. I’ll withdraw!’

Ark grabbed Deimos’ collar and hid in a narrow entrance. Dedric also came back to him after he cancelled the summoning. Ark was saved from the crisis by drinking a potion that restored 50% of his health. At that time, Deimos even woke up from the hallucination. Deimos looked around restlessly and became sulky when he saw that there was no golden bone. Well, he knew that Deimos was crazy about bones.....

‘Grimwing is stronger than I thought. Somehow I think it is possible

to win if I have my summons.....if only there was no way to have the hallucinations affect them. What will I do? Should I just give up and find a way to escape? But it won't be easy to run away.....'

Ark was worried until he suddenly tilted his head to one side.

'Wait a moment. Why did that guy miss a while ago? The rocks falling caused a lot of dust to rise, but was it to the extent that it couldn't see me?'

There was suddenly a flash in Ark's mind.

'Dirt? No! It wasn't because of the dirt that it couldn't find me! It was because of the rocks falling! That's right, why didn't I think of that? There was an echo when I first came in. That was how Grimwing could see. It used its hearing to see just like a real bat. Just like the sonar of a submarine, it used supersonic waves to read my location.'

Ark's firm belief in victory showed in his eyes.

'That is its weakness! If I use it then I can beat it!'

Ark thought frantically. After he visualized a manoeuvre, Ark immediately summoned Dedric.

"This child, I won't leave it at that!"

Dedric caught Ark's collar as soon as he was summoned. He was still wandering in the hallucination.

".....Do you want to die?"

"Huck! M-Master?"

When Ark stared at him, Dedric was surprised and immediately removed his hand.

"Ah, no. This is just.....I was mad at those fellows before....."

"That's enough. Shut up and listen well."

“Grrrrr!”

Grimwing’s red eyes wandered around the cave. After it lost Ark’s trace, it used the supersonic waves many times but couldn’t find where Ark was hiding. However, he hadn’t fully escaped. Ark was clearly somewhere. That was what its wild animal instincts was telling it. Therefore, it held its breath and explored the cave. Suddenly, Ark ran out of a small cave. He came from behind, but the ultrasound monitored in a square around the wings. Grimwing kicked upwards and rushed towards Ark. However, Ark was different from before just ran around without fighting. Grimwing chased him for a while before letting out a roar of fury.

“Kkieeeek!”

An intense shock wave went through Ark. Then Ark fell to the ground. Grimwing smiled in satisfaction before it jumped. At the moment that Ark fell, his body divided into two.

“.....?”

Was its shockwave that strong? Deception was a phenomenon that it couldn’t understand. However, Grimwing soon realized that it was deceived. The body suddenly jumped up and ran around shouting.

“Is this a wild goose chase? If I’m caught this time then I’m dead!”

It wasn’t Ark’s voice. It sounded like the voice of a clamouring bat. When Grimwing used its supersonic continuously, it detected two objects moving on the ceiling.

“It’s too late, Dark Blade!”

There was a roaring sound about its head and all the images started distorting. That’s right, the person above Grimwing’s head was Ark! This was the details of Ark’s plan. Grimwing couldn’t see the opponent with its eyes. The most that it could figure out with the supersonic was the size and silhouette of the opponent. That was

when Ark came up with an idea to use it to his advantage. When Dedric wore a big armour, he was similar in size and shape to Ark. The foundation of his plan was to make Grimwing confuse Dedric for Ark! While Grimwing was focused on Dedric, Ark and Deimos would climb up the wall to the ceiling. Then Dedric would lure the target.....and he would use Dark Blade while hanging from the ceiling. He calculated the spots where the sharp stalactite would fall.

Kukukung, chwaak!

The stalactite tore through Grimwing's wings like it was paper.

"Now, isn't this more fair? Try to figure out where I am!"

Ark swung his sword vertically while jumping down towards Grimwing. Grimwing let out a roar of anger. Then, Deimos swung his sword with strength towards the ceiling. The power wasn't enough to drop the stalactite like Ark's was. However, the small stone fragments that fell like hail was excellent. The countless noises were fatal for Grimwing's ability to hear and grasp the location of the opponent. When Grimwing tried to swing its wings, the accuracy fell and it kept on hitting the wall. At the same time, Ark landed on Grimwing's neck and dealt multiple critical hits. The ensuing battle followed Ark's pace. Grimwing couldn't fly thanks to its torn wings and it couldn't see because Deimos kept on making the small rocks fall. Grimwing tried to aim the hallucination shockwave towards Deimos a few times but could not see Ark.

"Riposte!"

Ark used Riposte every time Grimwing opened its wings. Of course the shockwave flew to the wrong place.

'Heh, wings and ultrasound, when those two are sealed then it is easy.'

But he still had to be careful even if it was like a lion trying to catch a rabbit. A blind man with his eyes opened by oriental medicine was a powerful opponent. Ark attacked carefully and steadily reduced its health. At that time there was an unexpected development.

"These children, I'm going to kill you!"

Dedric had been hit by the hallucinations and frantically rushed towards Grimwing. Then Grimwing's eyes flashed and it grabbed Dedric and bit into his neck. Was Grimwing trying to restore its health by sucking it from Dedric?

'Vampire! That's right, wouldn't a hook bat be a vampire bat? Sheesh, I have to release the summon.....'

Ark regretted it belatedly and tried to release the summon.

"Ugh! This child, did it ask? It asked right? Doesn't it know that I also have fangs?"

Dedric cursed and bit Grimwing in the neck. As soon as they both bit each other, Grimwing's health recovery stopped. He didn't know what was happening but it was a chance!

"Okay, Dedric. Keep on biting! Dark Blade!"

The light from the sword split through the darkness! When Dark Blade hit Grimwing, its health quickly decreased. After the 3rd shot hit its neck, its body trembled and it collapsed to the ground.

"I won!"

-Your level has risen!

-Your level has risen.....

Grimwing gave quite a lot of experience compared to its level. The message quickly popped up and he gained 4 levels. However unlike his expectations, the only items that dropped were a ring and a wing.

[Grimwing's Wing (Special)

The wings of a bat made huge through mutation.

The purpose is unclear, but it is obviously a rare item.

If might become useful later on.....]

Mind's Eye (Rare)

Item type: Ring

User restriction: Level 120

Grimwing's 3rd eye. When connected to a suitable form, it seems possible to wear it on a finger. Grimwing lived only in the darkness and its vision deteriorated over time. The reason that it was able to find its opponent was through supersonic, using its third eye. Although the body has disappeared, this ring might be able to show the same ability if supplied with a suitable magic.

<Option: It is possible to use Mind's Eye.>

*Mind's Eye: When using Mind's Eye, you will gain the ability to see in the darkness for 1 minute. This has nothing to do with eyesight, so the ability isn't affected by sight restriction magic such as 'Stealth' or 'Darkness.' In addition, you will be able to easily discover the location of traps on all terrains.

Mana consumption: 50

'A rare ring! Although it doesn't raise the stats, an additional skill is added as an option!'

The ability to see in the darkness was not necessary. However, it is a different story if it is not influenced by darkness magic. While Ark could use Eyes of the Cat to maximize his sight, it was vulnerable to darkness magic. So in the Evil Silrion, there were a lot of times where he was forced into a corner because the opponent used a skill that had an effect on his vision. It also allowed him to see the location of traps. Of course if he had time then he would be able to find the location of the traps, but there was no time to search in the confusing fight against Duke. The only disagreeable thing was that it looked too evil. He had to insert the disgusting eye onto his finger to observe the surroundings.

'Well, that's it. Even though it looks like that, it is a rare ring. Because warriors would like it, it is possible to receive a high price for it. I found it accidentally but it is a good profit for a dungeon.'

After recovering, I'll go and collect the remainder of the ingredients.'

Ark sat down to restore his health and took out his pot. Then Dedric appeared with a bemused expression. The hallucination didn't seem to have broken yet as Dedric tilted his head from side to side while approaching Gurimwing's corpse. He bit it again before raising his voice like Columbus discovering a new continent.

"Yes, I am a vampire!"

What did he suddenly announce? This goofball?

"What are you talking about? Didn't you know that already?"

"That's not right! Look, look, I can bite!"

"Well of course you're a vampire....."

Ark murmured as he moved forward. Yes, why didn't he think it was strange until now? Dedric was a vampire. At first, he was only a vampire bat but then he evolved to the vampire Dedric. Naturally, he should gain the special ability of a vampire! Even if he was a vampire, it made sense that he would have a bloodsucking ability. Then why was Dedric making such a fuss with his words.....? At that time, a new message window popped up in front of Ark.

Your pet 'Dedric' has manifested the power of the vampire.

Dedric who had suddenly evolved from a bat was unaware that he was a vampire. Therefore, most of the special capabilities of a vampire were sealed. However once he was bitten by Grimwing, he obtained a vampire's instincts. Usually vampires are known to absorb their opponent's strength and power. As he was a bat that was promoted to a vampire and just acquired the ability, it isn't possible to show 100% of the vampire's special characteristics. The ability to use it only shows up at specific times.

* Dedric has formed 1 skill slot.

* Vampirism: Suck the blood of a specific person to absorb skills.

<If the vampire succeeds, one random skill from the opponent can be stored in the skill slot. The absorbed skill can only be used

once. If a new skill is absorbed than the one previously saved in the skill slot is automatically deleted.>

*Current absorbed skill: <Confusing Supersonic Wave> For 20 seconds, all opponents within a 20 metre radius will become confused. If the power to resist confusion is below 50%, there is an 80% chance of being confused.

‘Dedric has such a skill?’

Although it was random, he could absorb one skill from the opponent and use it.

Therefore, it was possible to exert a tremendous effect. On the other hand, Dedric wouldn’t stop cheering over Grimwing’s body.

“Hahaha, that’s right. I’m a noble vampire from the Netherworld! I have discovered the importance of my existence!”

Legend of the Unicorn

“Is there really no way?”

“Of course not.”

The magician replied. For more than 10 minutes, the magician didn't bother blinking. Ark looked at the bag lying on the table with pained eyes. It was the second material required for 'Slime's Immortality Pill.' It was the 'Corrupted Fairy Wings.' After he had finished collecting all the teeth of the hook bat, he wandered around the Argus Mountains looking for the corrupted fairy wings. The Monster Book had written that they were very rarely found in the Argus Mountains. However, he couldn't find it even after a few days. After going around hunting monsters for a few days, Ark accidentally discovered information about the corrupted fairy wings.

“The corrupted fairy wings? Let's see? Well I don't know what to say. Oh, you should go see the magician Madusein. He might know.”

“Madusein?”

“He is a magician that moved here before it became empty. He has a store that sells magic ingredients near the village entrance. The store is arranged in such a way that merchants have difficulty travelling there.....I can't understand that friend at all.”

Galen had introduced him to the magic ingredients store. Madusein was a grey haired magician. He didn't set up the store to make money, but as a quiet place to work when settlers came to Lancel Village. Anyway, he asked Madusein again who laughed and replied.

“It would just head towards the ground. It isn't easy to obtain the corrupted fairy wings. Every few months, the fairies would have a ceremony where they shed their old bodies and changed into a new one. It is like a snake shedding its skin. Then wings that would fall out are known as the corrupted fairy wings.”

“Then it would just fall onto the ground?”

“That’s right. There are quite a few fairies alive in the Argus Mountains.”

“Thank you.”

Ark quickly gave a greeting as he was about to leave.

“Are you going to search the bare ground?”

“Yes?”

“Have you ever seen a fairy? You haven’t seen it? Don’t you find it strange that you’ve been living in the Argus Mountains and haven’t even caught a glimpse of one?”

“That’s right.”

Ark nodded with a confused expression. Come to think of it, there haven’t been many places in the Argus Mountains that he hadn’t explored. However, he never saw any corrupted fairy wings let alone a fairy. Madusein clicked his tongue and continued talking.

“The fairies are different. The fairy can travel between this dimension and other dimensions. It might not even exist in this world. Do you understand? Naturally if the skin falls, it would fall in the other dimension. You will require very special skills to obtain it. Just like me.”

Madusein rummaged through a shelf before putting one bag on the table. It was the ‘Corrupted Fairy Wings.’ His intention was to force Ark who had no ‘special skills’ to obtain it, to buy it from the store. Although he could wander around the mountains looking for it, it might be better to buy it off him. However, Ark became dizzy the moment he heard the price.

“3 gold each. You said you needed 100? Then that would be 300 gold.”

300 gold! The prize money from the Evil Silrion was only 100 gold and the amount of money he won betting was 100 gold. He had also obtained 100 gold from hunting in the Argus Mountains. It was as if

Madusein intentionally named the price of his entire fortune, which made him angry. Then Ark spoke without considering.

“I’ll search for it using my own power.”

“Okay.”

Ark frantically wandered the Argus Mountains after that. But like Madusein said, ‘special skills’ were required. After a couple of days, Ark eventually found himself back in Madusein’s store. Even though he tried to decrease it by even 1 copper, Madusein didn’t budge.

“I heard that you didn’t run this business to make money?”

“It also isn’t good to suffer a loss in merchandise when running a business.”

As expected, it wasn’t easy talking to magicians. Besides, he wasn’t an original native like Galen and was an NPC that had only recently immigrated here. There was no intimacy with him. In the end, Ark had to purchase the ingredients while crying tears of blood.

‘Damn, it isn’t possible to give up after gathering all those fangs.....’

After all the money he invested in the ‘Slime’s Immortality Pill,’ if the item wasn’t worth it then he would die. However, it also made him think again. The ingredients were worth 300 gold. Then of course the stuff would have value. With those expectations, he eventually decided to buy the item.

‘Yes, this is an investment. Anyway, once Sid organizes the items and returns I will have a lot of money again. It isn’t necessary to worry about 300 gold. In order to earn a lot of money, the investment amount has to be big too. It is common sense that a larger investment would mean more profit.’

Ark.....if he didn’t think like that then he wouldn’t have been able to endure it.

‘Anyway, I have the corrupted fairy wings now.....there are only two ingredients left?’

“Information Window”

'Slime's Immortality Pill ' Recipe

Essence of Glowing Slime Jelly 1/1

Unicorn horns 0/1

Corrupted Fairy Wings 100/100

The roots of a Mandragora that has received moonlight 78/100

Tooth of a hook bat 1000/1000

It took him six days to obtain the tooth of a hook bat. He wasted three days on the corrupted fairy wings and eventually had to spend 300 gold to buy it. The amount of time and money he spent into making this wasn't a joke. But now it is almost up to the completed stage.

'I can find the Mandragora herb as I wander the mountain.....'

The Mandragora was a herb only found in the Argus Mountains. In fact, he had also seen the Mandragora when he came to the Argus Mountains in the past. But he didn't dare to even touch it. Just like the corrupted fairy wings, sometimes special herbs or ingredients required special skills in ingredient foraging. The Red Bee Honey was a high class ingredient where if you didn't sprinkle it with the mushroom poison antidote first, picking it would be dangerous. The Mandragora was one of those special herbs. The roots of the Mandragora were in the shape of a person, and when it was pulled out from the ground it would let out a horrifying scream. It was a sound that would instantly kill any user or NPC with a 100% probability. When Ark was a beginner, he could only check the texture of the cold ground.

However, Ark soon found a solution. The copy of the ingredient sent by the Magic Institute had details about the scent of the Mandragora. Ark was not a dog. However, he had a number of summons that was like a dog. Ark instructed Deimos to look for the Mandragora from a distance away. As an undead, Deimos was immune to the instant death magic of other monsters! He pulled out the Mandragora without any concerns about its cry. However, he

needed the Mandragora that had received light from the moon. Because it could only be picked at night, he was missing a few but that was easily solved with time.

‘The problem is this guy…….’

Ark breathed out a sigh as he read the recipe. The only thing left was the horn of a unicorn. It was in fact the biggest problem. Ark had tried to find the unicorn’s horn first. Because it was different from the other ingredients and only required one, he had tried to put it away quickly. The exact location of the unicorn was even recorded in the Monster Book. It was located at the Moonlight Pond in the northern part of the Argus Mountains. But no matter how hard he looked, he couldn’t even find a trace of the unicorn’s shadow. After a couple of days, he had given up to go hook bat hunting. However, he could no longer put it off.

‘There should be a way to catch it somehow…….’

Ark lived in the area around the Moonlight Pond. But a unicorn still didn’t appear. A whole day passed.

‘Perhaps the Monster Book was wrong?’

What other reason was there for it not appearing. In the end, Ark was attempting to move his seat when the moon rose on the Moonlight Pond.

“Hihihihing!”

Suddenly a cry was heard from the Moonlight Pond. When he flinched and turned around, wasn’t that a white horse running around the pond?

‘It’s a unicorn!’

Ark immediately jumped into the Moonlight Pond. However, when he arrived he only saw the unicorn’s shadow as it ran away. Its caution was enormous. Since then, the same situation was repeated. Ark would hang around the Moonlight Pond until it showed up. Once he was behind it, its form would be seen in the distance. When he attempted to ambush it with his summons, the situation was the

same. It was so wary that if there were any signs of a monster, it wouldn't appear. And its speed was so quick that Dedric couldn't even catch up with it while flying.

"Unbelievable."

There was a tight knot in Ark's stomach. These ingredients were so difficult to collect that sometimes he thought he would die! Now only the last ingredient was left. But if this pattern continued then there would be no way to obtain it. Even if he chased after it for one thousand years, he wouldn't be able to catch it. After Ark spent one day on it, he eventually wandered back to Lancel Village. He had been hunting while waiting for the unicorn and had a pile of japtem built up.

"Ark-hyungnim, you're back?"

When he entered the village, the guard NPCs greeted him happily. He knew those people. They were the thieves that had come with Ark. Among them were the thieves who had graduated from the Samcheong College of Education and lost the chaotic alignment. And they had specially trained in a career to help the village.

"Ark-hyungnim. A few days ago we took over the position of village guards with Big Hyung-nim's permission."

"Hello? I started working part-time at the general store today. This is the help out the livelihood of the training centre and ease Roco-nuna's concerns a little bit."

"I'm employed as the assistant to the carpenter. I'll extend Hyung-nim's house later."

Whenever he visited the village, the thieves were report to him. Thanks to that Ark's depressed mood became better. These thieves weren't seeking a new life. The number of thieves that have entered Lancel Village was now 130 people. The atmosphere of the village became lighter and they're started to fix up the surrounding roads now that there are a lot of people to help. It was the development of a village. It would mean a direct profit for Ark.

'Okay, okay. Work more diligently. Raise the real estate prices

higher.'

Ark smiled warmly at the NPCs running around. The village should develop and become a larger scale. And gain more awareness. The rapid changes would affect the real estate market value. It was natural for prices of houses in liveable towns to rise. If Lancel Village was established as a place with good real estate then merchants would come running with money to buy the houses. Then Ark would sit down and earn money. That wasn't the only advantage with houses. When the house had been empty for a while, sometimes he would come back to find items.

-Meow Elder Hassan has sent a gift (10 glowing molars)
-Galen the temporary chief of Lancel Village has sent a gift (Southern Speciality Fruit Basket)

Ark received overwhelming support from the NPCs in Lancel Village. When Ark left the house empty, they would often give him gifts like these. The Meow would give leather from the monsters they hunted in the vicinity, the raccoons would leave crafts to decorate the house while sometimes Hanson would provide a map with a new area discovered. A lot of it didn't cost a lot of money but they were all free items. Ark wasn't the type that would reject anything free.

'Huhuhu, what gifts will there be this time?'

Ark excitedly went to his house.

"Oppa!"

Just as he entered the house, he heard Roco's voice.

"Ara? Roco? How are you here?"

"I haven't seen Oppa for a while so I stopped by for a moment. Oh, but what kind of house looks like this? The dust on the table.....ghosts would appear. So I decided to do a little bit of cleaning.

Roco held a broom while laughing. He remembered that every time

he came home, it had been clean for some reason.....was she trying to take the role of a wife? It is definitely such a shape.

“But why do you look like that? The armour is shabby as well as your face, and did you wash at all?”

“Well it is in the game.....”

“Heung! It is obviously in reality as well. Haven’t you been playing the game for 20 hours every day? You’ve probably haven’t been washing and just eating noodles. Isn’t that right?”

She was completely correct. He played 20 hours a day. When he played for that long it was a pain to do anything else. When at home he would barely wash and he would often eat seaweed rolls in the game unit.

“I still go out for training.”

“That’s because the teacher is severe and you’ll receive hell for not going.”

“That’s it.”

“I don’t care whether it is a game or reality. It is a basic good etiquette to be clean. Other people manage to look good while in the game.....”

Roco continued muttering before closing her mouth. Then she looked around and quickly pulled Ark to the door.

“It is dangerous here for the moment so follow me.”

“What? Dangerous?”

“Shhh, Jana was sleeping on the neighbouring roof just now. And Sarah is helping her father map new areas but if she knows you’re back then it would be troublesome. So come with me quickly!”

Jana, Sarah and Roco were still having a war of nerves to try and maintain a grip on Ark. Anyway, Roco led Ark to a stream nearby.

“Take off your armour. I’ll wash it now. Whether it is a game or reality, a man should always be clean. Ah, and on the weekend I’ll

bring a few dishes to the hospital. Unlike New World, you should take a break to eat properly.”

“

After receiving Roco’s embarrassing confession, they’re met a couple of times to eat and watch a movie. It was good up to there. Ark used playing the game as an excuse not to go out for too long. But the aftermath had led to a surprisingly serious situation. Roco had started acting like his wife. But compared to reality, it was much more serious in the game. Particularly in Lancel Village.....maybe she became anxious because of Jana and Sarah actively expressing their affection. However, the bigger issue was that Ark didn’t hate her nagging. After his mother was hospitalized for a few years, there was no one around to nag him. He didn’t know it himself, but it was quite lonely. Therefore, Roco’s nagging sometimes felt quite lovely. And he gradually got used to it.

“Look. That’s a lot better.”

Roco was shaking off the moisture from the leather armour. Unlike reality, in New World there was no need to dry the leather armour. After the laundry was finished, the leather armour looked as good as new. Even if he repaired it using Magic Restoration, it wouldn’t get rid of the dirt. In addition, there was no need to reject the 5% increase in defense for 4 hours buff.

“Thank you.”

Ark wore the armour with an embarrassed expression.

“Oppa, how long will you stay in the village?”

“Why?”

“When you have time will you take a walk with me? I found a place that has a good view of this area. We haven’t been able to meet outside since Oppa has been busy hunting. So it would feel like a short date. Yes? When it comes to Oppa, we can just go to a nearby area and look around.”

Roco asked with eager and sparkling eyes. The landscape of New

World was so beautiful that it couldn't be compared to the real world. It was difficult to look at the mountains from a suburb in Seoul, but New World was different. There were jungles just like the Amazon and thick forests. There were places that haven't been touched by human hands. The fact that there were monsters waiting also made it more fun for the users..... If a suitable place was found, it wasn't necessary to take an airplane and fly to a foreign country. Recently, there was the trend of lovers going on dates inside the game. New World was the best environment for lovers to date in. They didn't need to go away. There were cities with theme parks and a medieval village in the background. There were strange food and no matter how much someone drank, they wouldn't get a hangover. Dating in New World was so popular, that there were even websites on the Internet that specialized in it. If monsters showed up on the date, the lovers could show off in front of each other and gain a lot of attention. For Ark who lived in the game, Roco came up with this method of dating.

'It's not a bad idea to cool my head off a little bit.'

"Okay, I'll have a quick look around."

"Hohoho, then follow me. I'll show you a wonderful place."

Roco guided him to a place that Ark had visited already. However, it looked like an entirely different place once he saw it again.

Was this scenery always here?'

When he was hunting, he didn't pay any attention to the scenery around him.

"How is it? Is it okay? All the rehabilitation brothers have come here before as well. Jjak-tung oppa even said that he would bring his girlfriend here again in the future. Ah, did you know that Jjak-tung oppa had a girlfriend? There is an 11 year age difference between them so I called him a cradle robber."

Roco stood next to him and babbled in a pleasant voice. However, Ark was already trying to navigate the Andromeda. How could he catch a unicorn? Those were the only thoughts his head was full of.

‘.....that damn horse, should I ask Roco to come and help me take care of it?’

That was the idea that Ark suddenly thought of. The beautiful scenery, woman and unicorn.....the combination reminded him of a fantasy movie he watched when he was a kid.

‘Wait? Unicorn? Wasn’t a unicorn a monster with one horn? And the unicorn I saw was a horse. Speaking of the unicorn.....?’

Ark quickly pulled out the Monster Book.

Unicorn Habitat: The Moonlight Pond in the Argus Mountains.

The unicorn is a mysterious animal that crosses dimensions freely. Using its power, it can sometimes cross the dimensions and show its form on our dimension. Although it has a lot of wariness, its nature is good and it likes a righteous person. If someone appears that is the opposite, it would know straight away and never appear. The unicorn’s favourite things are babies and an innocent maiden. In particular, it likes the form of an innocent maiden and is drawn instinctively to her. The unicorn horn has powerful magical effects and is a premium magic ingredient. Thanks to the indiscriminate magicians attempting to capture them, they rarely show their form on this earth. But there is a rumour that some travellers saw them at the Moonlight Pond in the Argus Mountains.

‘That’s right, as expected.....!’

Ark also remembered similar contents from the movie. The man in the movie sent his innocent daughter as bait to catch the unicorn. Then the unicorn went to sleep in the daughter’s lap and the man attacked it. Of course that was the reason the unicorn didn’t appear for Ark. The unicorn would be wary of an alert man who didn’t even wash when he was dirty.

‘But an innocent maiden.....?’

According to the legend, it would appear at her foot? And there was such a woman right in front of Ark! Ark grasped Roco’s hand and asked.

“Roco! Can you help me out?”

“Yes? What is it?”

“I need your assistance in catching a monster.”

Roco blushed under Ark’s attention and asked.

“Are you certain I can help?”

“Yes, your help is definitely necessary!”

“I understand.”

“However.....”

Ark folded his arms and looked at Roco. When he thought about it, it probably wouldn’t be that simple to catch a unicorn. The woman who summoned the unicorn in the movie wasn’t simply a woman, but one with a lot of charms. Of course he didn’t mean Roco’s appearance. Objectively, Ark would score Roco 8 out of 10 points. Moreover, in New World people could slightly improve their beauty so a lot of them have good looks.

‘Plastic surgery in New World.....that is the problem.....’

The problem was that other female users possessed Roco’s beauty through this plastic surgery. In New World, performing artists were considered ordinary. He didn’t know what the monster was looking for but as the average appearance in New World was very high, there was no guarantee that it would be tempted. Roco was also lacking a fatal blow. Seduction! Unfortunately, Roco didn’t have that. However, Ark didn’t consider it impossible.

‘Then I guess I have to use that method.’

Ark checked a recipe and made a survival cooking dish.

Drink of Bewitchment.

It is a drink that has been created through the refinement of several herbs. Once drunk, a subtle scent of temptation would float from the body. If you have someone from the opposite sex in mind,

confess using this chance!

<Increases charm by 300% for 1 hour>

The quiet lake shining in the moonlight. Low and gentle music echoed above the soft sound of the water. Sitting on the shore of the lake with a woman dressed in white playing a harp. It indeed looked like a picturesque and beautiful scene. In addition, half of the fantastic atmosphere was due to make up and lighting while the other half was due to the Drink of Bewitchment.

‘Now, she is equipped with everything that a unicorn loves. Come out! You stupid horse!’

Ark was enthusiastically hiding on a hill not too far away. How much time had passed? 10 minutes, 20 minutes.....Roco and Ark were getting a little tired when something approached from the pond. It was a white horse with a sharp horn, the legendary unicorn! Roco jumped at the sudden appearance of the unicorn. Then she smiled gently and began to play the harp again.

‘Okay, good. Incite it just like that!’

Roco who received Ark’s support continued playing calmly. After a while, the vigilant unicorn narrowed the distance. Roco smiled and whispered in a sweet voice.

“Yes, be good. Come on. Aren’t you tired?”

The unicorn seemed to smile and rustled its tail straight away. Was it planning to lie down on Roco’s leg? Ark wondered if a creature that was wary of everything would suddenly change its mind just because of a woman. He wanted to throw away his patience and just run out straight away. But the unicorn was a clever guy. If it ran away while

he was approaching it, there was a high chance that he wouldn't be able to catch it again.

'According to legend, the unicorn would go to sleep on the maiden's lap where it would be cut down by hunters.'

As expected, the unicorn propped its chin on Roco's knee and fell asleep while listening.

"Okay. Now. Deimos, Dedric. Gently approach at a crawl from three directions. Don't move hastily until I give you a signal."

"I understand. I don't like that bastard."

Clack clack.....

Deimos and Dedric also found the unicorn quite disagreeable. Anyway, Ark and his summons narrowed the distance from three directions. Just as they were a few metres away, the sound of broken leaves was heard from Deimos' direction. The sound was like a small needle dropping. However, the unicorn stood up with its ears pricked.

'Oh damn, why is that guy's ears so sensitive?'

"Deimos, Dedric. Now!"

When Ark raised his voice, Deimos and Dedric immediately rushed forward. The unicorn was surprised and tried to retreat. It alternated looking between Roco and Ark.

Were they working together? Its glowing eyes seemed to ask.

He was angry at the unicorn while Roco felt guilty and avoided its eyes while crying. It seemed to have felt betrayed. However, Ark wasn't about to listen to the complaints of a monster.

"That's it. Roco, just leave the rest to me."

"O-oppa. Don't be too hard on it."

"Now, go! Dedric, Deimos! Plan A-2!"

"Okay!"

Clack clack clack! Clack clack clack!

Ark surrounded the unicorn and did a combination attack with his pets. The unicorn was surprised and tried to step back. And it made a weird cry while shaking its head, and a space immediately warped behind it. When the situation became worse, it tried to escape.

“Don’t miss, Dedric!”

“I understand, Dark Dash!”

Dedric flew like crazy and closed the gate. In the end, with its escape blocked, the unicorn changed to battle mode. It was a gentle monster so it was afraid, but Ark didn’t think it was gentle. It was a monster of fantasy after all. Level 250. It wasn’t an opponent to be trifled with. In addition, the unicorn had speed that couldn’t be compared with other monsters.

“Purrruk!”

The unicorn rushed forward like a bull with its horn pointed forward. The speed of the rush was so quick that even Dedric who was a flying monster couldn’t follow it.

Kkakak!

Ark blocked it with his sword, but was pushed back a few metres thanks to the heavy force.

‘I thought once I drew it out it would be easy.....but isn’t it surprisingly strong?’

Ark pushed forward and corrected his posture. It was level 250, so he couldn’t afford to be careless. But after hunting in the Argus Mountains without any breaks, Ark was now level 151. In addition, the unicorn didn’t know that the moon was slowly rising in the sky. With the 40% dark attribute bonus, he was level 211! The stats of his summons had also steadily grown to level 90. Even if it wasn’t an easy win, there was no reason for him to lose. The unicorn again rushed forward with its horn.

‘If I pursue it with my eyes then it is already too late. The important

thing is feeling!’

It was a word that stayed in his mind after coming home from training with Lee Myung-ryong. Ark caught the timing with his intuition and swung his sword.

Kkakakak, Teteng!

He managed to catch the tempo and blocked the hit. He used Riposte to break the collision and the unicorn was pushed back a few metres. The most important thing in battle has always been timing. He had to take the opportunity whenever there was a chance! He narrowed the distance and another chain skill burst from Ark’s sword.

“Dark Dance!”

The red footprints appeared in the darkness like a film. Ark moved his body quickly and followed along the tracks like a ghost. He had raised his ability in the Argus Mountains. He made sure to use his skills in every fight until he ran out of mana. Because the battles weren’t urgent, he could make a dish for recovery after every fight. Thanks to that, his proficiency in various skills had raised considerably. Since he became more proficient in Dark Dance, his percentage of completion significantly increased. His completion percentage was 80%, making his movements very complicated and it seemed like an illusion was created of his body. The unicorn swung his horn in every direction as it became confused. But Ark wasn’t hit by the blind attacks. He avoided all the attacks and returned it using Dark Blade. It was the chain skill of Dark Dance and Dark Blade! Liquid flowed from the body of the unicorn.

“Hahaha, die! I really hate smooth looking guys like you!”

Dedric who had a complex was working harder than usual. Tadadada.....Clack clack clack! Deimos also had flames in his eyes as he laughed. Sometimes he was so concentrated on the attack that he ignored Ark’s instructions. He seemed to absolutely want the bone from the unicorn’s leg. Clearly.....the unicorn was strong. However Dedric was jealous while Deimos wanted the leg bone. And the unicorn wasn’t so strong that it could endure Ark’s

attack who saw it as money.

After 5 minutes, the unicorn was in a critical condition.

After being hit by Ark's Dark Blade, the unicorn staggered and collapsed sideways. The whole body became a deep red as there was a chance for a double critical hit. Ark wasn't the type to miss the opportunity to kill it.

"Hahaha, finally!

Ark laughed as swung his sword downwards.

"O-oppa! No!"

Roco screamed and ran in front of Ark. Ark freaked out and hastily swung the sword so it hit the ground.

"Why, why would you do that? When I was about to strike the final blow and end it?"

"You don't have to kill the unicorn?"

"What? What is that.....it's obvious why they're called monsters. And there is a reason for me to kill the unicorn."

"You're not supposed to kill a unicorn! I can't just watch this beautiful animal die. In addition, the unicorn believed in me."

Roco shouted as she embraced the hurt unicorn. Ark was puzzled.

'Damn, I was careless. Wouldn't Roco be fond of cute and beautiful things?'

He hadn't thought that far. The unicorn was certainly beautiful. The shape was beautiful enough to fascinate other people. It wasn't called a unicorn for nothing. The body glowed with a subtle white light. And the big dark eyes seemed to say 'I'm very gentle.' That was probably the reason why Roco was in an uproar. However, Ark couldn't just let the unicorn go. But even if his partner was an NPC, he couldn't just ignore her and stab the sword in. But the monster was an impudent fellow who made the maiden act strangely.

It was no good! He didn't mind losing the items and experience the

unicorn would drop. But the 1000 teeth from a hook bat. And the 100 corrupted fairy wings! He invested 300 gold into buying that. All that effort and investment would be wasted if he didn't obtain the unicorn wings.

".....do you understand? Only that, it isn't possible for me to conceded because of that!"

"Then oppa can get the horn from it without killing it."

Ugh, he had no words.

"I can, but....."

"Then ask the unicorn. The unicorn is gentle. If you explain then it might give it to you."

"It is a monster....."

Ark couldn't understand a thing. No, he didn't want to understand. However, Ark had lost the chance for a critical hit.

'Ugh, this, unbelievable.....!'

Ark had used the 'Drink of Bewitchment' to increase the charm by 300% to incite the unicorn not himself. Tears flowed down Roco's face as she clasped her hand to her chest and begged Ark. She looked incredibly beautiful and he had the urge to listen to anything she wanted. It was probably 100% due to the effects of the drink but.....it was like he had swung an axe at his own foot.

"Ah, I understand so stop. If it obediently gives me the horn then I won't kill it."

Roco nodded and continued petting the unicorn as she said.

"I'm sorry about the violent handling. But you probably heard that he had a good reason. So do me a favour. Please give a bit of your horn to oppa."

"Purrrruk!"

When the unicorn sneaked a peak at Ark and snorted, he stared back.

‘That guy doesn’t have manners……!’

Ark became angry and was about to say something when Roco opened her mouth again.

“Please do me a favour. If you are stubborn then I cannot stop oppa. Please help me so that this doesn’t become bad for you. I really don’t want to see you die and become leather.”

Roco told it in a sad voice as the unicorn became silent for a moment. How much time had passed? Suddenly the unicorn lowered its head and a crack appeared before a corner of the horn broke off. The unicorn looked at the broken corner with an unpleasant face before quickly pushing it towards Roco. Then it turned its eyes to Ark and snubbed him.

‘I’m not giving it because of you!’ it seemed to say.

“Oppa, is it okay now?”

“Sheesh, I guess I can’t kill it anymore.”

Then Dedric who was watching raised his voice angrily.

“No way! Why do we have to let a guy like that live? Master, where is the temper you showed when torturing me? You can just catch it and eat it!”

“What lousy things are you saying with that mouth?”

“Aaargh, let me go! This woman!”

Roco pulled Dedric’s mouth who quickly retreated.

“Well, disappear before I change my mind!”

Ark turned his head and didn’t even bother looking at the sight. He had got what he wanted in the end but he wasn’t satisfied with the circumstances. According to the data from the Monster Book, the treasure of the unicorn was the whole body. The leather could be used to make fairly good armour while the bones were materials for weapons. In addition, Deimos couldn’t even receive the leg bone that he wanted. Just having one would’ve increased his stats

tremendously. With the unicorn's speed, his agility would've gone up significantly. It was in his grasp only to have to let it go.....he felt like crying from regret. With Ark's agreement, Roco used 'Song of Recovery' on the unicorn.

"You can go now. Don't be fooled by bad girls like me and live well."

However, the unicorn hesitated and just wandered around the area.

"Why is that guy hanging around and testing my patience?"

Dedric said while looking annoyed. Ark also didn't look good. The 'Drink of Bewitchment' might still have an effect but was it enough for it to hang around a woman at the risk of dying? His bitterness was showing a little bit. While Ark, Dedric and Deimos, who hadn't abandoned its regret for the bone, stared at it the unicorn seemed to have made a decision and came back. Then it kneeled before Roco and licked her hand.

Under the steed exchange system, the famous horse Unicorn has sworn allegiance to Roco.

The unicorn is an intelligent and dignified horse. The unicorn can swear allegiance to an innocent maiden once in its lifetime. If the unicorn makes a pledge and it is accepted, it can be summoned through the steed exchange system. As it is a five star mount, it will take you anywhere you want to go at an amazing speed. However, the unicorn doesn't like fighting so will not appear on the battlefield even when requested by the person it pledged allegiance to.

The Unicorn has pledge itself to you.

* When riding the unicorn, you will experience a 1000% increase in movement speed.

* When riding the unicorn, you will experience a 100% rise in luck.

* When riding a unicorn, you won't be attacked by monsters.

“O-oppa!”

Roco was astonished and explained the information window to Ark. Ark couldn't speak as he opened and closed his mouth absentmindedly.

“What, what the?”

It was like earning 1000 gold. And it was because of Roco. Furthermore, the additional effect was enormous. Among the horses being sold, the faster one was the Red Blood horse that only certain professions could use. It only increased movement speed by 500%. However, the unicorn was double that at 1000%!

Even though it couldn't be used on the battlefield, the movement speed was incredible. In addition, monsters couldn't attack when riding a unicorn. But was that all? Wouldn't there be no maintenance cost as it wasn't an ordinary horse? Usually owning a horse was expensive since you had to buy deluxe oats and crops to feed it. If it is sick, then you would have to buy medicine to heal it and when you arrive at a village, you would have to put it in a stable. The cost of maintenance was the same as a decent car. But she got it all for free.....was there a vehicle without a high oil price these days?

Ark never even imagined that his 'Drink of Bewitchment' would give such a huge benefit.

“This bastard.....he was saved so why is he still hanging around?”

“Puruk, Pururuk!”

The unicorn couldn't stand the nonsense and kept on snorting. Anyway, Roco liked the unicorn and immediately ran to it.

“Now it's possible to meet with oppa anytime I want!”

“Puruk?”

The unicorn's face suddenly looked like it was eating poo.

“Hyung-nim, I found it!”

The delinquent said with a glance. Then the big guy stood up and said.

“You’ve found him?”

“Yes, I’ve spent a few nights looking and finally found him.”

“Bring it here!”

The delinquent quickly handed him something. It was a report that had been stuck together with tape. The name of the man who accepted the report was Wang Ho. He was a person who would accept money for a contract to do bad things, and would inflict violence with a pleasant smile. It was to the extent that any delinquent would flee in the other direction when they ran into him. The one who hired Wang ho was someone who knew him from a while ago. He was hired to find out the personal information about the user Ark who participated in the entrance examination for Global Exos.

“It took a longer time than I thought.’

Global Exos was one of the world’s largest corporations. So well-secured that a delinquent like him couldn’t penetrate it. However, Wang Ho soon found an unusual resource. In Global Exos, the reports would go in the shredder after being reviewed. Wang ho had obtained the information by bribing the cleaning service employees and piecing the report together. Then he finally called his younger brother who started putting the reports together.....and he finally found the information that he desired. After almost a month of searching, he had finally found a report with Ark’s name on it.

“Ark.....Kukukuk, you’ve been hiding like a flea.”

However, there was no private data on the report. Instead, the only thing written was the email address. Wang Ho muttered and

laughed.

“Well, once the email address is known then its game over. Good work.”

Wang Ho confirmed the email and immediately walked to the phone.

“Hey, how long would it take to figure out personal information from an email address?”

“It’ll take a couple of days if there is no trouble.”

“Okay, give me the email and I’ll call you when I have everything.

Wang Ho repeated the email with a satisfied smile.

“Now the only thing left is claiming the fee.”

It was a strange twist. In fact, Ark’s reports weren’t even printed for months. If that had continued, they wouldn’t have been able to discover any information about Ark. However, thanks to Ho Myung-hwan’s interest, the reports were printed again and shredded and eventually ended up in Wang Ho’s hands.

“Wow, look at this unicorn!”

The villagers rushed to the square. Roco had returned to Lancel Village riding the unicorn. The people watching were amazed as the unicorn proudly strutted along. The unicorn had almost died before being rescued was mentioned.....now it was accompanying Roco to the village. Of course, Ark had come around. He honestly didn’t want to ride the unicorn. After all, many problems occurred thanks to its personality. However the villagers were excited and gathered like a cloud.

“This, this is a Unicorn!”

It was at that time. Madusein protruded his head to see what was

going on and ran out surprised. After admiring the unicorn with his eyes, he approached Ark.

“Don’t tell me you’ve managed to tame a unicorn?”

“Well, it wasn’t me that tamed it.....”

“Then the horns? Where is the unicorn horn?”

“I have it.”

“Will you sell me the horn?”

Madusein asked in a desperate tone.

“You might not know but the unicorn horn is an amazing magic ingredient. But it’s been called a fantasy ingredient because no one has managed to catch a unicorn. I’m prepared to pay a lot of money. 300 gold.....No, 500 gold. Just sell it to me!”

“It’s difficult. I also need to use the unicorn horn.”

When Ark gave a rough explanation, Madusein immediately looked grumpy. However, he sighed a few times before saying.

“So please sell the next horns to me. I’m asking you.”

“What are the next horns?”

“You don’t know?”

Madusein looked at Ark in surprise.

“The unicorn’s horns grow back over time once it is cut.”

“Yes?”

Roco was occupied with the unicorn while Ark’s eyes sparkled. Once it is cut, the horn grows back again! That means that over time, he could cut it off again. It also meant that he could receive 500 gold for the item multiple times. Of course the unicorn had sworn allegiance to Roco and probably wouldn’t be willing to give him its horns. However, Ark had ways around that. Sweet talk, intimidation, confinement, violence and so on.....If it was profit then Ark was

willing to use any method.

‘This is unexpected information!’

Ark grinned widely and looked at the unicorn. He no longer thought that the unicorn looked hateful.

“Unicorn, don’t make me hurt you. If you would like to eat then listen to my words.”

“Pururuk?”

Ark turned around and looked intimately at the unicorn while it stared at him with suspicious eyes. However, after a while.....

“Okay, you can go now. Thanks for the ride.”

Roco gave the unicorn a kiss before returned to the steed exchange system. After flirting with the unicorn, Roco disconnected as she had to go to her part time job.

After organizing things, Ark returned to his cabin.

“Stat Window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +250		
Fame	2575 (+500)	Level	151
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of All, Jackson’s Hero		
Health	2485 (+150)	Mana	2380
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	304 (+28)
Agility	394 (+35)	Stamina	484 (+20)
Wisdom	53 (+10)	Intelligence	457
Luck	54	Flexibility	52
Art of			

Communication	43	Affection	79 (+10)
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		98	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
* Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 13			
Improved Norad Boots (Shoes): Movement Speed + 15%, Evasion + 10%			
Veil of Fire (Mantle): Flame resistance + 50%			
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available			
Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%			
Mind's Eye (Ring): 'Mind's Eye' enabled			
Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds			
Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%			
* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark			
* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)			
* Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.			
* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.			

He had spent 20 days in the Argus Mountains. All his hard work was rewarded. Now he was over the level 150 restriction on Magaro's quest. But was that all? Although it was a laborious process, he now had all the ingredients necessary to complete the 'Slime's Immortality Pill.' He still hadn't found the location of the 'Sacred Soil,' but it knew that it wasn't possible to look for it immediately.

"Now, let's get started?"

Ark opened the personal safe that was in the cabin. He had kept the tooth of a hook bat, the Mandragora and the corrupted fairy wings in the safe. He took all the ingredients out and piled it on the table. Ark looked at the ingredients with warm eyes and took out his pot. Now, it was time to create a survival cooking dish!

“20 days and 300 gold went into this. It better not be some medium item!”

Ark prayed as he began to put the ingredients in one by one. First, he put in the Slime’s Essence which melted to a shining liquid in an instant. After he added the rest of the ingredients, the liquid started shining even more intensely as it simmered. After he finally added the unicorn horn, five colourful halos rose from the liquid and a message window appeared.

You have gathered all the necessary ingredients to create ‘Slime’s Immortality Pill. Now it is time to start the immortality process.

Mixing = Crystallization= Maturation, once it goes through these 3 stages then it is complete. The estimated duration is 72 hours.

Stage 1 mixing process.

The ingredients in the Slime’s Immortality Pill have magical qualities that are contrary to each other. If there is a slightest mistake in mixing then all the efforts so far would be wasted. Special attention is required to ensure that all ingredients are mixed correctly until the process is finished.

<Once the brilliance of the liquid becomes a little muddy, you have to shake the pot and mix the ingredients together.>

The abilities of the immortality pill can vary by how well it is mixed.=
Mixing time remaining: 2 hours

“What the? It could also fail? After all that trouble?”

Ark looked in astonishment at the information window. He had thought all the trouble was finished, but now it was different.

“Damn, if I do it this way then it’ll be done by tomorrow.....Even though I haven’t slept for 30 hours, I have to stare at this pot for 2 hours? In addition, it would take 72 hours to finish?”

However, he had already started to boil the ingredients. Now he had to stare at the pot for 2 hours if he wanted to create the Slime’s Immortality Pill. Ark stared at the pot with bloodshot eyes. And if he saw even a slight dullness in the shine then he would shake the pot uncontrollably. The results of his hard work so far depended on the next 2 hours!

“Even if I have to bit my tongue, I will create the best Immortality Pill!”

The Cathedral dungeons in Selebrid.

In the dark and drab atmosphere, a hobbit was sitting in jail with a soulless expression. It was Sid, Ark’s sales agent. He was unexpectedly sitting inside a jail underneath the cathedral. Of course, the reason he had a soulless expression was because Sid had left the unit in reality. Once users were stuck in jail, there was nothing for them to do. However, users had to be confined in jail for a certain number of days before they could disconnect. Sid also left the unit connected while he did other things. How much time had passed? Suddenly the cage was opened and a guard entered.

“Number 1590, Nein. You’ve received permission to leave.

“Whew, I’m lucky.”

The merchant who was sitting near Sid let out a sigh of relief. And after a moment in the prison, Sid trembled and blinked. Nein stopped and smiled at Sid.

“Ah, Sid-nim. You came back. Although we’ve only spent 2 days

together, I would've been sorry to leave without saying goodbye....."

"You're going out?"

"Yes, yesterday I called a friend to bail me out. He arrived just now. Wasn't Sid-nim sentenced to life imprisonment? It might be hard but I hope the misunderstanding is resolved.

Sid blinked his eyes as he suddenly remembered something.

"Come to think of it. Are you going to travel near Jackson?"

"Yes, because I was stuck in jail the schedule is a little late, but I will drop in there once.

"Is it possible for you to drop by a small village called Lancel Village while you're there?"

"Lancel?"

"Yes, there is a person that I know there. That person doesn't know that I'm stuck in jail. So can you drop by while in Jackson and let him know my situation."

"But the schedule is tight....."

"Please, I'm begging you. I don't know his phone number. The moment I leave I'll deposit 30 gold into your account at the Merchant's Guild. I'll give you my phone number. If you check your phone now then you can confirm that it is me called you."

Sid begged with tears in his eyes. Once he was stuck in prison then his entire luggage was temporarily confiscated. Nein thought for a while before nodding. 30 gold for a quick stop on the way to Jackson. It was a decent compensation. He didn't have to worry about fraud since he had Sid's phone number.

"Yes, I understand."

Nein noticed the guards gesturing him to leave so Sid immediately gave him a message.

"Ark is definitely in Lancel Village. Please tell him about my situation."

Magic Detection

-‘Slime’s Immortality Pill’s mixing process has been completed.’

-You have entered the 2nd stage crystallization process.

Now that you have completely mixed the ingredients together, you must make a decision. This process requires the same amount of concentration that a blacksmith uses to extract good quality iron from iron ores. If the fire is too strong then the ingredients will oxidize and the immortality pill will fail, but if the fire is too weak then the crystallization won’t be accomplished well.

<A red colour means that the fire is too strong while the brown means that it too weak. If the strength of the fire is perfect then the colours of the ingredients will be pink. If you fail to efficiently control the strength of the fire then there could be serious losses to the effectiveness of the pill.>

= Crystallization process, time remaining: 6 hours

‘Huck, 6 hours? Are they trying to kill me?’

He couldn’t resist his impatience to start the immortality pill. After 30 hours of non-stop hunting! It was a situation where he was so tired that he could fly to Andromeda at any time. Then he had to frantically shake the pot for 2 hours. If he moved away during that time then all his efforts would be undone. He didn’t have a choice. But after 2 hours, now he had to watch the pot and adjust the fire for 6 hours. It was the most irritating poisonous message window! His anger flared up and he felt murderous. No, he felt like his life was being threatened.

Now when someone died because of online games, it wasn’t a newsworthy event anymore. But this game wanted him to die from

overworking? It was an irresponsible message window that didn't consider the user's health and would drive them to death.....even though he wanted to argue, there was no one that would listen. System messages were an absolute law in online gaming. A few times other online games also had similar situations. They didn't want to regret abandoning it and would continue to the extent they would get tired and die. It started with thoughts like 'It is simple to end this when I want' or 'I've met a like-minded party but I'll do a little more.' However, when they had to spend a few hours at work they would start to feel nervous and would begin to play all night. That was how they became addicted to the game.

'Who can I blame?'

He only had himself to blame for starting the immortality pill too eagerly..... But now that he started it, he had to see it through to the end!

"Okay, I'm going to make the best immortality pill possible!"

Ark stared at the pot with bloodshot eyes.

"Ugh, it increasingly turning red. Temperature down to 20 degrees.....eh? Did I doze off for a moment? Huck, it's brown. When did the temperature go down? Increase by 10 degrees! Damn, did I raise it too much? Why is it so overheated so quickly? Go down 5 degrees. No, 3 degrees down."

If he had to move his body then he would rather hunt. If he was careless for even a short moment when staring at the pot then his spirit would begin to sail to Andromeda. Thanks to his sleepiness, his mind was so muddled that it was difficult for him to distinguish between a dream and reality. But he had invested considerable time and money into this. It wasn't possible for him to fail just before the end. He clenched his teeth and held on until a message window popped up.

[-The 2nd stage crystallization process is finished.]

You have entered the 3rd stage maturation process.

This is the final step in creating the Slime's Immortality Pill. The only thing left is to let it mature long enough to draw out 100% of the effect from each ingredient. Make sure to seal it up completely, avoid any direct sunlight and keep it in a cool, dry place.

<Handle with care! There is no guarantee of what will happen if you shake it or it receives an impact.>= Maturation process, time remaining: 64 hours

"I did it.....I'm getting paid!"

Now he didn't have to stare at the pot anymore. Seeing the information window was as wonderful as if he had received a rare item. Ark sealed the pot and quickly put it in his personal safe. Then he made sure to firmly lock up the cabin. The NPCs that brought him gifts could leave it in the open in the meantime.

'Now I have to organize the remaining japtem and go to sleep.'

It was currently evening in New World and if he went to sleep then it was likely that all the stores would be closed when he connected again. Because most shops would be closed, he had to empty his bag in advance. However when he visited the general store, the door was already shut.

'What's going on? It normally isn't closed this early.....'

When he looked around he saw that the smithy operated by a raccoon was still slightly open. But his 30% discount in Lancel Village only applied for Galen at the general store. In addition, since there was no specific profession then he would buy all the japtem.

'If I sell it to other stores then there would be a 50 silver difference.'

Ark forced his eyes open and went to search for Galen. Fortunately, he was able to quickly discover Galen. However the atmosphere was dark. Outside the village, Galen was having a serious talk with Hanson while sighing.

"Galen ajusshi."

“Ah, Ark!”

“What’s going on?”

“Well, that’s.....”

Galen and Hanson hesitated. Then Sarah grasped Ark’s hands and pointed. On the outskirts of Lancel Village was a big field, where most of New World’s crops could only be harvested twice a year. Lancel Village had become self-sufficient thanks to that field. But the field crops that Sarah pointed to seemed to be in fairly bad condition, even from Ark’s inexperienced eyes.

“Why are the crops so withered?”

“Because of all the residents that left, it looks like it has been neglected for too long. Since the management wasn’t proper, the harvest is in bad shape.”

Galen sighed and replied.

“I never even considered it. When I accepted the 300 residents that you brought, the upcoming harvest season was approaching so I thought the food situation would get better. But our crop isn’t good this year.....I don’t know how we’re going to handle the upcoming hard winter.”

In New World, users also had to eat to live. If the satiety fell then they would receive various penalties and if it went down too low then the user would die. It was the same for NPCs. No, it would be an even more serious problem since this world is reality to the NPCs. Then he heard a rough voice from one side.

“Hey, this is my field!”

“What the? I’ve been planting here for ages. Nobody stopped me when I carried water to these fields.”

“So it’s yours just because you put your hand on it?”

“How long do you think it has been in my family?”

“How would I know?”

“This bastard, do you think I would just give it to you?”

The farmers who were shouting eventually grabbed each other's collars.

“Guys, what is with this shameful conduct? Stop immediately! Since things are difficult, shouldn't we put aside our pride and help each other?”

Galen ran up to them and shouted in a pained voice.

Just like any other village, the pioneers of Lancel Village also took ownership of the fields. However, the strong sense of community didn't distinguish between what belonged to each other.

They produced it together and used it together. That was the way of Lancel Village. However, it was difficult to avoid in an emergency situation. Since the situation was difficult, they only cared about their own greed and there were endless conflicts. This was the reason that Galen had closed the general store and headed to the fields. The only person who could mediate between the migrants settled here was the temporary chief Galen.

“Is a handful of food so important that you would grab at each other's necks? And shame the village in front of our benefactor Ark?”

“Benefactor?”

The farmer raised his head and glared at Ark.

“What benefactor.....didn't he make things in the village more difficult by bringing a bandit group or something? It if wasn't for them then we wouldn't be so pressed for a good harvest. We're the ones in this difficult situation because of him!”

“Hey. What are you saying? Ark.....!”

Galen jumped in surprise. However, the farmer didn't want to hear and turned his head, spitting.

“Anyway, our problems aren't for the eyes of foreigners.”

‘What’s this?’

Bewilderment spread on Ark’s face at the farmer’s reaction. His intimacy with Lancel Village was the highest possible. Therefore he couldn’t imagine a resident showing such behaviour in front of Ark. But while he was hunting the ingredients for ‘Slime’s Immortality Pill,’ he didn’t pay any attention to what was happening in town so his reputation fell. No, that was the second problem. Ark checked the information in the village town hall with Galen.

The food situation has reduced by 10%.Unity has also been reduced by 10%.

Commerce, industry and armament has also been reduced by 8%.

2 of the village residents have left because of a feud.

Galen related the information from the last days in the village. All of the figures related to village growth were at the bottom. It was a natural result since they were lacking food, an essential condition for survival

‘Is this a usual problem?’

Ark weighed the severity of the problem. His reputation wasn’t the problem. Ark owned a house in Lancel Village. If there was trouble with the village development than the real estate market would also decline. His plan to make a killing in real estate might be falling apart! And if Lancel Village became impoverished again then it would be difficult to receive decent compensation for the <Find New Settlers> quest that he worked so hard on. Ark’s voice became desperate.

“Is there any other ways?”

“We could buy food from somewhere else. But since we’ve built a lot of houses these days and invested money in fixing the roads, our financial status isn’t very good. If our crop conditions don’t get better than this winter is going to be a lot harder.”

Galen shook his head with a regretful face.

“It’s also because 300 people suddenly showed up.”

“We can’t assume it is the only reason.....”

“What other reasons are there?”

“The biggest problem is that the field is ravaged after being left alone for too long. And there are also a lot of monsters around. When there are a lot of monsters, the number of wild animals decreases so hunting becomes harder.”

Ark had also seen the monsters in the vicinity of Lancel Village.

“Can we catch the monsters to eat?”

“Most of the monsters in the Argus Mountains are poisonous. If it isn’t cooked well then it could be life-threatening. Would we rather be hungry or poisoned?”

“That’s a big deal.”

“It isn’t possible. I’ll ask you to consult with the Meow and hunt rabbit and venison for the moment. Since the food is scarce, we must figure out a way to procure it from Jackson. You must be very worried. Unlike the winter and spring harvest, in autumn we can prepare iron since the current price should rise.....”

Galen sighed. Ark also couldn’t stop sighing. He was now in an inseparable relationship with Lancel Village. If the village was in a tough situation then Ark would also receive several disadvantages.

‘Well, in this circumstance it wouldn’t be possible to see edible meat at a high price.....’

When the food situation becomes even worse, then the town’s financial situation would become devastated. However, the food situation was not Ark’s only problem. The population of Lancel Village was already 700 people. He could hunt wild animals for its meat. However, the food situation would only improve by 1%.

“If only there was Yggdrasil’s protection.....”

Then he heard a voice sighing from the back. When he turned

around, one of the raccoon representatives was talking with a melancholy face.

“Even if we didn’t have abundant light, we never had to worry about food at least. My great father was indebted to Yggdrasil’s protection. After I’ve experience the outside world, I realized again how important that protection was. If only I can go back to that place.....”

The raccoon clan representatives that came to the town hall bowed their heads. When the village’s situation became worse, the raccoon clan became homesick for the Underground World. When he heard that even the raccoons wanted to leave the village, Galen’s face darkened even more. However, Ark pricked up his ears.

‘Yggdrasil!’

Yes, the patron of the Underground World! It was in accordance with the covenant where the raccoons keep the secret of the seal while their world was protected by Yggdrasil. But what if such a presence existed in Lancel Village? That was the thought that flashed in Ark’s head.

‘Popo is the seed of Yggdrasil. When Popo is planted near Lancel Village then he might cause the same effect. No, the only thing is to believe it!’

So far he had delayed the <Sacred Soil> quest because of the Slime’s Immortality Pill! Now he had to urgently solve the quest.

‘But the residents are leaving. The cause of all the problems is the food shortage. Completing the quest will solve that but for the moment I need to put out the sudden fire. Yes, JusticeMan ajusshi and the NPCs at the camp should stay clear for a little bit.’

Once Ark organized his japtem he went to visit JusticeMan.

“.....Well, I have actually been concerned about the situation for a while. We’re trying to make sure that the residents of Lancel Village don’t suffer any damage because of us. Alright, for the moment we’ll hunt wild animals even if we have to go far away to hunt the hippos.

Ark who had made progress cut off the connection at once. Since he had stayed awake for 36 hours, heavy fatigue hit as soon as he left the unit.

Hyun-woo screamed and opened his eyes. And he glanced around for a while with a bemused look. There was mould on the gutters, an old wardrobe, a 15 inch TV and a computer set. His virtual reality unit was located in this room and didn't match the dismal surroundings. It was Hyun-woo's room which he paid rent for every month. After a while, Hyun-woo sighed and stood up.

'Phew, it was just a specific dream.'

His clothes were soaked in sweat. When he thought about it, it was a really scary dream. When his mother was hungry, he was forced to cry..... Since the age of 17, Hyun-woo dedicated his life to his ailing mother. To Hyun-woo, hungry and poverty wasn't a horrible thing. No, not being able to provide for his hungry mother was more terrifying than being chased by a ghost or demon. After suffering through 36 hours of the 'Slime's Immortality Pill' and then hearing about the bad situation of Lancel Village, it was no wonder that he had a nightmare after falling asleep. It was only 4 a.m. and he had only slept for 3 hours, but after the nightmare he didn't want to go back to sleep. He decided to leave for the gym in one hour. Hyun-woo washed quickly before sitting down in front of the computer.

"Should I take a look at today's current prices before leaving?"

Hyun-woo connected to the auction site. He consistently sold 2 items a week and had steadily made 1.5 million won. That was 6 million won a month. Since he had to pay a 7% handling charge, the auction site got 420,000 won a month. Thanks to this, his ratings rose quickly and the other day he became a gold member. A gold membership offered many advantages. There was a 1% discount on the fee and information windows about the various items were also

provided. This could be useful when trying to determine the selling price, as it listed the fluctuations in the price during the past month.

<p>-The auction has been completed. Crystal Golem's Head: 800,000 won.</p> <p>-The auction has been completed. Bracelet of Strength: 450,000.</p> <p>-The auction has been completed. Heavy iron sword: 1,800,000 won.</p> <p>-The auction has been completed. Deluxe repair box (4): 480,000 won.....</p>
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‘Except for the Heavy Iron Sword, all the prices are similar.’

Hyun-woo sighed after checking the auction results. The average level of the users had risen by a lot. The sale price for items lower than level 60 was steadily decreasing. On the other hand, the price was increasing for items over level 70. It was the reason why the heavy iron sword, which sold for 1,300,000 won in the past was now sold for 1,800,000 won. But recently Hyun-woo could not sell high level items. No, if he looked at the items he obtained. The unique “Gladiator’s Honour” or the rare ring ‘Mind’s Eye’ for example..... would be able to earn him several million won. However, both those items were necessary for Hyun-woo. In online gaming, it was common sense to keep the better items first in order to get stronger. He couldn’t blindly sell it just to obtain money.

‘When combining all the items sold this month, isn’t the profit around 4,000,000 won?’

When he checked the ledger on his computer, he saw that it was 4,700,000 won. Thanks to his Magic Restoration reaching the advanced level, he sold some of the deluxe repair boxes that he didn’t need as well as some of his potion collection. There were a few items that weren’t sold at a reasonable price, but overall it wasn’t a bad profit.

‘But it isn’t enough to pay the hospital bills.’

Hyun-woo needed 5,210,000 won every month to pay the medical expenses. It was average. If there was a sudden unscheduled medical treatment, the bill could go over 6,000,000 won.

Fortunately, there was a surplus in his bankbook thanks to the 'Fire Slayer.' But if the next month was ordinary like this then it would become difficult.

'But now I have a full set of bracelets, rings, necklace and shoulder blades. It would be possible to sell items from now on. But I still have to tighten the belt a little bit more. I have to hunt hard and strong.'

Since his life was tight, he had to make money or die. But no matter how difficult his situation was, Hyun-woo never thought that it was unfair. If it was 5 years ago, he probably wouldn't have been able to last. Since he didn't know when his mother would be released from the hospital. However, Hyun-woo was not the thoughtless child of 5 years ago. He had seen many people at the hospital. Among them, he saw the pain of parents or siblings who didn't have enough money. It might be cowardly, but Hyun-woo felt a sense of solace after watching them cry.

'I will endure it. I now have money to treat my mother and she is looking better. Now is not the time to sound weak!'

He didn't know the importance of his father's existence until he lost him. So he was happy to be able to do something for his mother. He could survive with rice for meals and play the game all night if it meant making enough money for the hospital bills. More.....a little more.....he wanted his mother to be happy.

'To do that, I have to make money even more fiercely. I can't be short even ten thousand won.'

He had everything he needed to achieve this. Hyun-woo scoured the site with bloodshot eyes. It was important to grasp the current market price of items in the game.

'There still isn't a trading group for food ingredients.'

In New World, it was rare for people to earnestly learn how to cook.

And because ingredients were sold in general stores, there was nobody like Ark who wanted unique ingredients. Only ingredients like the Mandragora which could be used as a magic ingredient were rarely sold. But he would rather save money and cook his own dishes.

‘If there was no expiration date on cooking then I would be able to sell it.....’

The only trouble was that it was a survival cooking dish. Even if he needed expensive spices, the ingredient cost was cheaper than a potion with the same effect but because it was a food, there was an expiration date. Of course, since it was an advanced dish then the expiration date was quite long, however since the dish could become bad when taking the time sold through the auction site in consideration, not many people were willing to spend gold on it.

‘I wonder if there are any ingredients that have a preservative effect?’

Hyun-woo clicked his tongue and searched all over the site. His alarm clock suddenly went off and signalled that it was 4.30 a.m.

Bang, bang, bang!

A booming sound rang out as the mat shook. Hyun-woo experienced the wrestling technique where an arm closed around his neck before he was thrown to the ground. But he had already become used to such pain. Hyun-woo got up and blocked the opponent’s incoming arm. If he was the same as before, his opponent would’ve counterattacked immediately. However, since he strengthened his lower body the opponent couldn’t easily use techniques against him. It was a tense match against a National Championship bronze medallist.

“Ha, isn’t he doing quite well?”

“He’s not tackled so easily anymore.”

“Is he really trying wrestling for the first time?”

The SWAT team members swarmed and expressed their admiration. Then Lee Myung-ryong snorted and muttered.

“Bah, he should be able to do this much after sparring every day.”

“Hey, that’s different. Would any thug be able to learn so quickly just by sparring under master every day?”

“In your own words. He is able to face off against great athletes who have participated in the nationals.”

“Shut up, what do you understand? Your standards are at a childish level. Don’t you exercise? Would you like to be hit by a knife when you’re dispatched?”

“Sheesh, I won’t say anything else.....”

After Lee Myung-ryong threatened them, the members immediately scattered.

‘Certainly.....’

Lee Myung-ryong stared at Hyun-woo. To be honest, he secretly admired him. Of course, Hyun-woo was still a novice at fighting against opponents. The fight would probably be over in 1 minute. But even so, the growth of Hyun-woo was remarkable. After he made Hyun-woo train in boxing, wrestling and taekwondo, now he had to learn how to apply it to his whole body. Boxing was not about hitting the opponent with only arm strength. The action for a punch should naturally come from the waist and footwork. It was the same for wrestling and taekwondo as well. If he didn’t take advantage of the whole body then the technique wouldn’t be used correctly.

‘Even though he is foolish, he has noticed it.....’

Even though martial arts could be understood with the mind, it wasn’t easy to apply it to the body. Only a large amount of practice and actual fighting would engrave it into the body. But Hyun-woo had learnt the trick after only one month. He had thought Hyun-woo was

useable since the first time they met, but it was really beyond expectations. He played all day long and still managed it.

‘Who knew that I had such a discerning eye for talent?’

But Lee Myung-ryong soon shook his head and smiled.

‘I’m not the one that caused all that talent to emerge.’

Then what was?

‘Isn’t the answer obvious?’

Besides eating and sleeping, Hyun-woo spent all his time in the game. Thus, his skills seemed to increase every time he appeared at the gym. If so, the answer was the virtual reality game.....he didn’t know what it was, but the secret would be there.

‘The atmosphere around Hwa-rang hyung-nim also changed after he started the game.....what is it about that virtual reality game?’

While Lee Myung-ryong was thinking, the third round of the wrestling match ended. It was followed by leg exercises and Hyun-woo sparring in taekwondo.

“Teacher, I’ll stop now.”

“Sure. But why wasn’t your steps natural today? Is there something wrong?”

“Just a little bit.....I’m not in good condition today.”

“A young guy should have better condition.....take more care.”

“Yes.”

Hyun-woo nodded and was about to leave the gym.

“By the way.....you and Hwa-rang hyung-nim are playing a virtual reality game called New World right?”

“Is Teacher also interested in the game?”

“No interest.....I’m going now.”

Lee Myung-ryong made up an excuse with an embarrassed face. But as soon as Hyun-woo left, he headed straight towards a nearby virtual reality gaming room.

‘What is it about New World that made Hyun-woo improve as well as Gwon Hwa-rang change his movement so much? Is it different from the other games I’ve played?’

Lee Myung-ryong’s nature couldn’t endure the curiosity. That was the reason why he headed to the game room. After thinking and pacing in front of the room for a while, Lee Myung-ryong finally entered.

‘I’ll never know unless I look for myself.’

So a former member of the national Taekwondo team and a current SWAT team leader was about to step foot in New World.....

“Captain, there have been orders from the headquarters!”

“Sheesh that killed the timing. Alright. Summon the team together and wait.”

.....It would take some time until he could try it out.

‘So I have a cold?’

After he had a nightmare, he wasn’t in very good condition. He seemed fine when exercising at the gym, but after he came home his body started drooping. There was also a headache quietly building. However, Ark returned to New World.

The money earned from just one day playing New World was around 250,000 won. If he was absent for just one day then he would lose 250,000 won.

‘I’m not going to give up 250,000 won just because of a cold!’

When he returned to Lancel Village, the environment was quite dark. After playing New World, his concept of time seemed to be mixed up. When he returned home a little while ago, it was 8

a.m. However, in New World one day had passed and it was now evening. He had somewhat gotten used to it but still found it strange sometimes.

“But one or two days.....”

Since his condition wasn't good after sleeping, it would probably clear up after he played for a bit.

“Then, should I start putting things in order?”

Ark checked the pot in his cabin first. The process of maturation was still progressing without any problems. The only thing left was to wait. He was also level 151. His goal of reaching 150 was reached.

‘But there are still a lot of things to do here.’

After communicating with Yggdrasil, he had received the <Sacred Soil> quest. At first, Ark hadn't thought that this quest was important. The compensation received was ambiguous. In order to complete the quest, he had to plant the seeds. Then who would he receive the compensation from? Yggdrasil was in the Underground World so it couldn't possible give a reward while Popo was just a seed so he couldn't give compensation either. Perhaps he would only receive fame and experience. When he received the quest, he wanted to complete it somehow but the lack of obvious compensation meant he didn't try very hard.

But now things have changed. Lancel Village was having a severe food crisis! Although he wasn't sure, but Popo must be able to solve the problem. Even without a quest reward, it wasn't possible to delay it any longer in case Lancel Village's real estate price declined.

‘And.....I was very indifferent in the meantime.’

Ark looked at Popo uncomfortably. When Popo first began to travel, he often spoke to others from the bag. But by the time they had arrived at Lancel Village, his words had gradually decreased until he wasn't talking any more. A plant receives its nutrients from the land. While Popo was in his seed state, he couldn't eat anything. The current Popo had no energy because of a depleted battery.

Since there was no time limit on the quest, he had become too comfortable. If he kept on going like that, Popo would completely have his batteries depleted. After all, Popo was a child of Yggdrasil. If Popo withered up and died, his intimacy with the raccoons might even fall.'

In fact, Ark didn't have a high intimacy with the raccoons that moved to Lancel Village. They were the raccoons who had been transformed into monsters in the Underground World. The monsters that Ark defeated were their colleagues. Therefore, they had no reasons to like him. Even so, the raccoons displayed a friendly attitude to him when Ark arrived in Lancel Village.

'It was to the extent that they gave me a cabin as a present.....'

Ark was able to guess the reason. He was carrying the seeds of Yggdrasil, the guardian of the raccoons which probably gave him an intimacy bonus with them. Therefore, it was because of the seeds that he was favoured. But wouldn't they take their gifts back if he allowed Popo to die? If that happened, he couldn't guarantee what would happen to his relationship with the raccoon clan. So he couldn't put off the <Sacred Soil> quest any longer.

'Yes, it's clear that I have to do this immediately.'

But once he starting thinking, he had no idea about where to start. Even though he had made up his mind, Ark couldn't just wander around aimlessly. When he was searching the Argus Mountains, he always had 'Sacred Soil' in the back of his mind. But even after exploring the Argus Mountains for 20 days, he still hadn't found a clue.

'There are a lot of areas I still haven't seen, but I can't just wander around blindly. Is there any way to obtain information about it?'

At that time, Hanson appeared in Ark's head. Hanson was a cartographer so he should know more about soil than Ark.

Hanson replied after thinking for a while.

"Sacred soil.....yes, I've heard of it before. It is a ground where the power has been concentrated for so long that the earth becomes

very powerful. The Northern People used to call it the Sacred Soil whenever it appeared”

“Can it be found in the Argus Mountains?”

“I think so. Because mountain plateaus are one of the places it is most active. Among those places should be an area where an especially strong power is gathered.....maybe where the mountains overlap?”

“The area where the mountains overlap?”

“It is often collected in places like mountain valleys. A northern race used to consider the valley a sacred shelter of the gods and prayed there. Wouldn't there be a relationship between those two things?”

“So you're saying that the Sacred Soil might be found in the ground of valleys?”

“I'm only guessing. I've never seen a Sacred Soil directly. I don't know what it looks like. Even if I saw it then I probably wouldn't have recognized it. Even though it is the Sacred Soil, if the colour is the same then how would you recognize it from the dirt surrounding it?”

Ark's eyes became bigger at Hanson's words.

‘Eh? That reminds me, how would I be able to tell that it is the Sacred Soil?’

Why had he never thought of that? He was just blindly trying to find the Sacred Soil. How would he even distinguish it from normal dirt? What if it was identical in appearance? Was there an alternative method?

“Then there is no way for me to find the Sacred Soil?”

“Well from what I heard, the Sacred Soil is imbued with so much power that plants would often grow around it. You should probably look for a place that is strangely overgrown. But since this is the south and the Argus Mountains have lush forests, it might be difficult to find it that way.”

Hanson was locked in thought for a moment.

“I don’t know if this is useful or not, but someone from the Northern forests might be able to help you.”

“Northern forests?”

“Yes, they lived in harsh environments where not many forests grow, unlike the south. So the people there developed a ‘special skill’ to ensure that they can find anything in the forest, even very small objects. I also heard that they could find the shelter for gods.”

“There is a special technique to find something?”

Then a name suddenly appeared in Ark’s head.

“Madusein!”

Madusein was the owner of the magic ingredients shop who had ripped him off over the corrupted fairy wings. He remembered hearing him say the same words. Finding something that couldn’t be seen required special skills. It wasn’t a coincidence that an NPC said those words.

“Thank you.”

Ark immediately ran to the magic ingredients shop near the entrance of the village.

“How did I find the corrupted fairy wings?”

“Yes, what was the special ability that ajusshi said was needed?”

Madusein scratched his head and looked at Ark suspiciously. There was often a slow response to the first question asked when meeting an NPC. If they answered the question then it confirmed that the intimacy was high enough. In other words, intimacy was necessary to find the required information. Fortunately, he had bought corrupted fairy wings worth 300 gold of him so there was some degree of intimacy. Thanks to that he barely made it.

“I don’t know why I have to answer the question, but there is no reason to hide it. It’s a technique called Magic Detection. Only a few magicians in the Schudenberg Kingdom have mastered this vision technique.”

Madusein bragged as he replied. Ark asked in an urgent tone.

“Is it possible to learn that technique?”

“Why would I teach it to you?”

Madusein snorted.

“Why do you think I came to live on this mountain? There are various magic ingredients that can only be obtained from the Argus Mountains. There are an infinite number of them, but it isn’t easy to get such important ingredients. So why would I teach you such a technique and have another competitor? I have no thoughts of selling my technique.”

It was a natural reaction. It wasn’t easy to learn skills from NPCs. There must be a significant degree of intimacy, or a reason to teach it such as a quest or pay an equivalent price. In that respect, learning battle or production skills were relatively easy. A warrior’s skill could be learnt from a mercenary NPC. No, there was no need to give money in order to learn. For one thing, repetition of a behaviour would result in a new skill being learnt. If you can see and imitate the NPC, then a new skill would naturally form. The purpose of production was to make money, so NPCs would set up a school where people would pay to learn skills.

However, a magician’s or alchemist’s skill was different. Magic and alchemy was knowledge that had been passed secretly from ancient times! Unlike a warrior’s skill, it couldn’t be learnt by repeating the behaviour. The NPCs desire to monopolize the skill was also strong so they weren’t easily bribed. In the end, the only way was to find the skill themselves so it was much more difficult to learn a magician’s skill than a warrior’s. Madusein was a shop owner as well as a magician NPC. It wouldn’t be easy to get him to teach the skill. Ark also knew that much. But even Madusein was a resident of Lancel Village. Ark thought he would be able to persuade him by saying it would help resolve the food shortage crisis. When he tried to explain that, Madusein just turned his head and snorted.

“Why do I have to pay attention to things like that? I don’t want to hear it. Just get out.”

Madusein became annoyed and drove Ark out. His impression from the first time they met wasn't very good and Ark also became annoyed. In fact, Madusein didn't have a good reputation in Lancel Village. There was hardly any interactions with the residents, and charged the town quite a lot of money while hardly spending anything. Ark hadn't understood even when he bought the fairy wings and he refused to discount even 1 copper. It was a mistake to think that he would obediently teach the skill. However, Ark wasn't the type to give up once he had a goal.

'There are two ways to learn a skill from a NPC.'

One way was through quest rewards and high intimacy. It was the universal method in New World. But after looking at Madusein's character, that way seemed impossible. Then he had no choice but to use the other method. Now, how could he apply pressure to Madusein?

'I have to discover the thing that Madusein needs and then blackmail the skill out of him. The only thing I can remember is the unicorn horn, but I don't know when that would grow back..... does he have any other weakness? Did the magician have a reason for coming to this mountain village? That might be a hint.'

Ark ran around Lancel Village trying to find information about Madusein. But Madusein hadn't been in Lancel for very long. In addition, he didn't interact with the residents so none of them knew him well. In the end, Ark had wasted a few hours struggling.

"Madusein.....there is something I remember. He runs the business but he also has to collect magic ingredients from the Argus Mountains. Therefore, I've never seen him leave the store. But I have heard that he often roams the mountains at night looking for ingredients."

Galen added as if he suddenly remembered.

"He also purchased these strange tools from my store in the past."

"Tools?"

"Hum, it was a hammer or pickaxe as well as a wheelbarrow. Maybe

they are tools necessary to dig up the magic ingredients?”

After Galen spoke, Ark became puzzled. Hammer or pickaxe and wheelbarrow.....they weren't normally tools used for picking ingredients. If he never leaves the store except for collecting ingredients, why would he buy such tools? Ark noticed something suspicious with his intuition. After he asked around Lancel Village again, new information came out.

‘New World is a game no matter how much it seems like reality!’

A system where you could only obtain another clue after finding the first one was the basics of RPGs! That rule was also applied to New World. In other words, the residents couldn't answer when he asked them for information about Madusein but once Galen pointed it out, he was bombarded with information about other suspicious events.

“The other day he ordered a large quantity of wood and stone. It wasn't a small amount so he would need a place to pile it up. The store's basement wouldn't be that big.”

It was the testimony of a raccoon.

“I often feel the earth shaking late at night. I asked other people in the morning but they didn't know anything.....is it because I've become weak these days?”

It was the testimony of a resident who lived near the magic ingredients store.

“Recently when I've gone scouting in the forest, piles of soil and gravel would appear overnight. It couldn't be monsters.....so who would have moved the dirt? Well, I don't really want to find out.”

It was the testimony of a Meow warrior guarding Lancel Village.

‘A tool set used for construction. And a large amount of wood and stone. During the night the earth shakes and unidentified piles of dirt appear.’

If he looked at it one by one then he wouldn't have been able to figure it out. But if he put all the information together then there was

no doubt. And if he tried to guess the reason then he could only come to one conclusion.

‘Madusein is the type to consider even 1 copper precious so what if.....?’

Ark considered and immediately went to the town hall. After confirming the registration information for the magic ingredients store, Ark was convinced that his idea was right.

‘That Madusein.....I’ve caught you!’

“W-what are you talking about?”

Madusein stuttered with a confused look. It was the expected result.

“Why are you so surprised? The several wide warehouses revealed you. Since you have a lot of money, how about teaching me the technique for free?”

“The warehouse was wide? I don’t know what on earth you’re talking about. I cannot have a rival. Stop talking such nonsense.”

Madusein said as he turned his back quickly. Then Ark asked with a strange look.

“Is it really okay?”

“So what? What do you mean?”

“I’ve examined a few of them. Since it is a pioneering village, instead of promising residents low tax they promised them interest free land. Therefore you have freedom to make an underground cellar underneath your shop. Isn’t that right? Didn’t ajusshi properly receive the land that this store is built on?”

“So?”

“You became greedy and wanted more.”

Ark kept on knocking the floor with his feet.

“I checked it at the town hall. The land that ajusshi received was a 10 metres radius. This store certainly meets those criteria. But what about underneath?”

“U-underneath?”

“Although you have been fairly careful.....Lancel is a small village. You bought tools from the general store and wood and stone from the raccoon family. So what would the owner of a magic ingredients store do with items like that?”

“That, that is.....”

“In addition, a vibration was felt in the earth around here at night. And mounds of dirt appeared in the forest overnight. Does ajusshi knows the answer?”

Ark lifted the corners of his mouth. That’s right. When he put the information together, he could conclude that Madusein was secretly expanding his underground warehouse. The tool kit and wood and stone materials was necessary for the work. And the vibration in the ground was because of the construction. A magician could reduce the noise using ‘silence’ magic, but it wasn’t possible to completely get rid of the vibration. The mounds of dirt and gravel in the forest were because he had secretly moved it there.

In the game, renovating buildings illegally was also a crime! Well let’s think about it. Why would Madusein sneak around and proceed with the construction? Of course, it was because Madusein was a penny pincher. Although migrants were given a certain amount of land for free, if they wanted to widen it then the NPC would have to pay more money. That money was precious to Madusein. Because of that he expanded his warehouse secretly. The reason he built the shop near the village entrance was because there were no other houses around.

“Although it is a little strange. Ajusshi didn’t rest and just kept on collecting ingredients. The only magic ingredients store is in this

village so you've also been selling the ingredients to other villages. If so, where would you keep all your extra ingredients? I don't think the small warehouse underground is large enough for that. What would happen if Galen ajusshi figured it out?"

"Are you threatening me now?"

"Threatening? I didn't say that....."

Ark slowly narrowed the distance.

"Let's negotiate."

"Negotiate?"

"Yes, isn't this world give and take? There is no reason for ajusshi expanding the warehouse to affect me. If you want then I'll shut my mouth. But shouldn't ajusshi also show some sincerity in return?"

".....What do you want?"

Madusein asked while shooting him a nasty look. But there was no reason for Ark to be afraid. By revealing his feelings, he had admitted defeat. Ark smiled and said.

"Don't you already know what I want?"

"Don't tell me! Are you asking me to teach you my vision technique?"

"If you don't want to then don't."

Ark said before turning his body around. Madusein quickly opened his mouth.

"W-wait!"

'It has ended.'

A smile formed around Ark's mouth. In fact, he couldn't have failed in the negotiations. Before Ark started the negotiations, he had already examined the village rules with Galen. If there was an unauthorized construction on the land then the village chief had all rights to take away the building. In other words, the magic ingredients that Madusein collected and stored in the underground warehouse that

he widened without Galen's permission belonged to the warehouse. Lancel Village was already in a crisis situation. Furthermore, the opponent was Madusein who didn't have a good reputation. If Galen knew this then he would confiscate the ingredients with cheerful arms. He would also scold Madusein who tried to save money by waiting until everyone was sleeping at night in order to expand the warehouse!

'It would be better to have him teach the skill then give me hundreds or thousands of gold. Because it won't cost a lot of money immediately. And Madusein's assets would belong to the village so I wouldn't get a large profit from it. The chance to learn the skill is a hundred times better.'

If Madusein taught Ark the skill then they would both profit. That was why the negotiations couldn't have failed.

'Do not blame me. It was you that did this to yourself.'

"Now, have you decided?"

".....If I teach you this technique..... "

"I swear to keep my mouth shut for my whole life."

Ark laughed while Madusein saw him as a devil. However, he had no choice. Finally, he held out a thin book.

"Damn, here it is. I wrote down everything about the vision magic. Have it and get out."

Madusein couldn't tolerate the bitterness and turned his head. But has wasn't intimidated by the words anymore.

"Then see you next time."

Ark said making the NPC even angrier before quietly exiting the store.

'Huhuhu, you thought that you could just casually eat all my money? I'm the type of person who will make the NPC pay.'

The 300 gold that he wasted buying the corrupted fairy

wings! Madusein wouldn't even take 1 copper off the price. Ark hadn't forgotten the grudge from that time.

"Now, let's learn the skill."

After he opened the book and information window popped up.

A new skill 'Madusein's Vision (Rare) has been learnt.

Magic Detection (Special, Beginner, Active: Using this mysterious magic, it is possible to sense changes in the surrounding magic for 30 minutes. There are various magic ingredients with special effects that can't be seen by ordinary people. Magic Detection can help you grasp those ingredients. However, Magic Detection is limited to plants and objects. You won't be able to find memories of things that have been buried a long time ago. It is impossible to overlap with another vision related skill (Mana cost: 50)

Absurd Death

He had learnt a new skill after a long time. Ark immediately headed towards a testing ground to test it out.

“Now, where should I try it out? Magic Detection.”

When he used the skill Ark’s pupils shone with a blue light. In the dark evening, Ark’s eye lit up the forest! Deimos and Dedric looked on enviously.

“Oh, Master, somehow I feel a great force.”

Clack clack clack! Clack clack!

Ark also liked the special effects. However.....he didn’t feel any other changes except for the ones to his eyes.

“What is this? Is this really a skill?”

Ark wandered the forest with an ambiguous expression. As he was walking, he suddenly saw a pale light gathered near a bush. When he approached it looked like the ordinary gravel found anywhere. But it was impossible for an ordinary gravel to radiate light.

“Maybe this is the effect of magic detection?”

As soon as he picked up the gravel then an information window appeared.

-Suspicious gravel (Unidentified) <Low level texture>
--

Ark’s eyes widened.

‘That’s it. That is the effect of Magic Detection!’

On the ground it looked like an ordinary gravel. He had never seen

this message whenever he picked up a gravel. And he had picked up countless of them while building a camp or for some other reason. But a gravel had never been registered as an item until now. It was like when those who don't know the value of a gold nugget would think it was just a coated stone. Even if they saw a valuable plant, it would only be weeds for someone without the knowledge. That is the reason Magic Detection was necessary. It could check if a gold bar was a gold bar or if a carrot was just a carrot. However, Magic Detection only told him that the item was special. Finding out why it is special was a different matter. Because the item information would come out as 'Unidentified.'

"Discerning Eye!"

Sound Ore (Magic Ingredient)

The Sound Ore is a magic ingredient with a unique property. Although it looks just like ordinary gravel, it is an ore that has absorbed the properties of the magic sound field. When turned into a powder, it can be used to dilute powerful magic.

<Grade 5 Magic Ingredient. Value: 10-20 silver >

Ark used Discerning Eye to display the item information and average market price. Surprisingly it was 10~20 silver! It was 15 silver at most for precious minerals. In addition, general stores didn't buy the minerals at the set value. Although there was a value attached for the harvested ingredients, he couldn't sell them in stores. However, when it was an identified magic ingredient then he could sell it for 90% of the value at the magic ingredients store. Of course, there was no 'feelings' skill better than his intuition. It normally took 5 gold to release a low level protection and identify the object. If it wasn't an amazing magic ingredient then he would experience a loss. However since he could use the 'Discerning Eye' that he developed in the blind auction, it wasn't a problem. In the end, he would still get a profit even if it was a cheap item only worth 1 copper! It wasn't different from picking up money on the ground or in the streets.

'If I pick up an item then I can sell it unconditionally! This is perhaps.....it might be a huge windfall!'

Now he knew why Madusein was so determined to keep the skill to himself. There was no other NPC who could use Magic Detection around Lancel Village. So he had plenty of time to search for ingredients. But if Ark could detect magic then the situation was different. How sick would Madusein be now that he had to share what he had previously eaten by himself?

‘Yes, that’s why it was so difficult to get from Madusein!’

Ark had a wicked smile on his face.

“I’m going to collect all the magic ingredients in the Argus Mountains!”

The world looked different once he had this skill! Just yesterday it was an ordinary hunting ground and now it looked like a field of money. Money! What other word could make Ark so crazy? Of course he could get items and experience from hunting. But with the extra bonus of finding magic ingredients, he found it fun to wander the mountains. It wasn’t tedious even if a monster didn’t appear.

‘Ores, plants, insects.....they’re also magic ingredients!’

He had never seen so many high calibre items piled up neatly in his bag. Bark and larvae that could be used in magic and cooking, magical iron ore and even fruit harvesting that had been impossible until now. Among them were also corrupted fairy wings. There weren’t a lot of magic ingredients. During the 30 minute duration of Magic Detection, he only picked up 4~5 items. If he was gathering common ingredients in 30 minutes, he would find 15 which was approximately 3 times the drop rate of magic ingredients so it was quite low. However since there was a light around the magic ingredient when using Magic Detection, there was no need to walk around looking at the ground like when he was searching for common ingredients.

‘If this light is on my eyes then I can find things that aren’t visible.’

When the corrupted fairy wings falls to the ground, it is transparent. Madusein dyed the transparent wings and sold them. Although he paid 3 gold for one, when he looked at it with Discerning Eye he saw

that it was only worth 1 gold. It could only be found using the special skill, but selling it for 3 times the value.....

‘Damn, Madusein was a vicious merchant!’

Ark could say those things but he also wasn’t a gentle person when it came to money. Anyway, Ark once again realized the importance of learning new skills. Madusein was able to sell one corrupted fairy wing for 3 gold because not many people learned the detection skill. Of course, finding equipment items was important to a user as well. However no matter how good the equipment item, it would be replaced with a better one someday. On the other hand, once a skill was learnt then it was there forever. No matter how good the equipment was, it couldn’t last forever. When Madusein sold something worth 1 gold for 3, a person without the skill would have no choice but to accept it grudgingly. It was a professional skill was a huge additional value! It wasn’t a bad idea to learn as much skills as possible.

‘A lot of the ingredients can surprisingly be used for many things!’

He looked at the ingredients. It was an opportunity for him to create even more new dishes. He had only been able to raise his pets stats to level 90 thanks to the limitations of the ingredients. He had already used all the possible combinations of the ingredients in the Argus Mountains to create new dishes. But since he was now able to find magic ingredients, the situation changed. There were dozens of new combinations of ingredients that he could use to create new dishes! Considering the failure rate of survival cooking, he could raise his pets stats by three or four levels. Once again he would use the opportunity to keep his summons in check.

‘I have to tighten my grip again.’

Ark watched the battles vigilantly and waited for a chance. However, Dedric and Deimos made no mistakes.

‘There is a dangerous look in Master’s eyes!’

‘Damn, am I going to be unreasonably scolded?’

The two pets instinctively felt something. The time had come to take

extra care! Dedric and Deimos had spent more than a year of game time with Ark. They had faced the same situation several times. If there were no new ingredients then Ark was fine. Ark's nature was that if there were no new ingredients, then it was better to save them and he didn't make the torturous dishes anymore. However the situation was different if he was able to create new food. He would catch the slightest mistake and force feed the new dish to them. That's right, 'New Ingredients= Force feeding' was already an official situation! While the discovery of new ingredients was a source of happiness for Ark, to his pets it was a catastrophe! It wasn't below a catastrophe for them.

"Wah ah ah! Take this!"

Clack clack clack! Clack clack!

Deimos and Dedric immediately rushed forward whenever a monster appeared. Dedric would equip a steel helmet and head butt it while Deimos would grasp the legs until it collapsed. Their combative spirit was to such a degree that the monsters were puzzled whenever fighting the summons. But was that all? No matter how complicated Ark's instructions, they obeyed them perfectly.

"Uhh, even though I suffered some injuries.....I'm going scouting for Master's sake. Master, there doesn't seem to be any monsters in the vicinity. Perhaps you should do some errands?"

Once the battle ended, he would go scouting for more enemies.

'What's with these guys?'

Ark became embarrassed of his pets. The monsters in the Argus Mountains were relatively low level. Since there was no way the battle could fail, they were relatively relaxed. Of course, he wouldn't make up an excuse to feed them. However, he would punish any wrong actions. Those were the rules that Ark had established so far. If he pushed it too blatantly then they would become stubborn and cause adverse effects.

'Hah, but if they behave too well then it is also a problem. Should I have just continued feeding them from the beginning? But if I used

that system would they still listen now? What should I do? I already tried making the plans too complicated so that they would make a mistake.....’

However, that problem was soon solved. There weren’t many monsters in the Argus Mountains that could make Ark tense. That was because the monsters hunting ground was across the entire mountains. Among them, the most powerful was the level 100 steel maned gnolls. While there were other higher level monsters, the steel maned gnolls organization and skills made them more difficult to hunt than the level 150 ogres. Their party consisted of five or six steel maned beasts and it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that they were the most dangerous enemy in the area. But it was tedious for Ark to face them. Since he had already developed tactics with his summons to deal with them, they weren’t very difficult opponents. So when a group of steel maned beasts came running out of the darkness, Ark had no reaction.

‘The group is back again. I’ll dispose of them quickly since its troublesome.’

If the battle was somewhat unfamiliar, he would examine the surroundings carefully and determine the opponent’s strength. However, since he dealt with them often then he thought he didn’t need to bother. Even if his condition was worse than normal.

.....That was how the mistake happened.

“Awooooo!”

“Kung kung kung kung!”

When it was in trouble, one of them howled towards the forest and summoned more troops. When it howled, four or five steel maned beasts and gnolls emerged from the forest. Confusion was seen on Ark’s face.

‘Don’t tell me another scouting troop was nearby.....’

He confirmed that he only had 40% health left. He had fought five steel maned gnolls. Normally he would have 60% left. However, he neglected his normal battle principles and paid for it. It was harder

than usual for him to concentrate on hunting. Therefore he never noticed the gnoll reinforcements were nearby.....

‘Damn, I must have been losing my mind’

However, that was not Ark’s real mistake.

‘But I can still win. By using a strategy with my pets, I can beat them!’

“Deimos, defensive stance and protect the back!”

Ark shouted as he penetrated the gap. There were two gnoll archers present but he had protection at the back. There was no need to worry. Deimos would understand and stop the flying arrows. But just as he tried to swing his sword, he felt a sharp pain in his side.

-You have received a critical hit from the arrow of a steel maned archer!

240 damage. With the arrow lodged, your movement becomes slow for 30 seconds.

“Ugh, what, what the?”

It was unexpected damage! After Ark turned around, he was able to understand the situation. Ark had commanded Deimos to take a defense stance at the back. However, Deimos was crouched far away and rummaging around the corpse of a dead steel maned gnoll.

“He, he.....!”

His bone collecting skill was activated in this situation of all things.

Deimos has reassembled the tibia bone using his ‘Bone collector’ skill.

He has replaced it with a sturdy leg bone and is now able to move more quickly.

<Agility +1, Reaction Rate +2>

Deimos was only concerned about the new bone. Then Dedric used the chance to hurl curses at Deimos.

“You foolish skeleton! Do you enjoy your hobby more than your life? Are you going to laugh next? Can’t you see that Master is vulnerable because of you? Master, he should be forced to eat your food.”

Even if Dedric hadn’t said anything, Ark was about to explode. Ark’s operations with his summons had gone perfectly recently. Their role in battles had become much larger. But this was a double-edged sword. When a strategy was pulled over perfectly, a fatal weak point was revealed. When Ark was protected by Deimos, he would jump into the crowd to fight. But if Deimos was preoccupied, he was surrounded by himself. In addition, the arrow slowed his movements!

“Grrr, he thinks he can take care of everyone by himself?”

“This impertinent bastard!”

“Kill him. Grab him and tear him apart!”

“Grrr, the flesh has become soft.”

It was a group attack! Their attacks flew from everywhere. He would stumble whenever he got hit. There was no time to use his skills. A red light surrounded him as his health was steadily decreased. It fell to 20% while the arrows that continued to hit his arms and legs decreased his movement and attack speed.

“Dark Dance!”

Ark managed to escape the group using his evasion skill. But naturally, his bad condition even had an effect on his character. The Dark Dance skill became disabled when the completion rate fell below 30% and he received considerable damage.

“He’s struggling!”

“Catch him!”

The gnolls exposed their fangs and rushed towards him.

‘I’m not ready to die fighting against steel maned gnolls.....’

Eventually Ark used a trump card.

“Dedric, Vampire skill activate!”

It was the vampirism skill that Dedric had just learned in the hook bat cave! When he sucked the blood of a monster, he could absorb a random skill that could only be used once. The skill that Dedric had currently absorbed was Grimwing’s ‘Confusing Supersonic Wave,’ which had an 80% chance of causing confusion in opponents with low resistance! The battle situation could change in an instant thanks to that one skill! It wouldn’t be hard to control the dogs that had been confused. However, that was the most crucial mistake committed by Ark. His concentration suddenly fell as he received damage to his neck and all the information windows that popped up displayed a crazy amount of information.

Dedric had used Vampirism on the Steel Maned Gnolls. The existing skill was deleted and a new skill saved.

* Currently absorbed skill: < Howling> Summon all the gnolls in a 100 meter radius.

The steel maned gnoll had been bleeding heavily. Thanks to the blood, Dedric could not resist his blood sucking vampire instincts. When Ark ordered him to use the skill, Dedric lifted his head and howled.

Awo, Awooooo!

It wasn’t necessary to see the results. After the howling sound was heard, a group of steel maned gnolls once again came running from the forest. Dedric was surprised and gave a hasty excuse.

“I, I didn’t know! It’s not my fault! Master ordered me to do it!”

“Damn, this guy is really……!”

The situation became even more complicated. However, Deimos’ and Dedric’s nature didn’t help the situation. His health was already at a critical condition. In such a situation against another group of steel maned gnolls, the only possible result was death. In addition,

he had already sold all his intermediate potions and only have low level ones left. Drinking 1~2 potions that restored 100 health would not help the situation.

‘There’s only one option!’

Ark pushed the gnolls back using Riposte. Ark’s level was 151. With the dark attribute bonus it was 211. But now he had to run away from level 100 monsters..... His pride might be hurt but wasn’t living more important?

Kung kung kung kung!

The steel maned gnolls immediately chased after him. But there was a small mercy. His Indomitable Will and Adrenaline had kicked in thanks to his critical condition. Fortunately, his defense and reaction rate increased and he could endure a few attacks while widening the distance. And he soon appeared in front of a sheer cliff. Its height was approximately 10 metres.

‘My remaining health is 120. If I use the Cat Knight’s flexibility to reduce the fall damage then I can live!’

“Grrrr, die human!”

As soon as the clubs aimed at his head, Ark dived off the cliff. Ark tensed his body and twisted it as he was about to hit the ground. Although he felt some pain, luckily he only lost 30 health.

‘I did it! Alright!’

Ark jumped up and scanned the surroundings.

“Grrr, that bastard is alive!”

“Chase after it, it is dinner. Do not miss!”

They started steadily jumping down the cliff. But it would take some time to reach the bottom of the cliff. He used ‘Stealth’ to widen the distance between them. But just before he left out a sigh of relief, a red light flashed in front of Ark.

||-Your pet ‘Deimos’ has been forcefully recalled to the Netherworld. ||

||You have received 50% of his health as damage.||

‘T-this.....!’

Ark screamed. While he was busy fleeing he had forgotten about his summons. After Ark had run away, the steel maned gnolls had attacked his summons. Dedric had the ability to fly so running away wasn’t difficult for him. However, Deimos was completely surrounded and killed. Deimos wasn’t a trivial summon like before. Thanks to the evolution and cooking, he exceeded level 90. His stamina was 1,500. When he saw the information window, Ark received a critical hit. Ark received 750 damage. He felt dizzy and strength began to slip from his body.

‘It can’t be! To die in this way.....!’

Ah, a warm smile could be seen on the faces of the gnolls approaching. So.....Ark became the dinner of the steel maned gnolls.

“Hah, it was crazy.”

Hyun-woo sighed as he pulled up the blanket. He wasn’t in very good condition as the thermometer showed this his temperature was 39 degrees. He clearly had a cold. It was reasonable. Even though the weather was getting colder, he hadn’t been up to turn on the heater because of the gas cost. He even washed with cold water so it wasn’t a surprise that he had a cold. Then he ignorantly exercised at the crack of dawn, so his symptoms became more intense.

‘I have to play the game.....’

Hyun-woo stared at the game unit. Game time was money. In addition he died in such an absurd manner. He wanted to restore the experience and stats that he lost. But Ark soon shook his head.

‘No, it’s better to rest for the moment.’

It was worth enduring. If he acted unreasonably then the situation might become bigger. Being sick wasn’t the problem. Ever since the health care privatization, the hospital had become incredibly expensive. Without health insurance, it would cost Hyun-woo 100,000 won just for one visit to the hospital. Once the price of injections and medicine was added, the cost was 150,000. It would also be a problem if his cold became more intense and he had to go to the hospital then he would be unable to play. Hyun-woo bought a herb tonic tea and ate with the blanket wrapped around him. But that was when Hyun-woo’s ordeal started.

Since Hyun-woo had been disconnected for a long time, JusticeMan immediately called him. When he told them that he had a slight cold, within 1 hour all the rehabilitation members were over. They came to visit the sick person once they heard the news. Tears welled in Hyun-woo’s eyes. He had thought the only place he wasn’t alone was in the game. But he was wrong. In reality, Hyun-woo also had people who cared if he had a cold. He was so thankful that he couldn’t speak.....but it didn’t even take a few minutes to turn into a nightmare.

Dangtangtang!

It was from the kitchen. Hyun-woo stared horrified at the rice that had fallen to the ground.

“My hands slipped.....Hahaha, it’s nothing to worry about. I bought a lot of ingredients to make porridge.”

Before he could process the words, there was another crashing sound. While Yapsab had been cleaning, he knocked over a vanity table. The lotion bottle that had been on top of it broke and poured out. That wasn’t all. While trying to mop up the floor, he used so much strength that the mop was torn apart.

‘W-what the hell.....?’

The 10 sturdy men couldn’t move around the house without causing accidents.

“Jjak-tung hyung, there’s fire too! The pot.....Huck, Bul-kkun. Be careful lifting the computer.....eh? Yapsab hyung, the table leg is broken so it is barely holding up the centre.....”

Just as he barely settled that side of the room, he had to return to the kitchen.....He didn’t know whether they had come to nurse him or terrorize him. The rehabilitation members seemed to think they were pretty good at housework. Therefore, Hyun-woo started sweating while running around after the rehabilitation members.

‘I might really die.....’

His feverish symptoms became so severe that he really felt like his life was threatened.

“Stop moving!”

All of a sudden a sharp voice was heard in the room. At the moment, the rehabilitation members froze in place. Their fearful gazes turned to where the voice was heard. Standing there was.....Hyun-woo’s saviour. Gwon Hwa-rang had arrived. But the voice that made them tremble in fear was not Gwon Hwa-rang’s.

“Hye-sun?”

The person who had appeared with Gwon Hwa-rang was Jung Hye-sun.

“I knew it would be like this if oppas came first.”

“No, we just.....”

“Enough. I can already guess what had happened. Do you have any idea? Are you here to help Oppa? Or did you come to harass him?”

The terrible rehabilitation members were quickly controlled. As the rehabilitation members pathetically tucked their tail between their legs, JusticeMan said.

“I knew this would happen.”

Anyway, Jung Hye-sun’s appearance was Hyun-woo’s salvation. Once Jung Hye-sung stopped the terrorizing, she gathered the

rehabilitation members together and rectified the situation at an incredible pace. The power of a woman was amazing.

While she cleaned up the mess in the house one by one, the fragrant smell of porridge also drifted from the kitchen. Hyun-woo was able to breathe a sigh of relief.

‘I lived.....’

How much time had passed? He was able to relax and eat before going to sleep. When he woke up, there was no one around.

‘Did they leave without waking me up?’

He saw that it was 10 o’clock at night. He had slept for 2 hours. After sleeping his body seemed to feel somewhat better. His temperature seemed to have gone down quite a bit.

‘It is lucky. After taking medicine and resting, I seem to have gotten over my cold.’

Hyun-woo stood up to eat the rest of the porridge and drink medicine. Then the door opened and Jung Hye-sun came in. Hyun-woo who thought everyone had left became surprised and asked.

“Eh? Hye-sun, you haven’t left yet?”

“Did you just wake up?”

“Don’t you have to go to your part-time job?”

“I called and asked for a day off.”

Jung Hye-sun said with a smile. He suddenly saw that she was holding a basin in her hand. The basin was intended to make a wet towel.

‘No wonder my temperature decreased.....’

Had Jung Hye-sun been changing the wet towels? Even after JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members had already left? Then in the meantime we were alone in the room? The idea made Hyun-woo’s face heat up. After Jung Hye-sun saw Hyun-woo’s face, she belatedly realized the situation and stuttered in an embarrassed

voice.

“Uh,t-that.....Hwa-rang ajusshi forgot that he had an appointment today.....he said that he would come back later.....it was late so he gave me a ride.”

‘Damn, that cunning raccoon that was pretending to be a bear!’

“Oh, Oppa, are you hungry? I’ll bring the porridge.”

“No, I’ll go.”

Jung Hye-sun put down the basin and quickly grabbed the door handle. Hyun-woo was one step slower so when he reached for it, he grabbed her hand instead.

“.....”

There was a strange silence in the air. It was already late at night. The room was a rented place where a man lived alone. A woman was holding a man’s hands while looking at each other. What kind of picture was it?

His heart beat strangely and the white hand he was grasping felt soft. Jung Hye-sun had tied her long hair up to do the housework. Her sleek neck showed underneath it. A raised lip. He didn’t have a blood sucking instinct like Dedric, but his saliva suddenly dried up. He heard something that sounded larger than thunder. Hyun-woo was surprised and removed his hand.

No, in this moment the power was in Jung ye-sun’s hands. Hye-sun didn’t avoid his gaze and stared at him with astonished eyes. There was an incomprehensible power within those eyes. Hyun-woo involuntarily stepped forward, drawn by that power. A man in this situation wouldn’t understand the power and he slowly raised his hand to her shoulders. And.....

“Hey, Hyun-Woo!”

Abruptly, a loud sound was heard. At the same time, the magic was broken. Hyun-woo retreated in surprise. They avoided each other’s eyes while he went out to see who the unexpected guest was.

“Teacher Lee Myung-ryong?”

“Oh, I came to the right place. I wandered around for a long time looking for your house. I heard from Hwa-rang hyung-nim. You have a cold? Anyway, drink this for the time being.”

Lee Myung-ryong held something out with a laugh. It was a somewhat black liquid.

“What is it?”

“It’s my own recipe that I created. It contains ginseng, lemon, carrot, eggs and other things. Drinking this will cure your cold faster than herbal medicine.”

He had created a survival cooking dish in real life.....!

Although Hyun-woo made a face at the ingredients, he had to drink it in front of Lee Myung-ryong. He shuddered as the horrible feeling entered his mouth and slid down his throat. Now he knew what his summons felt when he force fed them food.

“Hah, how was it? This is a man’s drink. Am I also getting a cold? Why do I feel a chill? I’ll go home and make another cup. Then I’ll be going.”

Lee Myung-ryong left after adjusting his collar. There was a pair of eyes staring at the back of his head from the window. It was Hye-sung and her glare was the cause of Lee Myung-ryong’s chill.

He didn’t know whether it was because of Jung Hye-sun’s nursing or Lee Myung-ryong’s survival cooking, but his cold seemed to have completely disappeared. Fortunately, Ark was able to connect to New World again the next morning.

‘Damn!’

He cried angrily after he appeared in Lancel Village and checked the information window. After leaving the beginner village, he had never died. While there weren't any particular bonuses applied, he had felt a sense of pride at that achievement. But now he had ridiculously died from level 100 monsters on what felt like his home ground, the Argus Mountains.

'There's no point in getting hung up on it since I already died. But.....'

Ark had a severe self-criticism time. He had become too lazy after becoming familiar with the monsters in the Argus Mountains. Since he considered the monsters trivial, he hadn't seen the need to be tense. But a battle was a battle. A different variable was likely to happen at any time. He had died because he forgot this simple fact. However, that was not the whole problem.

'I've been too easy on Dedric and Deimos.'

In fact, yesterday wasn't the first time he thought that. However, he thought 'well, it's just his much.....' and let them get away with it. Ark thought that it was time to tighten up the regulations. Since he had been together with his summons for a long time, they've developed some inconvenient quirks. Deimos had developed the bone collecting skill. Collecting bones was an undead instinct. And since collecting bones raised the stats, didn't Ark also benefit? He thought like that and left it alone.

.....It was a mistake. Increasing the stats through bone collection was good. But what use was raising the stats if it couldn't be used to help him in time?

'Dedric was the same!'

He had absorbed the rare boss skill 'Confusing Supersonic Wave'! That was the only skill he received so far. The power of the skill was enormous. Furthermore, he couldn't get it again since Grimwing died. He felt reluctant to give it up but was willing to use it when it was necessary. But Dedric had selfishly used Vampirism and lost the 'Confusing Supersonic Wave'. But was that all? He had absorbed the ridiculous 'Howling' and threw Ark as dog food. He

recalled the whole situation and decided to discipline his summons. Ark concluded.

‘I made a mistake so I should fix it.’

He had also suffered along with his summons. After eating lee Myung-ryong’s survival dish, he was able to understand his pets situation. But since he wasn’t willing to endure the same problem over and over again, Ark became resolute.

“Summon Demon, Dedric!”

There was a soft light and Dedric was summoned. Dedric nervously twisted his hands and said.

“M-master! What did you do during that time? I was worried. Ah, perhaps you are angry? I really couldn’t help it. A vampire has the vampire instincts. I didn’t even know I was sucking the blood. So when Master used the skill.....”

“You said instincts right?”

“That’s right. Instinct, instinct. You know? ”

Ark laughed and nodded his head.

“Okay, let’s confirm how unbearable your instincts are. Follow me.”

Ark suddenly pulled Dedric and headed to the hunting grounds. The unlucky prey caught was a troll.

“Would you like to check it? Dark blade!”

Ark had clearly shaken off the cold and the troll was soon in critical condition. After Snake made a haemorrhage poison, he inflicted another blow.

“Ooooooh!”

The troll that had been stabbed collapsed to the side while bleeding heavily. It was strange. He was talking about vampire instincts and then out of nowhere attacked the troll.....Dedric’s face had been cautious until his eyes suddenly changed. After he saw the blood, his vampire instincts kicked in.

“Bl.....Blood!”

“Resist drinking the blood. Huh?”

Ark had said while glaring at Dedric with a chilly gaze. But once he smelled the blood Dedric went out of control, and despite Ark’s intimidation he flew towards the troll and plunged his fangs into its neck.

Dedric has used Vampirism on the troll. A new skill has been saved in the empty slot.

* Currently absorbed skill: <Revival> For 5 minutes, this will restore the target’s health by 10 every 5 seconds

Trolls were known for having the best restoration skill.

“Good?”

“Oh, this fulfilment and satiety! It is good being born a vampire!”

Dedric rubbed his stomach with a satisfied expression. Then Ark began to smile and approached Dedric.

“Ack, why, why Master? Are you crazy? Did you become crazy since you lay down once? Huk, ah, it hurts! I just had a meal. It’s coming out!”

Dedric swelled up after having his stomach stepped on and vomited out all of the troll’s blood. The skill disappeared after he just got it but Ark wasn’t interested in the skill. Dedric stared at him as he wept with a hurt face.

“Huk huk huk, what did I do wrong that would make you treat me like this? Even if you are Master, this is too terrible.”

“Do wrong? Didn’t I tell you not to drink the blood?”

“B-but the vampire instincts.....”

“Didn’t I tell you? I’m trying to confirm how much of that troublesome instinct you can endure.”

“Huck, don’t tell me Master……?”

Dedric suddenly turned pale as he realized his intention.

“No way! I’m not a dog! This is a violation of human rights!”

“Human rights? You’re a vampire. And you as a dog? No, with training a dog can control its instincts. But the fact that Ark’s pets can’t control themselves is ridiculous. Of course it’s not going to be easy. But even so, we have to work together. Because I ‘really’ love you guys.”

Ark laughed while clenching his fist.

“Do you understand? That is the pain of growing up.”

“……No, you could have died before when I was beating you……”

“So?” You have to recover before the next training.”

Ark immediately took out a pot. Since he hadn’t found any excuses for a while, quite of lot of new ingredients had been built up. However, he didn’t need an excuse to make something.

Rules? Human rights? Don’t be ridiculous.

Ark felt bitter at the mention of human rights and decided not to bother with such trivial things.

“Come and eat. Aren’t you hungry after throwing up just now?”

“I’d rather save my stomach.”

“Would you rather die and go to hell? Or just eat it?”

Dedric was forced to swallow the food and bent over gasping. Heh, what an unlucky fellow. But Ark just continued the training without lifting an eyebrow. Ark continued to cause a bleeding status in the monsters that appeared. Every time, there was the monster spilling blood, blood, blood, everywhere! But Dedric clenched his fists and endured it. After a few minutes, he succumbed to the vampire instincts and sucked the blood. The punishment was imposed immediately! After a few hours of violence and torture by food, Dedric became emaciated.

'It's not a joke. In this situation I really will die and wither up!'

It was natural for Dedric to become aware of the danger. The same situation had repeated many times. A gradual change eventually occurred in Dedric. Fear won over instincts! No, a new instinct was produced. Sucking blood would 100% lead to violence and food torture. When sucking the blood, he might be happy. But after the pleasure of the moment, the result would be a world of pain. This idea was so established in his mind that even when the vampire instincts appeared, he hesitated to obey it. His fear had created a new instinct.

"Oooh.....!"

Even though his saliva was spilling out, Dedric endured until the end. It was the first time he had won over the vampire instincts!

"Look, you could do it."

Ark nodded in satisfaction. However, that was not the end of the training. The next training was to fix Dedric's unbalanced diet. Dedric's vampire instincts weren't triggered for every monster. Just like a person had a favourite food, a monster with a more useable skill would stimulate the appetite more.

"Now, this time the trolls."

Ark was cruel once he set his mind on something. While a monster was bleeding, Dedric was forced to suck the blood of other creatures. It was like a court cuisine was placed right in front of a hungry person and they were told to eat instant noodles. From not eating at all.....Dedric now had to quickly develop a taste for all types of blood. Once again he was tortured with food!

Thanks to that, Dedric was able to gain 6 levels in 8 hours.....the horrible situation could be imagined just from that. However, the effect was obvious despite the terrible methods.

"Come on, eat. No, stop."

"Gulp! M-Master!"

Dedric stared at the blood while breathing harshly. Although he had

to swallow his saliva, his body did not move. He had instinctively stopped when he heard Ark's voice.

"No. Wait, wait....."

Ark was like a cruel master teasing a dog with meat. After approximately 5 minutes he killed the monster. In the face of despair, the League came up with this dead. A look of despair appeared on Dedric's face.

"Alright. That's it. Even if a monster is bleeding heavily and you want to drink its blood, you are not allowed to without my orders. This standard is enough for now but let's not forget today's lesson."

"Yes!"

Dedric replied obediently after being disciplined. After he completed Dedric's training, he checked the time. 24 hours had passed since he died. He summoned Deimos who had been forcefully recalled.

"Summon Demon, Deimos!"

With a soft light, Deimos was summoned. Ark clenched his fist and smiled.

"Deimos, shall we have a serious conversation about your bone collecting habits that you've been enjoying these days?"

Clack clack clack?

Deimos was confused as he tilted his head. Dedric looked at the next victim with compassion in his eyes.

"Yes, it's better to learn this as fast as possible....."

Sacred Soil

“Okay, with this training is over.”

Clack.....Clack.....Clack.....

Deimos' jaw trembled with his overwhelming joy. Why did it end so quickly? While a vampire was born into debauchery, Deimos was different and relied on willpower. In addition, his loyalty to Ark was higher than Dedric's and he obeyed his commands. Therefore the violence and food torture ended earlier than expected. When monsters revealed a bone, he gasped but listened to Ark.

‘Now it's back to the old system.’

Although the day started badly, he was quite satisfied with the results. Once he decided to invest the day in training, the discipline of his pets was like it was in the beginning. There was also a rise in stats thanks to the food torture! Dedric and Deimos had both reached level 100 stats.

‘The death penalty also disappeared while hunting the minor monsters..... ‘

It was now time to continue his original purpose of searching for the ‘Sacred Soil.’

Before Ark left Lancel Village, Hanson gave him a few ideas to search. The point where the power concentrates. In other words, a valley. After he had visited around half of them, he still hadn't found the ‘Sacred Soil.’ Instead, the valleys had twice as many magic ingredients compared to other regions. Unless.....?

‘Ingredients growing faster compared to other regions are the main point. Hanson said that valleys were a gathering place for large amounts of power. The power concentrated in the ground turns the soil fertile until it eventually becomes a Sacred Soil.’

Ark looked at the map and moved to the next valley. The forest gradually became wetter and darker. At that time there was a strange sight. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Even in New World that didn't change. Then why was there light gathered on the east side of the valley when the sun sets in the west?

'Something is there!'

Ark hurriedly ran to the valley and descended.

"Huk, what, what the? Is that?"

"What's the matter Master?"

"What's the matter? Can't you see it without me telling you?"

"Isn't it just a valley? Should I be seeing something?"

Dedric looked at Ark in bewilderment.

'He doesn't seem to be joking. Then only I can see it?'

Ark looked at the valley with bemusement. An incredible sight was developing. Nestled deep in the valley, an extravagant brilliance was slowly rising. Dedric and Deimos couldn't see what Ark was looking at. If so, the answer was simple. He was able to see the light because of Magic Detection! Whenever he found a magic ingredient, he only saw a small light bulb flickering at most. However, the light he saw rising from the valley was completely different. The whole valley became hot from the light rising.

'That light isn't coming from plants or ores. The ground itself inside the valley has a magical aura! Then this place.....!'

The Sacred Soil! There was no doubt.

"I've found it. Dedric, Deimos! Follow me!"

Ark immediately followed the gentle slope and entered the valley. However, rare magic ingredients weren't the only things present when power was gathered. Rare Monsters were also gathered there.

Roaaaaar!

As soon as Ark entered the valley, a huge shadow emerged. It was a large, green muscular monster over 5 metres tall. It was an ogre. The ogre's level was 150. It was the strongest monster in the Argus Mountains. They preferred acting alone so it hadn't been a huge problem so far, but 5 ogres had appeared while dragging large stone axes! Ark's current level was 151. It would be difficult to deal with five level 150 ogres. But when he checked the information window, he saw that his dark attribute bonus had been applied. His revised level was 211! At that level he could attempt it.

'But I can't be careless. An ogre is much stronger than other monsters with the same level.'

Just like a NPC or user, a monster couldn't be judged by its level. The physical damage and defense of a level 150 monster depended on the species. Among them, he had to be particularly careful of the ogre. The ogre had strength. While it has low agility and intelligence, it could do a lot of damage with just one blow.

"Dedric, Plan C. Lure two of them. Because its movement is slow, it shouldn't be difficult for you to keep your distance. Deimos, you assist from the side. You don't have to forcefully attack. If you see a situation where it is needed, prepare your defensive stance."

"Okay!"

Clack clack clack! Clack clack!

Both summons moved quickly according to the strategy.

"Over here. You stupid green monsters! Woo-hoo!"

Grrr!

Dedric had smacked the ogre's cheek before flying in the opposite direction. The ogre's mouth curled back to reveal its fangs before raising its axe, but the attack couldn't hit Dedric. He quickly flew out of the ogre's range as it started wildly chasing him. Two ogres left while three remained.

"Now shall I get started?"

Ark plunged through the ogres. Stone axes attacked him from three directions. Ark ran before sliding through an ogre's legs. When the three axes struck, the ground shook like an earthquake was occurring. At the moment Ark got up and used a skill.

"Cancel Magic Detection, Eyes of the Cat!"

'Magic Detection' and 'Eyes of the Cat' couldn't be used at the same time as the magic was applied to the same eye. Ark's eyes changed from blue to gold and red spots immediately appeared on the troll's back. Eyes of the Cat had detected the weak point!

"I have to reduce the number as quickly as possible. Dark blade!"

The ogre's skin was similar to a high defense armour. However, Dark Blade ignored the defense and dealt a critical hit! There was a flash as his sword struck the weak point and enormous damage was dealt. If it was a normal monster, it would stagger and become off balance. However, the ogre just swung its axe without even flinching. It was an immediate counterattack before Ark could even lift his sword.

'If I get hit by the counterattack then it would be a critical hit.....!'

This monster was the most difficult opponent. The most effect part of Ark's combat skills was his critical hits. A normal warrior would invest more in strength than in agility. It was in order to use their basic attacks and wear heavy armour. However, Ark's agility was currently higher than his strength. When compared to a warrior, his strength was probably two times lower. Therefore his general attack was quite low but his chances of striking a critical hit were many times higher. Since Eyes of the Cat identified the weak points and he used taekwondo principles as well, the chance of a critical hit was 50%! When he struck two times, a critical hit would occur. That was one of the reasons why his hunting speed was a lot quicker even though his general attack was lower.

However, there was one weakness to that fighting style. He lacked defense since his stats were invested in critical hits. He also didn't have a defense related skill which would give him additional points in defense. Therefore, Ark's lack of health was stressful during a

fight. Since Ark would become stiff for a short time after dealing a critical hit, he raised evasion to compensate for that. But if it didn't even flinch at the critical hit, the counterattack would be dangerous since the power of the ogre was unimaginable.

There was the sound of blowing wind as the axe was raised!

Teteng!

However, the stone axe was blocked by a shield. Deimos had taken a defensive stance behind him.

"Okay, that's it."

Ark nodded in satisfaction. The effect of the training was showing. Before the battle, he had ordered Deimos to keep an eye on the ogres from the side. He was probably interested in the ogres' bones. The old him would have blindly ran to it, but after the mental training he focused on the battle. Dedric was the same. Blood flowed from the sides of the ogres that were fighting Ark. Dedric reflexively turned his head at the fragrant smell of the ogre's blood. But when he saw Ark's face he turned around and swallowed his drool.

'Huhuhu, the one day of training was clearly effective.'

He no longer needed to worry about 'bone collecting' and 'vampirism' having an impact on the battle.

"Then should I turn up the heat? Snake, unequip your bags and make the paralysis poison."

Dedric and Deimos were not the only ones who grew. Snake had also steadily developed new abilities. Wandering alone to pick up items or memorizing the necessary ingredients for a recipe were some of the abilities it learnt. Unlike Dedric and Deimos, he didn't demand it of Snake. But Snake wanted to be helpful to Ark and developed it due to its voluntary efforts. And not long ago it had developed another ability. When Ark ordered it, Snake crept up and entered the bag. After it climbed into the bag, it could manually switch from 'item storage' to 'poison manufacture' and create the poison itself. He didn't have to make it do so.

“Saek saek saek!”

After Snake finished manufacturing the poison, it looked up with blue eyes. It really seemed beautiful! That was why Ark couldn't be weak to Snake.

Surururung, chaking!

The sword turned a deadly blue colour after the poison was applied. If there wasn't enough paralysis poison then the critical hit would apply! Ark unleashed a barrage of attacks on the ogres with the poison coated sword. He quickly continued with a series of kicks and defeated two of them down. Meanwhile, Deimos health fell by 80%. The attacks from the ogres were too much even with his high defense. If it was the same as before then it would have been unbearable.....

“Dedric, target Deimos with you vampire skill!”

“Ooh, I got it!”

Dedric activated his vampire skill with glee. The present skill saved was the troll's 'Revival.' Ark also retreated from the ogres until Deimos recovered his health using the buff. Then Ark called in the two ogres lured by Dedric.

“Deimos, during the battle you can search the dead ogres for their bones. Dedric, when the skill slot is empty then I don't care about your vampire habits.”

Clack clack clack! Clack clack!

“Hahaha, I waited for this. Blood! Give me your blood you green monsters!”

Deimos and Dedric cheered and enjoyed their hobby.

-Deimos has reassembled the ribs using his 'Bone collector' skill. He has replaced it with the bone of an ogre and gained a more durable body.

<Strength +1, Attack and Defense +1>

-Dedric has used Vampirism on the troll. A new skill has been saved in the empty slot.

* Currently absorbed skill: <Power> Increases the target's strength by 20 for 30 minutes.

He sucked all the blood. Ark once again coated his sword in poison and attacked the ogres. When Dedric and Deimos were satisfied with their hobbies, they joined the battle which ended immediately. Once he had solved the problem the situation ended smoothly. 'Bone collector' accelerated the growth of Deimos' stats. And Dedric's 'Vampirism' provided the opportunity for Ark to use skills from different professions. Even if he didn't have a priest who could use 'Revival' and 'Recovery,' he would be able to obtain various buffs and attacks to use in different situations. The unfortunate thing with 'Bone Collector' and 'Vampirism' was that they had to obtain it from monsters. In some cases it was obtained at once, but in other cases it took dozens of tries to succeed.

'If I can control it then it would be a skill with high utilization.'

If the results were good then it was a good thing. Then Ark started to actively invade the valley. The goal was to reach where the light was rising inside the valley. However, at the entrance of the Valley there were a significant number of Ogre villages. Although he wanted to urgently find the Sacred Soil, he wouldn't make a mistake like when he fought the steel maned gnolls.

"Dedric, lure a few of them."

Ark carefully gathered the enemy by luring them. Once there was a strategy, even the toughest monster wasn't that difficult. Ark proceeded in an orderly manner for 4 hours inside the valley. There were barely more than a hundred ogres in the Argus Mountains. At the beginning he was on 90% at level 151 and now he had risen two levels to 153. Unfortunately, the ogre was a monster that didn't drop a lot of japtem. Instead it had a low probability of dropping 'Ogre's Blood.' While it could be used as food, as a magic ingredient it could

be sold for 3 gold in the stores.

‘I picked up 5 so that is 15 gold.’

He was quite satisfied with the experience and income from 4 hours of hunting. However, the ogre had the worst regeneration rate among the large monsters. Once the ogres inside the valley had been exterminated, it would take a few days for them to respawn.

“Unfortunately I can’t help it. Now should I go inside? Dedric lead the way.”

Ark used Magic Detection again and entered the valley. How far did he enter? Finally the narrow valley widened and an absurd amount of light filled his vision. A huge square was surrounded by cliffs with the light coming from the centre.

“The light is coming from this whole area. The power is being absorbed by the earth. Obviously this is the Sacred Soil. Let’s start digging shall we?”

But there was a problem he hadn’t thought of. The ground where the light was coming from was definitely made of soil. However, it was as firm as a rock and he couldn’t dig out the soil even with his sword.

“Damn, what kind of soil is harder than rock? Let’s see how long it can hold up. Dark blade!”

Ark was annoyed and struck the ground.

Double bang, Rumble!

Suddenly the earth started shaking. The earth burst upwards like a stream of water and kept on rising.

1 metre, 2 metres, 3 metres.....10 metres, 20 metres.....!

It rose up until it seemed to pierce the sky. Ark stared at the piles of earth with a foolish face.

“What, what is this? Don’t tell me.....a giant golem?”

-Boss monster ‘Sacred Soil Guardian Colossus’ has appeared!
--

“Oh my god! That’s a boss monster?”

The Colossus was dozens of metres tall with vines and rocks attached to it! The head part wasn’t even visible from the foot. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that it was almost a small mountain. Ark confronting it with his sword seemed like an ant attacking with a toothpick. However, he had no choice.

Roaaaaaar!

Colossus suddenly swung a fist at Ark. It was like a mountain attacking! Ark rolled his body in surprise. However when the fist made contact, the ground shook and he bounced 1 metre up. The strike literally shook the earth! The shock waves that spread out at the same time also decreased his health. Just the shock wave caused 100 damage! With his defense, one well aimed hit would squish him like a pancake. Ark lost his fighting spirit quickly.

“I made a mistake. How can I deal with this guy? I should forget the quest and retreat!”

And then Colossus threw a nearby rock. There was a roaring sound and the rock ended up blocking the entrance. Of course, he could climb over it. Colossus wasn’t going to let him escape. It took a step forward and swung a fist again from 20 metres away.

“Damn, shall we do this to the end? Dedric, Deimos. Plan A-1!”

“You want to fight against this guy?”

Clack clack clack! Clack clack?

“Shut up, if you want to ask questions then ask that guy!”

When Ark raised his voice, Deimos sighed before going to attack with Deimos. Fortunately, its movement was very slow as it had an extraordinary large frame. Dedric and even the relatively stupid Deimos could easily evade the attacks. Nevertheless, the battle situation was looking pretty gloomy.

“Vampire skill activate. Target Ark. Take this, Dark Blade!”

Ark’s strength rose thanks to the ‘Power’ skill and he used Dark

Blade. However, Dark Blade which had defeated numerous monsters only scratched the shell of the Colossus. Only sand and soil fell from where Dark Blade hit and the Colossus didn't even lost 0.1% of its health. It was also the same for his unbeatable skill Blade Storm.

Bang bang double bang!

Even the sword fragments only created numerous scratches on the Colossus' skin.

"Unbelievable, even Blade Storm doesn't work....."

Roaaaaar!

It did have an effect. The Colossus became really angry. The Colossus wildly beat up the cliff with his fists, making a shower of rocks fall down.

"Huk!"

Dedric freaked out and flew into the sky. Ark used Dark Dance to quickly avoid the rocks. Deimos didn't have the ability to fly and he also couldn't use Dark Dance so he instantly lost 70% of his health. If he wasn't in the defense stance then he would have been instantly recalled.

"What the hell! Deimos, cancel summon! Dedric, disturb that guy's eyes!"

Ark quickly sent Deimos back to the Netherworld. Anyway, he wouldn't have been useful in this situation. If he was forcefully recalled then Ark would've suffered fatal damage.

'I'm also in the same state. I will either be crushed by Colossus' fists or crushed by a falling rock. I have to attack but there's no sign of his health decreasing.....'

There was also a limit to running away. He couldn't attack while he was avoiding the shower of rocks or the shock waves. In the end, his health decreased as his clothes became muddy. Then, a question

suddenly appeared in Ark's head.

'Wait, why hasn't his health decreased? Blade Storm should have done a minimum of 1,000 damage. But it didn't even decrease by 0.1%? How does that make sense?'

Ark looked at the Colossus with Eyes of the Cat. The Colossus was level 250. It was lower than the 'Awakened Heartsoul Bead' he fought in the Underground World. It didn't matter if it was a boss monster. Even if it was an extraordinarily large monster with adjusted stats, 1000 damage should have at least decreased the health.

'That's right, I misunderstood it for a while because it was so big. The health is extremely high but not that impossible. He also has some secrets just like the other bosses!'

Ark was convinced. He had encountered boss monsters in New World. They were so strong that it was difficult to find them in a regular game. He wasn't just talking about their stats. Each boss will have a unique weak point. If he couldn't find it then it would be difficult to win against the boss monster no matter how high the level. The core strategy to dealing with bosses was to identify the weakness and attack it!

'Eyes of the Cat didn't show this guy's weakness. Then.....'

"Magic Detection!"

When Ark used the skill he saw a brilliant light from the body of the Colossus. The Colossus was made from the Sacred Soil so power was gathered in his entire body.

"Was I wrong? I have to find a way to discover the weakness....."

At that time, an idea flashed through Ark's head.

"Overhead!"

Yes, it was the one place that Ark couldn't see from the foot! If the weakness was at the top of the head then he wouldn't have been able to see it with 'Eyes of the Cat' or 'Magic Detection.'

“Dedric, look for something different on the top of that guy’s head.”

“Wait a minute, huh? I found it. There is a weird lump on top of the head!”

“That’s it! Is it possible to attack that place?”

“It’s not that difficult.”

Dedric answered confidently and flew in. Dark Dash! But soon there was a ringing sound and something bouncing off stone.

“Huck, ah, I can’t attack it. It is surrounded by tough skin that my teeth can’t break.”

Of course there would be a defense around the only weakness. And the only thing that could penetrate it was Dark Blade which ignored all defense. He could also use the power of Blade Storm to destroy the defense as well.

‘In other words, I have no choice but to attack directly!’

Ark looked at the huge Colossus and made a firm resolution.

‘There is no way to escape anyway. I just have to see it through to the end!’

“Dedric, distract that bastard!”

Ark rushed towards the Colossus.

Roaaaaar!

“Where are you looking? Your opponent is me!”

Colossus instantly reached out his fist as Dedric disturbed him. But the fist of the Colossus eventually struck the ground. After the ground shook, Ark used the force of the shock wave to jump onto his leg.

‘This is the correct answer. I can see the way!’

Ark grabbed a vine attached to the Colossus. He then began climbing, the leisure sport that was popular nationwide. It was a

sport where people climbed artificial rock walls using gears and fake handles. When his father was still alive, Ark had received lessons for a few months. The Colossus' body was a lot like artificial rock climbing. Although he couldn't see the entire body, there were rocks and roots placed at regular intervals. Thanks to that he was able to grab the roots and climb to the top.

'I might have forgotten most of what I learned but this is a game. My strength and agility can't even be compared to reality. It is also possible with my increased stamina!'

Strength was necessary in order to climb up artificial rock. But it wasn't only strength that made the movement possible. When grasping a handle to move himself, he would have to calculate the route so that he wasn't stranded in a place with no handles. Ark used his experience to carefully check each time he climbed up the body.

Roaaaaaar!

"This way! Come on, reach up here!

Dedric flew around and taunted the Colossus.

When he struck with his fists, the shockwaves didn't even hit Dedric. While he tried ripping out rocks and throwing them at Dedric, the accuracy wasn't high enough to hit. Meanwhile, Ark had already achieved a great accomplishment on his climb.

'Huk huk, 10 metres. This climb isn't a joke'

Although it was a game, his whole body seemed to be making a creaking noise.

'Fortunately it seems like the Colossus has forgotten my presence. Anyway, I'll take a break for a moment since I'm halfway there.

Ark took a break with the vines wrapped around his arm. It was at that time. At Dedric's provocation, the Colossus strongly stomped his foot. The aftermath of the Colossus' retaliation was enormous. Rocks started rolling off the cliff while a huge vibration occurred in the ground. At that moment, the rock that Ark was holding on to

popped out from the shock.

“Ugh!”

Ark fell down the Colossus' body. After he fell down 2 metres, his body stopped.

...

Thanks to the vine wrapped around his arm, he didn't fall to his death. However, he had no time to breathe a sigh of relief.

“This, this is.....!”

Ark lifted his head. Round and wooden black eyes were looking at Ark. Because the skin was scratched, the Colossus had noticed Ark's presence. The rocky face of the Colossus warped. Then a fist with a diameter of 10 metres swung towards his waist. It was a situation where Ark couldn't avoid it! Dedric covered his eyes while screaming.

“M-Master!”

Bang bang double bang!

There was a sudden explosion on the Colossus' side. Rock and dirt fell like mist. It slowly cleared up. However, Ark couldn't be seen after the dirt was gone.

“M-master! Are you really dead? Then.....’

Dedric murmured puzzled before suddenly laughing.

“Kekeke, in your face! That greedy rice cake is dead! This is divine punishment!”

“Hah, so those are your true feelings?”

“Huk, what, what the? This is Master's voice?”

Dedric freaked out and looked down. Ark was staring at Dedric fiercely from the fist of the Colossus. The thing that connected him to the Colossus' fist.....Saw Blade!

Yes just before Ark had been flattened by Colossus, he reflexively summoned Deimos. Then he used transformation to change him into the saw blade. The saw blade was also available as a whip sword! Ark had managed to wind around Colossus' fist using the whip and avoided his punches. He swung that whip just like Indiana Jones! It was a bit of improvisation during his moment of desperation.

"Really Master! Don't you know that I was joking just then? I really believed that you were alive, really!"

"Shut up before you make me angrier!"

Roaaaaar!

Then the Colossus shrieked and raised his arms. He beat at the cliffs trying to flatten Ark.

'Now!'

Ark was after that moment. The moment the Colossus raised his arms over his head, Ark shook his wrist before releasing the whip. His body rose with the momentum and flew up into the sky. But after a moment, Ark fell down thanks to the force of gravity. He had been thrown 10 metres and was now falling from that high. It was like a bungee situation without the rope. Even a person without a fear of heights would turn pale in fear. But there was no room for Ark to feel fear.

'Just once! I'm hanging everything on this one chance!'

"Snake, one decent sword!"

Ark grabbed the sword Snake spat out and focused. Once he flew up into the sky, he saw the weakness attached to the top of the Colossus' head. It was the place where light gathered even more intensely! Ark held his stance in the sky and used his special attack.

"Blade Storm.....eh?"

It happened when the cracks spread like spider webs on the sword. The Colossus sensed a crisis and flinched before retreating.

‘At this rate, Blade Storm will hit the bare ground instead!’

However, there was a black explosion which increased his momentum.

“Dedric, hang onto my back and use Dark Dash!”

“What the? Really? Is that Master’s order? Are you making an irrelevant remark?”

“Shut up and hurry up!”

“Hehehe, okay!”

Dedric let out his resentment while carrying him. Ark pushed towards the body of the Colossus just as Blade Storm occurred. The fragments of the broken sword! The black sword fragments spun like a whirlwind on top of the Colossus’ head. The shield was torn to pieces. The Colossus instantly lost 70% of his health. The barrier that had been difficult to attack was now broken.

“Mind’s Eye!”

Ark immediately activated the special effect of the ring to see in the darkness. His range of vision increased and he saw that he was rapidly approaching the bright spot. Ark swung his sword vertically and used Dark Blade. The sword landed a critical hit on top of the head. Ark’s health decreased to 50% at the same time. It was because he couldn’t disperse the fall damage properly.

Roaaaaar!

Colossus shrieked and swung his fist. However it only had 10% health left. Ark swung his sword and used Dark Blade again as the approaching fist suddenly stopped just before his nose. A strange silence floated inside the valley. Then the rocks that had formed Colossus broke off until it had all disappeared. And.....the fist of the Colossus in front of Ark’s nose broke apart like sand. The head, shoulders and legs also turned into sand.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.....

Ark received the continuous message windows that popped up as he was buried in the earth and sand that had collapsed.

“Huk huk huk, damn, I thought I would choke and die.”

After a while, Ark pushed the earth and sand apart and crept out. The Colossus seemed really huge but once turned into sand and earth, he appeared quite small. He had managed to defeat such a monster. But he was rewarded for his troubles. He checked the information window and saw that he had gained 6 levels. It was the boss that had given the most experience since the Awakened Heartsoul Bead.

“Ssak ssak ssak!”

Then, Snake’s blue eyes emerged as it headed towards an area. When he dug at the earth, a shield appeared.

Sacred Earth Shield (Unique)

Armour type: Steel Shield

Durability: 23/70

Defense power: 200 (+80)

Weight: 50

User restriction: Level 120 or higher with Warrior profession

A shield of superior quality made from high class steel. When looking at its name, it is probably a shield that had been used a long time ago. However it has been buried for a long time in the ground where power gathered, changing its nature. This shield would be difficult to produce with the power of a human. Although all warriors can use it, only warriors with holy powers would be able to draw out 100% of its power.

<Option: Strength +20, Stamina +20, Holy Power +50, Shield Defense +80>

<Special Option: The attack of the whole party increases for 10

minutes once a day, and it is possible to use 'Protection of the Earth' to increase the defense by 100% (Limited to professions with Holy Power>

"Wha, What it this?" A unique shield!"

Ark checked the item that Snake had picked up in its mouth. It was a level 120 unique shield! When he checked the information window, the additional stats were terrific. The defense was 280. It also increases strength and stamina by 20 points. But was that all? There was an additional 50 points to Holy Power while 'Protection of the Earth' could be used to raise defense by 100%! There hadn't been a lot of unique items with this option.

'Although I cannot use this item.....'

For a while, Ark hadn't been able to make money while he gathered a full set. If so, a unique item would earn a hundred times more than a rare item. He felt warm at the thought of his bank balance having some money after a while.

'Yes! It's been a while since I've been able to buy some nice fruits for my mother!'

How much would he earn with this? When he thought of his mother, tears obscured his face.

"Hehehe, Master. You're a genius at playing cheap tricks in a moment of desperation.....No, strategy! It was really wonderful."

Dedric approached while twisting his hands. Whenever he committed a crime, he tried to appease Ark by flattering hm. He was a cunning fellow. Ark stared at him before turning around.

"Hmm, I'll let it go this time. But be careful. I'm watching you."

Ark had become a little generous since he found what he was after.

-Sacred Soil

A mysterious soil that has absorbed the powers of the earth over a long period of time. Since it has absorbed the power, it has the

ability to purify the surroundings and promote plant growth.

“Got it, now the <Sacred Soil> quest can be completed and the problems of Lancel Village solved!”

Ark clenched his fist after he checked the information window. Then the message window suddenly turned red as a warning message flashed.

-The Sacred Soil is almost a living organism.

The form of the Colossus was created to maintain the ‘Nucleus of the Sacred Soil,’ a crystal that had been created after many years of gathering intense power. Once it lost the power of the crystal, the Sacred Soil will rapidly lose its power.

Time remaining: 30 minutes

“What, what is this?”

What is it saying? He had defeated the Colossus using all his strength. He had barely found the Sacred Soil and now it was becoming useless. Ark grabbed his head and screamed.

“Dammit, why did I crack the nucleus?”

Perhaps there was a different way to obtain the Sacred Soil. But the accident had been caused already. No, even if he was in the same situation again then he wouldn’t of thought of another method.

“Then I have to plant Popo here before the Sacred Soil loses its power?”

Ark was about to pull out Popo but stopped and flinched. Ark’s purpose wasn’t just to plant Popo. He wanted Lancel Village that was suffering from a food crisis to receive Yggdrasil’s protection. But was that all? Even if Popo was planted here, there was no guarantee that he would grow in the 30 minutes before the soil lost its power. The worst possible situation was that <Sacred Soil> might end in failure.

‘Crazy. But I can’t just stand here watching.....’

Ark fidgeted as he recalled the contents of the information window.

‘Wait, the Sacred Soil is almost a living organism. Then? Okay, it won’t hurt to try!’

Ark laid both hands against the soil and shouted.

“I call on the Mother of every existence on earth! Please grace us with your presence, Nursing!”

The Sacred Soil was almost a living organism. That was certainly a hint. After Ark used his nursing skill, the light coming from the soil became brighter.

-The health of the Sacred Soil has temporarily become stronger.

Time remaining: 20 min

Originally the soil possessed the power of healing. When Ark added the blessing effect from Nursing, the health of the Sacred Soil immediately became strong again. Once Ark saw the effects, he continuously used Nursing until all his mana ran out. But since it was spread over a large area, Ark could only extend the time limit to 4 hours.

‘The fire is put out for the moment thanks to Nursing. But I can’t just stand here nursing and extending the time limit forever. When there is time, I have to move the soil to Lancel Village.’

There must be a way to move the soil to Lancel Village.

‘But I can’t move this much soil by myself. If I can’t mobilize the residents of the village then it will become difficult.’

However, the villagers were currently in conflict and might not listen to Ark. The method to persuade the villagers.....

‘I have to make them think that the soil is completely necessary.

Once he organized his thoughts, he quickly swept a small amount of Sacred Soil into his pocket. Then he immediately ran to find Galen

in Lancel Village.

“What is going on? You said there was something to show?”

It was early morning in New World, and Galen was still waking up when he asked tiredly. However, he soon forgot about sleep as his expression lightened.

‘Huk, this, this is.....?’

‘As expected!’

Ark gripped his fist tightly. When he was confirming the Sacred Soil information, the part about promoting growth attracted Ark’s attention. Lancel Village was suffering because of the food situation. The bad conditions of the crops for this harvest made the situation worse. It was because the fields had been devastated. But if they used the condensed power of the Sacred Soil.....

‘Yggdrasil’s protection would help with Lancel Village’s food situation. But the effect might not solve the food crisis straight away.’

But if the soil promoted the growth of the crops then it would help solve the problem. That was when he thought of the plan to convince the residents to move the soil. As a trial Ark sprinkled a bit of the Sacred Soil in the field. The result was more than expected! The plants that were withered became shinier while the seeds became thicker. Galen’s reaction was natural since he had been worrying about the food problem.

“D-did you perform some magic on the earth?”

“Let’s move somewhere else and discuss it there.”

There was no reason to rush now that he had confirmed the effect on the plants. Ark gathered the residents in the Town Hall and explained the situation to them.

“Sacred Soil! You really found it?”

Hanson shouted in surprise after his explanation. Since Galen still looked confused, Hanson explained it to him.

“The Sacred Soil is the soil that has absorbed the earth’s power. It has absorbed that power over hundreds of years. But I don’t know if there would be an effect on the growth of the crops.....”

“I’ve already tested it.”

Ark grinned and replied. Galen flinched and looked at Ark.

“Then that was the dirt that you threw on the field before?”

“Yes, I sprinkled the ground with Sacred Soil.”

“So it was like that?”

Hanson nodded.

“But according to Ark’s explanation, the power of the Sacred Soil won’t last for much longer. But all the crops are ahead of the harvest. If we are able to maintain the harvest while moving the Sacred Soil and sowing it in, the profit would certainly increase this year.”

“Oh, doesn’t that sound exactly like what Lancel Village needs? How much is there?”

At that moment, all the attention was focused on Ark. If the amount of soil was small then it wouldn’t be any good. Ark paused for a moment before he spoke with a smile.

“There is more than enough to help Lancel Village.”

“Wah ah ah!”

After the tension was broken, the residents cheered with joy. Galen even embraced Ark with tears in his eyes.

“Thank you, Ark! You really are the embodiment of Lancel Village!”

Frankly, Ark never imagined that there would be that much Sacred Soil. Ark had thought there would only be a small handful of the Sacred Soil. Since there was a lot more than expected, he had to think about how to use it.

“But we can’t give you that much in return.”

It was Ark that settled the problem every time something happened in Lancel Village! Galen wanted to do something for Ark and looked at him with an anxious expression. Ark felt refreshed at that moment.

‘What am I doing?’

He had searched for the Sacred Soil to solve the food situation because it would increase Lancel Village’s value. However, he was about to give such a large amount of soil for free? Was he crazy? Although it was also for a quest, if there was no quest compensation then what was the point?

‘I found a unique shield and forgot about my hungry spirit.....you’re pathetic Ark!’

He was disappointed in himself. He even felt anger.

‘After reflecting I have to fix it!’

Ark regretted it deeply.

‘It is possible to receive a price for the dirt. But I can’t ask for something too excessive. First I have to check how useful the soil is in raising my intimacy with the village before asking compensation. In addition, I have to request something that all the residents can pay.....’

“I am willing to receive any compensation with gratitude. But how about we transfer the soil first? It is best to move it as soon as possible so that the harvest will increase and the residents will be warm for winter. We can discuss the small matter of my compensation afterwards.”

“You are different from the other foreigners. If it was other foreigners, they would be trying to get the profit first.....”

“Hahaha, as expected from the Truthseeker!”

The Meow elder Hassan struck his stomach as he laughed. Hanson, the raccoon clan and even the villagers looked at Ark with great respect.

‘Oppa is my hero.’

Sarah wrote that sentence on the palm of his hand. Galen nodded and looked at Ark with proud eyes.

“I take my hat off to you. Alright. After the work is done, I promise I will give you a worthy reward for your efforts. I hope all the villagers will as well.”

‘Huhuhu, that’s right. By acting to this degree then I can receive the best reward!’

Galen’s words lit a fire in Ark’s heart.

“Then work will start immediately. Even if we start now, it will still take a few days.”

“Okay, gather the villagers who want to help move the soil!”

Then JusticeMan nodded and stood up.

“All the people training at the camp will also help.

“If we want to eat together then we should help too. We’ll patrol and prevent monsters from attacking when moving the soil.”

“I’ll make a cart.”

Hassan and the raccoon clan also volunteered and left. The village that had been suffering insecurity and strife thanks to the food crisis suddenly regained hope and vigour. Everyone raised their hands and the ambitious land reformation project began. When the residents were joined by JusticeMan’s rehabilitation group, there were 700 people available. The raccoon clan made carts while the Meow warriors shouldered the responsibility of guarding the residents as they headed towards the valley. And the rest of the people gathered the soil and moved it.

However Ark was the busiest person. There was a huge amount of Sacred Soil. No matter how thirsty he was, he had to use nursing on the soil evenly. If one part of the soil was affected too deeply or not deeply enough then the effects of nursing would disappear when the soil was moved. Therefore Ark had to continuously go around and use Nursing. Apart from that.....a great amount of soil was

gathered onto the carts and carried to the village. And scattering it in the fields appeared to be very effective. The withered crops quickly became shiny again while the seeds grew thicker. Thanks to that, the residents were even more inspired to spread the soil. Sarah scattered the soil eagerly with her hands.

“Sarah, you don’t have to do that.”

Sarah smiled as Ark approached. She spread both arms with a wide grin. She enjoyed working together with everyone. Cute! She was different from Jana. Jana just sat on a nearby roof shaking her tail. The other Meow was patrolling the area while she was alone with her favourite things.

“Jana! You should follow Sarah’s example!”

“I’m a shaman. Have you ever seen a shaman do any labour?”

Jana muttered as she stretched and yawned.

Just then.....

Roco returned riding the unicorn and scoffed.

“Bah, there are no shamans who laze around like you.”

“Sheesh, another noisy woman has showed up.”

Jana replied and turned around to lie on her side. While Jana slept, Roco approached Ark on the unicorn.

“Oppa, the Meow has dealt with the monsters on the hill.”

“Really? Then I guess we have to go up the hill. Go tell Galen in the valley that the route has changed. This operation is going to be a few hours ahead of schedule.”

“Okay. Sarah, don’t you want to see the valley? Come with me.”

Roco laughed as she approached on the unicorn. In the meantime, Roco had become quite close to Sarah. Even though she was a child, Roco initially watched her quite closely. Roco was more jealous of Jana who kept on trying to seduce Ark. Sarah who had only travelled with Hanson quickly became friends with Roco.

“Pururuk!”

Sarah hesitated until the unicorn kneeled down beside her. Ark’s face crinkled in displeasure. Once again, Ark wanted to kill it.....if it hadn’t hidden behind a woman or a child then that bastard would’ve died by now!

“Oppa, I’m going now. Come on Unicorn.”

“Hihihihing!”

The two women got on its back before the unicorn got up and started running.

‘If only I can breed it and get the horns from the offspring, then I would eat it straight away.....’

Ark stared at the unicorn until JusticeMan came up to him and muttered.

“Ark. I wanted to say something.”

“Yes?” What is it?”

“Honestly, the food situation in Lancel Village became worse because of us. Galen said it was fine but we couldn’t help noticing.....so I’m really glad about the good news. Now we can also hold our heads high.”

Sincerity was in JusticeMan’s voice. He didn’t show it but JusticeMan had been struggling with the situation inside his head. Ark felt a little strange after listening to him. Unlike Ark, JusticeMan had experienced every event in the game with NPCs. Was it because of that? While Ark thought of it as a game, sometimes JusticeMan felt like New World was reality. Of course, New World was more meaningful than just a game to Ark. But it wasn’t to the extent that he would feel sorrow and joy in quick succession for the circumstances of the NPC.

‘Well, it might be fun to play the game that way.’

However for Ark, New World was money! The reason he was nice to NPCs was because they were free money!

‘I can’t afford to play the game like ajusshi. I can’t lose my original intention. If I don’t get money then there is no reason to play New World. No, it isn’t possible.’

Because it was so busy, the operation was almost finished. Then a problem that he hadn’t thought of occurred. They had spent 20 hours carrying and spreading soil. It was more than 2 days for the NPC residents. When the residents who were spreading the soil became tired, the working speed decreased immediately. But fatigue wasn’t the only problem.

“Hey, that soil belongs to my field first.

“What are you talking about? You’ve spread soil on your field many times already.”

“The soil that is scattered on my field doesn’t have a lot of power. The crops didn’t turn out that good!”

“Noisy, do you know how long I had to move that soil?”

The field that was sprinkled with the Sacred Soil first would of course grow faster. Over time, the difference showed itself in the residents frantically trying to sow their fields first. That was one reason that the pace slowed down.

“Please wait.”

As soon as the two farmers tried to grab each other’s throat, Ark had to jump in between them. He approached the field and laid both hands against the ground before using Nursing.

“Great Earth, please provide power to this site and allow your children to grow strong!”

He could see a bright light as power poured into the soil. Ark produced a huge sigh.

“Now it’s done. This field will be fine for a while.”

“Y-you.....!”

The farmers who were watching jumped in dumb surprise and lifted

a finger. There was a nosebleed dripping on Ark's face. Although the concept of time was different for the NPCs, the 20 hours that Ark spent working on this wasn't easy. Since he ran around and used Nursing continuously, it wasn't a surprise that he got a nosebleed. So Ark just smiled and wiped off the nosebleed like it wasn't a big deal.

"I'm fine. If all the residents make an effort then I will be satisfied. Please continue carrying the soil without fighting. I'll make sure there is enough power for a good harvest, even if my body becomes broken."

The farmers looked at him before grasping his hand.

"Sorry. We must have seemed crazy for a while."

"I don't know what you think of us.....we were also harsh to you the other day. Then you saw us fighting when you have been working hard for two days without resting..... Shameful. I'm really ashamed."

"I was blinded by greed. This soil should be scattered on your field."

"No no. Don't you have a family? You should have a better harvest."

"I will not. I'll just move the soil a little bit faster and more eagerly."

"That's right, that the only way to return Ark's favour!"

The farmers who were impressed with Ark's actions didn't complain any more. Then work continued again until one day had passed. But unlike the first expectations, the situation was gradually getting worse.

'Huk huk huk, it is really never-ending.'

Ark couldn't rest and had to run around using Nursing. When he first made this plan, he had remained optimistic about the time. He thought it would take approximately one day to transfer the soil and 2~3 days for the crops to improve before they could be harvested. It would be difficult but he could use Nursing until then. But when he actually did it, things weren't that easy. When he restored the Sacred Soil in one area, he would immediately have to run

somewhere else to restore that soil. When he paused for even a little bit, it would return to ordinary dirt. Ark couldn't become complacent since he was doing it alone.

"Take this!"

Ark looked at the Sacred Soil that had become ordinary with resentment. But he couldn't show his resentment. The Sacred Soil had just lost its power right in front of him. Ark renewed it and turned around.

'If I give up here then the quest will fail.....I really want to clear this now!'

In these circumstances it was difficult to have high expectations for the crops. Even if it returned to ordinary soil it still had an influence on the crops, so it should improve by 20% at least? In addition, he still hadn't prepared the necessary soil for Popo.

'Hang in there! There's only a little bit more time until I can plant you Popo!'

However, his legs felt weak and he started to feel dizzy. While before he had spent 24 hours alternating between resting and hunting, now he was spending the same amount of time running around like crazy while using one skill repeatedly. Then someone caught Ark's shoulders. He saw that it was Galen and the farmers.

"Ark, you're being too unreasonable. You should rest for a moment."

"B-but....."

"I know. While you're resting the soil will return to normal. But you have already done a lot for us. It's not just the crops. We have really cherished what you taught us."

"Yes, even if the soil returns to normal the crops will still be better than before."

"You don't have to do so much anymore."

"Even if the crops don't turn out well, nobody will blame you."

Galen and the farmers spoke as they looked at him with affection. However, he didn't feel that thankful.

'They dare to say that now?'

They had been complaining from the very beginning. Ark almost died running around because of the <Sacred Soil> quest as well as the real estate market price! And now he told to just give up and waste all that suffering? It wasn't enough.

"If I give up here then I wouldn't be able to forgive myself!"

Ark squeezed out every bit of power and used Nursing.

"The Sacred Soil! Please exert more power!"

Instantaneously, an amazing sight occurred. Under Ark's care, the spread of Nursing expanded and the light spread over all the fields. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark with spectacular sound effects.

The Miracle Nursing was successful.

The earth isn't just simply soil. It is the source that gives power to all life and the world will suffer hunger and disease if that power is lost. You have treasured the soil and begun the healing process. Without caring about your life, you have continued to nurse the injured earth. That dedication and effort has touched the earth. The land that was losing its power will listen to the voices of the existences it bears and return the favour. And the power of the amazing miracle will enrich the entire soil.

* Due to the success of miracle nursing, all stats increase by 1.

* The Affection stat increased by 10.

* Fame increases by 50.

* Increased the alignment to good by 50.]

* The effect of 'Sacred Soil' will rise by 1.5 times and last for 6 months.

The Miracle Nursing was a success and you have acquired the title 'Caretaker of the Land'

Your fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many people.

* As a title bonus all stats will increase by 1.

* Fame increased by 50.

'The Miracle Nursing!'

With a flash, Ark realized what was happening. Miracle Nursing only occurred when he felt true affection for his patient. However, Ark had only cared about the real estate prices while nursing. Real estate.....In other words, the earth. He was committed to maintaining the real estate price of the land. In other words, it was caused by Ark's obsession for money. The result was truly spectacular.

'Wow, this, unbelievable.....!'

Galen stared at the field with shocked eyes. When the light spread like a wave over the crops, they regained a shine that couldn't be compared to before. The fruit instantly became firmer while the number of seeds increased. It was truly a miracle!

"Ark.....You really.....!"

Galen had stumbled to the shining soil and touched it with quivering hands. The farmers were also crying as they kept on staring at Ark. Ark had laid down so they could only stare at his back. After the tension had been released then all the fatigue came rushing in and he became dizzy. But even the sense of fatigue felt sweet. It was an unspeakable sense of accomplishment!

"I did it.....!"

Ark was stunned and then he fell asleep. He faintly heard the voices of the villagers calling his name.

While he had slept for 2~3 hours, all the work had been completed. The amount of Sacred Soil was enough to make an entirely new field every time they sprinkled it. Thanks to that, the food situation in Lancel Village grew by 60% while the growth of the surrounding forest also rose by 40%. The rehabilitated thieves also kept on improving. But the real change in Lancel Village was just starting. While the work was entering the final stage, Ark headed towards the centre of the village. A dirt bed of suitable width had already been created in the town centre.

The raccoons had dug a large pit and poured out the Sacred Soil until 1/4th of the bed was filled again. He judged that the seeds of Yggdrasil would require that much to grow. As the residents watched, Ark pulled the seed out of his bag. Once he sprinkled water on the soil bed, an amazing spectacle occurred. It looked like a video as light formed a bud, which rose until it formed a tree trunk and branches grew from the trunk. Once the tree was covered with blue leaves, an information window appeared.

Yggdrasil's seed has been rooted in Lancel Village.

Yggdrasil is a sacred tree that maintains the balance. While the tree is growing, Popo cannot communicate. But once Lancel Village receives Yggdrasil's protection, the village will grow quickly. When Yggdrasil grows, the effect given will rise.

- * The likelihood of the village being attacked by monsters will reduce by 50%.

- * The development speed of the village will increase by 50%.

- * The value of the village rises by 50%.

* All NPCs who are resting in the village will have their recovery rate increased by 200%.

*The fame of the village increases by 1000.

‘Indeed.....!’

Ark’s forecast was correct. Planting Yggdrasil who was the patron of the Underground World had a considerable effect on Lancel Village. Once again, the whole day was a worthwhile investment. The value of Lancel Village rose when Popo’s roots were planted. In addition, the effects would grow as Popo grew. This was a stepping stone for the development of Lancel Village. But when Popo grew a branch, the ones who appreciated it the most was the raccoon clans. They surrounded Popo and cheered wildly.

“Yggdrasil!”

“Oh, to think that I would see the birth of the patron with my own eyes!”

Yggdrasil was like a god to the raccoons. When they escaped from the Underground World, the one thing they missed more than home was Yggdrasil. But now Yggdrasil had been planted in Lancel Village. Now the rest of the raccoons would work harder to become a part of Lancel Village.

‘It would be more profitable for me as well.’

Ark made a satisfied looking smile.

-Thank you, Ark!

One of Popo’s branches abruptly shook and a solemn voice was heard.

‘Yggdrasil?’

-Thanks to Popo, I can now observe the world’s history. In addition, you have provided the raccoons from the Underground World a chance at a new life. All this is because of you.

“I am also glad.”

Ark replied with a smile. Of course, Ark wasn't happy because of Yggdrasil's words. It was because of money. However, he had no intention of telling Yggdrasil that and accepted the thanks gracefully.

-Although this might be insufficient compared to your efforts, but will you accept it?

It was at that time. The light focused on one branch and it broke off.

Sacred Branch (Special)

This Sacred Branch grew from the Sacred Soil. If you always carry this Sacred Branch around with you then you will also receive the effects of Yggdrasil's protection. Even if you were in a desert, you will be able to have a comfortable rest under the shade of a tree and there are opportunities for unforeseen good fortune to occur. In addition, you will be able to communicate with Yggdrasil from anywhere in the world.

<The continuous effects for the Owner>

- * Luck + 30

- * The probability of succeeding all skills +10%

- * Probability of finding a magic item + 20%

- * When resting inside a house, Health and Mana Regeneration +30%

- * Able to communicate remotely with Yggdrasil.

-The quest 'Sacred Soil' has been completed.

Slime's Immortality Pill

‘Hehehe, what kind of luck it this?’

The residents were all watching Ark like he was a hero. This whole show was to obtain items. But an embarrassing giggle kept on escaping from his mouth. Planting Yggdrasil's seed! He honestly didn't have high expectations for that quest. He thought he would only receive experience, fame and an increase in intimacy. There was a reason Ark thought like that. In the Underground World, he had gone through all that suffering to defeated the awakened Heartsoul Bead and save Yggdrasil. At the time he had been satisfied receiving the Dark Piece but after thinking about it later, he realised that he didn't receive adequate compensation. The Dark Piece would've been passed to Ark anyway thanks to the ancient vow with Hero Maban.

‘Didn't that old tree guy manage to stealthily avoid giving me a reward?’

It was a breach of trust! Therefore he hadn't been that concerned about the <Sacred Soil> quest when he received it. Furthermore, Yggdrasil who gave the quest was in the Underground World. Popo was just a seed so he couldn't give compensation. But he was rewarded in this way! Yggdrasil had been saved and he planted the seed.....

Although there was a lot of time in between, this was a connected quest. And the reward he received was because of how long the quest took. It was a sacred branch with a faint light glowing along its length! The success rate of his skills would increase by 10%. Needless to say this was the best option. Compared to other games, the failure rate of skills in New World was a lot higher. This applied to passive skills and active skills like Dark Blade as well as skills like Survival Cooking. The higher the skill level the higher the failure rate would increase. Of course, if he carefully used the skill then the success rate would rise but he could still fail thanks to the

system. In the case of a warrior or wizard, it might be the final blow before dying! When producing advanced materials, it might fail at the last moment! When a skill failed then the damage was incredible. Therefore the items that increased skill success when items that all users drooled over. But there was a separate option that made Ark happy.

‘The probability of finding magic items increases by 20%!’

The item drop rate in New World wasn’t that high. The reality was the one had to fight countless amounts of monsters before finding a general item. Rather than selling it in shops, they would have to use it until the performance fails. It also wasn’t easy to change equipment when you have levelled up. Ark had used the equipment purchased in the beginner village until level 60~70. That was the reason why New World’s item prices grew over time. In particular, the magic items would sell for a lot of money. Although rare and unique items would sell for a lot of money, the chances of them being sold were atrocious. It was similar to trying to win the lottery. On the other hand, magic items appeared pretty steadily.

‘Magic items are a stable income. If there is an extra 20% chance of finding magic items then that is a 20% increase in profit!’

In addition, he could just simply put the Sacred Branch in his bag. There was no need to change his equipment and it could be used forever.

‘Other people might not understand but this is the best item for me.’

“Thank you very much. Ark-nim has brought back our faith and beliefs. Now we can live here peacefully in the future.”

The raccoon clan had approached after he received the Sacred Branch. They had previously talked to him roughly but now they were using honorifics. Once he had planted Yggdrasil, his intimacy with the raccoons immediately shot up. No, aside from intimacy they also had a lot of respect for him. He possessed a branch of Yggdrasil who they served so all their doubts were gone.

“You have kept your promise of friendship with Yggdrasil.”

“Ooh”

The raccoons murmured. Ark became even more awesome in their eyes and they considered him as a friend.

“Please tell us if you ever need us for anything.”

“We will do our best to help.”

“Thank you. Those words.....I will never forget them.”

Ark smiled as he replied. Having skilled craftsmen owe him a favour would definitely be useful.

‘Now shall we cut to the chase?’

Ark turned around and walked towards the general store. It was time to put things in order. Even if he moved the Sacred Soil, the ones that benefited the most was Lancel Village. He made that decision to peacefully complete the quest.....if Ark did the NPCs a favour then shouldn't he receive a compensation? Ark believed in words with good will and put it into practice. If he gave something then he should receive something in return. That was the first step to a bright and cheery community.

‘I don't know when this opportunity will come again. It's better to do it when the atmosphere is nice.’

“Welcome Ark!”

When he entered the shop, Galen greeted him cheerfully.

“You really found an enormous amount of Sacred Soil. The amount of crops planted has been doubled and we will soon be able to harvest it. It should take 2~3 days. Can you believe that? Thanks to you this coming winter.....No, we won't have to worry about food for the next few years!”

“I'm glad I was in the village to help.”

Really glad. Because he'll be able to extract even more!

“But the compensation we were talking about the other day.....”

At Ark's words Galen steadily became more tense. However his intimacy with Galen was the best so he quickly smiled generously.

"Of course. I already told you that I would give as much as possible."

'Hmm, will it be as expected?'

He'll accept anything within a certain range. In the past, such Galen had said that he would give anything in his power. In fact.....the compensation for this system was the most difficult. When doing a favour for a NPC, if someone asks for an excessively extravagant item or money then of course it wouldn't be accepted. But Ark had also experienced this failure.

When he headed to Cairo from Giran, he had save an injured hunter in the forest. The hunter initially said the same thing.

"You are a life saver. I'll give you whatever is possible for me to give."

Ark had asked for his bow without thinking. Even since the blind auction, Ark's keen eyes were already at a considerable standard. He could estimate the value just by looking at it. The hunter didn't appear to have money. However the bow was made of considerably good materials.

'It is at least a magic item!'

He secretly coveted it! But at his suggestion, the hunter's attitude had a 180 degree change.

"I didn't realize that you were a person with no shame and decency. Are you asking me to give you an heirloom that has been passed down through generations of my family?"

"But didn't you say you would give anything possible?"

"I clearly said that I would offer compensation. I meant things like recovery potions or food, not this valuable heirloom that is worth more than my life. However you used to opportunity for absurd demands, so you're even worse than a jackal!"

“No, it’s not…….”

“That’s enough. I feel ashamed that I owe a favour to a man like you!”

Therefore the hunter gave him some recovery potions and walked away ranting. Ark had forgotten that unpleasant memory for a while but he remembered it again. New World was a huge game. And the people who lived here were NPCs……. They might speak and behave like an artificial intelligence, but in the end they were just a part of the system. Just like people can’t escape the physical laws, the NPCs can’t escape the rules of the system. There was an upper limit of what they could give to a user. Even if it was a quest received from an aristocrat, a level 1 user couldn’t receive the reward that a level 100 user could. This was one of the laws of New World, just like the physical laws in reality.

But it was fortunate that the rules weren’t as tight in New World as they were in reality. If the level 1 user judged the situation well, while he couldn’t receive a level 100 reward he could at least be rewarded something 10 levels higher. The technology might that he could receive the maximum benefit as long as it was within the upper limit. Sometimes the reward depended on the choice of the user. That was the freedom of New World!

When Galen had offered a reward, Ark had postponed it for the moment. Once all the Sacred Soil was transferred and Galen saw how much it benefited the town, hopefully he would be willing to offer a compensation at the upper limit. However, the situation was the same as before. But the width of the upper limit would rise a little bit more than before.

‘I can probably request an item or money immediately.’

The problem was that Lancel Village wasn’t an abundant village. Also the finances had gone down in recent years thanks to all the construction! It was the worst time to ask for a reward. The compensation that he could receive in such a situation was clear. It was probably a common item with an upper limit of 100 gold. Of course, the quest occurred by chance but to only receive 100 gold…….

‘I rescued 700 people from a food crisis just for 100 gold? As expected, something is lacking.’

For Ark, receiving money right now wasn't urgent. He only had a bag of money, but once Sid returned he would receive thousands of gold. There was no reason to hang himself for 100 gold. At that time, an idea popped into Ark's head.

‘Since I don't need money now, I'll make a long term investment!’

In New World, a user could invest in a village or city. Once a certain amount was invested, the user would obtain a share of the village just like the village chief or Lord. However, there was a prerequisite first. The only way to invest was to have a real estate, guild office or rental warehouse in the village or city. While they were eligible, there was no guarantee that they would be able to invest unconditionally. The grade of the house, the market share, the user's fame or intimacy with the place were all factors that could affect the investment. Therefore, Ark hadn't been too interested in investing. But now he possessed a house in Lancel Village!

He had met the minimum eligibility requirements. Thanks to the additional effects of Yggdrasil, Ark was convinced that Lancel Village's development would rapidly increase in the future.

‘Lancel Village is an unknown mountain town. The land value is at its lowest right now. But if it develops accordingly thanks to Yggdrasil, it will soon be registered as a formal village. Then the land price would also rise. Yes, this was the time for an investment!’

It was worthy of a long term real estate investment. Finally, Ark's methods of gaining money would expand to the lucrative real estate market. Whether it was hunting, fraud or real estate speculations.....if he earned money then who cared what method he used? After Ark organized his thoughts, he spoke in a deliberately anxious voice.

“I've been trying to think of an appropriate reward without affecting the village too much. Hasn't the village's finances decreased in recent years due to the construction projects?”

“As expected, you have consideration for such things. Yes, our finances are a little tight at the moment.”

Galen let out a deep sigh. Then Ark quickly said.

“But declining your sincerity would be rude. Therefore I came to a conclusion about my worries. I want to help restore the village.”

“Restore?”

“Yes, instead of receiving a reward how about I receive a stake in the village?”

“A stake in the village?”

“I have a house in Lancel Village so don't I qualify for a stake?”

“Certainly but.....”

Even if it was a low value pioneering village, they couldn't just give a share of the village so easily. However, words have different meanings just like ‘Ah’ was different from ‘Eh.’ If he just asked for a stake in the village then Galen may have felt discomfort. But Ark used the word ‘Restore.’ The difference was surprisingly large. He gave the impression that it wasn't for a profit but was instead for the village. Galen thought for a while and nodded.

“I see. While Lancel Village normally wouldn't transfer a share to a foreigner, we owe a great debt to you. If you don't want a reward then we'll give you a share. 2% should be a suitable compensation for your efforts. How about it?”

700 people lived in the village yet he received a compensation of 2%. If Lancel Village grew as expected, then it wouldn't be easy to obtain even 0.1% percent of a share.

‘It is a case where having high intimacy with a NPC increased the upper limit. If I become greedier then I might not receive any compensation. But.....’

An opportunity to receive shares wasn't that common. It would take a lot of money just to meet the minimum requirements. So if there was an opportunity to increase it by even 0.1% more than shouldn't

he take it?

‘Okay, it’s all or nothing! I’ll try it.’

“Can you wait a minute? My stomach is a little sore.....”

Ark made an excuse and left the store. Then he pulled something out of his bag and drank it. It was the ‘Drink of Bewitchment’ that Roco used to seduce the unicorn! It was a drink that increased his charm by 300%. Aside from users, even the unicorn was affected by the drink that Ark made. If the effect was so powerful then he might be able to use it to increase his reward. Ark entered the general store again.

“Can’t you make it 3%?”

“3, 3%? Aren’t you being a little greedy? Don’t you know how amazing the shares of the village are? Even though it is a pioneering village, 2% isn’t a small amount.”

That was Galen’s immediate reaction. However he had already expected that reaction.

“.....Of course I know. Ajusshi has presented the shares with sincerity, but.....to be called greedy.”

A tear dropped from Ark’s eyes while he made a sad expression.

“As you know, I’m a foreigner. Ever since we were born our destiny was to wander around, never settling in one place. And I had accepted that fate until a little while ago. But my heart has ended up shaken. Galen is a great leader of the village and is like an uncle to me. Yes, I thought that I wouldn’t mind spending the rest of my life in this place.”

“Um.....”

“But I had to leave Lancel Village. That’s because it is the fate of the foreigners. While I wandered around and met lots of people, I sent some of them back here and my heart was shaken again. Then I returned to Lancel and realized clearly. Yes, although I was born with a wandering fate, my home was here. It is my shelter and my

hometown!”

Ark seemed to express all his emotions.

“I’m not interested in things like the land. I never thought about being greedy. But my greed has emerged due to my affection for Lancel Village. I love this village and would like to have a bit more of the land. I suppose I’m cheeky for wanting more. So that even if my body is away from Lancel Village, I will always feel like I’m a part of the residents. That was how I became greedy. But.....I suppose my greed became too excessive.”

Ark sighed heavily. Galen silently watched until his eyes became red and teary.

“.....I’m sorry. I misunderstood you. I had no idea you felt that way. I am ashamed of myself. I should’ve known that you weren’t a person who would request something without a reason.....I forgot about all the work you’ve done so far.....”

‘It has a large effect!’

Ark inwardly cheered. If the NPC showed these reactions then he was already halfway successful. But he had to stay vigilant until the end. Ark said with a lighter expression.

“No. My greed was too excessive. I’m flattered that you would give a wanderer like me 2%.”

“Please don’t say that. I apologize.”

Galen eventually gave in.

“I understand your sentiment. But 3% is impossible. I can’t even increase it to 2.5%. Instead I will give you the right to extend your house, and once the enlargement ends then you can invest 5%. How about that?”

“Thank you.”

Ark grabbed Galen’s hands. Dududung, with the sound effect a new information window popped up.

<Relevant Investment Information Window>

You have obtained a share of Lancel Village.

A player who owns a house can earn the right to obtain a share of the village. The value of the share will rise as the village grows. When the village earns a big profit, it is possible to apply for a special dividend. Conversely, you can be charged money for anything that threatens the village such as famine, being attacked by monsters and so on.

The upper limit of the share that 1 player can obtain from the village is 2%. However, if you manage to upgrade your house then that upper limit will increase.

Currently owned shares in Lancel Village (Owned/Upper Limit):
2.5/2.5%

‘I did it!’

Ark stared at the information window with delight. Lancel Village wasn’t simply a high affinity village anymore and had transformed into an investment product. Of course, he didn’t know how much profit the shares would bring. However, the Sacred Soil has promised a great harvest for the next few years. In addition to Yggdrasil’s protection, there were 300 ex-thieves who could occupy any position. There was no reason for the commercial value to fall.

‘When Lancel Village grows then I will get more profit from the shares!’

There was no reason to hesitate to obtain an investment. When Ark left the store, he immediately went to find the raccoon clan.

“Ark-nim wants to extend his cabin to general housing?”

“Galen ajusshi has already given permission.”

“Then of course you’ll have it. That fact that Ark lives in such a squalid place actually was weighing on our minds. We will start

tomorrow after calculating the labour and material cost.”

The raccoons also had to earn a living. Ark sold all the magic ingredients and earned 50 gold. He agree to give a little settlement for the construction materials, depending on the value.

“For Ark we’ll use the best workmanship.”

They extended the 8th grade cabin to a 7th grade general housing. But it didn’t look like the same house. Even though it had the same acreage, the value would change depending on how well it was built. The raccoons were the best craftsmen, so the best housing was built.

‘Once Sid brings the money, I need to invest as much as possible when the upper limit is raised.’

Ark’s special affection for Lancel Village wasn’t a lie. When his assets in the village grows, his affection for it would also grow.

‘Isn’t Lancel Village located at the intermediate point between Jackson and Giran?’

It was only a matter of time before he was sitting on a cushion of money! He felt like a rosy future was unfolding before his eyes.

“Oh, I’m tired”

He wanted to go sleep on time but there’s always something else to do in an online game.....when that happens then a few hours always passes without him noticing. Didn’t that show how addictive New World was? Since he had to go gym and remember to eat, he only ended up sleeping for 3~4 hours most nights.

“Since the exercise benefits the game, I can’t complain.”

That was Hyun-woo’s strong point. He had made a firm resolve to never give up. He believed that when a person was determined,

they would be able to do most of the work. 5 years ago, he never imagined that he would be able to pay his mother's hospital bills as well as the costs of living. But didn't he somehow manage to do it with his firm resolve? He managed to survive the hardship and lived. Napoleon's saying that nothing was impossible was nonsense. Why would nothing be impossible? There were impossible things. It could be found anywhere.

"Hu hu hu hu."

There was a sudden warm smile on Hyun-woo's mouth. The sacred steel shield he obtained from Colossus had to be registered.. It was a level 120 unique shield! How much would he get from it? Hyun-woo couldn't resist and turned on the computer before accessing the auction site.

"The unique blunt weapon I obtained from Valderas sold for 12,000,000 won. The price for a defensive item would usually be less than a weapon but it has a level restriction of 120. Once they see the options then it is possible to receive as much as the unique blunt weapon."

In New World, the largest profession are the warriors. It was an important factor in determining the demand price. Unique items for warriors would sell at a more expensive price.

"Okay, let's use this opportunity."

Hyun-woo boldly set the starting price for the auction at 10,000,000 won. The auction period was two weeks since it might take hours to receive the first offer.

"Now I just have to wait. Then.....isn't today the last day to submit the report?"

It was once again the submission date for the reports. As always, Hyun-woo quickly wrote the report before the deadline. This time he had a lot of things to include in the report. But since there was only 1 hour remaining, Hyun-woo wrote sparsely and focused on the important bits. He immediately relaxed his body after the email was sent.

“Phew, I barely made it in time. Should I go to sleep now?”

Hyun-Woo yawned and stretched.

“Alan-nim. It’s been a long time.”

‘Alan?’

He heard a name that had been forgotten for a while on the TV. The familiar face of the reporter smiled and said.

“Alan has always given the impression that he is the centre of New World. Everybody already knows about how you took 1st place in the Event Quest. And didn’t you manage to occupy a castle in Nagaran not too long ago? In addition, you have already successfully defeated two sieges. Everyone is probably wondering this.....what is Alan’s trick?”

“Although I’ve said this before but I’m not playing the game by myself. Luckily I’m in charge of the ‘Dawn Blade’ guild and the results are because of their hard work.”

“Ah, you’re really humble.”

The reporter said and continued to praise him.

“Occupying a castle must give you a significant income. Will Alan-nim soon become rich?”

“I’ve never thought of making money off New World. New World is good as it is and the users and NPCs are also very nice. I wanted to occupy a castle in order to make New World more interesting for them.”

“Brilliant. So what are your future plans?”

“I’m currently expanding the estates. Once the estates in Nagaran are developed then a lot of content will be available.”

“That means you have confidence that you can defend the castle in the future.”

“Of course.”

“Then can we broadcast the siege?”

“That is a little difficult. Since it will show our strategies for the battle. If you broadcast our strategy then all the hostiles guild will know it. It would be a significant penalty. Therefore the siege will have to be private for the moment. Please understand.”

“It is a pity. But I understand.”

At the end of his words the scene changed.

‘That Alan.....he had already occupied a castle?’

His feelings were complicated. In fact, the candidates had started one month later than the other users and therefore had a penalty. When he compared it to the pioneers he fought last time, it was actually two months. Nevertheless, Alan was growing steadily. He didn’t know whether he should feel glad or sad. Since Alan was a candidate, he was a rival. Furthermore, there was a hostile relationship between Alan and Hyun-woo. They would definitely cross paths again and he was a formidable opponent.

‘I don’t know what will happen.....but there’s no time to be playing around.’

Even if he died trying, he had to catch up with Alan. If he was even a little negligent then the difference would become even bigger. There was no time to relax. He had to earn even just 1% more experience or 1 more copper. Hyun-woo felt like he was being pursued as he returned to the unit. Hyun-woo entered the game again.

Although he was being chased, his actions were still reasonable. The reason that he reduced his sleeping time and arrived at Lancel Village again was because of Sid. When Sid came back then he could proceed with the <Genius Alchemist’s Laboratory> quest. But

he had to first meet up with Shambala in Selebrid.....There was a lot of things to be done. Before Sid arrived, he had to finish everything in Lancel Village. Because he was being pursued. However, there had been no contact from Sid. Furthermore, it felt like it took a long time for things to progress. It had been 23 days since Ark arrived in Lancel Village. If he included the time in the Evil Silrion, it had been one month. Disposing of items worth 5,500 gold would be somewhat time consuming, but wasn't he taking too long?

'I wonder if something happened?'

When he was busy he didn't think about it, but now his misgivings had started to appear. 58% of the items left to Sid was Ark's share. It was 3,190 gold! If he invested more money than he would've received more profit in return. The reason he wasted 200 gold on the Corrupted Fairy wings and investing in shares of Lancel Village was because he thought he would be receiving a large amount of money soon. He thought that he could afford a long term investment. But what if something went wrong? In New World his entire fortune was gathered there.....just the thought made him sweat.

'Damn, this is why people don't invest. A secure investment like that with a guaranteed profit actually makes me this anxious.....is it only people with a heart of steel that doesn't feel anxious about investments?'

Ark quickly shook his head.

'Yes, it isn't necessary to think negatively. Sid might be a little naive but he is still a merchant. He knows a lot more than me. Since I bought it at a 40% discount then it is impossible to lose money. Sid might be taking his time to try and earn even more money.'

He hadn't left his entire fortune in Sid's hands without thinking about it. Although he failed once and had a bad credit, the hobbit was a fairly resourceful merchant. He was even more cautious because he experienced the failure.

'Anyway, a month has passed so he should arrive in a few more

days. Until then let's try something new.'

Of course, the first thing he thought of was hunting. But his level had already rose significantly in Lancel Village. The monsters in the vicinity won't give him much experience anymore. When hunting high level monsters, the addition experience was 10% per 5 levels. However with low level monsters it was the opposite, with every 5 levels lower having a penalty of 10%. But if he couldn't fight high level monsters then it was better to chase a group of them such as the hook bats. However, Ark needed to kill a lot of them thanks to the experience conversion. Therefore, it would take quite a long time for the group to respawn again.

'When I first came, I still received 30~40% of the experience even with the penalty. Now I only receive 2~3% so it would take at least 3 days just to gain one level. Then I'd rather learn a new skill!'

Sometimes skills are more important than level in New World. Ark realized this simple fact once again. 'Magic Detection' managed to turn an ordinary forest into magic ingredients and normal dirt to Sacred Soil. When learning a new skill, unknown areas of New World would appear. He wouldn't have been able to learn 'Magic Detection' without a high degree of intimacy with the residents of Lancel Village. However now there was an opportunity to learn general skills.

'In Lancel Village there are many NPCs with various skills that are high levelled. There were many skills I'm not familiar with that I might be able to learn. Once I gather information on the skill then I should give it a try.'

Ark earnestly went around Lancel Village gathering information. After Jackson, Lancel Village had become Ark's hometown.

"Oh Ark. Did you want to ask me something?"

Whenever he asked the NPC something, they would answer it with detailed information. As expected, the raccoon clan had the most diversity of skills. However they were craftsmen NPCs, so he couldn't learn the useful skills thanks to his profession. Ark could only learn skills such as 'Wood Harvesting' or 'Mineral Extraction.'

‘If I have a break in between then I can gather small change.....’

But Ark already had the Ingredient Foraging skill. Since he was always lacking in bag space, it wasn’t possible for him to gather wood or minerals. It took a lot of time to learn skills so most people stopped at the primary production skills.

‘I would prefer a skill that could also be applied to battles.’

However it was the same with the Meow. The Meow had numerous combat skills but they were all racial special skills.

‘Haha, once I go looking for it there are no skills that I can learn.’

Then something popped into Ark’s head.

‘No. There are still the skills that Roco and the rehabilitation hyungs learnt. Because they don’t have an occupation, the rehabilitation members learnt the skills directly. Then I can learn the skill as well. Furthermore, since I have direct guidance then it shouldn’t take that long.’

So Ark went and visited the training centre. Roco was busy trying to finish the lyrics which would raise her skill.

“Eh? What is Oppa doing here?”

She blushed as soon as she saw Ark. Ark also blushed as well. Ever since the strange atmosphere that occurred at his house, the relationship between the two had cooled off a little bit. Of course it wasn’t a bad relationship. It was more like they were conscious of each other? However personal business was private. Ark was a nice guy who knew how to keep things separate.

“I came to ask you something. What was the skill you used the other day?”

“Skill?”

“The skill that gave defense to my armour.”

“Oh, you mean the laundry skill?”

“How did you learn it?”

“I don’t understand either. I just did laundry a lot and then I received it.”

‘This is it!’

Ark immediately peeled off all the clothes of the people at the training centre. Washing the clothes of 300 people wasn’t a joke. Ark carried the mountain of clothes and frantically did laundry in the stream. However, laundry wasn’t as easy as it sounded. Ark thought that he just had to wash it. But if he didn’t do it properly then the durability and defense would decrease.

“Ark hyung-nim, do you even know how to do laundry?”

“Eh? This is a high grade leather armour.....”

“Oh, we’re screwed. The defense fell.”

There were calls from all over the place complaining about the laundry. Roco shook her head and sighed.

“Oh Oppa. How did you manage to wash it like that? Have you never done the laundry?”

He hadn’t. Although it was old, Ark washed all his clothes in a washing machine! All he had to do was press the button on the washing machine, nothing more and nothing less. Roco couldn’t stand it anymore and reached out her arms.

“If you do it like that then the dirty water won’t fall. Now look. I’m grasping it with both hands and rubbing it with force like this. Ah, that’s different. If it is a leather armour then you gently wash it with a cloth.”

The world of laundry was more profound than expected. For every colour or material, there was a different way to wash it and it required the appropriate strength adjustments. But with Roco’s kind (?) help, he eventually conquered the world of laundry. Just as his waist was aching, a new skill information window was created.

You have learnt a new skill.

Laundry (Beginner, Passive): If you are a true Warrior then you

should pay attention cleaning your armour as well as its performance. Even if nice clothes and armour are worn, what is the point if there is an offensive odour?. If you keep the armour clean then the performance would also improve.

<For cloth and leather armour, defense will increase by 5% for 4 hours.>

‘Huk huk huk, I finally learned it!’

A 5% rise in defense for 4 hours! He washed thousands of clothes and was rewarded for his effort. Before Roco, he hadn’t known that skills like Laundry existed. No, it was probably likely that most users wouldn’t know about the skill. It was natural. Who would do laundry in a game? And even if did wash their clothes, doing it thousands of times would be a difficult thing. It was a skill that people would rather buy hundreds of pairs of clothes then learn. The only reason that Roco managed to learn it in the game was because she washed the clothing of 300 thieves. Ark became motivated and met with the rehabilitation members to learn their skills. All the rehabilitation members had 1~2 unique skills.

Among them Ark was interested in Hae Gyeol-sa’s ‘Intimidation’ skill. It was a skill with a lot of uses such as causing merchant NPCs to decrease their prices or making monsters freeze in fear. However, it had a low probability of success and wouldn’t failure make the NPCs and monsters even more angry?

“Hrmm, you would like to learn this skill?”

Hae Gyeol-sa asked in a triumphant voice. He suddenly puffed up as his appearance changed and Ark stiffened automatically.

“Don’t you know that ‘Intimidation’ is a very old tradition that I can’t just pass on to anyone?”

Even with his history, he still took a few months to learn it. The rehabilitation members were starting to look similar to JusticeMan. Well he was their founder and leader after all.

“I know. But I would still like to learn.”

“Hmm although you’ve realised the greatness of ‘Intimidation, other praiseworthy guys have approached me.....”

Ark quickly stepped forward and handed him a bottle of liquor.

“Please.”

“Oh, then I’ll teach it to you!”

The traditional technique was sold for a bottle of alcohol. Anyway, Hae Gyeol-sa grabbed the bottle and dragged Ark to the mountainside.

“Now, I’ll teach you the skill. First, the basics of intimidation is the eyes. Stare aggressively straight into the opponent’s eyes and use the momentum. If you’re pushed back then you will fail. Then concentrate all your strength into your abdomen.....and say ‘Salrabi Eurachacha!’”

“Eh eh? What did you say?”

Ark’s eyes popped out. Then Hae Gyeol-sa frowned and asked.

“What the? You don’t understand? First, stare into the eyes of the opponent.....”

“Oh, no. I heard all of that. But what was the last one?”

“The last one? Ah, ah, you mean Salrabi Eurachacha?”

Hae Gyeol-sa laughed as he repeated the alien words that seemed to come from Andromeda. Ark’s face immediately turned pale.

Shouting out Salrabi Eurachacha.....Even though he said it before, but he couldn’t believe Hae Gyeol-sa’s words. Ark couldn’t understand it and he didn’t want to say those words.

“Do I have to do that to learn Intimidation?”

“Huhuhu, of course. That is the core of Intimidation. You have to be strong and effective to scare your opponent. Do you understand? That’s why you have to say Salrabi Eurachacha.....”

“Please stop.”

Ark was appalled and blocked Hae Gyeol-sa's mouth. He really dreaded having to hear anymore. He had heard all sorts of obscenities but he had never heard anyone swear like they were rapping. Although didn't originally gangsters started rapping to solve disputes? It was no surprise that the opponents would shrink back at the bad words.

'I have to speak those bad words if I want to learn Intimidation.....'

He sighed. However, he had already decided to learn. In addition, his pride wouldn't allow him to retreat since he bribed Hae Gyeol-sa with alcohol. Once Hae Gyeol-sa wrote the words on a piece of paper, Ark shouted it in the mountains.

"That's not it! More viciously! Be more lethal! Say it like you really mean it! You really hate the enemy! Your mindset is that you want to kill him!"

"Ah.....Salrabi Eurachacha!"

"Okay, it is getting better."

He shouted it until his voice was cracked and sore.

You have learnt a new skill.

Intimidation (Beginner, Active): You have become adept at intimidating enemies. Sometimes the threat of a single word is more persuasive than one hundred words. When threatened, people with no resistance to fear will have their morale decreased. However, intimidation and provocation are different things. If you fail then there is a chance that you will provoke them.

Mana consumption: 30

< Chances of persuading a NPC has increased by 50%. A monster's morale and will to run will decrease by 50% and they will become stiff for 2 seconds. However, if you fail then hostility will increase by 50%>

"I've learnt it!"

Ark shouted in a hoarse voice. Then Hae Gyeol-sa stroked his head like he was a dog.

“Hehehe, you’ve learnt this technique in 8 hours. Surprisingly you have an aptitude in this. But now is the road to true intimidation. I want you to have more spirit.”

Then he suddenly disappeared as he headed back to the training centre. Ark collapsed with a thud.

“Phew, that was difficult. My body start aching every time I learn a new skill.”

His waist and lower back become sore from washing clothes while his throat was hoarse from swearing. But it was worth it. Laundry and Intimidation were beginner skills, but once their levels rose then they would become quite useful. However, there was another reason Ark wanted to learn new skills.

‘New World has skill sets!’

Once multiple skills were combined then a new skill would be created! Sword Mastery and Hand-to-Hand combat combined to form Sword-Hand Combat, while Nursing with Magic Restoration would create Purification Restoration. The side effects of skills sets were much better than general skills. However, nobody knew what kind of skills could combine. So it was necessary to learn new skills. Well, it was also interesting to look at the new skills developing. Then Ark travelled around learning hunting skills from the rehabilitation members and the reformed thieves. And he learnt some unique skills in addition to laundry and intimidation.

‘Weapon Destruction’ which destroyed the durability of an equipped weapon. There was also ‘Sprint’ which increased his travel speed by 200%.

‘Blade Maintenance’ temporarily increased the performance of his sword.

‘Courage’ boosted the resistance to fear for a period of time.

It was unlikely to be useful immediately, but they were all skills that

would help in the future.

“Huhuhu, skills that raised the intimacy with NPCs could also be considered a defensive skill. Now, let’s see what other skills I can learn.....”

Ark was heading back to the training centre after he learnt ‘Courage’ when he suddenly stopped.

“Wait, come to think of it today.....is the third day since I’ve started the Immortality Pill!”

Ark hurriedly returned to his house and opened the personal safe. The pot that had entered the final stages was tinged with a red light. As there passed there was 4 minutes left, 3 minutes, 2 minutes.....an intense light emerged from the pot as it was finally completed. He watched as all the ingredients disappeared and a small pill appeared.

The maturation process has ended and ‘Slime’s Immortality Pill’ has been completed.

You have completed the ‘Monster’s Pill’ that has been passed down from ancient techniques.

The Monster’s Pill is one of the hidden secrets in New World. It allows you to maximise the power contained in the Monster’s Essence and apply it to you. Making the Immortality Pill is one of the biggest honours for Survival Cooking chefs.

* Fame has increased by 500.

* Intelligence has increased by 20.

* Proficiency in Survival Cooking has risen by 30.

* The ‘Monster’s Pill’ information has been updated.

<Number of Immortality Pill completed: 1.>

"I finally finished it!"

Ark lifted the pill with trembling hands. The required time to make it was 23 days. He had used hundreds of gold to make the pill. However, Ark had regretful thoughts as he looked at the pill.

'This item can't be sold.....'

So obviously the immortality pill would have an enormous effect. The Unicorn Horn was approximately worth 700 gold. The Corrupted Fairy Wings was 300 gold. In addition, it required a significant number of items. Just be calculating, the ingredients were worth approximately 1,500 gold. Given the rarity of the ingredients, it might even be worth 2,000 gold!

However with Survival Cooking, there was no way of knowing the effects of the dish until it was eaten. It was a tremendous amount of money and time that other users wouldn't dare waste. Since the pills have unknown effects, most users wouldn't even spend ten gold on it let alone thousands.

'Drat. I have to just eat it.....!'

2, 000 gold! With that amount of money he could buy lots of small wild ginseng roots. Ark hated wasting even 1 gold and trembled as he brought the pill to his mouth. But he just closed his eyes tightly and swallowed the Slime's Immortality Pill. At the same time an information window appeared.

Slime's Immortality Pill (Immortality Pill Rating: B, Degree of Completion: A)

The power of the Slime in the immortality pill only emerges in unusual circumstances.

It takes the power of an ancient Slime and grants it to someone.

*There is an added bonus according to the degree of completion.

<+5 to all stats, Flexibility +30, Shock Absorption +20%, Poison

Resistance +50%>

The resilience stat has been created.

*Resilience (+20): Resilience uses the momentum to increase the defense. Resilience is a stat point that raises the resistance to blunt force attacks by 0.1%. In addition, resistance to stun and petrification also increases by a small amount.

Stat distribution is impossible and it only rises by resisting blunt force attacks.

You have learned the racial skill 'Slime's Time.

'Slime's Time: Once a day, you can choose between two skills. No matter what skill you choose, both skills can only be used again after 24 hours.

1. It is possible to cover your body with a slime coating. Once covered with the slime, all physical attacks will become invalid for 10 minutes. In addition, you will not receive any falling damage no matter how high you fell from. However, you will be vulnerable to magic and receive an additional 100% damage while the damage of your sword will also decrease by 100%.
2. You can summon any type of slime that is within a 500 metre radius. The gathered slime will assist the player for 10 minutes. However, the relationship will become hostile again once the 'Slime's Time' ends.

'J-jackpot!'

Ark's eyes popped out. He thought that he would've received some options as reward for all the trouble. However, the result was beyond his expectation! He expected his stats to rise but he never

guessed that a new stat would be created. Ark had the most difficulty dealing with blunt weapons. Since Ark wore leather armour, he was vulnerable to additional damage from blunt weapons. However, Resilience was a stat that boosted his resistance to damage from blunt weapons. But was that all? The description was a bit vague but he gained some slime racial skills. Skills that were locked to specific species couldn't be learnt by other races.

'The reward was worth all that trouble!'

As an added bonus, the degree of completion was more than expected. All his stats increased by +5 while his flexibility stat that was difficult to increase rose by 30! Shock absorption also increased by 20% and poison resistance by 50%. He gained the characteristics of a slime thanks to the immortality pill.

"Let's confirm the stats.....Information Window!"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +300		
Fame	3075 (+500)	Level	159
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of All, Jackson's Hero, Caretaker of the Land		
Health	2625 (+150)	Mana	2,590
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	356 (+28)
Agility	416 (+35)	Stamina	486 (+20)
Wisdom	55 (+10)	Intelligence	499
Luck	56	Flexibility	4 (Raws say 4 but it must be an error)
Art of	46	Affection	89 (+10)

Communication			
Resilience	20		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		113	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
* <King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Improved Norad Boots (Shoes): Movement Speed + 15%, Evasion + 10%			
Veil of Fire (Mantle): Flame resistance + 50%			
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available			
Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%			
Mind's Eye (Ring): 'Mind's Eye' enabled			
Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds			
Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%			
* 40% increase all skills in the dark.			
* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)			
* Resistance Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is			

increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

It was always enjoyable to check the information window after getting something. But he never imagined that he would have cold water poured on his mood. Ark put everything in order and left the cabin. Then a member of the vigilante crew that was recently hired came rushing up.

“Ark hyung-nim, you were at home. I was looking for you outside for a while.”

“Me? Why?”

“A foreigner is looking for you at the village entrance.”

“Foreigner? Does he seem like a merchant?”

“Yes, he was a merchant. He definitely told me that.”

‘Sid! Has he finally come?’

I wonder how much money he made to only return after one month? Ark became expectant and quickly ran to the village entrance. However, when he arrived it was a different merchant. A dapper looking merchant approached Ark.

“Are you Ark?”

“Yes I am, why? Who are you?”

“I am Nein. I was asked to deliver a letter from someone called Sid some time ago. But I had something to do so I was a little bit late.”

“From Sid-nim?”

Ark read the letter than Nein gave him.

Ark-nim, I'm in prison so I can't write all the details. Anyway there

was an unfair situation and now I'm stuck in the dungeons of the Cathedral. The situation is more serious than I thought so please quickly get me out of here!

Seeing Ark's bewildered expression, Nein added.

"I don't understand it either but it looks like a pretty serious matter. Normally when imprisoned in the cathedral dungeon a reasonable bail is set but with Sid, they won't even accept a bail."

'What is this unbelievable thing I hearing?'

Was there a problem with all the money invested?

"When you meet Sid, tell him not to forget about the payment."

Nein left the village after he finished. But Nein's words didn't enter Ark's ears. He wanted to immediately fly to Selebrid. Ark quickly rushed to the training camp and found Roco.

"Rocco, I need to urgently get to Selebrid. I need your unicorn!"

"Yes?" What has happened all of a sudden?"

"Well I think something really bad has happened to Sid."

"What? Sid?"

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were also surprised and raised their bodies. They had also left their entire fortune with Sid. Of course, their viewpoint was different from Ark's.

They had money unlike Ark who was poor in reality. From the beginning they were equipped with rich funds. However, JusticeMan had prohibited them from spending by saying 'If you have money then you won't be properly educated' so they entrusted their fortunes to Sid.

"What the hell is going on?"

"I'm not sure yet. Once I get there then I'll find out more. After I learn then I'll contact you."

"But the unicorn will not give a ride to Oppa....."

“I have to at least try once.”

Roco anxiously called out the unicorn. After Roco requested it, the unicorn just snorted and shook its head. Although it didn't mind women or children, it would not tolerate him it seemed to say.

“I'll try.”

Ark pushed past Roco and came forward. Ark stared at the unicorn as he took out a dish and ate it. It was a dish that made his voice louder, and Hae Gyeol-sa had already used it to influence his Intimidation skill. Ark stared at the unicorn and continued threatening it silently while eating.

“You stupid horse. I might have let it go before but not his time. If you continue then I'll peel off all your leather and cook your meat. No, did you want me to beep-beep? Or how about beep-beep? Do you think I'm not able to?”

Apart from the unicorn, even Roco and the rehabilitation members paled at his uncouth curses. It was something he normally wouldn't do. Once Ark began then he couldn't seem to stop. After learning the Intimidation skill, his curses and threatening power exceeded Hae Gyeol-sa's. No, that was not a threat. He was concerned about losing 5,500 gold. Ark would do anything for money, even risk his life. He really would cut off the horn and peel the leather. Ark's intimidation exerted its maximum power thanks to his obsession with money.

“U-unicorn, O-oppa has made a request.....do you give permission.....?”

“Hi, Hihihing.”

The unicorn trembled and nodded. The Unicorn was a monster. But it swore allegiance to Roco and became an NPC. Thanks to that, the intimidation skill worked by 50%. As expected, it was a useful skill to learn. Although he succeeded with the intimidation, he couldn't ride it without the owner. In the end, Roco and Ark rode the unicorn to Selebrid.

Hae Gyeol-sa looked proudly at the figures in the distance.

“Heh, I don’t have anything to teach anymore.

“It was you?”

Thwack! A thick hand hit the back of Hae Gyeol-sa’s head. When he turned around he saw that JusticeMan was glaring at him.

“You were the one that taught Ark all that abusive language?

“Huk, that.....Ark begged me to teach him.....”

“So you would teach every beggar that asked?”

JusticeMan’s eyes flashed. The intimidation skill couldn’t even compare to that look in his eyes.

It is War!

“Whew, Oppa, I’m going now. I’m late for my part time job.”

“Okay, I understand. Go and I’ll take care of the rest.”

Going straight from Lancel to Selebrid would normally take 4 days. That was 32 hours in reality. However, his movement speed increased by 1000% thanks to the unicorn. They could also ignore the monster’s attack. But was that all? When the speed fell even a little bit, Ark would threaten it and the unicorn would run like a wild boar was chasing it. Thanks to that, Ark only took 3 hours to arrive in Selebrid.

“Pururuk, puruk, purururuk!”

Once Roco disconnected, the unicorn stared at Ark before leaving. Once he threatened the horn, his intimacy with the unicorn plummeted to the very bottom. But Ark didn’t pay any regard to the childish horse. Ark immediately searched for the cathedral.

“Stop, what do you want?”

Two guards blocked the access to the dungeon.

“I would like to make a brief visit to someone trapped in the dungeon.”

“Visit? With whom?”

“Sid.....I received a message that he was locked up here.”

“Sid.....”

The guard frowned as he rummaged through the ledger.

“This fellow’s crime was very bad. I received special instructions from the bishop not to allow anyone to visit. Go back.”

‘It appears to be very serious!’

After listening to the guard's words, Ark's worry was rekindled. New world was a game. Even if a serious crime was committed, the NPCs wouldn't lock up the user for more than a few days. If they were incarcerated in jail then of course they couldn't play the game. But he had been locked up for how many days and denied bail, now even visitation rights were prohibited? If it was an NPC then freedom was never guaranteed but such cases were rare. The system might release him of course, but Ark couldn't afford to wait for that to happen.

'What on earth did he do?'

"Please look into the circumstances. It should only take a short time."

Ark took out 2 silver and asked about the circumstances.

"You dare to ask such a thing? For only 2 silver? Are you joking?"

'Damn, was the amount too small?'

He has 5,500 gold taken away so now 2 silver was all he wanted to part with.....even in urgent situations he always remembered to use the lowest possible price. However, they wouldn't budge for 2 silver. He also couldn't use his intimidation skill on the guards. It was very unlikely that such skills would work on the guards. Besides, he wouldn't be allowed close again if it failed.

'Since I invested gold into extending my cabin, I only have 5 gold left.'

Ark retreated for the moment while thinking. And he racked his mind in a dark alley.

'With that atmosphere, even bribing with 5 gold is unlikely to work. I should look for some other ways.....if I want to enter the jail secretly then I have no choice but to use Stealth. But.....'

If he used 'Stealth' to get past an NPC and was discovered then the penalty would be equal to being caught using the [Lie] scroll. He would become chaotic for a certain period of time and his intimacy would decrease.

‘But since the circumstances are like this then I have to take the risk. However, if I use ‘Stealth’ when the guards were at the door then there is a 100% chance of being caught.’

That was the problem. The guards blocked the door completely so there was no space for one person to slip past. Of course, if he made contact while using ‘Stealth’ then he was a 100% chance of being detected.

‘Is there a way to remove the guards from the door for a moment?’

Ark worried about it until he came up with a brilliant idea.

“Ugh!”

There was a sudden scream in the dim evening. The relaxed guards flinched and turned their gazes. At the same time a boy ran out of an alley dripping blood.

“H-help me!”

“What is going on here? Why are you bleeding?”

“A demon, a demon is coming!”

“Demon?”

The guards didn’t know the situation and when they turned their heads to where the boy pointed, they flinched. Something leisurely emerged from the alley the boy had ran from. A monster made of bones holding a shield and sword! It was a skeleton. However after it saw the guards, the skeleton quickly fled to the alley.

“Huk, eh, how come there is a skeleton in Selebrid.....?”

“The wicked summoner called it here!”

“Summoner?”

“Yes, I was just walking along when he suddenly appeared. Since I’m too pretty his intention was clearly to kidnap me. But I was smarter and suspected as soon as I saw him and ran away. Then he summoned that demon to kill me!”

“Pretty? Smarter?”

At the boy’s words, the guards muttered with a strange expression. Then the boy yelled and shook the guards.

“That’s not important right now!”

“Oh, yes. How dare someone try to kidnap and murder you in Selebrid……!”

“You have to catch the skeleton and summoner right now.”

“But shouldn’t it be empty?”

“Ugh, is ajusshi stupid? Since the skeleton ran away, the summoner will soon get away as well!”

The boy shouted as if he was dying.

“Yes I see. Do you know where the summoner is?”

“Yes, he was just behind me in the alley.”

“Fortunately it’s not far away. Okay. Lead the way!”

With their sense of justice overflowing, the guards ran to the alley. And after a moment, a blurry shape went through the door that they had been blocking.

‘Jeez that Dedric. Isn’t he normally mean and vicious?’

The person who entered the prison was none other than Ark. Of course the boy was Dedric and the skeleton was Deimos. They put on that play in order to get the guards away from the door. He didn’t have to worry about Deimos since he was recalled early on. And Dedric……he was a cunning fellow so he would finish it well.

‘It is possible to use my summons in such a way. I should utilize it more often.’

However, it wasn't over once he entered the jail. Since there were guards in the prison, it wasn't easy for him to relax. Ark maintained his 'stealth' status and explored the dungeon. After avoiding the guards and exploring the dungeon, he finally saw a familiar face in a corner. The person sitting with a soulless expression was the hobbit Sid. Ark approached and muttered in a low voice.

"Sid-nim, Sid-nim."

After he called a couple of times, Sid raised his head. His eyes were fat and swollen from crying. Sid looked around with swollen eyes before sighing and looking down again. Since Ark was using 'stealth' he couldn't be found.

"Sid-nim, it's me. Ark."

"Ah, Ark?" Ark-nim?"

Sid approached the grate.

"I'm using 'Stealth' right now. So lower your voice."

"What the? Why is it so noisy?"

At that time a guard that was patrolling turned his head. But he didn't see anything at the grate so he shook his head and turned the corner. Sid blew a sigh of relief and once again came to the grate. Then he murmured with a tearful voice.

"Huk.....Ark-nim, you've come."

How could he say that? Since Sid had his 5,500 gold, why wouldn't he come? Anger welled inside Ark but he firmly pushed it down. While he wanted to berate him for 4 days and 3 nights, there was no time. The duration of 'Stealth' was only 20 minutes. 5 minutes had already gone by so he had 10 minutes left before he had to leave.

"There is no time so speak clearly. What on earth happened?"

"I was tricked."

"Tricked? By who?"

Sid sighed and explained what happened. Due to circumstances he

had to move to the border of Nagaran. He sold chaotic scrolls and protection scrolls and made a lot of money.....

“The atmosphere was really good. I thought that I could double the capital.”

Ark nodded. Ark would've also used that method to engage in business. The method to barter scrolls for consumables wasn't bad. It was common sense since someone could raise the price and gain even more profit. That's why he thought it was good to leave selling in Sid's hands. But he became furious after listening to Sid's words.

“After I exchanged the scrolls for consumables, I headed to Nagaran. There I luckily met a user who was in charge of a fairly large guild. And I was asked to deliver the materials to a camp on the outskirts of Nagaran.”

“Why did you enter Nagaran with all that luggage?”

Ark's voice became cold and Sid immediately shrunk away and made excuses.

“Uh, you can't use scrolls inside Nagaran. I also hired NPC mercenaries so I thought it would be okay to head to the outskirts. The warrior also offered to escort me.”

“.....So?”

“My first few transactions were okay. But when the third trade was occurring, the guild had to urgently move the camp. So they asked me to procure the necessary materials for them. Since it was an urgent matter, they would increase the price.”

“.....So?”

Although the outcome was obviously, Ark stayed patient.

“But when I entered carrying the required materials, masked thieves showed up. There were a lot of them and they were also high levelled.....the NPC mercenaries were instantly killed.....”

“Were the items lost?”

“No. I didn’t drop any items. Nagaran is a PK free area so the probability that an item would drop was extremely low. But I was resurrected in Selebrid with those guys blocking me. Because I was late and broke the contract, the violation set by the contract was money…….”

“How much?”

“3, 000 gold…….”

It was like a thunderbolt had instantly struck his head.

3, 000 Gold! 3, 000 gold! Since Ark had a 58% share, 1740 gold was from Ark. That hobbit had lost him 1,740 gold, which he could’ve used to buy 8,700 kimbap. He went through a variety of emotions from shock, feeling like he was going to collapse, disappointment and then murderous. Ark wanted to enter the prison and strangle him. But the prison bars blocked him. When Ark started breathing heavily, Sid quickly continued talking.

“B-but you only lost 500 gold from the principal amount.

“Only 500 gold? Why are you talking shit like that? Aren’t you a merchant? What else is there aside from the principal? The principal amount came from my hands. Sid you will pay the principal amount and the 3000 gold!”

At the end of Ark’s words, Sid’s complexion became pale.

“What the hell? Why are you yelling at yourself? Are you crazy?”

Then, the annoyed voice of a guard was heard. Ark and Sid closed their mouths for a moment. After the short silence, Sid’s expression became sulky. However, Sid might’ve died from a heart attack if Ark hadn’t been using ‘Stealth.’ An evil spirit! Ark’s face while glaring at Sid definitely looked like an evil spirit. In his mind, he really wanted to discard a hand like this. No, he should break it a little bit but not discard it. 3,000 gold. It wasn’t a fact that could be forgiven. Even if he had to use Hae Gyeol-sa, he would extract it all from Sid. To do that, he had to remove Sid from the prison.

“…….I understand the situation for the moment. But why on earth

are you imprisoned in jail? Since you still have the principal amount of money left, you could pay off the breach of contract and I also heard from Nein that you weren't allowed a bail.....

"It's because of that!"

Sid punched his fists together in resentment.

"I was tricked from the beginning!"

"Tricked?"

"Yes, when I was attacked by the thieves I accidentally saw the symbol that was engraved on their clothes. It was covered by a cloak but I clearly saw it. I saw it at the guild camp as it is the symbol of the guild that traded with me."

After Sid's description, all the circumstances became clear in Ark's mind. Those guys were making fun of Sid from the beginning. There were few merchants who didn't like money. However, it was easy to persuade and trick naive merchants. After winning their trust, they would make the naive merchant sign a huge collateral contract and then stab them in the back. They aimed for a scam from the beginning! Sid then continued talking.

"It's an obvious scam. But the Merchant Guild is the one that is supposed to have jurisdiction to pass judgement. Although I tried to plead with the cathedral, the situation was the same."

It was true that the whole thing was written on the contract. On the other hand, there was no way to prove that the robbers were a member of the contracted guild. Even if the situation had happened in real life, there was no way for the police to intervene. But for Sid it was a matter of life or death.

'If I leave it like this then Ark-nim will kill me!'

Sid was determined and began to protest even through his embarrassment. Day and night, he ran around the cathedral actively appealing to senior NPCs to their chagrin. He called for a fair investigation and a punishment for the guild leader.....After holding signs and demonstrating for several days, he was suddenly

captured by guards and imprisoned in the dungeon.

“Huk huk huk, the leader of ‘Dawn Blade’ accused me of libel. I tried to explain the situation but it was no use. He was a leader and a lord. So what rights did I have? Huk huk huk, do people without any power have to suffer like this in the game? It’s not fair. But no one even listened to my words.....So I had to ask for help from Ark.”

“Wait, what?”

Ark approached the bars closely.

“Dawn Blade? That person was the leader of that guild.....?”

“He was the Holy Knight Alan. I didn’t understand until later but he is a fairly well known user. He also appeared on TV. So I was relieved.....a guy like that.....I didn’t think that he would trick a person like me for money.....”

After Ark heard Sid’s words, he became deep in thought. Organizing a guild required considerable amounts of money. Well, it would probably be more than 3,000 gold. And since the guild was famous, if news of a scam was spread then the guild’s public reputation would be harmed. But such a large guild actually went to Nagaran and carried out a scam. Why? However, Sid’s next words answered his question.

“Did Sid-nim say that the money was from investments?”

“Yes, but why?”

Ark’s face stiffened as the last question was solved. Since Sid didn’t participate in the Event Quest, he didn’t know about the relationship between Ark and Alan. On the other hand, Alan? Of course, he didn’t know about Sid’s relationship to Ark. But what if Andel had been there? Andel would remember Sid’s face from Cairo. That’s right. It wasn’t Sid or money that triggered Alan’s scheme. It was Ark!

‘Son of a bitch.....it was because of their grudge towards me.....!’

Ark ground his teeth together.

“I understand. I’ll check it out more so just hang on for a while.”

“Ah, Ark-nim. Will you be able to get me out?”

“You have to get out. Because your body has to pay off the 3000 gold.”

Sid's face paled even more at his cold words. He blinked in chagrin. Money was a dreadful obsession for Ark! The hobbit's real suffering would start when he got out of the prison. Even if Sid escaped from the wolf's mouth, he was forced to enter the tiger's.

‘My future game life.....’

Sid's tears were flowing at the thought of his future.

Ark used the same tactics to leave the dungeon. After talking with Sid it was clear what he had to do. Alan was a Holy Knight. Ark as a Dark Walker was supported by the beast clans, however Alan had a significant support base with the Cathedral. He had a lot of status to be able to have Sid captured for an ambiguous crime like defamation and to not even get bail. In addition, there was the Cathedral.....the fact that Alan and the Cathedral had a close relationship was something Ark had to consider.

‘Alan.....why couldn't he just leave it alone?’

Since Andel had appeared with the assassins, he was able to guess what had happened. Andel lost in PK and couldn't have hired the assassins from the Dark Brother organization alone. Without a doubt there was someone backing him. And the person behind Andel was probably Alan.

‘I don't have to pay any attention to Andel. Alan is my opponent.’

Currently, Alan had a considerable power with the lords and he also occupied Silvana castle. In other words, he had to completely smash Alan in order to rescue Sid and get back his 5000 gold And if he found evidence of the scam then he would be able to get back his 3000 gold. He had to settle things with Alan once and for all. If he just stepped on him without making things clear than the same situation would happen again. And since it was a fight then he had to win using any method.

‘Alan, I’ll say this once. You’ve touched the wrong opponent.’

Fire burned in Ark’s eyes.

‘But it doesn’t just depend on my motivation. Alan is powerful. While taking on Alan I can’t overlook the people in the ‘Dawn Blade’ guild or the Cathedral. Moreover, Alan now occupies a castle.....I don’t stand a chance if I use foolish guerrilla warfare. A head on confrontation is inevitable. I need to be prepared. I need to collect information about Nagaran.’

In New World, Alan had built up a lot of friendships with senior NPCs and even commanded lots of users. However, Ark wasn’t being idle in that time!

‘Since it’s come to this, I have to rally everything. Yes, this is war!’

Alan had taken 3000 gold while Sid had 5000 gold confiscated. It was 8,000 gold at stake. No matter what he had to recover that money. The question was how. Ark became resolute and left the game unit.

“What the? That rascal Alan?”

Gwon Hwa-rang shouted. After leaving the unit, Hyun-woo had immediately called him to tell him the situation. In reality, JusticeMan also believed in justice so his anger was incredible.

“That child dared to do that.....”

“I don’t need to tell you why Alan targeted Sid.”

“I can guess.”

Gwon Hwa-rang growled as he replied.

“He knew that Sid managed our money and did such a thing. We won’t stop until he dies. So, have you thought about how to deal

with him?”

“Do you want to try to reason with him?”

“Are you joking?”

“Then there is only one method. War!”

“That’s how it should be Ark.”

Gwon Hwa-rang laughed. However, Hyun-woo voiced sounded heavy over the phone.

“But it’s not an easy problem. Alan was briefly shown on TV the other day. He is also the leader of the ‘Dawn Blade’ guild that has occupied a castle. Of course, the number and level of people in the guild is also significant. Well, I would be able to figure out a way somehow but the problem is money. Since we’ll be fighting a war in Nagaran, we’re going to need quite a lot of consumables.”

“War is originally a consumption competition.”

It was an unavoidable law that war was a consumption competition. New World also followed that rule. Hundreds gathered on the battlefield. Of course, the necessary supplies were incredible. They couldn’t fight the opponents without drinking potions like water. Therefore a colossal amount of money would be spent on potions. In a sense, it was more important than levels or equipment. Unless it was a 1-on-1 fight, the more economical and durable side would win.

Alan was very rich in funds since his force overtook the other guilds and occupied the castle. He didn’t know if he would be able to mobilize that much in the fight against Alan. There was nothing Ark could do about that part. Then, he heard Bul-kkun shouting from far away.

“You don’t have to worry because we’ll take care of that part!”

“That rascal, he dared to touch the nose of a sleeping lion? Originally we considered the game as a form of training.....but this is a matter of pride. Money? Ha, that fellow has money? Hyung-nim,

while we promised not to do more than necessary, this time is an exception.”

Jjak-tung also made a face and looked at JusticeMan.

“.....We can't not do it. Because this is not related to the game but is simply retaliation.”

“Okay. Hyung-nim gives permission. Hey, you guys prepare some cash for tomorrow. I'll show them clearly what money is.”

“I understand. Is 10 million won enough?”

The rehabilitation members were people who have lived their lives with pride. However, a little child was hitting the back of their heads. Therefore, the rehabilitation group's eyes were completely open and they couldn't see anything else. They went home and grabbed some documents.

“I got it. The funds have been secured. However the troops.....even though we have the thieves, isn't the level of Alan's guild quite high? It isn't possible to just fill our head count with low level guys.....there are only 30 high level thieves.”

“I have an idea for that.”

Hyun-woo explained the method that he had already imagined.

“Hrmm, it might work.”

“If it goes as I expect then it should work. I'll head there while ajusshi should take care of Lancel Village.”

“I understand. Good luck.”

The next day, a storm struck the auction site. 10 users logged in as guests without any IDs and stockpiled various items. They purchased various level 100 weapons and armours and well as consumption items like crazy. Thanks to inflation, the prices quickly rose from 2 million won to 4 million won. The auction site was accessed thousands of times a day. In just a few hours, those 10 people made the prices skyrocket. Without caring about the market price, they just blindly bought items. A special price range was systematically formed and spread in their wake.

“What the hell, who are these people?”

“Don’t they know the market price? Are they just buying blindly?”

“Damn, the price of another item has suddenly skyrocketed.”

“Ugh, I was about to buy that item.....”

The users visiting the auction site were stunned. But the cash storm was over in just a few hours. They suddenly appeared and bought dozens of items at random before disappearing. All that remained of the storm that hit the auction site was a bunch of inflated prices. The aftermath was challenging because it would take a few days before it would return to its original state.

“What the hell. Those people?”

“Siege!”

“That’s right, clearly those people are preparing for a siege.”

“But if they’re preparing for a siege then why did they only buy level 100 items?”

“.....Indeed, shouldn’t they be at least level 130?”

“But what would be the alternative reason.....”

After all no one could figure out their identity. In the end, what happened in the three hours at the auction site became a legend.....

“Huhuhu, the quality is as good as expected.”

Jjak-tung smirked as he organized the newly acquired items. To be honest, he had wanted to obtain equipment using money immediately. They were already deeply immersed in New World. But JusticeMan’s rules was ‘it is necessary to obtain it yourself’ and banned the use of real money. In addition, conservative Roco also disagreed.

“The quality is more horrifying than gambling. If you use it just once than you won’t be able to stop.”

However, even JusticeMan and Roco changed their minds in this situation. The gold they lost wasn’t the problem. Their pent-up anger broke over Ark losing his money. They knew better than anyone why Ark was obsessed with money.

“That kind of money.....the money that Alan stole is for Park So-mi’s hospital bills.....!”

“How many times has Ark Oppa slept with an empty stomach to save money.....!”

“I’ll beat that kind of guy with the hammer of justice! But with my current strength I can’t uphold my principles.....Park So-mi’s hospital charges.....If Ark doesn’t receive that money then he’ll have to go begging! This time is the exception. Just this once, I’ll allow it for 3 hours.”

If Alan was going to steal the money for the hospital bills then he was going to kill him.

“This is for Park So-mi.....No, it is a crusade for justice! It isn’t necessary to worry about the means!”

“Yes, for my future mother in law.....No, it is a crusade for justice!”

There was no way the rehabilitation members would miss this chance. As soon as they got the cash they headed straight to the auction site!

“There is no time to relax. Before Hyung-nim changes his mind, we need to buy all the necessary items!”

“Hahaha, this is not a joke? This is the warmth of shopping for luxury items.”

“Yes, I see a potion that is available to buy.”

“Good. Because this is for justice and our little brother!”

“Of course.”

“He is just an ignorant guy. Hyung-nim will educate him.”

“Ha? This guy put 500,000 won here? There is no time so I’ll bet 1 million won!”

The rehabilitation members became irrational and created a legend in those 3 hours. But thanks to that, they were able to obtain the finest equipment. Since they poured money into it their defense, attack and various stats increased dramatically. The equipment was enough for them to crush users 20~30 levels above them! Alan’s provocation ended up making the rehabilitation group stronger.

“Okay, I have the necessary equipment so now it is time to gather the troops!”

JusticeMan immediately summoned the thieves at the training camp. They numbered 300 people! But he couldn’t take all of them. During that time, they continuously trained and hunted so their levels rose tremendously. But since they were already avoiding the eyes of the Dark Brother organization, it would be a waste to use potions on low-level thieves. JusticeMan selected Wangnuni and the best 30 people. The problem was how to make them participate.....

“Ark-oppa is in a crisis. Please help!”

The situation was resolved with just those words.

“Ark hyung-nim found a new home for use!”

“Oh, now it’s a chance to repay the favour!”

“Let’s go!”

So he secured 30 people just like that. But that wasn’t enough. It was a large scale battle and it might even become a siege. Aside from numbers, they also needed the appropriate troop configuration. But Ark had already made a rough summary of the configuration. JusticeMan also agreed when he was told. JusticeMan explained the situation to the residents in Lancel Village.

“Ark is in a crisis?”

Hassan pulled his beard and tightened his stomach.

“A Meow never forgets the favour it once received. If our friend the Truthseeker is in a crisis then of course I have to run and help. Okay while I have to protect the village, I can send 10 Meow warriors. Hired mercenaries can’t even be compared to them.”

“We’ll help.”

It was the raccoon clan representatives.

“Ark saved our clan. Since he planted Yggdrasil here we want to return the favour. Although we won’t be able to fight, we can help in other ways.”

Although they were better craftsmen than fighters, their levels were over 100. In addition, they had various techniques that exerted a lot of power on warriors.

“Thank you all!”

JusticeMan accepted the raccoon clan as well as the 10 Meow warriors. But the real problem was from now on.

“Thieves and Meow warriors. Depending on their use, the raccoons could be better than regular NPC mercenaries. Since there is a high degree of intimacy then they will follow commands well. But they

still lack a collective combat experience. The combat troops need people familiar with a strategy against guilds!

JusticeMan sighed with anxious eyes.

‘Ark must succeed as well.....’

At that time, Ark got off a carriage that arrived at Jackson castle.

“Ark, it has been too long!”

The young Lord gladly stood up and greeted Ark.

“What brings you here so suddenly?”

“I came because I wanted to ask a favour from you.”

Ark sighed and explained the entire situation. The young Lord was silent for a while before sighing.

“You’ve experienced a difficult thing. So what do you need me for?”

“There are two things. One is to ask My Lord to use your power and investigate the case properly.”

“Since the Cathedral is involved I can’t guarantee anything, but I will try. The second thing is?”

Ark gulped and said in a low voice.

“Soldiers.....can I borrow them?”

“Is that it?”

The young Lord looked serious as he nodded.

“I understand the situation. Sir Alan.....Yes, the Cathedral would get involved to protect his reputation. But the world will not just blindly believe your words. You’ve gained my trust. And Alan does deserve

punishment for his crimes. But.....”

“Does the Cathedral weigh on your mind?”

“Of course it would weigh on my mind.”

The young Lord turned to Ark and said firmly.

“Ark, I think very highly of you.”

“I know.”

“I want to help you. This is serious. In addition, the hearts of the soldiers are also with you. The Cathedral is a problem. But no matter what, I can’t oppose the royal family.”

“You’re talking about the rules of Nagaran.”

“Yes, the Three Powers have no influence in Nagaran. Therefore, the entrance of soldiers is prohibited. If I break the rule then it would be considered a revolt against the Schudenberg royal family, and the Bristania and Sinus Kingdoms would consider it a declaration of war. The problem isn’t something that a mere Lord like me can solve.”

“That’s right.”

Ark had also gathered such information in Selebrid about Nagaran. Still, he had been wondering if there was another way. But the results were as expected.....the same laws that applied to medieval times also applied to New World. There was no way a Lord would defy the laws of the nation for a mere foreigner.

“I’m sorry.”

Ark instinctively knew that being stubborn wouldn’t work.

“It’s not possible. I have no choice but to fill the headcount with the thieves, even if the overall abilities would decrease.’

“Instead I’ll try to figure out as much as possible about that incident.”

“Thank you. I apologize for the inconvenience.”

Ark nodded as he prepared to leave. Just as he was leaving, the young Lord said.

“Ark, are you convinced that Alan orchestrated this incident?”

“.....Yes.”

“I see. Ah! Thanks to that issue I forgot to warmly welcome you. I’m sorry, but in order to avoid the gazes of other people please leave through the back entrance.”

Ark was secretly disappointed at the young Lord’s sober tone.

However, when he left through the back door he was soon able to understand the attitude of the Lord.

“Ark!”

“Sir Cross?”

Ark looked at the approaching people with surprised eyes. It was Sir Cross, 4 guards and 15 people from the Sylphid Knights. They surrounded Ark and muttered in an upset tone.

“This person, were you really going to leave without seeing us?”

“I’m really sorry. There is urgent work that needed to be finished.....”

“Really? Then we’ll go with you.”

“Yes?”

“Hah, this is really amazing.....in fact, the Young Lord just dismissed us. Thanks to that we’re unemployed. Well, we’ll probably be reinstated in the near future but at the moment we need to find a way to eat. If it’s possible then can you hire us? We don’t require a lot of rewards.”

Sir Cross and the soldiers laughed as they hit the backpacks they were carrying.

‘Dismissal?’

Ark suddenly raised his head. The young Lord was looking at Ark from the second floor balcony above the back entrance. His friendly face was different from before. The young Lord didn't say anything, he just shook his finger and grinned. He didn't need any words. His face explained it all. Sir Cross murmured in a subtle voice.

"This is the young Lord's message. I called you Jackson's Hero. And the hero shouldn't receive that kind of hospitality. Well, I don't know what he is implying with those words."

Jackson's Hero, the title that Ark forgot about! But the young Lord had remembered.

'Yes, so far my choices haven't been wrong!'

Tears gathered. Ark trusted NPCs more than users. They had never betrayed him when he gave them his trust. Although it might cause difficulty, he never regretted it. His trust was rewarded. Even though he received the title of Jackson's Hero, the young Lord's decision wasn't an easy one. Ark bowed towards the 2nd floor balcony.

Now the preparation for war was over.

Ark, JusticeMan, Roco and the rehabilitation members were carrying advanced equipment. The total was 13 people. There were 30 reformed thieves, 10 Meow warriors, 10 raccoon clan craftsmen and 20 unemployed soldiers. The result was that an unprecedented group consisting of 80% NPCs was formed. Ark and JusticeMan was ready to attack!

'I have collected everything from my time in New World. If this attack doesn't challenge Alan then I would've been stepped on twice!'

"Let's go, to Nagaran!"

Shrine of War

Schudenberg Kingdom, Bristania Kingdom, Sinius Principality.....some time ago, the rulers of the Three Kingdom fought over the supremacy of the continent using the War of the Shrines. The disturbing incident was reported in many places.

And there were also the ominous predictions from shrine priests..... in recent years, the political situation became messier and caused a lot of issues. The kings began to feel anxious and eventually agreed to the Armistice Agreement over the border dispute. The agreement was rapidly made. But some problems occurred in the final stage. The influence of the Three Kingdoms in the Nagaran war was almost equal. Since it was a push and pull battle, it was hard to distinguish the borders.

That caused problems with the Armistice Agreement. They all wanted to expand their territories even further. They naturally asserted their rights and argued.

“That territory is ours. Didn’t we capture that castle a long time ago?”

“Bah, you’re just trying to plunder it using a lousy method.”

“Please refrain from saying that. Do you really want to continue the war for such a petty reason?”

The Schudenberg and Bristania Kingdom were loudly arguing while the Sinius Principality just sat quietly in the middle.

“Do you know how much we invested in that territory?”

“The territory is more about the people than the money. Didn’t half of the residents from that territory immigrate to my kingdom?”

“Be quiet! The important thing is who occupied the castle in the end.”

“If you put it like that then my troops were the ones who expanded

the territory. If the battle continued then of course I would've taken over."

"What? Are you insulting the honourable soldiers of the Bristania Kingdom? Did you want to try it?"

"No problem!"

The low level argument continued as the candles started to burn down. At that time, the Archbishop who was the mediator for the war talks suggested.

"Then how about all Three Kingdoms jointly manage the Nagaran territory."

"What do you mean by that?"

"There's an old saying. The sovereign reigns but does not dominate."

"The sovereign reigns but does not dominate?"

The kings looked at him with eyes that asked what he was talking about.

"Is there a reason that your Majesties covet that territory?"

"When a territory is expanded, it brings peace and well-being to the residents....."

"This is the reason?"

The Archbishop smiled and briefly summarized.

"Isn't it because of the tax obtained from the territory?"

"Hehehe, well. That is also important."

They all blushed and coughed as their reason was explicitly pointed out. The reason that the kings desired the territory was indeed money! In fact, the kings were only focused on making money from the territory. Once they occupied a castle, it was possible to request a monthly tax from it. Taxes are responsible for the finances of the kingdom.....it was also an enormous help in funding the war between kingdoms. It was a cycle of them receiving the funds and

using it to fund the war, capturing more castles and gaining even more money.

“If that’s the case, then this map isn’t needed.”

The Archbishop put the map away and stood up.

“Let me clarify the key points. The important thing isn’t permanently ruling the castles in Nagaran. It is for the money to enter Your Majesties pockets. Of course, you would be offended if you received less than the others. The heart of these talks is to divide it fairly so that everyone can be satisfied. If so, the solution is very simple. Although you will rule the area, you won’t dominate it.”

“.....I don’t understand so can you please explain it more easily?”

“The conclusion I was trying to reach is to open up Nagaran to the foreigners.”

“Foreigners?”

“Yes, the foreigners don’t really belong to any royal families. Although they follow the rules of the nation, they can’t really be called residents. We will give them the chance to rule a castle in Nagaran. Then they will have to pay a tax that the Three Kingdoms will share.”

“Hoo.....”

A King began to show interest.

“I don’t need to explain how diligent the foreigners are. To them there is no night or day. One foreign merchant once spent 3 days and nights setting up a shop. They’ll work both day and night once they’ve captured a castle. Your Majesties purses would become thicker even faster.”

The Archbishop explained with a satisfied look.

“And once the foreigners occupy a castle, the soldiers will be able to relieve their nerves. After the long war the soldiers’ nerves are sharp and there are risks that a minor emotional fight will cause the war to spill over.”

“Indeed.....!”

One king burst out with admiration. Thanks to the Archbishop’s proposal, all the arguments were solved. They didn’t need to compromise and their pride also wasn’t hurt. Once the territory develops more, the income will become larger so there was no reason for their stomach to hurt. Because Nagaran had 12 castles, the income could be divided into 3 fairly. They also didn’t need to invest large amounts of money to restore Nagaran, an area that had become impoverished from the many years of war. At that time, the King of the Sinius Principality looked worried and opened his mouth.

“But the foreigners sometimes go too far.”

“Um, that’s right. I don’t know how honourably they will fight.”

“If the war is opened to the public, I’m afraid Nagaran will become even more impoverished.”

“Then wouldn’t rules be necessary?”

The Archbishop spread out a thick parchment. Using a pen he wrote down the special laws for Nagaran.

“This much should be enough. If we do any more then it will give the feeling of excessive interference.”

“It’s not bad”

“Okay. I’ll follow you to the end in this matter.”

The kings became satisfied and signed the Armistice Agreement. And the news was announced to the entire continent a few days later. Episode II: <Pioneering Age of the Foreigners> had begun. The Nagaran area was composed of 12 estates. It was opened to all foreigners. Although originally NPCs fought there, it was now a battlefield for all users.

You have entered the Nagaran area.

The special laws that the kings of the Three Kingdoms jointly signed are applied.

- * Use of scrolls has been sealed.
- * Killing a player does not affect the alignment. The same effect applied to NPCs belonging to a player. However, if you attack an NPC with a neutral alignment then a heavy penalty will be charged. In addition, resurrecting after dying has the same experience and stat penalty as the other regions.
- * Groups who register will be able to participate in siege warfare.
- * You cannot update your resurrection place to Nagaran. However, a castle that is occupied by a guild and its allies will be able to turn it into a base. This will be cancelled if the castle is taken away.

“From here it is Nagaran.....”

Ark looked at the plains stretching out in front of him. The area looked exactly the same as other areas, but once he crossed an invisible border than a warning message popped up indicating that it was a dangerous area. When he ignored it and continued forward, the above message immediately showed. He had entered Nagaran where even murder was permitted.

“Ark, the departure preparations are finished.”

Cross approached with a face that was still sleepy. That was the hardest part of travelling with NPCs.

For a user, one day was three days in New World. Since their concept of time was different, a user could stay connected and hunt for three days. But for NPCs, three days was literally three days. Therefore they could not act the same as a user. Since they are people, when they don't sleep their stamina and strength would fall. If the NPC doesn't sleep for more than one day then a considerable penalty will be applied.

Vampires and the undead such as Dedric and Deimos don't have those limitations. Sometimes he thought interacting with NPCs was inconvenient. Of course, Ark wouldn't waste 2 hours. During that time, he wandered the camp finding general and magic ingredients.

'I've collected enough food ingredients to create dishes that provide buffs.'

Ark looked warmly at the thick bags and rubbed it. Cross was tired and shook his head.

"You didn't sleep and stayed up all night digging herbs? I've thought this before, but your body really is made of iron. The other foreigners are similar but you are especially intense. I don't understand how you can go three days without any sleep.....it really is amazing."

He hadn't slept for several days. Thanks to thoughts of thousands of gold flying away, he wasn't able to sleep.

"I move diligently since I don't want to fall behind other people."

"You're correct. I should also learn from you."

"There is still a large distance before we reach Silvana, our destination. I have to hurry to join JusticeMan ajusshi who left first."

"I see. By the way, it's been a while since I've seen Teacher."

Ark lead Cross and the soldiers across Nagaran. They managed to go over one hill. Then yelling and metal clashing was heard from the bottom of the hill.

"Attack the side!"

"For the glory of the Hawk Guild!"

"Ugh, this time I won't back down!"

"The formation is collapsing. Use the mercenary troops!"

A cloud of dust was caused by the hundreds of people engaged in a fierce battle. Swords crossed paths while battle magic exploded! In such a battle, recovery potions were only used as first aid. If the formation collapsed and they became surrounded by enemies, in a blink of an eye they would lose all their health. 1~2 potions wouldn't be enough to recover all their health. It was like pouring water into a bottomless pit! Even if they poured recovery potions down a funnel

into the mouth, it wouldn't be able to keep up with all the damage.

'This is what they mean by a guild battle!'

Ark hid on the hill and sighed automatically as he watched. They recovered health using potions. But was that it? If they consumed items like they used skills, how much would they use? While Ark was watching, he calculated that the items used were worth approximately hundreds of gold. A war of attrition! Such battles were spread out all over Nagaran. He couldn't even imagine how much money was flying around Nagaran in one day.

'If you have more troops and fight more battles then the money involved would also increase.'

Ark opened his bag and sighed again. Although he was broke when he left Lancel Village, he now had 120 gold. This was thanks to the contract of the Three Pig Brothers who tried to attack Ark. It was an agreement to pay 40 gold every 10 days in reality. After one month he entered the Merchant's Guild and was able to withdraw 120 gold.

120 gold.....it wasn't a small amount. However, it was insufficient for waging a war. Fortunately the rehabilitation members prepared some funds, but that was also limited. If he spent the original amount of money then it would decrease. He had to avoid unnecessary fights in order to save money.

'I have to stay clear until I find Alan. I don't need a trivial misunderstanding to increase the number of enemies.'

"Summon Demon, Dedric!"

"Oh, is it a fight?"

Dedric looked around motivated after he was summoned. Because he hadn't fought after the battle against Colossus, quite a lot of stress had accumulated. Of course, relieving his pet's stress wasn't a reason he thought of when summoning them.

"No, it is the opposite. Please scout ahead and avoid any possible battles."

“Sheesh, you called me just to do that?”

“You don’t want to?”

After Ark showed the pot in his bag, Dedric became appalled and frantically shook his head.

“U-understood. I’m doing it. I can do it.”

Ark’s choice was appropriate. It was the first time that he had entered a war zone. From where he was lying, he could see battles occurring everywhere.

‘There seems to be an overabundance of money everywhere.’

If money was a factor in battles then of course he wouldn’t fight excessively. With every relationship, he considered the pros and cons to it. Since it was a war zone, he didn’t know when he would be attacked be surprise. Since his forces were weak, it was smart to walk away from battles. Moreover, Ark still had to register to take part at the Shrine of War. He also only had 20 troops.

“Master, 40 foreigners are gathered down in that valley.”

“Okay, we’ll go back and bypass the valley.”

Ark was busy avoiding the land mines throughout the evening until he finally arrived at Silvana. Silvana was surprisingly large. There was quite a large town with dozens of smaller ones situated at a reasonable distance and there were also quite a lot of residents.

‘Alan is in that place.....’

Ark looked at the giant grey castle that was situated in the centre. He became anxious once he confirmed that it was Silvana. Guilds with considerable funds, skills and personnel flocked to Nagaran.....yet Alan had defeated all those guilds and managed to capture one of the 12 castles. As the Lord, he would’ve built up a great reputation and have lots of supporters. He didn’t understand it that much, but he had already seen Alan in Jackson. Of course, Ark couldn’t even be compared to when he was in Jackson. But that was strictly his personal views. Although he had piled up experience in

the meanwhile, he didn't know if it would be enough to defeat Alan.

'But I still have to knock him down.'

If Alan kept his power than Ark wouldn't be able to undo Sid's life imprisonment. He would also completely lose his 5000 gold. Therefore he couldn't give up even if the odds were only 1%.

'I'll think about it more after I join up with JusticeMan ajusshi.'

When he arrived at the place he was told on the phone, simple tents had been erected. JusticeMan, who was supervising the raccoons who were moving things, ran happily towards him.

"You've arrived safely."

"Yes, I was a little late because I was avoiding other guilds."

"Yes, we did that too. This place is bloodier than I thought."

It was thanks to the Meow warriors that JusticeMan and his group were able to avoid being hurt. The Meow lived and hunted in the woods so they were outstanding warrior scouts. Cross made a welcome gesture as he approached JusticeMan.

"Teacher, it's been a while."

"You guys have come."

"Since it is Ark and Teacher, it isn't possible to pretend that I don't know."

Cross smiled and looked around the barracks.

"These are the comrades that will be fighting with us?"

"Yes, they haven't been introduced. They are the residents of Lancel Village."

"It's good to meet you. I am Cross."

JusticeMan introduced Cross to the Meow, the raccoons and the rest of the group. Meanwhile, Ark started organizing the configuration of the 83 people into attack groups. The captain

needed to have reputation and leadership. It was like he had hired mercenary NPCs. However Ark's troops were influenced by the degree of intimacy just like when he made the raccoon troops, and weren't like hired mercenaries. This was one of Ark's strong points.

He finished organizing the groups for attack and sat down with JusticeMan.

"Now let me sum up what has to be done."

When Ark opened his mouth, Bul-kkun immediately said.

"What do you have to organize? The children are gathered to attack."

"The situation is not so simple."

"Not simple?"

"The first problem is that the number of members in the Dawn Blade guild is more than we expected."

Ark said in a low voice.

"The Dawn Blade guild has 500 members."

"500?"

The rehabilitation members stiffened their jaws. Ark also breathed out a sigh. When Ark arrived in Selebrid, he researched the basic information about the Dawn Blade guild. Knowledge was power. If he knew more than he would be able to catch more opportunities. But that wasn't the case this time. Once he saw the information, he felt like the situation was even gloomier.

'I thought that the Dawn Blade would only have 100 people.'

Ark had not been interested in guilds thanks to other online games. But when he checked, he saw that a small guild in New World had over 200 people.

New World was a game that made the most money thanks to its commercialization. The game moved a lot of money so the organizations in it would also become big. In addition, the unity was

incomparable to any other game. Of course there were limits to the guild personnel. Since fame was obtained from hunting or trading, there was no use in guild leadership. However, it was important for the guild master to have high fame. The fame of the leader could decide the reputation of the guild and would also allow them to hire the appropriate number of NPC mercenaries. In New World, an average guild had 200 people and it was still early in the game so users with high leadership and fame were rare.

“The reason that Alan could gather enough forces to capture an estate in Nagaran was because of that.”

In fact, Ark had been wondered about it when he heard that Alan had occupied a castle. But he was able to understand after he examined the guild. Alan chose the highest level users among the candidates. If you compared their levels to the rest of New World, they weren't that high. That was because the candidates had the penalty of starting the game one month late. But that was why Alan could stand out! The special quality of a Holy Knight was a bonus to fame and leadership. 500 people, which was more than 6 times the number of people in Ark's group. The guild also occupied the castle and the average level of the equipment was higher.

He had at most 80 people. If a group consisting of 80% NPCs attacked an opponent like that, there was a 100 in 100 chance of them losing. The Holy Knight was a class specializing in group combat and it was a wall that Ark couldn't climb over. JusticeMan thought for a moment before saying.

“Then we have no choice but to use guerrilla warfare.”

He had no chance in a head on confrontation. All that would be left was defeat. In Nagaran, if the NPC mercenaries hired by a user died then the death penalty for a user was also applied to them. No access for 24 hours. In other words, if he disposed of the Dawn Blade guild one by one within 24 hours then he might have a chance to defeat Alan. However, Ark shook his head.

“I've already checked that. But it is impossible.”

“Impossible?”

“If the guild captures a castle, they obtain the right to occupy it just like an NPC. Unless they leave the castle where we can attack them, it will have to be siege warfare. And I know that Alan and the members of the Dawn Blade guild will not leave the castle.

“Then the method to take down Alan is.....?”

“.....The only way to win is to apply for a siege.”

The atmosphere of the barracks sank heavily. In order to defeat Alan, he had raked up equipment and rushed here while avoiding other battles. But the opponent was like a rock while Ark and his companions were eggs. Although money was lost, they could just give up and return before further damage was done. They were suffering from indecision. At that time, Ark once again opened his mouth.

“We have no choice but to do a siege.”

“But we’re not a match for the opponents.

“If it was only us then that would be true.”

“Only us? Then you mean.....?”

“Yes, an alliance.”

Ark nodded and replied. Yes, that was the reason why Ark hadn’t given up even after he investigated in Selebrid.

Anyway, siege warfare was not something that one guild could afford. In this war, having a large number of people would be more advantageous. Of course, there was a limit on the number of people one person could gather. Various interests had to be taken into account and they also needed income and profit so that they could capture another castle. Since Nagaran was just starting to become occupied, it would be difficult to expect a large profit in the beginning. In general, it was normal for 1000~2000 to be mobilized for a siege. Ark paid attention to this point. Once the territories became larger than tens of thousands of people could be mobilized. There wasn’t a gap where Ark could intrude. Even mercenaries could do well with the appropriate tactics. However, Ark had room if

there were only 1000~2000 people.

“Guilds will definitely want to join an alliance with us.

Once entered into an alliance, it was likely that the largest guild would gain control of the castle. However, Ark had no desire to obtain a territory in the first place. No, if possible he wanted to occupy it because it might make him a huge profit. But realistically it was impossible. The reason was because of the nature of occupation. Since Ark didn't have a support base outside of NPCs, it would be impossible for him to defeat the guilds that would challenge him and continue occupying the castle. Therefore Ark had been disinterested from the beginning.

‘Investigating the fraud case and getting back the money lost as collateral would be nice, but it is difficult. Then I must focus on obtaining the money confiscated from Sid. Yes, it is vital to take down Alan first.’

Then, JusticeMan raised a question.

“It is a good idea. But you can't look for a guild to ally with blindly. It has to be a guild that is in Silvana and also knows guild siege warfare.”

“It is simple to recognize.”

Ark started laying out the rules.

“Do you know the rules for a siege?”

“Siege rules?”

“It was the first thing I found out in Selebrid. Dozens of guilds can challenge them but it takes place once a day.”

“Indeed a siege would cost a lot of money. It would cost a lot of withstand daily sieges, even with the tax from the estate. But if they don't accept the challenge from other guilds then they won't be able to occupy the castle.....eh? Is that really true?”

“Once a week. That's the minimum amount of challenges you have to accept as a Lord.”

Ark explained the information gathered in Selebrid. Once a week or more, they must accept the challenge of the other guilds. That was the basic rules of the siege. And if they don't accept the challenge of other guilds within a week then the power to veto challenges will disappear. Now, which guilds would be able to challenge Alan? It was at this part that Ark showed interest.

"They decide the challenge rights through a lottery."

"A lottery?"

"The Shrine of War is a place within Nagaran. It is the only neutral territory. And when there is only 2 days left in the veto deadline for the Lord, it is where they decide the guild using a lottery. If the Lord knows the guild then they can decide to waive the remaining time or accept the challenge from another guild."

"It is a right given to the Lord of the castle."

"Yes, there are various benefits to being the Lord of a castle. During those two days, the Lord can gather all his allies and make preparations for the siege."

"I know what you mean. So you will try and contact the guild selected?"

"Yes."

"Um.....but if we only have 100 people then will they enter an alliance with us?"

"Well I don't know until I try. And because the challenger is chosen by chance not power, there is a possibility that we might be chosen. If we possess the challenge right then manage guilds will approach first."

He honestly didn't expect that much. His luck had never been that good in New World. At that time, a silent member of the rehabilitation group lifted his head and said. He was a former gambler who was nicknamed 'Tazza' by the rehabilitation members.

"Ark. What kind of system is the lottery?"

“I don’t know yet. I just heard that it was lottery.”

“Really?”

Tazza raised his mouth and nodded.

“I have a good feeling for some reason.”

“Huk, you! You look like.....?”

Once Ark transformed into Dark Wolf, Cross and the NPCs became surprised at the intimidating form. Silvana was Alan’s home territory, so if he reveals his true shape than Alan would receive the knowledge in advance. So he was going to participate in the Shrine War under Dark Wolf. He explained the situation to Cross who nodded.

“That’s right. But I can’t believe you’re really Dark Wolf.”

“Yes?”

“I saw you in the Evil Silrion newsletter. It was an amazing fight.”

Cross silently sent him a look of respect. Since he had never transformed into Dark Wolf after that, he had never seen a NPCs reaction. However, the winner of the tournament was someone that most warrior NPCs held in high esteem. Of course, it could also be the opposite. The Meow warriors grunted in a dissatisfied voice.

“Sheesh, you turned yourself into a wolf of all things.....”

It was common sense that cats and dogs didn’t get along. It was something Ark hadn’t considered. But who was Ark?

“I don’t like dogs. That’s why I transformed into a dog. It is because my fighting spirit will burn even further if I’m in a form that I hate.”

“Ah ah, is that so? It is like you said.”

The Meow quickly nodded. It was because cats are fairly simple. They also didn't give off a forceful impression. If he transformed into a cat, it would be more like a gag concert than a fight.

"Now let's depart."

Ark finished the preparations and left the tent with Cross. The War Shrine was a neutral territory. However all the other areas except for the Shrine of War was a war zone. Since it was possible to be murdered in a village, he needed a bodyguard just in case. But he couldn't take JusticeMan and all of the rehabilitation company. He didn't know what would happen if he left the NPCs alone. Therefore JusticeMan stayed behind to protect the barracks while only Jjaktung and Tazza followed him. They insisted on going with him, even if they ended up dying together.

The Shrine of War was nestled in the heart of the nearest town. When he arrived at the shrine, a uniformed NPC was standing in front to take the lottery registrations. Ark greeted the priest like he learned in Selebrid.

"I'm here with the intention to join the honourable battle....."

"A righteous person will obtain the last victory....! Are you here to participate in the ceremony of trust?"

The priest asked with a friendly gaze.

"Yes, I heard that I could participate in an attack."

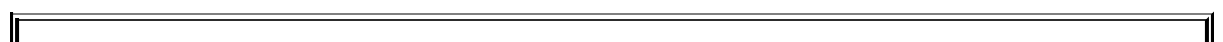
"Of course." You must have more than 50 people to take place in a raid."

"There are 83 people."

The priest confirmed the information of Ark's raid party and nodded.

"There are 83 people. But you haven't registered to participate in a siege at the War Shrine yet. In order to participate in the siege, you must register your party. Would you like to register now?"

Ark filled out the registration form under the guidance of the priest.



* Attacker: Dark Eden	*Attack Leader: Ark
* Unit Commander: JusticeMan	*Number of Personnel:
83	

He came up with the name of the group while he was writing. He got the name Ark from the Bible so he also got the name of the attack group from the Bible.

“Thank you. You may enter.”

It was at that time. Tazza approached the priest and asked in a low voice.

“Does the attack leader have to be the one that draws the lottery?”

“Not really. Anyone from the guild or the attacking party can draw the lot.”

“Ark, I’ll draw the lottery.”

“Sure.”

Ark nodded without thinking. It didn’t matter who picked since it relied on chance. No, Ark was more busy gathering information about possible allies than worrying about the lottery. So Ark and his party entered the shrine. The significant area of the shrine was already packed with people. Indeed, the representatives of the guilds seeking to occupy the castle were armed with all kinds of advanced equipment! There was a crest on their chests that represented their guild and Ark memorized twenty of them. And some of those gathered were already in an alliance.

‘It will be difficult with the emerging forces.’

The odds were in favour of a huge force winning to chance to capture Silvana. And if they have huge forces then it was possible that they had hit the limit on their troops and weren’t likely to allow Ark’s unit to join. However, Ark could not find the answer to gathering the same type of forces. Then something unexpected happened when Ark was looking away.

“Huk, what, what the? That person?”

“.....The Black Wolf clan.....it can't be?”

The users' attention instantly focused on Ark.

“Dark Wolf!”

“Dark Wolf is also after Silvana?”

‘Eh? What the?’ How do they know me?’

Ark felt embarrassed by the enthusiastic attention of the players. In fact Ark was unaware that Dark Wolf had already become a celebrity. The people who watched the match at the Evil Silrion was 10,000 people! However, the users that knew of Dark Wolf were many times that number. Some users uploaded a video capture onto the Internet where it was at the top of the search rankings. Ark only visited the auction site on the Internet. Therefore the attention made Ark uncomfortable.

‘Damn, if I knew than I would've transformed into something else even if it took longer.....’

Ark avoided the eager eyes and sighed. But his features shone to the users watching him.

“Is he avoiding attention?”

“He probably doesn't think that we are worthy of his attention.”

“Indeed, Dark Wolf is probably already in a large guild.”

“If we had that influential power then it would be a huge help.....”

Ark pricked his ears at those words.

‘Eh? They don't dislike me?’

Since he defeated the pioneers, it wasn't impossible that the crowd would have that reaction. If so, then the name Dark Wolf would probably be helpful when forming an alliance with other guilds. Ark was thinking like that.

Then all of a sudden the people in the shrine stirred.

“The Grey Wings guild!”

The people split like the Red Sea as a group of people entered the shrine. They were people aiming for the castle. Naturally they were armed with high level equipment from the auction house. However, even he felt humble at the people who appeared this time. After Ark polished his eye in the blind auction, he was able to estimate how much the equipment was worth! Even if he could only see the periphery, it was clear what kind of position they occupied in Silvana. When the disturbance appeared to be shrinking, another group appeared.

“T-they came. The Hermes Guild!”

Ark reflexively turned his head and flinched. The equipment that appeared in that crowd wasn't a joke. However Ark wasn't surprised because of the equipment. There were two users on either side of the leader. Surprisingly they were the two pioneers he met in the Evil Silrion.....Jewel and Duke.

“Just by looking I can tell that force isn't a joke.”

“Isn't there over 30 pioneers that belong to the Hermes Guild?”

“Damn, a decent guild won't even be able to make an offer to them.”

The sound of gossip from the crowd flowed into his ears.

‘The pioneers are the people with the highest level in New World and there are 30 of them!’

Ark looked at Jewel and Duke. He now realised that the five pointed star was the crest of the Hermes Guild. With that background a pioneer didn't have to hide their face and name in the Evil Silrion.

‘Alan managed to occupy a castle even with that guild here?’

Then he carelessly locked eyes with Jewel. For a moment Jewel's face wrinkled.

“You are.....!”

‘Damn, I never thought I would meet Jewel and Duke in Silvana.’

Ark became annoyed. The situation was starting to become more twisted. When Ark and Jewel’s eyes met, it immediately gained attention from the crowd.

“Jewel from the Hermes Guild!”

“That’s right, wasn’t Dark Wolf’s final opponent Jewel and Duke?”

However Jewel just focused on Ark and didn’t pay any attention to the other users.

“To think that I would see you in Silvana.....”

“Jewel.”

Then, someone touched Jewel’s shoulder. It was a knight who looked like the leader.

“.....Sheesh, I know.”

Jewel turned around with a dissatisfied look and muttered in a low voice.

“I’ll return the grudge later.”

“Any time.”

Ark bluntly replied and turned his head. The knight looked at Ark quickly before leaving with Jewel and Duke. The situation had become so sticky that Ark’s head was whirling with complicated thoughts.

‘It has become troublesome.’

An enormous guild with a large number of pioneers. Clearly the Hermes Guild had a large influence in Silvana. He obtained a hostile relationship with a guild as soon as he entered Silvana. He couldn’t guarantee that no problems would occur. But Ark shook his head.

‘I don’t have to be concerned about that. This was a transformation anyway. And my opponent is Alan. The Hermes Guild is also aiming for the castle. Since the guild’s opponent is also Alan then they

shouldn't cause any problems for me.'

.....He hoped.

Once all the participants were gathered then the administrator stepped onto a podium.

"According to the rules set by the kings of the Three Kingdoms, it is time to determine who will gain the right to challenge. The representatives of each registered attack party or guild come forward!"

'There are more people than I thought!'

Ark had identified 50 guilds in Silvana. But there were 70 people who came forward. Some were smaller groups like Ark who was hoping to participate through luck. So the odds of winning were 1/70.

'I thought it was possible, but it will be seriously difficult to obtain the challenge right.'

"Don't worry."

Tazza who was standing beside him muttered as Ark sighed.

"Anyway, the odds are unrelated to the number. No matter how many people gather, the odds of victory are 50/50. Either winning or not winning."

"But....."

"There is no need to worry. Just watch me. Hyung-nim will show you a skill."

"Skill?"

Tazza just smiled subtly. When the users gathered, the administrator lifted a piece of paper.

"Because there are first time participants, I will explain it simply. The person who picks this piece of paper will obtain the challenge right. While some people might think it unreasonable, luck is also a skill on the battlefield. The same thing also applies for obtaining the chance to participate in the siege. The God of War will bless those

equipped with luck and skills.”

The presence of a God of War while drawing lots.....As expected, the NPCs in New World had a medieval mindset. But there were no users who raised an objection. The administrator placed the piece of paper in the lottery and shook it. Then Tazza stealthily moved beside Jjak-tung and asked.

“How is it?”

“It is surprisingly simple. 3 minutes is enough.”

Jjak-tung nodded with suspicious eyes and disappeared somewhere. Meanwhile, the draw was proceeding. However, the odds were 1/70. It couldn't be won so easily. 30 people had drawn a blank piece of people and retreated cursing.

“God dammit!”

The leader of the Hermes Guild had also drawn a blank piece of paper. At that time, Jjak-tung came back and handed something to Tazza.

“That's it. It hasn't come out yet?”

Tazza laughed and shook his head.

“This much is okay.”

Half of the participants had drawn a blank piece of paper. Then Tazza immediately climbed onto the stage.

“I am the representative of the Dark Eden party.”

“Pick a lot.”

“Dark Wolf, you should prepare champagne.”

The administrator held out the lottery to Tazza who winked at Ark. And he slowly lifted a lottery with a serious expression. Then he closed his eyes tightly and murmured something.

“Come out, come out, come out, ah the pressure!”

The users who were looking stirred.

“Eh?”What, what the.....?”

“The Red SealIt really came out?”

“Holy shit!”

The users murmured with disappointed voices. Surprisingly Tazza had really pulled out the winning piece of paper with an engraved seal.

“I did it! I really got it! I picked it!”

Once he confirmed the message, Tazza jumped and shouted. After the loud barrage, he shook the piece of paper at the administrator.

“I picked it! Is it okay? We’ve obtained the right to challenge?”

“That is correct. Congratulations. So just calm down.....”

“Hahaha, I did it! Mother, I did it!”

Although the administrator was embarrassed, Tazza ran around enthusiastically. Then he accidentally fell with the lottery while he was running around. The lottery hit the floor with a crash and slips of paper came rushing out.

“Sheesh, way to go.”

“He hasn’t even occupied the castle yet and is already acting carelessly.....”

The users who failed muttered in a cold voice. Then Tazza hurriedly got up and bowed with an embarrassed expression.

“I’m really sorry.”

“No. Can I look at the lottery to confirm it?”

“Yes? Ah! Here you go.”

“Um.....There is no error. The right to challenge in the next attack has gone to the group Dark Eden. If Dark Eden doesn’t abandon the challenge or the Lord doesn’t accept another guild’s challenge within

the next two days, Dark Eden will be sieging the castle.”

After the administrator’s announcement, the disappointed users scattered. Ark, Jjak-tung and Tazza also left the shrine. Ark spoke with a slightly flushed expression.

“We really won.....luck is favouring me today!”

“Luck? Ark, there is no such thing as luck in this world.”

“Yes?”

Tazza stretched out his hand with a cynical smile. The previous winning note was in his hand. Why was he showing it again? Ark stared blankly until he suddenly flinched and raised his head.

“Wait, didn’t the administrator take the winning piece of paper a short while ago?”

“That’s real.”

“Yes? Real.....t-then?”

“I told you. Didn’t I say that there was no such thing as luck in this world?”

Tazza shrugged before explaining the situation. It was the reason Tazza and Jjak-tung strongly insisted on coming. They had lived in a world where they had a lot of experience with this kind of lottery.

“Lotteries drawn this way are normally meant to be fair.”

Tazza got a hint from there. Jjak-tung was a former criminal and experienced in forgeries. Therefore there was a skill he obtained in New World.....he immediately used ‘Counterfeit.’ He hadn’t used it that much so it was still a beginner skill, but it allowed him to create a similar object. The reason Jjak-tung had disappeared for a while was to forge the winning paper.

“Then there is my technique.”

Tazza had firmly grasped the lottery slip. And when he opened it the slip of paper disappeared. He had used the same technique when Ark visited JusticeMan’s house. Tazza was skilled in hiding and

changing the pieces of paper in a blink of an eye. It required a lot of skill. Since he lived his whole life as a gambler, this skill was engraved in Tazza's body. After seeing the technique, Ark was able to understand the situation. Tazza held the forged slip of paper in one hand while drawing out a lottery slip in the other. Of course the forged winning note would be picked. It was an amazing hand trick that Tazza had learnt from his years as a gambler that no one spotted.

The probability of success was 100%!

"Well, it was lucky that the lottery fell down before the votes inside were taken out."

'He could play the game in this way.....'

While Ark was listening with a foolish face, he realized something strange.

"But you said that you had given the administrator the winning note? Then you actually had to take out the winning slip of paper?"

"That's right, that's the toughest part of this trick."

When Tazza waved his hand, the forged note was shown. Then when he moved his fingers, the winning slip disappeared.

"Anyway, it's a fake created with beginner skills. If they check it then it would be discovered. With a first rate NPC, there is no possibility of deceiving him. So I switched it later on."

"Yes? You changed it.....but the winning note was inside the lottery.....eh? Then perhaps?"

"Bingo!"

Tazza said and flicked his forehead. Tazza had pulled out the real note by causing a fake commotion and then spilling all the lottery slips onto the ground. Since the already saw the winning note, the users and administrator had no interest in the lottery slips. But the winning piece of paper was still in it. In the brief moment when the lottery slips were pouring out, Tazza found the real one and switched

it. It was a precisely calculated fraud!

“You might be superior in the game but we’re experts.”

“.....”

He really didn’t have anything to say. It was a daring idea but Ark wouldn’t have had the ability to pull it off. It was only possible to Jjak-tung and Tazza who have lived eventful lives!

‘The real experts are terrific!’

Ark was speechless with admiration.

“Dark Wolf-nim.”

Later 30 users approached him. A satisfied smile appeared on Ark’s face.

‘All right, they’re caught!’

The people had approached Ark in order to request an alliance!

Conditions of the Alliance

“Transfer?”

It fell short of Ark’s expectations. Haiyan, the user who introduced himself nodded and said.

“Yes, if you transfer the challenge to us then I’ll immediately give you 300 gold.”

“Are you able to transfer the challenge rights?”

“Didn’t you know?”

Haiyan asked in surprise.

“Not everybody who signs up wants to participate in the siege. Half the people register because the challenge right can be bought at a high price.”

‘So that’s why all the small groups gathered?’

If they were lucky and drew the prize than they could obtain hundreds of gold. Therefore they registered for the siege even if they had no interest.

“Right. But I have no intention of selling.”

“I heard that Dark Eden is an attack group.....have you already joined hands with another guild?”

“No. I’m looking for allies now.”

“Then it would be better to sell to us.”

Haiyan said with a look of relief.

“I’ll explain it simply since you are new to Silvana. There are 50 guilds and attack groups currently in Silvana but the only forces worth paying attention to is the Hermes Guild and our Grey Wings

guild. The rest of the guilds haven't made a coalition yet. Therefore making an alliance with them won't be easy. Did you see everyone leaving after the lot was drawn?"

Then Ark became a little embarrassed. He thought that if he won the right to challenge then many offers of alliance would pour in from other guilds. But no one had approached him even after he left the shrine. Haiyan just laughed.

"There are two reasons for this. The first is that they can't make a decision until they see who wins the challenge right."

"So they can see if there is a shot at winning?"

"Of course, that could be a reason. The Dawn Blade guild has pretty strong allies. But there is a more important reason. Three weeks has passed since the Dawn Blade guild occupied the castle. So there should've been three sieges. But the guild didn't confront any of the three winners."

"What is that.....?"

"I don't fully know why. But those guilds received the challenge right. But there is a clue. The veto power disappears if they don't accept a challenge from another guild within the next two days. In other words, if the Lord accepts a challenge from another guild then your right will become invalid. Do you understand?"

"Then Alan?"

"Yes, he always accepted a challenge just before the veto right would disappear. He accepted a rising guild called Hades all three times. Although we searched for them in Silvana, they managed to send a challenge to Alan all three times. Unlike the lottery, once Alan accepts the challenge then it is a 100% chance of a siege occurring. So many guilds tried to contact for an alliance request but it isn't easy."

'Hades?'

With a flash, Ark realized what was happening. He had already heard the name Hades once. Sid had engraved the crest of the

masked robbers into his head. It was the crest of the Hades guild. If that's the case.....one thought immediately came to Ark's mind. Hades was associated with Alan. There was probably a secret relationship between the masked robbers and Alan. No, it was possible that the ghost guild was created by Alan. Yes. Alan created a ghost guild which he pretended to accept so that he could lessen the burden of the siege! So it was impossible for Hades to accept the allied request of another guild. The last three times they gathered, they probably had a barbeque party instead of a siege.

'Heung, that Alan fellow. He went on TV and talked about strategy exposure and other nonsense when this was the actual case. He used such a lousy method.....'

Thanks to Tazza, Ark had managed to find a blind spot in the system. However, Alan was already using a much higher level fraud.

'No, it is not all bad news. There should be a way to prove the relationship between Alan and the Hades guild through an NPC witnessing the siege. Then there would be evidence that Alan swindled Sid. I might even be able to get back the 300 gold taken as collateral!'

He had half given up on the 3000 gold but now there was a way to recover it!

'But why did Alan do say a dangerous thing? Unlike his outer appearance, Alan is a snake. He knows that the slightest slip would be fatal to his reputation. He would only trust a partner who he could control completely. Then possibly.....'

"Do you know the name of the Hades guild master?"

"I never participated in the lottery but someone told me that the name registered in the War Shrine is Andel."

'Indeed!'

It was clear that Alan and Andel were conspiring to keep their hold on Silvana. Anyway the alliance between Alan and Andel could be a serious problem.

‘Damn, I thought it would be settled once I received the challenge right.....’

Then, Ark realised that there were some inconsistencies in Haiyan’s words.

“Wait, then why do you want to buy the challenge right from me? If Alan only accepts the challenge from Hades then why do you want it?”

“That’s why I’m going to explain the second reason.”

Haiyan answered.

“There is a separate provision in the siege rules. If the guild leader with the challenge right dies or more than 40% of his guild dies then the challenge right would automatically disappear. In other words, if more than 40% of Hades or Andel dies before the siege begins then his right to challenge would be cancelled. If Hade’s challenge disappears and the Lord hasn’t accepted another challenge then it would automatically revert to Dark Wolf.”

Ark couldn’t understand what Haiyan was saying. But he understood the contents well enough. The Grey Wings was aiming to get rid of Hade’s right to challenge before Alan could accept it. Then wouldn’t Ark’s challenge right be important? But Haiyan said that the other guilds would definitely not make an offer of alliance to Ark.

But if Ark had the challenge right then why wouldn’t they ally with him? But his question was answered immediately.

“That rule also applies to those with the challenge right. In other words, if Dark Wolf or more than 40% of Dark Eden is killed then your challenge right will be cancelled. If that happens then this lottery will be held again. That is why I would like to skip such difficulties by buying the challenge right.”

Tension gathered in Ark’s face. He noticed the threat hidden inside the message. The only forces with power in Silvana were the Grey Wings and Hermes guild! He should’ve noticed when he heard those words. It didn’t simply mean that they had the ability to take part in a siege. It meant that they were able to take the challenge right from

other guilds if they wanted.

‘I see. Then I would have to fight them off in Nagaran!’

Ark had tried to avoid fighting with any guilds when he entered Nagaran. Since his only purpose was to occupy the castle. There was no reason to fight with other guilds. But he couldn't avoid it if it was a quarrel over the challenge right. Challenge right.....This small thing would be the main cause of endless battles and assassination in Nagaran. The reason why other guilds wouldn't ally with Ark was also clear. If they allied with Ark then they would be the target of the Grey Wings and Hermes guild who are Silvana's biggest powers. Because Ark didn't have the power to protect them, they would rather wait until one of the two guilds defeated Ark and then send an ally request to the winner.

Nagaran was a land of war where anyone had the opportunity to become lords they said. However whether it was reality or a game, the number of people capable of becoming lords was only a handful. Ark clenched his teeth and inwardly thought.

‘.....I made a mistake!’

Haiyan had asked him if he had a huge guild or alliance. He had wanted to determine if Ark had joined hands with a big guild that he didn't know about. If he killed Ark then he didn't want to risk having a hostile relationship with the huge guild. However, Ark answered that he didn't have an alliance and wanted to make one. He confessed with his own mouth that he had no power behind him. It was a fatal mistake! He basically told Haiyan that there would be no trouble if he killed Ark. Haiyan had calculated all of this before he approached.

‘Alan and.....Haiyan.....they use their heads unlike ordinary players. It wasn't easy to obtain a castle in Nagaran using just power. If it was like that than the Hermes guild with the power of the pioneers would've occupied the castle.’

There were numerous plots and schemes! Alliances and oppositions! There were all kinds of rules in New World! Once he grasped all the rules it was possible to move carefully and survive in Nagaran.

'I was irrational because of the money and ran to Nagaran without finding all the information, which meant I made a big mistake!'

"What do you think?"

Haiyan smiled like he was a nice person and asked.

"Have you made a decision after I kindly explained everything?"

30 users standing behind Haiyan laid their hands on their swords. If he failed to respond then they wouldn't hesitate to kill him! Jjak-tung and Tazza also noticed the gesture.

"What's this? Are you going to try it?"

"Just like the rumours, this really is a lawless area. We're actually being threatened like this in town!"

Cross and the Sylphid Knights also grabbed their swords with anger.

"Wait!"

Ark was surprised and interrupted all of them.

'The Grey Wings are one of the two major forces in Silvana. They could probably mobilize hundreds of troops in an emergency.....if it was just users then he wouldn't care.....'

If Ark or the rehabilitation members escaped the crisis then they could just disconnect until it was time for the siege. Andel probably use such a method until the siege was imminent and then he would log in. Now Ark couldn't use such a method. 80% of his troops were NPCs. If the NPCs escaped here then the Grey Wings guild would track them down and wipe them out. The fatal weakness of Dark Eden was that NPCs was the core of their group. However, Ark had one last card.

"So why not ally with us?"

Yes, if the Grey Wings guild allied with them then all the problems would be solved. In a situation like this, Ark thought to enter an alliance with conditions. However, Haiyan shook his head.

"I'm really sorry. The members already chosen are very tight."

“But

“I’ll sell it. That’s the only thing you can say to us.”

‘Damn, do I really have to give up the challenge right?’

Ark ground his teeth together as he thought. If he lost the NPCs then he wouldn’t be able to achieve anything.

Bang bang double bang!

It was at that time. An extravagant was suddenly heard from the side alley. Ark and Haiyan turned their heads at the same time.

“Grey wings. What are you trying to do hiding in a place like this!”

“Kukukuk, it’s obvious. But that idea isn’t going to work!”

“We’ve already taken the wolf.”

“These Hermes guys! They’re trying to scatter ash on our hard boiled rice!”

Haiyan growled and took out his sword. The users who fired magic randomly from a side alley wore the mark of a five pointed star.

The Hermes Guild! The leader he saw in the shrine, Jewel, Duke and dozens of other people firing arrows or magic was gathered on a side street.

“It’s not necessary to see. Kill everyone!”

Haiyan’s troops who received a surprise attack took a lot of damage. However, the surprise wasn’t enough to make the Grey Wings crumble.

“Stop them! Don’t let the challenge right shift to the Hermes Guild!”

When Haiyan raised his voice an extra 20 people ran out from an alley.

“Sheesh, this fellow hid people here for an ambush.”

They did it in case the Grey Wings guild needed to attack Ark’s party. But the Hermes Guild suddenly appeared and everything

became mixed up. Since there were 100 troops fighting in a cramped street, the fighting became confused as people were cramped next to each other. But since they had similar numbers, the pioneers from the Hermes Guild started prevailing.

10 people from the Grey Wings guild collapsed without being able to drink a potion. Once the balance was broken, the Hermes Guild became the overwhelming side. But the two guild's fight didn't have anything to do with Ark.

"This is a chance, run!"

Ark led his party and began running down the alley.

"Dark Wolf is running away. Get him!"

"Come back here!"

When Haiyan tried to run after him the leader of the Hermes Guild immediately blocked him with a shield. Haiyan's lips curled up.

"Raiden.....you.....!"

"Heh, I thought that you should taste victory and then defeat."

The leader called Raiden laughed and shouted to Duke and Jewel.

"I'll take care of this, you two chase after Dark Wolf!"

"Come on, let's go!"

Jewel and Duke tracked Ark while leading 20 people from their guild. When members of the Grey Wings guild tried to block them, Duke and Jewel shot arrows and magic and they quickly collapsed. With Raiden there, the Grey Wings guild had to continuously defend against him. Thanks to that, Jewel and Duke were able to chase after Ark without worrying.

"Dark Wolf, I won't miss!"

Jewel's magic attack range and damage wasn't a joke. It extended over ten metres to steadily drain his health. Duke also used the special effect of his shoes to barrage him with arrows that decreased his health. As long as they didn't have the level penalty of

the Evil Silrion than their power was scary.

‘An encounter like this!’

Ark sent an uneasy look towards Cross. Ark, Tazza and Jjak-tung were wearing leather armour. However, Cross and the Sylphid Knights were wearing heavy armour so their speed dropped significantly. It was because their role was as a shield but in a crisis they were quickly overtaken.

‘Jewel and Duke have 20 guild members. Although it would be difficult, I might be able to handle those numbers. But I’ll be screwed if the rest of the Hermes Guild comes here.’

Then Cross turned his body around as they were rounding a corner.

“Damn it, I can’t do it. I’ll make a stand here. You run away!”

“No way!”

Ark let out a startled scream. However, Cross just lifted his sword with a resolute expression.

“It would be difficult to escape their pursuit anyway. In addition we are soldiers fired from the state of Jackson! I can’t stand being pursued like flies by these fellows and then dying. If I die then I’ll die with pride.....”

“Don’t be silly!”

Ark quickly grabbed Cross’ shoulders.

“Do you think I brought you here just to die in a place like this? Even if I die here, you have to live! No, I’ll revive!”

“Ah, Ark.....!”

Cross flinched and looked at Ark with bloodshot eyes. However, Ark was cursing inside his head.

‘Damn it, does an NPC have no awareness?’

His pent up anger was bursting. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that all of Ark’s power relied on the NPCs. If Ark, Tazza and Jjak-tung

died then they could revive in 24 hours. But if an NPC died once then it was goodbye forever. It was difficult enough to bring them to Nagaran from Jackson, if he lost 20 of them then how would he be able to challenge the siege? Even if Ark died, the NPC wasn't supposed to die.

'I'm prepared to risk my life for the NPCs!'

His anger built up but Ark hid it in his heart and spoke.

"If you sacrifice your lives for me then I really won't be able to live with myself!"

"Ark, for us you.....!"

"You are indeed Jackson's Hero, it wasn't a mistake to follow you!"

"If it is for you then we're not afraid of death!"

Cross and his party's emotions burned even more after his words.

"Didn't I say you couldn't do that? Please listen to me a little bit! Jjak-tung hyung, Tazza hyung, you know these guys are important for my goals. So accompany the soldiers and escape first! I'll take care of the rest. If I'm on my own then I'll be able to get out somehow."

"I understand. Sir Cross, follow me!"

Tazza and Jjak-tung guessed Ark's thoughts and led the soldiers down another alley. The Hermes Guild shouted from up ahead.

"They have scattered!"

"Bah, they just want to distribute our power. But our target is only Dark Wolf. Attacking his group means nothing to me. Dark Wolf has the challenge right!"

"Everyone circle the narrow alley and block his escape routes!"

The guild members scattered in all directions under Jewel's command. Then Ark started to be hunted like a wild boar. The members of Hermes Guild were all higher level than him. Of course he had confidence of winning 1-on-1, but with them circling him there

was no chance for that. But the most intimidating members were Jewel and Duke as expected.

“Lightning Curse!”

Black lightning poured from Jewel’s fingertips. When Ark tried to run away, the AOE magic quickly expanded. The damage of wide area magic was lower than that of a single spell. Yet he still lost 300 health and had a curse hanging on him. Duke’s ‘Footprint Trace’ skill was also a problem. It allowed him to track Ark no matter where he hid in the alleys and he would inform the rest of the guild.

“Hahaha, Dark Wolf. Where did you spirit from the arena go?”

Jewel continuously shot magic while taunting him. Although his pent up anger was starting to build, there was no way for him to escape.

‘My health is already at 70%. Even if I run away, I won’t be able to hold up for 1 minute! But in their situation there is nowhere to hide.....’

Then something popped into Ark’s head. When he entered Nagaran, he read a description of the basic rules.

‘That’s right, there are still a few rules to keep in mind even if I’m not in a siege. I should’ve thought of this before.....!’

“Summon Demon, Deimos!”

Clack clack, clack clack clack! Deimos came running with his sword.

“Sorry Deimos! I’ll waive the penalty just this once!”

Ark covered Deimos with a leather robe and kicked him while covered into the lane outside. Deimos rolled out into the lane and stumbled around as he was confused about what was happening. At that moment, a black ray of light hit Deimos.

Ttadak! Ttadak!

“I caught you.....eh? What the?” Isn’t he one of Dark Wolf’s summons? Damn you can go to hell!”

Jewel’s face contorted as she turned around. She had kicked and

shot magic at Deimos when he appeared but she immediately grasped the situation. Then Deimos grabbed at Jewel's pants with his burning loyalty.

"This.....cheeky skeleton.....!"

Jewel struck Deimos with fists filled with magical powers. He was hit a few times with his health falling by 5% until he was engulfed in a dim light and disappeared. Ark had released the summons. Jewel belatedly entered the alley that Ark was in. Then she followed to a side street where an embarrassed look spread on her face.

"God dammit.....!"

There was a market across from the alley. The market was teeming with numerous NPCs. Yes, Ark had thrown Deimos as bait before running into the market. There was one type of person that users couldn't touch in the lawless area of Nagaran. It was NPCs with neutral alignment. Even Jewel with the help of the Hermes Guild couldn't indiscriminately attack.

"Look around, he couldn't have gone too far!"

Jewel plunged into the market annoyed. But Ark wasn't that far from Jewel. While Jewel's eyes were focused on Deimos, Ark released the transformation and blended in with the NPCs.

'I'm glad that Jewel doesn't know my true form.'

Ark sighed as he leisurely strolled through the market.

'Anyway, this time I managed to get away.'

Ark returned to the barracks and summed up the situation.

'Our forces alone won't be enough to knock Alan down. I will have to

join hands with one of the two main guilds in Silvana, either the Grey Wings or Hermes guild.'

There was no time. Soon the Grey Wings and Hermes would come find Ark. He had to request protection from one of them before they find him. But when he spoke to the Grey Wings they said their capacity was already full. If he looked at the situation objectively, from the fight in the alley he could tell that the Hermes guild was stronger than the Grey Wings.

'But Jewel and Duke are in Hermes. Even if I have the challenge right, they won't accept me as allies. Moreover, it will also be meaningless if Alan accepts the challenge from other guilds. I have to make sure that Hermes will accept the alliance.....'

A smile suddenly formed on Ark's mouth.

'That's right. The answer is surprisingly simple. I'm the one with the power to call the shots.'

Ark used a 'Feather of Whispering' to call Jewel. Since Jewel was in Silvana, the communication connected.

-Ark? Who is Ark?

His real name was shown when he used the Feather of Whispering. Jewel only knew him as Dark Wolf so she asked in a strange voice.

-Will you understand if I say I'm Dark Wolf?

-D, Dark Wolf! You.....!

The communication link instantly filled with abusive language. But Ark just responded with an energetic voice.

-Hey, farts are a natural body function.....it will appear if a person becomes angry.

-If you're in Silvana then I'll definitely find you!

-Then I guess you don't want to hear my proposal.

-Proposal? From you?

-As a pioneer do you have the right to speak for your guild? If you don't then simply say so. As the leader of Dark Eden, I propose an alliance with the Hermes guild.

-Alliance? Ha, are you crazy? Why should we enter into an alliance with a guy like you?

-Are you forgetting that I hold the challenge right?

-That's no big deal, if you die then the challenge will become invalid. And since you alone have the challenge then you'll just lose against the opposing guild. We can just wait until next week.

-You must have forgotten about the Grey Wings.

-.....

Jewel was silent for a moment. It had a big effect. If he allied with Haiyan and the Grey Wings then he would have enough power to occupy the castle. And if the Grey Wings occupied the castle then it would become quite difficult for Hermes. It was an influential threat judging by Jewel's reaction.

'If I'm going to survive in Nagaran then I have to use my head too.'

But Jewel soon laughed.

-It doesn't matter if you ally with Grey Wings. It won't be accepted. Even though you have the challenge right, the situation will still be the same. You won't be able to participate in the siege and they'll abandon you.

-Because of Hades?

-.....That's right. Although we've tried to capture them for the last 3 weeks, we were unsuccessful. Alan will definitely accept Hades' challenge this time. Thus I don't have to worry about the Grey Wings joining with you.

-What if I take care of Hades?

-What?

-I'll speak clearly. I will be able to deal with Hades. If Alan accepts

Hades challenge and they die then the next challenge rights will come to me. Do you think the Grey Wings would still decline my request? Even if you regret it after the Grey Wings occupies the castle, wouldn't it be too late?

-How can you guarantee that you will catch Hades?

-I can't go into detail, but I am 100% sure.

-.....I will consult with the guild leader.

Ark waited in a relaxed mood. They bit the bait that he threw. There was no reason to become impatient. After a few minutes the expected message window popped up.

[-Raiden-nim has used a [Feather of Whispering] to whisper to you.]

'As expected, Raiden is the leader of the Hermes guild.'

Once Ark accepted the whisper, Raiden's voice immediately entered his ear.

-.....I heard what you said.

-The answer is?

-It depends on the requirements.

-I will form an alliance with you and we'll participate in the siege together. When you occupy Silvana then I will receive 40% of the proceeds every month.

-Isn't that too much? -Silvana is still a territory that is developing. If we occupy the castle then the early investment will be more than the profits. In addition, we have already signed an alliance with 4 other guilds. Since I also have to distribute the proceeds to them, I will receive severe backlash if I give only you 40%.

-You're not participating in the siege alone?

-We didn't advertise that you obtained the challenge right. Since you talked to Grey Wing, we never imagined that you would contact us.

Heads will roll if I bring my forces into Nagaran under those

conditions.

-Okay, 30%. With the condition that you will supply all the materials for the siege otherwise there is no reason to enter an alliance.

-I understand. I'll agree to 30%. But there is a condition. You're sixth in command.

And not everyone can participate in the siege. The right to sit on the throne is only given to the representative in command of the guild. And if a representative dies in battle then the right goes back to the next guild leader in command. In other words, all the representatives ahead of you will have to die before Ark can be given the command right.

Ark wasn't interested in being a Lord in the first place so he just nodded.

-Okay, but if you occupy the castle then you should guarantee that I can come and go as I please. Also you have to protect Dark Eden from the Grey Wings guild until the start of the siege.

-That is natural in an alliance. Then the talk is over. Pick a place. We'll both come alone to sign the contract. However, the agreement will only become effective after you deal with the Hades guild.

After a few hours, Ark exchanged alliance agreements with Raiden.

Alliance Agreement Contractor: Hermes guild leader Raiden= Dark Eden attack captain Ark.

In accordance with the guild master Raiden, Hermes will join the alliance.

Details: If the Hermes Guild occupies the manor then 30% of the proceeds will be distributed to Ark every month. This part of the contract is only relevant when the Hermes Alliance occupies the castle. The conditions of the alliance will begin showing once Dark Eden takes care of the Hades guild.

'Hrmm, I'm somewhat uncomfortable?'

Ark looked at the alliance agreement with uncomfortable eyes. He wasn't sure but 30% of the proceeds from the castle was probably a considerable amount of money. Frankly, Ark thought that receiving 10% would've been a success. But they promised 30% very easily. The pioneers possessed a lot more information than Ark. There may be some ulterior motives.

'But that can't just easily break the alliance agreement that both of us have agreed to. In addition, they also have agreements with other guilds. They won't be able to openly betray me.'

Ark signed the contract.

"Okay, now we're riding the same ship. You might have a bad relationship with Jewel and Duke but I'll tell them to bury the petty grudge in this situation. Our enemy is Alan."

"Yes, thank you."

Ark and Raiden shook each other's hand. Ark to reclaim his money, Raiden to occupy the castle.....

'Okay, now I just have to draw out Andel.'

But it was not an easy matter. With other guilds looking for him, Andel won't show up so easily. Of course, if Ark showed up then with Andel's character it was likely he would approach first. But to do that, Ark had to catch Andel's attention first. He was worried for a while before he came up with a brilliant plan.

'If he wants to challenge Alan then he'll have to stop by the Shrine of War. If he's there then I can easily catch his attention.'

Ark went back to the square in front of the shrine. Then he summoned Dedric.

“You called, Master?”

“Yes, hit me until I tell you to stop.”

“Eh?”

Dedric looked at him with a stupid expression.

“D-did I do something wrong?”

“No, it’s not that. Don’t make irrelevant remarks and just hit me.”

Dedric tilted his head and thought for a moment before saying.

“Huhuhu, Master. Do you regret abusing me?”

He was really simple.....Ark didn’t feel like arguing so he just nodded.

“Well, it is like you said.”

“Okay, then should I do it later?”

“Do you want to annoy me?”

At that moment Ark crumpled. Dedric’s fist had hit his stomach. His breath got stuck in his jaw. He was careless since the appearance was like a child. But his level was quite considerable so his fist was quite hard. He told his summon to do it but once he was hit he felt quite dirty. However, Ark pushed down his anger and endured it. When Ark showed no reaction, Dedric immediately began to hit Ark in earnest. He seemed to be releasing all his sorrows as he hit him again and again.....Ark’s face quickly became swollen. While Ark was being beaten up by a kid in the middle of the square, users began to gather.

“What the?”

“That child doesn’t seem to be a user.....why is a NPC beating up a user?”

“Is this also a quest?”

“What kind of quest would require being battered like that?”

The users looked at Ark with astonishment.

‘Okay, people are beginning to gather.’

This was Ark’s purpose. An astounding scene like this would gather people’s attention. With so much attention focused on him, even Andel would become interested. This was to ensure that the opponent would approach Ark first. It was more efficiently than trying to find a guy that was hiding. But it wasn’t the only reason that he was being hit by Dedric.

[-Resilience has increased by 1.]

When he endured for a while, a message window popped up. Resilience increased his resistance to blunt force! The way to increase his resilience was to be hit with blunt force. The reason he called Dedric was because Deimos used a sword. Since fists belonged to the blunt weapons category, he thought that being hit would increase his resilience stat. It increased his stats and attracted Andel’s attention. It was the strategy of killing two birds with one stone!

But even so.....

“Hehehe, Master, die!”

Ark’s face changed as Dedric became hyped up and swung his fists like crazy.

‘This kid, is he really hitting me this ignorantly? He’ll see in the future.’

Ark vowed revenge inside his heart.

‘Kukukuk, foolish bastards.....’

Andel smirked as he looked through the pile of mail. Although he

hadn't connected for a week, the day before the siege he temporarily connected to send a challenge. Meanwhile alliance requests or threatening letters to abandon the challenge had piled up. The most irritating letters were sent from the Grey Wings and Hermes guilds.

'As expected, Alan is too smart.'

As predicted by Ark, Alan had created the phantom guild Hades. The guild consisted of 150 people. It was a small guild that concentrated on attacking. In order to refuse the challengers, he had created a ghost guild and placed people he trusted there. It was a clever method used to exploit the siege rules.

'Now we just have to connect tomorrow and spend the time drinking alcohol.'

Andel finished the procedure and exited from the Shrine of War. That was when he noticed the crowd of users that were chattering in the nearby square. Andel became curious and peeked through the crowd before suddenly hiding his face.

"Eh, t-that guy is.....!"

The person who was creating an amazing scene in the square was.....Ark. Andel reflexively hid his body and looked at Ark.

'What is he doing here.....aha, right. Alan was correct. If we beat the dog then the owner will come out.....he must've listened to Sid's circumstances and came here. But why is he acting like that in the square? No, I don't care. This is my chance! My knowledge of Silvana is similar to that of my home town. Once you've caught my eyes then it is the end!'

Andel grabbed his sword tightly. He wanted to just run out and cut him down right there. But Andel wasn't stupid. He had already identified the tremendous growth of Ark in Cairo. On the other hand, Andel hadn't really raised his level. He had almost never connected to the game in Silvana in order to hide his identity. Although he didn't know why Ark was being beat up by his summon, but he was definitely not weak. Anger alone could not kill Ark.

‘How should I do it? Should I summon the entire guild? But if he gets away in the meantime.....’

While Andel was thinking that, Ark recalled his summon and crossed the square.

‘Ark, if he leaves Nagaran then it will be a problem.....but he knows my face.....’

Andel quickly arranged for one of his guild members to chase after Ark. Ark sneaked out of the town. And he arrived at a small camp after walking for 20 minutes. At the camp 10 people were gathered. They were JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members.

“Was it impossible?”

“I didn’t think that Alan would be the Lord already. Now that Alan occupied the castle, I can challenge him to a battle but the odds aren’t in my favour.”

“It’s not possible. Although we lost 3000 gold, it isn’t possible to fight him. Since it will become troublesome if Alan knows we’re here, let’s just organize patrols before we leave.”

“Yes.....”

Ark replied with a grumpy face.

The news was immediately conveyed to Andel.

“Leave? Bah, do you think I will let you leave freely? Although you might have freely came in, I won’t let you leave that easily. Once everyone is gathered then I’ll use this chance to pay back my humiliation! Contact all the guild members and tell them to gather immediately!”

“But the siege is in 24 hours. Did you forget that Alan told you to stay hidden? If something happens.....”

The guild member spoke in a worried voice. However, Andel was already too far gone to listen.

“At most they only have between ten and fifteen people. Nothing will

happen.”

“But aren’t the Grey Wings and Hermes guilds looking for us?”

“Do you think I’m a fool? I received a call that the Grey Wings and Hermes guilds are fighting in another village. Now is the ideal chance. If anyone in the guild kills these guys then they will receive 50 gold per person.

“50 gold?”

The guild member Nolan murmured with surprised eyes.

“If you’re still worried then I’ll request Pegasus as backup.”

“But it’s better to report to Sir Alan first…….”

“Do you think I’m just Alan’s follower? Can’t I decide anything by myself?”

Andel snarled and glared at the guild.

“There’s no time. I don’t know when these guys will leave Nagaran. If he knows that the opponent is Ark then Alan won’t have a problem with it. I’ll take all responsibility so quickly make the preparations!”

“………I understand.”

The guild member broke the contact and mobilized the emergency contact line. At the same time, a bat attached to the window grinned and flew into the sky. The bat flew through the evening sky until it reached Ark’s camp nestled in the woods. The shadow was Dedric! Dedric perched on Ark’s shoulder and said in a voice filled with laughter.

“Kikikik, Master. That dumb child is making preparations to kill you.”

“Okay, the prey has bitten the bait.”

Yes, this was Ark’s plan. Andel wasn’t likely to be alone. After leaving the village, he secretly summoned Dedric and ordered him to keep watching Andel. At the same time, he contacted Hermes and asked them to have a guild battle with Grey Wings. Therefore Andel could attack Ark with ease. Andel was irrational and moving like he

expected.

“The preparations to catch the rat are finished.”

“Andel.....is only a warm-up.”

JusticeMan grinned and replied.

“Everybody move carefully. It will become troublesome if they notice and run away.”

A group of soldiers moved silently through the dense woods and gathered in one place. It was Andel and the ghost guild Hades. Although he used the emergency contact line, he was only able to gather 100 members in 20 minutes. But against 15 people, that was more than enough.

‘I’m not going to miss this time.’

Andel glared at the campfire visible in the distance. He had been humiliated in Cairo one month ago! He couldn’t forget the humiliating scene of Ark and the rehabilitation members surrounding him and using scrolls before killing him.

‘This time I’ll carve a memory that you won’t be able to forget into you!’

100 people were gathered so it was natural for him to win. The question was how to kill them. Although he couldn’t use scrolls because of the rules of Nagaran, he would use every method to give them a shameful death! Andel moved his troops and surrounded the camp carefully. In the distance, the form of 10 people could be seen between the flickering lights.

‘Huhuhu, those disgraceful guys just leisurely chatting without knowing that they’re going to die soon.....’

“Now. Attack!”

100 Hades members rushed the camp while shouting wildly. The ten people in the garrison flinched and turned their heads. And in the next moment, they fell to the ground and waved their hands frantically. It was crazy. While they were lying down on the ground, they just disappeared into the earth.

“What, what the?”

“Did they just burrow through the ground run away?”

“They also have burrowing skills?”

The guild members looked at the mounds of earth with astounded eyes. However, they couldn’t afford to be surprised. 15 torches soon flew through the darkness from the top of the hill. The torches fell onto piles of twigs placed around the campsite. They fell onto oil with flames quickly spreading everywhere.

“Huk, f-fire!”

“It is a trap!”

The guild members became surprised and fled in every direction. The health of the guild members near the flaming branches quickly decreased.

-You have received 300 fire damage.
-Under the ‘Burn’ status, you will receive 10 damage every 10 seconds for 1 minute.
-You have caught on fire and your cloth and leather armour will have its defense reduced by 20% for 10 minutes.

“Oh my God!”

“What in the world is this?”

“Hahaha, you rookies. This is because of fire attack!”

Then, a massive body appeared on the hill. JusticeMan! That's right. JusticeMan was the one who thought of all these strategies. Using fire to attack was a fairly advanced strategy that not many users could put into action. It was a skilful thing to be able to think of using physical laws to deal damage to the opponent. But JusticeMan had led one of South Korea's SWAT teams. He was talented enough to memorize and implement several highly advanced strategies.

Thanks to New World, he got a chance to use the highest level skills in the 'Tactics III' textbook. And because the reformed thieves voluntarily obeyed him, his skills kept on climbing. JusticeMan also received a title for the first time.

You have received the title of 'Great Commander' from the subordinates who follow you.

You have built a lot of experience and have reached the level of Great Commanders in tactical combat operations. You will be able to conduct your allies with more precision while making the opponents even more confused. A Great Commander will improve the survival rate of his allies. Those who know you as a Great Commander will send you overwhelming support.

* As a title bonus all stats will increase by 2.

* A 50% bonus to the reliability of your subordinates is applied.

* Fame has increased by 500.

* The attack, defense and hit ratio of your allies as well as the success rate of the operation will increase by 10%.

* As a Great Commander you can use various strategies, with 100% damage added to the general damage.

<Corresponding Strategy: Cutting off water supply, Fire attack, Ambush, Surprise attack, Rushing, Scattering and Siege tactics.>

The additional bonus of 'Tactics III' piled up.

In a group battle, the bonus was applied to those who changed

professions and well as the unemployed. And in the case where skill effect of the attack leader and unit commander was the same, according to the rule the skill with the more advanced level was applied. Therefore, JusticeMan's tactics skill was applied to Dark Eden's attacks. JusticeMan use his tactics skill to plan the strategy that would be the most effective.

The raccoons disguised themselves and run away by burrowing through the ground when Andel approached. The troops from Dark Eden were waiting on top of the hill to use the fire attack. Since JusticeMan received the title of Great Commander, the effect was enormous. The common chemicals could confuse the enemy but it wouldn't do that much damage. However, under the Great Commander the strategy was enough to deal fatal damage.

"It will cause quite a sting."

"Where did you learn nonsense like this.....!"

Andel shouted in a loud voice.

"Brace yourself, they don't have that many people so just ignore the fire damage. Decrease their numbers by sheer force!"

Andel climbed up the hill leading his guild. However, trees started rolling down the hill before they could completely climb it. The raccoons had prepared it in advance using the 'Wood Harvesting' skill. Thanks to that, the members of Hades guild had their health steadily drained.

"Those bastards! Warriors, press forward and push them back!"

The warriors built a shield after Andel's command and stopped the trees. Then JusticeMan smiled and raised his voice.

"Ark, it's your turn!"

"All troops load you cannons!"

40 soldiers suddenly sprang from the side. The whole group was composed of thieves and raccoons. Ark was already aware of the weaknesses of NPCs after the first time he led them. The weak

point was that if the NPC died once then they were gone forever!

Of course, he was prepared for sacrifices during the siege but he wanted to increase the survival rate as much as possible. So he came up with the method of teaching the NPCs 'Cannon Shooting.' Ark used the funds from the rehabilitation group to commission plenty of cannons from the raccoons. Unfortunately, Cross' party and the Meow couldn't learn it since they were limited by their profession. But the thieves were still unemployed so 30 of them mastered the skill 'Cannon shooting.' It was also possible to utilize unemployed people.

Tu tu tu tung!

The 40 soldiers fired the guns at the warriors. Even though it was blocked by the shield, the cannons still had the destruction option. The durability of the shields quickly fell until the warriors couldn't use it anymore.

'Fighting the warriors isn't necessary. Since the craftsmen NPC mixed the powder together, the effect has increased!'

This was information he learnt from leading the raccoons in the Underground World. Andel's whole body trembled as he shouted.

'Dammit, dammit, dammit! Why do these fellows always interfere when I'm about to kill that guy? What are these guys? This time I won't just give up! Ignore the cannons and attack! Kill that guy!'

Andel rushed in blindly with his guild. Since the NPCs were equipped with cannons, they would find it difficult to fight against the Hades guild.

'If I think about the siege then protecting the NPCs is the top priority!'

"It's Hyung-nims' turn!"

"Yes, I was waiting for it!"

"Gather your courage. The earth is your friend and will always protect you."

The rehabilitation members' defense rose thanks to Roco's 'Protection Song.' Ark also raised their stats and courage using 'Nursing.' Thanks to the overlapping buffs, their defense rose rapidly. Meanwhile, the warriors had just managed to reach the top of the hill.

"Bastards, go to hell!"

"Riposte!"

Ark blocked the sword of a warrior.

"Summon Demon, Deimos! Use your defensive stance and attack the enemy!"

Clack clack clack!

And he immediately used his 'Intimidation' skill.

"Where are you swinging your sword so arrogantly? You're just like a Salrabi Eurachacha!"

The guild member became stiff and stopped his rush. However, it was only a beginner skill while the Hades member was level 130.

"What the? Do you want to eat shit? Shut your dirty mouth."

"Shall we finish this?"

"My hair shrivelled from listening to such bad words. Kill this guy!"

Ark was immediately surrounded by 10 people from the guild.

"Aren't you acting rashly because of some rude words? I'll make shabu-shabu out of you and eat it. These beep-beep bastards!"

A different standard of swearing emerged from behind Ark. The people listening could only hear an endless stream of abusive language! Combined with the menace contained in his voice, the guild members couldn't help flinching and stiffening their bodies. Hae Gyeol-sa threatened them with his advanced intimidation skill. The skill of the founder was indeed different.

"Amazing. Making 20 people stiffen at once.....!"

Ark looked at Hae Gyeol-sa with admiring eyes. However, that wasn't the only surprise. 100 versus 83. The number was similar but Ark had the burden of protecting the NPCs. The Meow and Cross' soldiers were stationed in the back which was why only Ark and the rehabilitation members engaged the warriors. Of course it wasn't an easy battle. Since they hadn't fought together for a while, he had no idea about the combat capability of JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group.

The rehabilitation members also didn't have a profession yet and just fought in their own style. But when they used their unique skills then the situation completely changed. They were able to learn those skills because they were unemployed so it was a strange battle style!

'I was worried about their levels.....but I never thought the battle would be like this!'

Bul-kkun preferred building up his power and hitting. So he trained his body.....so after several months, he raised his body's defense by 50% and learnt the unique skill 'Impenetrable Skin.' With the addition of his high quality equipment, his defensives abilities were unimaginable.

"Hahaha, is that it? I don't even feel a tingle!"

Bul-kkun was able to fight against 3~4 people alone. On the other hand, as an ex-conman Jjak-tung used 'Fraud' and 'Art of Communication' to create a skill called 'Quarrel.'

"Hey, didn't Andel say something like he just had to feed you to obtain your dog like loyalty? Aren't you just cannon fodder? Look, Andel is telling you to attack while he's just watching from behind."

"S-shut up, ooooooh.....!"

The warriors became confused by 'Quarrel' and swung their swords wildly. However, none of them could compare to the deviant character of Tazza.

Tazza raised his character in a way that Ark couldn't imagine. Since he was a former gambler, he invested a lot of points into

luck. Thanks to that, his strength and stamina were only around level 70~80 when his actual level was 100. On the other hand, he had 500 points in luck. It was a really abnormal character! In the beginning it was a useless character. However once it crossed 500 then he gained an unimaginable ability.

His luck stat now had an influence on his evasion and critical hit probability. With his high level equipment, Tazza's evasion and critical hit probability just increased even more. Thanks to that, Tazza could avoid most attacks when counterattacking with a critical hit.

"Hey, I'm over here. Stupid!"

Tazza rushed forward and received all the attacks. If it hit then he would've received 800 damage. But he avoided most of the attacks and had to drink even less recovery potions than Bul-kkun.

But the most helpful person was none other than the former pickpocket Yapsab. Ark attacked 10 people until his health decreased to 30%.

"Eat this!"

Yapsab watched from afar and suddenly threw a recovery potion. After a lot of practice, Yapsab learnt the skill 'Throwing Potions.' When the potion vial broke and it touched Ark then his health was restored. While money was a problem, the skill was similar to having a priest as an ally. It was skills that people couldn't get if they just trained conventionally. While the rehabilitation members had played around in the beginning, eventually they raised characters that suited their dispositions.

Ark and the rehabilitation members attacked from the front while the NPCs shot from behind.

The Hades guild eventually collapsed one by one. Since they were hastily summoned they couldn't prepare a lot of potions. Andel shouted after half his guild had died.

"Send a distress signal to Pegasus!"

It was Andel's last resort! One of the guild members shot a flare into

the sky. Alan had created a new ghost guild Pegasus which Andel had waiting nearby. Although it was a small guild with only 50 people, it would be enough to turn the situation around. After a while, the sound of 50 users running through the woods was heard. Andel's face brightened.

'That's it. Ark! No matter how much you try, you're in the palm of my hand!"

"Really?"

Ark smiled and shrugged. Andel's eyes widened as he saw the players that were approaching.

The crest on the arriving player's chest was not the winged horse symbol of Pegasus. It was a silver moon! The Silver Moon was a guild allied with Hermes who was chasing Andel. Thanks to Dedric, Ark already knew about his plan and set up an ambush with Silver Moon at the place where Pegasus was gathered. Andel finally realised the situation.

"You, you.....bastard. Don't tell me the Hermes guild....."

"Don't you understand yet? Don't tell me I'm smarter than you?"

"Son of a bitch!"

Andel rushed forward and tried to attack him. However, Andel was already no match against Ark. He mercilessly kicked him! Andel flew backwards from the kick and was stunned. The moment Andel flew back, his guild members began to flee in different directions. But Silver Moon had been waiting for this moment for 3 weeks. They blocked the escape in an orderly fashion and took care of the remnants.

"Now, what should I do with you?"

Ark pushed his face in front of Andel's nose.

"You.....you bastard.....! Don't think that this is the end of it....."

"Thank you. I have no intention of finishing it like this."

Once again Andel was flattened into a rice cake by Ark.

Defense Tower Defeated

“That stupid child!”

Alan’s face lit up with annoyance. Just a moment ago, an NPC in charge of the siege came to Alan.

“According to the news I just received, Hades guild master Andel has died and 60% of the guild has been lost as well. In accordance to the rules of the Shrine of War, Hades’ challenge right has been revoked. As your veto right will disappear tomorrow, the guild selected for the siege will be chosen by the shrine.”

Andel had made such an uproar that he had entrusted the ghost guild to him. Alan asked him to not do anything stupid until the territory stabilized.....but he caused an accident after all. Thanks to that, he now had to take part in the siege.

“Doesn’t he know how much money it takes to survive a siege?”

“But this is normal.”

Lariette said in a depressed voice from beside him.

“What?”

“Frankly, using the ghost guild to avoid the siege warfare.....it’s just tricking people in order for you to keep eating. In addition, the basement underneath the castle.....I get goose bumps whenever I go in there. Even though it is a game.....”

Alan banged on the table and yelled.

“What is so disagreeable? This is not just a simple game! It is the company entrance examination for us! And it is thanks to me that Lariette is being considered at all!”

“But.....”

“Now stop it! If you continue to question me then I won’t tolerate it.

How many times have I told you? If you want to get a job at Global Exos then just continue following me!”

Lariette tried to move her lips before sighing and turning away.

“.....Since we’re taking part in the siege this time, I’ll convene all the allied guilds.”

When Lariette exited, Alan looked at the NPC with petulant eyes.

“So what guilds are participating in the siege this time?”

“The person who has received the challenge right is Ark, the leader of an attack group called Dark Eden and his allies.”

“Ark?”

Alan confirmed the documents in a surprised voice. Ark was also in an alliance with the Hermes guild. Alan could roughly guess the situation from that. No matter how stupid he was, Andel wouldn’t have blindly led the Hades guild outside. It was clearly Ark behind the situation. Because Andel was in the way of the siege. Although he didn’t know how Ark joined hands with Hermes, his final goal was clearly Alan.....

‘That conceited child, should we end it here?’

The reason Alan created the ghost guild to avoid the sieges was not because of his lack of confidence. A proper siege required a lot of funds. But Alan was currently building up the territory, so the incoming tax was poured into road and land development. Because Silvana was still under development, the castle was lacking in money. He could not afford a siege since he had nothing to spare from the castle’s income.

‘Damn, I shouldn’t have believed in Andel. Now I have to work urgently. Although Dark Eden is just composed of a few trivial fellows, the Hermes guild isn’t an easy opponent. If they manage to take away this castle then everything is finished. I’ve poured a lot of money into allied guilds to maintain the relationship with them.....If that Ark guy knows about the secrets of this castle then my support base from the Cathedral will also come to an end.’

Alan had invested everything into Silvana. If he was beaten here then Alan would just become an ordinary user. It is already 80% confirmed that he would pass the examination and join Global Exos.

“It absolutely can’t happen!”

Silver Moon, Noel, Hamanechi, Fugetsu.....along with Hermes, that was 5 guilds in the Hermes alliance and with Dark Eden it was 1,600 people. With the addition of 200 hired mercenaries then they had 1,800 people. The average level in Hermes was 170, with Raiden, Jewel, Duke and several other pioneers around 180. The deputy leader of the Silver Moon guild was level 150. Noel and Hamanechi averaged 140 while Fugetsu had an average level of 130. While Ark was level 159, Dark Eden’s average level was between 110~120. Thanks to that, the Hermes alliance didn’t like the idea of joining with Dark Eden. Anyway, they all gathered in one spot at a wide plain covered in black. The siege would take place in 1 hour so Raiden called all the guild masters together.

“We have 1,800 troops. Alan and the Dawn Blade coalition only have 1,700 people. The average level of Dawn Blade when they occupied the castle was 145. Since I haven’t seen them leaving the castle, it should still be at a similar level. In conclusion, we have the edge in both numbers and levels.”

Raiden explained in a tone that was assured of victory.

“Since they’re challenge partner suddenly changed, they won’t be prepared properly. Well, even if I don’t explain it you know how difficult a siege is. If this fails then it might take a few months or even months to gather sufficient power again. In addition, it gives the opportunity to the Grey Wings to take Alan’s power. No matter what, this siege has to be successful. If you participate in the siege then I’ll honour the price I set, so please do your best.”

“Don’t worry.”

“We have been waiting a couple of weeks for this day.”

“Then I’m going to explain the strategy.”

Raiden placed a map on a table and explained.

“You might already know this but the first barrier we must get past is the Defense Tower.”

Raiden indicated to two towers located on both sides of the castle. It was an old artifact that existed in every castle to protect it. It would grant a bonus to the Lord’s side during the siege, such as raising morale and courage, or increasing the maximum value of hired NPCs or other various effects. As an aside, but the shield that protected Jackson from the turrets in the past was also an artifact.

Silvana’s artifact was a defense tower! It gave a shielding effect to the walls, and it also continuously recovered the durability of the walls.

“The Defense Tower is a grade A.2 artifact so if we don’t defeat it in the time limit then the walls would be difficult to crack. In general, we should enter the castle within 18 hours for the siege to be a success. If we take into account the time taken to destroy the walls after defeating the defense tower, we have to destroy the defense tower within 14 hours.”

Raiden immediately divided his forces. The strongest forces from Hermes and Silver Moon will attack the castle. They would occupy the main forces. Noel and Hamanechi will attack the right defense tower while Fugetsu and Dark Eden will take care of the left. Since the Dawn Blade coalition will also arrange their troops at the defense tower, the battle will be spread out over 3 areas.

‘That Raiden.....’

A frown appeared on Ark’s forehead. Hermes and Silver Moon were going to attack the castle. But the next strongest guilds Noel and Hamanechi were grouped together while the weakest groups Fugetsu were together. It was a plan which ignored the balance of

power. Raiden was probably already determined to abandon Fugetsu and Dark Eden. The guild master of Fugetsu also realised this but couldn't raise an objection. He was a weak person after all.

'Well, okay. Because it is a burden if I expect too much.'

Raiden finished the organization of the troops and distributed supplies to the allied guilds. The Hermes guild had agreed to share the proceeds of the occupied castle if they won at the end of the siege. Therefore it was customary in a siege to provide military supplies to the allied guilds. Thanks to the contract, Ark also received 100 Low-level recovery potions and 100 intermediate recovery potions. 10 repair boxes were also given.

'Huhuhu, what kind of luck is this?'

Thanks to the money from the rehabilitation members, Dark Eden had plenty of supplies. Ark boldly grabbed the 100 intermediate potions and deluxe repair boxes. Although he knew about it from the day he signed the contract, the windfall was better than expected!

'This is worth around 2000 gold in the stores!'

Since it was a big situation, the scale was also different. Even though it was a bad action, Ark didn't hesitate. Then the sound of a horn rang from the Shrine of War and a NPC's voice was heard.

"From now on I declare this place the siege area! Aside from the people participating in the siege, nobody can approach this area until the siege ends in three days!"

Ku Ku ku kung!

At the same time, a giant hourglass filled with sand started moving. It was 3 days in New World, so the amount of sand in that hourglass signalled 24 hours in reality.

"Please ready the siege weapons. Archer unit, protect the serious illness unit!"

As soon as the NPC's words ended, Hermes made the first strike. The catapult approached the walls with a heavy sound. A catapult

was a siege weapon that could only be manufactured in an ironworks in a large city. It probably cost hundreds of gold for one and they had 20! They must have invested thousands of gold on siege weapons to break the walls. There were also the supplies given to the allied guilds.....the survival of the guild was really hanging on this. Well, Ark just thought that it was foolish to waste money on things like that.....

Anyway, numerous arrows and rocks flew towards the walls. But the walls' durability didn't even decrease. Instead, the arrows were reflected back and damaged the archers of the Hermes guild and their allies. This was the effect of the Defense Tower.

"The troops will advance first. Don't rest until the protection of the Defense Tower is destroyed.

So the long siege began.

"To the Defense Tower!"

The Fugetsu guild master shouted as he ran ahead. He pointed towards a crystal tower enclosed in light in the centre of a small castle on the hill. The Fugetsu guild master Baron lifted his sword and shouted.

"An all-out attack!"

"Wait a minute!"

Ark stopped Baron with an astounded face.

"What the?"

"The Defense Tower is an important part of Silvana's protections. Wouldn't they naturally have some preparations? But without understanding the enemy's power you're just going to assault them

head on?”

“Have you ever participated in a siege before?”

“This is my first time.”

“Then don’t talk when you know nothing about it.”

This guild master was different from the guy who couldn’t even open his mouth in front of Hermes and just continued chattering. Ark seemed quite insignificant to him. Indeed, he only had a total of 83 troops. And 70 of them were NPCs. In addition, the NPCs didn’t look like much with thieves wearing leather armour, hired soldiers, the Meow warriors and the raccoon clans. While it was the weakest of the Hermes allied guilds, the Fugetsu guild still have 250 people.

Baron increased the power in his neck and said.

“Anyway, the defense tower is just a skirmish. Alan won’t have that much protection on it. In the previous sieges, the guild occupying the castle never assigns a lot of troops here. See, there aren’t that many troops visible. There should only be around 50 soldiers here.”

“But still, we should reduce the possible damage.....”

“Do you think this is a war movie? We have the advantage in numbers and levels anyway.”

Baron looked at Ark before laughing and ignoring him.

“Although the people with low level and equipment would have to use those sorts of cheap tricks.....if you’re unconfident then please retreat. Because I don’t expect that much from Dark Eden. Warriors forward!”

“Wha ah ah ah ah ah!”

At Baron’s command, the warriors rushed forward with their shields in front of them. At the moment something iron sprang from the ground with a whirring sound. The sharp points penetrated the foot and came out the other side! The warriors stiffened and became paralyzed from the venom.

“Tr-trap!”

Baron’s lips contorted before he issued a command.

“Sheesh, such a bother. Priests, use detoxification!”

But before the order could be completed, small mounds 100 metres away opened revealing small windows. They weren’t small mounds but bunkers that had been created artificially. Dozens of arrows flew continuously from the window.

“Cough, I’m going to die without even swinging my sword....!”

The warriors who were caught by the paralysis poison became like a porcupine and collapsed.

“Eat this! Warriors detour and charge!”

Baron shouted. But the result was the same. In addition to the front, traps were tightly laid out 100 metres from the tower in every direction. The same scene seemed to be on repeat, with warriors rushing forward blindly before being caught by the paralysis poison and falling in vain to the arrows. Baron’s face was red with embarrassment.

“Oh my god, they’re all around.....!”

It was a minefield where they would be barraged from arrows the moment they stepped in.

‘That Alan.....he used his head to prepare for this.’

Ark’s eyes started to shine with a serious light. With the defense tower protected, it wasn’t necessary for Alan to go out and fight. With the protection from the defense tower, even the catapults wouldn’t be able to knock the walls down in the time limit. Alan just had to sit for 24 hours and the castle siege would end in vain. In that sense, the arrangement of the situation for the defense tower was quite ideal. It was a tightly oriented defense formation! It was like a situation in Star O where the Terrans laid mines in front of a bunker which caused a lot of confusion when the opponents ran in. There should be a method of intercepting it from far away.

However, the opponents were armed with longbows and crossbows that had a long range. Furthermore, they had the favourable geographical position of being on top of the hill. The opponents only had to place the crossbow out the window and shoot. Baron's face became annoyed.

"These bastards.....what a lousy trick.....!"

He must be joking. Using strategies to prevent them from capturing the castle was a lousy trick?

"It's not possible." The arrows would just kill the warriors when they're caught in the trap.

Eventually, the Baron would be forced into a prolonged war. But Ark viewed it a different way. There were some professions in the hunter system that could disable traps. The traps were also established within the range of all the bunkers. Although they could block the arrows with their shields, the dozens of arrows that fell steadily would gradually decrease the warriors' health.

"Baron, it's impossible to hold out anymore!"

"1st line should retreat to recover. 2nd line protect the hunters!"

30 warriors retreated while others came forward holding shields. The traps were disabled one by one but Ark felt even gloomier. Although it had been one hour, the Fugetsu guild hadn't even managed to advance 2~3 metres. Using simple calculations, if it continued like this then it would take 30~50 hours to advance 100 metres.

'No wonder he placed so many archers.....'

There were a lot of archers placed at the Defense Tower so it was a natural result.

'In addition, dismantling the traps means being closer to the range of the arrows. It will also take a while to destroy the bunkers.....even if the pace quickens by 2~3 times, it still won't be finished by the end of today!'

Traps and bunkers were a simple but effective combination. Since the operation wasn't working, Baron glared at Ark.

"What is Dark Eden doing? Can't you see the situation at the moment?"

Ark replied in an uninterested tone.

"We don't have anyone who can release traps....."

"Then what about warriors with shields?"

"Didn't you say before that there was no need for us to help out?"

".....Then go ahead!"

Baron turned his head away. Of course, Ark wanted to quickly deal with the Defense Tower. But even if Cross supported Baron, the situation wouldn't change that much. Although they could use the shields to block, a lot of warriors from Fugetsu still died.

'I can't just leave it to Baron. I have to find a way myself.'

Even if only one defense tower was destroyed, he had confidence that Raiden would be able to destroy the walls in time using the catapults. Although the other side had the same numbers, their levels were higher. Therefore this side was insignificant to Raiden's siege strategy. But.....

'I should pay for my meal.'

Ark signed a contract with Raiden where he would receive 30% of the proceeds from the castle. In an alliance of 5 guilds, only Dark Eden received 30%. The only reason they accepted Ark was because he had the challenge right, but once they distributed the proceeds of the siege then it could cause problems. In fact, that was the day he dreaded the most.

"What do you think?"

"Let's see....."

JusticeMan who was the master of strategies sighed in frustration. The rehabilitation group couldn't speak. Although they

were armed with various skills, it was useless in a battle like this. It was also beyond Cross' and the NPCs capacities.

“Ah, Oppa!”

Then, Roco clapped and looked at Ark.

“Do you remember the movie we saw together the other day?”

“Movie?”

Ark remembered and suddenly hit his knee. Then Ark and Roco shouted in unison.

“Ridge of Death!”

The Ridge of Death was a movie that he watched with Roco when JusticeMan tricked them last time. Roco was a girl and wanted to watch a romantic comedy but Ark refused. Details about a person's relationship. Why should he pay money to watch such a movie? He wouldn't watch it even if the money went bad. If he was going to waste money on a movie then it was better to relieve his stress by watching bombs detonate and missiles flying. So Ark ended up watching a movie called Ridge of Death.

.....It was a mistake!

Ark who had no interest in movies found a cinema showing war movies. But out of all things, it was a movie about the Vietnam War with modern tanks and missiles.....Thanks to that, Ark and Roco dozed in the movie theatre for 2 hours. The worst date!

But there were a few memorable scenes from the movie. In the final part of the movie, the US military forces built bunkers and land mines in order to stop the charge of the Viet Cong. But in the end, the US army lost the high ground in vain. Only the main character barely survived. Currently Ark's position in the situation was reversed! Then, how did the Viet Cong manage to attack.....eh?

“How did they do it? What method?”

Ugh, damn it. He just had to be dozing during that scene! But fortunately Roco watched it as well.

“That’s it. The Viet Cong used that method. Then.....”

“Heh, those pathetic guys.”

“Look at them trying to cancel the traps.....it’s going to take them 3 nights and 4 days.”

“We just have to sit here and enjoy the show to the end.”

Inside the bunker there were 20 archers sitting and yawning. The Defense Tower was attacked first in the siege. They had to defend this place even if they died. Before the siege started, they were quite tense and couldn’t sleep but now it was quite boring. All they had to do was sometimes shoot the crossbow from inside the bunker. It didn’t even feel like they were in the middle of a siege.

“Even if I end up dying in a fight, at least it would be more interesting than this.....”

“I agree.”

“Ah, we’ve been sitting for 6 hours and now I’m sleepy. Does anyone want coffee?”

One archer scratched his head and turned around. Shakes shake, all of a sudden the ground in the centre of the bunker started to become restless.

“What the, what’s happening here?”

The archer asked puzzled. And when he touched the earth it started to move up and down. Suddenly loud shouts erupted from underneath the ground.

“Blade Storm!”

Bang bang double bang!

Numerous scraps of iron emerged from the earth and caused a tornado in the bunker. The archer who was there lost 40% health while the other archers lost 20%. The archers who were staring outside turned their heads and looked at the unbelievable sight.

“What, what the?”

“What the hell.....eh? W-who are you?”

The storm had passed. The hazy form of one person was standing within the dust. With his whole body covered in dirt.....it was Ark!

“Is it an enemy? H-how.....?”

“Do you know how much I suffered having to eat dirt?”

“A-attack!”

The archers focused their crossbows on Ark. As soon as they tried to pull the trigger, earth and sand exploded in front of them. A pair covered in black appeared and grabbed their collars. They were two fierce looking rehabilitation members, JusticeMan and Gyeong Saeng-dan.

“You thought a fight would be more interesting?”

“Then how about you fight us?”

There was an explosion at the same time. That wasn't all. From the hole in the floor, dozens of soldiers came pouring out.

“Hahaha, we found them!”

“Taste the sword of justice!”

It was Cross and the Sylphid Knights, as well as the thieves.

“Huk, there are so many guys from underground.....!”

The archers immediately panicked. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were experts at fighting, and in the small space of the

bunker there was nowhere for the archers to run. In addition, there was also Cross and the Sylphid Knights. The thieves were also good at melee combat and used their knives skillfully. Furthermore, it was 30 against 73! The archers weren't able to shoot their arrows properly.

"It is all under control."

JusticeMan ended the battle by sending the last archer to the underworld.

'The archers were a pretty easy opponent.'

The battle was too easy to the point that he considered it boring.

'It took 5 hours to get here.....it took longer than expected but it's not too bad!'

A smile spread on Ark's mouth. He had obtained this hint from the movie Ridge of Death. The Viet Cong who struggled to occupy the higher ground eventually used a last resort.

Because they couldn't approach the higher ground with the machine guns and mines, the Viet Cong decided to use their specialty and dig. After a long time and various sacrifices, a tunnel was dug underneath the bunker and the US forces in the bunker were surprised and destroyed. Once he heard this, the racial skill of the raccoons immediately came to Ark's mind. Didn't the raccoons also have the ability to dig tunnels like the Viet Cong?

"It seems possible. Let's give it a try."

Ark told the raccoons who immediately started digging the tunnel. The raccoon clan can move through the ground like a mole. But if the NPC craftsmen appeared inside the bunker then they would just be turned into porcupines. Because other people could use the tunnels, it took longer to create a 100 metre long tunnel. Even though the rehabilitation members and Ark were used to carry the soil, it still took 5 hours.

It was the Viet Cong strategy! Well, the results were obvious.....the Meow refused to crawl through the ground, but

even without the Meow warriors they still managed to handle 30 archers.

‘That boring movie was actually helpful. I should watch movies with Roco more often in the future.’

Ark looked out the bunker window to examine the situation. He could grasp the situation outside even from here. Baron and his guild were still unaware of the shovelling.

‘Huhuhu, Baron please suffer more.’

Until he controlled the rest of the bunkers, Dawn Blade couldn’t know what was happening. In the Viet Cong strategy, until they seized two bunkers they had to be careful of security because if the enemy becomes aware then there is a chance of a counterattack. Therefore, Ark concealed it from Baron and dug the tunnel.

‘The next bunker is 60 metres away. It should take 3 hours judging by the current pace.’

“Rest here for the moment. The raccoon are tired as well.”

The NPCs working with users had to rest. Ark allowed the raccoons to rest for 2 hours inside the bunker before rushing them to start digging again. After 3 hours, the tunnel to the next bunker was completed.

“Hahaha, everyone attack!”

Ark’s party beat the archers to death.

“Now there are only the soldiers that are defending the tower.”

Ark immediately gave orders to the raccoons and thieves.

“Take 20 people each and divide them between both bunkers!”

Ark left the raccoons and thieves in the two bunkers. Then a 40 foot cannon emerged from the bunker and started shooting continuously. When the cannon started shooting from where they believed their allies were, the soldiers who protected the tower suffered enormous damage. The soldiers who barely survived

couldn't understand the situation.

"What's going on? Why is our bunker shooting us?"

"What is this bullet? Huk, is this damage a joke?"

"Our guys in the bunker aren't responding to the Feathers of Whispering."

"Was their connection lost?"

"Oh my God, did they snatch away the bunker?"

"It's coming from the bunker within range! I'm not going to stand here and let them exterminate me. Destroy the bunker!"

The soldiers from the castle flocked to the bunker. However, a huge amount of money was spent on the bunkers to prevent an attack from the Hermes guild. Its durability didn't decrease no matter how much they struck it. Meanwhile, 2 people died from one bullet that came from the bunker. Eventually the soldiers had been decreased by 30 people and the doors of the bunker opened, with a group of soldiers immediately rushing out. It was Ark, the rehabilitation members, Cross.....it was the Dark Eden attack group.

"Now it is time for battle. Make sure you put your whole body into it!"

The health of Dawn Blade had already decreased by 50%. Meanwhile, Dark Eden had rested comfortably inside the bunkers. JusticeMan rushed forward while Ark kicked the opponents. The Dawn Blade guild became even more confused. Thanks to the rehabilitation members' odd skills and the attack from the NPCs, the opponents collapsed from the confusion. However, in this situation the most confused man was none other than Fugetsu's guild leader Baron.

"Eh? How did he get over there?"

They've been marching for 11 hours! Although he hurried his guild who kept on complaining, they only advanced 40 metres. But then all of a sudden Ark showed up on the other side of the traps. And he immediately seized the Defense Tower. Fugetsu's guild members

who had been marching tirelessly looked at their guild master with soulless expressions.

‘What did we do all that for?’ their looks seemed to say.

“What’s with that guy?”

However, no one answered Baron’s question.

A Defense Tower has been destroyed.

There is a 50% decrease in the shield applied to the castle. The recovery rate of the durability of the walls has been decreased by 50%.

“That’s it!”

Raiden clutched his fist tightly and shouted. He checked the hourglass and saw that 12 hours has passed. It was 2 hours faster than expected.

‘The heavens are helping me!’

While the Defense Tower existed, it was extremely difficult to break the walls. His previous attacks weren’t intended to break the castle walls. It was meant to prevent them from sending reinforcements to the Defense Towers. Therefore Raiden didn’t attack using all his force and just stood at a distance shooting arrows. However, it was different if one Defense Tower was destroyed.

‘It is clearly the Noel and Hamanechi guilds. Fugetsu and Dark Eden are probably still wandering. Well, I don’t care. Because I did not expect anything anyway. But if one of the defense towers are

destroyed then there will be no trouble breaking down the walls in time!’

“Now! Summon the stone-throwing golems!”

“Great power of the earth, follow your Lord’s command!”

The summoners in Hermes immediately followed Raiden’s order and give huge golems rose from the ground.

“Huk, Golems!”

A scream rang from the walls. The giant golem was level 180! It was an advanced summoning that was impossible unless they were a pioneer! Although it was only 5 golems, they were rarely seen in New World. The range of the stone throwing golems was short but their power was incredible. The golems stomped forward and started throwing rocks at the wall. It was an incredible offensive attack!

Since the protection of the shield was cut in half, the durability of the walls started to decrease. The 20 catapults also attacked along with the golems. On the other hand, the Dawn Blade guild had a lot of their archers assigned to the defense towers! Therefore they had no way of stopping the attacks from the golems.

“Hahaha, how is it? This is the power of Hermes!”

Raiden was bragging when something suddenly happened. The castle gates opened and hundreds of users poured out.

“Everyone attack! Don’t let them break down the walls!”

“Don’t pay any attention to those guys. Attack the catapults and the summoners of those golems!”

“If the walls are destroyed then it is the end!”

“Don’t be afraid of death!”

The Dawn Blade members brandished their swords and magic and rushed towards the catapults and summoners. However, Raiden just laughed.

“Ha, do you think you can beat Hermes in a direct confrontation? Since the defense tower collapsed, reinforcements will also be coming soon.”

Currently the Hermes guild gathered in front of the castle had 900 troops after sending the rest to the defense towers. Meanwhile, the Dawn Blade guild had 1,200 people. The Hermes guild was inferior in terms of numbers. However, Raiden actually welcomed the enemy's attack. The Hermes guild was filled with pioneers. The Silver Moon guild was also equal to Hermes. Their levels, equipment and skills weren't at a level that normal users could beat. Raiden had hoped for this head-on collision!

“It is time to show the power of the Hermes Alliance! Trample them!”

The sound of two armies colliding was heard. However, the result was different from what Raiden expected.

“What, what? These guys?”

The coalition of guilds was stronger than he expected. The difference in skills and equipment wasn't as much as he expected. In fact if he knew the true identity of Dawn Blade then it wasn't that surprising. Their true identities are candidates participating in the Global Exos examination. With a job at stake, they didn't care about how much they invested in equipment.

“I was ignorant of the people gathered in Dawn Blade.....but it's not just their equipment.”

If the equipment was similar then of course higher levels would dominate. And the levels in Hermes were the highest in New World. Even so, the battle became strained. Didn't that mean that the members of Dawn Blade are also at Hermes' level?

“How come? Weren't their levels lower than ours when they occupied the castle? It has been 3 weeks and I've never seen any of them leave the castle.....then how are their levels similar to ours?”

Raiden couldn't understand it.

“But we're still superior. We're pushing them back.....”

Raiden was optimistic about the battle situation.

Dudududung, the sound of drums rang from the walls and someone exited the castle. He was riding a white horse with armour that shined.

“Alan!”

Raiden’s eyes started flashing. It was the Lord of Silvana, Alan! Of course, even if Alan died the siege would still continue as long as Dawn Blade kept on fighting. But losing Alan would be a great blow to Dawn Blade. Although the battle situation wasn’t disadvantageous, it was a golden opportunity for Raiden.

“What a foolish guy. The Lord actually appeared on the battlefield. Catch him.....Huk!”

Raiden had stood up and yelled. Then 20 troops riding behind Alan came pouring out. Horses cost thousands of gold. But he had enough for a horse unit! In addition, Raiden could even see equipment on the equestrian troops.

“When did he get those soldiers.....!”

“Kill Alan! Cough!”

Alan dealt huge damage because of the unique sword in his hand! The cavalry troops also followed swinging maces. The formation of the Hermes Alliance collapsed thanks to the cavalry unit. A formidable attacking power! But the problem wasn’t simply attack power.

“Miracle Force! Heavenly Light! Holy Imprint!”

The aura applied to the unit stacked up three times thanks to Alan’s profession, Holy Knight! Once Alan appeared on the battlefield, not only was there a rise in tactics but also an increase in stats. In addition, the Holy Knight’s skills didn’t consume his mana so it wouldn’t be turned off when his mana was low. The buff made a huge difference to the battlefield.

Bang bang double bang!

Alan's cavalry unit rode around attacking the summoners until the golems collapsed one by one.

"Curse, curse them!"

Raiden shouted as he emitted light. But the warlock's curse was blocked by Holy Imprint with 80% of it failing! And the 20% that worked was immediately lifted.

"What, what the? Holy magic? Then they're all Holy Paladins?"

It was a profession with mighty combat power and holy magic. It was a profession that required enormous luck to change into yet there were 20 of them! The moral of Dawn Blade shot up thanks to the cavalry unit.

"All the summoners have collapsed. Priests and magicians, concentrate your attacks on the catapults!"

"Warriors group up in units of 5 and your highest priority is to attack the priests!"

"Archers use your arrows to intercept the magicians' magic!"

"Debuff all of them!"

"Area of effect magic. Retreat from the range!"

Blood quickly rose to the pale sky before falling!

The momentum had suddenly shifted to the side of Dawn Blade. The cavalry unit was a natural enemy to magicians and priests. Thanks to their mobility they were able to attack several times faster! With the low defense of magicians and priests, they couldn't even last more than a few seconds. Meanwhile, the rest of Dawn Blade was decreasing the durability of the catapults.

"This, such a thing.....Pioneers stop the cavalry unit! The rest protect the catapults!"

Raiden shouted to his warriors. In this situation he was commanding from the rear of the troops. Then a cloud of dust was raised as a group of soldiers arrived.

“The Noel and Hamanechi guilds have returned!”

Raiden’s face brightened. If the Noel and Hamanechi troops show up then the situation could be reversed! But when he checked he noticed something strange. He had thought that Noel and Hamanechi had destroyed the tower and was returning. However, the people who were leading the troops were Ark and Baron.

‘What on earth..... the Defense Tower was destroyed.....it wasn’t by Noel.....!’

It was actually Fugetsu and Dark Eden?

“No way? What the hell?”

Raiden was completely confused. But no matter the reinforcements, it was better than nothing.

“Baron, Ark! Attack Alan!”

Caretaker of the Battlefield

‘Alan!’

Ark’s eyes quickly looked around after hearing Raiden’s voice. He was soon able to see Alan wielding his sword along with the cavalry troops in the middle of the battlefield.

‘Okay, I won’t stop until I take him out this time!’

“Dark Eden troops depart, attack Alan’s unit!”

“Ah, Ark-nim. What about us?”

Baron asked in a surprised voice. After Ark led Dark Eden to destroy the Defense Tower, Baron’s attitude had a complete 180 degree change. His personality was the type that would prostrate himself if he judged that someone was superior to him.

“Protect Raiden!”

Ark replied with annoyance and approached Alan’s cavalry troops. Now that Alan appeared, he had no interest in Fugetsu. Alan was leading the 20 man cavalry unit as well as 100 soldiers through the battlefield. The pioneers including Jewel and Duke were confronting him. But even the pioneers of New World were pushed back by Alan and his cavalry unit.

“Ugh, what’s with these monster like fellows……!”

“Your best dark attribute magic only did 10% damage at most to them?”

“These bastards, what on earth are their levels?”

“All 20 paladins are wearing gloves that have recovery magic!”

Then Ark jumped into the battlefield leading Dark Eden.

“Sir Cross, you and your soldiers take up defensive stances and

prevent enemy attacks! The raccoons and thieves, please shoot the enemies with cannons while supporting Sir Cross. Roco, assist from a distance! And JusticeMan ajusshi, Hyungs and the Meow.....take care of the fighting!”

“Okay!”

Bang bang double bang!

When Ark’s troops stormed in, a violent sound was immediately heard. Thanks to the influence of JusticeMan’s Tactics III, the NPCs followed Ark’s commands perfectly.

“That fellow!”

Cross prevented the enemies’ offensive using the shield while pointing at a priest. A bullet flew 40 feet across the battlefield. Its damage couldn’t even be compared with normal arrows! It was difficult for even a warrior to endure without dying. Much less compared to the priest wearing robes with much lower defense. The priest’s health quickly reached the bottom and he collapsed.

“Huhuhu, the enemy won’t stop with just this! It reminds me of the time I was stranded in the middle of an uprising! Good, the more the better!”

“It reminds me of the incident in the nightclub.”

“It’s time to show our true characters! Come on.....these beep-beep bastards!”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members jumped into the battle with excited faces. But it was the Meow who went through a complete reversal. Ark had not seen the Meow fight yet. While the Meow clan fought in the battle against Debra, there was no chance for during when fighting Andel. The Meow also didn’t want to go underground so they did not participate in the destruction of the Defense Tower. The cat was a really selfish species, who he had only seen eating and eating.....it was to the extent that Ark thought he brought them for no reason.

But that thought was completely blown away in this fight.

“Let’s show them why we’re called the best warrior beast species!”

“I’ll show you how an elegant cat fights.”

Suuk, sasasak, seokeok!

The Meows’ battle was truly phenomenal. They used incredibly quick foot movements that couldn’t be seen, and then avoided attacks using their flexibility before jumping across several metres to deal damage!

Yes, he had forgotten for a while-no, he just did not believe-but the Meow were descendants from Hero Maban! Once Ark switched jobs to Dark Walker, the skills he learnt were originally from the Meow. They were a naturally gifted warrior clan!

“Huhuhu, slow, slow, too slow!”

The Meow quickly avoided the sword and attacked in the weak spot. Ark looked for weaknesses using Eyes of the Cat. However, the Meow were the origin of the cat eyes. Even if they didn’t use the skill, the Meow could just look and they would see the weaknesses. In addition, they were born with Ark’s Cat Paws. Their sharpened nails pierced the areas that the armour exposed such as neck and wrist and tore the flesh.

“What, what the? Who are they?”

“What kind of NPCs are they? First there is the raccoons firing the cannons, and now isn’t that a cat?”

“What kind of quests would you have to do to be able to hire these mercenaries?”

It wasn’t only the people in Dawn Blade, but the Hermes Alliance was also watching in confusion. But the person who had the most brilliant performance was of course Ark!

‘The reward was worth going through all that trouble!’

Ark ran around the battlefield pushing back enemies. The Dawn Blade members mostly consisted of candidates. Only they would be so enthusiastic about the game. But he confirmed that they were

only around level 150 using Eyes of the Cat. The highest level users were no more than level 150. On the other hand, Ark's level was 159! With his darkness attribute bonus it was 222!

He was finally receiving some compensation for not sleeping a lot. Dying and then coming back to find yourself at a higher level than other users.....wasn't that a glorious moment for all users? Of course other professions had abilities that increased the stats or gave special effects, none of them could beat Ark in a 1-on-1 fight. With his dark attribute bonus, it wasn't even hard to fight 5 people at once. It was the result of grinding! And.....

'That warrior is using the skill Shield Shock!'

Once Ark saw the warriors pull their shields, he was able to read their attack patterns. Thanks to the Evil Silrion, he was able to see the skills of most professions and read their attacks by looking at the special movement. Ark reflexively closed the distance, avoided the shield and attacked at the weak point. After the practical training at the gym, his transitions were so fast and sharp it couldn't even be compared to before.

'In the past I didn't even dare fight against other candidates but now.....I've become stronger!'

He was stronger than other candidates. That meant he had a higher chance to pass the entrance examination. Since his confidence increased, Ark's movements became livelier. The battle situation once again became strained thanks to that. Alan became confused because he never thought that Dark Eden would have such achievements.

"Ugh, what on earth are these NPCs? Huh?"

Just then the sharp sparkle of a sword appeared in front of him. Alan reflexively lifted his sword and a sharp clanging sound rang out. 3~4 warriors died as he leapt forward and struck a blow on the shield. Rough curses flew from Alan's mouth as he confirmed who it was.

"Ark, you bastard.....!"

Ark had confirmed that it was Alan from a distance and ran towards him.

“Why are you surprised? You were the one who called me here. Isn’t that right?”

“What are you saying?”

“Well? Didn’t you ‘dare’ me to come here?”

“You cheeky bastard! Shield Blow!”

Alan ran to him with his shield raised. However Ark quickly lowered his body and counterattacked with Dark Blade. It signalled the start of the wild clash between Ark and Alan.

Holy Knight and Dark Walker!

Two people who walked the road in different directions yet they were destined to clash. No, if only the facts were looked at then Ark would be inferior in strength. Alan had always been ahead of him from the beginner so he was like a tough mountain pass Ark had to climb. But.....

‘Alan.....doesn’t seem as strong as I thought!’

After receiving Alan’s attack, Ark felt quite confident. As Dark Walker was a hidden profession, he received a 40% bonus in the dark which was something general users would have a hard time imagining. The bonus was how Ark had managed to defeat opponents a lot stronger than him. It was evening at the moment so the perfect for a Dark Walker.

However, Alan was not an ordinary user. He also had one of the hidden professions. Moreover, his character was that of a hero walking in the light. He also received a bonus of course. While Ark received a bonus in the dark, Alan received a bonus proportional to the number of troops he led. The more troops he commanded the higher his stats would rise. And if he was on a warhorse, there was a slight boost to his damage and defense. After the bonus stats were applied, they were almost equal! The rest of it was levels and skills!

‘Alan’s level is lower than mine!’

After checking with Eyes of the Cat, Alan’s level was surprisingly lower than Ark’s. Ark was level 159. Alan was level 158. At one time he was an opponent that Ark had to crane his neck to look up at. But after several months had passed, Ark was now ahead. It was an inevitable result. No matter how much bonuses and experiences he got from being in a party, Alan had focused on creating a guild and capturing the castle while Ark had only focused on hunting.

Ark had continued to hunt and hunt while sleeping less. Any turtle could overtake a rabbit if it was sleeping. Especially if the turtle had a motor attached to its foot!

‘I can win. I can take Alan down here!’

However, the situation was not as simple as he thought. It wasn’t a 1-on-1 fight but a bloody battlefield with hundreds of users. Unlike Ark, Alan also had strong support in the form of his cavalry unit. If Ark pushed Alan back even a little bit then a cavalry member would rush over and attack.

“Ugh, what’s with these bastards……..?”

Alan had stumbled after Ark kicked him in the knee. When he had the perfect opportunity for continuous attacks, the cavalry unit interrupted again. Meanwhile, the other paladin poured recovery magic at Alan. Of course Ark also had his health restored thanks to Roco’s help. Thanks to that both of them were unable to strike the killing blow.

‘Damn, this would normally be the time to use Blade Storm……..’

In this melee it wasn’t as simple as it sounded. Ark’s ultimate skill was Blade Storm. When used correctly, its destructive power was enormous. But to use Blade Storm he had to take a sword out of his bag. And the preliminary action to trigger it was more time-consuming than his other skills. It wasn’t a skill that he could use against Alan.

‘I have to use a more advanced skill!’

If Alan saw any signs then he would immediately disrupt the offensive. Ark was the same as well. If he saw signs that Alan was using a dangerous skill then he would immediately disrupt it. Since they both had hidden professions, the power of their best skill would be unimaginable. In such a situation, the person who managed to use the skill would strike the killing blow. It was like they both had access to nuclear bombs but were fighting with rifles.

‘That Ark, when did he become this strong? It’s not simply a problem of his level. Something else.....’

Alan was unclear about the situation. At that time, two unexpected variables entered the fight.

“God dammit, die! Burning Force!”

Jewel who was fighting the cavalry unit cast a spell. It was a powerful magic from a level 180 pioneer! However, it just bounced off the overlapping reflection shield that the cavalry troops created. The intention was probably to have the magic bounce off and hit the enemy troops. But ironically, the magic flew behind the enemy line to where Ark and Alan were having their bloody battle.

“Ah, Sir Alan!”

Alan reflexively raised a reflective shield after hearing the paladin’s shout. It was an intense magic! It caused a violent impact which shook the shield.

‘Ah!’

Alan shook and fell off his horse.

“It’s a chance! That guy fell off his horse!”

“If we catch him then it’s Hermes’ victory!”

At the same time, the Hermes Alliance flocked at the opportunity. After the close fight with Ark, his health had fallen to 30%! Fortunately the 20 Holy Paladins stopped the Hermes Alliance and protected Alan. They had swift agility! However, Alan had no interest in the Hermes Alliance.

“Ark.....!”

Alan stiffened and turned his head. The person who was closely approaching.....his nemesis, Ark! During the confusion Ark didn't miss the opportunity.

‘Thanks to the impact from falling off his horse, he must be stiff! In this situation he won't be able to disrupt my skill. There's also no time for the Holy Paladins to use their recovery magic! It is the ideal chance!’

Ark ignored the attacks flying around him and shouted.

“Snake, Magic Swords!”

He didn't want to give Alan a chance to use recovery magic. Ark used a magic sword just in case. It was a magic sword that could be sold for 10 gold in stores!

“Blade Storm!”

Cracks spread like a spider web on the 100,000 won magic sword. Alan instinctively sensed that he was in a crisis. A formidable amount of magic seemed to be emanating from the cracking sword! In this condition he would surely die! If he died here then he would lose the castle! Panic spread throughout his body and he instinctively grabbed the nearest user. At the same time, a surprised word emerged from Ark's mouth.

“La-Lariette!”

“Ark-nim?”

The person that Alan grabbed was Lariette of all people! Ark reflexively turned the sword. The users who were running on that side were unfortunately shredded by the 100,000 won Blade Storm. At that moment, Alan's eyes lit up.

“What a stupid guy, Grand Cross!”

After receiving the recovery magic from 20 people, Alan used the Holy Knight's strongest skill. Hundreds of lights shot from Alan's sword into the sky. And it created a huge cross made of swords

which plunged towards Ark. It was a holy scene, but to Ark it appeared like a reaper was swinging a huge scythe at him. And just before the giant scythe was about to pierce his neck, an angel flew in front of him.

“No!”

With her long hair flying, it was Roco who jumped in front of Ark. The black light pierced through Roco and into the ground.

“R-Roco!”

“Ugh, our cutie!”

“Saint-nim! You.....you bastard.....!”

JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and the thieves headed towards Alan furiously. However, the cavalry troops blocked them before they could reach Alan and Ark and a fierce battle took place. Ark turned his head slowly away from Roco with vacant eyes. Lariette looked at Ark with guilt.

“A, Ark-nim.....!”

“Damn, Grand Cross!”

“No!”

When Alan tried to use the skill again, Lariette shouted in surprise and grabbed his arm. Thanks to that it only skimmed Ark’s side but he still lost 500 health just from that. However, the damage was not the problem. When the sword of light flew past, he had been surrounded by the cavalry troops. Ark was hit repeatedly and was forced to withdraw.

‘Oh my God, I can’t die here!’

“Slime’s Time, NO1!”

Since Ark was in a critical condition, he regretfully used the skill.

‘Slime’s Time was something I learnt when I made the Slime’s Immortality Pill.’

It was a skill which could defend him from physical attacks by 100% for 10 minutes! When he used Slime's Time, Ark's body was immediately covered in a smooth viscous liquid. Then Ark managed to withdraw from the paladins. It was the perfect invincible state! Ark easily ran away from the maces flying all over the place. However, there was a penalty for using Slime's Time. While it blocked attacks for 10 minutes, his sword couldn't inflict any damage. Even though he could see Alan, it wasn't possible for him to do anything. Meanwhile Alan got back on his horse and shouted.

"Concentrate everything on your attack! Their recovery priests have all died!"

"Alan.....!"

Ark was forced to just watch. While he had averted the attack on Lariette, he couldn't forgive killing Roco.

'But.....'

Ark wasn't so stupid that he would just blindly run up to Alan. Roco died in the game, but if Ark died here then there was no way to recover the 5,000 gold. And.....even if it wasn't Ark, there were already enough stupid people.

"Huk, drat. Dammit!"

Bul-kkun was impaled by a spear. In addition, Jjak-tung and Yapsab were also in a critical condition and close to dying. Thanks to their fury over Roco, they just fought randomly. But that wasn't the problem. Roco was the only person who could use recovery magic in Dark Eden. With her 'Gentle Reverberation,' the recovery magic was even able to be stacked 3 times. After Roco died, Dark Eden was immediately on the defensive. 5 Sylphid Knights had already died while 4 Meow had collapsed. Thankfully the raccoons were still intact, but the thieves had rushed towards Roco and 12 of them died from the cavalry unit's attack. Frankly, their deaths caused more pain to Ark than Roco's did.

Roco would revive perfectly fine tomorrow. But once the NPCs died then it was the end. So he had put all the effect into building intimacy

for nothing. But was that all? Ark was the one who dragged them into the battle. If they were all wiped out? While he wasn't sure about the thieves, his intimacy with Jackson's Lord, the Meow elders and the raccoon clan representatives would be negatively affected. No, there was no need to think. When Dark Eden started to be pushed, the Hermes Alliance that had managed to maintain its balance started to wobble.

They didn't have a lot of recovery potions left. On the other hand, the 20 mounted troops could all use recovery magic.....

Nevertheless, Ark couldn't attack the enemies for 10 minutes.

'If the formation collapses then it is the end!'

"Huk, A-Ark.....!"

Then, Cross was struck by a critical hit and stumbled.

"Ah, no! Gather your energy! You might be tired but you still have strength left. Real courage isn't fighting for breath. Sometimes fighting to save lives is true courage! Wield your sword and shield to survive!"

Ark desperately used Nursing. Nursing was not recovery magic. But if the spirit and courage rose then it could increase the recovery rate. And the blessing would increase various resistances and stats which would make the survival rate a little bit higher. Ark ran around the entire battlefield using Nursing. He was immortal so none of the attacks could stop him. But once the battle situation was pushed then it started to get out of control. Although there was a difference in power, their health and recovery potions in the Hermes Alliance were starting to run low.

"Please gather your courage. You aren't supposed to collapse! We can win!"

So Ark used Nursing even when he got a sore throat.

Then.....a miracle literally happened!

The Miracle Nursing was successful.

You have understood the deep sorrow of the heart on the battlefield.

The battlefield is a trench of endless sins. In the place where the importance is placed on a sword and shield, you have used your power to heal the wounded. With hundreds of enemies to fight, it takes great courage to heal instead of fight. Your heart has considered that saving lives is more important than killing. Thus you have given an impression of a strong attachment to life to many soldiers. You will also get a chance to save their lives.

- * Due to the success of miracle nursing, all stats increase by 1.
- * Affection increases by 10.
- * Fame increases by 50.
- * Alignment towards Good increases by 50.
- * The defense of all allies increases by 20% for 2 hours.

The Miracle Nursing was a success and you have acquired the title 'Caretaker of the Battlefield.'

Fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many soldiers.

- * As a title bonus all stats will increase by 2.
- * Fame increases by 50.

Thanks to miracle nursing, the defense of the Hermes Alliance increased by 20%! But the miracle didn't end there. His Nursing skill which had stopped at 290 increased to 300! Nursing was now an advanced skill.

Thanks to your sincerity and caring, your Nursing skill has risen.

Nursing (Advanced, Active): You can take care of the patients for a

long time and use various treatments more effectively. In addition, the performance of any type of potions has increased by 30%.
<When used on a patient, energy and courage increases by 50%.
Mana consumption: 10>

* Advanced Nursing bonus effect: Great Sacrifice <Your desire to save as many patients as possible has increased the effects of all medical treatments to the extreme (If you use all the recovery potions in your bag then the recovery effect is given to your surrounding allies. It is impossible to choose the number of recovery potions. The effect changes with the number and rating of the recovery potions.)>

= Minimum trigger limit of 10: Minor recovery effects on allies within 10 metres.

= 50~100 potions: Intermediate recovery effects on all allies within a 100~200 metre radius.

= More than 100: High recovery effect on all allies within 300 metres. (Every additional 5 recovery potions used will increase the range by 5 metres and recovery amount by 50.)

‘Great Sacrifice!’

Ark looked at the message window with bemusement. An advanced magic that recovered 800~1000 health was only possible with holy magic. If he used Great Sacrifice then he might be able to reverse the battle situation. But that thought was overwhelming to Ark. It had a reckless penalty where he had to use all the recovery potions in his bag!

At the moment he had 107 potions in his bag! 100 of it were the intermediate potions he took from Raiden. It cost 2000 gold to buy 100 intermediate potions in shops! Yet he had to use it to recover the health of the people here.....!

‘I’ve received 100 potions thanks to Raiden! Why now.....?’

How could he possibly use it in this way? Were they purposely taunting him by giving him 100 potions and then making him use it

like this? Even if he hit someone, it wasn't possible for him to kill them.

'But if this siege fails then there would be no other opportunity to defeat Alan. Then Sid.....'

His 5000 gold was confiscated because Sid was trapped in jail! Of course 5000 gold was a lot more than 2000.

'I may regret this decision! But.....I can't lose to Alan! Yes, I'll just have to extort more out of Raiden. But first I have to turn this siege around!'

Ark convinced himself and shouted with a voice filled with tears.

"Great Sacrifice!"

His bag automatically opened and 100 potions rose into the sky. The potions formed into a huge jar before scattering around the battlefield.

'Ah ah ah, my 2000 gold.....!'

Ark shed tears like a waterfall as he looked at the scattering potions. All that money gone. All that money certainly had a huge effect. The health of the Hermes Alliance began to recover at a tremendous pace. The effects of advanced Nursing were also successfully applied! The defense and health recovery was immediately converted to combat power. But the Hermes Alliance didn't use its powers to attack immediately. It was the first time that they had experienced such an absurd situation.

"Eh? Why has my defense increased?"

"The Miracle Nursing effect it says, what is that?"

"What is with the huge jar just then? Was there such a potion?"

"Do you know? This might be a pioneer's skill that we are seeing for the first time."

"Indeed, there are a lot of pioneer skills that we don't know about."

Then Ark shouted in a threatening noise.

“These damn slow beep—! Why are you just standing around chatting?”

Even though he had just wasted 2000 gold on their recovery. Why? His spirit heated up. Even though 1 minute and 1 second had passed, they were just standing around discussing the 107 potions that had scattered! Those stupid idiots haven't even grasped the situation.....Ark's resentment echoed through the battlefield in the form of curses. However, he didn't use intimidation for the effects. He really felt like cursing deep inside. It was a situation which caused Intimidation to have the best effect.

[-'Intimidation' has triggered a critical effect!]

The intimidating effect couldn't affect his allies. Thanks to that the Hermes Alliance wasn't affected but the members of the Dawn Blade coalition became frightened and had the morale decreased. Lowering morale in a battle had a significant impact on overall combat power. The laws of reality were also applied to the game.

'Intimidation' has lowered the courage and morale of all Dawn Blade coalition members in range by 30%.

Morale affects all troops no matter the size of the party. The most important role of a commander is to raise his troop's morale, if the moral of the troops under the commander falls then the effects of 'Command', 'Leadership', 'Tactics' and 'Strategy' will also fall until morale is recovered.

<The influence of the Dawn Blade commanders has decreased by 30 %.>

The morale of soldiers was clearly important in a battle. If there was high moral then the commanders could move the soldiers, but once moral falls then any strategy or order would fail.

'Intimidation can also be utilized in such a manner!'

It was indeed New World!

It was the miraculous effect of the combo of Advanced Nursing and Miracle Nursing! Therefore while the stats of the Dawn Blade members fell, the Hermes Alliance had their defense raised and health recovered. Thanks to the negative effect on the enemies and positive effect on allies, their combat power doubled.

“Their attacks have weakened!”

“With our increased defense and health, now is an opportunity!”

“The cavalry unit has also run out of mana! Now is the chance to beat them!”

The Hermes Alliance who had its spirit recovered shouted and ran. The cavalry troops who had constantly used buffs and healing magic had run out of mana.

“Catch Alan!”

“Inflict our sorrow on the mounted troops!”

With their high morale, the Hermes Alliance had cornered the cavalry troops.

“Sheesh, the catapults are already ruined. Retreat!”

Alan had exquisite timing.....he had used the opportunity to inflict a blow that increased his chances of winning the siege to 70%. But thanks to Ark’s Miracle combo, he had no choice but to retreat.

“God dammit, it should’ve ended then.....!”

Alan clutched his fist tightly. The Hermes Alliance had been halved. While one Defense Tower had been destroyed, Noel and Hamanechi were still stuck at the other one. The game should’ve been decided. He should’ve clinched it. However, he missed the chance because of the absurd potion jar.

‘Fortunately, the summoners and catapults are destroyed so the walls should remain intact.....’

If Noel and Hamanechi destroyed the tower then they would join the battle. Then he could no longer be confident of victory.

“Alan-nim.”

He turned his head to see Lariette walking from behind with a tired face. She was not the only one tired, the users had been playing the game for 20 hours. Then Alan remembered what happened on the battlefield and quickly explained.

“Lariette-nim, I apologise about what happened before.....”

“That’s enough. It happened.”

Then Lariette hesitated before saying.”

“I have something to say to Alan-nim.”

“Please say it.”

“No matter the results, after the siege I will withdraw from the guild.”

“Yes?” What is that.....is it because of what happened just now?”

“No, it’s not that. I’ve been thinking about it for a while.”

“For a while? Did you forget? If you’re with me then you can pass the entrance examination. I’m someone who will definitely pass so Lariette-nim will pass as well!”

“That’s right. I originally joined Alan-nim because of the examination. But.....that’s not all. I also wanted to meet a good person and play this game happily. I had hoped that partner was Alan-nim. But.....”

Lariette shook her head with a regretful expression.

“I’m not amused right now.”

“A fun game? I don’t see how that has anything to do with passing the exam!”

“You still don’t understand.”

“I don’t understand? Me? It is Lariette-nim that doesn’t understand a thing.”

“You never know.”

Lariette sighed and turned around.

“Alan-nim’s thoughts on the game are completely different from mine.”

“Lariette-nim, wait a minute!”

“Anyway, I’ve told you about my intentions. Then.....”

“Damn it, why on earth? How are you dissatisfied?”

The sound of something hitting the table could be heard. However, she already couldn’t hear it.

‘In such a situation.....he didn’t attack me.’

Lariette closed her eyes for a moment and remembered the situation. It was just something that happened in a game. To die or live wasn’t a very important issue. And yet, at that moment her heart was fluctuating. Ark stopped his sword. Why? She wanted to know the reason. She became tired from thinking about it so deeply. But the feeling when he stopped the sword and then the emotion that she felt when she looked into his eyes, she wanted to know what it meant.

‘I want to ask him. After we meet.....I want to ask.....’

However, if she was with Alan then she would have no chance to ask the question. So she decided to leave. After she became free then she would like to ask.....

“You need 100 more intermediate potions?”

Raiden asked in an astounded voice. After Alan retreated to the castle, Raiden was reorganizing his troops for a counterattack.

“It was because of the enormous potion that you evaded a crisis just now! That was a skill that I used!”

“It was a skill that you used?”

“Yes, and it used my 100 intermediate potions! You can ask the people surrounding me if you don’t believe it. You promised to supply me with the necessary materials for the siege so give it to me!”

Raiden nodded after a moment.

“Okay, then I’ll give it to you.”

“R-really? It’s not a lie?”

Ark asked again. In fact, he hadn’t expected much. But he was giving it obediently. Damn, if he knew then he would’ve said 300.

“Since you defeated the Defense Tower, you were more useful than expected. So you’ve qualified to receive it. But now right now. After we win the siege then I’ll calculate it. I’ve used almost all the guild funds on the siege. I can’t afford to pay for that many potions if I lose the siege.”

“Well.....I guess I have to concede that much.”

“But it is frankly worrying. Alan ruined our catapults. Since our summoners are also dead, I don’t know if the castle walls can be broken in time.....”

Raiden said with a sigh. If the special siege weapons broke down then users wouldn’t be able to repair it. And since this was a siege battle, NPC craftsmen wouldn’t have been hired. But Ark just grinned and said.

“Okay, I can resolve that.”

Ark and Raiden moved towards where the catapults were. Then he immediately had the raccoons inspect it.

“It should take half a day.”

“If it is half a day for NPCs then that is 2 hours. Is that enough time to reorganize the troops?”

“They can fix it?”

“Of course.”

Ark nodded and made a circle with his fingers.

“But the cost of repairs is 50 gold. 20 catapults means 1000 gold.”

Raiden muttered under his breath.

“That greedy bastard.....he’s also charging for the repairs?”

“Doesn’t everyone have to eat? If you don’t want to then don’t.”

“I understand. Then a credit note.....”

“I don’t want empty promises. Shall we sign a contract first?”

The reason that Raiden was being so obedient was his need to win the siege. Since he was willing to sacrifice everything to win, it was a golden chance for Ark. Once he regained the money from Alan, he would’ve also obtained Raiden’s.

Merchant’s agreement.

<Contractor: Raiden=Ark>

If the Hermes Guild Leader Raiden wins the siege, once he becomes Lord of Silvana he will give Ark 100 intermediate potions as well as 1000 gold for the repair cost of the catapults.

In the end, Raiden drew up an agreement through a merchant in the Hermes guild.

‘I’m a bit uncomfortable but I had to do it.....’

Raiden had no other choice.

‘I’ve secured 3000 gold!’

Ark’s heart rate rose at the sight of the contract. It was money that would pay for war costs. It wasn’t a few hundred old but thousands of gold. After making up his mind to knock Alan down, that was the biggest problem. He’ll say it again. War costs a lot of money. That means that people who go to war will spend money like it was water. Thousands of people would have their money rolling on the ground. Then wasn’t there a chance for him to obtain some extra funds in this situation?

‘Yes, I’ve thought of everything.’

Although there were still a few hours left in the siege, Raiden was busy making plans to occupy the castle. Therefore he was paying no attention to where Ark was resting inconspicuously.

“Snake, from now on go around the battlefield and swallow whatever you can.”

Ark commanded Snake but he also gave a few precautions. In Nagaran, the probability of users dropping items was less than 1%. In addition, there was a high probability that only potions would drop from the bag. So Ark didn’t consider it at all until he destroyed the Defense Tower, and then he changed his mind.

Improved Crossbow (Magic)

Weapon type: Crossbow

Attack: 15~35

Durability: 55/70

Weight: 20

User restriction: Level 80 or more

The latest modifications have been made to the traditional crossbow. The frame of the bow has been replaced with steel smelted using special techniques, increasing the damage and range

of the crossbow by 3 times. However as it is heavier and more difficult to use, the shooting speed will decrease a lot.

<Option: Attack +5, Range +20 metres, Firing Speed -30%>

While attacking a bunker, one of the archers had dropped a crossbow.

‘Yes, the probability of dropping items in Nagaran is low. But that doesn’t mean that it absolutely won’t drop!’

Even if it was 0.1%, there were still 4000 people. Wouldn’t the items start dropping once the body count piles up? In addition, only high level players participated in the siege! With luck, there was a huge probability of hitting at least one jackpot!

Fortunately, everyone’s nerves were focused on the end of the siege. If they saw him looking around dead bodies then a stir would be caused. No, even if he saw items fall he wouldn’t dare pick it up. But if it was Snake, no one would notice it snooping around the dead bodies.

‘This is a huge opportunity to take the items!’

“Ssak ssak ssak!”

Snake boldly moved through the gap between corpses. Ark was in a situation where he couldn’t afford to lose any money.

‘After all, money is money.....that Alan, I won’t forgive him for killing Roco!’

Ark’s rage once again built up in him during the resting period. Anyway.....it was another reason why he couldn’t forgive Alan. The Hermes Alliance had suffered a lot of damage during the attack. Hermes and the Silver Moon guild had lost 40% of their forces while Fugetsu and Dark Eden had also received considerable damage. In JusticeMan’s party, Roco and 6 rehabilitation members had died with only 4 surviving. Out of the 70 NPCs, 30 had died from Lancel Village and Jackson. After Roco died, the rehabilitation

members started rampaging, causing their formation to collapse and more individual combat. Since Dark Eden's level was low, it was too premature for them to take part in individual combat. It was understandable considering the war.

'Although the deaths of the NPCs weigh on my mind, it is okay since the elders expected there to be some casualties. The war has been quite profitable, so I should pay attention to maintaining my troops.'

While they were repairing the catapults, Ark took off their clothes and headed towards the well. Even a 1% increase in defense would raise the survival rate. Thus he used his laundry skill to increase the defense of leather armour by 5% for 4 hours. All the skills he learnt had a use somewhere. Roco was dead but he could maintain the additional effects of laundry since Ark learned the skill off her. Well thanks to the circumstances, Ark had a happy smile on his face even while washing dozens of armour.

"Everything's sorted. Now all that's left is to win the siege. And I will knock Alan down and become rich. Washing dozens of clothes is such a wonderful feeling! Hahaha!"

Alan had led a unit and appeared directly. The results of the siege hinged on his survival. Hermes had a huge problem when they couldn't attack Alan. However, the attack failed thanks to Ark and he retreated after receiving a huge blow. And Noel and Hamanechi haven't even joined up with Hermes yet. As soon as they destroyed the defense tower the chances of winning was 6:4. No, since Hermes was superior it would probably 7:3.

"It's possible to win. No, I have to win. Sid's 5000 gold is hanging on this! And the 3000 gold from Raiden! That is 8000 gold from this war. In addition, there are the 30% proceeds from the castle! All those things are mine once I beat Alan. I have to do whatever it takes to win!"

But.....Ark was only thinking about Nagaran. There were other things happening in the world that wasn't visible to his eyes. It was unclear just how much money this huge battle would take.

The remaining time was only 7 hours!

A bad relationship with Alan. And a battle worth 8000 gold! The final phase of the siege where deceit and betrayals were swirling was beginning.

Cash Walker

“Shit.....”

He cursed with a sigh. Things were getting all twisted and dirty. Alan was a part of the so called elite 1% of South Korea. He was born into a rich family and received an education worthy of his background. When he entered a prestigious university, it was natural that he would graduate with top honours. He was always at the heart of the topic and never failed at anything he worked on. Success was something that came naturally for him. It was natural. Out of the 99% of humans, he was part of the 1% elite. It was also like that in New World. And it had been like that until recently. Since he was always at the heart of the topic and had become an enviable existence to everyone. Users ran around until they got nosebleeds obeying Alan and NPCs were the same. However.....

“Ark.....!”

He had screwed up everything. An unexpected siege, an unexpected battle situation and Lariette unexpectedly announced that she would be leaving the guild. He was at the centre of all these events. That’s right, Ark.....!

He didn’t understand why Ark was so good. He didn’t have abundant funds like Alan and he hadn’t been playing longer like the pioneers. Nor did he have a strong organization like Raiden with the Hermes guild. That guy didn’t have anything to boast about yet he kept on grabbing Alan’s ankle.

“I will never let him.”

Alan bit at his lips until it became bloody. If someone looked impertinent then he had to punish them severely. That was the sentiment Alan had about Ark so far. But today Alan realised that he had been too comfortable. He never considered that those guys

could do any damage. The stray dogs will become fiercer as they become hungrier and snap unprovoked at a person more excellent than them. It was the lowly nature of guys like that.

‘Then I have to show those guys my power. I’ll show it until those dogs won’t dare bark twice. I’m going to finish him in this siege and end this!’

Alan sneered.

‘After that I can convince Lariette again. What can she do by herself? Although I’m excited thinking about it, I can’t go outside.’

If the situation goes as planned then Alan was sure to win. Alan’s side had suffered a lot of damage in the opening campaign. But Alan had succeeded in his original purpose of removing the magicians and catapults. In addition, the presence of one Defense Tower left means that the durability and regeneration of the walls was boosted. The Hermes Alliance also had the burden of having to break the walls within a time limit.

‘With one Defense Tower remaining, breaking the walls with no siege weapons will be difficult. If we can endure for 3~4 hours then it is our victory.’

The remaining time was 7 hours. Even if the castle walls collapsed after 4 hours, it would be difficult for the Hermes guild to occupy the castle. The next 3~4 hours were the crossroads in the game! And since Hermes lost the catapults, they would never break down the walls within 4 hours.

‘The result of this siege is already clear.’

After visualizing the situation in his mind, Alan gave a relaxed smile. However, his smile didn’t last long.

Bang bang double bang!

Suddenly he heard a roar from the window. It was a familiar sound.....a member of the guild immediately identified the sound.

“Alan, those guys have started to attack with the catapults again!”

“What? Catapult?”

“Yes, the situation is urgent. The repair rate of the walls cannot keep up with the damage.”

“What nonsense are you saying.....the catapults were destroyed!”

Alan could not understand the situation. Once the siege begins then they were no longer able to procure materials from the outside. Yet they’ve managed to repair the catapults. The Hermes Alliance must’ve hired craftsmen to repair it so quickly. But he never received information that any of the NPC mercenaries they hired were craftsmen. Yet they managed to repair the catapults in the end. The catapults had definitely received a lot of damage from his concentrated attacks.

‘But how?’

He figured out the reason after he looked over the wall. The NPCs repairing the catapults had pricked ears with a broad tail attached. It was the NPCs mercenaries who had shown up with Ark and Dark Eden and fired the portable cannons that did a lot of damage. Those mercenaries were craftsmen? After he saw Ark standing next to the mercenaries, sparks flew from his eyes.

“Ark! It’s you again?”

“Sir Alan. The remaining Defense Tower also isn’t going to last long. At this rate.....”

“There’s no need to panic!”

Alan roughly ordered and turned his body.

“It doesn’t change the fact that there are only 7 hours left. If we manage to defend the throne for 7 hours then it is our victory. We’ll concentrate all our energies on protecting the castle walls for the moment. And you head to the courtroom and tell the paladins to be prepared.

“The paladins.....you’re using them again?”

“It was a promise with the Archbishop. If the castle is about to be

taken away then there won't be any trouble.”

“I understand.”

The guild members hurriedly ran to give support.

Bang bang double bang!

The rocks flew through the sky at an incredible speed and crashed into the castle wall. It blew debris all over the place with the durability of the walls noticeably decreasing.

‘Wow, this, unbelievable……!’

Raiden swallowed his saliva as he watched the scene. The raccoon clan had started repairing the catapults and after 2 hours they looked like new. But they didn't simply repair it.

“Hmm, I don't understand.”

“Why did they design this part?”

“If they did this then the range and damage would be much better……”

When they first started repairing, the raccoons became confused about the design and started chattering. Ark didn't miss the conversation.

“So you can raise the performance of the catapults if you have the materials?”

“The materials aren't necessary. No, we actually have to remove several things to raise the performance. They put wasteful equipment in which lowered the performance.”

“They seemed to have put several unnecessary parts in to ensure that anybody could use it……if an expert uses it then the continuous

shooting speed would be quicker.”

“Experts?”

“A craftsman like us.”

After his answer Ark heard the sound of pouring gold coins.

“Then wait a minute. I’ll ask Raiden if you can convert it.”

Ark ran like the wind and explained it to Raiden.

“Upgrade? Then of course they have to remodel it!”

Raiden welcomed the speedy solution with open arms. Then he noticed Ark’s face as Ark replied.

“But it requires some valuable materials to convert the catapult. It isn’t possible to explain the trade secrets of the NPC craftsmen.....therefore they’ll demonstrate the performance but they’ll have to operate it directly.”

“.....Is it money?”

It fit perfectly well. By now, Raiden was able to 100% grasp Ark’s nature. Ark was like a cunning merchant as he made a proposal.

“The upgrade cost and labour costs is 30 gold per NPC. So that’s 600 gold in total. How about it? Because of my high intimacy with the NPCs, I finally persuaded them to agree to this repair price. Aren’t you thankful? Please decide as soon as possible. There’s no time.”

He could earn money on the battlefield. Once Ark realised that, he persistently bit at Raiden’s pocket. Although his real profession was Dark Walker, Ark was more like a Cash Walker. And in New World, Raiden was a user strong in a specialized field. It was impossible for him not to figure out that Ark was running a scam. However, it was a situation where even 1 minute was critical!

“.....I’ll put it on the account.”

Raiden wrote up another contract with an expression that looked like he was eating shit.

“That’s it. Now please hurry!”

After taking the contract, Ark hurried back to the raccoons and immediately made them start work. In fact, Ark did not have that much time. Apart from stepping on Alan, the contracts with Raiden relied on him occupying the castle. If he didn’t then Ark wouldn’t get anything. The 100 intermediate recovery potions and all the costs of repairs and upgrades totalled 1,600 gold! If he didn’t win then it would be difficult to claim the money. Fortunately, the raccoons were the best craftsmen NPCs and soon finished all the work.

“This is the upgraded catapult?”

Raiden’s face showed an expression of disappointment when he looked at the changed appearance of the catapult. However, his face brightened after watching the performance. After the remodelling, the range and damage had been upgraded. In addition, it normally took users 4~5 minutes to use it but the raccoons only took 2 minutes! The firing speed was 2 times faster.

.....He was able to confirm its power.

The durability of the walls fell at a faster rate than when attacked by the golems. With the longer range, they didn’t have to worry about the arrows flying from the walls. Ark laughed when he saw that people from Dawn Blade were in a state of panic.

“How is it? Isn’t this worth 80 gold?”

“Well, I guess.....”

Raiden scowled at Ark.

‘What on earth is with this kid? He leads a group of NPCs. And the warrior NPCs are much stronger than usual. And there is also the cats who flew around at the beginning.....how on earth did he manage to hire such NPCs?’

Even though he was a pioneer, he couldn’t imagine Ark’s game system.

‘And why is he so shameless about taking money.....’

Raiden shook his head. He was a very scary guy who would start biting once he found a weakness. In New World, it was the first time that he had seen such a man. Nevertheless, he still felt like swearing. Ark had successfully negotiated the price of the money. Although it was an appropriate price and it was necessary, Raiden was still getting his money stolen. In fact, it wasn't that different from Ark's view on life.

'If you receive a meal, there is no reason to mourn the price.'

While Ark used scams to swindle money, at least he never PKed anyone. But he never does anything free of charge.

Give and take!

Wasn't it natural that he receives a prize for a favour? Thanks to that mindset, Ark felt no shame even while he was biting at Raiden. After all, when the crisis is over then the Hermes Alliance will immediately become profitable.

Once the catapults were repaired, the Dawn Blade coalition immediately went on the attack. But they couldn't deal enough damage to the Hermes Alliance. Fugetsu and Dark Eden joined to rally the troops, but the situation was less dangerous because Alan wasn't there to directly influence them. Once the attack was completely blocked, the Hermes Alliance had a chance to win.

-The 2 Defense Towers were destroyed.

*The shield applied to the castle walls has been reduced by 100%.

* The recovery rate of the durability of the walls has been reduced by 100%.

Since the start of the siege, they accomplished the feat in only 19 hours. Noel and Hamanechi had continuously attacked the Defense Tower. Unlike Ark's forces, they were pushed hard by the defense and only 300 survivors re-joined the main force.

"Currently we have 900 people but those guys have received considerably more damage. Since the Defense Towers are

destroyed, it is only a matter of time until the walls fall. Although they have the favourable terrain of the castle to dominate the battle.....it is not enough. No, we will certainly win!”

Raiden became red in the face from repeatedly shouting the good news.

“Keep on attacking! Not long now!”

Raiden waved his mace around and yelled until his throat was sore. Then.....

Tu tu tu tung, kwakwang, kwarururu!

With a roar, the gate and walls eventually fell apart.

“The whole army, charge!”

“Wah ah ah!”

“Sweep them all away. The last victory will go to the Hermes Alliance!”

Raiden and the 900 users rushed into the castle shouting wildly. There was no place for the Hermes Alliance or Dawn Blade coalition to withdraw anymore. It was the final decisive battle!

A fierce battle was waged as if a match was thrown into oil. While airplanes holding missiles flew about and a number bomb destroyed several hundred thousand people in modern warfare, the one that inserted their flag at the end in the enemy camp was the infantry.

War in New World was no different. The magicians and priests from both sides had already fallen. The only thing left was the warriors with high health and defense. Which one had the higher level? Who had stronger equipment or had more potions? It was those things that would determine the final result. But it was a little bit different battling inside the castle compared to when they were fighting outside. It wasn't a vast empty plain. Inside the castle, it was densely packed. In other words, it meant that the hundreds of people couldn't just stampede into the castle. The watchtowers were also placed in strategically important positions. From the standpoint

of the attackers, they had to quickly take off the various facilities with as little damage as possible!

On the other hand, the results depended on how long the other side could defend and hold out. Of course, this required more advanced tactics than all-out war. In that sense, Raiden was a professional.

“There is no need to rush. After the walls crumbled, the morale of those guys are already at the bottom. Hermes and Silver Moon will take the front while Noel and Hamanечи will take the left and right. Fugetsu and Dark Eden will deal with the remaining forces. Now 2nd line, advance and occupy the watchtowers in the front!”

Raiden quickly ordered simultaneously.

Square, barracks, and above the collapsed walls.....the warriors' bloody battles spread out all over the place. Ark and the survivors of Dark Eden were also in the middle of the confusion.

“Now it's time to get revenge for Hyungs, Jjak-tung!”

Tazza breathed out hot air from his nostrils and lifted his dagger. The thieves, Cross and the Meow all followed. However, Ark became surprised and shook his head.

“No, Dark Eden will stay in the back and assist.”

“What?”

“We've already received considerable damage. Unless the battle situation becomes worse, there is no reason to go out and receive more damage. Our purpose for coming here is to defeat Alan. But if we die without even seeing Alan's face then how unfair will that be?”

“Certainly but.....”

“But.....the people who've died.....as the leader of Dark Eden, won't you let us fight and defend their honour?”

Cross said as he couldn't agree with the decision. Ark sighed and shook his head.

“Yes, I know that it isn't suitable behaviour for a knight. I will take the

blame. But losing you will be even more painful than your condemnation. Since my cowardly self cannot stand to see any of the Sylphid Knights die. I'll receive all your criticisms as long as you concentrate and survive. I'm not asking, this is a command."

"Ark.....You are really.....!"

Cross looked at Ark impressed. He was a commander who thinks of the lives of his soldiers more than his honour! What kind of soldiers wouldn't follow such a commander? The rehabilitation members and the thieves also nodded with a face as impressed as Cross'.

"I'll follow your command."

Ark breathed a sigh of relief.

'I cannot lose any more NPCs!'

Thanks to the repeated combat, Dark Eden was severely damaged. Including JusticeMan and Roco, 6 members of the rehabilitation group had died with only 4 surviving. Out of the 70 NPCs, 30 had died. It was understandable since it would be difficult to take part in the war with their levels. But after considering the damage, Ark had to make a decision. Since it was likely that they would win the battle, there was no need to go out and receive unnecessary damage. Then Cross asked in a worried tone.

"But to fight like that in such a confusing battle....."

"Don't worry about it."

Ark smiled towards Fugetsu's guild Leader Baron and shouted.

"Baron-nim, please go forward first."

"Yes? Us?"

"We're just handling the remnants in the rear. All of them will have received considerable damage so it is possible for Fugetsu to handle it."

"Of course, but Dark Eden can also do that....."

Baron hesitated and said. Ark gave a friendly laugh and replied.

“We have already decided the proceeds at stake already. But aren’t the other guilds supposed to get a stake depending on how much achievements they have? It is a great opportunity for some accomplishments.”

“T-then.....?”

“We destroyed the Defense Tower together. Therefore Fugetsu is on the same level as other guilds. We’ll definitely support from behind so just give everything you have into fighting!”

“Wow, thank you very much! Everyone charge!”

Every time they killed an enemy in the siege, they got a point. When the siege finishes, the leader of the alliance will give compensation based on the contribution.....it was merit system. However, Fugetsu were just advancing during the Defense Tower attack so didn’t receive that much points. Because of that, Baron received glared from his guild. After Ark drove home his point, Baron didn’t hesitate to rush out and attack the enemies.

But it was too late. People in the Dawn Blade coalition were quite strong. Fugetsu were the weakest in the Hermes Alliance and couldn’t kill the opponents.

“These bastards are only level 130 yet they’re still trying to attack us?”

“Did they become overconfident just because the walls collapsed?”

“Ugh, these guys.....are strong!”

The Baron became confused after his rush was pushed back. And he tried to retreat too late and the path behind was already blocked. Ark and Dark Eden pushed towards where Fugetsu was.

“Don’t panic! We can win.”

“Everybody gather! Help out the Fugetsu guild!”

Ark pretended to care and fired the cannons blindly as they pushed through enemy territory towards Fugetsu. Thanks to that, Baron and Fugetsu had no choice but to fight the enemy with even more

determination.

“Damn, since Dark Eden is helping out like that it isn’t possible to run away.....”

“Sink or swim!”

Eventually Fugetsu became Dark Eden’s shield thanks to Ark’s plan.

‘If this continues then it will become difficult.’

Ark summoned Dedric and ordered.

“Mmm, the fragrant smell of blood from the battlefield is stimulating my appetite.”

“Stop sounding like a pervert and look around from the sky. Tell me if any enemy unit tries to join up with the ones Fugetsu are fighting. Let me know the location in coordinates.”

“Sheesh, always making me do these kinds of things!”

Although Dedric complained, he clearly did as ordered.

“Master, there are three or four guys moving at your 3 o’clock.”

“Okay, artillerymen move to the right and shoot them!”

“Master, there is a guy playing dead at your 8 o’clock.”

“Hyung-nims, please step on him!”

With Dedric’s help, Ark was able to use the artillerymen with their cannons to defeat the enemy. Since Ark couldn’t afford for Baron to die, he swung his sword and intercepted the opponents. Meanwhile, Ark also summoned Deimos after recovering his spiritual power.

“Deimos, be prepared for any surprises and protect the artillerymen as well as Cross.”

Clack clack, clack clack clack!

Thanks to Deimos defending in front of the artillerymen, a perfect formation was made.

‘Huhuhu, this is like I’m swimming on land.’

Anyway, the nearby enemies also fell thanks to the efforts of Fugetsu working together. And after 3 hours passed, the events were slowly decided. When they collided outside, there were some doubts about how the levels of people in Dawn Blade were so high. But compared to the Hermes Alliance, they were somewhat lacking.

“I’ve captured the barracks!”

“The East Watchtower was knocked out!”

“We’ve also overwhelmingly dominated the battle in the annex!”

“There is no more power to stop our advance!”

The good news was conveyed.

“It was a tough fight but everyone has done well.”

Raiden looked at his forces with thrilled eyes. After a long battle, they’ve finally reached the final stop in Silvana.

“The resistance has 300 forces left!”

“Okay, the end is in sight! All the remains is the Hall of Glory! Without a doubt, Alan will be prepared for a conflict there. Except for the ones still fighting, all troops rush the Hall of Glory!”

Raiden entered the castle leading 300 people. Ark quickly grasped the opportunity and led Dark Eden. Thanks to Fugetsu falling for Ark’s temptations to fight, Dark Eden was able to join the main forces without any damage. Of course, Raiden wouldn’t eagerly fight until the end. With the military situation tilted, the safest place was next to Raiden. If he was near Raiden who was the leader of the Hermes Alliance, he could avoid any danger until the decisive moment. He would also get the chance to strike the final blow to Alan.

‘Okay, now should I watch the figure of Alan fall?’

“Kill everybody visible!”

Raiden was in good spirits and moved to the upper floor. And they

finally arrived at a place blocked by a huge iron door.

Hall of Glory!

It was the room inside the castle that symbolized the Lord's control. The iron door that was battered by the warriors' maces and Ark's cannons soon shattered.

"Alan, there's no place for you to run to!"

"Damn it, stop them!"

Alan's desperate voice was heard from a corner. The two groups clashed with a violent ringing sound that shook the room. Dawn Blade's last line of defense in the Hall of Glory numbered 250 people. They were also the members selected from the guild with considerable skills. But the Hermes Alliance had 300 people. They also had an overwhelming strength thanks to the pioneers.

"Oh spirit of deterioration, turn everything to ashes. Hellfire!"

Jewel and Duke had survived the battle and used their wide area skills. A fire pillar roared and moved around while dozens of arrows came pouring down like a shower. Since the magicians and priests had died, the power of the wide area skill was absolute. Following Raiden's commands, the warriors quickly cornered their opponents and Dawn Blade's health steadily decreased. However, soon a wide area magic was also invoked from someone in Dawn Blade.

"Blades of wind, Tornado!"

"Kuaaaaak!"

Numerous blades swept through the Hermes Alliance. Users who had low health collapsed.

"Sheesh, these guys still had a magician left?"

Raiden cursed and looked at the magician.

Ark reflexively looked and felt momentarily breathless. The last magician in Dawn Blade.....standing next to Alan was the elf Lariette.

‘Still.....you’re alive.....’

At that time Raiden shouted.

“Duke, shoot that woman!”

Duke quickly held his posture and pulled the bow taut. After using wide area magic, Lariette had exposed her body! It wasn’t a situation where she could avoid Duke’s sniper skills. But why? Ark grasped the situation and ran forward, blocking Duke’s view.

“What are you doing, you idiot!”

Duke shouted at Ark and fired the arrow. But thanks to the late timing, the arrow bounced off Alan’s shield.

“Such a stupid child.....!”

Duke spat out, but Ark ignored him to give a bittersweet look towards Lariette hiding behind Alan’s body.

‘Doing such a thing even after Lariette chose Alan.....’

She had been with Alan for a long time. But when he saw her helping Alan on the battlefield, he couldn’t help feeling terrible. A defeated feeling or maybe a feeling of betrayal.....but Ark still didn’t want to see her die. Even there was a chance to attack with the artillerymen many times, Ark didn’t give the order. But he knew he couldn’t take such an ambiguous attitude forever.

It had been 20 minutes since the battle started and 400 users had already collapsed in the Hall of Glory. Combining the remaining troops from both sides, there were 130 people left. Only 30 of them were from Dawn Blade. If someone saw the chance then they would attack Lariette. On the other hand, for long distance attacks they only had Duke and the artillerymen from Dark Eden. Since Ark blocked Duke, the only chance was Dark Eden’s artillery. Once or twice was fine, but if he kept on protecting her then he wouldn’t be able to feign ignorance anymore.

‘Yes, this is war. She knows that too.’

Ark sighed and ordered the artillerymen to target Lariette.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang! A violent sound suddenly came from the rear of the Hermes Alliance. Ark flinched and turned around with a look of horror. What appeared to be the paladins came rushing in and squeezed the Hermes Alliance into a wedge formation.

“Are they.....?”

He had forgotten about it. When they smashed the front gates, the 20 cavalry troops that came out with Alan! Although a few of them had fallen in the confusion outside, there were still 17 left.

“He wanted them to rush us from the back!”

The 17 paladins joined forces with the remnants of Dawn Blade and trampled the Hermes Alliance.

“Heh, did you think I would give this room to you so easily?”

Alan’s face was filled with confidence.

[-You have acquired 1 Intermediate Recovery Potion.]

Ssak.....

Snake checked the information window and sighed. Snake had been wandering the battlefield and became covered in dust and blood.

‘There might be some useful items that have dropped. I only believe in you, Snake.’ After receiving Ark’s order, it had spent many hours searching. Snake searched the corpses really eagerly in order to please Ark. When something glittered, it crossed the battlefield with determination and swallowed it.....

Ssak, ssak ssak ssak

Snake raised its shabby face. Ark’s face flashed through its head. Snake knew. Ark had a happy look on his face whenever he saw money, not to mention items. In fact, Snake didn’t know the value of items but worked hard to learn what ‘items that would

become money' for its Master. But so far it hadn't eaten anything of use. All it had swallowed was a couple of potions. If Snake returned like this then Ark would probably be quite disappointed.

Ssak.....

Tears welled up in Snake's blue eyes.

'I'm counting on you Snake.' Ark's voice was going around its head. But it didn't eat an item of worth that would make Master satisfied.

Maybe Ark would think that Snake was like Dedric and Deimos. That would be so unfair and vexing. It just wanted to please Master in every way possible.....but why was it so incompetent? Eventually tears flowed down Snake's innocent face.

Suddenly a message window flashed in front of Snake.

You have manifested a new power.

Stalking (Beginner, Species Characteristics): You have gained a new skill thanks to your efforts in searching for something hidden. Your tongue has the ability to connect the sense of touch and smell together. It is possible to identify everything around you using the tip of your tongue and you can even identify what direction to go to if there is a collection of targets. This ability will provide crucial clues to keep track of hidden items and enemies.

<You can find all items in a 200 metre range. In addition, you can determine the direction of movement by looking at past traces for 1 hour. When the level rises, the range and search time will increase.

Mana consumption: 30>

Ssak?

Snake's eyes widened.

In fact, stalking was a skill that an Alamone Larvae would learn when it was born from its mother. However, Snake grew up with Ark so it didn't have that opportunity. After wandering off from its owner and swallowing items, it naturally learned the skill. Although the

information window was supposed to appear in front of Ark, Snake was too far away. Snake who couldn't read didn't understand the contents, but it felt like its senses were keener.

Swaeek.....swaeek!

It immediately flicked its tongue and smelled something plausible from far away. It was a familiar smell, the smell of items worth money that Ark liked. Snake immediately followed the smell. And after a while, it discovered a paladin's body. With a body that had ripened, it was one of the cavalry riders that had harassed Ark. Snake became angry and struck the paladin with its tail. That guy deserved to die for pestering Master. As revenge, Snake crawled underneath the armour. As expected.....a gauntlet was buried in the corpse.

[-You have acquired 'Gauntlet of Glory.']

Swaek! Saek saek saek!

Snake swallowed it and immediately screamed. Although it wasn't able to verify the information window- but with just a look- it was able to instinctively sense money. Now it was able to return Master's expectations. Snake looked around with greedy eyes. It wanted to find other things. Unfortunately, the gauntlet was the only item there. It wasn't possible so Snake was about to move to another place.

"Now. A lot of the Dawn Blade members were killed but there is still hope. In this battle, a blow in the back can also reduce moral!"

The paladins suddenly rushed charging out and rushed to the rear of the attacking forces. Snake who was hiding under the corpses became worried and secretly chased after them. The armoured knights would drop fairly good items. If they were going to fight then some of them would die and it could pick up the items. In other words, if Snake followed them then there was another chance to get good items.

Saek saek saek.....

There was a grin at Snake's mouth.....a familiar smile. It was an expression that was normally seen on Ark's face.

Final Winner?

“Heung, even with that it’s only going to extend the time until you lose. Crush them!”

Raiden led the troops and rushed in. Although 30 people died from the paladins’ surprise attacks, the Hermes Alliance still had around 100 people. On the other hand, with the paladins the Dawn Blade coalition only had 50 people. The difference was twice as much. In addition, the damage of the paladins weren’t that strong. While on horseback outside the castle, their offensive dealt heavy damage to the magicians, but most of the users gathered in the Hall of Glory were users with high defense. It wasn’t so easy to hurt them. No, since they had twice as many troops then there was still a large difference.

“Ark, it is time for the final stage. Let’s go!”

“No, please wait a moment.”

Ark stood in front of Jjak-tung and said. In this situation it was clear that the Hermes Alliance had the overwhelming advantage but.....

‘What on earth?’

Ark looked at Alan strangely. Alan definitely looked uneasy before. But when the paladins appeared he immediately changed. He just sat back and watched the Hermes Alliance attack with a relaxed face. It was like a subtle sense of provocation was coming from him.....!

Ark was soon able to confirm the ominous feeling.

“Kill the enemies with the power of God, Divine Field!”

The moment the two troops were about to crash into each other, Alan used a wide area magic. A blue light spread like a wave along the floor. But the soldiers from the Hermes Alliance didn’t pay any

attention. Alan's Holy Knight skills were fairly well known. It was natural because Alan was famous. Among them, the holy magic that only exerted a lethal force on the undead. However to normal monsters and users it wasn't an intimidating skill. If it was damage received from a distance, then it would deal at most 70 damage. It was like a tickle for warriors with health around 3000 points.

"Just ignore it!"

"Heh, he probably wants to save mana.....is that why he's using these skills?"

"It is lucky that we've managed to back Holy Knight Alan into a corner."

The warriors snorted and laughed. However, it didn't take long until it turned into screaming.

"Divine field!"

The armour of the knights abruptly became white and red hot at the same time the spell was chanted. The floor became so hot that it turned blue. Including Alan it was 18 people! The divine field overlapped 18 times. The wide area magic dealt 1000 damage!

"Keuahahak!"

The fierce warriors had their health decreased by half as they were wrapped in the blue flames. The warriors who were barely out of the range quickly pulled out potions to recover from the incredible damage. Surprised words emerged from Raiden's mouth.

"What, what the? Isn't Divine Field a special skill of the Holy Knight?"

"T-then.....these guys are all Holy Knights?"

"No way!"

Cries of shock and distress burst from the Hermes Alliance. And Raiden roughly shook his head.

"That's impossible. Holy Knight is a hidden profession. It isn't possible to change professions so easily!"

“Yes, they must have used other magic to cheat!”

“Divine field has a long cool down.”

“It must be the last desperate struggle. Don’t be scared to attack!”

The warriors swung their weapons and ran up again. Then Alan smiled and murmured coldly.

“It is certainly the last desperate struggle. But that last struggle isn’t something so trivial. Defense Aura, Elemental Aura and Warrior’s Strength!”

He overlapped 3 of the Holy Knight’s special skills! Alan raised their defense, strength and elemental resistance, as well as increasing their willpower and total health by 20%. The Holy Knight’s skills were strongest in a group! But since there were 2 times as much troops it wouldn’t make that much difference. No, it couldn’t be. However.....

“Defense aura, Elemental aura, Warrior’s Strength!”

Once again the knights’ armours glowed so they were using the same skill? At the same time, the aura was overlapped 18 times. It was an enormous boost in defense and health! Even the attacks of the level 180 pioneers weren’t able to properly hit. In addition, the health went up so much that it didn’t even appear to decrease. Since they were unable to hit them, the soldiers ran around attacking the other members while avoiding Alan and the knights.

“Come on, there is only 40 minutes left.”

Alan said in a relaxed tone as he looked out the window. On a hill far away, the hourglass that signalled the siege deadline was already reaching the bottom. Alan only had to hold out for 40 more minutes. If no one occupied the throne then the siege would’ve failed.

“Everybody start shooting at once!”

After seeing the situation, Ark ordered the bombardment to start. However, the attacks were blocked by the knight’s shields.

.....It was truly impregnable!

“What, what is up with these ridiculous guys.....!”

Raiden's face darkened. Since the knights protected Alan and the throne in a circular formation, there was no way to access it. Also, the damage dealers such as magicians or thieves had all died a while ago thanks to their low defense. In this situation, he didn't know if they could get through the knight's wall of defense in the time limit. No, if they tried to attack with force then they might get exterminated instead.

“Damn, there's not much time remaining.....!”

Raiden's lips went dry at the sight of the falling sand. Ark was also impatient as well. He had thought it was over. So what was with the absurd turn at the last moment? If this siege failed like this then all his efforts would be for nothing. Sid would rot in prison and he wouldn't be able to get his 5,000 gold back. But was that all? The potions and repair costs that he would've received from Raiden would disappear into thin air. The damage would be thousands of gold.....!

It was just like a death sentence for Ark.

‘Even if I die, I have to make the siege succeed!’

It happened when Ark started getting restless.

Saek saek saek?

He heard a familiar sound at his feet. When Ark lowered his head, Snake immediately climbed up and rubbed against his face.

‘Eh? Why is Snake here?’

Ark soon had a strange thought in his head. While Snake's charm always made Ark laugh, now was not the time for Snake to be playing. However, whenever Snake rubbed its body against Ark it meant that it had something to vomit out. And it would move its head from side to side as if asking for praise.

‘Ah, that's how Snake looks when it has collected something that I

would praise it for. Then.....'

Ark took a deep breath and removed the item. After looking at the information window, he felt refreshed and full of ideas.

Gauntlet of Glory (Rare)

Armour type: Steel Gauntlet

Defense power: 75

Durability: 55/90

Weight: 70

User restriction: Level 150 or more Holy Knight.

A gauntlet filled with amazing power that was specially designed for Holy Knights who have received God's ancient power. Ordinary people could never find or even use this gauntlet. In addition, if the Holy Knight doesn't serve the ancient God of the religion that manufactured the gauntlets then they won't be able to draw out the gauntlet's true power.

<Option: Strength +10, Health +500>

<Special Option: You can use the power of 'Divine Copy.' Divine Copy can reproduce any Holy Magic from the same religion. However, you can't select the target that the spell is applied to and the same magic will only have 70% of the original skill. If the person who you replicated the skill from dies or escapes from a 10 metre range then the copied magic is cancelled.

Mana consumption: 300 >

A rare item! Although the stats weren't that amazing for a rare item, that wasn't the important part.

'Divine copy?'

It was a special option that could replicate the magic of other people!

When he saw that option, all of Ark's questions were answered. Although it was a hidden profession, there was no law that there could only be one person with that occupation. However, in order to maintain the uniqueness of the profession the system would have to limit it. If so, having 18 people with the same hidden profession didn't make sense. Moreover, there would be a problem with the balance of the game if there were that many Holy Knights.

'The answer is the gauntlet!'

Ark stared at the knights suspiciously. Not surprisingly, they were all wearing gauntlets and items similar to what Snake vomited up. Now he understood the situation. The knights didn't use magic. They were only able to perform the magic after Alan used it first. It was the action of Divine Copy. Alan also didn't use another skill because once he did then Divine Copy would end.

'But for 17 people to have the same rare sacred item.....'

That was already a scam. But if he interpreted it differently than it was easy to figure out. It was extremely difficult to change professions to a Holy Knight. In order to use 'Divine Copy,' the knights had to belong to the same sect as Alan. The sect which recognized Alan as a Holy Knight was the god of balance, Asyeosu.....the 17 knights must also belong to that religion to use the sacred item. Thanks to the conditions it wasn't that easy to equip it.

'In other words.....Those knights are NPCs!'

There was no doubt. When the second clash was occurring outside the courtyard, the cavalry troops didn't move. Unlike users, NPCs had to take a break as well.

'Those knights must be dispatched by the Cathedral since Alan has a close relationship with the Cathedral and its bishops.'

Even though he felt angry, Ark couldn't really complain. After changing professions to a Dark Walker, Ark also had close relationships with NPCs.....because of that he received the help of the raccoons and Meow. That might actually be the biggest

advantage of a hidden job.

‘Now let’s pull myself together. Those guys are practicing a swindle.....thanks to that I found a way to penetrate the barrier. The way to destroy ‘Divine Copy’ is to deal with Alan who is the one being copied. But.....’

There was no way to avoid the knights and fight against Alan 1-on-1. If he received a concentrated attack from the knights then he wouldn’t be able to last for one minute. Slowly an idea started to form as he organized his thoughts. Alan was looking out the window overlooking the hourglass.

‘Okay, I have no choice but to try. There isn’t that much time left. If I defeat Alan then the Hermes Alliance will win the siege. All the problems will be settled. If I take him out then it won’t be a problem even if I die!’

Ark stroked Snake’s head and solidified his resolution.

“Snake, good work. If I win this siege then you will receive the number 1 merit.”

Ssak? Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake nodded with a happy face.

“Dedric, you stick to the ceiling and pay attention. Notify me if you spot any of the enemy’s movements from there. Prepare yourself. If you miss even one.....”

“I got it. You don’t have to threaten me like that!”

Dedric moved to a shadowed place and hid behind a chandelier. Once everything was prepared Ark grabbed his sword and shouted.

“Raiden, please make concentrated attacks on the right side. Dark Eden will concentrate on shooting the left!”

“What? What did you say?”

Raiden frowned as he replied. But since Dark Eden was

concentrated on shooting the left side, he was forced to attack the right. Once the knights moved to the left and right, there was a slight gap in the middle. The others might not dare to squeeze through such a small gap but Ark was different!

“Dark Dance!”

Ark squeezed like a ghost through the gap between knights. With Dark Dance he was able to get through no matter how small the gap using tricky footwork, but because it was so complicated he had to concentrate on the footprints on the floor. It was a fatal drawback because he couldn't see the movements of the enemies but.....

“The knight is swinging his sword. The knight is coming from the front, and the knight on your left side is trying to hit you with his shield!”

Ark was able to imagine the movements of the enemies thanks to Dedric's voice. Thanks to that he could concentrate on his footwork and slip between the knights and through the gap. When Ark was close then Alan would hide himself behind the knights' bodies. Therefore Ark completely missed Alan's position. But it wasn't possible to avoid the eyes of Dedric who was watching from above.

“Alan's position is?”

“Behind Master's right side, on your 5 o'clock!”

“Here? Dark blade!”

Ark rotated his body like a spinning top and quickly used Dark Blade. It was the Dark Dance and Dark Blade chain skill Dark Strike! A critical attack that ignored the defense! In front of Dark Blade, the various buffs had no meaning. Ark continuously tracked and attacked Alan with Dark Strike and then keeping his distance using Dark Dance. However, Alan only had a moment of confusion.

“Heh, those are your special moves?”

Compared to a warrior's health, the damage of Dark Strike was only a small amount.

‘Sheesh, is it impossible like expected?’

“Bah, this stupid guy just stepped into his grave. Holy Light!”

Alan pushed Ark with his shield and chanted a holy spell. When he finished, a small ball of light formed around Alan’s head like a ring of sunlight.

[-Your dark attribute bonus has been turned off by ‘Holy Light.’]

‘What? My dark attribute bonus.....!’

Ark’s face darkened. Since the siege started at 6 a.m. in game time and lasted three days, the current time was 5 a.m. Dawn was coming but it was still the time ruled by a Dark Walker! It was because of his dark attribute bonus that Ark could fight Alan evenly in the middle of the enemies. But if it was turned off.....

“I guessed right. Your damage was somewhat strong compared to your level.....”

Alan ridiculed him with a chilly laugh and swung his sword. Unlike before, he felt his health falling from that one blow. His defense and stamina had increased because of his dark attribute bonus so it was an inevitable result. In addition, the Holy Knight’s attack applied an additional damage bonus to the darkness attribute.

Ark was pushed back by Alan’s shield. The attacks from the knights and users were flying all over the place. Dozens of swords and maces headed straight to a weakened Ark. In just a few moments his health fell and he was in a critical condition.

“This, this is! Support Ark!”

Raiden and the warriors ran over but weren’t helpful. Alan gathered the knights to block Raiden and ran up to Ark. Since Ark’s health was depleted, his expression indicated that he felt confident enough to deal with Ark.

“Huhuhu, you stupid bastard!”

‘Now!’

Ark's eyes flashed. Ark didn't rush recklessly. This chance could only be grabbed once. The 1-on-1 fight with Alan in front of the window was all for this moment!

"Let's finish this to the end!"

Ark rushed up to Alan. Alan flinched and swung his sword but Ark avoided it and attacked. And he gripped the waist tightly with both hands. It was the wrestling move he learned from the National Police gym! Ark lifted Alan using the force of his waist and ran towards the window. It was then that Alan noticed Ark's plan.

"What? What, what are you doing.....do you intend to die together?"

"Don't mess around. The only one who will die is you!"

Alan screamed and grabbed the window frame.

"Lariette-nim, what are you doing? He is dying. Your magic.....!"

Ark flinched and turned his head. He finally noticed that Lariette was standing restlessly near Alan. Ark looked at her and shook his head slightly. Then Lariette who was chanting a spell winced, and whether intentional or not cancelled the spell. At that moment, Ark was saved.

'Lariette-nim.....!'

"Son of a bitch.....Holy Knights!"

The knights turned around as they responded to Alan's voice and swung with both hands. With their destructive power, one hit from the mace would kill Ark. However, Ark stared blankly at Lariette before he suddenly shouted and released a burst of light.

"Hahaha, I'm not afraid anymore! Summon release, summon Deimos!"

Clack clack clack!

Deimos loudly stopped the attack from the mace with his shield. Deimos bounced back from the impact into Ark's back, forcing Alan

to release his hands from the windowsill in shock. At the moment Ark and Alan, as well as Deimos fell out the window.

“Huk.....!”

The Hall of Glory was on the top floor of the castle. The height was 30 metres from the ground. When thrown from such a place, Alan immediately began to panic. One of a warrior’s greatest fears is falling while clad in steel armour. However, Ark would also suffer in this situation.

“Summon release, Deimos! Snake, sword!”

Ark sent Deimos back and took out a sword. Now, it’s time to settle this!

“Blade Storm!”

The sword shattered in front of Alan’s nose and caused a storm. Alan was sucked into the debris and his health declined rapidly. But it was not the end. Before the effects of Blade Storm disappeared, Alan was forced upside down. In regards to falling damage, defense was meaningless. Thanks to the attack from Blade Storm, he fell even faster. Thanks to his health as a warrior, Alan was like a cockroach and avoided instant death but he only had 5% of health left. On the other hand, Ark was able to reduce the fall damage by 80%. Thanks to Blade Storm and the fall damage, Alan was collapsed at Ark’s feet and only need 150 more damage to die.

“You, you bastard.....!”

Alan stuttered and glared at Ark. However, he was stunned since he received falling damage while wearing steel armour. The only resistance Alan could do was stare at Ark. Ark raised his body and slowly approached Alan.

“Alan, if you wanted to show off then you should’ve picked a rival who was more insignificant.”

“Ark, absolutely.....I will not leave silently.....”

“Then I’ll pay you back 2, no three times. Just like Andel.”

“You’ll definitely regret today.....Cough!”

Snap!

Alan screamed as a sword was driven through his neck. With a snap, his blood came rushing out. Alan continued staring at him as his body convulsed. After a long time, the fight had finally ended. It was a long journey of revenge, but he had no interest once it finally ended. Ark waited until he saw Alan’s pulse stop and then collapsed with a thud.

However, the siege was still not over. Ark restored his health using food and went back up to the Hall of Glory. As expected, after Alan died all of the knight’s Divine Copy was also cancelled. In addition, using Divine Copy consumed 300 mana. They used it 4 times in succession so they ran out of mana. Without any mana, the Holy Knight was just the same as a normal warrior. Raiden used to chance to unleash his offensive and the knights and remnants of Dawn Blade helplessly fell to the Hermes Alliance.

‘Lariette-nim.....’

Ark looked at her body with bitter eyes. But her death was inevitable in order for the Hermes Alliance to win. The fact that she hesitated to help Alan in the last minute meant a lot of to Ark.

‘When the situation is stable then I’ll meet her again.’

“Damn....you’ll soon see!”

While Ark was thinking, the last member of Dawn Blade collapsed.

There was no one who could prevent Raiden from sitting on the throne anymore!

“Finally.....!”

Raiden looked at the throne with red eyes. He had been waiting for this moment for a long time. And the remaining time was only 20 minutes. Even if Alan died, the castle still belonged to Dawn Blade since some members of the guild hadn’t taken part in the siege and was still alive. However, Raiden just had to sit in the throne for 20

minutes and it would become his territory. Raiden slowly approached the throne and was about to sit down when he saw Ark standing in the doorway.

“You’re alive?”

Then there was a suspicious smile on Raiden’s face.

“Good. It wouldn’t do to sit down before doing this.”

-Raiden has used the ‘Trick’ skill.

The alliance with Hermes has been destroyed using Trick!

“What?”

Raiden said with a smile.

“I made an effort during that time. But it ends here.”

“Then the promise.....!”

“Don’t you understand? The alliance has finished.”

Ark then began to realise his mistake. That’s right, it was the uneasiness he felt when he conceded to his demands so obediently. He had felt it several times. The intermediate recovery potions, catapult repair and renovation costs.....even if it was a war, he had signed the contracts too obediently. It was natural. From the very beginning Raiden had no intention of giving him a single penny. The distribution of the proceeds from the 2 contracts all relied on a prerequisite. That Raiden the leader of the Hermes Alliance would capture the throne and occupy Silvana.

In other words, with the alliance released the contract was just a piece of tissue. However Ark believed that the Alliance Agreement could only be destroyed with the agreement from both sides. He never imagined that there would be a skill which could destroy the contracts. However, Ark didn’t fully understand New World yet. Although reality wasn’t that different, this was still a game. There were always methods to ignore the rules. No, no matter what kind of meaning it was still a skill!

“Ugh.....I came this far just for this?”

“It was because you were too greedy. I will admit that your role was big in this victory. Therefore I didn’t want to do this. But 30%that is too difficult. In this situation, there is no way that I can give you 30% of the proceeds.”

The guild masters standing around Raiden nodded. As expected, Baron the guild master of Fugetsu tried to avoid the attention. Ark realised that all the remaining guild masters had agreed with the results.

“Now, sweep them up!”

Raiden ordered while sitting on the throne. The situation was like a wolf had opened its mouth and ran up to the tiger to be killed. The remaining Hermes Alliance users ran towards Ark and Dark Eden. Nearly 100 Hermes Alliance members were still alive. On the other hand, Ark and Dark Eden only had 45 people. And more than half were artillerymen. It wasn’t a situation where he could fight and win.

‘I have to save the NPCs!’

“Raiden! As a knight you would dare to do such a dirty thing.....!”

Cross couldn’t stand it anymore and lifted his sword. However, Ark grabbed Cross’ collar and ran out.

“Dark Eden, retreat at once!”

Ark exited from the Hall of Glory with Dark Eden. After the 20 minutes were over, everyone except for the Hermes Alliance who had occupied the throne would be expelled from the castle. It was regrettable but at least he could still save the NPCs. However once Ark was considered as an enemy, Raiden wanted to completely exterminate him. Raiden ordered the 100 users to chase Ark. So when he rounded the corner towards the stairs, he was faced with dozens of Hermes Alliance users coming from downstairs.

“Damn, these guys are such dirty bastards.....!”

“Sir Cross, please understand the situation!”

Ark angrily pulled Cross with him and entered the next room. It was a room that had crumbled a little bit from the previous fights!

‘This is it. They can survive 20 minutes here!’

“Pick up the piles of debris and build a barrier in front of the door!”

“What? But it won’t survive more than a few minutes!”

“I don’t have the time to explain! Please do as I say!”

When Ark raised his voice, the members of Dark Eden hurriedly scraped the wreckage and built a barrier. It was a shabby barrier that would collapse when hit by a mace two or three times. But Ark had a magic item that would make it stronger than the castle wall. He pulled out a big tube from his bag. It was the Spirit Body Glue that would stay stuck once attached.

‘The last one.....it is valuable but I can’t lose all the NPCs here in vain!’

Ark bombarded the barrier with the Spirit Body Glue.

-Ooh eh eh eh, I’m out!
-Attach to everything!

The babbling of the Spirit Body Glue was annoying but it was effective. Even if it was hit by the Hermes Alliance, it would not move an inch.

‘Now I can rest assured. But.....’

Once their safety was secured he didn’t both pushing down the anger.

‘Did I really come all the way here just to be betrayed? Even though I have dethroned Alan so I can release Sid.....’

“Huk huk huk, Master! What is going on?”

Dedric had sneaked out of the Hall of Glory by flying through the window. At that moment, a large number of ideas went through Ark’s head. He could change the crisis into an opportunity! Ark suddenly

stuck his body to the window.

‘Okay it is worth a try. Even if I fail, it is better to die then leave it like this!’

Ark leaned his body out the window and shouted to Dedric.

“Dedric, there is no time. Quickly suck my blood.”

“Eh eh? What, what the? Master, are you crazy? Was your head hit a little bit too hard?”

“There is no time for your chatter. Shut up and suck it quickly!”

“You really want me to do it? I won’t be scolded later?”

“If you say one more word then I’ll make tempura out of you!”

“Ah, I understand. Then.....I’ll eat well.....”

Dedric was shocked by Ark’s threat and extended his fangs. He felt like something was being sucked out.....but it still wasn’t enough.

“No, that’s no it. Suck again!”

Dozens of times.....Dedric happily sucked the blood. Then he heard dozens of footsteps and banging against the barrier. The barrier swayed with every hit. At that moment, a message window flashed in front of Ark.

‘I got it!’

“Hahaha, delicious. Master’s blood is so delicious!”

“That’s enough, stop sucking.”

Ark struck Dedric who jumped back. Then he felt a sense of dizziness. However, Ark clenched his teeth and clung to the window.

“Now there’s only 10 minutes left. Please hold on until then!”

“What? What are you doing.....eh? Ark!”

Jjak-tung looked bewildered until he suddenly screamed. Ark had climbed out the window. Of course he didn’t want to commit suicide.

Ark began to move sideways on the ledge outside. Under her foot were distant cliffs. It was enough to give someone anaemia. However, Ark had used his strength to climb up the body of Colossus in order to obtain the Sacred Soil. He moved his body carefully and eventually arrived at his destination. It was the windows in the Hall of Glory that Alan had fallen out of. Ark used 'Stealth' to enter the Hall of Glory.

"I've finally got my hands on Silvana."

"Congratulations."

"With Dark Eden gone the proceeds will be distributed as promised."

"Of course."

Raiden was convinced of his victory and lowered his guard. He never imagined that Ark would use 'Stealth' to sneak into the Hall of Glory.

'The biggest hurdle in the plan is the magician Jewel. I'll have to dispose of Jewel first!'

Ark took out a sword from his bag and approached Jewel.

"Blade Storm!"

"Kuaaak, what, what the?"

Thanks to 'Stealth,' the storm even applied a backstab effect! Extravagant damage was applied and Jewel's health quickly went down to 50%. Jewel had rare armour with high defense or else normal magicians would've had their health decreased by 80%. Jewel stumbled in surprise. At the same time his 'stealth' was deactivated and warriors flocked in the room.

"Ugh, this, this guy.....!"

"You're back? You came back just to die!"

'I don't have to deal with those other guys!'

His health decreased from the attacks flying from everywhere. Ark avoided the offensive of the soldiers using Dark Dance and shouted.

“Dirty scum, I’ll beep-beep to guys like you!”

[-‘Intimidation’ has triggered a critical effect!]

He had cursed using all his sincerity. In addition, all of the users here were extremely tired after fighting for 24 hours. Then they received ‘Intimidation’ just as they were convinced of victory so it was natural that there would be a critical effect. ‘Intimidation’ was a skill that was influenced by the conditions of the opponent. 100 warriors froze up at once.

“Jewel, I’ll kill you!”

Ark immediately used Blade Storm again. Jewel’s health fell to 30%. Jewel quickly chanted a spell. That was the moment Ark was aiming for. He waited for the opponent to move first and then used Riposte! Jewel failed the spell and was thrown back by Ark’s counterattack.

“Ugh, this, unbelievable.....!”

Jewel had collapsed to the ground before trying to raise her body.....No that was exactly what Ark had aimed for.....the place where Jewel got up was in front of the room where Dark Eden was hiding. The Dark Eden members had already received a command from Ark and aimed their cannons through a gap in the stone before firing simultaneously. A dozen rounds of ammunition! Jewel was shrouded in white steam and collapsed.

‘I did it!’

Ark turned around after he was sure that Jewel died. But Raiden just laughed and murmured.

“You’re certainly not normal. But what will killing Jewel do? Do you think you can kill the remaining 100 people in 10 minutes?”

“Let’s see?”

Ark said and laughed.

“I’m certain of one thing.”

“.....?”

“The person who makes me his enemy will end up regretting it!”

“Cheeky, kill him!”

Raiden shouted at the 100 users who gathered and brandished his weapons.

“Blessing of the sea!”

A light was emitted from Adelaine’s Necklace as Blessing of the Sea was activated. Was he calling an enormous summon? The Hermes Alliance flinched and tensed up. But the light disappeared after restoring 500 mana and increasing his defense by 40%.

“What the? It just raised the defense?”

“Are you really going to fight with us?”

“That wouldn’t be bad. Dark Dance!”

After Ark recovered his mana he immediately used Dark Dance. At the same time, a gust of wind passed through the 100 warriors. Once he used Dark Dance, it was inevitable that he would appear like a ghost. However Ark wasn’t planning to fight with them. He only avoided the attacks and by the time he reached Raiden, the percentage of completion was 80%. When the percentage of completion rose, his body disappeared like smoke.

He avoided the attacks with millimetres of difference. But the attacks from the 100 people also weren’t a joke. Although he avoided most of the attacks, by the time he reached Raiden his health had decreased by 70%.

“Hut!”

Raiden flinched as Ark appeared in front of him like a ghost and drew his mace. But Ark had already started attacking. His ensuring spin kick hit Raiden in the temple. Raiden fell to the ground with his mace.

“Ugh, this child.....until the end.....!”

Ark shot Raiden a look of disdain.

“I never thought I would die but thanks anyway.”

“What?”

“Thanks to the betrayal from the Hermes Alliance, Dark Eden became a separate attack group.”

“What is that.....?”

“You’re more stupid then I thought Raiden. Don’t you understand yet? As the 6th in command, I didn’t have the right to sit on the throne. But now I’m the group leader of a 3rd force.”

“What you’re saying is nonsense.....!”

“Would you like to confirm if it’s nonsense?”

Ark smiled and sat down on the throne.

Dark Eden’s attack captain Ark has sat down on the Throne.

If he manages to defend the throne until the siege ends then the right of a Lord will be granted.

Time remaining in the siege: 5 min.

Raiden let out an astounded laugh.

“You stupid bastard, you thought it would be resolved once you sat down? There is still 5 minutes left. Although it would be an honour for you to die in a place where you’ve never sat down in your life. Kill him!”

Raiden and the 100 warriors flocked to him. However, Ark shouted while sitting cross-legged in a relaxed manner.

“Dedric, Vampire skill activate! Target Ark!”

“Oooooooh!”

Dedric appeared outside the window and activated the skill. At the same time, Ark’s body was covered with yellow mucus.

That’s right, it was ‘Slime’s Time!’

It was the reason Ark made Dedric bite him! 24 hours hadn't passed since the last time Ark used Slime's Time. Therefore he couldn't use it again normally. But he looked at Dedric and thought of an ingenious idea. Dedric had the ability to extract a skill from the opponent once he sucked their blood. The problem was whether he could extract a skill from Ark, but fortunately Dedric answered that the first time. He had extracted the 'Harvesting' skill. Ark gained hope and had Dedric repeat it many times until he finally obtained Slime's Time. That was the reason why Ark relentlessly killed Jewel.

There was a weakness in the invulnerability of Slime's Time. It completely blocked physical attacks but was vulnerable to attack magic, and Jewel was a magician that was still present in the Hall of Glory. However, once Jewel died then Ark was invincible! Once Slime's Time was activated, both swords and maces slipped off. The warriors looked perplexed.

"This, what on earth is this ridiculous thing.....!"

"Pudding? A pudding?"

"This skill is a ridiculous trick. Is that what you think Raiden? Yes, you don't know the skill. And in New World, if someone doesn't know something then they could die. But the skill is not a trick."

Ark said in a cold tone as he was covered in slime. The time remaining was 4 minutes.....if he held on for 4 minutes then he would obtain Silvana. Noticing the urgent situation, Raiden lifted his mace and shouted.

"This guy uses a strange skill. So just pull him down from the throne!"

The warriors began to pull Ark. However Ark firmly held onto the throne. He used the techniques he learned working to survive every day and held on. Thanks to that, his arms and hands were as strong as a wrestler. Since his body was sleek, it was hard for them to grab him.....the warriors eventually gave up catching him and started punching instead. However, Ark had no intention of dying.

'Hang in there. Just 3 minutes left!'

Yes, the violence really fit the realistic game as his face became swollen and he got a nosebleed. But there was no time to think about the pain. Ark clenched his teeth and held out against the pain. And he shouldered the pain until the time ran out. Loud horn sounds came from outside before a message window popped up.

The time limit for the siege has been completed.

The person who has occupied the throne is Dark Eden's attack leader Ark. According to the siege rules, Ark has now become the ruler of Silvana.

Using the Lord's special skill 'Authority,' you can banish all remaining enemies from the premises.

<You have acquired the castle of Silvana. Fame +3000>

<You have acquired a bonus for capturing the castle with less than 100 people: Experience for all the group members who survived +250,000>

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.

Thanks to the bonus he acquired 5 levels.

"Oh.....oh my god!"

All colour disappeared from Raiden's face. Ark slowly lifted his head. His face was crushed like dough by the warriors' fists but there was the proud smile of a winner on his face.

"I've obtained the castle. Now if you'll please leave my castle? Expulsion!"

At the moment an intense light flashed and the Hermes Alliance was forced from the castle. The person who occupied the throne after a long battle.....was Ark!

"Hum.....wasn't today the last day of the castle siege?"

Ho Myung-hwan stretched and yawned as he searched the

information window. Since there were 12 castles in Nagaran, there were always two sieges happening every day. One of his morning routines was to monitor the name of any new users that showed up in the siege information. It was in order to understand the overall system as well as keeping an eye on the influences of strong guilds.

“The Lord of Baltania has changed. Indeed, the Boramae guild and their allies were too weak to keep the castle. They didn’t have deep pockets and didn’t waste any money on defense, only attack. It will be hard for the Boramae guild to recover.”

Ho Myung-hwan clicked his tongue and muttered. In fact, Ho Myung-hwan had a keen eye about the situation in Nagaran. The assumption that they would receive a huge tax once they occupied the castle was a misconception from the users. NPCs in New World are clever- the kings and Archbishop set up the Shrine of War in order to set safeguards for those sorts of situations. Sooner or later they’ll discover the truth, but the users would have to defend the castle for at least a month before receiving any proceeds from it. It was only then that the NPCs would recognize them as the Lord.

“However, the kings receive a tax that hasn’t decreased at all.....ha! In this instance the NPCs are cleverer than the users. Even so, it is a gamer’s dream to become a Lord.”

Ho Myung-hwan made a wry smile and searched for information on the next castle.

“Now, the next castle is Silvana? Well.....it should be Alan.....eh?”

Ho Myung-hwan stopped moving his mouse. But no matter how many times he rubbed his eyes and looked at the monitor, the results were still the same.

“Alan had the castle taken away? And the user who became the new Lord is.....!”

Surprisingly, the name that came up in the information window was one that he knew well. It was one of the candidates that he was recently paying attention to, Ark!

“Ark! Ark managed to take Silvana away from Alan?”

Ho Myung-hwan quickly opened all the information that had been registered at the Shrine of War. However, he felt like he was lost in a maze the more he looked at it.

“This, what on earth is this? First Alan accepted a challenge from the Hades guild.....was the Hades guild destroyed on the verge of the siege by Ark? No, it is okay up to there. But what is up with the data that comes afterwards? What the hell happened?”

Including the Hermes Alliance and Dawn Blade coalition, a total of 11 guilds took part in the siege. Ark occupied the lowest seat of command in the Hermes Alliance and participated in the siege. In fact, he only had the power to command. Unless all those above him were killed, there was no chance for him to become the Lord. However, the result from the siege was that Ark was the Lord. At that time, there were still 8 guild masters from the Hermes Alliance and Dawn Blade coalition left.

No matter how Ho Myung-hwan looked at the situation, there was no way to make sense of the result. What on earth happened in the siege? However he only had the information posted in the Shrine of War. He also couldn't find any videos related to the siege. The siege could only be shown on TV if the Lord allowed it. On the other hand, Alan had kept the siege completely confidential.

‘We still don't know what happened.....’

He wasn't the only one who would be interested in this. Ho Myung-hwan organized the materials and immediately visited the Planning Department's chief Ha Myung-woo. He thought that Ark would definitely be excluded from the eliminated contestants list. However, Ha Myung-woo's response was not impressed.

“Ark? I've never heard of that ID.”

“Yes, he was one of the candidates put on the eliminated list.”

“So?”

“So what? An eliminated contestant has managed to push back Alan, who is a part of the highest ranked group.....No, he also managed to beat the pioneers in the Hermes guild and occupied the throne. If

the results are to this degree, don't we have to start paying attention to Ark as a candidate again?"

"Can I see the data again?"

Ha Myung-woo scanned the data and laughed.

"The candidate Ark only had 83 people in his raid party. Do you think he really defeated the Hermes guild and Alan with that number?"

"Yes? But the results....."

"I think there are two ways that could've happened. He got lucky or the Hermes guild leader put him on the throne for some other purpose. Both reasons have nothing to do with his ability. I'm not interested in lucky candidates. I only pick candidates with skill."

"Then.....?"

"But it is still necessary to look at it once. When does the report come in this month?"

"There is still one week left."

"Okay, that is when the next siege has started. I'll call the reference room and tell them to send me Ark's report for this month. I'll look carefully at how he performed during the siege. But if he performed weakly then his evaluation won't change. Ark is still eliminated. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

Ho Myung-hwan withdrew with a disappointed face. In fact, he also didn't think that Ark became the Lord with real skills. Just like Ha Myung-woo, he also thought that Ark obtained the castle due to luck.

'Ark.....You performed well in the Evil Silrion. You have a lot of experiences against various users in New World. But is it really possible for you to become the Lord with only 83 people? How will you defend Silvana in the future?'

Ark's last report came 3 weeks ago.....so he didn't understand that Ark's group consisted of NPCs. So he could not imagine Ark

participating a lot in the siege. He also had to protect Silvana. All those answers would be recorded in the next report.

‘Can Ark really defend his territory? The next submission deadline is in one week.....it is crazy.’

Ho Myung-hwan pulled out a cigarette with a pained face. It was the first time that he couldn’t wait to read the contents of a report.

Now Kang Mi-su at the reception desk.....if he visited then he would be able to hear from Lariette how the siege went. But Ho Myung-hwan shook his head.

‘I don’t need half of the information. Yes, there is also some pleasure in waiting.’

He would prefer to read the contents directly from Ark’s viewpoint. That was the wish of Ho Myung-hwan who considered himself a ‘secret fan of Ark.’

Secrets of Silvana Castle

“Ha.....”

Ark sighed with a pained expression. It was because of a NPC named Berami. After the siege ended and he got a good night's sleep, he connected to an office in Silvana. It was a luxurious office overlooking his estate! It was the first time Ark realized that the estate was his. After all the suffering he was able to sit down and relax in a comfortable chair. He became thrilled at the thought of being a Lord. Then while he was in a good mood, a middle-aged NPC knocked and entered.

“I am the Lord's advisor, Berami.”

Berami's role was estate management, legal advice, financial management and so on.....while he was old-fashioned about military affairs, his financial style was modern. A user who came to power overnight wouldn't be equipped with the knowledge to handle the castle and its estate. So an NPC who specialized in estate management was provided. From the beginning Ark didn't really like Berami. And unfortunately his intuition didn't lead him astray.

“Do you like the office?”

“Hmm, it's not bad.”

Ark deliberately answered in a haughty tone. Berami pushed his glasses with his fingers and smiled.

“I'm glad you like it. You were brilliant in the siege but the castle is a mess. This was the only decent place. Well, enough about that..... according to their Majesties' law, the rights of the Lord have been transferred to Ark-nim. Congratulations. I hope you last for a while.”

The civil servant spoke in an official tone. Although there was a slight sense of sarcasm.....he was still a civil servant NPC. But Ark's pleasant dream soon turned into a nightmare because of his words.

“The most important thing I have to explain is about financial management.”

“That’s right!”

Ark strained his ears and concentrated. It was the part that Ark was most curious about. He went through a lot of struggles before occupying the castle. So how much profit would he get from it? Berami’s explanation continued.

“The income for Silvana is earned from the import of alcohol, customs, various taxes and businesses in the territory.....so one month is 150,000 gold.”

‘150,000 Gold!’

Ark’s mouth dropped at the astronomical amount. That was worth 15 billion won in reality! It was more money than he’s seen in his life.....no, he couldn’t even imagine that much money. Of course, since it was the castle’s income he might not earn that much as an individual. However he also had to apply medieval economics to New World.

‘As the Lord, am I free to spend 150,000 gold however I like?’

His heart rate sped up and his breathing became rough at the thought! Was this what winning the lottery feels like?

However.....Ark’s happiness got water poured on it.

“Now I’ll explain the amount to be spent. The most important thing is that you have to pay a tax to the royal family of the Three Kingdoms. That’s 10% of the monthly revenue, so 30% is 45,000 gold.”

45,000 gold instantly flew away.

Ark felt like he was hearing a scam but he made himself calm down.

‘I-it’s okay. There’s still 105,000 gold.....’

However Berami cruelly continued talking.

“By default, you should use the rest of the 105,000 gold for estate management. Now, I will tell you the things that need to be done

based on priority. The most urgent thing is to repair the Defense Towers and castle walls that were destroyed in the siege. This is important as a Lord. Then.....ha, it was neatly smashed. Repairing it should cost roughly 47,000 gold.”

Berami shook his head as if he was irritated. However, Ark felt more like crying. He struggled so hard to destroy it and now he had to use his money to repair it!

“Then there is the monthly salary for the estate’s employees. The costs for hiring soldiers and servants is 17,000 gold. The donation to the Shrine of War is 4,000 gold. The maintenance of various infrastructure on the estate is 10,000 gold. And the castle development fund.....”

“S-stop!”

Ark shouted with fright.

“What the hell is with all that money?”

Berami retorted with a scornful look.

“Did you think the estate is maintained for free? The items I mentioned are just summaries. I will go into more details in the following days. But as the Lord you don’t have to be concerned. I will handle most of it and you will still receive a small salary.”

“Then I can use that money anyway I like?”

“Didn’t you know?”

Berami asked with surprise.

“Although the kings from the Three Kingdoms authorized you to become a Lord, your actions are still limited. You can only use the proceeds from the castle for castle related business. As the Lord, you’ll receive 2% of the total revenue of 150,000 gold. That is 3000 gold.”

In the end the salary for a Lord in Nagaran wasn’t that different from a president. Of course, 3000 gold was still a large amount. However, he had to consider the vast amount of money that was

needed for a siege. And only receiving 3000 gold from 150,000? He had a sinking feeling.....

“Honestly, at present Silvana is in a deficit. Because Sir Alan who was the previous Lord started a lot of construction projects. He invested a lot in the estate. Well, if the facilities were completed then the income for the Lord would increase.”

After hearing Berami’s explanation, Ark’s idea of having a castle changed. He had thought that he could get profit just from occupying the castle. But it was a big mistake. New World’s system and its NPCs weren’t so easy. All his funds from the territory were tied to the estate thanks to the law. In other words, he had to invest most of the money into development of the estate. Of course, the Lord would be able to get a profit in the long term.

Currently Silvana was a D class estate. Once it develops to a C class then the proceeds would double. The Lord’s income would also increase by 2, making it 6000 gold.....so if he developed it to an A class estate then he would get a monthly income of 12,000 gold. Since one month is 10 days in reality, that was 36000 gold every month! It was an absurd income! But it would take a few years and there was no guarantee that he could defend the castle for that long.

‘Realistically, it would take 1~2 game years to raise the rating of the castle by that much. In reality that is half a year.’ If I fail to defend the castle in the meantime then it won’t be very good. In addition, I also have to consider the money involved in a siege.....’

The Lord’s monthly salary of 3,000 gold was not that much. Ark now understood Alan’s feelings. Since he couldn’t use most of the money, Alan couldn’t afford to waste the 3000 gold on a siege. A ghost guild was made to reduce the cost of a siege as much as possible. And because the Defense Towers and walls weren’t destroyed, he could rush the estate’s development. Ark once again realised the uselessness of war.

‘Anyway, it is impossible for me.’

The cost of repairs, food, various potions and hiring mercenaries..... If he participated in a war again then it would

cost several thousand gold. Well, in the last one the money came from the Hermes guild but he still wasted 600 gold on food, cannon production and so on.

He also only used 83 people. But if he was a Lord then he needed more money and troops for a war. Since Alan had occupied the castle until now, it was clear that he suffered a huge financial loss.

‘Since I was never that greedy about it, I can just collect the 3000 gold and leave.’

That was what he first thought when he heard about it. But the cunning of the Three Kings immediately appeared. Instead of being paid beforehand, the Lord’s salary was paid afterwards. If it was like that.....then he would receive the salary one month after he became Lord. A month was 10 days in reality. He would have to be victorious in the sieges that were held once a week in order to receive the salary! If the Lordship changes then he would receive nothing. It was a brilliant law.

‘Isn’t this like the kings are professional conmen?’

Ark became gloomy. With the siege next week, he had no confidence about keeping the castle. Of course, as the Lord he might be able to attract allies. However, Ark had no funds to hold a siege. Who was help a Lord who couldn’t even buy potions? They would rather help the other side to take over the castle.

‘If I scrape money together then I might be able to hire some mercenaries.....’

He would be driven penniless by that kind of money. With no money Ark was powerless to keep the castle.

‘But the land is too good to just give up. Just like me, Raiden or Haiyan from Grey Wings wouldn’t have known anything about the estate. But Silvana’s geographical position means that its development potential is immense. When Nagaran becomes stable, I can develop it to C or even B class. Then the income from the castle would be unthinkable.’

If it was like that then money wouldn’t be a problem. With the huge

funds, organizing an army of 10,000 people wouldn't be a dream.

'But despite the castle, I can't even ask for 1 copper.....I would rather Raiden become the Lord like originally planned.'

Ark felt resentful towards Raiden. If Raiden had just followed the agreement then he wouldn't have to worry about this. The value of 100 Intermediate Recovery Potions was 2000 gold. Catapult repair costs 1000 gold. Renovation and labour costs for the raccoons 600 gold. In total it would've been 3,600 gold!

That was more than the Lord's monthly salary. However, Raiden's betrayal meant he didn't get a penny of it and the only thing he received was the castle.

'I really don't have any luck.....'

Ark kept on sighing. But Berami acted like Ark's feelings didn't matter. He extended a thick document.

"Then please settle the payment for the estate management immediately."

"Please come back later!"

After Ark angrily raised his voice, Berami shrugged and left the office. His attitude clearly showed that he opposed the appointment of the new Lord. After he was alone, Ark organized his thoughts for a bit. Ark quickly gave up. At the thought of dying and losing his money, he easily gave up.

'It is impossible for me to control the castle next week. So I'll put that problem aside for the moment.....while I'm the Lord I'll do what I can. Alan used his power as a Lord to imprison Sid in the dungeon.'

It was the objective he had to achieve first.

'But it might be insufficient. Alan is closely related to the Cathedral. It is to the extent that the Cathedral secretly dispatched the Holy Knights. Alan also disturbed Sid because of his grudge. This has become troublesome.....'

Ark thought of something and nodded.

‘That’s it. It is the reason why the Lord of Jackson hesitated to help me. There is the rule that regular soldiers can’t interfere in Nagaran. That also applies to the knights from the Cathedral. If I find proof that the Cathedral secretly helped Alan then it is possible to strike a blow to them.’

Once the Cathedral is shaken then it wouldn’t be difficult to extract Sid. Once Ark determined his task, he immediately began to explore the castle. 20 knights were kept in the castle so they should’ve left a trail somewhere. And he found the trail without any difficulty. No, it was just left in the open.

“What is this?”

Ark muttered with a foolish face. Inside the castle a luxurious building had been set up. The building had an atmosphere like a temple and was locked when he pushed the doors.

“Ah, that is the Asyeosu Temple.”

“Asyeosu?”

Berami explained the history after Ark visited him.

“Yes, the goddess of balance. But it is mostly called the Cathedral because it is the most influential of the 12 religions on the continent. The church of Asyeosu was revived 100 years ago. The former lord Sir Alan is a devout believer. According to what I heard, the church helped Sir Alan a lot when he was undergoing the ordeals to be recognized as a Holy Knight.”

“Then this temple.....?”

“Originally it just contained an old statue of Asyeosu. After Sir Alan became the Lord, he invested a lot of money into building the temple.”

Ark began to feel suspicious after Berami’s words. A guy like Alan wouldn’t invest money in a temple for no reason.

‘Maybe he had to build a temple in order to receive the church’s

help. If the temple was built then the church would send NPCs for free. But.....it weighs heavily on my mind. Would he really waste all that money building a temple in the castle just for some helpers?’

Just as Ark was thinking this.

“Apart from Alan, everyone in Dawn Blade was a devout believer.”

“What?”

“After Sir Alan built the temple, all of the Dawn Blade coalition lived in the temple. They would not leave the temple even after spending three days and three nights there.”

“What were they doing in there?”

“I don’t know. Sir Alan’s commands prevented other people from coming near there. Well, wasn’t it to keep a vigil all night? They were always tired after leaving.”

Berami answered in a disinterested tone. And Ark suddenly saw a flash.

Three days and nights praying in the temple? Once the users connected they would spend hours stuck in the temple. In addition, Alan did it as well.....No, it was impossible for him to be that devoted to Asyeosu. Even if the religion gave him all sorts of benefits, it was difficult to transfer those benefits to reality. There was no reason to believe in a fake religion in a game. Since he built the temple and wouldn’t leave it, there was definitely something hidden.

‘If I want to find a link between Alan and the Cathedral then it would be here!’

“Can I enter there?”

“Of course. Because everything in the castle is the Lord’s possessions.”

It was the first time Berami said something great. While he couldn’t receive the Lord’s salary yet, he was the Lord of the castle.

“But it was locked?”

“My Lord should go to your office safe. The keys to all the facilities are kept there. But my Lord is prohibited from carrying the key outside the estate. Since the title of Lord was released, the key should be housed there.”

Ark headed straight to find the temple key.

Clatter, creak.....

After he inserted the key the door opened with a massive sound. The interior wasn't that different from other cathedrals. There were long chairs lined up inside with a slightly higher platform at the front.

‘What the hell? It's not hiding anything? Then what were they doing in here?’

He really spent his fortune just to pray to the gods here? Ark looked around until he suddenly became puzzled.

‘Wait. Isn't something strange?’

Ark stood in the centre of the temple and looked around. Berami said that the Dawn Blade coalition stayed here for three days. It was a coalition not one guild. In numerical terms it comprised of 1,700 people. However the temple wasn't big enough for all those people. Even the commuter buses could only cram in a few hundred people at 7 in the morning. Then where did the remaining people go?

‘Are there any other exits?’

Ark searched every corner but nothing caught his eye. After a few minutes.....he was searching the platform when he saw small letters engraved on the bottom.

||Turn your head and bring back the darkness.||

‘What does that mean?’

Ark looked around the area with a dubious expression. However Ark had quite a lot of experience in solving puzzles in New World. Once he knew the location of the statue of Asyeosu, Ark was able to

understand the phrase. Since breakfast had just finished, the morning sun was coming from all directions through the transparent windows. The light was concentrated on the statue's right side. In order words, he had to turn the statue away from the east. One of the unshakeable laws was that the sun always rose in the East! He had to turn the statue to the darkness, which meant to the west.

‘Then.....’

Ark insolently grabbed the statue's face and turned it. The face turned around just like he expected. When he let go a mechanical whirring sound was heard. The platform was pushed to one side, revealing a long staircase leading into darkness.

‘It is a secret passage! The Dawn Blade members went in here!’

There was no need to think. Ark used Eyes of the Cat and descended the stairs.

‘Where do these stairs lead to?’

The stairs were longer than expected. It twisted into a spiral staircase that seemed to lead to hell. How far did he go? He suddenly felt a cool spirit on his skin. It wasn't simply a feeling of the temperature going down. It was like cold slippery tentacles were gripping his body. An unidentified fear crept into his mind.

“What the? Why does it feel so unpleasant?”

Ark murmured in an uncomfortable voice. The stairs ended and a huge cave appeared.

The Cradle of an Ancient Evil (Special)

You have discovered a cave with a cold chill that makes even the soul tremble. You've heard the groaning of a mysterious ghost deep inside the intricate maze-like cave. And the more powerful and evil spirit as it grabbed them. The bloody history of this cave isn't as simple as you think. No doubt huge and sinister secrets are hidden. If you are wise then you should never enter alone.

“Dungeon?”

Ark looked at the information window with stunned eyes. There was a hunting ground underneath the castle? He didn't understand but it would obviously be filled with monsters. After he read the description he knew it wasn't a low level dungeon.

‘But I can't possibly go back empty-handed. Although my dark attribute bonus will be supplied, I have no information about the dungeon so I have to be prepared.’

Ark took out his pot and made a survival cooking dish. To raise health he made the ‘Abundant Stew,’ ‘Grilled Smoke Bison’ to increase strength and agility, ‘Shellfish Salad’ to boost defense and so on.....after dopping Dedric and Deimos, he entered the dungeon.

“Dedric, scout the area. Deimos, stay right beside me.”

“Ugh, I feel like this is a bad cave.”

Clack clack clack clack.....clack clack.....

Even Dedric and Deimos began to feel nervous about the sinister aura. However, unlike his worries he didn't encounter any monsters.

‘Indeed, since Alan and those guys came in here many times then of course they would sweep all the monsters. I don't know how large the cave is or where the remaining monsters are.’

Then Ark heard something while he was thinking.

“M-Master! There it is!”

Dedric flew back all flustered. A pair of red eyes abruptly appeared behind Dedric. White fangs appeared underneath the eyes while a horrible stench was coming off it.

Grrrrr!

‘Monster!’

Kaaaak!

The monster quickly rushed towards him. Ark reflexively avoided the club by throwing his body towards the ground. The whole cave shook with a tremendous roar. The incredible force even crushed the rocks! Ark got up after dodging the attack and glared at the monster. Thanks to Eyes of the Cat, the monster's information floated in the darkness above its head. After verifying the information, Ark's face turned white and terrified.

"Huk, what is with that guy.....?"

Its massive body filled the passage! The upper part was human which the lower body had a goat's legs. The face also looked like a black goat, with three thick horns spiralling up from the forehead. It was the shape of a devil that was often portrayed in ancient religions! However Ark wasn't appalled by its appearance. The monster's name was the Ancient Evil Goat. If he changed it to Hangul then it could be interpreted as bad goat. No, now was not the time to joke. The Ancient Evil Goat was level 300! The name displayed had a red star engraved next to it.

'Red star.....Elite monster!'

Ark's spirit was stunned. Elite monsters gave several times more experience and items than general monsters. It was also many times stronger than general monsters. It wasn't just a level 300 monster.

Kkuaaaa!

The Goat swung its club and confronted him. Ark avoided the first attack but got trapped in a corner! Ark lifted his sword and blocked the club. No, he tried to but the power in the club exceeded Ark's imagination.

Kwajajak. The impact forced Ark into the wall and crushed some bones.

-You've received a critical hit regardless of your block.

640 damage received. Thanks to the intense block that shook your head, you have become stunned for 5 seconds.

‘Oh my God!’

Even if it was a critical hit, to do 640 damage with one blow.....

The problem was not only the damage. His spirit became stunned. His body felt like cotton every time he tried to move it. Meanwhile, Goat ran wildly and lifted its club.

Clack clack clack!

Then Deimos appeared behind Goat yelling (?) wildly. The damage caused Goat’s club to be pushed to the side but it still glanced Ark’s shoulder. Then Dedric also entered Goat’s line of sight and distracted him. But the look on Dedric’s face wasn’t one normally seen there.

“H-here. Hey! M-Master, is it still far away? This bastard.....unbelievably fast!”

Goat’s speed did not match its huge body. Eventually Dedric was hit in the back of the head by the angrily pursuing Goat.

Backstab damage! Dedric’s defense was low so he instantly lost 50% of his health and was thrown to the ground. Goat let out a puff of hot air and lifted his foot.

“Ugh, ugh, ugh! Help!”

Clack clack clack!

Deimos appeared in front of Dedric and blocked with his shield. Goat kept on hitting his club like it was a hammer. Deimos used his shield to block but his health was still decreased by 20%. However Deimos didn’t retreat, he just stepped forward and swung his sword at Goat. Since Ark and Dedric were unable to act, Deimos judged that he was the only person (?) available.

“Deimos! You are actually a nice guy! Okay, that’s it!”

Dedric was rooting for Deimos with an impressed face. However, Goat wasn’t something that he could face with just courage.

Thump, thump, snap! Every time there was an explosive sound,

Deimos' health would decrease. And he fell into a critical condition in just a few seconds. After Deimos stumbled, Dedric immediately raised his voice angrily.

"Ya, you! Are you just going to die like that? Hold on for more than 3 seconds before dying!"

Yes, that bat was truly a shameless person. Goat was just about to strike the final blow when.....

"Blade Storm!"

Numerous particles of light appeared inside the cave and started to strike Goat. The sword debris continuously attacked it and Goat was pushed back a few metres. Dedric shouted with glee.

"Master, you got up! Help me!"

However Ark couldn't even afford to answer.

'Oh my God.....!'

He naturally moaned. The sword that Snake spat out was a pretty good sword. He could've got several gold for it even though it wasn't a magic sword. Even though he used Blade Storm, he only managed to chip off 7% of its health. It almost had the stamina of a boss.

'In addition, the cave is pretty narrow. With the huge figure, there is no room for me to escape.'

The narrow area was a disadvantage for Ark.

'But there is a way. It is dangerous.....'

"Deimos, transform!"

Deimos who was burning with a fighting spirit changed at Ark's command. Ark drew the sword and shouted.

"Dedric, can you move now?"

"Okay! Although I can move a little bit, with that Goat as the opponent....."

“If you see any other monsters while flying let me know right away.”

“If you like. Are you going to run away?”

“Too noisy! Just do it!”

When Ark raised his voice, Dedric immediately flew to the nearest passage. When Dedric ran away, Goat shrieked and followed.

“You goat bastard, your opponent is me!”

Ark struck Goat with his whip like blade. Then Goat turned and charged towards him. Ark ran away and attacked a few times while he ran down the passage that Dedric flew in. It was the plan that Ark had come up with.

The range of the whip blade was 10 metres. Thus he could attack with the whip from a distance until Goat got close. Of course, if he used the whip then the damage was only 70% of the Saw Blade. But clothes would get wet even when it is a light shower. Although it might take some time but it would eventually run out of health.

It was a hit and run strategy! It was an operation he often used when his health was low.

Kwaaaaa!

However, Goat was much faster than Ark expected. Although it was 20 metres away, Goat quickly cross the distance and swung its club.

“Huck, sprint!”

Ark hurriedly screamed. His body became as light as a feather and he quickly got some distance between him and Goat.

‘This is surprisingly useable?’

Ark had learnt ‘Sprint’ from Lancel Village and he never imagined that it would be so useful. When he used Sprint his movement speed increased by 50%. Although it only lasted a few seconds, the effect was still enough for his plan to work. Ark alternated using Sprint and the whip attack and gradually decreased Goat’s health. However his plan had one risk factor. If he encountered or aggravated other

monsters while attacking then the situation would become even worse. It was the reason why Ark urgently sent Dedric to scout ahead.

“There’s a monster in the right passage! It is another Goat!”

“Huk, there are two goats here. The other side, the other side!”

The Cradle of Ancient Evil was truly a dungeon where he couldn’t be careless. There were boss level goats everywhere. Thanks to Dedric’s reconnaissance, he was able to slowly kill Goat without running into another one.

It had been 40 minutes since the battle started.....Goat’s health dropped to 10% but Ark never rushed it. If Goat managed to land one blow on him then all of his 40 minute efforts would be undone. Ark slowly attacked until.....finally there was only 1% health left.

“Now it is time to finish this!”

Chwarararak, Kakakakak!

Ark turned around and brandished the Saw Blade.

Roaaaaar!

Goat was struck with a critical hit and collapsed with a scream.

“Huk huk huk, I killed it.”

Ark sat on the ground with a heavy thud. When he checked the information window, he saw that he only had 30 mana left. Thanks to using Sprint which consumed 20 mana, his mana was low. He also got hit three or four times so he only had 1,500 health left. Ark’s current level was 159. With his dark attribute bonus it was 222. Nevertheless, he would not be able to win against that opponent in a head on confrontation. However, the experience was equivalent to the difficulty level.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.

It was indeed an elite Monster! He quickly gained 2 levels.

Also.....

Ssak ssaak ssak!

Snake immediately showed Ark the item it found.

Heavy Chain Gloves (Magic)

Armour type: Chain Gloves

Defense power: 65

Durability: 13/50

Weight: 50

User restriction: Level 150 and more.

These gloves are made of tightly connected small chains. Since it is old, the weight is a little difficult. But it does not look worn at all. It seems to be made out of a hard magic material.

<Option: Strength +20, Stamina +15>

‘A magic item dropped from a monster I encountered for the first time.....!’

A tremendous amount of experience and a magic item!

‘Now I see.’

Ark had questioned something during the siege. Raiden had said they haven’t left the castle since they occupied it, yet the Dawn Blade members had become stronger. In fact, they actually never left the castle. The answer was because of this dungeon. If they monopolized and hunted in a dungeon filled with elite monsters then of course they would become stronger.

“If I can monopolize the dungeon then its value will become immense. But how did Alan even find this place? And how big is it? While I was running away a while ago, I saw some stairs leading down.....this dungeon has even more secrets.’

Ark contemplated before deciding to explore a bit more. Of course he had no intention of fighting a Goat again. He could barely deal with one. If he encountered two or more of them then he wouldn't be able to handle it with his ability now. Ark recalled his summons and used stealth.

As expected, he soon saw groups of two or three goats. A level 350 elite monster that resembled a devil also appeared regularly.

'This isn't going to work. I don't know the detection abilities of those monsters so I won't be able to approach. I'll leave before stealth wears off and return with the hyungs.'

It was the first time he felt like the darkness was terrifying in New World. Ark headed towards the entrance of the dungeon. Then, a horrible smell suddenly came from another passage.

'What, what the? This smell? Is this?'

Ark instinctively turned his head and winced. The bad stench came from a place with another Asyeosu statue. In the temple the statue didn't seem that strange. Was it because of the darkness? It somehow had an even more eerie feel. Not only that. The landscape expanded into a place that looked like a meeting place for a devil worshipping cult.

No, it actually was that place. There were ritualistic instruments, bones and rotten corpses lying around the area. It felt like the set of a horror movie.

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak!

He glanced around to see Snake scratching at something in the ground. After 3~4 minutes, a shiny object was pulled out.

'Eh? That is.....?'

It was the size of a fist and made out of a crystal-like material that he had previously seen in the Underwater City. Thanks to that, Ark knew the purpose of the item. It was a memory crystal often found in ancient ruins. During the Dark Century, any texts or images were retained in the memory crystal instead of books. Unfortunately, that

ancient knowledge had disappeared and was now thought of as simple stones.....But Ark was different, as he had a Dark Walker's Knowledge of Ancient Relics.

Of coursewhen he picked up the crystal, an image floated in front of him. It wasn't a beautiful scene like the ones he saw in the Underwater City. The blurry images that looked like an old scene showed the area where Ark was standing now. People dressed in black were gathered. They chanted an unknown spell towards Asyeosu's statue. When the atmosphere became heightened, they pulled in a group of naked people. The naked people were stricken with terror. There was a barrage of screams.

However, the people dressed in black smiled and flocked to them like wild animals seeking their prey. A bizarre twisted sword tore their flesh off and into their bones. Every strike made a ringing sound and echoed. At the end, the blood of the sacrifices were scattered all over Asyeosu's statue. Then Asyeosu's face distorted. As if it was alive, the entire face distorted and emerged with an entirely different shape. It was the face of a crow with red eyes! There was a loud thunder like cry that shook the eardrums.

Worship the Great Asyeosu!

Asyeosu has the appearance of Ankh, god of the dead! It changes from balance to destruction! Blood is a symbol of destruction! That is why we offer blood to Asyeosu. To destroy the balance.

Your Knowledge of Ancient Ruins has shown you the information hidden in the 'Memory Crystal.'

The Memory Crystal contained the secret history of the ancient society that worshipped the Devil. The true identity of the god worshipped by the masked figures is hidden in ancient writing.

<Knowledge of Ancient Relics +25, Intelligence 20, Luck 10, Fame has increased by 200>

The Memory Crystal shattered into dust. At that moment, it was like a thunderbolt had struck his head.

‘All the questions in my head are answered!’

It was the reason why the Cathedral helped Alan by sending Holy Knights! The identity of the Asyeosu church was one that secretly worshipped the devil. And their birthplace was here, hidden in the basement of Silvana Castle. That’s why they wanted to control Nagaran, in order to keep this place secret. But the war suddenly finished and it was opened to users.

There was no time to dispose of the things left in this dungeon. The NPCs also knows that users have a lot of curiosity. Once they occupied Silvana then it was only a matter of time until someone discovered it. If the Lord kept on changing, there was a chance that someone with the Knowledge of Ancient Relics might become the Lord. Because of that, they tried to have foreigners who worshipped Asyeosu seal up the secret.

‘That is why Alan got approval to use the Holy Knights!’

It was the reason why Alan aimed for Silvana among the 12 castles. In exchange for the church’s help, he promised to keep Silvana’s secret hidden. And they told Alan the secret of the platform in exchange.

‘Yes, the temple was built in exchange for the Holy Knights.....they were dispatched to help Alan and to also keep the secret. If they had an opportunity then they would probably get rid of the evidence. But since it is a large and complex dungeon, they probably couldn’t find it.’

The memory crystal was buried in the ground and would be hard for users to find. At that moment, Ark’s head was spinning fiercely.

‘Anyway, it is difficult to go against the church. On the other hand, I already know the secret between Alan and the Cathedral. If Alan recovers, the Asyeosu church will help him retake it again and that would be an obstacle. Then.....!’

He had no choice but to discard all answers except for one! And he had plenty of bombs to throw at them. The pieces of the Memory Crystal was scattered around!

‘Huhuhu, Alan, you’re done for now!’

See you again, Silvana!

Crack!

The door broke off with a harsh sound. Several knights and soldiers suddenly came through the door. The priest who was praying got up with a surprised expression.

“What are you doing? Don’t you know where this is?”

“Shut up!”

The knights glanced at the soldiers and pushed the priest outside. The soldiers held up a bucket with a strange smell and poured it on the statue. The statue’s face instantly changed into that of a crow.

“Ankh, the god of death!”

The knight exclaimed and pulled out his sword.

“There is no need to look anymore. Capture all the wicked ones! If they become rebellious then kill them!”

A continuous uproar took place. The priests began to resist, forcing the soldiers to draw their swords and a messy fight suddenly occurred. It wasn’t limited to that room. Throughout the cathedral, the same scene was occurring at the temples that worshipped Asyeosu. However, in this situation the soldiers had already completely surrounded the temple. The priests soon gave up their resistance and the soldiers bound them.

“This room belongs to Asyeosu’s Archbishop!”

The soldiers who were clearing the top floor of the temple plunged into the room. However, the Archbishop was not in the room. He had sensed the commotion and fled.

“Damn.....he couldn’t have been able to run far away. Send

soldiers to every exit and block his escape!”

“I understand!”

The soldiers ran away in a hurry. Soldiers from the Schudenberg Kingdom were raiding Asyeosu’s temple! They found a secret meeting place to worship Ankh inside the cathedral. After searching and seizing documents, they found irregularities with the church of Asyeosu. Unfortunately, the Archbishop and several senior priests had fled beforehand but the church of Asyeosu was still destroyed. Taking into consideration the impact on the kingdom, they did not disclose any further details. Thus the church of Asyeosu quietly disappeared into the depths of the history books, while a hobbit merchant who was imprisoned for life in the cathedral dungeons was released.

“Uh, my sore eyes.....!”

The hobbit frowned at the painful sunlight. It was none other than Sid who had spent a month in jail.

“I wonder why I was released?”

Sid didn’t know what had changed. His day in the prison had begun like normal until a soldier suddenly approached and asked.

“Are you Sid?”

“Yes? Yes I am, but why?”

“You’ve been released from prison.”

The soldiers just released Sid without any notice. He didn’t know what happened today but Sid didn’t bother questioning it.

“Anyway, I can now play the game again. I’ll never come near the Cathedral again!”

Sid quickly left the tedious Cathedral. But a few minutes after Sid had gained precious freedom, his face darkened. It was because he had found a letter from Ark in his mailbox.

Have you left? Please come to Silvana castle in Nagaran

||immediately!||

Although I managed to get the confiscated 5000 gold back, there is no way to obtain the 3000 gold that you lost to a scam. In such a situation Ark had no intention of letting his food go. The poor hobbit had once again gone from the mouth of a tiger into the wolf's trap.

'Since the letter is written by Ark-nim.....it is impossible not to go.....'

Sid sighed and headed towards Nagaran.

'How did my gaming life become like this?'

.....The King congratulated him after listening to the situation. But there were still remnants of the social party. The church of Asyeosu had gathered a lot of social power, so if it was discredited then confusion would spread throughout the continent. So he had to wait for the King's permission to disclose the secret. Once the political situation calmed down then he would have a chance.

'Huhuhu, okay, Alan and the Cathedral have been dealt with.'

There was a sudden warm smile on Hyun-woo's mouth. Yes, it wasn't necessary to explain once again but Ark was behind the church's downfall. Ark collected the fragments of memory crystal from the dungeon and headed straight to the young Lord of Jackson. He relayed what he found with the memory crystals as evidence. After that it progressed rapidly. The young Lord realised the severity of the problem, the King mobilized his troops and Asyeosu's temple was raided. Of course, Asyeosu's destruction was unrelated to Alan and Sid. However, Ark had gained a lot of recognition from the situation and Sid was released from the prison based on his words. Well Sid was imprisoned for an ambiguous reason by the church of Asyeosu in the first place, so he was released once the charges were reviewed.....But what made Ark even more cheerful was

the situation surrounding Alan.

The Pope had sent him a report from the King.

Judging from the circumstances, I think that there is a secret deal between Alan and the Asyeosu church in regards to Sid like you claimed. The information the knights confiscated from the temple is the proof. Alan clearly knew the truth behind the church and hid it. Unfortunately, there is no way to prove that he had anything to do with what happened to Sid. But he can't escape the charge of conspiring with the church. Arrangements have been made for Alan's downfall. Because I have to conceal the contents, the public charge will be that he made a ghost guild in Nagaran and deceived the Kings of the Three Kingdoms. Once he is caught then there will be a big punishment.

'Now he doesn't have a chance.'

The crime of socializing with the church was hidden. Instead his sin was deceiving the kings using a ghost guild. Thanks to that, overnight Alan went from being a Lord to a fugitive. The guild master was accused of a crime so the Dawn Blade guild was also dissolved. Alan had lost all his power and his entire support base. But was that all? Since he was a wanted man then he couldn't even hunt properly. If it was to this degree then Alan was already over. In addition, the same thing applied to Andel who relied on Alan.

'You shouldn't have picked a fight with me.'

Ark felt refreshed at the thought of their downfall. But it was only the start. Ark's motto was to step on them again and again until they became trash.

'Even though the conclusion is that I won, Alan still has my 3000 gold. I won't be pleased if it ends like this. Since his crime was stealing my money, using Lariette and killing Roco, I won't be pleased until I kill him at least three or four times!'

Once he made up his mind, Ark was more persistent than anyone else.

“We have the same thoughts. We won’t be satisfied with this.”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members nodded.

“Park So-mi’s medical expenses.....urgh, the resentment of 3000 gold is deep!”

“How dare he kill our cutie Roco right in front of us.....!”

“That’s not the problem. Alan used a woman as a shield.....! I have to make sure such a person doesn’t step foot into New World again.”

Roco growled fiercely. Ark who had been listening in silence finally said.

“The problem is that there is no way to figure out Alan’s location. When Alan was the Lord the castle was his resurrection point. Since we’ve captured the castle, he will resurrect in the location before the castle. But we can’t just go out and search the 1~2 villages in the vicinity. And Alan probably won’t travel like he did before.”

“The time has come to show my skill.”

At that time, Hae Gyeol-sa smiled and cut in.

“Don’t you know I’m a professional at finding people?”

Hae Gyeol-sa.....In other words, his former job was recovering money from people. Thus he was an expert at finding people who hid with the money.

“But isn’t this a game?”

“The method to find people doesn’t actually change. Everyone has similar habits in regards to hiding. If I go out and search the vicinity then I’ll quickly be able to catch his trail.”

Hae Gyeol-sa replied. Ark had already seen Jjak-tung’s and Tazza’s skills a while ago. Hae Gyeol-sa would only tell him that if there was a good reason.

“It will be difficult alone.....if I had a few people then I could find Alan within a couple of days.”

“I’d go. Because I have no interest in levelling up.”

“It might be too dangerous with just you.”

Tazza and Bul-kkun volunteered.

“Okay let’s start straight away. Send any information about Alan to my mail.”

So Hae Gyeol-sa, Tazza, and Bul-kkun left to track Alan.

‘Now I just have to wait.’

Once Ark organized that he turned his attention to the problem of Silvana castle. There was no way that Ark could defend Silvana with his power. He had no money or organizing ability to create a ghost guild like Alan did. When the next siege began there was a 100% chance that he would have his Lordship taken away. At best he would only receive 1 copper from being the Lord before being kicked out. But Ark had already found a way to solve the problem.

“For the moment, I’m going to transfer this castle to Raiden.”

“What?”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members’ eyes opened.

“W-what are you talking about?”

“Why are you handing the castle over to the guy who betrayed us?”

“Of course it’s not for free.”

Ark shook his finger left and right as he laughed.

“As you know, we don’t have a way to keep the castle. But we have the right to choose a challenger. I’ll sell that right to Raiden. Since he’ll definitely obtain the castle once he gets the challenge right, there is no way Raiden would refuse.”

“Certainly but.....”

“Giving a castle that we worked hard to capture to a guy like him.....”

“Didn’t you hear? I said for the moment.”

“Huh? For the moment?”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were puzzled. Ark smiled and explained in detail what he had envisioned. And JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members expressed their admiration.

“That, that method.....!”

“Now do you understand? Silvana isn’t like that now, but in the future it will be a goose that lays golden eggs. It isn’t possible to overlook such a place. So I’m going to install a few precautions before I pass it to Raiden. And since I developed the idea, I want Hyungs to make it possible.”

“I got it. Leave it to us.”

The rehabilitation members rolled up their sleeves with excited faces. JusticeMan nodded and looked at Ark with admiring eyes.

“I see why you picked Raiden to make the deal with.”

“I have to return the favour at least once.”

Ark replied with an evil grin. Although he had to deal with Alan, there was still a debt that Raiden needed to repay. A few hours later, Ark sat facing Raiden in his office. Raiden’s face was haggard since he couldn’t sleep after the siege. Indeed, on the way here Raiden vomited on the road which Ark noticed and couldn’t help making insinuations while smiling.

“What happened to your pretty face?”

“You bastard.....!”

Raiden drew his sword as his shoulders shook with anger. Well, if he tried to kill him then the NPC soldiers would expel him like a dog..... Ark seemed carefree as he said.

“In this situation there is no reason to be angry with me.”

“Did you call me just to say things like that?”

“No, I called because I have a good proposal.”

“What? Proposal?”

“I’ll skip the small talk and just simply say it. Do you want Silvana castle?”

Raiden’s eyes flinched.

“.....What does that mean?”

“The next siege is in 5 days. If you want then I’ll give Silvana to you then.”

“Are you serious?”

Raiden asked Ark in an incredulous voice.

“Of course it’s not for free. 6000 gold.”

“What, what the? This kid, are you crazy?”

Raiden jumped in surprise. However, Ark just replied as if he hadn’t said such outrageous words.

“Hey, we’re talking about the Lordship here. You could get that much from selling cookies at a small store, yet you think that 6000 gold for a territory is too expensive? Besides, you offered me 3,600 gold the other day. You’re willing to spend that much on war funds but you won’t part with 6000 gold to buy you’re precious territory?”

“T-that is.....”

“You wouldn’t have this issue if you had just given it to me in the beginning.”

Ark coolly replied. Ark and Raiden had been willing to spend money during the siege because they thought there would be an enormous profit once they had the castle. But that wasn’t what he found once he finally occupied the castle. Occupying the castle would certainly be profitable. However, he had to defend it until he obtained the profits. Even if Hermes was an enormous guild, it wouldn’t be easy for them to have the funds necessary for the siege. Since he had been in Nagaran for a while, he probably already knew that. There

was a high chance that Raiden had already organized that with the other guilds in the alliance. The 5 guilds invested in such a way that they would receive the profits after the estate upgraded. After all, Raiden betrayed Dark Eden over the promise of 30%. No, Ark was the one who didn't know anything when he was making the demands.

"The problem was that I didn't know anything about the castle. Anyway, my requirement is 6000 gold. You decided whether you will take it or not."

"The salary of Silvana's Lord is only 3000 gold!"

As a pioneer, he also had access to such information. However, Ark retorted without even blinking.

"Yes, so that payment is the profit for two months."

"Don't joke around. Do you think I'm a fool? Two months in New World is 3 weeks in reality. I'll have to participate in three sieges in the meantime. We need that money to pay for it. Thanks to the siege, developing the estate until it's not in a deficit anymore would take a few months. But you want to receive 6000 gold without even lifting a finger?"

"I'm not playing around."

The smile disappeared from Ark's face. Ark lowered his upper body and threatened.

"Weren't you aware of it before the first siege? You had confidence that you would be able to obtain a profit, wasn't that why you started the siege in the first place? And if you defend it a few times then you'll definitely get a lot of benefits. Well, I lack the ability to defend the castle which is why I proposed a deal. But I'm the Lord now. I can choose any challenger."

"What.....?"

"Apart from you, there are other people willing to buy the castle. For example, the Grey Wings guild."

“Grey wings!”

“The Grey Wings guild would respond to my offer without complaining. Nevertheless, I offered it to you first. Although you betrayed me in the end, I still managed to occupy the castle because of you. I have my own kind of loyalty. That’s all I have to say. Do you want to buy it or not?”

Raiden rolled his eyes at Ark’s words. But he had already decided the answer from the beginning. If Silvana was owned by the Grey Wings then Raiden would have no choice but to siege again. That would require thousands more gold to be poured into his military power. There was also no guarantee of a victory. So he might not even get a profit from it. All Raiden could do was bargain for the best price. As expected, Raiden muttered in a strained voice.

“But right now 6000 gold.....”

‘I made the right call. He should be a beginner in regards to these kinds of deals.’

Ark didn’t seem like he would be good at it compared to Raiden. However, Raiden didn’t know that Ark had been in charge of the family budget since he was young, so he had twice the experience in making money transactions.

“I’ll simply say it. How much can you possible save up?”

“I can only gather 3000 gold in a week.”

“That’s a bit difficult.”

“W-wait a minute. I will give you 3000 gold in a fortnight and write up a contract.”

“I do not believe in contracts now.”

Ark added in a cold and quiet voice.

“But the circumstances are difficult so I’ll concede one thing. 4000 gold in cash. I’ll allow you to use something else to pay the remaining 2000 gold.

“Something else?”

“The shoes that Duke is wearing.....it looks pretty good?”

Raiden was surprised and shook his head.

“That’s impossible.”

“I won’t accept anything else. 4000 gold and Duke’s shoes. Or I’ll meet up with Grey Wings and sell them the challenge rights next week. If I don’t receive a call tomorrow then I’ll see it as a rejection and make a deal with the Grey Wings guild.”

Then Ark ended the negotiations. Shoes that enabled him to move freely without breaking his posture! It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that Ark’s primary purpose was those shoes.

Raiden had just gone through a siege. In order to get the money, he would have to scrape it from his war funds. If he paid Ark 6000 gold then Raiden would have no money left in his funds. The maximum he could get from scraping money together was 4000 gold. So Ark asked for 6000 gold and stealthily sneaked in Duke’s shoes as if it was just a side concession. These kinds of sale pitches done in black market shops were nothing to Ark.

‘Raiden absolutely can’t refuse. He will bring the shoes even if he has to kill Duke.’

As expected, Raiden sent a notification the next day accepting the deal.

“The deposit is 1000 gold. The rest will be paid after you accept Hermes’ challenge.”

“Okay.”

‘Raiden will regret this decision for the rest of his life.’

Ark gave a wicked smile and collected the 1000 gold. Anyway, his problem regarding Silvana was solved. Silvana which had been empty will be turned into 4000 gold and unique shoes after 6 days.

‘In the meantime I won’t just play around!’

“Ajusshi, has everyone done what I told them to?”

“Yes, Berami will take care of the rest.”

“Then gather all the NPCs together. From now on we’re exploring the dungeon!”

“Good, I’ll finally get to see an elite monster!”

JusticeMan grinned and raised his arms.

“What? What did you say?”

Duke looked at Raiden with an amazed expression. Raiden scratched his head and muttered an excuse.

“That.....you know the guild’s situation. Since we had to pay for the siege before, we’ve ran out of money. It is much easier to gather 4000 gold in a few days than 6000 gold.”

“But to give that guy Ark my shoes? Does that make sense?”

“I didn’t want it to be this way either! All of this is to take the castle away from him. I’m the one that should be more irate at him! Even though I want to kill him dozens of times, I can’t think like that!”

While he was trying to persuade his guild members, Raiden’s resentment burst out.

“But there is no other way. We can’t miss this opportunity to occupy the castle. I know, I know. After being threatened I also felt ill. But now there is no way to turn around. I’ve already given the 1000 gold deposit to Ark. If I don’t pay the rest then that would be wasted for nothing! Furthermore, all of our efforts will be in vain if Ark just hands the castle to the Grey Wings guild.”

“Indeed.....”

The guild members that had been gathered nodded. In fact, so far the power of Hermes outnumbered Grey Wings by 6:4. But if Grey Wings occupied the castle and becomes the Lord, that would change. Since they've already participated in a siege, they knew that defending was more advantageous than attacking. If they took into account the damage Hermes received in the failed siege, their current ratio was 4:6.....No, Grey Wings would have the upper hand with a ratio of 3:7. No matter how much time and money they spend, it would be impossible to take back the castle once it is in Grey Wings' hands. He wasn't going to let his pride get in the way.

“I promise that when we occupy the castle, I'll reward you first.”

“Yes, the guild master is right.”

“We'll help you get some shoes later.”

“You're not going to betray the guild just because of some shoes are you?”

The guild members surrounded Duke and started pressuring him.

‘Damn, I handpicked that item and now I have to give it to that guy.....’

Curses rose in Duke's throat. Those shoes made moving while shooting possible! It wasn't an exaggeration to say that it had the best possible option for a ranger. Although his level was less than the other pioneers, he was able to fight side-by-side with Raiden and Jewel because of those shoes.

However.....now he had to give it to Ark?

Frankly, in this situation he was angrier with Raiden and his guild then about giving Ark his shoes. Meanwhile, the guild members had slowly narrowed the distance. They had already decided to just peel Duke's shoes off.

“No! I'll never do it!”

Duke stared at Raiden and the guild before turning around. He was

going to defend his shoes. He just had to hide until the next siege occurred in several days. Well, he might be chewed out by his guild later on but it was better than being deprived of his shoes.

“Eh? Catch him!”

Raiden shouted when he sensed Duke’s aim and Duke ran away. However, Duke used his shoes to escape from the guild’s encirclement.

‘I did it! Heh, do you think I would give up these shoes so easily?’

Duke smiled with satisfaction as he walked through the door. Then a dozen wind chains abruptly rose from the ground and wound around Duke.

-You have been caught by the advanced ‘Restraint’ spell. <You will not be able to move for 1 minute>

Duke looked in surprise at the magician who suddenly appeared at the door.

“Eh? J-Jewel, even you.....!”

“We have no choice. This time you’ll have to concede a little bit. You’ll still be compensated for it. And we still owe Ark a debt. When he leaves Nagaran then we’ll strike and get back the shoes.”

“Son of a bitch, you’re not serious?”

Duke seethed with rage but it was all over from the moment he had been captured by the chains. After that, he was surrounded by the guild members who used intimidation, confusion and hit him for 20 hours until Duke eventually raised the white flag.

“Damn, I got it! I understand! Kuhuk, you dirty bastard. I’ll give it!”

Duke shouted, his eyes brimming with tears. However, Raiden’s face was still dark even after he got the shoes.

“Phew, I’ve got the shoes.....but how am I going to get 3000 gold in a few days?”

If he scraped all the japtem together and sold it, he might just be able to make 3000 gold. The deadline was slowly drawing closer.

“Now! Artillerymen, fire!”

He shouted after Ark and the rehabilitation members are cut Goat’s health in half. The thieves who were in the back fired the cannons simultaneously.

Tu tu tu tung!

Roaaaaar!

Eventually Goat was engulfed in flames and collapsed. Meanwhile, another Goat was having a fierce struggle against the Meow. The Meow weren’t bothering to defend against Goat. Instead they used several reckless attacks that made Ark stiffen with fear. But the situation was different from the time Ark was fighting alone.

“The source of life which boils up from the heart!”

When Roco used the song of recovery, the Meow immediately recovered their health. When Ark, the rehabilitation company and the thieves helped, the remaining Goat instantly collapsed.

[-Your level has risen.]

‘Hahaha, that was pretty quick!’

Ark confirmed the message window and let out a cheer. After Ark decided to sell Silvana, he brought the rehabilitation company and

the NPCs to the ‘Cradle of Evil’ dungeon. The dungeon was overflowing with elite monsters that dropped experience and a magic item every time they killed one. And he was also able to monopolize the dungeon! However, the downside was that the monsters’ stats were so high that he couldn’t hunt alone. But once he gathered the rehabilitation members and the NPCs, that problem was solved straight away. Ark and the rehabilitation members’ intimacy with the NPCs also rose as a result!

‘It’s good that I didn’t tell anyone about this dungeon.’

Ark had not told anyone about the dungeon, including the Lord of Jackson. He reported that the memory crystals were found in a few places in the castle. Because there was a possibility of a team being sent to investigate the dungeon if they knew about it, and in the worst case situation close up the dungeon. This meant that Ark wouldn’t have his golden farming ground.

‘But I can’t use the dungeon for long.’

Once he sold Silvana then he won’t be able to enter the dungeon anymore. Ark was so enthusiastic about hunting that he got almost no sleep. After spending 4 days in the dungeon, he was able to reach the 5th floor underground.

“Character information window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +350		
Fame	6375 (+500)	Level	178
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Battlefield, Jackson’s Hero		
Health	2940 (+150)	Mana	2,805
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	359 (+28)

Agility	499 (+35)	Stamina	549 (+20)
Wisdom	58 (+10)	Intelligence	542
Luck	69 (+30)	Flexibility	83
Art of Communication	46	Affection	105 (+10)
Resilience	147		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
*<King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20			
Warrior’s Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Improved Norad Boots (Shoes): Movement Speed + 15%, Evasion + 10%			
Veil of Fire (Mantle): Flame resistance + 50%			
Adelaine’s Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, ‘Blessing of the Sea’ available			
Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%			
Mind’s Eye (Ring): ‘Mind’s Eye’ enabled			
Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds			
Gladiator’s Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%			
* 40% increase all skills in the dark.* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into			

combat)

- * Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.
- * You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.
- * Shock absorption is increased by 20%.
- * Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

Even though he was in a party, he was able to gain 14 levels in a few days! Because of the relatively low level of the rehabilitation members and the NPCs, they got an experience bonus and gained an average of 20 levels during the dungeon hunt. It was also common for the monsters to drop magic items. Of course, Ark couldn't grab everything as he wasn't hunting alone. Although it was so valuable that he shed tears, he still had to share the items properly. Well, he couldn't hunt along so he couldn't really complain.....

'I've managed to collect 300 gold which isn't bad.'

Anyway, the hunting speeds became faster and faster because the rehabilitation group and the NPCs had better equipment.

'I have to hunt even more during the remaining time!'

"Dedric, find the next prey!"

JusticeMan turned pale when he heard Ark give the enthusiastic command.

"Huk, you want to immediately hunt again?"

"Yes, there's no time."

When Ark gave the natural sounding reply, the rehabilitation members let out a cry. While the NPCs inevitably had to rest, Ark and the rehabilitation group hunted without getting any sleep.

"Huk huk, Ark, we're going to die."

“Are you always like this when you play the game alone?”

“You only got 3 hours sleep last night after hunting for 30 hours non-stop! Did you even go to the gym?”

“Teacher told me to rest for a few days. I don’t get many chances to happily hunt like this.”

Ark replied with a smile. In recent times, Lee Myung-ryong hadn’t been coming to the gym a lot.

“B-Bastard.....!”

“Ugh.....there are two coming!”

Then without any notice.....No, the astute Dedric had been herding the Goats.

“Son of a bitch!”

“I’m never hunting with you again!”

The rehabilitation members cursed as they had to stand up again. Thus they once again spent 10 hours hunting. By the time Ark reached level 180, it was time for Raiden to pay what he owed.

‘Okay, I’ve achieved the level that I wanted. My heart would like to earn more but.....’

There was a lot of work to do before he could give the estate to Raiden. So Ark ended the hunt and left the dungeon. When he arrived at the Shrine of War, Raiden had reached it first and was waiting nervously.

“Are you ready?”

“Here it is. 3,000 gold and.....”

Raiden handed him a purse and quickly averted his gaze. Duke was standing behind him with a red face and handing him the shoes. He had taken off his equipped item. That was a cause of tears for any gamer. Although it was related to the profit of the guild, Duke couldn’t help but stare at the shoes with bloodshot eyes before tears started falling.

“Don’t worry, I’ll receive it thankfully. I’ll treat it well.”

“Oooh!”

Ark quickly packed the shoes while Duke made an expression that seemed like he was going to cry out. But he swallowed the curses that rose in his throat. Raiden looked at Duke apologetically and bluntly said.

“Ark, now it is your turn to keep your end of the deal.”

“I got it. Unlike you, I keep my promises.”

Ark replied before calling the priest over.

“I designate the Hermes guild as the next challenger.”

“I understand. “Thank you. The siege will start tomorrow at 6 a.m.”

The priest explained the siege information.

“By this time tomorrow, the castle will be ours”

“.....I got it. See you tomorrow.”

Ark smiled as he watched the two of them leave the shrine.

‘Huhuhu, I’ve finally obtained the shoes! Now, should I look at it?’

“Information Window”

Wind Spirit’s Boots (Unique)

Armour type: Leather Shoes

Defense power: 50

Durability: 60/60

Weight: 15

User restriction: Level 150 and more

The boots are enchanted with the power of a wind spirit.

A long time ago, a legendary wind spirit used these boots. After the

wind spirit carefully polished the leather boots, it gained the ability to speed up the wearer's movements. In addition, you have the ability to glide without moving your feet.

<Option: Agility +30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%>

<Special Option: You can use the skill 'Slide.' When using slide, the player can move to their desired location without moving their body. Since the body isn't being moved, there is no penalty to attack speed, offense and defense.

However, the movement speed is the same and no more than 30 metres can be exceeded. Mana consumption: 10>]

He was stunned by the stats! The leather armour had amazing defense while the option was the best. And Ark could use the skill 'Slide' that he desired more than anything immediately. The methods to utilize this skill were endless.

'All right, I've collected everything. Since the remaining time is 20 hours, I'll put on the finishing touches!'

So Ark restlessly returned to Silvana. He visited Berami as soon as he got back.

"Berami, have you finished what I told you to do?"

"Yes, I've finished it for the moment....."

Berami replied, looking at a huge building that had been erected near the castle. After negotiating with Raiden, Ark had ordered Berami to build a large trading post on the estate. Of course, the money came from the estate's funds. Although he couldn't embezzle the money for personal use, as the Lord he could decide what the money could be used for on the estate.

"Stop any other construction and create a trading post instead."

When he heard the command, Berami asked with an outraged face.

"But that money is needed to repair the Defense Towers and castle

walls. But you really want me to stop that construction?”

“Of course.”

Ark nodded with a calm face.

“Because of the repeated sieges, the development of Silvana has been delayed and it is an unnecessary waste of money.”

“That’s true but.....”

“The castle shouldn’t rely on such foolish things. Anyway, I have no confidence that I will win in the siege. In that case, shouldn’t I do something for the estate while I’m still the Lord? Fortunately, Silvana is located in a good position where it can be a trading post. If we can build a trading post on the estate then it will accelerate the development of Silvana. Then the lives of the people living here will become a little bit better. You don’t have to waste the precious funds on defending my position.”

“M-my Lord!”

Berami shook for the first time. He was different from the other Lords that had only cared about defending the castle! He was sincerely concerned about Silvana’s future!

.....That was what he thought.

However, Ark wasn’t that good of a person. Berami was so impressed that he started the construction without any protest. Meanwhile Ark proceeded with another plan along with Jjak-tung. Shortly after the construction started, Ark contacted Wolkosu who came from Cairo.

“Wolkosu ajusshi, didn’t you manage a large store in Selebrid before?”

“I did.”

“Then do you want to operate a trading post here?”

“Trading post?”

“Yes, it is a trading post on the grounds of Silvana and ajusshi will

receive substantial compensation. As the Lord I can give permission for Lorenzo to stay here if he wanted to and we'll give you a piece of land to live in."

"Really?"

"But there is one condition."

"What condition would make me refuse? I'll do my best to set up the best trading post in Schudenberg."

Wolkosu nodded and grabbed Ark's hands. It wasn't possible to give the funds designate for the estate's facilities to the user. However the Lord could hire the managers of the facilities, so Ark succeeded in assigning someone to the trading post. Of course the income from the trading post would go to the castle. Ark wouldn't get any profit even if the trading post did well. However, Ark had learned something from Raiden.

"There are also skills to overturn the rules of the game system!"

In reality, the laws in New World weren't perfect. Users could find a way to get around the rules depending on the skill. While Ark purchased the land and set up the trading post, Jjak-tung fabricated some documents. It was called 'Dual Registration'! Of course, the trading post didn't belong to Ark even if there was dual registration. However, if he created two sets of books then it wouldn't be difficult for him to hide a part of the trading post's profits by fabricating the books. But he definitely needed the help of the NPC in charge of the trading post. The condition he required from Wolkosu was to make these double ledgers. And the monitoring station was left to Sid.

"I'm sorry."

Sid had murmured with a poor expression after he arrived a few days ago. Ark and the rehabilitation members had entrusted Sid with 5,500 gold. After Sid only had the 5000 gold he received back from the Cathedral. He didn't receive compensation for the 3000 gold Alan stole through a scam. But Ark just hit Sid's shoulders and said in a soft voice.

"That's okay. Sid-nim as already suffered in the prison."

“A, Ark-nim.....!”

“However.....wasn't it Sid-nim's fault that the money was lost?”

Ark replied with a smile. As expected, Ark wasn't going to let him get away with it. Sid gave him anxious glances and stuttered.

“I-I don't have the money right now!”

“I know, I know. Do you think that I am someone who would ask you to pay it back straight away? Once you earn it then you can pay me back.”

“E-earn? But.....”

“Huhuhu, I've even prepared a job for you. Sid-nim, from now on please help Wolkosu ajusshi manage the trading post here. Aren't you thankful? The job isn't that difficult. Wolkosu ajusshi will take care of most of it. Of course, 50% of your salary will be used to pay off the 4000 gold.”

“4000 gold? Eh, how come.....?”

“Since you're only paying it off with 50% of your salary, I don't know how long it would take you to pay it all. If I deposited it in a bank then I would've gained interest.....you should be glad that I'm not making it more expensive.”

Sid's face withered at Ark's words. Since Ark had stared and threatened him indirectly, he had no other choice. Eventually he had to write up a contract stating that he would give Ark 50% of his income until 4000 gold was paid off. It was the perfect slave contract! Thanks to that, Ark could somehow place two people at the trading post. Of course, all those preparations would be useless once Ark wasn't the Lord anymore. So Ark also proceeded with another plan.

‘The secret lies within the dungeon!’

Ark had paid attention. If he participated in the siege again one day, he could take advantage of the dungeon to get in. Ark had a crazy idea and ordered the raccoons to create a secret passage out of the

dungeon. Then he had them seal up the entrance of the dungeon. It could only be penetrated using the raccoons' skill 'Den Destruction'.....

'That's it, now I can use the secret passage to access the castle anytime I need to.'

That was the reason why Ark willingly handed over the castle to Raiden. While other people were struggling as the Lord to develop the castle, he could just eat up the profits! Once Ark finished all the preparations, he once again visited Berami.

"Berami, how much of the castle's funds are left?"

"Because we completed the trading post in a hurry, there is 50,000 gold left. But after paying 17,000 gold to the employees for their salary, there will be 33,000 gold left."

"You said I was free to use the public money?"

"Yes, of course. You can use it on the Lord's personal business....."

"I would like to give the soldiers and administrative personnel a bonus."

"Yes?"

Berami's eyes popped out. So far, there have been no Lords that have given a bonus to the NPCs. Of course, most users wouldn't give up the castle early like Ark.

"Well, it's possible but....."

"Then you can take care of the bonus for the soldiers and administrative staff. Please evenly distribute 20,000 gold between them. I'll also give you a bonus of 200 gold."

Anyway, it was somebody else's money. Ark created a good atmosphere and scattered money around. Berami looked puzzled at Ark's spending. If he used the public money so casually then there would be a setback for the future development of the castle. Moreover, Ark hadn't paid the cost of maintaining the facilities

required for a siege. Thanks to the excessive trading post, the castle was in a serious deficit. Once it fell into a serious deficit, the aftermath might last for several years. Berami hesitated before closing his mouth and nodding.

“Everybody on the estate is thankful for the Lord’s consideration.”

Even if they were NPCs, there was nobody that didn’t like money. There were two reasons why Ark used the public money so carelessly. One reason was to screw with Raiden. Ark still hadn’t forgiven Raiden’s betrayal. Therefore he didn’t want Raiden to touch even one penny of the castle’s money once it was transferred to him.

‘Didn’t I warn him that he would regret touching me? Let’s see that empty head try to handle the castle’s deficit!’

And his second purpose was for the future when he had occupied Silvana again.

<p>-Your degree of intimacy with the residents of Silvana has increased.</p> <p>-You have become widely known and your fame has increased by 300.</p>

Thanks to the bonus, his intimacy with the soldiers and staff quickly rose. Their enthusiastic support would become useful once he had to try and take back Silvana.

So one week passed like a storm in Silvana. When it was time for the siege, Ark gathered the residents and made a speech.

“My work on the estate has finished. Although I might be lacking, I’ve tried to sincerely help everybody. Now the siege will begin soon. But I have no ability to keep my position as the Lord. In order to avoid the useless fight, I thought to just leave the castle. But I will promise. Silvana is my 2nd home, so I will come back once I gain the power to defend it!”

Ark spread his arms wide and turned towards the castle.

“Goodbye Silvana, I’ll be back soon!”

“Hooray Lord Ark!”

“Kuhuk, goodbye. I won’t forget My Lord!”

“You must come back again!”

“We will wait for you My Lord!”

With tears in their eyes, Berami and the castle residents cheered like crazy.

“I’ve finally got my hands on Silvana!”

Raiden said as he sat down in the office on the top floor.

The castle that he had desired for so long was finally in his hands. For the moment it didn’t give a lot of money, but it would soon be the goose that laid a golden egg! Duke who looked depressed sighed and said.

“Don’t forget to give the promised share of the profits to me.”

“Of course. Just hold on for 2 months. Think of how much footwear you will be able to buy when the castle is upgraded to B class. That Ark guy, he didn’t know the value of this castle……Kukukuk!”

“Let me tell you the financial condition of the estate.”

At that time, Berami came to the office. Raiden nodded with an arrogant attitude.

“Yes, speak.”

“The current estate is suffering from a serious deficit. The current estate has 0 gold in its funds, and the money the needs to be paid

over the next few days is 12,000 gold. It is because the costs of maintaining the facilities haven't been paid for a while. The previous Lord also didn't repair the Defense Towers and castle walls. Since it will be some time before the next tax, if you want to repair it then it will have to come out of the Lord's personal funds. Ah, we also won't be able to pay the Lord's salary until the deficit is cleared."

"W-wait! What did you say? 0 gold in the funds?"

"The former Lord was a very good man."

Berami pushed up his glasses and smiled. He sincerely viewed Ark like that after Ark gave a bonus to the residents. As a result, the castle had entered a deficit. Raiden didn't understand how Ark could be considered a good Lord. Berami made an official looking face and said.

"Do you want me to take out the budget?"

Now Raiden realized that he had been shot in the back by Ark.

"That, that bastard.....Ark! He dares.....!"

Foam started frothing on Raiden's mouth. Even though he had occupied the Lord's seat, in this situation he was basically working for free. But was that all? There was another siege next week. It would be a tight schedule to repair the Defense Towers and castle wall. But the tax would only come after a few days. Even if he scraped the bottom of his personal funds, he would not be able to repair it in time. It wasn't a goose that will lay a golden egg, instead it was a hippopotamus that was sucking all his money.

"Kill him. You have to kill that Ark bastard no matter what it takes!"

"We have to keep the castle first."

Duke who had been restless since he lost his shoes said.

"Hell.....It's not possible. Call everyone in the Hermes Alliance together! They have to urgently secure funds and begin the repairs of the walls and Defense Towers for the moment. If we have the castle taken away now then we're screwed."

“I understand.”

Duke bolted outside. Raiden roughly smacked the table with his fists.

“Just wait Ark.....once the estate is stabilized then I’ll teach you not to mess with Raiden. No matter what, I’m going to pay back this debt!”

However, Raiden’s revenge was likely to take a very long time.

Alan Stabbed to Death

“Hmmm, it’s a little frustrating?”

Hyun-woo scratched his head. The time had come again for him to submit his report. As always, Hyun-woo only sat down in front of the computer once the deadline was near. It was the last day of the winter holidays and he had to hurriedly finish his homework. But since he could finish the report in 1~2 hours, time wasn’t the issue. His problem was that he couldn’t think of where to begin.

‘How much should I edit?’

Talking about the siege wasn’t an issue. But the process he used to sell the estate was one. Under the current system, selling or transferring the castle was illegal. It could become a big issue in reality. In fact, buying or selling the castle was no different than fraud. And he also used ‘Dual Registration’ at the trading post. Not to mention he set up a secret tunnel as a way to get into the castle later. Ultimately selling the estate using that method was illegal. While Hyun-woo firmly believed that there was justification for it, he had no idea what Global Exos would think.

‘I’ll just leave that part out.’

It was better to avoid any possible problems. So he summed up the eventful week with one sentence, ‘the castle was taken away.’ Although it was somewhat flat, the truth was that he had lost the castle.

“Okay, the report is now finished.....”

Hyun-woo sent the email before stretching. Hunting in the secret dungeon and selling the castle.....it really was a busy week where he hardly had any time to breathe. So he slept and woke up feeling refreshed after finishing everything he had to do. After submitting his report, he exercised in the morning and realised that one month had passed. However, there was still the most important thing that he

had to do after one month.

“Time to organize my household accounts!”

Hyun-woo smiled happily. Normally he would sigh because of the tight finances but this month was different! Hyun-woo divided his household ledgers into two. His real household finances and New World’s finances. It was impossible to separate them since they were so closely related. When one rose, just like a seesaw the other had no choice but to fall. The reason was that if he didn’t sell an item then it wasn’t possible to obtain a substantial income. But this was the first time that formula had broken.

‘20,000,000 won!’

That was the bidding price for the ‘Sacred Steel Shield’ after several days. He actually hadn’t expected that much. In the past, his unique mace ‘Fire Slayer’ had sold for 7,000,000 won and the price for unique armour couldn’t even compare to weapons. And shields normally sold for the lowest among the armour. He thought it would be good if he received 15,000,000. And after 10 days the bidding price was 14,000,000 won. But then someone had suddenly bid 20,000,000 won and requested to purchase it immediately.

“Huk, D.....deal!”

Hyun-woo who had accessed the auction site quickly agreed. The buyer immediately asked him to cancel the remaining auction period. But he requested that the money be paid in advance. He had no intention of being tricked by other people. After taking off the handling fee, 18,600,000 won was deposited into his account. While he couldn’t possibly understand the person who would spend 20,000,000 won for one item, thanks to that Hyun-woo would be warm this winter.

“This will last me two to three months!”

Whether it was good or bad luck, it always seemed to come pouring in at once. Hyun-woo put his household account book in order and opened Ark’s account book. The number there was also as beautiful as his household finances. The first item was the 5000 gold that he

received once Sid was released. Since he couldn't entrust Sid with large amounts of money anymore, Ark distributed it according to how much they invested. Ark's share was 58% so he got 2,900 gold. Then there was the 4000 gold he received from the sale of the estate! Unfortunately, Hyun-woo couldn't keep all of the estate sale money. He didn't occupy the castle by himself. He had to concede the majority of it to the NPCs since they made up 80% of his forces. The rehabilitation members had also invested a lot of money into the siege.

'Cross and the Sylphid Knights also did a lot of damage. I have to prepare the proper compensation for the NPCs. While the Meow, raccoons and thieves didn't openly demand anything, I have to give them a certain amount.....other users might not know but NPCs could be lethal.'

Hyun-woo was a man who would bet his life for 10 won. However he wasn't stupid. At a young age, he had experienced all sorts of things. There was no part time job that he had not experienced. If there was one thing that he learnt during that process.....it was that two types of money existed. In other words, if he eat and worked alone then he would be able to obtain 100% of the money.

'But the foundation of my siege was the NPCs I met in New World.'

He keenly realized what a reliable presence they were through the siege. If he ignored their efforts and didn't give them anything then a problem would definitely occur. An NPC was like a human. If they did a favour then of course they would want something in return.

'For the sake of the future, I shouldn't be stingy.'

Thus Hyun-woo decided to boldly invest 3000 gold that he got from selling the castle. First, he gave JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members 1000 gold while he distribute 2000 gold between Cross, the soldiers, the thieves, the Meow and the raccoons.

"You don't have to do this....."

"We came running to defend you because of justice."

"Of course I know that. It really is a pure friendship. But my heart

won't accept it. Every time I think of the colleagues who died on the battlefield, my heart starts hurting. Please take it and look after the families of the deceased.

Ark said with a warm tone.

"If you say it like that then I can't possibly refuse. I won't say anything else."

Cross sighed and accepted the money. He felt as if his bones and flesh was being slowly shaved away but being too greedy would cause trouble.

'I've still managed to earn 3,900 gold this time!'

With the 40 gold he received from the Three Little Pigs, it was another 160 gold. In total, he earned 4,060 gold! He felt an excited current flow through his body. If the NPCs were compensated then they would have a reason to look after him.

'The compensation this month has cleared all of my worries in one shot. How good would it be if I could do this every month? This world is not that kind to poor people.....'

Hyun-woo packed up his ledger and looked at the unit. Although he wanted to connect to New World, he checked the clock and turned on the TV. It was time to watch the aired scoop on the game. Information was power. And unlike the false rumours on the information sites, the information on the TV broadcast tended to have more credibility. Since it was broadcast once a week, the freshness of the information was low but it was quite useful as it dealt with a wide range of information. After an advertisement finished, the game exclusive news began.

"Hello everybody in the audience."

The now familiar female reporter laughed as she greeted them. Then she deliberately put on a tragic expression and said.

"This time I have very shocking news to tell you. For those who are not aware, I would like to show you a video obtained by our reporters in Selebrid, the capital of Schudenberg Kingdom."

Soon the screen was replaced by an image of Selebrid square. A crowd had gathered and chattered excitedly in the square where a spokesman was speaking loudly.

“After we obtained information from Silvana, the truth that the church of Asyeosu had committed many misdeeds was revealed. They used the privileges of the church to further their own interests as well as covering up several acts of blasphemy, until it reached a point where it could not be tolerated anymore.”

The spokesman said after a deep sigh.

“After His Majesty investigated the church, he has decided to deal with those involved harshly. Therefore if you are offering them any help, you will be charged with the crime of harbouring them.”

‘In the end the truth was covered up.’

He felt more relaxed after hearing the conversation on the TV. Anyway, the King was taking care to hide all mentions of Ankh, god of death. After the recent troubling events, if the god Ankh was mentioned then the people might fall into a chaos similar to the Dark Century. He also had to worry about the role of the Asyeosu church. Because quite a large number of NPCs worshipped that religion. The situation wasn't bad for Hyun-woo. When all the truths come out, it would be natural for Hyun-woo to be mentioned. The interest of other users in this matter would be good.

“Is the incident truly that shocking?”

The reporter on screen said back in the studio. Then the male host nodded his head.

“Yes, if you look carefully at New World then the role of the Cathedral is not light. The Holy place of the 12 religions has some of the biggest influences on the continent. That's why it is called the Cathedral. But now one of the churches is closed due to corruption. For the followers of Asyeosu it is like the sky collapsed.”

“So it will send a large shock wave through New World?”

“Of course.” When the believers of the church of Asyeosu, all the

authorities said was that it was a crime and they won't be explaining the details. There are a lot of people who don't understand so they're talking about it."

"What about the users who have a job related to the Asyeosu church or have a sub-profession related to them?"

"Right. It is not just NPCs affected but users as well. But it will not be a big change. If they select a different religion then their profession will remain intact."

"What will happen to it in the future?"

"According to the information posted, most of the leaders of the Asyeosu religion have escaped. Searching for the remnants will not be easy. But most of the attention is on the fact that although the King's decision was very sudden, all the other religions were quiet. They didn't protest when the King used his authority to invade the Cathedral."

The male host said with a straight face.

"I think there were other reasons besides the one they told us. And in the future it will clearly be connected to some big event."

The female reporter asked in a curious voice.

"So you think this will lead to an event in the game?"

"We'll see. Global Exos hasn't given a formal reply yet."

"They have quite a lot of secrets."

"Well, I understand. The point is to stimulate the curiosity of the users."

The male host gave a wry smile and changed the topic.

"But in this case, something else was revealed?"

"Yes.....It is really disappointing."

The female reporter sighed as she mumbled.

“If the event regarding the Asyeosu church made NPCs feel betrayed, this news will make many users feel betrayed. It is regarding the Holy Knight Sir Alan.”

“I hear there was a problem with the siege?”

“Yes, they discovered something after investigating the results in the Shrine of War. During that time, Sir Alan had been abusing the rules of the siege by creating a ghost guild, accepting their challenge and then not fighting in the siege.”

“So that was the reason why he didn’t want to release any video about the siege.....”

“He was afraid that his plan would be revealed.”

Then the female reporter complained with a gloomy face.

“Frankly I’m a little upset. Along with many other female users, I was a fan of Sir Alan. Since Sir Alan always insisted that people should play fairly and honestly, it is a big disappointment.”

“Reporter Lee Hye-won is not the only one who thinks like that. Sir Alan was respected by many users. So their disappointment will be bigger. Our homepage has been bombarded with thousands of messages slandering Sir Alan. On the other hand, quite of few of them were protecting him. Although it wasn’t a proper method, the method itself does not break the rules. Rather, some of them thought it was wonderful that Sir Alan found a blind spot in the system and utilized it. How will this affect the dynamics of Nagaran in this future?”

“The Shrine of War has overhauled the old rules that applied to Nagaran, and they announced that they will delete the Lord’s right to specify the challenger. A more intense siege will occur if the Lord can’t avoid the challenge of a powerful guild.”

‘Ha, everything in this news scoop is related to me.’

Asyeosu’s downfall and Alan with the ghost guild. Hyun-Woo uncovered all of it. Because it was handled seriously by the TV, thousands of people posted comments on it. On one hand the events

were thrilling but they were also frightening.

‘I’m glad that my name wasn’t brought up.’

He inwardly sighed with relief. The male host continued.

“Anyway, Sir Alan is in a pretty difficult situation.”

“Yes, although the users are offended, I was told that creating a ghost guild isn’t actually a criminal offence in New World. However, Sir Alan also has a relationship with the Asyeosu church. While the church was being investigated, it was revealed that Alan had been secretly helping the higher ranked NPCs. This is an obvious transgression. Sir Alan knew about the hidden corruption of the church and hid it. So Sir Alan has also been branded as a follower of Asyeosu.”

“Then Sir Alan has become a wanted criminal?”

“Yes, there is a bounty on him. Because Sir Alan has become a criminal, the Dawn Blade guild has been disbanded and its members scattered. Since the reputation of the guild leader is the most important, there is no meaning when he is severely criticized by every NPC.”

“I guess Sir Alan’s thoughts will probably be complicated.”

“You’re right. His face has also been publicized on TV. When I went to find him for an interview, he wouldn’t meet with me. As everybody knows, in New World you can only create one character. We’ll have to see if he can recover and overcome this situation in the future.”

“The higher they fly, the worst the impact will be when falling. Since Sir Alan had been so famous, it will be difficult for him to overcome this adversity. But a game is a game and isn’t breaking through any difficulty a charm of the game? Although he is in a difficult situation, one day he might recover enough to have users call him using the title ‘Sir’ again.....”

“.....It won’t happen.”

Hyun-woo muttered as he turned off the TV. The man was talking

about the standard method. The game was a game, but a situation that occurred in reality would be different in the game. There was nothing in the game that would cause a user to abandon it. They've prepared lots of methods to recover. If you murder someone then you can hide until your chaotic alignment decreases. No, because he was a wanted fugitive his crimes would only disappear once he was imprisoned. Although it wouldn't be easy to gather his forces again, Alan was clever and had a lot of funds so he might somehow recover.

.....But Alan's opponent was Hyun-woo.

'Alan, didn't you hear me say it? You've picked the wrong opponent.'

Although his agreement with the rehabilitation members was already over, Hyun-woo had no intention of withdrawing like this. Of course, the first reason was because of his grudge. Although it was only because of Lariette and Roco, his grudge about the 3000 gold was truly fearful. And the second reason was because of Alan. Ark had a grudge against Alan but Alan also had a grudge against him. If Alan managed to regain his forces then his knife would be aimed straight towards Hyun-woo. If he was like Hyun-woo then he would be even more troublesome than before. Hyun-woo wasn't going to wait politely until that happened.

'The end? No, it is only the beginning.'

I'll have to kick him until he is trash in the dirt. In other words, I have to kick him as much as possible. Alan's recovery will slow down if he kept on stepping on him and Hyun-woo would be safe for a while.

"But since the situation isn't good, Alan might not connect for a while.'

Hae Gyeol-sa, Bul-kkun and Tazza had already been searching for Alan for a week. It wasn't an easy thing to find a user if you didn't know the resurrection point, and it might take even longer if Alan didn't connect at all.

'But Alan is a candidate. He will have to connect soon.'

Then the phone rang.

“It’s me, Alan was found.”

The voice heard on the other end was Bul-kkun.

“You found Alan?”

“Yes, dammit! We thought Alan would hide in the vicinity of Nagaran since he was a fugitive.....but he had gone all the way to Selebrid.”

“Selebrid?”

Ark repeated in a strange voice. Ark had also thought Alan would hide near Nagaran. Since Alan was a fugitive, he was a target for the guards. If so, it would be easier to escape if he was in Nagaran. Instead of an ordinary village, he had gone all the way to Selebrid which was teeming with guards and bounty hunters? Was he intending to die? Ark couldn’t understand his behaviour.

‘Anyway, it is an opportunity for me!’

“Hae Gyeol-sa is chasing after him. Since we can’t defeat him, we’ll try to hold him until you reach Selebrid.”

“Yes!”

Hyun-woo hung up and entered the unit.

Alan (Foreigner)

The criminal who conspired with the Asyeosu church.

Since he had the ability of a Holy Knight, special care is needed.

Area last seen: His location after Nagaran is unknown.

Difficulty: ???

Bounty: 300 gold
Bounty payer: Chancellor of Selebrid

‘That’s fantastic!’

When he arrived in Selebrid, he immediately saw Alan’s bounty posters. In Schudenberg Kingdom, the bounty posters were updated every few days on the board. The members of the Asyeosu church were NPCs. Usually NPCs were only wanted in the area the crime was committed, however the Asyeosu church was wanted throughout the whole continent. Alan also occupied a spot on the board. His bounty was 300 gold! That was an unprecedented price compared to other NPCs. The amount of the bounty determined the punishment time. It was usually 10 gold for 24 hours. If Alan was imprisoned, he wouldn’t be able to see sunlight for a month. One month.....if he was imprisoned for that long then he would obviously fall behind. Since Alan was a candidate, he had no choice but to run away until the bounty somehow went away.

“Sheesh, this bastard, he was so smug when he appeared on TV.....”

“Obviously he would win if he used such a lousy method.”

“At one time I thought he was so great.”

“I’m disappointed. Turns out he only has a good face!”

People were gathering around the bulletin board and hurling abusive language at his poster. In fact, there was no reason for them to curse at Alan. After investigating at the Shrine of War, it was revealed that Alan used a ghost guild to win the siege. Since it was just a game, they had no reason to care about the Asyeosu church. Even so, the reason they started excessively cursing Alan.....since he appeared so great on TV, the shock of his fall was huge. Since Alan had been so big, the blow was even larger. Of course, he didn’t feel compassion for Alan.

‘I’m not some hero who puts on a mask of justice.’

Ark was laughing at the poster when his name was called.

“Ark!”

Bul-kkun had contacted him.

“What about Alan?”

“He is hiding in the mountains not far from here. Hae Gyeol-sa and Tazza are watching him.”

“Then I’ll go now.”

“However, will it be okay since Hyung-nim and the others haven’t arrived yet?”

“Don’t worry. Alan is not a very difficult opponent anymore.”

Ark smiled and left Selebrid with Bul-kkun. Bul-kkun used ‘Feather of Whispering’ to contact Hae Gyeol-sa who was chasing after Alan. And 10 minutes later, he was able to find Alan hiding in a dark forest. Alan’s equipment had become tattered and he was eating mouldy bread. Since he couldn’t enter a village, he couldn’t repair his equipment or buy food so he was forced to rely on wheat bread that thieves dropped to fill his satiety. It had been 1 week since Alan and the one thousand coalition members returned devastated after the failed siege.

‘His appearance makes you want to throw a coin at him.’

Ark sincerely felt sympathy. He thought that there might be old guild members that had stuck around in the vicinity. If it was Alan when the game first began, more people might have defended him. But when Alan suddenly changed, Lariette wasn’t the only one who became worried. The guild members were treated coldly and like accessories. The majority of the people in the guild were candidates. Since Alan was famous, their probability of success would increase. But now Alan had lost all his reputation. There was no reason to risk themselves for no reward. Alan’s power relied on the pros and cons that he could give them.

‘Poor guy……sitting with that appearance……I kind of don’t want

to step on him.'

But Ark was a ruthless human.

"Hyung-nims, surround this guy and don't let him escape."

"What? You're really going to face him alone?"

"I've already done it once."

".....Understood."

Hae Gyeol-sa, Tazza and Bul-kkun scattered around the place. Once they were in position, Ark leisurely walked out. Alan immediately jumped like a frightened rabbit and stood up. The piece of wheat bread he was eating fell to his foot. Alan really felt like crying.

"You.....how are you here.....!"

Alan said after he saw Ark's face.

"Didn't I tell you? I have no intention of ending it like that."

"You bastard, well met!"

Alan swung his sword without any notice. Ark stepped backwards and blocked the sword. Since it was a sudden attack, he failed to completely disperse the impact. But a small smile still spread on Ark's face.

'As expected!'

"You don't understand the situation."

Ark immediately fixed his posture and stabbed with his sword. Alan flinched and barely lifted his shield in time. Although he blocked the attack, there was a ringing sound as Alan was pushed back a few steps. Even though he blocked with the shield, he still received a lot of damage.

"W-what is this.....?"

Alan murmured with a puzzled face. Ark looked at him and laughed.

"Have you finally realised a little bit of the situation Sir Alan?"

The conclusion from the short bout was simple. Surprisingly, Ark was stronger than Alan! Ark had already expected that. Alan's profession was Holy Knight, and the Holy Knight gained its maximum strength when he was leading a lot of troops. The more soldiers there were the more his stats would increase! In addition, he received a bonus to the power and range of his skills depending on his fame. Even if Ark was high levelled, it wasn't easy for him to win against Alan in a group battle. But the situation changed. Since Alan was now completely forsaken, there was nobody to boost his stats. Ark also grew while Alan was hiding. After discovering the secret dungeon in Silvana, he reached level 180. If he counted the dark attribute bonus then he was level 252! On the other hand, Alan had only gained 4 levels to reach 160. Not only his level, but Ark's stats were also higher than his. Even if Ark's sword didn't directly hit him, it would still be quite painful.

"Let's see how evenly matched we are!"

.....Frankly, it wasn't that even.

Pepepeng!

Ark began to attack Alan in earnest. He swung his sword while turning his body. With most warriors, there was a gap in the timing of attacks where the opponent could attack. But Ark had already overcome that weakness a long time ago. He used the opportunity to kick Alan as well. Since his abilities were so much higher, the heavy kick was like poison to Alan's body. The difference in stats clearly showed.

"Huk, I'm in an abnormal state?"

Alan staggered because he was in a 'slowed' state. Ark's sword continuously flashed as he moved his hands. Every attack accurately stabbed a gap between the armour! Alan's health was steadily drained by the constant critical hits.

"Eat this, Holy Light!"

Alan hurriedly used his Holy magic. Thanks to the ball of light, Ark's dark attribute bonus was released.

“Heavenly Light, Miracle Force, Defense Aura!”

Alan followed with three skills that would increase his attack and defense. However, the skills of a Holy Knight were also based on fame. Because he was chaotic, his fame was at the bottom and the effects of the skills were cut in half. But Ark’s dark attribute bonus was still released and Alan’s stats rose a little bit so they were at similar levels.

“Heung, you still think that I’ll lose?”

Alan wielded his sword like a storm and cornered Ark. However, Ark’s skills were still stronger. He had a lot of experience dealing with strong bosses without any buffs.

Teteng, kakakak!

While Alan’s attack only hit once, Ark’s hit three or four times. However, Ark’s health still decreased faster. While his dark attribute added damage, the Holy Knight had was covered in armour and rare items. Alan realised that Ark’s sword had more speed than power.

“You foolish noob, you’ll regret appearing in front of me by yourself!”

“You still seem to be misunderstanding something.”

“What?”

“I’m sorry but this isn’t all of my strength. Summon demon, Deimos!”

There was a faint light and Deimos was summoned in front of Ark in time to block Alan’s sword. Meanwhile he stepped back a bit.

“Ha, you think an undead can stop me?”

Alan thought it was ridiculous and brandished his sword at Deimos. A Holy Knight had a powerful advantage against the undead. But just as Alan’s sword was about to hit Deimos, Ark’s eyes glittered and he said.

“Slide!”

Ark used the special option ‘Slide’ from the Wind Spirits’ Boots that

he took from Duke. Then he did a series of kicks while sliding backwards. Ark withdrew a few metres away from Alan. That was the reason why he wanted the Wind Spirits' Boots. His kicks had three times the power of his punches. But he still used boxing over taekwondo in fights.....the reason was because his kicks had a fatal weakness. Boxing allowed him to move his body while punching. But when he was kicking, once he started the movements he had no way to stop. He couldn't move freely and take the steps required to move forwards or backwards. This could become a huge weakness in a fight. The power was strong but there was a lot of room for a counterattack.

It was one of the reasons why kicks weren't seen a lot in mixed martial arts competitions. If you have the same level of proficiency then it would be more beneficial to use boxing then kicking. In reality it was an insurmountable wall! This wall also existed in the game. Although Ark had a lot of kicks in the beginning, as the monsters levels rose he started using it less. But what if it was possible to move while doing the kicking motion? Ark thought of that idea while watching Duke use 'Slide.' And the combination showed an effect that was beyond his imagination. He could freely control the distance while kicking!

Once Alan was caught by Deimos, he was helpless to stop Ark from beating him with the kicks. He would kick and then slide away like he was moving on ice. The situation completely changed because of one item. That's the excitement of a game!

While trying to attack Deimos, the slide kick of Ark caused Alan a lot of headaches. If he tried to go after Ark then Deimos would act as a shield. Alan was caught by the pincer formation and couldn't do anything as his health kept on decreasing. His recovery skills had also lost their effectiveness. But since Alan had a rare upper class profession, he lasted for quite a while. Of course he could use Blade Storm to settle it, but Ark was determined to finish Alan using kicks.

'I'll slowly crush you.'

His grudge wasn't something that could be released quickly.

"Ugh.....!"

Alan stepped back and took out a recovery potion. He had run out of mana because of his recovery skills.

“Not a chance. Summon Demon, Dedric!”

“Aha, it is my turn! Dark Dash!”

Dedric was aware of Ark’s intention as soon as he was summoned fiercely rushed towards Alan. Dedric bumped into Alan’s wrist causing him to drop the potion. And his situation worsened since he was surrounded by Ark and his two pets.

“This is the end!”

“Damn, it can’t be. Flash!”

At the moment a blinding light emerged from Alan’s body.

-‘Flash’ has triggered a critical effect!

Due to the ‘Flash’ effect, you have been paralyzed for 10 seconds.
--

He was careless! ‘Flash’ was a beginner magic and could be easily avoided. However, Ark was careless and ended up losing his eyesight.

“Woaaah, my eyes!”

Dedric grabbed his eyes and wandered towards the trees.

“Mind’s Eye!”

Ark used the effect of the ring and lifted his sword after the paralysis wore off. He thought that Alan would counterattack with a strong skill. Instead Alan just pushed Deimos aside and tried to flee. When Ark saw it he just laughed.

“It’s too late Alan.”

“Where are you going?”

At that time, Bul-kkun suddenly appeared in front of Alan and punched him. Alan who was hit by the sudden blow fell down. Then

the faces of Hae Gyeol-sa and Tazza appeared on either side of him. Alan instinctively sensed his death.

“Our resentment for you killing our cutie is pretty deep!”

“.....Divine god, replace equipment!”

After Hae Gyeol-sa, Bul-kkun and Tazza ran up to him, Alan shouted something. At that moment, Alan was wrapped in light and his equipment was replaced. A sense of confusion appeared on Ark’s face before he realized.

“Huk! Ah, no! Kill him, kill Alan!”

Ark shouted as he ran up using ‘Sprint.’

Bul-kkun, Hae Gyeol-sa and Tazza attacked simultaneously. Alan’s health immediately disappeared. But Alan just smiled before he died.

“Killing me.....you’ll only get honour.....think.....don’t wish for anymore.....”

“Son of a bitch!”

Profanities burst from Ark’s mouth. When a chaotic player died, the penalty for death was doubled. He would lose 60% experience and -2 stats! But the horrific penalty was the chance of losing an equipped item. Alan’s equipment was all rare items, so no matter what dropped it would be a jackpot. Because it wasn’t possible to change armour during a fight, the probability was 100%. But Alan had used a strange skill at the very end to change all his equipment to japtem.

Old Shoes

Armour type: Leather Shoes

Defense power: 15

Durability: 7/35

Weight: 5

User restriction: Level 70 and more

A shoe that is commonly seen everywhere.

Once he saw the trivial stats in the information window, his anger erupted.

“That damn Alan bastard.....Ya, I’m going to tear him apart!”

Ark’s summons attacked Alan’s body at his command.

Deimos as used his ‘Bone Collector’ skill to reassemble the ribs.

Since he changed bones with a user, their stats are exchanged.

<Deimos: Stamina +5, Defense +2>

<Alan: Stamina -5, Defense -2>

Dedric has used Vampirism.

A new skill has been saved in the empty slot.

* Currently absorbed skill: <Defense Aura> which increases defense by 20%. Mana consumption: 10

Even though he took it out on the body, his anger had not abated at all. Ark bit his lip until it became bloody and lifted his head.

“Do you know Alan’s last updated resurrection point?”

“Yes, it is the quartermaster near Selebrid’s north gate.”

“.....Really?”

Ark’s face lit up at Hae Gyeol-sa’s answer. A chaotic user lost one item every time they died. Once the equipment he was wearing all dropped, items from his bag would start dropping. So there was still a chance to obtain his equipment.

“I have no intention of leaving it like this.”

“Of course!”

“Then I’ll hunt properly and go to the quartermaster’s tomorrow. Alan will probably connect at that time.”

Ark’s forecast was correct. Alan thought that Ark didn’t know the resurrection point and he didn’t want to seem scared of Ark by not connecting, so he resurrected in Selebrid after exactly 24 hours.

“Hey, it’s good to see you.”

“Ark……..!”

Alan stared at Ark aggressively. But in New World there was no skill that could kill the opponent with anger. This time the battle was much easier. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members had already arrived. After 13 people surrounded him, Alan had no chance. Halfway through the battle Alan just gave up and didn’t bother counterattacking. Alan once again dropped japtm when he died. However, Ark didn’t care. Thanks to Alan’s proud nature, he revived a few times before being killed. How many times would Ark have to kill him before he dropped a useful item?

‘Eh? He’s not here?’

However, after Alan died twice more he didn’t connect even after 24 hours passed.

‘Is he trying to make me relax my strength?’

Alan was a candidate so he would have to connect. Perhaps he was waiting for Ark to get tired. But Ark was relentless and won’t give up. Ark assigned 3~4 rehabilitation members to guard the quartermaster’s in shifts. So after 12 hours…….when Ark was getting tired Alan suddenly resurrected.

‘Ha, I knew it. You don’t I couldn’t endure until you resurrected?’

Ark and the rehabilitation members stood up and surrounded Alan.

“Divine god, replace equipment!”

It was at that time. Alan used the skill to change to his original equipment. And immediately rushed forward and slammed his shield into Jjak-tung. Jjak-tung had low defense and immediately collapsed

while Alan jumped over him and ran.

“He’s trying to run away? Eh.....?”

Ark was confused but quickly chased after him. Alan fled towards Selebrid. He was a chaotic user wanted by the whole country yet he fled towards a place filled with guards. Did he intend to kill himself? But Ark finally realized Alan’s intention.

‘Yes, that bastard. He judged that it would be difficult to run away from me so he’s intending to go jail?’

As he already knew, most people killed or captured by hunters or guards were automatically thrown in jail. Ark didn’t register to capture Alan because of that. Although the prize money was good if he registered as a bounty hunter, he would only be able to kill Alan once. Alan was clearly trying to use that against him. If he died because of Ark he would lose all his equipment, so Alan would rather die because of a guard and then go jail.

“Do you think I would let you do that? Snake, sword! Blade.....eh?”

After Snake spat out the sword, he was about to use the skill but suddenly flinched and stopped.

“Eh, he, he is.....?”

“Alan!”

The guards rushed forward as Alan ran through the north gate. If he used Blade Storm then the guards would be caught as well. If that happened then Ark would be registered as a criminal. Ark put the sword away and ran using ‘Sprint.’ He had to get to Alan before the guards!

“Jeez, what are you doing? You’re interfering!”

“I’m really sorry. I’m a broke hunter and I’m trying to catch Alan.....”

Ark deliberately blocked the guards and narrowed the distance. Alan was already surrounded by many guards. But there was something wrong with Alan’s behaviour. Although he was

surrounded, he used recovery magic to prevent himself from dying while he ran away. His behaviour after resurrecting was strange. If he intended to die then he should've exchanged the equipment.

‘Does he have some other purpose?’

Ark saw the direction that Alan was running in and suddenly became shocked.

‘T-that.....don't tell me that Alan?’

Alan was running up to a mailbox. Clearly an item couldn't be exchanged through a general mailbox. But there was one way to exchange items even with the general mailbox. The auction site! Yes, it was the auction site's item delivery method. The auction method in New World was unique in that Ark could put an item up for auction or purchase something even in places like a dungeon. If the unit was connected to the computer and the computer to the access site then they could put items on the auction site at any time. And once the payment was complete, the item would automatically be sent to the buyer's mailbox.

‘Alan definitely purchased an item to escape this situation. Then the item is.....?’

Thanks to his health that was like a cockroach's and recovery magic, Alan finally arrived at the mailbox. Then he hurriedly took out a bundle of scrolls and tore one. Then Alan disappeared from among the guards.

‘It was indeed the [Warp] scroll!’

Alan had escaped the crisis in a way that Ark had never imagined.

“Sheesh, I almost caught him.....”

The guards muttered and scattered. But what was Ark doing?

‘The travel distance of [Warp] is 500 metres. But he had a bunch of scrolls that he is going to use. So there is no way to chase him.’

Alan had a weapon that was necessary for chaotic users. The scroll that allowed him to randomly teleport! Although the [Warp] scroll

moved him, even Alan would not be able to predict where he would end up. It was difficult to chase someone using those scrolls.

‘Should I give up?’

OF course, Hae Gyeol-sa might be able to find him. However, there was no guarantee of how long it would take. Ark knew that the time taken to track him would probably be more than a week.

“Damn, if I registered as a bounty hunter then I would’ve at least earned 300 gold.....”

Ark muttered in an annoyed voice.

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake suddenly jumped down and slithered towards the place where Alan disappeared. After it licked the ground, its body stiffened and headed motioned towards a direction. After Snake pointed like an arrow towards a direction, a message window appeared.

Snake has used ‘Stalking.’

It is possible to grasp the location of the attacker.

Even if they ‘Warp’, ‘Teleport’, ‘Portal’ and so on, Snake can predict the movement direction using the flow of mana. However, the exact distance is impossible so you can only determine the direction. In addition, the effect will disappear after 1 hour if you don’t find new information.

<Current Mana Flow: The Southwest direction>

“Eh? Stalking?”

Ark glanced at Snake with wide eyes. Since there was no reason to check Snake’s information window, he hadn’t known about the new skill.

“Don’t tell me.....you learned it yourself?”

Ssak! Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake's eyes brightened like lanterns as it nodded.

"That's it! Aigoo, my cute baby!"

Ark skipped forward and embraced Snake as he jumped around. Then he kissed the very happy Snake. Ark immediately gathered the rehabilitation members together and explained the situation. After he registered as a bounty hunter, they started to move in the direction that Snake pointed out.

'Alan, this is the last time. I'll send you to prison with my own hands.....'

Salrin's Descendant

"Huk, huk, huk!"

Alan gasped and ran breathlessly through the forest. When he used the [Warp] scroll, he thought that he had completely lost Ark. But hardly any time had passed before Ark and the rehabilitation members started chasing him.

'Does he have the [Track] scroll?'

[Track] was a scroll that could find the designated target within a 1km radius! Ark was dangerous if he had that scroll. Alan continuously used [Warp] until he was out of the maximum distance of the tracking scroll. But once again Ark's party narrowed the distance in a short time. That was when Alan realised there was something strange. Ark's party clearly guessed the exact point Alan teleported to. But they don't know his exact location once they narrow the distance.

'Do they just know the approximate direction?'

If they weren't using a scroll then it must be a racial special skill. When he thought about it, Alan realised that he had a little leeway. Once Alan moved to a direction and the encircling net got closer, he would use the scroll to escape from the crisis. But this was Alan's mistake. If Alan didn't use the scroll after 1 hour, Snake would not be able to use 'Stalking' to determine the direction. Since Alan continuously used the scroll, Snake was able to update the information. And eventually he only had one scroll left after the relentless chase.

'Damn, I thought one bunch would be enough.....but it's okay, my destination is right around the corner. All I need to do is get there.....and watch them eliminate Ark!'

Alan looked at the ridge in the distance. It was a place where he could rest safely even though he was chaotic. No, they would

definitely help him for a chance to kill Ark! There was only one such force in New World. The Dark Brother organization! Yes, the reason Alan had risked coming to Selebrid was to make contact with the Dark Brothers. Just like Ark, Alan had no intention of forgiving Ark.

‘If it wasn’t for Ark, I wouldn’t have been deprived of my castle or branded a criminal! All the things I earned in New World crumbled into dust because of that child.....Even if I have to spend hundreds or thousands of gold, I’ll definitely make you quit the game!’

He didn’t know if it was fortunate or unfortunate that he couldn’t lose Ark. Now the Dark Brothers didn’t have to use a lot of effort to find him.

‘Whether in the game or reality, the ultimate winner is the rich man. Someone like him can never win! I’ll engrave that fact into his bones!’

Alan used his resentment as energy and finally reached the ridge. When he searched the forest, he finally found the small cave hidden by bushes. The cave led to the location of the Dark Brothers. He followed the passage until he arrived he saw a red palm painted. However, the atmosphere was different from before. Previously, the assassins had hid in the darkness until he raised his shining sword to see them.

“Who’s that? Is it that guy.....?”

‘That guy?’

There was something strange but Alan was in no condition to question it closely.

“Dark Bothers? I have come with a job request.”

“What? Do you think this place will accept requests from anyone?”

“I’m Alan. I’ve already commissioned a job before.”

“Alan? Holy Knight Alan?”

“I’d like to meet the person in charge.”

The assassins secretly spoke among themselves before Alan was

shown inside. When he entered, the form of a man stood up and his features became visible. He had a large red palm on his flapping cloak. It was not the old man he saw the previous time, but the assassin's attitude made it seem like he was in charge.

"Leader-nim, Alan has come with a request."

The leader was silent for a moment before asking.

".....The opponent?"

"Ark? The Lord of Silvana?"

"He already had the castle take away so he's not the Lord anymore."

"Is that so? He fought so persistently for the castle just to throw it away?"

He murmured while the leader laughed and shook his head.

"Well that doesn't matter to me. But since the famous Alan is requesting it so urgently, that Ark fellow doesn't seem so insignificant."

"It doesn't matter how much money it takes. I don't want to hire all of the Dark Brother organization. The purpose is the infinite assassination of Ark! The period is until Ark disappears from New World."

"What's the condition if you can't pay the price?"

"I already said it doesn't matter how much money it takes."

"Hmmm, this could become quite messy. However, I already know about the relationship between you and Ark. Didn't you originally have it out for each other? And now with users and NPCs after you, the only place you can lean on is the Dark Brothers."

"Are you going to accept or not?"

Alan retorted with a nasty expression. But the very next moment, Alan realised that something was wrong. The Dark Brothers was an NPC organization. But the leader just used the words 'user' and

‘NPC.’ Those two words were taboo for NPCs in New World. Then why did that person talk about users? And how did he know about the relationship between Alan and Ark? Alan became wary and withdrew a few steps.

“Who are you?”

“Now that we’re face to face, we should greet each other.”

The guy slowly turned his body around. He had black hair and black eyes. Although he was wearing a mask, the overall impression was familiar somehow. It was certainly not the first time he saw that user. Where had he seen him.....he searched his memories for a while before suddenly spluttering.

“Huk, you.....Jackson.....!”

“I’m thankful that you remembered.”

Of course he knew! In Jackson he was always by Ark’s side, the name.....!

“.....I’m Shambala.”

“W-what are you doing here?”

“I won’t speak for long. The conclusion is that I reject your request.”

“What?”

“I still have something to do with Ark. Well, it’s not just about that.....the Dark Brothers is in a situation where it can’t accept any requests right now, even if the target isn’t Ark.”

“If you need money. I’m willing to pay it separately. How much do you want?”

Alan shouted in a desperate tone. He didn’t understand it completely, but Shambala seemed to have a strong influence in the Dark Brothers. But if he paid the NPC organization then it wouldn’t enter Shambala’s wallet. Alan thought that Shambala refused the request because it wasn’t profitable.

“.....You’re irritating me now.”

Instantaneously Shambala's eyes became freezing cold.

"I don't like people. In particular, I despise humans who would betray others for money. But I also have contempt for a human who won't let a grudge go. Do you know who I am?"

Shambala showed his teeth as he growled.

"Guys like you who throw money around just invite betrayal."

".....!"

"Well that's enough. I still have something to settle with Ark. I was worried about how to pay Ark but.....he might consider you to be worthy of a trade."

"You bastard!"

"Capture him alive."

The assassins gathered after Shambala gave the order. When the situation suddenly changed, Alan immediately turned around and took out his shield.

'I didn't come here just to die in vain!'

Alan fled from the daggers coming from every direction. The opponents were assassins who mastered the assassination technique. The assassins gave Alan abnormal states such as 'Slow' or 'Paralysis.' But Alan was also a Holy Knight. He immediately overlapped his three auras to raise his defense and resistance. And he endured the rest using recovery magic. A Holy Knight had intermediate recovery magic and high defense so Alan's health was similar to a cockroach's. Alan maintained his defensive posture and gradually escaped the encirclement.

"Blink!"

Then he heard Shambala's voice from the rear. Shambala used the skill to instantly move beside him. Alan jumped and swung his sword. However, Shambala used 'Burning Mirror' and drove the dagger into him. After the dagger was removed, he swung it again and Alan was pushed back a few metres. It was Shambala's chain

skill! Alan lost 500 health with one attack.

“God dammit.....!”

So far while playing the game, he had not been pressed so hard by somebody. But recently he had experienced a lot of defeats. First he had been beaten like a dog and then pursued by Ark and now Shambala was beating him up. Of course he would be able to defeat Ark and Shambala if he had some properly equipped troops. No, if he had his original fame then he wouldn't suffer like this. It would be easy to deal with these miserable guys.....it was so unfair that he was on the verge of tears. But no there was no other way. With the assassins attacking alongside Shambala, they were too powerful for Alan.

“Defense rise, Movement rise!”

Alan activated both options attached to his items. Then he hit an assassin while in a defensive stance and ran away. It was pathetic but that was Alan's only method of resistance. But even with his defense increased, it wasn't possible to ignore the damage. His health continuously decreased until he only had 10% left.

‘But the encirclement has relaxed for the moment! I can drink a potion.....’

At that time Alan had a little bit of hope. Then like a scene from a ninja movie Shambala ran up and across the wall, landing in front of Alan and blocking his path.

“I'm sorry but it ends here. ‘Capture’!”

Something that looked like spider webs poured out from Shambala's mouth. It was an assassin exclusive skill that could only be used when the opponent was in a critical condition.

‘Ah, no! If I get caught by him then he'll give me back to Ark.....!’

Beodduk, seokeok!

At that moment a rope wound around Alan's waist! Then multiple swords emerged from the darkness and cut the rope to pieces. At

the same time, a number of masked men attacked Shambala. Surprisingly they also had the mark of a red palm on their masks. Shambala's forehead wrinkled at their appearance.

"Sheesh, these guys are still.....!"

'What the? Why are the assassins attacking Shambala? What the hell is going on?'

Then while Alan was contemplating the situation he suddenly heard someone's voice from the other side.

"This way Sir Alan!"

"You.....?"

It was an old man beckoning with a desperate face. It was the old man called Nabein who answered Alan's request last time.

'I don't know what is going on, but this is a chance for me!'

Alan struck an assassin who was approaching with his shield and reached Nabein.

"Now, retreat!"

The newly emerged assassins flocked Alan and Nabein and blocked the entrance. An intense fight took place while Alan exited the cave with Nabein. There were 10 assassins waiting outside the cave.

"Nabein, what is happening?"

"I don't have time to explain in detail. Although the urgent fire is put out for the moment, we can't hold them off much longer. In addition, others are going to appear soon. We have to quickly get out of here."

"Others?"

"Stop foolishly wasting time talking!"

Nabein shouted in a harsh voice.

"Anyway come along! It won't be a bad talk for you."

Alan hesitate but eventually ran alongside Nabein. Anyway, Shambala was still in the cave while Ark was tracking him. He didn't have anywhere else to go.

“Where the hell is that bastard hiding?”

Ark grumbled while looking at the cliffs high above him. As Alan predicted, Ark had tracked Alan until he was right underneath his nose. However Snake's information from 'Stalking' only told him the direction. Snake indicated that Alan entered a complicated cave system underneath the cliff. It wasn't able to determine anything else.

‘Although I went around the cliff, Snake is still indicated towards it. There is no way he is stuck on a rock so there must be an entrance around here.....’

Ark pursed his lips. The duration of stalking was 1 hour, he either had to find Alan before that or find the [warp] location to update the information, but there was not much time left now. If he couldn't find any clues on Alan then he wouldn't be able to chase him anymore.

‘He want into a confusing place like a dungeon.’

Ssak ssak ssak!

At that time, Snake licked him using its tongue and demanded attention. For the first time he pointed to a direction away from the cliff.

“What the? Snake, did Alan leave the cave?”

Ssak ssak! Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake's eyes brightened as it nodded.

“Dedric, to the south! Search!”

Ark quickly commanded Dedric to fly in the direction Snake indicated. Ark followed behind him for a while until Dedric quickly flew back.

“M-master! I found him.”

“Where?”

“300 metres ahead. But he’s not alone.”

“Not alone?”

“Yes, he’s going someone with 10 masked people.”

“Masked? Perhaps.....The Dark Brothers?”

“That’s right, there’s a picture of a red palm on the mask.”

‘That’s right, the Dark Brothers.....that explains it.’

Now he could understand why Alan took the risk and fled here. He had forgotten for a while. Assassins from the Dark Brothers.....

Even during all of this, Alan hadn’t discarded his idea of revenge on Ark. The Dark Brothers wouldn’t care if Alan was chaotic and would accept the commission regardless.

‘Damn, I never thought that the Dark Brother organization would be in this area.’

The situation became desperate. If Alan commissioned an assassination from the Dark Brothers then it would be Ark and the rehabilitation members being chased. Moreover, it was the Dark Brother’s domain so there was no guarantee that they could escape.

‘Alan has already contacted the Dark Brothers. There will be no way if kill Alan if they’re protecting him. But since the assassins haven’t made any sudden moves, he might not have made the request yet. Okay, I have to check it out properly before leaving.’

“Dedric, keep a suitable distance and follow those guys.”

Ark ordered Dedric to secretly follow Alan.

“They entered over there.”

Dedric pointed to a cleverly hidden cave.

“Any assassins around?”

“I didn’t see any.”

“Then.....”

Ark carefully approached the cave. There weren’t any idiots who would disguise the cave and then not leave a guard. He assumed that there were assassins guarding the inside. Ark made Dedric wait by the entrance and entered the cave. When he entered, the effect of a dungeon was applied. Ark immediately hid with ‘Stealth’ and breathed a sigh of relief.

‘Now I don’t have to worry about being discovered.’

Ark silenced his footsteps and explored the cave. The cave was divided into several areas, just like a secret base. There were considerable amounts of assassins gathered in each area.

“If Stealth is detected then I would definitely die.”

Luckily, Ark was level 252 with the darkness bonus so the assassins couldn’t detect him. However, he couldn’t be assured. If the sound of footsteps makes them suspicious then the chances of ‘Stealth’ being detected would increase. As assassins, their ability to see through ‘Stealth’ was much better than normal assassins.

‘Even if I’m undetected, the duration is only 20 minutes. I have to collect as much information as I can before time runs out.’

Ark carefully grasped the structure of the cave and the number of assassins. When he was almost at the end of the cave, he suddenly heard a familiar voice.

“Salrin?”

‘Alan’s voice!’

Ark quickly attached himself to a corner and looked inside. Alan and an old man were sitting facing each other under the light of a candle. The old man.....Nabein nodded and replied.

“Yes, Salrin.....although it is not widely known, but he was Seinan, one of the 7 heroes.

‘Seinan?’

It was a name that was often discussed in New World’s history books. He was the most secretive of the 7 heroes. There weren’t 7 heroes originally. But when a hero collapsed in the middle of a fight against the darkness, he suddenly appeared like a comet and helped the hero. In the Final Battle, he showed incredible skill and was given the title of Hero afterwards.

“Why did you suddenly mention the name Seinan here?”

Alan asked the question that Ark was wondering about. Nabein replied in a low voice.

“Seinan.....no he is Salrin, a Master Assassin.”

“A Master Assassin?”

“Yes, the person who reigned over all the assassins was the Assassin Salrin.”

Nabein casually told Alan a shocking story about the continent’s history. Salrin was the head of the prestigious Dark Brothers during that time. And at the end of the Dark Century, the Dark Brothers got the most prestigious commission in his life. The enemy was threatening the continent which led to a request to assassinate the Dark Lord..... After a few days contemplating he eventually accepted the request.

The Dark Brothers judged that the existence of light was necessary to live in the darkness. That was how the 6 heroes became the legendary 7 heroes. And at the end of an intense battle, the 7 heroes finally defeated the Dark Lord. Salrin was praised as a hero even though he was an assassin and became the ruler of a dukedom that eventually became known as Sinuis Principality.

“But what does this have to do with the Dark Brothers now.....?”

“Once Salrin became a hero, he mistakenly thought that the Dark Brothers could emerge from the darkness. Centuries of history couldn't be undone by one person. The Dark Brothers eventually helped the Sinius King from the darkness. But once it became peaceful after the Dark Century ended, the need for the Dark Brothers became smaller. After Salrin was killed, the Dark Brothers broke away from the Sinius Principality. When the Dark Brothers left, their main treasures also became scattered.”

“Treasure?”

“The Dark Brothers were originally nomadic people from a distant country. When they came to the continent, they brought three treasures with them. The foundation and strength of the Dark Brothers was based on those treasures. Salrin was called a Master Assassin because he had those three treasures.”

Nabein said while letting out a sigh of relief.

“One of them is the Dark Veil, a cloak that can stop the forces of darkness. An elder in the Dark Brothers has it at the moment. Without that, the Dark Brothers would've vanished a long time ago.”

“Then the remaining two?”

“According to the legends, it is a dagger quenched in the blood of a thousand people and a armour made from the leather of the corpses. All of them have an incredible power, but if all three were collected then the person would unlock the ability of a Master Assassin. But I don't know where they are. They disappeared in to history along with those of Salrin's blood.”

Nabein made a disgusted face and continued.

“That's why it is impossible for Shambala to appear with the items!”

‘Shambala!’

The hairs on Ark's neck rose. In fact, before Ark left for Nagaran he sent a letter from Shambala requesting help. But there was still no

reply. The quest must be taking longer than expected.....was what he thought. But to hear Shambala's name in a place like this!

'Then Shambala's quest is associated with the Dark Brothers.....'

Was the quest to obtain Salrin's treasures from the Dark Brothers? When he thought about it, everything made sense. The symbol of the Dark Brothers was carved on Shambala's dagger. If so, the blade that Ark sold Shambala was one of the treasures. Shambala then completed the dagger quest that was triggered. One of the treasures of Salrin, a member of the 7 heroes!

'Shambala had a quest relating to his profession. His occupation and skills are somewhat peculiar.....his Saint Assassin profession has something to do with the 7 heroes. Finally, if he finds the three treasures then he'll unlock the ability of a Master Assassin.'

It was most likely why their skills were so compatible. In the past, the 7 heroes had fought together against the darkness. Thus it was impossible for abilities that Ark and Shambala inherited to not work with each other. In addition, the Master Assassin and Hero Maban were the only ones with the darkness attribute among the 7 heroes. He didn't know what happened during that time, but their relationship couldn't have been trivial. The descendants of those two heroes had transcended time and space to meet. Although they didn't know each other, their skills still remembered the past.

'It really is an amazing coincidence.'

Ark was once again amazed at the world of New World.

'Seizing control of the Dark Brothers is also similar to the way I controlled the Meow and raccoons. Does that mean I won't have to worry about the Dark Brothers anymore once that happens?'

Ark licked his lips with anticipation. Alan was also thinking that and asked with a doubtful expression.

"Shambala has Salrin's treasures.....that is why he appeared at the rendezvous place. But why did you rescue me? If he has Salrin's treasures then the Dark Brothers should....."

“I can’t accept it!”

Nabein suddenly shouted.

“I respect Salrin. But Salrin lived hundreds of years ago. It’s not even a part of his lineage, yet now the Dark Brothers has to listen to some child just because he has the treasures.....does that make any sense? We’re the ones that have defended the Dark Brothers for a century!”

“Then Shambala hasn’t become the leader of the Dark Brothers?”

Alan’s question made Nabein snort.

“Leader? It’s not that easy. No matter how sick I am, who could accept a child as the leader? But the elders have accepted him.”

“Elders?”

“Yes, the Dark Brothers has weakened since the treasures scattered. But Shambala suddenly gathered one of them. So he has justification to gather the descendants of the Dark Brothers that have scattered. Well, it’s not just that.....”

Nabein’s voice rose with annoyance at the end.

“Anyway, the elders still have a vain hope that the Dark Brothers can emerge from the darkness. So Shambala was recognized as a candidate for the leadership and will be given a trial. If he passes then Shambala will be recognized as a Master Assassin.”

Although it was a long explanation it could be simply summarized. Shambala changed his profession to one of the 7 heroes related classes. Just like Ark had to find the Three Marvels left behind by Hero Maban, Shambala also had to find Salrin’s three treasures to change to his secondary profession. Once he obtains the 3 treasures, he will unlock the key to become a Master Assassin. However, it wasn’t as easy as it sounded. It wasn’t easy for Ark to get the recognition of the Meow and raccoon clans. If he failed then he wouldn’t be able to change his occupation to a more advanced one. That probably applied to all hero related classes.

Speaking of the trial to change to the 2nd occupation.....in Shambala's case, that guy Nabein was the one standing in the way. The game made a complicated relationship that Shambala would have to clear up. In that case, how will Nabein interfere with Shambala? Just as Ark became curious, Nabein started answering his question.

"But I can't follow that vain dreamer of an Elder anymore. If it was impossible for Salrin then that young child definitely can't accomplish it."

"Then.....?"

"Not long ago Shambala passed the trial the Elder gave him. Since Shambala passed the test, the elders will soon reward him with the Dark Veil. I can't possibly allow those treasures to remain in the hands of a foreigner."

An eerie light shone in Nabein's eyes.

"This is the only chance. Shambala will have to activate the dagger during the ceremony to receive the power of two treasures. That is the only chance to steal the dagger."

"Are you rebelling?"

"It is not a rebellion. I'm just taking back the treasure while squashing Shambala and the elders in the process. And I will revive the glory of the Dark Brothers after I own the two treasures!"

Nabein exclaimed.

"But won't there be a lot of assassins?"

"I've already put in measures to deal with them. Since they are aware of a potential attack, many assassins will be defended the outskirts just in case. And the headquarters of the Dark Brothers.....there are a lot of brothers sympathetic to our ideas. If we take action then they promised to fight together."

Nabein smiled and approached Alan.

"But there are also a lot of foolish guys who support the elders. Our

victory is assured, but it won't be an easy fight. That's the reason we decided to take a risk and save you."

"Are you asking me for help?"

Alan had already anticipated Nabein's request.

"It's not a bad thing. I already know your circumstances. You have no place left in the Schudenberg Kingdom. Your guild has been disbanded while hunters are chasing you so you can't get any rest. But if you help us and we succeed then things will change. The Dark Brothers will grant you sanctuary and the power needed to hold off your enemies."

Alan's eyes shone. After he lost the Lord's position, he was reduced to a fugitive. Even the Asyeosu church that promised him a secondary profession had been ruined. In such a situation, it was difficult for Alan to refuse the temptation of the offer.

No, there was no other choice. If he didn't get help from the Dark Brothers then it wouldn't be possible to avoid Ark's sword. Since he had a hostile relationship with Shambala, he might even be chased by his assassins. Besides.....

Nabein wasn't being kind when he made the offer. The message was also a threat of what would happen if he refused.

"Okay, I'll cooperate."

"I thought you would accept."

Nabein laughed as he replied. There was a reason Nabein took the risk of saving Alan.....although Alan would've been beaten up by Shambala and Ark, the situation had now gone through a 180 degree change. The Holy Knight's skills became more useful when he had more troops. He also affected the skills of his whole unit The presence of a Holy Knight in a war equalled to the power of a dozen troops.

"I want to check my equipment before resting.....do you have someone who can look at the equipment?"

“Of course. Just rest comfortably until it is time.”

“When is the action taking place?”

“Tomorrow, tomorrow at midnight.”

‘Tomorrow midnight.....!’

Ark stored the information in his head and left the cave. Tomorrow midnight was in approximately 10 hours, which fortunately meant that he still had time.

‘I have to consult with JusticeMan ajusshi.’

Since he knew about it, it wasn’t possible for Ark to let them get away with it.

After he left the cave, Ark gathered JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. They had to crawl on the ground in order to avoid the attention of the assassins. Meanwhile Roco screamed when she saw Ark who looked like a beggar and made them wash and do laundry. Because the situation was so rushed, Ark briefly summarized what he heard in the cave.

“You can’t pretend that you didn’t hear what they said.”

JusticeMan said in a serious tone.

“They’ll have a lot of power if they attack from the rear.....if they’ve made preparations in advance then they would’ve definitely prepared a way to attack from the rear. If there are also forces ready to revolt then it is likely to succeed.”

“Alan also has an aura of leadership, if they are influenced by that

leadership.....”

“It is game over.”

Alan would become a lot stronger even if there was only one person in his unit. If Alan helped the war, then the difference would change from 5:5 to 7:3. Since he was chaotic his skills decreased, but Holy Knight was still one of New World’s strongest occupations.

“The problem is after that.”

Ark said with a serious expression.

“If Shambala is defeated then it is likely that Alan will seize a lot of power in the Dark Brother.”

“.....If that happens then it’ll be a big threat to us.”

When Alan lead Dawn Blade, he still wore the mask of hypocrisy. Even if there was a problem, he had to act like a knight on the surface. But now Alan had no more fame to lose. He didn’t have to pay attention to others. Ark didn’t know what Alan would do if he took over the Dark Brothers. Only thing he could be sure of is that Ark and the rehabilitation members will be the first target. They’ll become the target of all the assassins in the Dark Brothers!

The assassins were different from normal NPCs. Even if a user had a hostile relationship with the guards, they could still play the game. But they were assassins, and if they orders from Alan then the assassins definitely wouldn’t hesitate. That was the worrisome part.

“That Alan, he’s still so persistent until the end.”

“It is simple.”

At that time, Jjak-tung shrugged and summed up the situation.

“If Alan succeeds then he’ll have a way to step on us. If we succeed then we’ll step on Alan.”

“Hrmm, he is a huge mortal enemy.”

Tazza was one of the intellectual ones and nodded.

“We have to prevent Nabein’s rebellion in order to stop Alan.”

“We urgently need to inform Shambala first.”

“But I can’t get in contact with Shambala. Since it is happening at midnight tomorrow, he might not get a letter in time. Without knowing the Dark Brothers headquarters, there is no way to visit them.....”

“Let’s take a look at this.”

JusticeMan took out some scrolls. JusticeMan arrived late because he was purchasing some scrolls. He bought the [Track] scroll in case Alan used [Warp]. However, Shambala’s name did not trigger the [Track] skill. The Dark Brothers headquarters was either more than 1km away or it was classified as a city.

Within a city, there were many constraints on the use of scrolls. The [Track] scroll could only find a user if they were not in a city.

“What now?”

“There is only one way left.”

JusticeMan replied after Ark asked in a worried voice.

“We don’t know the location of the Dark Brother’s headquarters. But we know that those guys are going to do a surprise attack.”

“Ah, then.....?”

“Didn’t they say the surprise attack on Shambala was at midnight tomorrow? It isn’t possible to stop them with our power. So we’ll stay concealed and put surveillance on them, and when they attack Shambala then we’ll attack from behind. It’ll be more effective if we attack from behind while Shambala attacks from the front.”

“So we’re going to strike the bastards in the back of the head.”

“That’s right.”

JusticeMan laughed and nodded. Then Ark started monitoring the assassins’ lair. But he couldn’t just waste time.

‘The Dark Brother assassins are strong.’

Ark had fought the assassins several times so he knew to be afraid of them. Of course, Ark became so much stronger that it wasn't possible to compare to that time.....

'But the levels of NPCs isn't fixed in New World.'

NPCs could also level up. He knew that fact for a long time. But with a battle against NPCs ahead of it, Ark found it quite stressful. The first battle he experienced with NPCs was with Viscount Haverstein and the Sylphid Knights. He didn't know it at the time, but the Sylphid Knights seemed to be about level 50. Ark was level 20 at the same so they seemed distant to him. But when he participated in the quest at level 70, he was a lot stronger than them. However the Sylphid Knights were still strong. Ark had raised his level. But the NPCs also raise their level according to the average level of the users. There was no guarantee that he could deal with 3~4 assassins alone.

'The Dark Brothers will also be different from the last time we fought.'

While Ark watched, he also made a variety of survival cooking dishes with different buffs. So 10 hours passed and it was finally midnight of the next day.....

"That's strange?"

JusticeMan's head tilted.

"Isn't it already midnight? Even if the Dark Brothers' headquarters was nearby, there still should've moved a while ago if they want to make the deadline.....why is it so quiet?"

"Come to think of it....."

Ark's heart dropped as he remembered something. He also couldn't see the assassins that had been patrolling around a while ago.

"I'll check it out."

Ark used 'stealth' and entered the cave.

'What, what the? What happened?'

There should've been 100 assassins but he couldn't see any. Something was messed up. Ark hurriedly searched the cave but he could only find 3~4 assassins.

'Don't tell me.....It's already started? But I've been keeping an eye on the cave entrance.....how did so many people go unnoticed.....'

Once he considered Nabein's words, Ark finally figured out why.

"Oops, I was wrong. The old man wasn't going to surprise attack the troops defending the outside. He never planned on a frontal assault. There must be a path that leads inside the headquarters. And since they didn't leave, there must be a secret passage in here somewhere!"

Then Alan and Nabein were already heading towards the headquarters of the Dark Brothers.

"Damn, hurry up and look for the secret passage!"

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members plunged into the cave.

"What, what? Who are you?"

"Can't you tell by looking? The side of justice!"

Kwajik, peuk, dangtang!

The 3~4 assassins were smashed in an instant. Hae Gyeol-sa then tied up an assassin who was in a critical state with his 'Chain' skill.

"Ugh.....did Shambala send these guys?"

"Tell me! Where did they go?"

"Kukuku, it's too late. The Liberation Army has already left."

"The Liberation Army will fall. Where is it? The passage that connects to the Dark Brothers' location?"

"Do you hear what you're saying. It is useless, you won't be able to kill them!"

The assassin glared at him. But such courage couldn't even last for a few seconds against Hae Gyeol-sa.

“Ah, would you like to beep-beep you son of a bitch beep-beep?”

Advanced Intimidation!

The assassin's face paled and he stammered.

“C-candlestick.....”

Hae Gyeol-sa quickly glanced at Ark. Come to think of it, he previously saw a candlestick that was slightly different than the others. A sound rang out and the wall shot back when Ark twisted the candlestick in the opposite direction. Then the intimidated assassin started talking in a distant voice.

“Kukuku, it's too late. By now, the elders and Shambala should've died already.....”

Pepepek!

Before the assassin could finish talking, he became a bloody rice cake.

“There's no time. If Shambala dies then everything is finished!”

Ark ran down the secret passage leading the rehabilitation members.

Salrin's Towers

“Y-you.....”

Someone was kneeling down clutching his chest which was soaked with blood. He breathed roughly while looking at the dozen bodies around him. The man's eyes were shaken. The masked assassins wearing black clothes.....death for an assassin wasn't peaceful. They had killed others. They were prepared for their deaths. Death to them was just an ordinary part of their lives. But the death reflected in his eyes was different. Until now, he had believed that the 20 masked men who killed his brothers were also his siblings. Betrayal! Since they lived in the darkness together, it was rare for them to betray each other. The man lifted his head and bared his teeth.

“You filthy traitors, aren't you ashamed of lifting your sword with those hands? We might live in the darkness but we have our own pride. We are descendants of the great Hero Salrin, a Master Assassin. Did you guys forget that while following Nabein?”

“We did not forget. It would be impossible to forget.”

“That is why we cannot accept a foreigner as the leader.”

“We will strike you all down to defend the pride of the clan.”

“.....Is that so?”

The man stared at them with piercing eyes. The assassins flinched while the man opened his mouth.

“The Elders would always say it. Although we live in the darkness, we shouldn't let the darkness inhabit our hearts. Although we cannot reach it, we should always strive towards the light. Until the day that we regain our name.....but you guys have stained your hands with your brothers' blood and have become dark. Pitiful.”

“Shut up, the Elders are forcing us to do this!”

“Haven’t you grasped the situation yet?”

“Answer, number 358. Do you want to live under the glory of a new Dark Brothers or die thanks to the pitiful delusion of the past?”

“It is nonsense!”

The man snorted and raised his neck.

“If you fear death then you’re already not a Dark Brother.”

“.....It was impossible.”

The assassins simultaneously lifted their swords. At that moment a loud yell came from a dark hallway.

“Dark blade!”

A sharp sword cut through the darkness. The assassin who was hit by the sword received an extravagant amount of damage. The assassins simultaneously turned their bodies. There were more than 10 people coming from the hallway on the other side. The only people in Salrin’s Towers should be masked assassins in black clothes. But these people were dressed messily with some wearing no armour. Yes, it was Ark and the rehabilitation members who had followed the assassins’ secret passage. Of course, the assassins didn’t know their identities so the obvious question was asked.

“Who are you?”

“We’re Shambala’s friends!”

“What?”

The assassins flinched and raised their sword in unison. Then Ark smiled and spoke to JusticeMan.

“Did you see? The ones who lifted their swords are the enemy.”

“Handle all of them except for the injured assassin.”

JusticeMan lowered his upper body and using explosive

acceleration, he approached the assassins. The surprised assassin brandished his sword. But JusticeMan just rotated to the side and grasped the assassin's shoulder. No, with just his grip he threw the assassin across the room and the assassin became stuck in the wall.

"Phew, that old geezer is quite furious."

"Are you already stronger than were you were on active duty?"

"The Tiger of the SWAT team has been revived."

The rehabilitation members marvelled over the scene. When the level increased then it was natural to become stronger. But JusticeMan's case was slightly different. JusticeMan was once the feared Tiger of the SWAT team. Although he did not talk about it, there were few people that could beat him in a one-on-one fight. However, his skills had become rusty after his injury and retirement. And he thought that he could never return to that condition.....JusticeMan keenly sensed that it could not be revived. In reality, his strength and speed had decreased due to age. But he could compensate for the lack of speed and strength with his stats in New World. And his experience and practical sense could be converted into combat power.

"Now, bring it on!"

JusticeMan threw the assassins like they were fish.

"We can't be defeated by such an old geezer!"

"We were still active until recently!"

"Hahaha, let me see your skills!"

"Today I'll catch them. Beep-and-beep- bastards!"

The rehabilitation members ran up to the assassins.

Syu, pepepepek!

Tazza has amazing dexterity and used the skill 'Throw Dagger' to throw 5 daggers simultaneously. Bul-kkun wore steel gloves and crushed the faces of the assassins. The assassins tried to take

control of the battle using their swift movements, but they stiffened thanks to Hae Gyeol-sa's 'Intimidation.' But the real hit was Roco's song.

"My hometown is on a faraway mountain, where apricot blossoms and azalea flowers bloom....."

Once Roco began to sing, the assassins' movements immediately slowed down.

Roco's registered song 'My Hometown' was played.

<The fighting spirit of all the chaotic characters in range is reduced.
Strength -20, Agility -20, Attack -20>

In the meantime, Roco had levelled up her Art stat to 250. She once again gained a new ability. So Roco was able to select a suitable song and save it as a skill.

The effects varied depending on the nature of the song. For example 'My Hometown' raised nostalgia for the past, making anyone with the chaotic status lose their fighting spirit.

"Damn, killing and seeing death everyday.....until when do I have to live like this?"

"Wah, I suddenly feel like seeing my mother who passed away."

After the skill was used, the assassins immediately murmured with melancholy voices. It was like a scene where the criminals felt regret after listening to sad music. In the beginning, the Minstrel might be dismissed but it changed to a strange character after raising it. Although the skill affected the chaotic characters, it didn't make them surrender. But JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members couldn't be compared to before.

Even when they learned certain odd skills, it was still useful on the battlefield. The experience of the siege in Nagaran was also carved into their flesh and bones. In addition, they also spent a while in the secret dungeon.....no, they also raised their variety of skills by a lot. Was that all? Ark also painstakingly cooked food and raised

their stats. Even though they were only level 140, it wasn't hard for them to fight against the assassins.

'Now Hyungs have found a way to integrate their battle style perfectly.'

Ark looked at the rehabilitation members warmly. Of course, Ark didn't play around either.

"Riposte!"

Ark immediately deflected the assassin's attack. It was his counterattack skill, Riposte! The assassin was pushed back and fell down like a bowling pin.

"There's no time. I must act quickly. Snake, one sword!"

Ark exploded the sword using Blade Storm. The space was filled with turbulent sword fragments! The barrage of sharp fragments tore into the assassins like the claws of a monster. He used the experience from the time he was hunting hook bats. But the assassins weren't as easily defeated as the hook bats.

"Ugh, u-unbelievable.....!"

Through the swirl of debris some assassins swung their swords. They wanted to deal critical hits to Ark before they collapsed. However, Ark's body slid back before the swords even reached him. He used the option from the Wind Spirits' Boots, Slide!

"What, what the?"

Thanks to that, the assassins collapsed in vain. One end of Ark's mouth lifted.

"Slide kick!"

He did a high spinning kick before sliding back!

"W-what's this nonsense.....gag!"

An assassin received the kick on his upper right temple and collapsed. Ark allowed JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members to deal with the 4 remaining assassins.

“Okay, this is good enough.”

The rehabilitation members spoke in a confident voice. In the old days, they wouldn't have been able to handle 3~4 assassins so it was a big development.

“Huhuhu, it was worth almost dying to raise the level.”

The opponent who didn't have enough power was beaten. Of course, this also applied to reality. However, in reality it could take a few months or even years to increase their strength. In New World, they could become stronger faster. It was the reason why RPGs were the most addictive games.

“.....Who on earth are you?”

The injured man asked in a confused voice. Ark was already a little bit aware of the situation.

“Are you an Elder?”

“Elder? How do you know about what's happening here?”

“Like I said, we came to help Shambala.”

“Shambala.....Leader? To help the Leader?”

The man said with a surprised expression.

“If the Leader is called Shambala then yes. There's no time to explain. We happened to find out by chance that Shambala is in a crisis. But we have no idea where to go since we don't know the geography of this place. Could you help us?”

The man looked at them suspiciously. The Dark Brothers' headquarters, Salrin's Tower was completely isolated from the outside world. Then some strange foreigners suddenly appeared and said they would help. It wasn't easy to believe such words. Ark also guessed what he was thinking, but in such a situation it wasn't possible to mention the name Ark. Although the situation was strangely entangled, Ark and the Dark Brothers still had a hostile relationship. Ark contemplated for a moment before lifting his arm.

“I’m sure a Dark Brother would recognize this?”

“That.....was on the Leader’s wrist.....Gladiator’s Honour?”

“That’s right. Only two people have earned this. Shambala and I.”

“Then you.....?”

“I’m Dark Wolf who paired up with Shambala at the Evil Silrion.”

“Dark Wolf!”

The man looked at Ark with shocked eyes. The whole world has heard Dark Wolf’s name, and that included the Dark Brothers. And the fact that an item called ‘Gladiator’s Honour’ belonged to them was also spread. Thanks to that, the man began to believe Ark.

“What is the situation?”

“.....It isn’t good.”

The man sighed and replied.

“Those who left the Dark Brothers knew about this opportunity and left some plans in place.....In addition, a number of Brothers collapsed because of a surprise attack by traitors.”

“Shambala?”

“Leader is still safe and sound. No matter how many elite people they have, they can’t all enter Jaerim Tower or it will collapse. But I don’t know how long we can hold out.....”

“Jaerim Tower?”

“It is where the ceremony took place.”

“Could you show the way?”

“.....Of course.”

Roco treated the man’s injuries.

“Come on, follow me. I’m called number 358.”

According to the man's words, only people in a special position were allowed to have names. But the only person allowed to give them a name was the Master Assassin. Since there hadn't been one for hundreds of years, the Dark Brothers were just called by numbers.

"Once Leader conquered all the trials and became the Master Assassin, he would give us our names. That is the wish of all the brothers. And finally a leader appeared after hundreds of years but Nabein....."

In the midst of the trouble, number 358 still didn't forget the role of an NPC. Although Ark didn't ask, he still gave away some information on the Dark Brothers. Of course Ark wasn't interested. However, the rehabilitation members nodded with sympathetic gazes.

"Doesn't it seem just like Nam-ssi?"

"It must not be very pleasant to be called numbers."

"It is just like a prison guard, calling the prisoners by number."

"Number 358.....I somehow feel a sense of empathy with him."

"Come on, we can talk later so hurry up."

"I know."

Ark's party exited the basement after being guided by number 358. Although he imagined the assassins' headquarters as a gloomy cave, it was actually a gorgeous tower made of obsidian.

'It isn't possible to see this from outside.'

When he looked through the window, he saw the cliffs surrounding it like a folding screen. The forces of nature completely concealed the three towers that stretched up several metres high.

Yaksok Tower, Jaerim Tower and Gyeolsok Tower. These three towers were secretly concealed by the Dark Brothers for hundreds of years, and were collectively known as Salrin's Towers. The place Ark's party entered was Gyeolsok's Tower.

Anyway, the top of Salrin's Towers were engulfed in confusion. Numerous assassins fighting could be seen through the open beehive windows. If the assassins fell then it was a horrible scene with blood splattering.

'Since they're dressed the same, I don't know what the situation is.'

"Is the situation bad?"

"Yes."

Number 358 moaned and pointed towards the centre tower.

"That is the top of Jaerim Tower where the ceremony was supposed to be held. The Elders and Leader are there."

A long battle was unfolding on top of Jaerim Tower. But they were too far away to grasp the battle situation.

"Summon Demon, Dedric! Check the top of the tower!"

"Understood!"

Dedric flew quickly across the sky. After a while, Dedric came back and explained what was going on in Jaerim Tower.

"Everybody is wearing the same outfit so I don't know what is happening. It is confirmed that Alan is pressing Shambala in the tower. But he hasn't been captured yet.....it seems pretty dangerous?"

"Alan!"

Ark growled while number 358 asked with a gloomy expression.

"You know Alan?"

"Yes, I actually knew about this because I was chasing after him."

"That's right. I don't know how he appeared here but their abilities rose thanks to him. We had no time to prepare before Alan had already entered Jaerim Tower."

"Are there any troops supporting the Elders?"

“The Elders’ troops have all been dispatched to patrol the outskirts. The Elders never imagined that there would be a secret passage. If they came then the problem would be settled.....Nabein is the elder that knows the most about Salrin’s Towers. Thanks to the surprise attack, it would take some time for the troops to reach here.”

“So for the moment we can’t expect any help.”

“Yes.”

“Then there is no time for this.”

“We can’t allow Alan to do what he wants!”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members shouted. Selecting number 358 to guide Ark was the perfect choice. No matter what the appearance, Salrin’s Towers was still the hiding place of assassins. In contrast to the outside, the interior was a complex maze. Ark and his companions arrived so late because of that. It took them a while to reach the basement after exiting the secret passage. In addition, they came to help but the Dark Brothers were chaotic NPCs. Ark couldn’t tell who was on Alan’s side because they looked identical.

But with number 358 guiding them, such problems were easily settled. When they arrived at a group of assassins fighting, number 358 shouted.

“All the followers of Salrin rip one sleeve off!”

Some of those who were fighting tore off their sleeve.

“The targets are those without ripped sleeves!”

“Well, that is convenient. Let’s go!”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members jumped into the rough fight. Although the assassins with shredded sleeves were losing, when Ark’s party joined the situation immediately changed. They rushed forward like a wolf pack. The 10 of them used their various skills and easily took care of the assassins. Once the battle was over, the assassins with ripped sleeves approached.

“Huk huk huk, number 358. Who are these foreigners?”

Number 358 had quite a high position among the assassins.

“They’re friends of Leader and have come to help.”

“The Leader?”

When the situation was explained the assassins immediately lost their wariness. They probably would’ve been attacked if number 358 wasn’t there.

“They’re skilful, just like what we expect from a colleague of Leader. Although it is shameful, we will receive your help.”

“Wait.”

Ark ran and blocked the assassins.

“It looks like I’ll have to reorganize the party.”

During the last battle, there were 20 assassins with ripped sleeves. But afterwards, only 13 of them survived. If they weren’t in the party, then the chaotic NPCs wouldn’t receive the effects of Roco’s songs or Ark’s Nursing. But if the chaotic NPC were in the same group then the buff effect would be applied. If they became a part of the group then it was also easier to increase the combat power by applying tactics.

“That sounds better in my opinion.”

“Understood. Although you are foreigners, since the purpose is the same then there is no reason to be reluctant.”

JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and the assassins nodded and agreed. Ark dismissed his party and reorganized it to include the assassins. The effect definitely showed. In fact, the melee combat taking place on top of Salrin’s Towers was very strange. There were hundreds of people engaged in sporadic battles throughout the tower. Fresh blood and fire flew everywhere. Even so, he did not hear one scream. It was to the extent that it seemed like he was looking at a war film on mute. The reason was because they were assassins who were trained not to scream even if their heads were

cut off. The assassins also had a keen sense of the action on the battlefield. If they were running then a sword would suddenly appear out of nowhere. It was the assassins who hid using 'Stealth' or 'Ambush.'

If it was only the rehabilitation members then they probably would've received a lot of damage. But the risk of that fell thanks to the assassins.

"These guys, using such clumsy deception in Salrin's Towers!"

Number 358 and the assassins instinctively blocked the glittering sword. They could detect 'Stealth' if the level wasn't that much higher than them. However, the response speed of the assassins to the opponents' attack couldn't be compared to the rehabilitation members. The assassin specialized in coping with a crisis. The assassins were taken by surprise and 'Stealth' was deactivated. But they died after Ark and the rehabilitation members attacked without bothering to confirm the features. The assassins were chaotic NPCs. Chaotic users had a much higher probability of dropping items. And since the assassins were rebels, Ark and the rehabilitation members could pretend ignorance and take the items.

'The assassins are quite high levelled so I'm pleased.'

While going up the tower, they saved quite a number of senior assassins from a crisis and increased their numbers. Roco's songs also had a huge effect. Usually the opponents were equipped with items that would contain debuffs or buffs that would increase resistance, but the enemies were all assassins. They couldn't apply buffs or recovery magic outside of potions or herbs. The difference in a group battle was extravagant. As the battle continued it became more profitable. By the time they reached the top floor, their numbers had already grown to 80 assassins.

"We can reach Jaerim Tower once we get to the top!"

Number 358 yelled as he ran up the stairs.

"What, what the? Who are these guys?"

"Did those guys down there die?"

“Stop them, there’s not a lot left anymore!”

“If we kill the Elders and the Leader then it is our victory!”

Dozens of rebels blocked the stairs.

“Those damn traitors……!”

Number 358 was in front and received some damage. Then Ark stepped on number 358’s shoulders, jumped and shattered his sword.

“Blade Storm!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The sword debris swirled fiercely around the rebels. Ark fell between the rebels. As soon as attacks flew from all sides, Ark evaded using Dark Dance and followed up with Dark Blade and his chain skill Dark Strike. The reason that Ark was able to attack so recklessly was because of their weapons. The assassin had two main weapons. The dagger that was associated with assassins and a blackjack, which was a blunt weapon. A blackjack was a blunt weapon with a leather pouch that was filled with iron powder. Because of its power, it had a high probability of inflicting ‘Stun’ or ‘Faint’ once hit. While assassins in medieval times killed without leaving a trace, the blackjack was a historical weapon often used. But Ark was rather fortunate.

-Thanks to Resilience, the damage of Blackjack has been reduced by 20%.

Because of his resilience, he didn’t get stunned.

‘It was worth the effort of raising it!’

Ark used his spare time in Nagaran to raise his resilience. Unlike other stats, it was a stat that would increase if he was hit. Because Ark almost died fighting a monster with a blunt instrument, he called Dedric and had him beat Ark up. So in a fortnight he raised his resilience to 200 points! So it unconditionally alleviated the damage of blunt weapons by 20%. Since he also evaded attacks using Dark

Dance, he didn't receive a lot of damage.

Pepepeng!

Once Ark invoked his skills, the assassins' formation collapsed. Then the rehabilitation members and assassins attacked the rebels, cleaning them up in an instant. When they reached the top of the stairs and exited, there was a bridge which connected to Jaerim Tower. Nabein's army of rebels already controlled it. The Elders and Shambala were trapped inside Jaerim Tower.

"Penetrate it!"

"Eh? You?"

Ark's party entered the bridge crowded with rebels. However, the width of the bridge was only 5 metres. Although there were a number of enemies, only 3~4 of them could fight at the same time! When Ark and the rehabilitation members ran onto the bridge, they immediately pushed the rebels.

"Riposte!"

Ark repelled the rebels and reached the middle of the bridge. Then he saw a flash of shiny armour from among the assassins standing in front of Jaerim Tower.

"Alan!"

"Ark, how did you get here.....?"

Alan reflexively flinched after he turned his head.

"I came for you!"

"Did you wipe out all the assassins trying to take over Gyeolsok Tower?"

Alan figured out the situation after seeing all the assassins behind Ark. For a moment Alan was confused, before a cold smile flashed on his face.

"Luckily I prepared for this."

Alan clapped his hands and the rebels retreated.

‘What the?’

Ark looked at Alan strangely. Then the rebels turned and looked at numerous scrolls attached to the railing. At that moment an icy sensation slid down his back.

‘The [Explosion] scroll!’

It was a scroll that he had seen many times. Ark suspected Alan’s plan and started to scream.

“Stop, retreat!”

“It’s too late!”

Alan smiled and activated a scroll. Flames started spewing along the railing of the bridge. Then.....!

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The hundreds of scrolls caught fire in a chain. The scrolls activated at the same time and there was a huge shock wave. In fact, [Bomb] was not a very powerful scroll. It only did 40~50 damage. But if hundreds exploded at the same time then the damage was unimaginable. The solid bridge broke into pieces. Roco screamed as the bridge burst into flames.

“Oppa!”

Ark was in the front and had caught the main blast of the explosion.

‘Oh my God!’

Ark bit his lips tightly. Since the target of [Bomb] was the bridge, Ark didn’t receive a lot of damage. He was enveloped in flames but thanks to the 50% fire resistance of his ‘Veil of Fire,’ his damage was cut in half. The problem was that only JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members managed to get off the bridge before it collapsed. Of course, he could reduce falling damage by 80% so he wouldn’t die. But he would drop into the rebel infested tower alone.

‘And it won’t be possible to stop Alan!’

As he was thinking, his body started to fall down. At that moment Ark suddenly came up with an idea.

“Summon Demon, Deimos! Transform!”

As soon as Deimos was summoned he transformed into a sword. Ark immediately changed it into a whip and closed it around an intact railing. It was an action similar to Indiana Jones that he came up with last time while climbing Colossus. When it changed into a sword again, the blade decreased and Ark’s body rose. But before he could breathe a sigh of relief, he felt a weight on his body. The rebel caught in the explosion was holding one of his legs.

“I won’t die alone!”

The rebel went for his dagger. In this state, there was a 100% chance that he would die.

“Don’t quit, you beep-beep-beep bastard!”

Ark used ‘Intimidation’ on the rebel who flinched and stiffened. However it only lasted for a moment before the assassin swung his dagger. At that moment, something flew through the cloud of dust towards the rebel.

“Master!”

“Dedric!”

“Master, I’m here to help! This guy, take this and this! Fall!”

“Ugh, you damn bat……!”

The rebel swore and swung his dagger but couldn’t hit Dedric. Dedric avoided the attack while stepping firmly on the guy’s head and nose. The rebel slipped a little bit every time until he eventually fell. Ark barely managed to creep back over the bridge.

“Oppa!”

Roco ran up to him with a tearful voice and used Song of Recovery.

“Hahaha, what do you say Master? Are you thankful? Eung, are you thankful?”

Ark sighed in relief while Dedric kept on bragging. He had to admit the truth. But he wasn't going to praise him.

'Damn.....!'

Ark looked at Jaerim Tower with a furious face. The bridge had been disconnected because of the explosion. The only way to get to Jaerim Tower from Gyeolsok Tower had disappeared.

"Number 358, is there any other way around?"

"Jaerim Tower has a separate entrance. The only bridge remaining is from the top of Yaksok Tower. But....."

Nabein's side had already captured Yaksok Tower. It will take a lot of time to defeat them while climbing up to the bridge. There was no guarantee that Shambala would hold out until then. No, after seeing the atmosphere he would only be able to hold up for 10~20 minutes.

'Have I come all this way just to give up?'

While Alan was dealing with the Elders and Shambala, Ark was stranded. And he would be mercilessly attacked by the Dark Brothers.

'That bastard Alan.....!'

He already couldn't see Alan on the other side. He had no interest in Ark's life or death. Since he cut off the bridge, there was no way for Ark to interfere. And if Alan succeeded in the rebellion of the Dark Brothers then Ark would die anyway. There was no reason to be impatient now.

'It is the worst situation but there must be a way I can join Shambala.....'

But no matter how hard he thought, Ark couldn't come up with a way to cross the bridge. And even if there was a way, Alan controlled the entrance to Jaerim Tower. Ark wouldn't be able to reach Shambala.

'Anything is good. I have to somehow find a way.'

“There is only one way left.”

At that time, number 358 spoke.

“Since there is no way to save Leader and the Elders at the moment, we must quickly call the troops back. If our troops come then we’ll be able to recapture Beacon Hill from Nabein’s forces.

“How long will it take to recapture Beacon Hill and reorganize the troops?”

“It’ll take approximately 1 and a half hour to recapture.”

1 and a half hour was 30 minutes in reality.....and it wasn’t just taking control of the troops. They also had to knock out Nabein’s forces. But he was convinced that Shambala wouldn’t be able to last that long. Then the roof of Jaerim Tower suddenly caught his eye. It was a sharp roof with the end pointed into the sky! An absurd scene appeared in Ark’s head. Ark turned his head and looked at Jaerim Tower again before swallowing his saliva.

‘Perhaps.....no, there is only a small probability of success.....but if it succeeds then there is a way to get to the top of Jaerim Tower. But I won’t be much help to Shambala if I go alone. If I take someone else.....’

Roco came to Ark’s attention. Because Alan was a Holy Knight who could use recovery and various buffs, the previous battles had been difficult. It made an incredible difference since assassins normally relied on potions or herbs for recovery. However Ark also had a user who could use recovery and buffs. It was Roco! What if it was Ark and Roco helping Shambala? Although they might not be able to beat all of Alan’s forces, there was a high possibility of holding out until the Elders’ troops arrived.

‘If 2 people try the success rate is low, but this is the only way!’

Ark decided and explained the plan to Roco.

“M-me?”

Roco freaked out when she heard the explanation. JusticeMan and

the rehabilitation members also had worried expressions.

“No matter what.....isn't it too dangerous?”

“But if Alan joins with the Dark Brothers then there is no future for us. If even one person reaches Jaerim Tower then the situation might change.”

“Even so.....”

JusticeMan sighed. Roco looked at Ark and grasped his hand as she decided something.

“Understood. I don't care if I die as long as it's with Oppa.”

If it wasn't for the situation, that confession would be quite shocking.

“Thank you.”

Ark gripped her hand tightly, causing Roco to blush and nod.

“Well, there's no choice but to try it. If you succeed then we can hold up a little bit longer. We'll also recapture Beacon Hill and recall the troops as quickly as possible.”

JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, number 358 and the assassins quickly headed towards Beacon Hill.

The slope of the spire roof exceeded 60 degrees. It was 100 metres in the air while he could clearly see the cliffs stretched out below. He was also carrying Roco.

“S-sorry. Oppa, am I heavy? I wish I dieted.....”

In the situation such a conversation made sense.

“No, you're not heavy.”

Ark panted while sweat was dripping down his face. After a while, Ark arrived at the lightning rod attached to the top of the spire. When he grasped the lightning rod and looked down, Ark became

distracted. The reason why people with high imagination were afraid of heights was because they could imagine themselves falling. Just because it was a game didn't mean that the fear would shrink.

'I have to brace myself tightly. If this fails then everything will end!'

"Hold on tight Roco."

"U-understood."

Roco closed her eyes and tightly clung to Ark's waist. Ark plunged the saw blade tightly into the roof with clenched teeth.

"Deimos, transformation off!"

Tadak, tadadadak!

Deimos once again returned to his original appearance. A skeleton holding a sword and a large shield.

"Deimos, lay out the shield on the ground."

Tadadak?

Deimos doubted Ark's command. However he obeyed the order and spread the shield on the ground. Ark ordered Deimos to stay in the centre and got on the shield. And he clenched his teeth tightly before letting go of the lightning rod. The shield started sliding down the slope at an amazing speed. This was the method that Ark thought of. Use the shield like a snowboard and accelerate down the slope. And then jump over the broken bridge with a ski jump. If he controlled the angle well then he would be able to enter Jaerim Tower instantly.

'I've seen a lot of snowboarding!'

The wind blew against him like a blade but Ark kept his eyes forward. There was only one chance.....if he missed the timing of the jump then it would be a useless death. Ark, Roco and Deimos on the shield instantly flew over the edge.

"Now Dedric!"

"Damn, you promise? I am exempt for food torture 3 times!"

If they slipped then their bodies would instantly be driven into the ground. They needed something to change the momentum of the acceleration so that they could fly. The one undertaking that role was Dedric. Dedric cursed and stuck to the spire's edge. When the shield touched his back, Dedric instantly rose up.

"Aaaak! H-Hot! My back! My head!"

Dedric had the hair on the back of his head stripped off because of the friction. But thanks to Dedric's sacrifice, the shield flew through the sky just like Ark planned. It was a strange feeling as all the sounds around them disappeared. However Ark couldn't afford to enjoy the flight. Jaerim Tower that was in the distance approached in an instant. If they hit the wall then they would be crushed like a frog!

"Deimos, Roco. Move your body to the right!"

When they twisted their bodies, the orbit changed to a window.

"Lower your body and prepare for impact!"

Wajachang! Tatong, Kurururu.....

The shield broke the window and entered the tower. There was an intense sound as the shield slid on the ground before suddenly hitting the wall.

"What, what the?"

The assassins who had been fighting stopped their movements and looked at the scene. The dust gradually dissipated until the blurry form of Ark and Roco was seen. Ark emerged from one side and surveyed the quiet battlefield.

"Ah, Ark?"

The person who spoke was none other than Shambala.

"Hey, Shambala. I came to help."

"H-how.....never mind, you're in the enemy camp you idiot!"

"What?"

Ark looked back and saw Alan.

“Ark.....kill him! Kill the bastard!

The assassins who were watching dumbly suddenly rushed towards him.

Ruin Knight

“Summon release, Deimos! Roco, hold on tight!”

Ark shouted while raising his body.

“Slide!”

He used the swiftness of the boots to quickly throw a kick. And then an amazing effect was displayed. Binggul, binggul, binggul.....when he used ‘Slide’ in conjunction with a spin kick, it looked like he was one of those spinning characters from the street fighting games. Ark continuously use spin kick to hit the assassins while moving forward.

Although the assassins attacked from all directions, his resilience reduced the damage. Thanks to Roco also using Song of Recovery, Ark was able to break through the encirclement and reach Shambala’s side.

“Ark, what are you doing here?”

“W-wait a minute.....uuk!”

Since he didn’t get a chance to rest after spinning, he now felt sick. He didn’t know how the fighters in those games didn’t get nausea. After his nausea passed, Ark grinned and replied.

“I told you, I came in order to help.”

“You were definitely born with an ability to surprise people.”

Then an NPC wearing a red mask approached Shambala from behind.

“Leader, do you know him?”

“Yes, I fought with him in the Evil Silrion.”

“Then this is who Leader was talking about.....!”

The NPC stealthily stared at Ark before saying.

“I’m Isabel, an elder of the Dark Brothers.”

Ark looked at Isabel with a stupid face. He had imagined that an Elder was an elderly grandpa. But surprisingly it was a woman with a gentle voice. Ark stared with bemused eyes until Shambala muttered in an uncomfortable voice.

“What you looking at with that piercing stare?”

“Oh, no.....rather.....the situation looks bad.”

“So even you see it?”

Shambala sighed and mumbled. Ark could see that the situation inside the tower wasn’t good. He didn’t have to use Eyes of the Cat to see that the assassins’ health was low. Although they already consumed potions and herbs, most of the assassins only had 20% health left. On the other hand, thanks to Alan’s buffs and recovery magic the rebels still had 60% of their health. If it wasn’t for the barricade then the situation would’ve already been over.

“Thrust through the barricade!”

After Ark appeared, Alan pushed the rebels to attack even more. One of the barricades fell down and instantly 3~4 assassins collapsed.

“We’ll speak more later, but are all the assassins inside the tower a part of your group? Me and Roco can give some buffs.”

“You.....so you’re with Roco.....”

Shambala then noticed the reason why Ark brought Roco along. Once Ark and Roco joined, the situation completely changed.

“The most precious life, the light touch of the Mother will reach out and stroke it.....”

Roco also got over her motion sickness and began to sing. Her ‘Song of Recovery’ restored 200 health for 3 minutes. With ‘Gentle Reverberation,’ that effect overlapped 3 times and the health of the

assassins inside Jaerim Tower quickly increased. Ark also wasn't idle.

"Shambala, collect all of the assassins' potions!"

"What?"

"I don't have time to explain. Hurry up!"

"Pass all the remaining potions to Ark!"

When Isabel commanded, all of the assassins immediately gathered their potions. The number of potions barely exceeded 50. Ark put the potions in his bag and shouted.

"Great Sacrifice!"

50 potions rushed into the sky and a giant jar of potion appeared. It was a smaller jar than what appeared in Silvana, but the intermediate recovery effect was given to allies within 200 metres! Thanks to the combo of 'Song of Recovery' and 'Great Sacrifice,' the assassins were able to regain 80% of their health.

"T-that.....the potion from that time was because of him?"

Alan's voice was clearly audible over at the enemy's camp.

"Courage. We're going to win!"

Then Ark used Nursing and raised the morale and courage of the assassins by 50%. The effect of the blessing increased various stats. These changes had a better effect than expected on the assassins who couldn't use recovery or buffs.

"It is not time to give up yet!"

"We can't possibly turn over the Dark Brothers to traitors like them!"

"Our comrades will be coming from the outskirts. We just have to hold on a little bit more!"

"For the glory of Salrin!"

The assassins who had been pushed so far started their

counterattack. The assassins in Jaerim Tower had a high level than the rebels because they were the Elder's aides. Because they were numerically outnumbered, they couldn't restore their health after the opponents' persistent attacks. But the rebels were also formidable.

"Bah, they've only increased by two guys! Attack with full power!"

Alan pushed an assassin with his shield while overlapping various auras.

"Alan, this time you won't get your way!"

But the buffs of a Minstrel couldn't surpass that of a Holy Knight. Although they had the momentum for a while, once Alan started pressing recklessly the assassins once started collapsing. In addition, dozens of rebels from Yaksok Tower also entered and boosted their forces. Shambala was pushed to a corner.

"Ugh, Elders.....!"

"Have strength. Salrin's Towers isn't meant to be handed over to such a person!"

However, Isabel's voice didn't have any energy. Shambala looked at Isabel and had his energy renewed.

"That bastard Alan....."

"Shambala."

Ark grabbed Shambala's shoulder and said.

"The situation is simple. The rebels are more powerful because of Alan. If we beat Alan, it is possible to endure even with lower numbers. When JusticeMan ajusshi regains Beacon Hill and takes control of the troops then this situation will be cleared up."

There was only one conclusion. Catch Alan!

"It won't be easy, but if it's you and me then isn't it possible?"

"It's not bad."

Shambala grinned and replied. That was the reason Ark navigated

through the crowd to join Shambala. Anyway, the key to this fight was clearly Alan. Once they made the decision, the two of them plunged through enemy lines.

Alan also knew how important his role was. Since he didn't want to run out of mana when facing Ark, Alan stayed in the rear eating while enthusiastically spamming buffs. That meant they had to go through the rebels to get to Alan. There were dozens of them. It wasn't easy even for Ark and Shambala. But it was a different story if it was the two of them together!

"Leader, be careful. You are our last hope."

Isabel said to Shambala before he turned his body away.

"Ark, I'll go first!"

"Okay!"

They used the two pincer movements that they had developed in the Evil Silrion.

"Petrification of Blood!"

Shambala used Petrification of Blood on 3 rebels while jumping at the same time. Then Ark immediately followed with Dark Blade and took them out. Following that the two of them used 'Dark Dance' and 'Blink' continuously. As soon as Shambala created a gap then it would be followed by Ark's kick. Once they fell over from Ark's kick, Shambala would kill them with his dagger. Since it was a familiar attack pattern, there was no need for words. However, the rebels were over level 140 and if they weren't killed then they easily recovered and surrounded them.

"We don't have to deal with all of them. Just push them away!"

"I know!"

Ark used Riposte while Shambala used 'Force Punch.' When Riposte and Force Punch was used, the rebels were thrown in all directions. The only downside with these skills was the delay was greater than the attack. But when the two of them used it, the rebel army couldn't

approach. They slowly penetrated the enemy's forces. Finally the white form of Alan stood out from among all the black clothes. Ark's eyes sparkled as they focused on Alan.

"There!"

"If we take too long then we'll be hit. Quickly!"

"I know!"

Ark and Shambala split into two. Then they attacked Alan from both sides.

"These bastards, do they think I'm easy to kill? Holy Light!"

[-Your dark attribute bonus has been turned off by 'Holy Light.']

Once the ball of light appeared, Ark and Shambala's stats quickly decreased. Alan stopped Shambala's attack using his shield and then swung his sword at Ark. There was a sharp sound as Ark was pushed back after he blocked it.

'Damn, I forgot.'

Since Alan had been weak for a while, he had forgotten. Alan was a Holy Knight. Ark would be able to defeat him if he was alone. But Alan now had the rebels. The more troops he had, the more bonuses would be added to his stats. In contrast, Ark's dark attribute bonus had disappeared. He was still 20 levels higher, but Alan's troops enabled him to surpass that 20 level difference.

'But now I'm not alone!'

"Son of a bitch, die!"

Ark swung his sword towards Alan. While Alan was blocking his sword, Shambala's dagger penetrated. Ark attacked again causing Alan to stagger.

"Ugh, you bastards.....!"

"Now Ark!"

"Okay!"

Ark and Shambala synchronized their behaviour and cornered Alan.

Pepepeng, the critical hits kept on landing.

If one attack was stopped then the other side would receive a critical hit. If he blocked the top then Ark would aim at the bottom, if the bottom kick was blocked then Shambala would aim the dagger at his neck. He was a Holy Knight, but even a Holy Knight couldn't stop the two pincer attacks.

When Alan was in a crisis, the rebels immediately flocked to him. However, Ark and Shambala just used Riposte and Force Punch to clear the area of rebels and attacked Alan again. Although it was hard to concentrate because of the rebels' interference, Alan was pushed by their continuous attacks. And the small minor attacks continuously decreased his health even though Alan was a rare tank class.

'Okay, the attacks are on track. He is too busy conserving his mana on the auras then using recovery magic. Once his health falls below 30%, I'll use Blade Storm and Shambala will use Torpedo Sword regardless if the rebels attack or not. Even if it is Alan, he won't be able to endure those attacks!'

Ark was drawing up the strategy.

"Huk!"

While fighting, Shambala glanced to one side and saw something in the distance. And he used 'Blink' non-stop to run back. Shambala was heading to Isabel's location. In the confusion of the battle, three rebels had approached from behind the Elder!

"Danger!"

Shambala embraced Isabel and turned his body around. At that moment, Shambala received 3 critical strikes in his back. His health had already been low from the fight with Alan and now he was in a critical condition.

"Leader-nim!"

“Back off!

Shambala turned and rushed towards the 3 rebels. And using his tremendous skill, he killed all three before staggering to one side and kneeling. He had been poisoned when he received the critical hit. One of the effects of the poison was dizziness so Shambala couldn't even stand properly.

“What the hell is going on?”

Ark was outraged.

He had known Shambala for a while. And Ark knew that Shambala wasn't a person who would die for a NPC. Of course, Isabel was a profession related NPC but Shambala had seemed to run there instinctively. It was an incomprehensible reaction. Well, that turned out okay. The problem was Ark.

After Shambala suddenly ran off, Ark had been surrounded by Alan and the rebels.

‘God dammit.....!’

“Kukukuk, have you been forsaken?”

Alan and the rebels wildly rushed forward.

‘Dark Dance! Slide!’

Ark used Dark Dance and Slide consecutively to retreat.....

But Alan wasn't going to just stay there obediently. Alan didn't care about conserving mana anymore and battered Ark with a variety of skills. Thanks to the rebels as well, Ark's health immediately went through a large cut. Fortunately, thanks to his resilience and evasion rate bonus he still had 5% by the time he reached their camp.

“God dammit, what was that.....”

Ark was about to say to Shambala before he flinched and closed his mouth. Isabel was sitting next to him with tears in her eyes so Ark couldn't say anything.

‘We missed the chance to catch him!’

They had cornered Alan and were about to catch him. But now that chance was ruined. Roco tried hard and sang 'Song of Recovery,' but Roco's recovery had no immediate effect. Even if it was useful in a large-scale battle, it was difficult to restore the health of 1 person. Even if it overlapped, 'Song of Recovery' only restored 600 health for 3 minutes. Ark had 3000 health, so it would take 9 minutes to restore it to 70%. Meanwhile, Alan wouldn't wait that long.

"Now. Kill Shambala and Ark when they cannot fight!"

That guy did not betray his expectations. The rebels pushed forward while yelling. When the rebels who couldn't attack helped protect Alan, the assassins fell down like autumn leaves. But that was not the end of Ark's nightmare.

'Wait, that shield is.....!'

It was like Alan had hit Ark on the back of the head with a hammer. Surprisingly, the shield that Alan took out of his bag was the Sacred Earth Shield! It was none other than the unique shield Ark got from Colossus.

'Then I sold Alan the Sacred Earth Shield?'

When Alan went to the mailbox in Selebrid, the scrolls were not the only things he picked up. Of course, Alan didn't know that Ark was the one who sold him the shield. Alan and Ark both used different usernames on the auction site. But Alan was clearly holding the shield. Then.....

'Oh my god, if so.....?'

Ark knew about the power of the shield more than anyone!

"Sacred Protection of the Earth!"

At the moment, Alan and the rebels' bodies turned white like limestone. It was the special effect of the Sacred Earth Shield that gave 100% defense and attack for 10 minutes! When he confirmed the information, he had thought that it was a really cheat-like option. 100% meant it was doubled! So if the normal damage was 100, under the effect then they would deal 200 damage. The rebels who

received the enormous buff literally crushed the assassins.

“The most precious life, the Mother of all beings.....”

Roco sung her ‘Song of Recovery’ until her throat was hoarse. Ark also used Nursing and Dedric’s saved skill Defense Aura but they could do nothing against the overwhelming damage. In just 1 minute almost all the assassins had collapsed. And the rebels immediately closed in on Ark.

“Kukukuk, spending money is great.”

Alan smiled warmly at the satisfactory result.

“Oh my god.....!”

Ark was stunned. Who would have guessed? He was choked by his own unique item.....

“The only thing that remains is the Elders, Shambala and Ark. Trample them!”

“Ooh oh oh oh!”

The rebel army shrieked and ran forward.

“Slime’s Time, NO1!”

He had gained Slime’s Time after eating the Slime’s Immortality Pill. It allowed him 100% defense against physical attacks for 10 minutes! After Ark used it, his body was covered with a smooth slime. In that state, Ark embraced the Elder, Shambala and Roco. Although he felt countless blows, he evaded any damage.

“Heung, is that a skill? But that skill will run out. And all the assassins are already dead. The time before they die is just extended a little bit.”

Alan said even though it was annoying. The duration of Slime’s Time was 10 minutes. Although the duration of ‘Sacred Protection of the Earth’ would also be up in 10 minutes, all the assassins had been wiped out. When Slime’s Time ran out, there would only be the 4 of them against 100 rebels.

“O-oppa.....”

“I’m sorry Ark. But.....”

Roco and Shambala murmured, There was 7 minutes left. He had recovered to 60% health, but that wouldn’t change anything.

‘Is it going to end like this?’

Ark raised his head. Suddenly he saw a giant structure on the tower ceiling. It was hundreds of tons of melted iron in the shape of an iron palm. The structure representing the Dark Brothers was hanging from the ceiling by several strands of chains.

‘Is it possible to drop that?’

But there were several problems. The first problem was that the steel palm was hanging from the ceiling 10 metres above him. There was also magic attached to the chains so it wasn’t possible to attack from below. Unless he climbed up the wall, it wasn’t possible to break the chains. Even if it was possible to climb up, Alan and the rebels wouldn’t just watch and do nothing.

“But that is the one way. There must be some possible methods. Something.....’

Then a spark flew in Ark’s head.

‘Yes, that’s the way!’

“Dedric, fly here!”

Dedric who had been surveying the battle situation flew over at Ark’s command.

“Master, you’re in serious trouble. What are you going to do? Huh? You want me to do what?”

“Shut up and hold still. Summon Demon, Deimos. Transform! Dedric, take this?”

Ark summoned Deimos and shouted. Then Dedric quickly grabbed the saw blade.

“Rise! Head to there!”

Yes, the method he devised was to use his summons! There was no way for Ark to climb up to the structure. Dedric also didn't have any weapons so he couldn't break the chain. However, it was possible with Deimos as a sword. If he transformed into a small sword, Dedric would carry Deimos like he was a small pet. Dedric flew to the top of the structure and Ark shouted.

“Deimos transformation release! Break the chain!”

Ttak ttak ttak, ttak ttak ttak ttak!

Deimos fearlessly swung his sword. Kung, the structure shook from the intense shock. Alan was confused until he finally noticed Ark's intention too late.

“This, this is.....quickly leave!”

“But we're at the top of Gyeolsok Tower and the bridge has already been broken.”

“Idiot, we can go to Yaksok Tower!”

“B-but the Elder's troops are entering Yaksok Tower.....”

“What?” Why didn't tell me this sooner?”

“I thought we would be able to handle Shambala and the Elder before that.....”

The ends of Ark's mouth rose when he heard the rebel's words.

“It seems I'm the winner once again. Alan.”

“Y-you.....!”

Deimos who had been attacking the chains finally broke one. The giant structure wobbled. Without that chain, it wasn't able to withstand the weight and the other chains started breaking. Then.....the structure fell apart at a breakneck speed.

Ku ku ku kung! Kwakwang! Kwakwakwakwa!

The structure crushed dozens of rebels as it hit the ground. But that wasn't all Ark intended. He had dropped a structure weighing hundreds of tons. Even if the floor was sturdy, it couldn't endure the weight of the structure. Indeed.....it continuously broke through the floors until it reached the cliff which was 100 metres down.

“Deimos, summon release! The Elder, Shambala and Roco, quickly get on my shoulders!”

The Elder, Shambala and Roco climbed onto Ark's slime coated shoulders. At the same time, the floor broke apart and everybody in the tower fell down. And after falling for a while.....

Thud!

Ark who was coated in slime made a different sound when he hit the ground. It just the sound was heard then it would've seem disastrous, but Ark didn't even have his health decreased by 1 point. Slime's Time invalidated the falling damage by 100%. Fortunately the 3 people riding on his shoulders didn't receive any damage either.

‘Huhuhu, isn't the calibre quite high?’

Ark looked at Alan and the rebels with a pleased face. While carrying 3 people, he had fallen a long distance. It was more than 100 metres, so the rebels who already had their health decreased looked like flattened rice cakes. He also expected Alan to look like that. But Ark's expectations went awry.

When Alan almost hit the ground he activated a scroll. Then he suddenly disappeared before his form appeared on the ground.

‘[Warp] scroll!’

The [Warp] scroll allowed the user to move randomly. But because it was impossible to move through the sky, the only place to land was the ground. That rule also applied to being in the air. It was an incredible method to invalidate falling damage! Instead of a penalty (?), the sphere of distance possible was limited because it was used in the air. It was an ingenious idea that Ark never even imagined! Thanks to that Alan didn't receive any damage and just smiled.

“I guess your excellent idea didn’t work!”

Ark threw a bemused glance at Alan and sighed.

“For someone so smart, you sure are stupid.”

“What?”

“Look around before you say that.”

Ark still had Alan cornered. Thanks to his experience in Nagaran, Alan had figured how a way to respond when falling.....if there was enough time then an honour student like him would easily be able to solve the problem. However, Alan’s wits still lost against Ark. He couldn’t understand the situation correctly.

Alan turned his face and stiffened. There was a reason he was able to last against Ark and Shambala. It was because 100 rebels followed him. But now all the rebels in Alan’s vicinity were dead. In other words, Alan was once again like the King with no clothes.

“Are you aware that this area is a village?”

Ark replied with a smile. Just like most scrolls, the range of movement for the [Warp] scroll in a village was limited. Even when the scroll was used, they were only able to move in the village. Alan had been able to escape from Selebrid using the scroll because he was near the entrance. However, this was the middle of Salrin’s Towers. And Salrin’s Towers had already been controlled. Of course, Alan also didn’t have a [Warp] scroll left.....

“Now, Shambala. Shall we clean this up?”

“Of course.”

Shambala laughed. Alan didn’t even have enough mana left since he blindly used it on his auras and skills. He couldn’t be compared to the partners who rallied an audience of 10,000 people in the Evil Silrion. When the 2 of them joined forces, Alan was forced on the defensive.

“Ark, as long as I’m alive I won’t leave you alone! I’ll mobilize all my strength to make you feel true despair!”

“I’ll still stop you…….Snake, give me the shabbiest sword.”

Ark snorted and made the sword explode. And then Shambala ended the fight using his best move.

“Blade Storm!”

“Torpedo Sword!”

After the spectacular special effects, Alan lay abandoned on the ground. A light flashed on Alan before a helmet fell. He didn’t have enough mana to use ‘Replace Equipment’ before he died.

Noruhein’s Helmet (Rare)

Armour type: Steel helmet

Defense power: 65 (+10)

Durability: 31/80

Weight: 50

User restriction: Level 130 or higher with Warrior profession

Noruhein’s helmet belonged to a legendary knight with an enormous reputation.

Noruhein was a great commander who struck down the barbarians using incredible resourcefulness and bravery. This helmet was his treasure and stayed with him until he died on the battlefield. The numerous scars carved on his helmet are proof of his prowess and bravery.

<Option: Defense +10, Strength +20, Stamina +10%>

<Special Option: You are able to use ‘Bravery in the Battlefield.’ Bravery in the Battlefield increases the morale of all allied by 30%. When a commander uses it, he receives an additional bonus to stats and tactics. Mana consumption: 50>

‘It will be possible to receive millions of won for this.’

Ark's face wasn't that bright when he picked up the rare item. A chaotic player was guaranteed to drop equipment when he died. So Ark had inwardly been expecting 'Sacred Steel Shield' to fall.

'Anyway, I have to collect it before Shambala gets it!'

Ark quickly put the helmet inside Snake. But Shambala seemed to have no interest in the item.

"Are you alright?"

"Yes, thank you."

Isabel grasped Shambala's hand and replied as she stood up. Ark was the one that saved her so why was she so thankful to Shambala? When Ark made a slightly dissatisfied face, Roco smiled and approached.

"Oppa, you were wonderful."

Well, he should be happy because he got to monopolize the item thanks to that. Ark turned his head and looked at Alan lying on the ground.

'So he'll be moving to jail soon? I have a month without seeing him. No, I might not see him forever.....heh, goodbye.'

Ark stepped on Alan's head. The rehabilitation members came too late but dropped a ladder so Ark's party could climb out. Once they went outside the entire situation had been sorted out. The subdued rebels were in prison while Nabein quickly had his neck slashed.

That was how the Dark Brothers rebellion ended.

'Why haven't I been forced to exit?'

Alan watched the scene where Ark and his companions disappeared with surprise. When a chaotic player died, the unit was usually forcibly shut down. The rule was that they couldn't connect for 24 hours. But even after a large amount of time had passed, it hadn't been shut down yet. But there were exceptions.

'That Ark bastard, he must've registered as a bounty hunter.'

If a hunter or guard killed a chaotic player, after a period of time they were automatically resurrected in the prison. And the length of imprisonment was according to the bounty amount. If he died because of a hunter, it wasn't possible to reduce the time or apply for bail. He was forced to spend a month in jail.

'Like this.....is this the end?'

If he was a month behind then it wasn't necessary for him to look at the test results. All his efforts would be for nothing.

"Ark.....!"

Unbelievable anger rose in his chest. Until recently, he had just considered Ark as a trivial human not worth worrying about. But now he had been killed 4 times by that bastard. It was something that he didn't want to admit. Losing Silvana, experience or stats wasn't a problem. His pride which he thought was more important than his life had been trampled on and muddled. If he gave up his revenge then he would be carrying the stigma of a loser for the rest of his life.

'I can't give up! I'll kill him. Even if I have to pour everything into it, I'll kill him!'

Alan vowed revenge and engraved it into his heart. And then a message window popped into his head.

A new stat 'Hatred' has been created.

Hatred (+ 10): The most powerful emotion a human can have is hate. Even if you have to use everything you have or lose your own comfort, hate is the most appropriate power to get revenge.

<Hate can only be created in a player with a chaotic alignment. The user with a hatred stat will gain 1 stat point for every 0.1% increase in their chaotic alignment. In addition, all skills will be amplified by 0.1%. However, any stats which oppose Hatred will be deleted.

'Hatred.....this stat is also possible?'

Alan laughed. He was trapped in jail for a month yet this stat was his

only consolation? At that time. There was a weak vibration in the vicinity of his chest. A black aura began to form around the 'Blessing Pendant' that he received after changing to a Holy Knight.

'What's this? While is there a black aura around a Holy Knight item?'

Once again a new message window popped up.

A special item has been triggered.

You have met the criteria of the Hatred stat and have activated the pendant.

Thanks to the special effect of the item you can now resurrect in a hidden location, the 'Ancient Altar of Evil.'

Would you like to accept?

'What the? It didn't have this information when I viewed the item.....'

Alan struggled for a while but he had to accept the resurrection. The name was 'Ancient Altar of Evil' but anywhere was better than prison. Alan's body was already deteriorating. Once he accepted the resurrection his body was enveloped in a red light. He appeared in a gloomy area and his vision gradually brightened. Alan blinked his eyes a few times until he saw an old man. It was difficult to guess the age from that elderly face. But surprisingly it was a familiar face. Alan jumped after he saw the face of the old man.

"You!"

"I knew you would come."

The old man smiled and nodded. Alan sharply declared.

"You knew I would come? That sounds like.....! Did you think you could use me for your purpose?"

"It's not my fault. You chose this result."

"What?"

“Didn’t you accept the will of the darkness?”

“Will of the darkness? What nonsense.....”

“You’re the one that didn’t say no.”

The old man chuckled and pointed towards Alan’s necklace.

“The only evidence I need is that you triggered the power of the necklace.”

“Necklace.....”

Alan fidgeted with the necklace and thought back on the situation. This necklace needed the Hatred stat to work. Hatred was a stat that only chaotic players could get and it increased when your chaotic alignment increased. In other words, the old man had expected Alan to be chaotic from the time he was given the necklace?

“You were the one who gave me this necklace! Was this all a part of your plan?”

Alan raised his voice and glared at the old man. Yes, the old man was the archbishop of the Asyeosu church, Maseutyu! No, he was a follower of Ankh, god of Death. After he disappeared from Selebrid he had hidden here. In the past, before Alan switched professions to a Holy Knight, he was the one who personally sent an invitation to Alan. And he was the one who gave him the unique ‘Blessing Pendant’ necklace. Thus it wasn’t unreasonable to suspect that this was all a plot.

“Not at all, I did not do anything.”

Maseutyu shook his head.

“But I knew. As a foreigner, you seemed satisfied with the glory of a Holy Knight. But from the beginning, I guessed that you weren’t as holy as you seemed. That’s why I tested you. If you could kill and deceive the world by acting as a Holy Knight forever. My guess was right but you exceeded my expectations. You wouldn’t be able to keep up the facade of a saint forever. I just had to wait until you

threw off the mask of hypocrisy.”

Maseutyu said as he stared at Alan.

“I’m not trying to blame you. You have a way to obtain even greater glory. And you don’t have to worry about the fame that affected a Holy Knight because you are a delegate of the Great Darkness.”

“Delegate of the darkness?”

“That’s right. It is the evil that is stronger than everyone! We have been waiting for the delegate of darkness.”

Maseutyu shouted while his blood pressure increased. However, Alan’s reaction was cold.

“Stronger than whom? Ha, you avoided the soldiers and ran away yet you claim to have power?”

“Run away?”

Maseutyu giggled at his provocative words.

“I was just waiting for you and then it will be time.”

“For what?”

“For darkness to cover the entire world!”

Maseutyu spread his arms and smiled while thousands of red lights appeared around him. Alan only noticed what it was after his eyes focused on it. It was a deformed creation that looked like it climbed up from hell! The demonic strength they gave off couldn’t even be compared to the demon like monsters that wandered outside.

“T-these are.....”

“This is power of Darkness. And you’ll be the one leading them.”

“M-me?”

“That’s right. You overcame a number of trials and that will become a part of your strength.”

Alan stared blankly at a demon and stuttered.

“Just now, you are being serious?”

“You’ve lacked the most important thing until now.”

“What is it?”

“Didn’t I say so? Something that could never dwell inside a saint. Hatred.....”

Maseutyu confirmed as he slowly looked at Alan.

“You have learned the most important thing to become a dark delegate. Betrayal and death of trusted colleagues. And you came to know the presence of an enemy that you absolutely can’t allow to exist. Now choose. You can keep the appearance of a Holy Knight and by derided by everyone who sees you or you can be baptized and join the Great Darkness, where you will get the power to destroy everyone who ever criticized you.....”

At the same time a message window popped up.

You have obtained information about the ‘Dark Delegate’ from the Archbishop of the church of Ankh, God of Death.

You have the chance to be a dark delegate.If you receive the baptism then it is possible to change profession to a ‘Ruin Knight.’

If you do then your former profession ‘Holy Knight’ will be automatically cancelled and all skills and characteristics reset except for your level and stats.

In addition, if you cancel the Ruin Knight profession then it will be impossible for you to obtain a special profession again as Ruin Knight is the dominant profession in this category.

If you change to a Ruin Knight then you will receive a special bonus and obtain an extra 50% to your experience and skills.

Would you like to accept?

Alan looked at the profession information carefully. It would be difficult because he would have to learn all his skills and special

abilities again. However just like its name, the Ruin Knight was different from the Holy Knight and it had a strong inclination to attack. If he raised it again to a certain level then it would definitely exceed the Holy Knight. It was a way for Alan to defeat Ark.....

‘Anyway, it is impossible for me to obtain the second stage profession of Holy Knight anymore.’

“I accept.”

“An excellent choice.”

Maseutyu let out a dark aura as he smiled with satisfaction. At the moment, Alan’s white armour became black like a raven.

-You have been baptized in the Darkness and became a Ruin Knight.

Alan just smiled as he saw the information window. As prediction, it was powerful.....no, the ability was more than he expected.

‘Ark, I won’t die just like this! Even if I have to discard everything, as long as I destroy you.....!’

Then he heard Maseutyu’s low voice in his ear.

“It’s not time yet. But before long you will show the glory of Darkness to the world.”

Door to a Different World

After Alan died, time passed until it was once again night time. At the top of Salrin Tower another ceremony was in progress.

“Shambala, according to Salrin’s will you are hereby known as the Deliverer!”

Once the rebellion had been squashed and clean up finished, Isabel once again started the ceremony at midnight on the next day. Isabel slowly approached Shambala and wound a dark veil around it. It was one of Salrin’s treasures, the Dark Veil.

“For the future of the Deliverer!”

“Until the day the clan finds the light!”

Then all the assassins gathered in Jaerim Tower immediately prostrated themselves. It was like a scene where the servants in an ancient Chinese imperial court all bowed to the Emperor. The world that the Dark Brothers came to the continent from might’ve been based on China. Anyway, the assassins all showed a deep respect for Shambala as he had collected two of Salrin’s treasures. Although he was the Deliverer, he couldn’t command them but he would have a strong influence on the assassins, just like Ark and the beast clans.

“Please achieve the dream that the Dark Brothers have been longing for.”

Shambala nodded his head without saying anything at Isabel’s words.

‘I see.’

Ark looked at Isabel with a bemused face. Isabel had taken off her red mask for the ceremony. After seeing her face, he understood why Shambala had protected her. Silky black hair flowed down her

back. Eyes like obsidian on a pale face. Yes, Isabel was a beauty. She was so beautiful it looked like she was drawn by someone. If such a beauty was in a crisis then even Ark would throw his body to protect her. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members also had the same idea and looked at Isabel with dazed faces.

“Oppa!”

Ark had been staring at Isabel until Roco pinched his side. Thanks to that Ark regained his sanity and stared at Shambala with envious eyes. But it was because of the veil wound around his body, not Isabel.

‘By the way.....is that a rare or unique class related item?’

Ark swallowed his saliva as he looked at the Dark Veil. Salrin’s treasures were similar to the Three Marvels that Ark had to collect.

‘Damn it, I went through so much suffering and almost died.....’

Fortunately he obtained an item from Alan and Alan was also in jail! He would also receive the 500 gold reward! But that was it.

Then Isabel approached Ark and smiled. Ah, damn.....she’s really pretty. Even if it was for free, he couldn’t complain.

“Truthseeker Ark-nim, you are a descendant of Hero Maban who was a close comrade of Salrin’s. I left the running of the group to Nabein because of my inexperience and it was a big mistake. The Dark Brothers is a friend to the Truthseeker. I wish to apologize for the rudeness of the Dark Brothers so far.”

After the revolt, Isabel finally discovered Ark’s identity. It was said that the one closest to Salrin was Hero Maban. She felt sorry that the descendant of Hero Maban had been pursued by them in order to kill him.

“Well, those days are already over.....”

Ark completely fell for Isabel’s appearance so he was quite tolerant.

“Even though we committed such rude actions, you still came to help our Deliverer and now I am too ashamed to look at Ark-nim and I

sincerely apologize for our impoliteness.”

‘If you really mean those words then I should be receiving compensation!’

As expected, he cared more about an item than a woman’s appearance. When it had seemed like Isabel was just going to apologize with words, Ark became angry. But Ark’s worry was needless.

“It was thanks to Ark-nim and your colleagues that the rebellion of the Dark Brothers was able to be stopped. I would like to reciprocate the favour.”

Isabel looked pretty even when she was concerned. After she spoke, 13 masked people lined up behind her carrying some bags.

‘Reward! I’m going to receive a reward?’

Ark was given a bag containing a sword with a red aura.

Gwisal’s Demonic Sword (Rare)

Weapon type: Two-Handed Sword

Attack: 45~60

Durability: 200/200

Weight: 45

User restriction: Level 190, Advanced Sword Mastery skill

The legendary demonic sword that cut down hundreds of monsters on the continent. The sword is so proud of its sharpness then even if it was struck with a rock, it wouldn’t lose one sliver of the edge. Gwisal’s sword was even able to cut away the thick leather of a huge black monster.

However, if the demonic strength becomes too strength then it can eat away at the wielder’s health.

<Option: Agility +20, Reaction speed +10>

<Special Option: You can use 'Demonic Opening.' It is possible to trigger the demonic spirit and increase damage by 20%. However, Demonic Opening will consume 5 health every second it is used>

'W-What is this? A rare sword?'

Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped. It was a sleek Japanese looking sword with a sharp edge! So far he had found some rare weapons, but this was the first time it was a sword. The sword did less damage than a two-handed blunt weapon or even an axe. But thanks to the balance it was easy to use and the attack speed and attack power was very good. That was why it was one of the most popular weapons in online games.

Presently Ark was using Lancel's Sword. Even if the offensive power was strong, it still only did 23~35 damage. If he used it in a pincer movement with Dedric then an attack bonus was also applied to Lancel's Sword. But Gwisal's sword did a huge 45~60 damage. In addition, the 'Demonic Opening' option added an extra 20% damage. It was like receiving rain after a drought, as the sword was truly monster-like compared to the ones he currently had.

'I'm a little unfamiliar with a two-handed sword.....but since I have Sword-Hand combat I can use any kind of swords. The attack speed is a little slower but with the high damage it won't make much difference. Hahaha, what kind of windfall is this?'

Now it would be possible to increase his strength by more than 30% just by changing swords. Of course, even with the rare sword it wasn't possible to sell Lancel's Sword or the Saw Blade. Since Dedric and Deimos were the masters of the magic sword, he would have to wait until he found a new magic sword.

'Besides the level restriction is level 190.....since I'm level 180, it will be possible to use it soon!'

Ark packed Gwisal's sword into his bag.

'Wow, this, unbelievable.....!'

"Huk, it's a rare item!"

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members stared absentmindedly with their mouths open. Just like Ark, they also received a profession related item. Roco obtain 'Siren's Harp' a magic musical item, JusticeMan 'Venom Gloves,' Tazza obtained 'Death Knife,' Bul-kkun 'Deadly Armour' and so on.....All the items had extraordinary stats that seemed to suit the person.

"I hope you forget about the grudge and remember our gratitude."

"Grudge? What is that?"

Ark joked around after he received the sword. Shambala just shook his head at Ark and gave a wry smile. At the same time, a message window popped up.

-Your relationship with the hidden 'Dark Brothers' has changed from hostile to friendly.
--

Now he didn't have to worry about the Dark Brothers anymore. Moreover, if Shambala's position in the Dark Brothers rose then Ark might be able to use it. Ark had chased Alan and accidentally intervened, but the harvest was better than expected.

'Now I just need to persuade Shambala.....'

After the ceremony was over, Ark arranged a meeting with Shambala. Ark poked Shambala's side while giving him a coy look.

"Hey, it looks quite good huh?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Isabel.....isn't she an extremely beautiful woman?"

"Don't talk nonsense."

Shambala bluntly replied but the areas exposed by the mask were flushed. Ark playfully said.

"You still shouldn't fall so much, since the partner is an NPC."

"What's wrong with an NPC?"

Surprisingly, Shambala replied quite sharply.

“What? You would really date an NPC?”

“Why do you have a girlfriend?”

“Eh?”

Although Isabel is an NPC, she is someone who truly understands me. And she is able to carry on a conversation with me. What more is necessary?”

Ark had no answer to that. Certainly.....if the NPC status was removed then she was no different from an ordinary girlfriend. But even if he could understand that in his head, he wasn't convinced emotionally. Wasn't she still an NPC?

“I understand!”

Then, Roco grasped Shambala's hand and shook it up and down.

“Love is beyond all of that! It must be love to ignore everything in your mind and protect her from an eternal death! Yes, it is true love. Now I know that Shambala oppa is truly a nice guy.”

“Uh, is that so?”

Shambala looked helplessly at Ark.

“You must be shy!”

She won't stop talking. Shambala's red face seemed to grumble as he looked at Ark. Ark blushed for no reason and moved Roco away before returning to the main point.

“Shambala, now that you're the Deliverer do you need to concentrate on the Dark Brothers for a while?”

“I guess.”

Shambala nodded. He had heard the story from Isabel already. Currently the Dark Brothers will split into many factions and they were spread out all over the continent. That was the reason why Salrin's treasures were scattered. Because Shambala had passed the trial and obtained two of them, his job as the Deliverer

was to find the remaining treasure. And he had to find the Dark Brothers in each region and rally them in order to revive the clan. Ark asked with a coy smile.

“Then you won’t have the time to do other things?”

“I’ll tell you in advance that I won’t concede the map and diary.”

Shambala sensed what Ark was leading up to and said it outright. The items needed for Ark’s quest <Genius Alchemist’s Laboratory> such as the map, key and diary were still with Sid. Ark and Shambala had agreed that they would fight in the Evil Silrion and the winner would obtain it. But returning to the Evil Silrion just for one match would waste a lot of time. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that Ark would win. He had gained a bunch of levels and skills in Silvana, but after fighting Alan together he knew that Shambala wasn’t an opponent that could be ignored. And Shambala had also received the Dark Veil. The Dark Veil wasn’t a simple item. Just like Ark’s stats would increase after he found one of the Three Marvels, Shambala’s stats would also increase and he would obtain some new skills.

However, Shambala’s reaction was cold.

“What, are you really going to act so petty? I thought you were busy?”

“Who is acting petty? It will take a long time to find all the Dark Brothers on the continent. I can do the quest in between.”

“I thought you would want to complete it as fast as possible for your dear Isabel? So why would you waste time?”

“Do you want to fight?”

“Eh? Why are you glaring? Did I strike a sore point? Have you already forgotten how I suffered and almost died helping you?”

“Did I ask you for help? And you’ve already been compensated. Did you really think I didn’t see you take that item from Alan? And you also got something from Isabel.”

“T-that.....Anyway I came as fast as possible to help you.”

“Because of me? It wasn't because you were annoyed by Alan?”

‘This guy is really quick at noticing things.....’

“Ya, are you really going to be like this?”

Ark was about to burst because of his anger. However, Shambala didn't even blink and just continued.

“I didn't desire Alan's items so I turned a blind eye. But my pride won't let me give up a quest in the game. In addition, there's no benefit for me if I give it up.”

“You will gain something. My affection!”

“No thanks.”

Ark spread his arms wide open while Shambala laughed. However, Shambala thought for a moment before opening his mouth again.

“If you give me something then I'll seriously consider it.”

“What do you want? Don't tell me you want to divide the quest reward.....”

“I don't care about the compensation.”

Shambala gave a sharp sidelong glance at Ark before continuing.

“That skill you used.....what is it?”

“Skill?”

“I've seen a lot of skills in New World but that was the first time I experienced such a weird skill. The one that changed your body into a liquid. If it wasn't for that skill then Isabel would've died.....”

“A liquid? Are you talking about Slime's Time?”

“The skill is called Slime's Time? No matter how you look at it, it doesn't seem to be a skill learnt in an ordinary way.....how on earth did you learn it? And my guess is that it gives you resistance to blunt weapons? When hit by a blackjack, it did no damage compared

to when hit by a knife. I guess that is also related to the skill.....”

As expected, Shambala really was sharp. Ark gave him the information after contemplating for a bit. Anyway, he couldn't make 'Slime's Immortality Pill' without survival cooking. It wouldn't be a problem even if Shambala knew about it. But Shambala's reaction to his words was completely different.

“Okay, if you help me make it then I'll abandon the quest items.”

“What, what the?”

Ark jumped in surprise.

“Were you listening just then? I told you how much time and money was spent just making one. It took me 20 days just to gather the necessary ingredients. And I had to buy the Corrupted Fairy Wings for 300 gold. Yet you want to exchange it with some quest items?”

Of course, if he completed the quest it was estimated that he would obtain thousands of gold. But Ark wasn't going to confess that.

“Who said that you would be the one making it?”

“You can't create the item without survival cooking!”

“I can use a skill scroll to create the 'Slime's Immortality Pill.' I'll purchase the rest slowly. Since you don't have to make it, it's not a bad condition.”

“A skill scroll?”

“Looking at the description will be faster than me explaining.”

Ark looked at Shambala with a bewildered face while he smiled. It was ridiculous but since Salrin's Towers also functioned like a city, there were quite a few shops inside the tower. Shambala bought a scroll from one of the shops and showed him.

Vision Scroll

It is a special scroll that can hold one particular skill.
--

However, it isn't possible to change the skill after saving it. In
--

addition, if you create an item with the scroll then the result will only contain 70% of the actual stats.

<Number of uses: 1, Advanced skills only>

Ark's eyes widened. Hidden shops often sold unique items. These items were compensation for finding hidden villages. But he never imagined that such an absurd scroll would exist. Shambala's intention was to use the Vision scroll to obtain the method of making 'Slime's Immortality Pill' from Ark. If he obtained the materials then Shambala would be able to make it by himself. The results were only 70% of the actual stats but.....

"Isn't resilience a stat that I can keep on raising? And Slime's Time has two different skills? Then isn't it unlikely I would get both? In fact, if I only got the poison resistance or resilience then I would be satisfied."

Shambala said after he heard the problem.

'Certainly.....'

Ark's face became serious.

'Shouldn't I obtain money from this recipe?' In fact, once he made the 'Slime's Immortality Pill' then he had completely forgotten about the recipe. The immortality pill only had one effect per person. Of course he would care about the pills from other monsters, but Ark had no reason to recreate the 'Slime's Immortality Pill.' Then Ark started thinking about selling it. It wouldn't be too difficult to obtain the ingredients. Ark was currently level 180. If he hunted the Polluted Slimes or hook bats then he wouldn't get any experience. Was it possible to give up levelling for the moment and travel back and forth between Cairo and Lancel Village to sell the item?

'But do I have to make it directly.....?'

Since his hobby was making money, Ark quickly thought it through in his head.

'JusticeMan ajusshi and the rehabilitation hyung-nims will level up if

they fight the monsters giving the experience. And if necessary then I can rally the thieves, Meow and raccoons.'

If they went hunting around Cairo and Lancel then they would be able to gather the ingredients. Although he was anxious about the unicorn horn, there was no reason for the unicorns to perish if one foal disappeared. No, the unicorn horn was a necessary ingredient.

In other words.....mass production was possible! Ark had already confirmed the effect of Slime's Immortality Pill so it wasn't necessary for him to eat it to see the effect. It was enough to make the buyers drool.

'This is an opportunity to obtain a large sum!'

He quickly calculated it and estimated that he would earn roughly 200 gold if he took off the labour costs. If he opened an ingredient supply route then it was possible to obtain a stable income.

'That is the most important thing in today's society.'

"Okay, I'll accept the suggestion but there is a problem."

"Problem?"

"The ingredient Corrupted Fairy Wings is not available in a normal way. So I'll get it. In exchange you'll have to obtain the unicorn horn."

"I'll do that."

Shambala looked a little bit suspicious but just nodded. So Ark added the Slime's Immortality Recipe to the scroll after making the agreement. Meanwhile the items for <Genius Alchemist's Laboratory> belonged to Ark. Although he hated it, Shambala was prepared to give up the items. Ark bought 20 blank scrolls and found JusticeMan and the others.

"Slime's Immortality Pill?"

"Yes, hopefully once you raise your level enough it won't cost too much to make and we can sell it. Although it once has 70% of the original ability, it is a rare skill so it should sell for at least 1,500 gold."

Ark explained in detail the business. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members will play the main roles by opening up the hunting grounds. Then the lower-level thugs could steadily collect the ingredients. Once the collected ingredients were gathered in Lancel Village then he would create it. When the goods were finished then he would sell it at the trading post in Silvana through Sid. The labour costs would be a lot but it was the most effective method. In addition, it was possible to make the thieves, Lancel Village and the trading post in Silvana grow at the same time.

“Indeed.....it would work if we have the thieves!”

“The other ingredients can be gathered through hunting but what about the Corrupted Fairy Wings.....”

“I’ll send it through the mail as I travel. As it is a magic ingredient, it costs 300 gold just to buy 100.”

“Then we can sell it for 300 gold like Madusein.”

“And the scrolls cost 100 gold each.....”

This was Ark’s plan.

He would sell the Corrupted Fairy Wings at 1 gold for one at the store. But once he had set up the slime factory then it was possible to sell it at 3 gold each just like Madusein. Then he would save 200 gold. And if he bought the scrolls through Shambala then intimacy would increase and he could buy it for 30 gold, so he would save 70 gold. So even if it took one month to create the Slime’s Immortality Pill, he would obtain a monthly profit of 270 gold. As Lancel Village was where it would occur, the real estate price would also increase. It was killing two birds with one stone. No, if JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members also took the pill then there were a lot of benefits! JusticeMan showed a very positive response to Ark’s proposal. The rehabilitation members’ reactions were also explosive.

“Really? Then it is good for us!”

“If we eat the Slime’s Immortality Pill then our stats will also increase.”

“Okay, let’s do it!”

However, there was a separate reason for the rehabilitation members to like the plan. Ever since hunting in the secret dungeon in Silvana, the rehabilitation members had been feeling anxious.

‘Hunting non-stop for 30 hours.....that Ark is not human.’

‘I don’t want to experience such a horrible thing again!’

‘Now that chasing Alan is over, will he make us hunt again?’

The rehabilitation members had never hunted with Ark before. It was only when they accompanied him for a short while that they finally knew his hunting style. Once they actually hunted with him they had enough. So they had been struggling to find some excuse to get out of it. So they quickly agreed to his plan and stood up.

“Now we must return to Lancel Village to organize the labour!”

“Yes! Let’s go, let’s go!”

“It is unfortunate that we can’t hunt with Ark anymore.”

“Isn’t it? But unfortunately that’s impossible!”

Ark took out 20 blank scrolls and saved the ‘Slime’s Immortality Pill’ recipe on them. Then the rehabilitation members emptied their pockets and bought another 20 scrolls before Ark saved the Slime’s Time NO2 skill on them. The most important ingredient for Slime’s Immortality Pill was the Essence of Glowing Slime, but the drop rate for that was very low. But if they gathered slimes using Slime’s Time NO2 then that problem was solved.

“Now the preparations are finished. Let’s go make money!”

The next day, JusticeMan lead the rehabilitation members back to Lancel Village. Although Roco was reluctant to go with them, she wasn’t able to run after Ark while he hunted for 18 hours.

“I can’t go with Oppas because of my part time job. But I’ll follow afterwards.”

Roco couldn’t always be there when they were chasing Alan but she

always caught up immediately. It was because she had the unicorn was a 1000% movement speed. Anyway, Ark parted with his group at Salrin's Towers.

'Now it is time to start a new business.....'

Ark wanted to expand his business to every destination he would visit. But the business would take some time to establish and gain a profit. So now he had time to settle the quest.

'There are two things left to do.....'

Ark decided to stay at Salrin's Towers for a little bit. The current quests he had remaining was the <Find New Settlers> and <Genius Alchemist's Laboratory> quest. However, the <Find New Settlers> quest didn't have a particular destination so he couldn't do it immediately.

'So the remaining one is <Genius Alchemist's Laboratory>.....no, there is also that one thing.'

Ark realized that he had forgotten about an important item he obtained a while ago. He had accidentally discovered it when organizing his bags.

-Lord of Darkness Valderas' Insignia: A level 150 quest starting item.
<Requires 100 Knowledge of Ancient Relics to identify this item>

It was an item that he got from Valderas, the boss of the Event Quest in Jackson. It required level 150 and 100 Knowledge of Ancient Relics! At the time Ark had stored it in his bag and forgotten about it. Apart from his Knowledge of Ancient Relics, his level had been too low to start the quest. But now he was level 180 and he had 138 Knowledge of Ancient Relics! Ark re-examined the insignia and the quest information was registered.

Home of the Fire Draconian

The hottest place on the continent is waiting hidden in the cold North.

It is said that a long time ago, the Fire Draconians hid their home

on the continent. After the darkness approached and Valderas the ruler of Jackson disappeared, the area lost all memory of the area.

However when Valderas' spirit was restored in his last moments, he desperately yearned to return to his homeland. Does his desire still remain? There is a sad aura around the insignia that indicates it would like to go back there. In order to console the regret in Valderas' spirit, you must find the place where the Fire Draconians' secret lies asleep.

<Difficulty level: C>

A red map was written on his map indicating the quest.

'The northern mountains in the magic kingdom of Bristania.....!'

He couldn't imagine how much time it would take to reach that area. The C level difficulty wasn't the problem, but since he had business here Ark was unwilling to travel that far.

'Yes, I'll settle the <Genius Alchemist's Laboratory> quest first.'

Ark decided to keep the insignia for later and look for the laboratory now.

'First I have to get the items from Sid.'

However, Ark had no reason to go there directly. It was enough to designate a suitable place through a letter. Thanks to the 3000 gold slave contract, Sid had no choice but to go if Ark commanded him to.

'Huhuhu, having a slave is quite convenient. I should make use of it before it finishes!'

"Now, should I begin with a new mood? Dedric, Deimos follow me!"

"Okay!"

Clack clack clack!

Ark left Salrin's Towers with a light feeling. And as always, he looked for another adventure with his summons. What kind of monsters and

events would be waiting for him this time? His chest was already racing because of his excitement. Ark definitely had the soul of an adventurer.

‘Hah.....’

Lariette let out a bittersweet sigh. She had left the Dawn Blade guild as soon as the siege finished just like she promised. Anyway, since the Dawn Blade guild ended up being disbanded the result was still the same..... After that she toured New World alone. She wanted to meet Ark but it wasn’t as easy as she thought. Ark’s location was unknown after he left Silvana. With no place to look for him, she wandered around and hunted alone. But it was so lonely. And since she had always hunted with a guild, she felt like it was a lot more difficult alone. Even though they were only level 150, it was difficult to hunt ogres alone.

‘I’ve always been protected so I haven’t played the game properly.’

Who was to blame?

‘I wonder where Ark-nim is?’

Lariette suddenly looked up at the distant sky. Actually there was a way to contact Ark. It was possible for her to know his phone number through the Planning Department of Global Exos. No, even without that she could still send him a letter in the game. But when she stood in front of the mailbox she didn’t send anything. She wasn’t expecting their meeting to be some kind of fateful encounter. But she didn’t want to meet him using such a blatant method. And.....such a vague message might seem suspicious.

‘Why is it like this? Why can’t I contact an acquaintance?’

Even she couldn't understand why she hesitated.

'I don't know. But.....'

Lariette stopped moving and sighed. Suddenly an old man who had been sitting at the entrance of a village approached her.

"You.....are you perhaps a magician?"

"Yes, what happened?"

"Could I perhaps ask you for a favour?"

"A favour?"

Lariette looked at the village resident in surprise. A NPC's request was usually a quest. However, this was the first time she had been in this town. It was rare to receive a quest without any intimacy with the residents. Perhaps the quest was simple. Lariette nodded.

"If I am able to do it....."

"Ah, it is fortunate. All the magicians refused to stop in town because they were worried. In fact, a few nights ago ghosts started appearing in town."

"Ghosts?"

"Yes, there is no apparent damage to the town but the residents have been complaining since the ghosts appear every night on the eastern hill. Oh, I'm not asking you to fight them. However, we have nobody who can talk to ghosts. So we decided to ask some magicians. So please go talk to them and convince them."

'The quest doesn't seem that difficult.'

If Lariette had to convince a gentle ghost then it shouldn't be that much trouble.

"I'll give it a try."

"However.....as you can see this town is not that rich. I'm embarrassed but the most we can provide are meals and a place to sleep."

The old man said as he studied Lariette's face. It was probably the reason why other magicians didn't accept the quest. The old man also thought that the magicians declined for this reason so his face was worried. However, Lariette just laughed as she replied.

"That will be enough."

"Thank you."

Soon the quest information window popped up.

Ghostly disturbance around the town of Gorno

A few days ago, rumours appeared that the town of Gorno was haunted by ghosts.

The ghosts weep and tell stories, making the residents terrified every night. If you persuade the ghosts to leave or fight them then the residents will provide you with a warm bed as gratitude.

<Difficulty level: F Quest Restriction: 200 Good Alignment>

'Ah, that is how the quest started!'

After seeing the quest information Lariette understood the situation. She had a considerably high alignment to good. While she was with the Dawn Blade, Alan and the other guild members completed quests while she took the time to help residents in trouble. Thanks to that, she received a title and her good alignment increased by a lot. The guild might consider it insignificant but she found helping NPCs quite enjoyable. Thanks to the NPC, her feeling of loneliness was alleviated a little bit.

Lariette waited for evening before heading up the hill to the ghost town. But on that day the ghosts did not appear. Lariette once again waited for the next night while hunting. And she waited for 1 hour before leaving and hiding. On the hill a faint shape appeared. The ghost who caused fear in the residents was a small boy. The boy sighed deeply before shedding tears.

'Under these circumstances, since I can see him I might be able to

settle it with words.'

Lariette spoke to the boy using 'Sensitive Soul' magic.

"Hey, what happened?"

-Eh?

The boy ghost looked at Lariette with a perplexed expression.

-How can you talk to me?

"I am a magician."

-Magician.....

"Yes, I arrived here yesterday and an old man in the town told me about you. The residents are afraid of the ghost that had been haunting them for several days. I don't think that you are deliberately trying to torment the residents.....so why don't you tell Noona what is wrong? If I can then I'll help you."

Lariette convinced in a soft tone. The boy ghost hesitated before replying in a tearful voice.

-It is because of a devil called Alan.

"What?"

Lariette's eyes widened. She never imagined that she would hear the name Alan from a ghost. Lariette made her heart calm down and asked.

"Did you say Alan?"

-Yes, do you know him? The Holy Knight Alan.

"Y-yes. I've heard the rumours. But why are you crying because of Alan?"

-In fact, hundreds of years ago I was a squire who served a Holy Knight.

The boy disclosed his identity in a sad voice. And then the boy

spoke about how he met Alan. Surprisingly, Alan received the NPC quest to become a Holy Knight when he was a beginner because of the boy ghost.

-Before Master died, he asked me to find the next Holy Knight. But that person didn't appear for hundreds of years. Then by chance I met the foreigner Alan. He was the right person. No, at the time he just seemed like it. So I told him the method to become a Holy Knight.

The boy explained up to here and suddenly ground his teeth together.

-But it was my mistake. Alan betrayed the Master's will and committed atrocities known across the entire continent. Thanks to that he has defiled Master's name!

"But it's not your fault."

Larlette said in a sad voice. She didn't consider the boy's circumstances as a way to complete the quest anymore. He was not the only one who had believed in Alan and tasted disappointment. Didn't she also become disappointed and eventually left Alan? Then the boy ghost shook his head.

-No, it's my fault.

".....So that is the reason you're crying?"

-No, I'm not crying because of that.

The boy's face distorted with anguish.

-A few nights ago, Master's gravestone started to be dyed black.

"Dyed black?"

-Only one thing makes sense. Alan has been tinged with evil and abandoned his occupation as a Holy Knight. Since the Holy Knight is chained by fate to Alan, Master is beginning to fall along with him. Because of him, Master's soul is now wandering the Netherworld as an aimless ghost. Master's pain is all because I

made the mistake of choosing the wrong man. But I am not able to do anything.

Tears once again fell from the boy's eyes. Then he grabbed Lariette's hand and said.

-Noona, please! Noona please help save Master!

"What? M-me?"

-Yes, I've been crying here for a couple of days but Noona is the first one to stop. Noona is the only one I can ask. Please save Master who is wandering as a ghost in the Netherworld because I was betrayed by Alan!

"B-but I don't know how to get to the Netherworld."

-That won't be an issue. It is possible to make a passage to that dimension using Master's grave. The door will lead to the Netherworld where Master is. And once Master returns to his original form then you'll be able to return immediately. If possible I would like to go but I am tied to Master's gravestone with a Chain of Covenant.

Lariette had a puzzled expression. All of a sudden she had to go to another dimension..... In addition, she had to save the Holy Knight but she had to find him first. However, she couldn't refuse the boy who was shedding tears. Eventually Lariette braced herself.

'This is because of Alan. Therefore it is my responsibility too. Yes, I don't know whether it's possible but I can't decline this child's request. Let's see how far I can go. The worse possible situation is that I die.'

"Yes, I'll give it a shot."

-Thank you!

The boy ghost bowed to her many times before leading Lariette through the woods. Deep in the woods was an old tombstone dyed

black. The Holy Knight was one of the 7 heroes. At the end of the Dark Century, all the heroes were like Kings in their homes so why was his gravesite in such a secluded place? Furthermore, the boy ghost was protecting such an old tombstone..... But the boy ghost didn't have time to explain every detail. The boy caressed the tombstone before he spoke in a distorted voice.

-Noona.....please save Master's soul.

"Yes, I'll try."

Lariette entered the dimensional door with a tense expression. She never imagined the fate that would be waiting for her.....

Kkuaaaa!

A huge brown monster collapsed with a shriek.

"Huk huk huk, I won!"

Ark breathed harshly before flopping onto the ground. After Ark left Salrin's Tower, he had looked for Sid in order to obtain the items. After deciphering the map with the cipher from the diary, he found the area marked which was a red wilderness. However, the red wilderness wasn't a joke once he entered it. The monster that had collapsed just then was a huge Beowulf that could cause 'Rigidity' with just its gaze.....and it was a level 130 monster. Since the quest level restriction was 150, Ark was amazed and felt like he had been struck by lightning.

'If I didn't have Wind Spirit's Boots then I wouldn't have survived.'

Ark looked at the luxurious boots made of red leather. The Wind Spirit's Boots had the 'Slide' skill attached. The best thing about this

skill was that he could combine it with any attack. Fortunately, a new battle style was produced and the synergy effect was beyond his expectations. Even so, it was difficult to fight the monsters of the red wilderness without his darkness bonus attribute. If it wasn't for Wind Spirit's Boots then he would die immediately. Anyway, every time he battled he would have to take a rest. And it wasn't possible to approach a group of monsters in the daytime. Thanks to that his schedule was delayed and it took his several days to arrive at his destination. But one consolation was that the monsters in the red wilderness gave quite a lot of experience. He was able to gain 9 levels.

“Character information window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good +350	
Fame	6,675 (+500)	Level	189
Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Battlefield, Jackson's Hero	
Health	3,040 (+150)	Mana	3,055
Spiritual Power	100	Strength	359 (+28)
Agility	509 (+35)	Stamina	569 (+20)
Wisdom	58 (+10)	Intelligence	592
Luck	69 (+30)	Flexibility	88
Art of Communication	46	Affection	109 (+10)
Resilience	210		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance			

+100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.

Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%

Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10

*<King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20

Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3

Wind Spirit's Boots (Shoes): Agility + 30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Slide' available

Veil of Fire (Mantle): Flame resistance + 50%

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%

Mind's Eye (Ring): 'Mind's Eye' enabled

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* 40% increase all skills in the dark.

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

‘I’m level 189! Just 1 more level.....!’

Yes, the fights were difficult at the moment but once he reached level 190 the situation would change. He would be able to use Gwisal’s sword.

‘My first rare sword.....what does it feel like? I want to try it out quickly.’

“Aaargh, its cold, cold!”

After Ark checked the information window, Dedric complained while rubbing his wings. It was currently winter in New World. And the red wilderness was literally engulfed in blades of wind. Even though he didn’t like wasting even 1 copper, Ark was eventually forced to buy a thick outer coat.

Clack clack clack! Clack clack clack clack!

Deimos who was made of bone didn’t know what the fuss was about.

“Shut up, unlike you I have a delicate body!”

“Please get up and be prepared. It is almost time.”

Ark stood up and once again wandered the wilderness. After some bloody battles, he eventually arrived at his destination. But after overcoming numerous difficulties, the place he arrived at was a shabby hut. In addition, the only things that had gathered dust inside were books and utensils but there was nothing related to alchemy.

“W-what is this?” Did I make a mistake?”

No matter how many times Ark looked at the map, all the information pointed towards the cabin. No, there must be something else. Then some phrases from the diary appeared in Ark’s head.

The place where the earth is stained with blood, but the world that you know isn’t the only truth. Behind the old mirror there might be other worlds you don’t know about.

‘Come to think of it, I still haven’t used the key!’

Ark started to look through the cabin with some expectations. And he soon found something in a big box. Although it was filled with antique picture frames, there was one picture with a wooden door that he couldn't pull out no matter what.

'Perhaps.....?'

Ark touched the key in the lock.

Kiiiiik!

At the moment, the key entered the lock and the door in the picture opened. The space inside the locked door started spreading outwards. He carefully dipped his hand into something that felt like water before he was suddenly swept into the picture.

'That's right, Magaro was studying different dimensions. He must've been successful in his research.....different worlds! The laboratory I'm searching for is in a different dimension!'

"A different dimension.....what kind of place will it be?"

Ark had no fear of landing in an unknown world. Even if it was different, it was still a game so the risks would be similar. Ark just smiled and steadily entered the picture. After a few minutes Ark disappeared into the picture.....

"Did you see? Did you see?"

"I saw. He entered the picture."

"Huhuhu, that Ark. He never imagined that we would be watching."

"Wouldn't there be a huge treasure inside that picture?"

Wearing fur hats and thick clothes, three people entered the cabin. It was Buksil, Sapjil and Ulmeok. The Three Pig Brothers. Before Ark entered the red wilderness, they noticed that he used his cash card at a village and shadowed him secretly. Of course, as merchants the red wilderness was deadly for them but luckily Ark disposed of all the monsters ahead of them.

"That Ark bastard. He only started looking for the treasure after

taking 200 gold from us.....”

“Because of that our backs are bent.”

Ulmeok cried out with a sad face. Then Buksil soothed him.

“But it is okay. Once we see a chance to steal the treasure it is our victory!”

“Huhuhu, I would love to see his crying face.”

“Okay, are you prepared? Let’s go!”

So the Three Pig Brothers jumped into the picture.

Diririri.

It was late when a mobile phone suddenly rung and vibrated. When he lifted the cell phone he heard a familiar voice.

“This is Wang Ho.”

“.....Did you find out?”

“Yes, I’ve found his name and home address.”

“What’s his name?”

“Kim Hyun-woo, he is twenty-two this year.”

“That little bastard.....!”

The one who was mumbling in a low voice was Andel.

“What should I do?”

Wang Ho asked and Andel replied in a cold voice after thinking for a

bit.

“Break both arms so that he won’t be able to play the game for several months. Once you take photos of the broken arms then I will deposit the payment as promised. Can you do that?”

“That’s our specialty. Don’t worry. It will be done with no problems.”

Wang Ho laughed and replied.

“It is a secret from my father.”

“Of course.”

Andel disconnected the phone and looked at the game unit with a desolate look. After being killed by Ark in Nagaran, he hadn’t logged back into New World. He had heard that Ark occupied the castle after obtaining the challenge right and that Alan had become a criminal. Andel knew Alan’s true character better than anyone so he didn’t dare answer Alan’s call.

‘But now it will be finished.’

Once I show Alan the photo of Ark’s broken arms, he will forget about it. The most important thing is to get rid of his anger.....

‘Ark.....you said I picked the wrong opponent? Never, the person who made a mistake is you.’

However, Ark didn’t only exist in the game.

Alive

Hwiooooo!

A snowstorm raged in a dark place. The look of snow inspires a warm feeling. But it actually felt like sharp knives were digging into the flesh like a knife. The ice debris didn't stop and just continued piling up. Zero sight.....in the hopeless darkness the only thing visible was snow and ice. It was an extreme environment difficult for most lifeforms to exist, a landscape of snowy mountains with no name. Surprisingly, a person could be seen in the middle of these snowy mountains. Snow piled on the thick cloak wrapped around the person. The person who tried to take a step forward in the thick snow before falling was.....Ark.

'Where on earth is this?'

Ark desperately looked around for a path. But all he could see was scattered ice.

".....Is this really the right place?'

That was the question that popped into his head. He didn't know how many days he wandered the mountain. The snow seemed like an endless field that had him in its scary clutches. No, the snowfield seemed like the hands of a devil. Thanks to the tremendous snowstorm, he couldn't even see beyond his nose. And since the snowstorm continued for many days, the terrain of the mountain seemed to change every hour. Even his footprints would disappear without a trace after a few minutes. After a short time he wasn't even able to distinguish what direction he came from.

'Can I really get out of here alive?'

Frankly, the fact that he even lived until now was a miracle. Up here, he had almost died many times because of an accident. But now he had reached the limit. The snowstorm was just a snowstorm, but the thing that annoyed Ark was the cold! The cold was so murderous

that the expression 'it was digging into the inside of his bone' was insufficient.

'I'm really going to freeze to death like this.'

"Ooooooh.....M-master. I-I can't stand it anymore."

The suffering voice of Dedric was suddenly heard. In fact, Dedric was even more desperate than Ark. Due to the nature of a warm-blooded animal whether they were big or small, Dedric lost body heat more easily. Even though some of Deimos' joints froze and he had difficulty moving, Dedric was the one truly suffering. Although Ark put him inside his coat, Ark's body temperature was also cold so it wasn't useful in helping Dedric. Snake was also as stiff as a wooden log.

"Endure just a little bit more. If we avoid the snowstorm then I can boil purified water."

"Huk, more water.....I won't drink anymore. Drinking water makes me more hungry....."

Dedric was brought to tears just like a child. Then, he heard the wind as a piece of ice entered his collar and froze him even more. The cold winds slammed into him for a moment before a red flashing message appeared.

<p>-Due to the cold your temperature has fallen by 10%! If your body temperature falls below 50% then various stats will rapidly decrease.</p>
--

Dedric's eyes started to become dim.

"Eh.....Master.....Somehow it suddenly became warm.....hehehe.....But I'm sleepy....."

"You idiot, wake up! If you fall asleep then you'll die!"

"Die? Ah.....I don't know.....I just want to sleep.....sleep.....let me sleep.....huh?"

"I said no!"

Ark yelled while striking Dedric's face. He struck him until the frozen face swelled up. However, it caused an impression as Dedric muttered.

"Hitting is good.....please continue....."

Clack clack clack.....Clack clack clack clack.....

All of a sudden Dedric fell onto the snowfield. Ark flinched and looked back to see that Dedric's eyes had become blurred, causing him to fall. Even Deimos had reached his limit.

"Deimos, y-you.....no! You're not supposed to die here!"

Ark hurriedly took out a pot and put something in there. He could raise the body temperature of his summons by making them drink boiled purified water from the snow. He honestly didn't know how long it would last. However, Ark had frozen limbs which didn't move the way he wanted it to.

'God dammit.....I shouldn't have blindly entered!'

Ark flared up as he remembered the circumstances from a few days ago. It seemed to be a scene in a documentary titled 'History of distress in the snowy mountains.' Ark was unexpectedly placed in this situation a few days ago. After killing huge monsters to pass the red wilderness, what welcomed Ark wasn't the legacy of a genius alchemist.....It was the great outdoors which inspired a lot of fear.

"Amazing!"

He naturally exclaimed. A short time after he stepped foot through the door drawn on the picture..... The light spread out in front of him until it became the endless snowfields. Ark never imagined that

the different dimension would be a such a landscape and was stunned. However, Ark's mind was soon taken away from the majestic scenery. The place that Ark arrived was not just the snowfield. As he approached the edge of a snowfield, a wonderful scenery unfolded. Clouds were stretching out underneath his feet. The peak of the mountain rose through the clouds. The peak was covered with snow and ice.....it felt like he was on top of the Himalayas which he saw on TV. After Ark stared blankly down, a message window popped up.

'The Lost World= Seutandal' has been found.

New World contains a numerous secret histories, and you've found the hidden 'Lost World=Seutandal' thanks to your boundless curiosity.

During your adventures, you have discovered knowledge about Seutandal from a history book. According to the knowledge acquired from the history books, New World consists of multiple structures. The commonly known Spirit World or Middle earth aren't different worlds but they all originate from the same place- New World might be the main stage but it is only one part. In ancient times there was evidence of free exchanges between the different dimensions and Middle earth. But at some point they became completely separate worlds.

It caused rampant speculation in a number of scholars but the reason has not been identified.

And today it is referred to as the 5 wonders of New World. In today's New World, the number of people who have travelled to different dimensions are very low.

<Experience +50,000, Fame +1,000.

You have entered a different dimension and earned the title of 'Great Adventurer.'

The top 100 adventurers who have entered a different dimension will receive a special title depending on their rankings. Currently Ark-nim has earned the eighth place S-class designation 'Great

Adventurer.'

Now you are an expert and can travel around on your adventures more effectively. In addition, on your adventure you will get the chance to learn a wide variety of useful skills regardless of the profession.

<Your sense of direction improves and your movement speed out of battle rises by 10%. When you rest, you've also mastered a method to recover health more effectively and your mana regeneration increases by 10%. When you consume food, a 10% bonus will be applied to your satiety>

* As a title bonus all stats will increase by 5.

*Fame increases by 500

* The skills 'Explorer's Knowledge' and 'Camping' is acquired.

Explorer's Knowledge (Special, Beginner, Passive): If an advanced adventurer explores a new area and doesn't pass on the knowledge then it is meaningless.

An adventurer can listen or watch that knowledge in order to improve their skills. It would be useful when exploring a new area.

<If you discover new areas and dungeons, or relics with historical value are found then it is possible to acquire a bonus skill point. The acquire skill point can be used to make any skill grow. However, the bonus skill point depends on the rarity of the information>

('The Lost World'= Seutandal: Skill Point +50)

Camping (Beginner, Passive): Even though an adventurer is accustomed to the hardships of the world, sometimes it is necessary to have a comfortable seating area.

As an adventurer, you are able to make a campsite and rest anywhere. However, a tent and coal and fuel to light a campfire is necessary.

<Health and mana regeneration increases by 50% when resting.

The probability of a monster attacking decreases by 50%. A monster also can't regenerate within 100 metres of the campsite>

‘What the? The Great Adventurer?’

Ark's eyes widened. He never imagined the fame and experience he would receive once he stepped foot into a different dimension. However the more surprising thing was that he received a S-class title, the Great Adventurer! There were millions of users currently in New World! The bonus was only given to the first 100 people to step foot in a different dimension. Even if he knew that information in advance, he never would've expected to be one of them. But he didn't just barely enter the first 100 ranking, he was eighth place! The astronomical bonus from the competition was staggering. Ark had also envied the Camping skill that the merchant Sid used earlier. But the 'Explorer's Knowledge' skill which gave bonus skill points was what really caught Ark's eyes. It wasn't necessary to explain but in New World.....no, in all online games skills carried an absolute important. But a skill couldn't exert any power if the rate was low, even if the skill was high ranking.

The most basic 'Sword Mastery' or 'Defense' was also like this. No matter how good the sword or armour, without the relevant skills then the performance of the item would only be at 80%. In the beginning, they wouldn't be able to handle the armour or sword so a 20% penalty would be applied. The penalty will disappear once the skill became intermediate and when it became advanced then bonus damage would be applied. Ark's Sword-Hand combat had reached the advanced level so he gained a bonus 40% attack damage. Without that skill, there would be an attack difference of 60%. Of course, looking at the numbers was easy. But he could really tell the effect of a 1 point difference when the sword strikes. Because of that, every user paid attention to skills. But the problem of raising the skill was not insignificant. Every time the skill increased a level, the rate would slow down until it required two times the points to reach the next level.

‘Well, even if I died while using it, the skill would still go up.....’

It applied to most simple skills. With full mana he could use Blade Storm three or four times. In addition, skill points didn't always apply to some racial special skills. If he just blindly hit a scarecrow then his combat related skill would not continuously rise. If he used the skill many times in a life and death battle then sometimes he would obtain enlightenment.

"But giving free skill points?"

Ark quickly opened the skill information window with an excited expression.

-Passive skills
M Sword-Hand Combat (Advanced: 425/500) A 40% increase in overall combat power when Sword-Hand combat is used.
m Archery (Beginner: 58/100) No penalty when you use the bow.
* Tactics: Intermediate: 159/300) There is an attack and defense bonus if the morale of your troops increases.
M Survival cooking (Advanced: 432/500) Unidentified food and medley dishes are produced.
m Indomitable Will (Intermediate: 168/300) When in a critical condition Attack Power, Critical Hit Chance, and recovery rate is increased.
m Indomitable Body (Intermediate: 161/300), When in critical condition, Defense, Critical Hit Evasion, and Recovery rate is increased.
m Foraging (Advanced: 379/500) You can smell food ingredients in nature.
m Ingredient Identification (Intermediate: 306/500) You can check in advance the effectiveness of the ingredients.
*Riding (Beginner: 3/100) You can handle a horse more skillfully.
m Counter-attack (Intermediate: 230/300) Additional damage applied if you successfully attack after the enemy's attack.

m Parry (Intermediate: 212/300) Blocking using your weapon will cut the enemy's damage in half.

m Laundry (Beginner: 58/100) Washing leather and armour will raise defense for a certain period of time.

m Weapon Destruction (Beginner: 20/100) The enemy's weapon and armour is attacked directly and the durability decreased.

m Camping (Beginner: 0/100) Pitch a tent and light at fire at your campsite.

m Courage (Beginner: 15/100) You become insensitive to the fear.

-Active skills

m Nursing (Advanced: 398/500) Give hope to patients and increase their courage and energy. Mana consumption: 10

m Spirit of the Cat (Advanced: 374/500) Seal the movements of mice and small animals and decrease their attack, defense and morale. Mana consumption: 120

m Eyes of the Cat (Advanced: 321/500) Identify the weaknesses of an enemy using sharp eyes. Mana consumption: 50

m Magic Restoration (Advanced: 393/500) Restore an item to its original form. Mana consumption: 10

m Discerning Eye (Intermediate: 168/300) Intermediate protection of unconfirmed items are released. Mana consumption: 30

m Intimidation (Intermediate: 126/300) Insult the opponent and decrease their morale. Mana consumption: 30

M Sprint (Beginner: 69/100) For a short period of time, your movement speed will increase explosively.

m Blade maintenance (Beginner: 58/100) Increases the attack power of your weapon for a short period of time. Mana consumption: 20

Profession-exclusive skills

M Dark Blade (Intermediate: 215/300) Assimilate your sword with the darkness and strike a blow. Mana consumption: 100

m Blade storm (Beginner: 67/100) The sword will break into smaller shards and tear the opponent apart. Mana consumption: 400

M Dark Dance (Intermediate: 136/300) Your movements flow through the darkness to avoid the enemy's attack. Mana consumption: 300

m Summon Demon (Intermediate: 125/300) When summoning your pets, the mana consumption is decreased. Spiritual Power consumption: 100

-Special skills

Slime's Time: You can summon slimes or invalidate all physical attacks by covering your body with slime.

Adventurer's Knowledge: Obtain bonus skill points every time you encounter a new area. Cartography: Create a map automatically when exploring dungeons.

Purification Restoration (Set, Nursing + Magic Restoration): Release a curse from an item.

Adrenaline (Set, Indomitable Will + Body): Dramatically improves reaction rate when in a critical condition.

Riposte (Chain, Parry + Counter Attack): Push the enemy back when counter attacking.

Dark Strike (Chain, Dark Dance + Dark Blade): Additional damage dealt to the enemy when continuously attacking in the darkness.

Double Critical Chance (Additional effect, Eyes of the Cat): Deal extra damage to defenceless enemies.

Line Designation (Additional effect, Eyes of the Cat) Determine the probability of an enemy attacking a certain way.

Heart of a Caregiver: (Additional effect, Nursing): A blessing effect is added to Nursing.

Great sacrifice (Addition effect, Nursing): Using potions, a recovery effect is applied to your allies.

Medley (Additional effect, Survival Cooking): Mix two or more dishes to produce other types of dishes.

* Available skill points: 50

‘I’ve really learned a lot in the meantime.’

He could clearly see the results of his efforts just by looking at the skills list.

‘Since there’s time I’ll organize my skill information window now.’

Ark needed to maintain his skills list. This is because of some information he heard from Shambala a while ago. When Ark talked about his skills and how Sword-Hand combat rose, Shambala immediately said.

“Passive skills that are assigned as a major skill will have the growth rate slowed down.”

“Major?”

Ark asked in confusion while Shambala became astounded.

“What the? Don’t tell me your registered your basic attacks as a major skill?”

“What’s that?”

“You’re either brave or ignorant.....you said your Sword-Hand combat was advanced? That is a surprise. Listen well you ignorant fellow. When the information window opens with the list of specific skills, isn’t there an option for specialized training at the top? Skills can be registered as major, minor or inactive.”

“So what’s the difference?”

“Skills registered as major will have a 120% growth applied. Minor skills will be 80% while inactive skills don’t grow at all. When you use

the specialized training window then you can register all the skills.”

Shambala gave a brief description. He could register up to 5 major skills and 20 minor ones. Inactive skills were unlimited.....the number of skills that could be grown was fixed. Ark hesitated after he heard the information. Except for the racial special skill which Ark wasn't growing, he had 27 skills. Except for 5 skills, a penalty was applied to the others which was why they didn't grow as fast.

‘The growth rate of Sword-Hand combat and Blade Storm can easily increase, so once I collect enough points then I can make it inactive. Since the selection is so wide, I should register skills that would quickly grow as a major skill.’

Ark commonly used Sword-Hand combat, Survival Cooking, Dark Blade, Dark Dance, Sprint so he registered them as major while the rest were minor. He didn't use a skill like riding while the special skills like tactics was registered as inactive. And he kept the newly acquired skill points for the time being. ‘M’ indicated major while ‘m’ indicated the minor skills.

‘I can't just blindly use the skill points.’

Ark completed the arrangement and closed the information window with a satisfied look. Adventurer's knowledge, campinghe got better than expected skills. Furthermore, he gained an addition 50,000 experience and rose one level. He was now level 190! It was now possible to use Gwisal's sword. As soon as he entered a new dimension, the atmosphere really seemed relaxing. Ark wasn't the only one having fun.

“Hahaha, this is great! Master, look at this!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack!

Dedric and Deimos jumped crazily around the snowfield like a dog. Snake was the same as well. It poked its tail into the snow and quickly withdrew it at the strange feeling. But after a brief moment it got used to it and Snake joined the others summons rolling around in the snow. Ark watched with pleasure as his pets had a little fun.

‘When was the last time it snowed.....’

In the present, global warming had been accelerated by severe air pollution. So there weren't much chances for snow in Seoul. Even since he was born, this was the first time that Ark had seen snow. Ark didn't feel the need to rush as he enjoyed the beautiful scenery. He was wearing a heart-warming smile when he was suddenly smacked on the back of the head by a snowball. Dedric who was in the form of a small boy made a stupid face and gathered more snowballs.

"Huhuhu, Master. Bring it on!"

"What's this? You really want to try me?"

Before he finished his words another snowball had already hit the back of his head. Deimos was behind him throwing snowballs as well.

"Ha, you guys.....you really want to do this?"

Ark laughed as he raised his eyes before gathering some snow. Then a fierce snow battle unfolded between Ark and his two pets.

"How dare you challenge me.....I'll turn you into snowmen, Dark Dance!"

"Eh? You're using a skill in a snowball fight?"

"There's no rules against using skills!"

Ark made some light movements and threw snowballs like an evening shower.

"Fufufu.....cold! He dared use such a method? Deimos, A-3 plan!"

Clack clack, clack clack clack!

As expected from the pets who received Ark's spartan training. Dedric immediately changed into a bat and bombarded him from the sky. And Deimos used his shield to deflect the snowballs. They used the things their Master taught them to turn him into a snowman.

"These children are so despicable....."

“Hehehe, whose summons are we? I learnt everything from Master. Die!”

“Fools. I won’t go easy on you anymore!”

Ark started throwing snowballs that was as hard as a stone. While this battle originally called for a cannon, sometimes a missile should be used. Dedric rose slightly making it hit the ground behind him before throwing another barrage. So Ark and his summons enjoyed an hour of a bloody snowball battle.

“Keuak-!”

After being hit by the stone (?), Dedric fell onto the snowfield. Ark grasped the chance and ran up to him.

“Huhuhu, be prepared. Take this bat boy!”

“Ugh, it can’t possibly be over! Deimos cover.....eh? Master, look.”

Dedric looked to the side with surprised eyes.

“Look at what? Do you think I would fall for something so shallow?”

“It’s different. Take a look.”

“What? There is nothing.”

“That’s the problem. The door we came through disappeared.”

“Eh? Come to think of it.....”

Ark stopped his actions and looked around. Dedric’s words were right. While he was distracted by the snowball fight, the dimensional door had disappeared. He immediately had a sinking feeling.

“The door isn’t maintained once open?”

He didn’t know anything about this place. There might be monsters here. He also didn’t know if there was a village in the area. He also didn’t know if there were any other gates back to middle earth. In such a situation there was no way to go back so anymore would be worried. However, Ark finally shook his head.

‘No. I don’t have to worry too much.’

If the gate from the cabin that connected to another dimension was a one-way passage, then clearly another gate would exist. And there have been 7 people who arrived here before Ark. Including Ark, that was 8 users on the continent. Didn’t that mean he could monopolize a lot of quests and items? In addition, the genius alchemist’s secret laboratory with a huge reward was hidden somewhere here. Even if he knew in advance that the gate would disappear, he wouldn’t have gone back. His one worry was that his bag had become full after travelling through the red wilderness.

‘But even if I returned, I still would’ve appeared in that small cabin.’

A considerable amount of time would be needed to reach a village from the red wilderness. Even if he organized his bag and crossed the red wilderness again, the situation would still be the same. Then wouldn’t it be quicker to look for a town here?

‘My choice won’t change even if the gate disappeared.’

Ark gave up on the gate.

“Anyway, this is not the time to be playing. Let’s go down the mountain and find a village before it is too late.”

“Understood. Master.”

So Ark began to lead them down the snowy mountains.

.....At that point, Ark never imagined the situation that would occur.

The first thing that confused Ark was the terrain. It seemed quite simple when looking down from the top but once he actually wandered down it was like a maze. The flat terrain with the steep slope would appear ordinary until a sharp crevasse would suddenly appear and block the way.

“Damn, this way is also blocked?”

Thanks to this he would often have to climb the mountain again. And since the mountain was covered in snow no matter where he looked,

Ark began to lose his sense of distance. In a place like this the map didn't help at all. Since he came to a new dimension the map was updated. Since Ark only wandered the snowy mountains, the map just showed the approximate shape. The only thing he discovered from the map was the name of the mountains, which was called 'East Moon.'

"This is not good. Dedric, look at the terrain from above."

"U-understood."

Dedric trembled as he flew towards the sky. But this time Dedric's scouting didn't help. He couldn't determine the topography while flying over the snowy mountains. In addition the cold winds meant that Dedric couldn't stay in the sky for a long time.

"Waaaaah, my wings are frozen. I can't fly anymore."

'This might be a very dangerous situation.....'

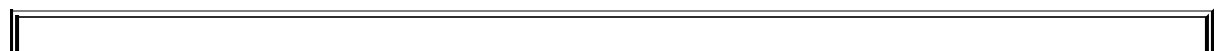
Now anxiety showed on Ark's face. Food was also a problem. In the red wilderness the monsters were so strong that Ark was forced to eat food every time a battle finished. Of course, there were a rich amount of ingredients scattered around but since his bag space was scarce he didn't keep them.

'I can get ingredients in the new dimension so japtem is more important.'

Since he could always make food, Ark didn't worry about it that much. But the mountain was only covered in snow and ice. The common rabbit or deer wasn't seen at all. Since he had to fight the cold and climb the mountain, his weariness quickly grew while his satiety decreased.

'Damn, I never thought I would be worried about my meals. I can't find any monsters or wild beasts, let alone weeds to make food.'

Naturally his summons also ate live creatures. Because the ingredients were very limited, Ark sent Dedric and Deimos back to the Netherworld. No, he tried to send them back.



-The summon release command has failed (Area Restriction)

<In the current area summoning/releasing your summons from the Netherworld is restricted.

Upon the death of a pet, they will lose 10% of their total stats and it won't be possible to summon them anymore. Instead, your mana will not be consumed while your pets are summoned>

‘What, what the?’

It was a completely unexpected message. In fact, Ark hadn't worried about the lack in ingredients because he could just return Dedric and Deimos. With two less mouths, he could eat sparingly and survive for a few more days. But now this suddenly happened?

‘Cancelling my summons is impossible? Furthermore, their stats will be decreased by 10% if they die?’

In the end, if they died they'll all die together while if they live then they'll all live together. In the worst case scenario, his satiety will fall below 50% and his stats would decrease until he eventually died. Ark who had used survival cooking to reach level 190 was now in the ridiculous situation of worrying about starvation. If he died then how many equipped items would drop? It was unlikely that he would find the items in the snowy mountains once it dropped. It was also evident that he wouldn't be able to sleep properly for a few days.

‘We can last one day with the food left. If we reach a place where wild animals live before the food runs out then we'll be able to survive somehow.’

Ark hurriedly made his way down the mountain. However Ark still didn't know the real fear of the snowy mountains. The terrible situation occurred a few hours later.

Hwiiiiing.....!

All of a sudden a snow storm occurred. The intense wind scattered a huge amount of snow. The terrain of the snowy mountains began to change every few minutes. To make matters worse, the foot of

the mountain and any edges was covered in complete darkness.

One mountaineer said. The mountain has a different face during the day and night.....

It was like he said. Although the snowy mountains was covered in ice, he could endure it during the day. However, when it was covered in darkness the mountains literally turned into a mountain of death. The temperature suddenly dropped and everything froze. Thanks to the soaring gas costs, Ark didn't even turn on a boiler during winter in December. Thanks to that, he unintentionally developed a strong resistance to cold. But the temperature of Seoul in December couldn't even compare to that of a snowstorm on the snowy mountains. Rather than simply feeling cold, he also felt pain. In addition, the coldness of New World directly connect to his brain causing him to feel a chill.

"W-what's this nonsense....."

It was the first time since he was born that he felt such an extreme cold.

"Waaaaaah, f-freezing.....M-Master, I, I'm dying.....!"

Clack clack clack clack!

Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Dedric, Deimos and Snake also trembled as they stuck close to Ark. At the same time, a warning message repeatedly appeared in front of Ark.

-Due to the cold your temperature has fallen by 10%!

<For every 10% your body temperature falls, your attack speed and movement speed will decrease by 5% and your satiety will also decrease by 5%. If your body temperature drops below 50% health then you will lose 10 health every 50 seconds. In addition, your body temperature will fall even if you have 100% health.

Please pay attention to managing your temperature. Temperature can be increased using food>

‘Oh my God!’

His eyes really became gloomy once he read the message.

“Oh.....M-Master.....n-now what?”

Dedric shoved his nose into Ark’s mantle and looked at him with resentful eyes.

“Even with the cloak.....my body is freezing.....that’s right.....you should’ve bought a coat when you went to the village.....I told you!”

Winter had just recently came back to New World after 3 years. Thanks to that, in every village general store their thick coats sold like hotcakes. However, Ark didn’t want to waste money buying a coat that only gave cold resistance and no stats. He could withstand quite a bit of cold. And he would warm up when hunting. Ark’s stingy nature had strangled him this time.

‘It is impossible to wander the mountain like this.’

Ark gave up on climbing down the mountain for the moment and looked for a place with protection from the wind. A steady area was needed to make a campsite. But he didn’t have a tent or fuel to set up the campsite. The most Ark could do was share his mantle with his pets to share body warmth. A message window popped up after 1 hour.

-Your resistance to cold has risen by 0.1%.
-You have become in unison with your pets and Affection has risen by 1.

‘This damnwe’ve been shaking like a dog for hours yet cold resistance only increase by 0.1%? Affection? Is this a joke?’

He cursed after seeing the message window.

‘Hold on! Just hold on until it becomes daytime.’

However, he couldn’t see even when it became daytime thanks to

the snow.

‘It’s still better than night time. I have to find a way before it’s too late.’

Ark made a very hot soup and began to wander the mountains again. When the snowstorm became strong again, he repeated his actions and hid again to avoid the cold. So 16 hours passed like that, which was two days in game time. Normally it would’ve taken four days to run out of food, but he used his ingredients making food every 30 minutes to maintain his body temperature.

‘Now I can’t even make any food. I have to maintain a minimum temperature.....’

Ark sighed while watching the blizzard which showed no signs of dying down.

‘Wait? What if I don’t need cook food to increase body temperature?’

Ark scraped the surrounding snow and put it into the pot. So far Ark hadn’t used water in survival cooking. What would happen if he added water to boiling water? Once he thought about it he became excited that hot water could also be useful for this situation. He quickly tried using survival cooking with boiling water.

‘As expected!’

-Survival cooking has created ‘Purified water.’

It is possible to get pure distilled water after melting snow that isn’t polluted. If you use purified water when cooking with basic ingredients, it is possible to expect some increase in stats.

Once he drank the purified water his body temperature increased by 20%. It was also survival cooking!

‘The situation is still urgent since this is only a temporary solution.’

When eating food it wasn’t possible to eat the same food every 30 minutes. But now his body temperature fell by 20% every 30

minutes. It would be difficult to endure as more time passed.

‘And purified water does not increase satiety at all. I have to somehow find food to survive.’

In the darkness the cold fell even more and now he couldn’t afford to avoid the cold by hiding in crevices. The remaining ingredients would only feed Ark and his pets once. If he didn’t starve to death, he would freeze to death first.

‘I’m not ready to die here!’

Ark set out to find food in a blizzard.

‘There must be something even if it is a snowy mountain. If I can’t use my eyes to search.....yes, that’s it!’

“Magic Detection!”

Ark’s pupils shone with a blue light. When he used Magic Detection, light started shining in several places in the snow. The light was so small that it wouldn’t normally be seen in the daytime. But in the daytime it looked clear.

‘Something is there!’

Icecap’s decision (Magic Ingredient)

These crystals are rarely found in icecaps. As the cold storms blew for millions of years, the frozen fire eventually hardened to form these crystals.
--

Seolmocho (Magic Ingredient)

A mysterious herb that only grows on icecaps. The herb grows like moss on snow-covered rock so it is very difficult to find. It has a strong fever reducing effect and is often used in the treatment of several diseases.
--

“Damn, what is this?”

Ark frowned. Normally he would be able to find magic ingredients

which meant money, but this was a life or death situation. A 1 copper food ingredient was more important than a 1 gold magic ingredient.

‘But I’ll collect it for the moment.’

Ark was still Ark. Even in these circumstances, he couldn’t give up items that would make him money. Ark fought against the cold and scraped all the ingredients he could find within seconds. When he was rummaging around in the snow, his body temperature quickly lowered to the minimum amount. In this dangerous situation he was forced to use his remaining ingredients to make food. It was indeed the Last Supper.

“That’s the last of our food. Do you understand? If we can’t find any more food before our satiety falls then we’re screwed.”

Ark once again sighed and raised his body.

“You can’t sleep! Pull it together!”

So after a few hours the situation became like this. It was a long time enduring the cold and hunger! Ark and his summons changed. Ark and Deimos still had their body temperature maintained at 60% but Dedric was more sensitive to the cold and only had 50% left. His health started to decrease and he began to rattle delirious words.

“I don’t like.....sleepy.....”

“If you go to sleep you’ll die! If you die the stats you raised with so much difficulty will decrease! Is that a good thing? Think about it. The days where you struggled to raise your stats and the memories we’ve accumulated so far!”

“Memories.....memories of Master.....”

Dedric recalled the past with hazy eyes.

The first meeting? As a hatred-bearing bat, he ignored Ark. When did he begin to talk? The awful food that was jammed into his mouth until he swallowed it. What about when he evolved? He was beaten to a pulp while claiming human rights. The vampire skills he learned? He was hit until he learned to control his vampirism. Looking back at the memories, a strange feeling rose in his chest.

“.....I’d rather die.”

Dedric muttered and turned his head angrily.

“Eh? What the, you! What’s with that expression?”

“I don’t know, I just realized once again how pitiful it is to be your pet.”

“What the? This child, even though I was so worried about you.....”

“Are you done?”

“I’m done. Did it help?”

He was starving and freezing because of his master. Dedric knew he would die anyway so he couldn’t resist attacking Ark before he died.

“Dammit, yes. It is Master’s fault I became like this. Okay, this is it. But I have to stop myself starving. There must be some wild animal that will give meat.....that fellow looks delicious. That thick body.....I wonder how delicious its blood will be? Eh, food?”

Dedric who had been looking around the snow suddenly gave an astonished expression. When he turned around, Ark’s eyes also widened. A small object could be seen in the distance.

Dodododo. Running through the snowfield was a small animal whose nose twitched.....to his surprise it was a mouse who lived in the snow.

“Master!”

Ark and Dedric looked at each other. Then they looked at the mouse before shouting in unison.

“Meat!”

Ark, Dedric and Deimos dived towards the mouse. The surprised mouse tried to flee. Because the snow reached up to his thighs, he couldn't catch up with the nimble mouse. However, who was Ark? He was the veteran of catching mice, a hero with the title of Cat Knight!

“Don't miss! Spirit of the Cat!”

Nyahhhh-!

Ssik-!

At that moment, the shape of a cat appeared like a lion around Ark's head. And when his eyes flashed golden, the mouse immediately stiffened.

“Uhahaha, it was caught, it was caught!”

“Oh, Master it was wonderful. It was the most wonderful scene so far!”

When Ark caught the mouse Dedric immediately shouted while drooling.

“Hahaha, how is it? I'm Ark!”

A level 190 user caught a small mouse using a large roar. Such an unseemly thing was considered his best moment? Ark pulled out his sword and immediately struck the mouse. The mouse immediately had its leather and meat peeled off. Then he created a mouse soup that would restore 20% of his satiety. Even with the purified water raising the effects, Dedric, Deimos and Snake would only have 6~7% restored. It wasn't that much but Ark was grateful for now.

“Huhuhu, Master quickly.....boil it quickly.”

“Okay men. Wait a minute.”

Ark laughed as he took out the pot. Just as he was adding the purified water and mouse meat.

Woodeuk, woodeudeuk!

Suddenly he heard a cracking sound underneath his foot. Ark jumped before his face suddenly paled.

‘Oh om god, t-this.....this design.....?’

A scene from a movie he saw a while ago suddenly popped into his head. It was a movie about the hardships of the people who wanted to conquer the Himalayas. One of the most memorable things was the design. The crevasses at the glacier. The design had snow accumulating over the crevasses until it looked like a flat plain of hardened ice. At first glance it looked just like a field of snow, but once stepped on then the person would find themselves falling through. Many people were tricked by this design and died in the snowy mountains because of these crevasses.

‘Fortunately it hasn’t completely crumbled. If I move a little bit then I can escape.....’

Ark breathed carefully as he tried not to slip while moving one step. At that time, Deimos who had his joints frozen approached.

Ark shouted with fright.

“N-no! Deimos.....please stop!”

Clack clack clack?

Deimos tilted his head and stopped after taking a step. However, Deimos had already stepped on the design.

Wadeudeuk, Jjajjang!

‘Hell.....we’re screwed!’

Ark heard the sound of destruction in his ear. At the same time his foot slipped and he fell down the crevasse.

Falling from a cliff and meeting an ironic fate

“Slime’s Time, NO1!”

Ark used the skill reflexively. The crevasse was a gap where the end couldn’t be seen. Thanks to the cold and low satiety, if he fell in this state then he would be torn apart. But Ark had a way of saving himself. Slime’s Time invalidated 100% of physical damage so he wouldn’t receive any falling damage! Ark’s body was covered with a yellow slime once he used the skill. In that state Ark struggled to reach Deimos. Since he couldn’t release the summon, he had no choice but to catch Deimos. And just as Ark grabbed Deimos, they approached the ground.

Tting! Tting! Tting!

Ark hit the ground and bumped around liked a water balloon. He bounced three or four times before properly landing on the ground.

“Huk huk huk, I’m alive……..!”

His entire body was soaked in sweat. He had fallen from a height of 100 metres before. But falling suddenly was different from calculating it in advance. At one point Ark really thought it was the end.

“What a stupid bag of bones!”

Dedric naturally starting telling Deimos off. But it was only for a short moment before he flinched and turned to Ark.

“Come to think of it, the mouse! What happened to the mouse meat?”

“The mouse meat……..”

Ark sighed and shook his head. A soulless expression spread over

Dedric's face. But afterwards Ark laughed and opened his hand.

"Of course I grabbed it tightly."

"M-Master. You scared me. Sob.....I was surprised."

Dedric had been moved to tears. That guy.....he was really starving. Ark had learned Survival Cooking. Thanks to that there had never been a time he made them starve, even if he had to forcefully feed them. Even if he beat them up, he would always feed them. In reality, Ark knew better than anyone the sorrow of missing meals and starving. That's why he never used taking away food as a punishment.

"Huhuhu. Why are you so surprised?"

"Aing, I don't know. Master is hateful. Quickly give me the soup."

Dedric immediately dropped the charm after he was reassured.

Clack clack clack clack!

Deimos also visibly brightened as he approached. Even the undead could feel hunger. Ark took out his pot while his pets stared at him encouragingly. It was the precious food. Ark carefully created a dish using various spices and purified water. Then with a flash, the dish was completed in the pot.

The Survival Cooking dish 'the best Mouse Meat Soup' has been completed!

Your sincerity was enough to infuse this dish with your devotion. The heart which considers the health of the person eating it is the most important virtue for a chef. Because you added the purified water and spices with sincerity, the Mouse Meat Soup has been reborn as an a la carte dish.

<Agility +2, Satiety +20%>

<A la carte bonus: Agility +2, Health +400, Satiety +20%>

"Oooooooh!"

Ark and his pets simultaneously exclaimed. He knew that Nursing would have special effects if he was sincere. But he never knew that could be applied to Survival Cooking. Since he always had abundant ingredients, there was no need to take care when cooking so he never discovered it.

‘But it is only one dish that can be eaten together. And the number of dishes we can eat together is limited to 10. If I cooked 10 of the a la carte dishes then a lot of stats would be applied!’

If he hadn’t been placed in this situation then he would’ve never discovered the information. It was information that could be used even when he had abundant ingredients. Ark was also grateful that his satiety increased.

“The leg is mine! Touch it and die!”

“Ack, so mean! Then give me the left hind leg!”

Clack clack clack, ssak ssak ssak!

Ark and his summons childishly rushed to obtain as much meat as possible. After eating their satiety and body temperature increased by 10%. But now their hunger became even more intense. And they became gloomy as they were faced with the reality.

“Now we have to find something again before our satiety decreases.....”

Ark looked around with concern. The sky high ice walls blocked the wind so luckily the chill was not that severe. However, the situation was still not good. Once again food.....he had to find food in the crevasse underneath the snowy mountains. And he had to navigate the tangled maze of crevasses. Rock climbing and climbing an ice wall was entirely different.

“Master, are we going to starve here and die?”

Dedric murmured in a gloomy voice.

“.....Let’s look for a way while we still have physical strength.”

Honestly, he thought there was no more possible ways. But it wasn’t

possible to just sit down and wait. Ark and his summons walked along the crevasses for the moment.

Kkururuk.

How far did they walk? After appeasing their stomachs, once again the sound of hunger was heard. When he checked, their satiety had reached 50%.

‘Damn, we only reached this far.....’

Ark breathed out a sigh.

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak?

Ark noticed as Snake suddenly raised its head. Then it crawled down from his waist and squeezed between an ice gorge.

“Eh? Snake, where are you going?”

Ark followed behind it with a befuddled look. He squeezed through the narrow opening and an information window suddenly appeared.

Snowy Mountain’s hidden cave.

East Moon is the snowy mountain covered in ice. You’ve found a cave hidden in a crevasse underneath East Moon. After hundreds or thousands of years of ice and rock, a beautiful cave has been produced holding an ancient mystery. Surprisingly, the vine plants not native to the snowy mountain also grows in this cave. But an eerie animal smell carried by the cold air can be scented from the cave. It seems that this is not a comfortable retreat so you should stay alert.

<Explorer’s Knowledge:Hidden dungeon bonus (Skill Points: 10)>

-You have found an undiscovered dungeon.

As a new discover, you can gain an additional 2,000 experience and 130 Fame if you register in the Hall of Fame.

Would you like to register?

‘A hidden dungeon!’

Ark’s eyes shone brightly. Although there were some ominous words in the information window, Ark just welcomed the news of a dungeon. A dungeon that no one had discovered yet! Who knows what treasures would be hidden here? In addition, the entrance of the dungeon was covered in entangled plants. In other words, it was growing plants. Ark who desperately needed ingredients had found an oasis in a desert.

‘I also got addition skill points!’

Ark was in such a good mood that he felt like screaming.

“Oh, is this place warmer than the crevasse?”

Clack clack clack clack!

Dedric muttered and his and Deimos’ face started to look alive again. Because the crevasse and cave blocked off the wind, it felt like they were in an igloo. Of course, the ice cave was still cold but it couldn’t compare to the temperatures outside. Its effect showed immediately. The speed at which their body temperature was falling started to slow down.

‘But satiety is still in a dangerous state. I have to seek food first. Since the entrance is cool, I might be able to find some suitable herbs or berries.’

As expected there were several small fruits stuck to the vines.

‘That’s it. If I gather everything from the cave then I don’t have to worry about starving and dying for the moment. Once I find an exit then I’ll be able to descend the mountain!’

Ark collected the fruit and looked at his waist.

“Okay, Snake. You can hold this for the moment.....eh?”

His waist was empty. Ark realised that Snake had yet to come back.

“Dedric, Deimos, where is Snake?”

“Snake? I don’t know. Wasn’t it just here before?”

Clack clack clack?

Dedric and Deimos just shook their heads. Ark had an uneasy feeling. Snake had moved without any commands and found the cave. Then it should have returned to Ark as soon as he entered the cave. But instead of coming back, it just disappeared without saying a word. Snake only had 50 health. Because Snake was normally attached to his waist, he never had to worry about it but if Snake ran into a monster then it would die instantly with one shot! Of course, monsters that attacks a snake were rare but he couldn’t summon his pets here. If Snake died then he wouldn’t be able to use one bag.

“Snake! Where are you?”

Ark cried out as he plunged into the cave.

Ssak? Ssak ssak.....!

He had run 100 metres. Then he heard Snake’s voice from the cave walls. He looked up to see that Snake was hanging over several branches. Ark let out a sigh of relief.

“Phew.....what are you doing in this place by yourself? You disappeared all of a sudden.”

It was at that time. Some black shadows quickly emerged from a side passage. Ark jumped and stepped back. But the shadows running through the darkness didn’t even head towards Ark. They didn’t grasp the situation and aimed straight for Snake! Ark shouted in an urgent voice.

“Huk, Snake! Hold still and don’t move! Slide!”

Ark slid along the floor and made a side kick.

Thanks to the power of the kick, the monster fell over backwards. The shadow that rushed towards Snake was a weasel like monster. While the monsters was frozen, Snake tumbled down and wrapped around Ark’s waist.

“Eyes of the Cat!”

Ark used the skill to check the monster’s information. Once he saw the name he understood why they attacked Snake first, unlike other monsters. The name of the monster was the Ice Mongoose. The mongoose was famous for eating snakes. Although Snake was raised by Ark among humans, it instinctively knew that the mongoose was its natural enemy. When the mongooses appeared, Snake buried its face in Ark’s chest and trembled. In such a situation, Snake wasn’t the only one that would feel fear. Thinking of the mongoose as the cute animal that was raised in a zoo was a big mistake. Its size was 5 metres tall! It was to the extent that it almost reached the ceiling of the cave. It also had sharpened fangs and fearsome claws that could knock out a polar bear.

‘Level 250.....’

Ark was currently level 200. With his dark attribute bonus, he was level 240. It was a similar level. But because of his body temperature and satiety, Ark had a significant penalty applied to his stats and attack speed. Unless it was one, he couldn’t guarantee the odds against several of them. But.....

“Meat!”

Ark grinned widely and shouted. And it was followed by Dedric’s loud cheers.

“Big meat! It is heaps bigger than the mouse!”

The mongoose flinched and revealed its fangs as they approached.

“Jackpot. Master! Let’s catch it and eat it quickly! There’s four of them, enough for each of us!”

Good. I’ll use some one of them to make a soup while the rest will be a roast!”

Clack clack clack clack!

Ark and his summons drooled as they ran forward. Thanks to their hunger, Ark and his summons only saw the level 250 monster as

meat.

“Now, shall I do a performance test?”

Ark removed something from his bag. It shone with a peculiar light. It was Gwisal’s sword that he received from Isabel! He was level 190 when he came to the different dimension but he hadn’t had a chance to use it yet. The legendary sword that was said to have cut thousands of demons shone with an eerie light.

Kyaaaaaak!

When the distance was narrowed, the mongoose immediately swung its sharp claws. Ark angled the sword to block before attacking. And he ended up cutting from the top to the bottom. As it cut across the mongoose’s body, Ark was covered in goose bumps.

‘W-what the, this feeling is?’

Thanks to the nice strike, the mongoose immediately lost 15% of its health. It did approximately 300 damage considering that it was a level 250 monster! If it was Lancel’s Sword then it would normally be a critical hit. But he wasn’t astounded at the attack power. It was a rare sword so he expected that much. It was the ‘cutting taste’ that Ark found unexpected.

Saaaaaak, the feeling of the two-handed sword cutting through the leather was incredible! The very real impression of cutting through the skin with a razor was delivered to his fingertips. It was impossible not to feel good at the sensation of cutting meat, but Ark sensed that Gwisal’s sword was not that simple. Words could not express the feeling of freshness! It was as if all the cells of the body was peeled along with the sword.

‘This is a rare sword……..!’

A slow smile spread on Ark’s face as he enjoyed the sword. Ark quickly became obsessed with the magic of Gwisal’s sword.

‘Now I understand why people strangle themselves trying to get a rare sword. After using this sword, a magic sword will feel like I’m swinging a club.’

The sword shone after it attacked the mongoose. Ark then rotated his body like a spin top and swung his sword.

Chiing!

Lancel's Sword made a cracking sound when it delivered a critical hit but Gwisal's sword just vibrated. At the same time the hot, pleasant sensation was felt through his fingertips!

'This feeling.....is crazy.'

Ark swung his sword like a man possessed at the mongoose. Of course, even Gwisal's sword had a weakness. Since it was a two-handed sword, the attack speed was slower. And since the sword was so big, it was hard to achieve the centre of gravity to do a kick after swinging it. In addition, due to the nature of a two-handed sword, it was difficult to obtain the accuracy needed for a critical hit. But despite its shortcomings, it was several times stronger than Lancel's sword.

Saaaaak, chiing!

Every sparkle of the sword decreased the mongoose's health. Dedric and Deimos also felt no anxiety and were facing the mongoose leisurely.

"Hehehe, do these guys just look strong?"

Dedric giggled as he flew around the cave.

"Do you think you can catch me using such movements?"

Clack clack clack clack!

Deimos also blocked the mongoose's attack using his shield and sometimes even counter-attacked. These changes were because of his pet's experience. After Ark entered Nagaran, a lot of their opponents were assassins. And the user, not to mention the NPC humanoid assassins had fairly high intelligence. Of course their strategies and attack patterns were very complicated. Ark and his summons had been dealing with such enemies for the past month. Since they were now dealing with normal monsters, their attack

patterns were easily seen through. Ark also faced a large degree of difficulty in the red wilderness. Moreover, Ark and his pets' goals was to eat the mongoose meat.

"Dedric, use the darkness to attack the mongoose from the rear! Deimos, defensive stance on the side!"

"Yes!"

After the command, the summons couldn't even be compared to before. As soon as he finished, Dedric crashed into the mongoose from behind who flinched and ran forward. The mongoose was forced to run towards Ark thanks to Deimos using his shield to block the side. A great opportunity! Ark used Dark Dance to strike two concentrated attacks. The mongoose who already had its health lowered with split in half.

'That's it, now for the two remaining, but with this much then it will be an easy victory!'

"A-2 plan! It's a concentrated attack!"

Ark and his summons cornered the remaining mongooses with a wave attack. And after just a few moments, the mongooses fell when Gwisal's sword cut their throats.

"That's it. Not it is time to eat!"

Dedric drooled as he flew towards the body of a mongoose. Suddenly a red shape ran into the cave at an incredible pace. Deimos saw it first and stood in front of Dedric holding his shield. A massive ringing sound shook the cave while Deimos was thrown back. Ark was surprised and flinched as he retreated.

Grrrrrrr!

A mongoose was walking in front of him. But it wasn't a conventional mongoose. This mongoose was bigger than the others and covered with red hair! When he checked it was level 300. 50 levels higher than the other mongooses.

'This guy is a special monster!'

Ark's eyes lit up. He had met such monsters several times before this. The body of the monster was usually bigger than the others and it would have a different clothing or skin colour. Special monsters such as this would make a light gleam in a monster hunter's eyes. Since the level and stats were so high and their bodies so big, it wasn't easy to catch them. But they had a high probability of dropping deluxe items.

'Meeting a special monster in a place like this.....!'

Ark swallowed his saliva and stared at the body of the red mongoose.

"That face and those bones.....you would look good roasted whole!"

Dedric said as he rushed towards it from the darkness. At that moment red flames emerged as the mongoose opened its mouth.

"Wah! F-fire! H-hot!"

Dedric screamed and flapped his tail as it was set on fire.

'T-this.....!'

Dedric said had a lot of health so it wasn't a big problem. But Deimos couldn't withstand the mongoose's attack with his shield. Once engulfed in flames then he would instantly die. He wouldn't be able to summon Deimos even after 24 hours had passed. However, the larger problem was that Ark would receive damage when Deimos died. Deimos had a steady growth and his current health was 1,800. 50% of that was 900 damage. The damage was 30% of Ark's health which would be catastrophic. Ark wrapped his mantle around him and jumped into the fire. It was the 50% fire resistant Veil of Fire! Ark shouted and stuck Gwisal's sword into the mouth of the mongoose who was radiating flames.

[-You have dealt a critical hit!]

Chiing, the mongoose wobbled and retreated.

"Deimos, withdraw to the back."

Clack clack clack! Clack clack clack clack! Deimos retreated from the flames after Ark came in and saved him.

‘This cave is too narrow. If he uses the same fire attack then Dedric and Deimos won’t have room to dodge. The attacks will be fatal to my pets since they don’t have any fire resistance.’

Moreover, Dedric and Deimos had already lost 15% of their health. If they were hit by the flames one more time than they would quickly fall into a critical condition. And if one of them died then Ark would receive extra damage from the forced recall.

“Dedric, Deimos, you guys retreat far away.”

“What? Master.....you’re going to fight along?”

Dedric had been rubbing his tail on the ice.

“You guys will be no help anyway.”

“But Master.....”

Dedric looked at him with restless eyes but left. In this situation Ark couldn’t afford to relax. They had taken down four mongooses relatively easy. He hadn’t expected any other monsters to come out immediately so he hadn’t paid attention to his health. Therefore his current health was only 30%. Ark grabbed his sword bag tightly.

‘If its 1-on-1 then the odds are in my favour!’

Kkuaaaa!

At that time, the mongoose who had waited for an opportunity rushed towards him. Ark swung his sword in a circular motion. Using the circular motion, he counterattacked on its chest.

“Riposte!”

-Tung, a dull ringing sound was heard as the mongoose retreated. Ark continuously attacked until he eventually took a break and grasped his sword bag.

‘My health isn’t enough. I have to pay more attention to defense than attack.’

Gwisal's sword had a slow attack speed. That means there was a lot of gaps in his attack.

'I can fight at close range with Lancel's sword and I can also switch back and forth between taekwondo. But Gwisal's character is completely different. Since it uses both hands, the attack range is narrow and the response time to an enemy's counter-attack is quite slow. The long sword is a disadvantage in close range battles. If I'm tempted by that exhilarating feeling then I have no choice but to accept receiving considerable damage.'

It was something he realised when facing the mongoose. It was easy to be mistaken because of the overwhelming attack, but the two-handed sword was a defensive weapon. If he had a sword in one hand and machine gun in the other then both were cannons. In order to take advantage of the long sword, he must keep a distance and attack. Since the attack speed was slow, there was a considerable delay. Ark reached that conclusion and changed his stance. He took a defense posture instead of an attack posture.

Kyaaak, kyaak!

The mongoose rushed forward swinging its arms. Ark angled the sword and received the attack.

'Indeed.....the attack rarely reaches.'

Using Gwisal's sword to defend was an excellent choice. The only defense skill that Ark learned was 'Parry.' If successful, the skill was attack as well as defend. Thanks to his intermediate sword attack, parry hit x4! The defense applied was 45~60% while the damage dealt was 180~240! It was the same standards as warriors who used a steel shield. It wasn't a perfect defense of course, but it was possible to reduce a considerable amount of damage. Ark used Parry to defend before using Riposte. In a matter of minutes, Ark reduced the mongoose's health by 70%. But in the process Ark also lost 10% of his health.

'I received 10% damage while I dealt 70% so if I maintain this then it is possible to win!'

That's what Ark was thinking. While he was attacking and counter-attacking, the mongoose was also thinking. It hopped back and started spewing fire. Ark lost 10% of his health and was in a critical condition.

'This damn mongoose.....it noticed my weak point!'

Of course he couldn't block the flames with his sword. The flame resistance cloak only reduced the damage by 50%. And it wasn't possible to do a counter-attack.

"If it continues like this then it won't be possible. Victory or defeat! Demonic Opening!"

Ark shouted as he lifted Gwisal's sword.

Kiyaaaaak!

Gwisal's sword trembled and the appalling sound of a ghost's wail emerged from the sword. After the ghosts emerged they stuck onto the sword. It was as if the ghosts' form had been tattooed on the blade. It was the special option of Gwisal's sword that increased damage by 20% in exchange for his health, Demonic Opening! Since he was in a critical condition, adrenaline also activated. His damage, critical hit, evasion and reaction rate all increased dramatically! He felt an incredible surge of power that made he want to pounce and tear off some flesh.

"Take this, Dark blade!"

Kkiyaaaaak, chiing!

Every time he swung the sword, the ghosts would wail and the mongoose would have its health decreased by a large amount. The overwhelming attack exceeded the monster's defense. The mongoose who fell into a critical condition shrieked and tried to turn around. Then it began to flee at a tremendous rate. Ark quickly chased it. Demonic Opening was a double-edged sword. His attack increased explosively but he would lose 5 health every second. Since he only had 300 health left, he could only last 1 minute. 40 seconds had already passed so he only had 100 health left. If he failed to kill it in 20 seconds then he would be devoured by the ghosts. Gwisal's

sword noticed that Ark didn't have a lot of health left. The monster engraved on the blade started to climb up his arm.

"The remaining time is 15 seconds.....if I can't knock it down then I'll die!"

"Sprint!"

Ark explosively dashed forward like he was in a race and narrowed the distance. And when he reached the corner, the mongoose suddenly turned around.

'Huk, was luring me its plan?'

If Ark couldn't knock it down in one blow then he would be vulnerable to a counterattack. However it was too late to stop.

'If I can't kill it then I'll die!'

Ark clenched his teeth and swung his sword. A sharp scream as well as the ghost's wail shook the cave. The mongoose's body was split in half and a message window quickly appeared.

-Your level has risen.

You have learnt a new skill.

Drastic measures— Sword cutting into two (Beginner, passive): You've dug into the enemy's chest and split it apart with one murderous stroke. This technique relies more on the sharpness of the sword and the weight of the blow than the user's ability. Expert craftsmen who dedicate their spirits to the sword will craft an excellent sword. Among them, only those who use the sword with both hands can learn this technique.

<If the enemy has less than 10% health then a successful critical hit will have a 10% chance of instantly killing it. If you are successful then there is a x1.2 chance of gaining extra experience and a x1.2 of the best items dropping. (Rare skill only available for two-handed swords)>

‘A rare two-handed sword only skill?’

But he couldn’t relax while reading the information window.

“Demonic Opening off!”

When Ark quickly raised his voice, the ghostly pattern that had almost reached his heart scattered like powder. He only had 7.1 seconds left until all his health was gone.

‘Phew.....This isn’t a skill that I can use too excessively.’

“Wah.....!”

Deimos and Dedric approached while Dedric let out a sound of admiration.

“Master, somehow you were very cool.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll let you eat your fill so you don’t have to flatter me.”

“Hehehe, you noticed?”

“Anyway, you guys also suffered fighting on an empty stomach. I’ll let you eat as much as possible.”

“As expected from Master. Did you know? I really do respect Master.”

Normally they made an uproar when he forced them to eat food. Now the summons were aware of the importance of food after starving. Sometimes it might be necessary to make them starve.....

‘Well ,they haven’t complained about food after their re-training at Lancel Village so it shouldn’t be necessary.’

Ark began to collect the loot from the normal mongooses while Dedric laughed. As expected from a beast monster, the items that dropped were quite trivial. In New World, there was a casual relationship between the type of monster and the items they would drop. In other words, humanoid monsters wouldn’t drop leather or meat. Instead they had a high probability of dropping weapons and

armour. On the other hand, it was hard to find weapons or armour from a beast animal. Of course, that didn't mean there was zero chance of it dropping. In the case of man-eating animals, sometimes they won't digest the items and would drop armour or weapons. But the odds were so low that it was atrocious. Leather, meat and bone was the most that he expected to drop.

'Still it is lucky that I found a lot of ingredients.'

Ark swept up the items and walked towards the special monster. The special monster had a high probability of dropping deluxe items. Since it was killed by being cut in two, there was a high probability that it would drop the best item. Ark excitedly searched the mongoose's body.

"Huk, t-this is.....?"

The item that the mongoose dropped was a deep red bead. Ark had seen a similar item before. It was the Shining Slime Essence that dropped previously. Ark looked at the information with a trembling heart.

Mongoose Essence (Fire)

This is the essence of the mongoose that only lives in the snowy mountains in another dimension.

*The information regarding the Mongoose Essence has been grasped using the excellent intuition of an advanced survival chef.

Sometimes a mutated mongoose will appear among hundreds with a special property. In some cases, the crystals are the source of the mongoose's power. Currently there are 7 types of crystals identified and they are Fire, Ice, Earth, Wind, Lightning, Darkness, Light. Each essence possesses the power of its relevant attribute.

If a player gathers all the attributes then they can freely manipulate the elements.

<Monster Essence Rating: D>

‘As expected, this is an immortality pill. In addition.....’

There were at least 7 different types of immortality pills! Then wouldn't the effects be tremendous? He got an extravagant effect just from his one Slime's Immortality Pill. Of course, the Slime's Essence had a B rating. The mongoose only had a D rating so the effect would be smaller. But it was a different story if there were 7 types. That meant he could get a bonus 7 times. And if he collected everything then a set bonus would be applied.

‘If I gather everything then it would be even better than the Slime's Immortality Pill. In addition, I wandered the snowy mountains for several days without seeing one mongoose. That means all the mongooses are gathered in this cave. If I wander around this cave then I might find the remaining essences. The problem is the remaining ingredients.....’

Ark quickly put the essence in a pot and heated it up. Soon a black smoke rose and a red lump of jelly was made. Just as before, a new message window popped up registering a new recipe.

‘Mongoose's (Fire) Immortality Pill' recipe.
Shining Jelly Mongoose Essence (Fire) 1/1
Purified water 3/10
Icecap's decision 16/20
Seolmocho 14/20

Ark's face was a little bit disappointed after he checked the recipe. The ingredients necessary were easily available in the area. And the maximum number required was 20. It might have a lower potency than expected. However Ark shook his head.

‘No, I don't know if the difficulty of gathering ingredients for the Slime's Immortality Pill was unusual. I can check the efficiency after I make it. The ingredients can't be bought and there will still be a bonus effect no matter the efficiency.’

Ark started to gather the desired ingredients. Collecting the ingredients was a cinch. There were quite a few of the snow crystals in the crevasses. And he was able to recover the Seolmocho from the bushes surrounding the cave. He could obtain purified water anywhere by putting snow into his pot. And just as he was about to make the immortality pill.

“Master, when are you going to give the meal?”

“Wait a moment. I’ll quickly create this…….”

Ark confidently said before he jumped and stopped his movements.

‘Wait? Am I just going to blindly make this?’

He had forgotten in the excitement of finding the essence. Making the immortality pill was difficult and time-consuming work…….He needed to stir the pot, adjust the fire and wait for it to mature before it was completed. It took him 72 hours to create the Slime’s Immortality Pill! It had a lower rating but it would still probably take some time.

‘While I’m doing that, I won’t be able to create other dishes.’

That was the problem. It wasn’t possible to use the pot until the immortality pill was completed. While he was blindly waiting, everyone would starve and die. Ark started sweating at the thought.

‘I almost made a huge mistake.’

Ark immediately made a mongoose soup full of ingredients.

“There’s plenty of ingredients so you can eat this by yourself.”

Dedric was tired of being hungry and poured the soup made with new ingredients straight down his throat. Fortunately, the mongoose soup was a food that gave a good effect.

<p>-You have made the survival cooking dish ‘Warm Mongoose Soup.’</p> <p>The mix of herbs in a rich meat soup warms the chest. The taste of the spices also adds to the meat.</p>

<Satiety +70%, Body Temperature +70%, Satiety or Body Temperature won't fall for 10 minutes>

“Hah, hah.....now I don't need to eat anymore.”

Dedric rubbed his protruding belly as he looked at the food information window. It was a good food to eat in the ice cave.

‘Okay, I have a lot of ingredients. Once I gather the herbs and meat and cook a lot of dishes then I can start the immortality pill.’

Ark created one dish for each of them and ate it on the spot. In order to collect the rest of the ingredients and kill the remaining mongoose, he started exploring the cave.

“Look in every corner of the cave for a special monster! Ah, before that.....Snake, from now on don't go wandering off without my permission. Understood?”

Ark didn't forget to pay attention to Snake.

Ssak ssak ssak..... Ssak ssak ssak!

But Snake's reaction was a bit odd. Although it paid attention to Ark, Snake kept on looking around the cave with restless eyes. In the beginning he thought it was worried about the mongoose who was its natural enemy. But when Ark thought about it, the reason might not be so simple. If it knew about its enemy then why did Snake go into the cave by itself?

“Wait? Is that the reason?”

Was Snake being influenced by the skill ‘Stalking?’ Stalking was Snake's special skill which allowed it to find items in the surroundings. There was a possibility that it instinctively knew an item was hidden in the cave.

‘That's right. Snake's stalking skill allows it to easily find items hidden in dungeons!’

Ark's pupils turned to gold at the crazy idea. Ark asked in a friendly voice.

“Snake, are you attracted to something?”

Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake nodded its head and waited.

“Okay, please guide me. I’ll go where you point.”

Ark headed in the direction that Snake’s tongue pointed to. Every time he turned the corner, there was a group of mongooses gathered together. They ranged from 3-10 mongooses. But Ark wasn’t worried now that his satiety was full. But it was impossible to deal with ten.

“Dedric, scout ahead.”

“Yes!”

Ark beat a suitable number of mongooses and moved forward. The scale of the ice caves was bigger than he thought. Although he didn’t look everywhere, it still took some time to head in the right direction. However Ark didn’t feel bored.

“Just like the snowy mountains, the scenery here is also beautiful.”

Ark fell into a trance at the sight of the ice cave. The rocks and ice tangled together to make a huge ravine. A breathtaking ice bridge hung over it. There were ice pillars several metres thick that lined the bridge. When the light came in from the distant gap in the ceiling and reflected off the pillars, it looked like a cascade of coloured light was shining around the cave. It felt like a crystal palace from a fairy tale.

“Hmm, I’m glad I came here…….”

Ark then used his cartographer skill to confirm the dungeon map. He had walked almost a straight line from the entrance. In the meantime, he killed hundreds of mongooses so the meat was piled up in his bag. He had enough extra food stockpiled for emergencies.

‘How big is this cave?’

Ark was thinking this when he suddenly stopped. When he followed the exceptionally long passage, a square block of ice appeared. He

looked around the area but there was no other way past the barrier.

“Then this is the destination?”

Snake licked its tongue and indicated the opposite wall. Ark tilted his head and explored the barrier. It seemed that something was behind the barrier. It was an object with a shape like a mountain. But one side of the ice was uneven and he couldn't grasp the correct shape.

‘There must be something.....what on earth?’

Ark lowered his head closer and used his sleeve to wipe off some of the fog. However, he could still only see the silhouette of the object. Then, something suddenly moved from behind the barrier. It was a huge object shaped like a mountain. At the top of the object a red light sparkled. He felt a familiar sensation in his body.

‘Monster!’

When Ark's head rose, flames wrapped around the object's body. Then it rushed towards Ark at an incredible speed. Ark became startled and quickly dodged. At the same time, the barrier broke with a large roar. Ice powder scattered as a mongoose was released.

Kkuaaaa!

The cave echoed with the roar of the huge mongoose. A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

-The nightmare boss monster of the East Moon ‘Galgashi’ has appeared.

‘B-Boss monster!’

Ark let out a scream of distress as he rolled along the ground. It had a 10 metre tall body with 5 different tails. It had two red eye and one white eye on its forehead. The 3 eyes rolled around and focused on Ark. It opened its mouth a laughed. The gaping mouth revealed jagged fangs. It looked like it wanted to grasp Ark between its fangs and take a bite out of him.

“Huk!”

Ark quickly raised his body and stood up.

Pababababa, beonduk!

It brandished its claws and made a challenging posture. Thanks to the impact of the claws hitting the ground, Ark once again fell and slid 10 metres.

‘It is difficult to fight on this slippery ice!’

Ark tried to raise his body as Galgashi attacked him again.

Clack clack clack! Clack clack clack clack!

Deimos held out the shield as he came running. However.....slippery! Deimos tumbled down and hit his head on the ice.

“Master!”

At the moment, Dedric used Dark Dash to crash into Galgashi. At the same time, Ark moved sideways using Slide. Although Galgashi tried to step on him, its accuracy was lower in the dark. Thanks to that, Ark was barely able to dodge it. Ark managed to draw his sword and stand in the correct posture.

“It’s sudden, but a boss is always welcomed!”

The boss was an item to Ark. A boss monster would drop a minimum of 1 or more magic items. In addition, the experience was also fabulous. Therefore there was no reason for him to avoid it.

‘Level 400.....it is slightly unreasonable.....’

Its level was a lot higher than the special mongoose he fought earlier. Ark’s current level was 202. With the dark attribute bonus he was level 241. That was a 160 level difference (Author wrote 60 but that must be a mistake). But Ark’s ability was quite high compared to users of the same level. And he could also use Gwisal’s sword. He couldn’t guarantee a victory but it might be possible if he tried.

‘The problem is not the level but the location.’

The floor was very slippery ice. He could stand but it was difficult to move quickly. On the other hand, Galgashi used its claws to dig into the ground and move quickly. Ark felt the overwhelming speed difference straight away.

‘But I can use Slide without any restrictions no matter the terrain. And Galgashi is also a mongoose. I’ve roughly learned their attack patterns after fighting them. If I combine them then I might be able to reduce the speed gap.’

“Slide!”

Ark used slide and began to attack Galgashi like what he envisioned. As expected, Galgashi’s attack pattern wasn’t that different from the mongooses’. The attack consisted of rushing and trying to bit or jumping all over and using its claws. Ark predicted the orbit using Galgashi’s preliminary movements and used slide to dodge it. Kakakakak, Galgashi’s claws scraped the ice every time. Gradually the ice disappeared, revealing the rocky ground. Thanks to that, Deimos was also able to join the battle. However the one that showed outstanding skills in this environment was Dedric.

“Take this. You big fat mongoose!”

Dedric taunted Galgashi who immediately got angry and jumped up. Dedric avoided the attack by flying lower. And Ark and Deimos waited for the moment Galgashi landed to launch an assault. They aimed for the moment it stiffened upon landing. Galgashi staggered and couldn’t fight back properly.

‘If it continues like this then I’ll win!’

Ark was inwardly convinced of his victory.

Roaaaaar!

Galgashi roared with fury and lifted one tail. When it struck the ground, the ground started shaking and something he never imagined happened.

Kwajijjik!

Sparks rose all over the ground.

<p>-You have received lightning damage. 100 damage!</p> <p><Every 30 seconds, there will be a 50% chance of shock, electric shock or stun for 3 minutes></p> <p><If you receive an electric shock then your movements speed will slow by 90% for 10 seconds></p>
--

“What, what the?” Lightning damage?’

All his movements became slower, like a video was being slowed down. While his arms and legs couldn’t move, Galgashi took advantage and ran up to him.

Snap, Ark flew through the air and hit the ground with a large impact. He felt dizzy. The wide area magic had a range of 10 metres and lasted for 3 minutes. And every 30 seconds for 3 minutes, there was a 50% chance of receiving an unknown status. ‘Shock’ would simply cause extra damage. But the penalty applied to his movements because of stun would be fatal in a boss attack. With one move, the battle completely changed. The spark just had to touch him and it would trigger that state. Thanks to the sparks, Ark had no access to Galgashi.

‘But it is not impossible!’

“Deimos, transform!”

Deimos quickly changed into the saw blade after Ark’s command. If Galgashi used his lightning magic then Deimos would be useful. Ark used the saw blade to avoid the sparks and attack. Dedric flying in the air was also unaffected by the lightning. However, lightning was not the only damage Galgashi had. He hit the floor with a different tail and this time an intense storm was caused. The wind grazed his skin and spilt blood.

<p>-You’ve been hit by the wind blades. 100 damage!</p> <p><When hit by the wind blade, there is a 50% chance of ‘Bleeding’ or</p>

‘Muscles Torn’>

<You’ve had your’ Muscles Torn.’ For 10 seconds, your strength and agility will be decreased by 20%>

‘Wide area wind magic?’

It became quite the spectacle as time passed. Galgashi didn’t use the wide area wind magic to just attack. The storm also whirled around Galgashi and deflected the whip. In addition, wind magic was fatal to flying creatures.

“Ugh!”

Dedric’s health was steadily decreased by the wind. Galgashi tormented Ark with a variety of magic. It had 5 tails with different properties and every time a tail was used, a different type of magic would occur. The damage from the magic was not that great. But the problem was the states there were triggered by the magic every time! If he was hit with ice magic then his movements would slow down, while earth magic would activate stun.

‘Oh my god, this really is a terrible boss.....’

There was no way for Ark to deal with Galgashi!

Ark couldn’t even attack properly and fell into a critical condition.

“No, I can’t keep it up for much longer. It’s regrettable but I have to live.’

It took him a few days to get here. If he died then he would be revived at a village near the red wilderness. Then it would take a few days to get back to the cave. No, there was no guarantee that Ark would be able to find the cave again in East Moon. He might even have to give up on the immortality pill set. Ark made a decision and turned his body around. The entrance was narrow and long. If he escaped through there then the boss wouldn’t be able to follow. But his opponent was a boss monster. It wouldn’t give up its prey so easily. Galgashi noticed Ark’s intent and jumped forward. Galgashi jumped over 10 metres and landed in front of Ark with exposed

fangs.

“T-this.....!”

When Ark became confused, Snake shot out from his waist onto the ground. At that moment, Galgashi's eyes focused on Snake. It instinctively forgot about attacking Ark. Galgashi reflexively went for Snake.

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

Snake moved across and floor and shouted (?).

‘Dad, I’ll lead it away so run!’ Ark seemed to hear. Snake showed impressive loyalty to its Master by facing against its natural enemy.....Ark ran away without looking back.

“Sprint!”

He shared his food with his summons on the snowy mountain. So why? The situation was different. He didn't mind if he died on the snowy mountains but here was different. Since there was no guarantee he could find the cave again, Ark had to live no matter what. But he had no intention of giving up his snake bag.

“Dedric, grab Snake!”

“Eh? Why would I?”

“If Snake dies then I’ll let you starve!”

Ark's threat worked. Dedric swallowed and quickly grabbed Snake. Galgashi who had its food taken away immediately emitted light and used wind magic, but Dedric used acrobatic movements to dodge most of the damage. Then Galgashi's eyes focused on Ark.

Galgashi used its tail again and its whole body was engulfed in flames. Then the projectile flew towards Ark at an incredible pace. It was the same magic used to break the barrier. It was impossible to avoid so Ark turned around and held up his sword. Instantaneously, an intense shock was felt. But it was fortunate that Galgashi used fire magic. Ark's mantle gave him a 50% fire resistance. Thanks to that, the fire damage was halved and he didn't receive any abnormal

states. And he slipped and slid towards the entrance due to Galgashi's strike.

"Master, I've saved it. Will you give rice?"

Meanwhile, Dedric had also flew towards the entrance with Snake.

"Well done. Now let's get out of here!"

Ark stood up, grabbed Snake and ran down the narrow passage.

Keuaaaaang!

The sound of Galgashi banging could be heard from the ice wall behind him. However, it wasn't possible to catch Ark unless it was a mole.

"Damn, what's with that guy?"

Ark let out a burst of anger when he reached the entrance of the cave. It was the first time he met a boss where he didn't have any answers about how to defeat it. Ark needed to do two things in the dungeon. He had to complete the immortality pill set and find another exit out of the crevasse. In other words, if the boss wasn't protecting an exit then there was no reason to fight it. But it was the first boss monster he encountered since Colossus in Lancel Village.

'I should catch it no matter what!'

Ark had no intention of leaving the ice caves even if he found the exit. He had to kill all the special monsters to complete the set. And since the ice caves were huge, he assumed that it had a large number of mongooses. If he completed the immortality set then Ark might be able to deal with the boss.

'There's just one chance. Next time there is no guarantee that I can

escape like before. I have to be definitely sure of my victory before facing it again.'

But would raising his level really allow him to succeed? If it was just levels then Ark could somehow face Galgashi. The problem was the various magic with different attributes that it could use. No matter how much he raised his level, it would be meaningless if he couldn't deal with the magic.

'Is there another way?'

But he couldn't think of an answer to his concerns.

'I guess I have no choice but to raise my level.'

Ark decided to leave the problem of the boss for the moment. Fighting the boss had taken a lot out of him. Ark took out his pot and made soups using all the meat. After securing the food, he earnestly started the immortality pill creation process.

'Now shall I get started?'

First was the mongoose essence. Then he added all the other ingredients until colourful halos emerged from the pot and a message window appeared.

-You have gathered all the ingredients necessary to create the Mongoose's Immortality Pill (Fire).

Now it is time to start the process of creating the immortality pill. Immortality pill Mixing = Crystallization = Maturation. Once it goes through these 3 stages then it is complete.

The estimated duration is 12 hours.

Since it had a low rating, the time taken to create it was only 12 hours. Fortunately, the mixing and crystallization process only took 1 hour each. Ark finished the whole process and carefully placed the covered pot in a corner. The remaining time was 10 hours so he just had to wait. Ark stacked the mongoose soup on the ground and said.

“Dedric, guard it carefully. I’ll be sleeping for a while.”

“I understand.”

“Don’t just eat tons of food. Deimos, watch Dedric.”

Clack clack clack clack.

Deimos nodded. In here it was impossible to release his pets. The summons just had to wait in that one spot while Ark left the game. Fortunately, it didn’t consume mana so Ark didn’t have to worry about that. However, it would be a problem if there was a surprise attack by the mongooses. That was the reason he went back to the entrance of the cave. So Ark placed a sentry in front of the pot and exited the game. After he slept and exercised in reality, the immortality pill had been completed.

-The maturation process has ended and the Mongoose’s Immortality Pill (Fire) has been completed.

*Fame increases by 200

* Intelligence increases by 5.

* Survival cooking skill increases by 10.

* The ‘Monster’s Pill’ information has been updated.

<Number of Immortality Pill completed: 2 >

Ark gulped and looked at it with expectant eyes. Ark who checked the information gave an easy laugh. Ark had been contemplating how to beat Galgashi but now he thought he was a fool.

“Ha, I see. That’s it. Catching Galgashi will be easy!”

Ark once again realized how deceptive the game was. If there was a problem then there would be a key in the area to solve it. It was the same for New World as well. The way to take down the invincible Galgashi was present in the Mongoose’s Immortality Pill information.

“Okay, I see what you mean. If I collect all the immortality pills then defeating Galgashi won’t be a problem.

Ark laughed and raised his body.

“Now, let’s go and gather some immortality pills. Into the dungeon!”

Legendary Hero?

“Phew, the weather has become a lot colder.”

Even though it used to be autumn, without even realizing it was now December. The weather was so cold with a few showers that even wearing a thick jumper didn't prevent goose bumps.

“Why do they have to call me today of all days?”

This weather was best for staying at home and playing games. Well, this cold was nothing compared to when he connected to the game.....at least he had the mongoose soup. And it was the same even without the soup. Anyway, wandering in the cold was a hundred times better if he was earning money from it.

“But I have to go out instead of playing the game.....”

He could use that excuse if it was Gwon Hwa-rang or the rehabilitation members. But that excuse wouldn't work with the people Hyun-woo was meeting today. He might even become a corpse if he brought the word game into the conversation.

“Anyway the year-end party.....it has already been a year?”

Hyun-woo looked up at the night sky. He never realised since he had been buried in the game. But once he looked back on it, he realized that it had been an eventful year.

“Above all, I've thankful that my mother has become a lot better.”

When he visited a few days ago, his mother even saw him off. She did it on her own without a wheelchair. It was just a few steps from the bed to the door. Her whole body was covered in sweat as she sat down but his mother just laughed. I'm better.....Hyun-woo, soon I'll be able to leave the hospital. His mother wanted to show that through her actions.

“Please don't force yourself. What if you become worse for no

reason?”

Hyun-woo said while leaving, before collapsing in tears on the hospital doorstep. He couldn't repress his happy and excited feelings. There were many times when he had to carry his mother because she couldn't walk. Every time Hyun-woo saw that, he felt like cutting his own legs. Then his mother walked on her own.

‘It was worth paying the higher hospital bills!’

The hospital costs increased every day..... He wouldn't have been able to afford it if it wasn't for the money earned from New World. Hyun-woo's earnings from New World were three times what he made last year. The result was because of hard work and luck. And the immortality pill collection was also near completion.

‘I've already completed 5 out of the 7 pills. Now there are only 2 left. With two days left, I'll be able to complete it within this year. Then I can scrape money again next year! If I finish Magaro's quest then thousands of gold will come pouring in!’

Hyun-woo dreamed about the future and headed to the meeting place. Then 4 serious looking people approached from the other side. The group's character didn't seem that good. With just a glance, Hyun-woo could tell that they were guys who picked random fights in the street. Hyun-woo had experience this situation a lot when he played around in the night life and tried to go around them. But the 4 people narrowed the distance and blocked in front of him.

“Are you Hyun-Woo?”

“.....?”

Hyun-woo stopped walking and raised his head. An unknown face looked back at him.

“Who are you?”

“I asked if you are Hyun-woo?”

One guy twisted his face and asked. He was somewhat

uncomfortable. Hyun-woo didn't know why, but he could clearly tell what was going on by their attitude and looks. Although they were talking to him, they fully intended to use violence. He could tell the difference from argumentative people from the look in their eyes.

"No. You got the wrong person."

Hyun-woo replied bluntly and tried to walk past only to have one of them grab his shoulder.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Do you think a kid like you can act like that with us?"

The guy pulled back Hyun-woo's shoulder. But Hyun-woo was not the same as before. When he felt the crisis, Hyun-woo's feet reflexively kicked up. Bump, his feet hit the guy's jaw who let go as he stumbled backwards.

"This bitch.....!"

The other 3 members of the group ran up to him. That was when it happened. An emergency bell rang in Hyun-woo's head. If he didn't run away now, he would be hit until he was a dust cloth.

'I have to run away!'

Once he thought of the simple and clear instructions, his body automatically moved. Hyun-woo avoided a punch and raised his knee to the face. The man stumbled with a bleeding nose. Hyun-woo was then grabbed by the collar and automatically used a wrestling technique to break free. Then he kicked the vital spots on both sides of the man's body. With two people collapsed, one guy rushed forward. Hyun-woo used the movements he learned in boxing and lowered his upper body. He launched himself into the air while spinning his body around. He spun as if he was in an action movie.

"Eh? What, what the?"

The guy stuttered with a stupid face. The spinning body fell like a thunderbolt. A giant spin kick technique! It was a technique that he had practiced in his spare time. The guy stumbled and screamed as

Hyun-woo kicked him.

‘This is a technique!’

Hyun-woo was amazed at his own movements. While training at the police gym, he had used pretty crazy moves. However, his opponents were representatives in boxing, wrestling and even taekwondo. Because he lost every day, he was unaware of how strong he had become. And he never had a chance to test it out. Thanks to the element of surprise, he was able to overwhelm the hooligans in an instant.

“What the? What’s going on?”

“Is a movie being made?”

“Oh, it looks great?”

The people who passed by stared and gossiped. Some people even took a video with their phones.

‘Dammit, what ignorant people would think this is a movie? Somebody call the police!’

Hyun-woo stared at the people shooting with an angry expression. But there was no time to quarrel with them. Although he managed to defeat the group, this was reality. This battle wouldn’t end until everybody was unable to fight. And it would be difficult if they decided to use a knife. This was the difference between game and reality.

‘For the moment I have to get out of here! I have to get to that place somehow…….’

While the group was wincing in pain, Hyun-woo plunged through the spectators and into an alley. If he made it past the alley then he would be at the appointment place. If he got there then he would be able to avoid the dangerous situation. Hyun-woo ran through the alley at his top speed. And just as he saw the sign for the appointment place and was about to leave the alley……a spark suddenly bounced in front of him.

Wobble.....when he lost his centre of gravity, someone grabbed his hair. Tremendous strength! Hyun-woo bent backwards as the guy who grabbed him threw him to a corner of the alley. Although Hyun-woo wasn't small, he was thrown lightly through the air and landed heavily. The rest of the group followed and kicked Hyun-woo several times before finally stopping.

"Those stupid guys, they couldn't even handle one kid?"

"I'm really sorry. Hyung-nim."

"Block the alley and don't let anyone see."

Some hooligans followed the command and blocked the alley entrance. Hyun-woo was finally able to determine the face of the leader. He was a huge figure with short hair and a scar on his face. His appearance clearly indicated a gangster to anyone who looked at him.

"Why are you doing this? Cough!"

Once again he was kicked. While Hyun-woo bent over in pain, the leader put on gloves and laughed.

"Shut up and listen. I won't speak for long. We have no grudge against you. So just close your eyes while I break the bones in your arms. If you don't fight back then you'll look pretty in the photo."

"Yes?"

"Or you can be photographed beaten up. It is your choice."

"T-that.....!"

Hyun-woo looked at the man with an astounded look. He suddenly grabbed a person in the street and was going to break his arm? What was going on? However he knew that the leader wasn't joking around. Just by looking at his eyes, Hyun-woo could tell that the leader was serious.

'What the hell? Who are these people?'

Hyun-woo's body began to tremble. In the game he could fight a

group of ogres without even blinking. However reality was different from a game. These guys were tiny compared to the ogres. But it wasn't possible to compare the intimidating feeling of these guys to the ogres inside a game. Also, he didn't like realistic violence. His fear when he imagined the upcoming violence was tremendous.

"Who are earth are you? I didn't even do anything....."

"You can only answer yes or no. Say anything else and I will pull out a tooth."

The leader growled.

'It's impossible.'

When Hyun-woo sweated and shut his mouth, the guy laughed and grabbed one arm. He wanted to completely break Hyun-woo's arms. He wanted to completely break Hyun-woo's arm. Hyun-woo panicked. But it wasn't because of the pain.

'If my arm breaks then I won't be able to play the game!'

If he couldn't play the game then of course he couldn't make any money. Then what about his mother's hospital bills? The cost of living? The loan situation.....like an advertisement, all these images came rushing through Hyun-woo's head. And the conclusion was simple. Whatever else happened, he could not allow his arm to be broken. Hyun-woo turned his arm with all his strength and elbowed the guy.

"Cough!"

"This bastard.....Do you want to be unable to use your leg anymore?"

"I don't know what's going on but please don't do this!"

"Didn't I tell you to shut up? Ya, grab him and immobilize him!"

The hooligans grabbed his limbs and held him down. Then the leader once again lifted the brick over his arm. Now Hyun-woo could only watch his arm get broken!

“N-no!”

Hyun-woo screamed. In this unfair situation, he had no power to do anything. So far, he had been through a lot of these situations and never once had anyone helped him. Just like the people from a while ago who were taking photos or videos with their phones. If any one of them had reported it then the police would've already come running. Yes, that was Hyun-woo's life. However, this time was different. When Hyun-woo screamed, an unexpected voice was heard from outside the alley.

“Eh? What scene is this?”

The hooligans flinched and turned their heads around. One guy was entering the alley wearing slippers. The 170 centimetre tall guy looked like a dwarf next to the hooligans. The hooligans put on a tough face and asked him.

“Who are you? If you don't want to die then disappear.”

Usually an ordinary person would bow their heads and run off right away. However the man just ignored it and approached the group.

“Is this Hyun-woo?”

Hyun-woo was surprised and lifted his head.

“Lee Myung-ryong teacher?”

“Eh? That really is Hyun-woo? Why are you playing around in such a place?”

The small person.....Lee Myung-ryong muttered in an incredulous voice.

“Teacher? The seal on his clothes shows that he is someone who teaches taekwondo at a dojo.”

“Why don't you run away before we make your face become puffy hey?”

The hooligans threatened as they tried to bully Lee Myung-ryong. Indeed, a taekwondo teacher would just be amusing to a

gang. And they didn't consider him seriously thanks to his 170 centimetre height and small physique. But they were wrong. The person they were threatening was the current leader of the number 1 SWAT team and a former national taekwondo representative. Although a sashimi knife was thrust underneath his nose, the man had a heart of steel and didn't even blink. The leader became angry and swung his fist at Lee Myung-ryong.

Bam-!

With a loud sound, the impact caused his head to rise by 90 degrees. Lee Myung-ryong sighed and wiped away the blood at his mouth.

"It's been a long time since I was hit. Well ,are you satisfied? So let's stop, yes?"

"What the, this bastard?"

Once again there was a loud bam as Lee Myung-ryong was kicked in the stomach. His 190 centimetre tall frame had a significant amount of weight behind it. Lee Myung-ryong collapsed from the blow.

"T-Teacher.....!"

Hyun-woo looked at Lee Myung-ryong with disbelieving eyes. Although he was taken by surprise, the hooligans had been able to take down Hyun-woo. But for Lee Myung-ryong who was in charge of the police gym to not even be able to land one blow? Why?

"Ha, this kid. He seemed quite relieved when his teacher appeared."

"Did you see him stop shaking?"

"Too bad I took care of him in a few minutes."

The leader chuckled and approached Hyun-woo again. Then he lifted the brick again. However, Lee Myung-ryong who had been completely knocked down just got up like nothing happened.

"Embarrassing me in front of my pupil....."

“What the? This bastard?”

“Now, let’s see. My mouth is bleeding.....and now my stomach is bruised. In this case, the usual punishment would be 4 weeks. But if I claim self defense, I won’t get 4 weeks even if I beat you up like a dog. Do you guys know what that means?”

Lee Myung-ryong laughed as he indicated towards his face.

“You guys are now dead.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Crush him!”

The hooligans rushed forward at their leader’s order. Some of them picked up pieces of timber with a murderous atmosphere. But Lee Myung-ryong just looked at Hyun-woo mischievously.

“Hyun-woo, this will be an outdoor lesson!”

“Teacher, danger!”

“What?”

Lee Myung-ryong lightly avoided the timber and spread his arms.

Bump!

The chin of a hooligan shook before he suddenly collapsed. Lee Myung-ryong had lightly walked through the hooligans and extended his fist. If his upper body was dragged then he would gently elbow them. As expected, the hooligan fell down and wasn’t able to move. The same thing occurred to the remaining two members. Lee Myung-ryong stepped up to the members lying down and pressed down on their temples with his heel, causing them to scream.

“These guys are like leeches. They won’t stop with just a single blow.”

“What are you doing? Those stupid fools! Why can’t you get up?”

However, the hooligans lying on the ground just continued sweating and couldn’t even breathe properly. After that the leader rushed

towards Lee Myung-ryong.

“I’ll take care of his with one shot to the face!”

His fist couldn’t be seen. Although it wasn’t clearly seen, suddenly there was the sound of the leader’s face being punched and moving 90 degrees.

“It really was one shot.”

“Huk!”

The man let out a muffled scream and bent at the waist. It was a rare sight. The small dwarf just walked forward. But when he moved forward, the huge figure of the leader screamed. The leader’s face instantly turned blue. Although he didn’t fall down, it wasn’t because of the leader’s abilities. He just wasn’t allowed to fall. Lee Myung-ryong casually walked up to him and grabbed his hair. Then he slammed the leader into a corner and inspected his pockets. Lee Myung-ryong laughed as he took out the wallet and confirmed the identity.

“Boss of the Pleasant Smile Company, Wang Ho…….”

“You……do you think you will be safe after doing a thing like this? I’ll find you gym and beat you to death!”

“What?”

Lee Myung-ryong stared at Wang Ho incredulously before bursting out with wild laughter.

“Hahahahaha, really? That will be fine with me. I’ll look forward to your performance then.”

“What, what the?”

“It seems he still can’t grasp the situation.”

“Captain, what happened?”

At that time, a few people with big shoulders peeped in from outside the alley. Hyun-woo also knew their faces. It was the SWAT team members that he exercised with at the gym. The former boxer and

wrestler were also there. Yes, the one who called Hyun-woo out in this harsh weather was Lee Myung-ryong. It was the year-end party of the number 1 SWAT team.

“It’s not a big deal. I’m just going to clean up the situation so wait a moment. Hey, let’s do an exchange.”

Lee Myung-ryong pulled out a wallet and threw it towards Wang Ho. Wang Ho opened the wallet with confused eyes and suddenly paled. Inside the wallet was the identification of the captain of the number 1 SWAT team.

“I’m also the teacher of a gym not far from here.”

“If it is the number 1 SWAT team, don’t tell me.....the so called demon of the National Police Agency.....”

“That’s right. And this guy is my one and only beloved disciple. So does this situation make more sense now?”

Lee Myung-ryong slapped the frozen back of Wang Ho and spoke.

“Well, let’s clean this up. Looking at the situation, you wouldn’t attack without a reason.....why don’t you tell me the reason why you dragged an innocent person into this? Or do you want to go for a ride? Either is welcome. If you decided not to cooperate then the interrogation will become quite violent and last for a while. The police taking crime really seriously.”

Wang Ho’s sweat started dripping down as he looked away. Lee Myung-ryong waited for a moment before slowly getting up.

“I guess that’s it. Shall we test your patience?”

“W-wait a minute. Actually.....I was asked to do this.”

“Asked?”

“Yes, a client’s son asked me to break his arms and take some pictures.....that’s the truth. Don’t you know? There is no way I would start a fight if money wasn’t involved.”

“Oh, someone asked you to break the arms? What a noble hobby.

Then his name?”

“Lee Myung-ban.....”

Lee Myung-ryong looked at Hyun-woo. He was asking if Hyun-woo knew the name. Hyun-woo shook his head and Lee Myung-ryong immediately stared at Wang Ho.

“Do you want to go to hell?”

“R-really. I didn’t really understand but there was some grudge because of a game. The game is called New World. The person who gave me orders is called Andel.”

“Andel!”

Hyun-woo jumped. Lee Myung-ryong roughly understood the situation and nodded.

“You’re not lying. Okay, you know his address right?”

Lee Myung-ryong forced Wang Ho to write down the address.

“It is too troublesome to put small fries like you in jail and then write up the reports. I get a rash whenever I look at guys like them. But if Hyun-woo ever sees you again.....you understand?”

Wang Ho nodded frantically with a stricken face. Lee Myung-ryong tapped his cheek and got up.

“Let’s go Hyun-woo.”

As expected from the leader of a SWAT team, Lee Myung-ryong didn’t hesitate in his actions at all. As soon as he left the alley, he took a cab to the address. It was a 100 square metre block of apartments in Gangnam. An ordinary person wouldn’t be able to enter. But once the police identification was shown to the guard, he was quickly ushered in.

“It isn’t necessary to do this.”

When the situation became larger than he thought, Hyun-woo spoke nervously. However, Lee Myung-ryong didn’t pay any attention and raised his hand to the doorbell. Then he saw the Lee Kyung-Ho

nameplate next to the doorbell and hesitated.

“Dammit, no wonder why the address was familiar.....”

“What’s wrong?”

“No. I’ve come here so I should see it through to the end.”

“Who is it?”

A voice spoke through the loudspeaker when the bell was pressed.

“This is Lee Myung-ryong from the number 1 SWAT team.”

“Oh, understood. Did you want to speak to the chief?”

“Can you ask if I may have a word?”

“Okay.”

The door soon opened and a 50 year old man greeted them. The spacious living room looked like a soccer ball. There was also a two levels of stairs leading up. Hyun-woo quickly became depressed. Why did this person live in a 100 square apartment while he lived in one with a hole in the wall? Hyun-woo was scared of fighting a rich person. He didn’t know how to deal with humans who have overflowing money. In addition, Lee Myung-ryong also seemed uncomfortable.....as he paced back and forth.

“Yes, what brought you here?”

“It is about your son.”

“My son?”

The middle aged man.....Lee Kyung-Ho looked confused. Lee Myung-ryong sighed and explained the situation that occurred. Then the facial muscles of Lee Kyung-Ho distorted and made an ugly expression. But after a moment, he smiled and took out a cigarette before saying.

“I still don’t see what’s wrong. Don’t tell me you believe the words of those delinquents? There is no way my son would do such a thing, since isn’t it unfair for them to implicate him? Well, you probably just

came to investigate the claims.”

“.....Well, that’s right. Can I see your son?”

“I don’t understand what you’re saying.”

Lee Kyung-Ho frowned as he looked at Lee Myung-ryong. Then he took out a 1,000,000 won check and placed it on the table.

“As an adult, we can’t pretend to be ignorant of the social rules. In addition, my son’s name was mentioned. I’ll have a chat with some juniors and have them investigate it. And since your friend seems to be injured, he can use this to pay for the medical costs.”

He said it in a soft voice but there was clearly a hidden threat. It was a lot more intimidating than the roars of the gangsters! Hyun-woo could guess Lee Kyung-Ho’s status just by those words. Perhaps he was a former high ranking police officer. It was the reason Lee Myung-ryong frowned when looking at the nameplate. Lee Myung-ryong looked at the cheque and muttered in a low voice.

“Necessary?”

“.....No. I hate smelly money.”

Although Hyun-woo needed money, he also didn’t grab it. Lee Myung-ryong hit the table with both hands and got up.

“Lee Kyung-Ho ssi.”

“What? Lee Kyung-Ho ssi?”

“Although there is no evidence, he still did it. Instead of giving us money, you should use it to re-educate your son. If this happens again then I won’t come visit Lee Kyung-Ho ssi. I’ll meet your son directly. Since it is Lee Kyung-Ho ssi, he will be released in a couple of hours but your son would find those hours horrible.”

“You, are you threatening me?”

“Threatening? Was that what you heard?”

Lee Myung-ryong smiled and nodded.

“You heard well.”

Then Lee Myung-ryong finally left the apartment.

“.....I’m sorry. Because of me.....”

Hyun-woo spoke in a concerned voice as they walked. Their opponent was a former high ranking police officer. Lee Myung-ryong had probably repressed his anger. It was because of the attitude which blatantly ignored Lee Myung-ryong. However, it was useless to become anxious over something that might happen in the future. Hyun-woo wasn’t stupid. He knew that this would cause trouble for Lee Myung-ryong.

“Child, don’t let alcohol make you cocky. That man will not leave his son alone. Anyway, now that Andel kid won’t be able to bother you anymore.”

Lee Myung-ryong hit Hyun-woo on the back and laughed. There was a person watching them from an apartment balcony towering in the sky like a medieval castle.

“That impertinent child.....”

Lee Kyung-Ho blew out cigarette smoke and lifted his phone.

“It is Lee Kyung-Ho. Let me speak to the Police Commissioner for a little bit. Tell him it is the former captain of the police prosecutors. Yes, ah, is that you? It’s me. Do you know someone called Lee Myung-ryong? Do you have any idea about this friend’s performance? No, it’s not a big deal.....”

Things have become even more twisted up. Reality wasn’t as simple as a game.

“Is it like the Chief expected?”

Ho Myung-hwan sighed while playing with his ball-point pen. Recently, he had been concentrating on the test taker Ark. Although he never actually saw it, the reports allowed him to indirectly experience the game. Ark was like the fictional hero of a novel to him. And he felt a sense of satisfaction that no one in the Planning Department knew about Ark. Once a big incident happened then Ark would be clearly seen. He truly believed that and hoped the event would occur soon. Then Ark became the Lord of Silvana a while ago. He participated in the siege and won over Alan and the pioneers. Ha Myung-woo thought it was just due to luck but Ho Myung-hwan who had read the previous reports thought otherwise.

“I’ve been looking forward to this report.....”

But the report that arrived was disappointing. He summarized it simply.

Due to certain circumstances, Dark Eden became a separate attack group during the siege. While Dawn Blade and Hermes were fighting in critical conditions, there was a chance for him to become the Lord. But he didn’t have the power to prevent the territory from being taken away during the next siege. There was no mentions of the schemes and corruption that occurred. Hyun-woo had become cautious and only wrote the bare minimum in the report. And the bare minimum happened to be what the Planning Department’s Chief Ha Myung-woo expected.

Ho Myung-hwan became discouraged.

“Naturally the situation should be like that but.....”

Since it was Ark, he expected to see the actions of a protagonist in the report. But he didn’t even want to defend the castle.

“Unfortunately, this report means that he will definitely be eliminated in the first round of eliminations.’

It had been 1 year since the company started the entrance examination.

But there were still no candidates that met Global Exos requirements. Of course, they didn't expect the requirements to be met in a year. But they were providing the examinees with 1,500,000 won a month and there were 2000 candidates. 30 billion won was being poured into this project every month. When considering the scale of Global Exos, it wasn't a big burden but as a business they couldn't pay for the income forever.

[There is no reason to invest in candidates with low expectations. The senior executives rational is they would rather invest in candidates with potential. Therefore the candidates will be watched in the next few months and then an eliminated notice will be sent to the lower 50% of test takers. The Planning Department should be prepared so there is no setback to this plan.]

That was the official notice from headquarters that recently came. But the Planning Department had already screened all the eliminated candidates. Ark was one of them which was why Ho Myung-hwan had paid more attention to this report.

'But because the Lordship was taken away.....now in a couple of months. Will an incident occur to change the Planning Department's mind?'

"Hey, have you seen the video posted this morning?"

Ha Myung-woo shouted at him the moment he came in.

"Yes? Video?"

"You haven't seen it yet. I'll link you the address."

When he connected to the address Ha Myung-woo sent him, it was an information site related to New World.

"Click on this and take a look."

Ha Myung-woo pointed to a video board. The views on the video had exploded during the few hours it had been posted. The title was 'Realistic Fight Scene.' Although the views were considerable, there were thousands of similar movies showing up every day. So why was the Chief making such a fuss? Ho Myung-hwan clicked on the

video with a strange expression. It was taken with a mobile phone so the picture quality was very poor. It was obviously the contents that attracted people's attention.

Just like the title, the content was a 1 vs 4 fight situation on the dark streets. It wasn't different from a common video. But after the people involved exchanged some greetings, an exciting action scene unfolded. The jaw was struck by a kick and then the knee was raised. But the climax was the full body spin kick that slammed into the opponent. It was also known as a windmill technique. It was a very hard kick that was rarely seen in battle. The video ended after 1 minute with the young man running into an alley but it left a strong impression. If it wasn't a staged scene then it required considerable amounts of skill. There were already thousands of comments underneath the video.

-The spin kick is quite cool.

-Are you stupid? It is 100% staged. Is this to promote a new movie coming out?

-It's not staged. I saw it by chance.

-But what happened to the guy after that?

-Ah, you should've filmed it to the end. Now what?

Ho Myung-hwan became puzzled after reading the comments and asked.

"It is wonderful but did they post this video in the wrong place?"

"No there's more. Look further down."

"Yes?"

Ho Myung-hwan moved the screen using his mouse. He soon realized why this video was posted on an information site about New World.

-But isn't the main guy in the movie similar to this character?

The person then attached a video in the next comment.

“Eh? This.....this is?”

Ho Myung-hwan had seen that video dozens of times. It was the video that had become a hot topic on the Internet a few months ago. The culmination of the Event Quest in New World, the video displayed the user who successfully defeated the boss Valderas. When the video was posted, there was a lot of talk about whether he was a NPC or user. But Global Exos didn't have any access to the servers and failed to grasp the information. Thanks to that, Ha Myung-woo had to appear on TV and make some excuses.

Ho Myung-hwan stared at the video with surprised eyes. One was a fast moving video taken on a mobile phone while the other was a blurry game screen. In both videos, the face of the protagonist wasn't clearly seen. However at first glance, the face contours, body type and hairstyle were remarkably similar. In addition, their behaviours were also similar when they kicked. Everybody had a different preliminary kicking motion, from the angle of their leg or their hand movements. It would be very difficult to imitate.

“Perhaps.....?”

“The video was sent to the image analysis lab. The probability of him being the same person is 82%. It can't be a coincident. I've already looked into it.”

Ha Myung-woo said as he clenched his fists.

Ha Myung-woo had ran around for weeks trying to find the user who fought Valderas. However, the problem was that he didn't register in the Hall of Fame. Ha Myung-woo thought he might've been an NPC and gave up halfway.....but now after several months, he had finally found a clue.

“Ho Myung-hwan, the user who was the Lord of Silvana the other day.....what was his ID?”

“You mean Ark?”

“Although his report should've come in, you didn't mention anything.”

“That.....”

Ho Myung-hwan scratched his head and gave a brief description of the contents of the reports. Ha Myung-woo just laughed like he already knew it.

“I told you. He wasn’t added to the eliminated list in vain. There was a good reason. Anyway, I have no interest in him so please look for the person in this video from now on. I don’t want to face a similar incident. He fought against Valderas so he should be around.”

“How?”

“The fight was noisy so the police might’ve interfered. And there might be a person who took a better quality video so look around the information sites. No matter what happens, you’ll be compensated if you find that person. But you have to conceal that Global Exos is intervening. Because it is publicly thought that the person who defeated Valderas is an NPC. Do you understand what I mean?”

“Yes, I understand.”

Ho Myung-hwan threw Ark’s report that he was holding in his hand onto his desk. Ha Myung-woo was unaware that the person he was looking for was right underneath his nose. And now Ho Myung-hwan also started looking in the wrong place. It was a sad sight indeed.

Radun

“Deimos, block the other side!”

Clatter, clatter! Deimos’ bones shook as he ran. He slid on the icy path, turned and raised his shield. Something bumped into the shield as a blurry form emerged in the darkness. They disappeared again but it was clearly a mongoose. It was a mongoose with black fur.

“That’s it. We ran it down. Dedric, lure the other mongooses and gain some time.”

“Understood Master. I’ll leave it to you.”

Dedric provoked three mongooses by shaking his hips. Meanwhile Ark stood and blocked the other side of the passage.

“Mind’s Eye!”

It suddenly became dark. But in a moment, sound waves just like the sonar waves used by deep sea submarines emerged and he clearly saw the shape of the passage. It was the special effect of his rare ring, Mind’s Eye. When the sonar scanned an area, he immediately knew where the black mongoose was. On one side was Deimos and since Ark was blocking the way, the mongoose used a special skill called ‘Shadow’ to hide its body in a crack. It was aiming for a chance to escape.

‘This time I won’t miss!’

Ark had spent 2 weeks exploring the cave and making his map. His primary goal had been to complete the Mongoose Essence collection. While sweeping through the cave and fighting mongooses, he had seen several with different attributes such as the one with blue fur or the mongoose with yellow fur.....they each possessed a different attribute that matched them. In addition, they were never alone. He was lucky that he accidentally caught the first fire mongoose by itself. Usually he would have a life and death battle

with four or five mongooses. Of course, at first he couldn't handle it. So he used the system where Dedric and Deimos lured the special mongooses while he fought the normal mob and ran away using 'Sprint' if he was close to dying. The battles were always like walking a thin plank of ice. But over time he managed to raise his levels. Not only that, his skill levels also become better and he became more accustomed to using Gwisal's sword.

'Without the Sword-Hand Combat skill, I wouldn't be able to use random weapons.'

Ark knew that he hadn't used 100% of Gwisal's attack power. It had different characteristics from a normal sword or dagger. Of course he needed time to adapt to the characteristics after changing weapons. It was the 'Adaptation' system. After he changed weapons, the impact was too intense and unexpected. But once he continued to use Gwisal's sword, he could sense the attacks become increasingly stronger. And he also corrected the disruption to his balance that he felt when he first used it. Thanks to that, Ark was able to use 100% of Gwisal's damage and there was no discomfort when he used kicks. He used Gwisal's sword like a razor while the kick would deal a terrible blow!

Ark used that combination and had fun fighting the monsters. So 2 left.....after fire, he had collected 4 more mongoose essences, the Earth, Wind, Ice and Lightning. And now the special mongoose in front of him had the darkness attribute.

'Damn, haven't I already wasted a few days because of this guy?'

He had found the mongoose with the darkness attribute a few days ago. However, this mongoose was different from the ones with other attributes. While Ark was fighting the normal mobs, the dark mongoose hid using 'Shadow' and fled. It was irritating because its 'Shadow' skill was different from stealth. Unless it attacked first, 'Shadow' wouldn't be released even if Ark managed to hit it. Because of that, Ark repeatedly missed it and then he would spend several hours searching for the mongoose again. It happened 5 times before Ark finally managed to corner it.

'The duration of Mind's Eye is 1 minute. It must be a quick fight!'

“Demonic Opening!”

Kiiyaaaaaak-!

The seal on Gwisal’s sword was loosened and the demons appeared on the blade. Ark quickly narrowed the distance and struck the mongoose in the side with Dark Blade.

Keeeeek!

The darkness mongoose fell down. But once he finished hitting it, the shape was once again assimilated into the darkness thanks to ‘Shadow.’

“Dark Dance!”

Ark ran close using fast movements and continuously used the chain skill Dark Strike. The darkness mongoose was a professional in escaping so it was faster than the other mongooses. But its attack and defense was lower than a normal mongoose. Once he caught it, it was just a matter of time before the mongoose would be defeated. Its health quickly decreased as it was hit by the sword. The mongoose felt the crisis and used ‘Darkness,’ but Ark was impervious to the magic since he was using Mind’s Eye. Ark captured the mongoose and persistently swung his sword. When the mongoose was driven to a critical condition, Ark’s vision suddenly became lighter and the shape of the mongoose disappeared. One minute had passed and the effects of ‘Mind’s Eye’ disappeared.

“Sheesh, I almost caught it.....!”

At the same time, he couldn’t hear the sound of footsteps anyone. The mongoose was cunning and killed the sound of its footsteps once Ark clearly couldn’t see it anymore.

‘I don’t want to spend another few hours searching. Where is it?’

Ark surveyed the area. Deimos was blocking the entrance so there was no room for the mongoose to squeeze past. It might be thinking of going to the relatively wide side where Ark was. However, he couldn’t just blindly swing his sword. If he moved in the wrong direction then it would run away.

‘Only one chance.....then.....’

“Where are you hiding? You beep-beep-beep bastard!”

Ark’s voice echoed through the cave. Intermediate ‘Intimidation’! Some icy powder instantly dropped a few metres away. Ark’s eyes started glittering.

“There you are, Sprint!”

Ark shot forward like an arrow and swung his sword. There was an exhilarating feeling in his fingertips. At the same time, some blood appeared in an empty space. And slowly the black fur of the mongoose was revealed.....the mongoose let out a groan as it was split in half.

“That’s it, I finally got it!”

“M-Master. Please help me. It is impossible anymore!”

Then Dedric came flying from the other side. His wings were torn by the mongooses and he was in a critical condition.

“Good work. You can rest now. Deimos, let’s go!”

Ark grinned and rushed forward with Deimos.

“Eyes of the Cat!”

He spent 2 weeks in the ice cave. During that time, he’s killed thousands of mongooses. Every time he killed 100 of the same monsters, he received an addition 5% on the special effect of Eyes of the Cat. After hunting thousands of them, the probability of the enemy’s attack being foretold by ‘Line Designation’ was 70%. When the mongoose lifted its arm, a solid red line appeared on Ark’s chest like a laser. Ark instantly turned his body and the mongoose’s arm shot past him. He also brought down his sword at the same time and dealt a critical hit, cutting off the arm.

“Yes, it’s a success!”

He had cut off a part of the enemy’s body. It was a new skill he learned after ‘Drastic Measures’ reached intermediate. It was

possible to instantly kill them when the enemy was in a critical condition! Furthermore, the amount of experience and probability of dropping a magic item increased by 1.2. Once he levelled the skill then wouldn't he receive even more experience and items? It was indeed a rare skill that could only be learnt with a two-handed sword. Ark couldn't miss the opportunity. After that, Ark kept on trying to use Drastic Measures whenever a mongoose was in a critical condition. But the probability of success wasn't high and it was a difficult skill to grow.

'But I have 60 skill points!'

Ark invested 40 of the 60 skill points and raised 'Drastic Measures' to intermediate.

Drastic Measures—Sword cutting into two (Intermediate, Passive 100/300): When using this technique, your blade has become sharper. The probability of cutting two pieces at once has risen.

<If you succeed in a critical hit when the enemy has less than 10% health left, there is a 15% probability of instantly killing the enemy. If you are successful then there is a x1.4 chance of gaining extra experience and a x1.4 of the best items dropping. Rare skill only available for two-handed swords>

* Additional effect (Cutting): If you target a part of the enemy's body and succeed in a critical hit, there is a 5% chance of cutting it off.

There was an additional cutting effect! If he cut off the arms or legs then he could slow their movements. Obviously it required a lot of concentration to target a particular part and land a critical hit. But because it was so difficult, he felt a tremendous pleasure when he succeeded.

"Now, let's get started?"

The 3 mongooses weren't even considered as snacks to Ark. Ark began to practice cutting off parts using the mongooses. While some mongooses had 50% health left, all their limbs were cut off so they

were unable to fight.

“Ugh, Master. You’re becoming increasingly cruel.”

Dedric was appalled as he looked at the mongooses from a distance. Ark was being a bit cruel, but didn’t he need practice in order to use the skill properly?

So Ark literally sliced the mongooses to pieces.

“That’s it. I got everything I need so let’s go back to the hideout.”

Ark packed the items and leisurely walked back to the cave’s entrance.

-You have returned to the camp.

<Health and mana regeneration increases by 50%. There is a 50% less chance of monsters attacking. Your body temperature will start to climb because of the campfire>

Ark had completely adapted to life in an ice cave. The first thing he did was make a camp in the cave. It was necessary to create a safe place since he couldn’t release his summons. So he gathered some vines and used it as fuel. Of course it wasn’t simple to light a fire using just that. He didn’t have a flint, so he had to create friction the old fashioned way and rubbed two sticks together for a while before he could get some embers for the fire. Once he lit a fire and used the camping skill, a campsite was immediately created. Monsters kept away from it once the camp was created. Furthermore, the campfire restored his health and body temperature so it was possible to relax. So Ark used the campsite as a base to attack the cave.

“Ah, it’s warm. I was starting to get cold.....”

Ssak ssak ssak. Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack.

His summons flocked to the fire as soon as they reached the campsite.

“Fortunately there is still a spark burning. Dedric, gather a lot of vines while I revive the fire a little.”

“Yes, yes, always giving orders. Sheesh, I get the bad jobs as usual.”

Dedric complained but quickly gathered the vines to revive the fire.

“Then I’ll start taking out the items.”

Ark walked towards a corner of the camp. After spending 2 weeks in the ice cave, the campsite had already become like a house. After crossing through the red wilderness, Ark’s bag had become nearly full. Since he also lived here for 2 weeks, he had long exceeded the capacity of his bag. But his pride wouldn’t allow him to give up on the japtem that fell. So his campsite was used as a temporary item storage.

“I’ve gathered quite a lot in the meantime.”

The Seolmocho, Icecap’s Decisions, Mongoose leather and bones, cooked dishes.....these items were piled up like a mountain. It was a sight that warmed his heart whenever he saw it. However, Ark sighed and his face became gloomy.

“The amount I can carry out of the ice caves is only what my bag can hold. No matter how much I gather, more than half of it will eventually be gone.”

Even if the leather and bones could be sold together, he would only get a few gold. But tears clouded his eyes at the thought of throwing it away.

“I have to be reasonable and pick the ones that will earn a little bit more money. Anyway, I’ll worry about it once my business here ends.....”

Ark searched among the pile of items for some ingredients. It was the ingredients needed to create the immortality pill. While his summons played around, Ark finished the mixing and crystallization stages.

“Now, I’ll leave you guys while I take a short nap. Eat the food and don’t let the fire go out.”

“Okay, stop nagging me.”

10 hours later, Ark came back to the ice cave.

“Master, it is finished.”

Dedric approached him holding the pot. Inside the pot was a black immortality pill that let out a mysterious fragrance. When Ark swallowed it, an information window appeared.

Mongoose’s Immortality Pill (Darkness) (Immortality Pill rating: D, Degree of Completion: A)

The immortality pill is enchanted with the special attribute of the mongoose that lived in a special environment. You have been granted the ability of the mongoose.

<All stats +3, Dark Attribute Resistance +25%>

*There is an added bonus according to the degree of completion.

<Spiritual Power +100>

Compared to Slime’s Immortality Pill, this was the only effect the mongoose pill gave. When he first ate ‘Mongoose’s Immortality Pill,’ Ark could not hide his disappointment. But he soon realized that it was not a small bonus. Although the Mongoose’s Immortality Pill only had a D rating, it was still an immortality pill. In other words, he would receive the bonus 7 times.

“Every immortality pill gives me 3 extra stats. That is an 18 stat bonus. Then multiply it by 7…….”

Wouldn’t he receive 126 stat points? He would also get a bonus for

the Degree of Completion. Until now, it had been bonus stats like strength and agility. Due to the immortality pills, his stats increased tremendously.

‘This time it is a Spiritual Power bonus! That means I can summon Dedric and Deimos at the same time!’

Although it was impossible to summon or release at the moment, it will become very useful once he returned to middle earth. And there was a necessary bonus as well. His resistance increased according to the attribute! Once Ark ate the pill with a fire attribute, he thought of a way to defeat Galgashi. The red immortality pill gave him 25% fire resistance. In other words, the other pills will increase his resistance according to their attributes. If he ate all 7 kinds then his resistance would increase by 25%.

‘It was difficult to deal with Galgashi because of its magic. But I didn’t receive an abnormal state when it used fire magic. That was because the Veil of Fire has a 50% fire resistance. If my resistance increases then it might make dealing with the effects from Galgashi’s magic easier.’

When affected by a magic state, it was difficult to avoid any attacks. But those magic states could be invalidated by increasing the resistance to an attribute. It meant that he had to eat all the immortality pills to defeat Galgashi!

“Immortality Pill information window!”

Mongoose’s Immortality Pill (Fire) (Immortality Pill rating: D, Degree of Completion: A)
--

<All stats +3, Fire Attribute Resistance +25%>
--

* Completion bonus: Strength + 10

[Mongoose’s Immortality Pill (Ice) (Immortality Pill rating: D, Degree of Completion: A)
--

<All stats +3, Ice Attribute Resistance +25%>

* Completion bonus: Intelligence + 10

[Mongoose's Immortality Pill (Earth) (Immortality Pill rating: D, Degree of Completion: A)

<All stats +3, Earth Attribute Resistance +25%>

* Completion bonus: Stamina + 10

[Mongoose's Immortality Pill (Wind) (Immortality Pill rating: D, Degree of Completion: A)

<All stats +3, Wind Attribute Resistance +25%>

* Completion bonus: Agility + 10

[Mongoose's Immortality Pill (Lightning) (Immortality Pill rating: D, Degree of Completion: A)

<All stats +3, Lightning Attribute Resistance +25%>

* Completion bonus: Wisdom + 10

[Mongoose's Immortality Pill (Darkness) (Immortality Pill rating: D, Degree of Completion: A)

<All stats +3, Dark Attribute Resistance +25%>

* Completion bonus: Spiritual Power + 100

When he made them appear all at once, it seemed sufficient. But how did he end up obtained 176 stat points? Every time he ate an immortality pill, an extra association bonus was applied and he received an extra 30 intelligence, fame + 1,200 and his Survival Cooking skill increased to 55. Therefore the effect of the immortality pills increased his level by 18~29. His level also increased dramatically while fighting the mongooses.

Ark was level 200 when he first entered the ice cave. The mongooses were level 250. Because 10% experience was added every 5 levels, he earned more than 100% experience when hunting. He also used the Drastic Measures skill so sometimes his experience increased by 1.4. Therefore Ark's current level was

227! When he applied the darkness attribute bonus, it was 317.....that meant he had a little leeway to play around with the mongooses and practice Drastic Measures.

The ingredients in the cave also increased his summons to level 120. It was a really crazy growth rate!

‘How much would I get if I could mass produce these immortality pills?’

But even though he had lived in the ice cave for 2 weeks, he still hadn’t found the mongoose with red fur again. It seemed like the respawn rate of the special monsters was as slow as a boss monster. In addition, the ice cave was the only place he could find the mongooses but there were thousands of crevasses underneath East Moon. There wasn’t a signpost so he wouldn’t be able to find the cave again after he left.

“Anyway, I have to leave here soon.”

Even though it was a good hunting ground, he couldn’t stay here forever. When there was still a level difference with the mongooses, he received an experience bonus of 40% but now his experience didn’t go up as quickly as before. And he wouldn’t be able to obtain all the items here, no matter how much he wanted to.

“All that’s left is the Light attribute Immortality Pill.”

But he could already guess which monster had this attribute. Ark had used his cartography skill to make a map of the dungeon. While exploring the cave, his map was now at 99% completion. The remaining 1% was the behind the ice wall where the boss was. So it seemed like he had caught all the mongooses except for the boss. But he still had one attribute missing.

‘The Light attribute Immortality Pill must be with the boss. It might be one of the beads embedded in its forehead. Okay, let’s complete the collection and leave the ice cave!’

Ark began preparing for the fight against Galgashi. He used ‘Magic Restoration’ to repair his equipment and ‘Blade Maintenance’ to increase the damage of his sword. He also used purified water while

washing his clothes to increase the defense. After filling his belly, he finally got out of his seat.

“Character Attributes Information Window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good +350	
Fame	8,875 (+500)	Level	227
Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Battlefield, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer	
Health	3,580 (+150)	Mana	3,745
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	437 (+28)
Agility	587 (+35)	Stamina	667 (+20)
Wisdom	81 (+10)	Intelligence	720
Luck	87 (+30)	Flexibility	92
Art of Communication	46	Affection	109 (+10)
Resilience	254		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138	
<Character's Overall Combat Power (Item and Skill values added)>			
[Health Regeneration]: 100 (Amulet of Vitality +5 health every 10 seconds)			
[Mana Regeneration]: 100 (Resurrecting Spirit + 5%)			
[Attack]: 110-122 (Advance Sword-Hand Combat +40%)			
[Defense]: 292 (Adelaine's Necklace + 40, King's set + 20)			

[Attack Speed]: 146 (Cat Paws + 10%, Wind Spirit's Boots + 10%)
[Reaction Rate]: 293
[Movement Speed]: 100 (Wind Spirit's Boots +30%)
[Critical Hit Success]: 337 (Cat Paws + 10%)
[Evasion Success]: 184

<Character's Resistance (Item and Skill values added)>
* Elemental Series Resistance
[Flame resistance]: 25% (Veil of Fire + 50%)
[Ice resistance]: 25%
[Earth resistance]: 25%
[Wind resistance]: 25%
[Lightning resistance]: 25%
[Dark resistance]: 25% (Profession characteristics +50%)
* Spirit Series Resistance
[Fear resistance]: 50%
[Confusion resistance]: 50%
[Bewitchment resistance]: 50%
* Nature Series Resistance
[Poison Resistance]: 20%
* Environmental resistance
[Water resistance]: 0 (Guardian Armour of the Merpeople+100%)
[Cold resistance]: 16%
* Other resistance

[Shock Absorption]: 20%

[Blunt Force Resistance]: 0 (Resilience +25%, 4%)

[Fall resistance]: 50%~80%

The attribute information window could confirm the combat power of the character. When he levels up then the numbers didn't change that significantly. But since he hadn't checked it in a while, he was able to confirm that it had grown steadily. However, he wanted to confirm the elemental series resistance. The numerical value was necessary to determine if he could fight against Galgashi who used magic freely.

Galgashi's magic is not that high ranking. The problem is the abnormal states. But a 25% resistance can defend against most states.'

"Okay, now it is time to get revenge!"

Ark led his summons and turned towards the boss room.

Ark leisurely traversed the ice cave. Now it wasn't easy to find a mongoose in the cave. That's why Ark was determined to leave. Once the gap had widened between him and the mongoose, his gains had started to slow down. And he used a lot of time hunting the mongooses.

"Well, it doesn't really matter if I leave once I defeat the boss."

Ark soon arrived at the place where Galgashi was waiting.

Keuaaaaang!

-The nightmare boss monster of the East Moon 'Galgashi' has appeared.

There was a ringing noise as the message window once again appeared. Galgashi was fiercely jumping about the room. In these 2 weeks, Ark had become stronger. But Galgashi had just been playing around. It didn't increase its level or develop new attack patterns.

"Eat this! Dark Blade!"

Ark forcefully stabbed it with his sword and then used 'Slide' to retreat. Chiing, there was a ringing sword and Galgashi slipped on the ice. Galgashi stared at Ark and started baring its fangs. The eerie red eyes became cold. But Ark just stared at the eye on its forehead.

'That's it, that's where the light attribute immortality pill is!'

Ark looked at the bead imbedded in the forehead with blazing eyes. Then Galgashi stepped backwards at his face.

"Huhuhu, it's too late. I'll dig out the ball stuck on your forehead. Go, Dedric, Deimos!"

"Take this!"

Clack clack clack clack!

The earlier part of the battle was similar to before. Dedric attacked from above while Galgashi jumped and roared. Then Ark and Deimos waited until it landed before bombarding it with attacks. However, this time Ark was concentrated on one point on Galgashi's body.

'If that guy uses its magic, it'll still be annoying even if the resistance has increased. Deimos and Dedric have no elemental resistance so I'll have to take care of it first.'

Ark didn't blindly decrease Galgashi's health. The previous time

Galgashi only used its magic when its health was less than 50%. In other words, it won't use magic until its health falls below 50%.

'I'll have to succeed before Galgashi uses its magic!'

Ark used 'Slide' to go around and attack the tails. After a dozen attempts, one tail was finally cut off. He used the cutting ability of Drastic Measures. The tail that he severed was the tail that could use wind magic. Now the weapon threatening Dedric had disappeared.

'Okay, I'll aim for the Earth magic tail next!'

Ark set his next target and concentrated his attacks again. The damage and abnormal state of the earth magic was not important. It was annoying because it could raise Galgashi's defense.

Seokeok, seokeok, chiing, seokeok, chiing!

Dedric and Deimos distracted Galgashi while Ark used Slide to move around it and attacked the tails. At first it was difficult, but once he got used to the movements then the success probability increased.

Bang!

In the end another tail was cut off. Galgashi stumbled from the pain and rolled away on the floor.

"Hahahah, isn't this exciting?"

Once two tails were cut off, Galgashi started to earnestly use its magic. Ark tensed up and grasped his sword firmly.

'The real fight is from now on!'

Once Galgashi shook its tail, the ground turned a deep blue and sparks flew. But Ark deliberating stood still and let the sparks hit him.

'I have to check to see if I'm right!'

-You have received lightning damage. 75 damage!
<You have resisted 'Electric Shock' thanks to your lightning

resistance>

‘Yes!’

A satisfied smile appeared on Ark’s face. His lowest resistance of 25% worked against Galgashi’s magic. In fact, Ark had been inwardly anxious since it was only 25%. His resistance was relatively low. While Ark’s Sword-Hand Combat relied on strength and agility, magic also increased because of skills or weapons. In other words, if the opponent had a skill that boosted spell damage by 200% then he would still receive 175% damage, even with 25% resistance. In fact, magicians actually used skills like ‘Amplification’ while increased basic damage by 200% and applied it to skills like ‘Explosion.’ It would be 300~500% effective. In addition, the elemental series was the most common kind of magic used. If the magician also had resistance to physical damage then attacking them wouldn’t help. That was the reason why magicians were scary. He wouldn’t be assured even if he had 1000% magical resistance. Indeed, raising a warrior was easy but magicians required more of a balance. Well, let’s put that talk aside for the moment.

Anyway, even Ark’s lowest resistance was able to completely resist Galgashi’s magic. After a couple more tries, Ark confirmed that he could resist 90% of the abnormal states caused.

‘Now there is no reason to be scared of the magic. That guy would do more damage to me with physical attacks than magical. But I will be able to face it alone.’

“Dedric, Deimos. Stay out of the magic damage range!”

If his summons stayed and fought then it would just become annoying. Ark dived into the reach of Galgashi’s wide area magic. While he received additional damage every 30 seconds, his resistance settled the situation. Ark invalidated all the abnormal states and just swung his sword. Then Galgashi finally noticed that Ark was different from before. He wasn’t affected at all by Galgashi’s magical assault.

“This foolish fellow, you became aware too late.”

Now Galgashi was just like an oversized mongoose. And Ark had spent the last two weeks killing thousands of mongooses. If he closed his eyes then he would be able to predict the mongooses' movements.

"Come, let's finish this. Demonic Opening!"

When he used Demonic Opening, the ghosts' wails shook the ice cave. Gwisal's sword turned black and was immediately plunged into Galgashi's underbelly. Galgashi tried its best to run away but it ended up being stabbed over and over. In the end, Galgashi became bloody and was in a critical condition.

"Now's the important part!"

Ark took a small break to recover his breathing. Galgashi only had 3% health left so it would end in one or two attacks. But he shouldn't carelessly kill it. He had waited 2 weeks to catch this boss monster! He wanted to suck every last drop of oil from Galgashi.

'If I succeed, this is a x1.4 chance of more experience and the best item dropping!'

But his opponent was a boss monster. It wouldn't be easy to find the chance to use Drastic Measures. However, Ark avoided the attacks and held out. After 20 minutes..... Galgashi finally wrapped its body in flames and rushed forward in a desperate attack.

Keuaaaaang!

"It's now, Sprint!"

Ark ran forward and swung Gwisal's sword from top to bottom. Galgashi and Ark met in a head on confrontation and a roaring sound rattled the area. And after a moment, Ark moved back. He had pierced the body and split it in half. Galgashi was severed with one stroke!

"Success!"

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.

The messages continuously popped up after Galgashi died. He had defeated a level 400 boss monster while level 227 and gained 7 levels. This was because the x1.4 experience effect was applied. However, Ark was not interested in his level.

“Items, items!”

Ark drooled like a hyena and ran over to Galgashi’s body.

Mongoose Essence (Light)

Galgashi’s Fur (Rare)

Armour type: Mantle

Durability: 13/50

Defense power: 25

Weight: 30

User restriction: Level 180 or more

The fur of a snow demon called Galgashi, it can be cut to a suitable size and wound around the body. While wearing this fur, your body temperature won’t fall regardless of how cold the environment is. The remnants of Galgashi’s magic will also protect you.
--

<Option: Cold Resistance +100%, Agility +20>
--

<Special Option: When the wearer’s health becomes less than 50%, ‘Magic Protection’ will activate. When ‘Magic Protection’ is activated, there is a 10% chance that the opponent will be attacked by one of Fire, Ice, Earth, Wind, Lightning, Darkness or Light>

Galgashi’s Claws (Special)

User restriction: Level 180 and more

Item type: Modification (Shoes)

You can attach Galgashi's sharp claws to your shoes.

<Additional Effect of Remodelled Shoes: These sharp claws can be used to dig into the ice and not slip. You can climb an ice wall at 90 degrees for 3 minutes. In addition, users who have mastered Hand-to-Hand Combat and use the claw-equipped when kicking will deal 10~15 additional damage.

* Hover the item over the desired footwear to equip it (Removable)

“Ooh!”

It was worth waiting 20 minutes for Drastic Measures to succeed. Even though the Mongoose Essence was a basic drop, a rare and special item had appeared. The mantle gave him 100% cold resistance! He immediately felt warm after he wore it. In addition, the special option would automatically use a spell. While the magic was not that strong and would be ineffective against a player, it would be quite useful against monsters. And Galgashi's claws also caught Ark's eyes. The items gave new skills and additional attack damage to his shoes. In addition, it was removable so he could wear it with new shoes.

“Hahaha, it was worth coming to a different dimension!”

Ark enthusiastically packed the loot.

“I'll test the performance later so let's make the immortality pill.”

Ark took out his pot. Once he killed the boss, it was like Ark owned the ice cave. It was pointless to go back to the entrance just to make the immortality pill.

“Snake, give me the necessary ingredients.”

Ark extended his hand. However, Snake was not at his waist. Once the battle with Galgashi ended, Snake crossed the square as if it was spellbound.

“Eh? Snake, what's wrong?”

Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake moved and pointed towards the hole in the barrier.

‘Oh, that reminds me.....’

Ark remembered the first time he came to this place. He had found the boss room because of Snake.

‘There might be another item behind the barrier!’

Ark considered this and followed Snake to the barrier. When he entered the hole Galgashi made, a wide space appeared. Then there was a ringing sound and a message window popped up.

-You have finished the map of the ‘Snowy Mountain’s Hidden Ice Cave’ with a 100% completion rate.

It is now possible to sell the ‘Snowy Mountain’s Hidden Ice Cave’ map. <Experience +3,000>

As expected, it was the remaining 1% of his map. However, Ark was puzzled when he saw the space inside.

“What the? Ugh, it is freezing. This is.....a refrigerator?”

Dedric muttered as he followed. It was a very accurate statement. Inside the large icy space, there were all kinds of monster corpses piled up like a mountain. The bones of the corpses were piled on one side while the other side had the half eaten remains left behind from eating. It was similar to beef hanging in a frozen storeroom. No, it was clearly a refrigerator. The mongoose must’ve collected it from hunting in the snowy mountains. Perhaps the reason monsters weren’t seen on the snowy mountains was because of the mongooses.

‘What the? Did Galgashi spend the whole time in here eating?’

Since the passage was too small for Galgashi to leave, it must have spent it all in here. No wonder why it was huge.....

Ssak ssak ssak!

Then he heard Snake's voice inside. Without thinking, Ark moved closer to where Snake was. Snake was wriggling into a place where the corpses of snakes were piled up like a mountain.

'All my questions are answered.'

The mongooses had caught an absurd amount of snakes as food. Snake probably came to the cave because it scented its kin from the cave.

'Wait? Isn't something strange? So far, haven't I hunted a lot of serpents with Snake? There was no reaction at the time so why would it suddenly be so sensitive now?'

When Ark thought about it, something was strange. Then a blurry light suddenly appeared from the pile of dead snakes. Something huge was moving among the pile.

"What, what the? For there to be a monster here.....!"

Ark reflexively took out his sword.

-Unbelievable.....

A distance voice emerged from inside.

-There is still an Alamone alive.....but how is that possible.....?

In the darkness, the thing asked with doubt as it moved about. It was a giant constrictor, much larger than the one he saw on TV crushing its prey. However, the huge snake looked miserable as giant chunks of its flesh was torn out. There was no sense of threat coming from it. Somehow it seemed rather friendly.

-I see, you chose this person.

The huge snake stared at Ark and nodded.

-You don't have to panic. Foreigner, I am not your enemy. My body is already dying. I won't be much of a threat.

But Ark was surprised for a different reason.

"The snake is talking.....?"

-I am not a snake.

“Eh? Then how are you speaking?”

-I am an Alamone. The last remaining Alamone in this world.....or so I thought.

“Alamone!”

Ark burst out with surprise. It made sense.....was Snake drawn by instinct to return to its kin? But there was some doubts remaining.

“I thought the Alamone was extinct?”

That was written in the information window when he met Snake for the first time.

-That's right. The Alamone was very curious and had a habit of collecting things. So the Alamone had always been targeted by other races and became nearly extinct. The Alamone barely avoided the threats and survived, travelling a long way until we finally arrived at East Moon.

The Alamone sighed and replied.

-But this place did not become a haven for us. It was the place where our natural enemy the mongooses lived.....so one by one we were captured by them and used as food. I got trapped in this place by the cursed devil Galgashi and used as a living food source.

The Alamone twitched as it relived the pain.

-When I disappeared, the Alamone clan disappeared from history. But now.....I have met an Alamone descendant after hundreds of years! To the great power that rules this land.....thank you.

The Alamone looked at Snake with a gaze filled with deep emotions.

Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake clung to Ark's legs with a frightened expression. Then it just gawked at the Alamone. Snake had been drawn by instincts, but

Snake never thought it would find a relative. Indeed, Snake had been with Ark from the time it hatched. Although Ark was a human, Snake considered him as its parent. But the Alamone just said happily.

-I'm glad that you met someone you could cherish. All Alamones long to find a master that they can serve and love. I can relax and close my eyes now that I've confirmed a descendant of the Alamone still lives!

The Alamone stared at Snake endlessly.

-It looks like he hatched you from an egg. Am I right?

"That's right."

-Indeed.....the Alamone seemed strange the first time I saw it.....Like this, the child will be unable to grow into a real Alamone. This is because it could not learn from its parents or siblings.

"Yes? Then.....?"

-Now I know why I'm still alive. I am the only survivor of the clan. Now, please send the child over here.

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak!

Snake became frightened and shook its head. However, Ark separated Snake by force and pushed it towards the Alamone. After listening to the words, Ark sensed an opportunity for growth. Although Snake looked uneasy at first, it finally made a decision as small crystals fell from the Alamone's mouth. Snake became curious and approached the Alamone. When the Alamone nodded, Snake stuck out its tongue and swallowed immediately.

Flash-!

At that moment, Snake's body bent and there was an intense light. Then Snake's skin started to crack apart like a shell.

The Alamone Larvae has successfully completed its growth.

The last survivor of the Alamone clan has given Snake the knowledge to grow. The crystals contained a part of the experience and knowledge of the Alamone. The Alamone has evolved into an adult by absorbing this knowledge. By becoming an adult snake, the Alamone is able to obtain one additional skill. Under the will of the Netherworld, the adult snake has been granted the name 'Radun.'

Radun

Snake has absorbed the knowledge of an adult Alamone survivor. It has fully manifested as an adult Alamone called Radun. It can store more items and many skills can be used freely. Once more experience and knowledge is accumulated, it will learn the skills instinctively.

Species: Netherworld Creature

Alignment: Dark

Ranking: Adult

Health: 1,000

Loyalty: –

Strength:-

Agility:-

Stamina:-

Wisdom:-

Intelligence:-

Luck:-

* The equipped skills slot has expanded to 2.

* Item storage capacity is doubled.

* It is possible for Radun to transform.

Radunma: For a certain period of time, Radun can transform into a mount called Radunma. Radunma is able to move as fast as the wind while still keeping its ability for item storage. However, in order to maintain Radunma's body who will become hungry after transforming, 5 mana is consumed every 10 seconds.

* Radunma's health once transformed: 2,000

* Player's movement speed when mounted on Radunma +500%

* Attack and Defense of player will increase by 10% when mounted on Radunma.

'Huk! Radunma? A mount?'

Ark's eyes widened at the sight of the information window. He didn't have that many expectations about Snake's growth. He would be grateful even if the bag storage expanded a little bit. Since Snake only had 1 skill slot, he had been unable to utilize the poison skill properly. But now that problem had disappeared. Two skill slots! Double the bag space! This meant that he could use the item storage along with the poison skill. But what was even more marvellous was the Radunma skill. Now Ark also had a mount! It could also be used in combat, instead of only transportation like the Unicorn. He got a mount normally worth thousands of gold for free!

-The descendant of the Alamone has been seen again after hundreds of years. Maybe a king of the Alamone might even be born again. Then the Alamone clan would rise again. Foreigner, please take care of this child until the end.....

The Alamone closed its eyes for the last time.

Ssak ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak!

Radun had finally begun to consider the Alamone family so it cried sadly. Now it really was the last survivor of the Alamone clan.

Mongoose's Immortality Pill (Light) (Immortality Pill rating: D, Degree of Completion: A)

<All stats +3, Light Attribute Resistance +50%>

* Completion bonus: Luck + 10

Ark finally swallowed the last Mongoose pill. Suddenly he felt a cold feeling and he sank heavily to the ground.....Fire, Ice, Wind, Earth, Lightning, Darkness and Light all started fighting. After a moment, he sat quietly and stared at the information window in front of him.

The Mongoose Attributes Set has been completed!

The immortality pills have harmonized in your body and a new skill has been awakened. You can choose one of two skills.

1. 7 Attributes Fusion: It is possible to fuse the 7 attributes and increase your body's stats dramatically. <If you select Fusion, a bonus 20 points will be applied to all your stats>
2. 7 Attributes Balance: It is possible to maintain the 7 attributes and use its power when needed. <If you choose balance, a Fire, Ice, Wind, Earth or Lightning attribute can be applied to your sword to form an 'Elemental Sword.' You can also learn the skill 'Shadow' thanks to the Darkness and Light attribute immortality pill>

'Ugh! W-what is this?'

Ark looked at the information window with a gaping mouth. The bonus for completing the set was more than he expected. However, he could only pick one bonus. Either receive bonus stats or learn 2 new skills.....

'Damn.....why did it show me.....ugh, what should I select?'

A bonus 20 points to all stats! That was 120 extra stats. He would be able to climb 12 levels with just the bonus stats alone. Naturally he would drool.....no, the bonus was so remarkable that he would

freak out over it! But that would mean throwing away the chance to learn 2 special skills.

“Dammit, this is torture!”

Ark pulled his hair and shouted. It was as if someone has shown Ark two children drowning in the sea and asked him to save only one of them. But standing around tearing his hair out was useless. Ark was tortured for a while before he made a decision with tears in his eyes.

‘Yes, I collected a lot of bonus stat points from the immortality pills anyway. And chances are that I can continue to receive bonus stats. But I might never learn these special skills again!’

Hadn’t he seen how useful the Slime’s Time that he got from the Slime’s Immortality Pill was? He couldn’t give up the chance to learn these skills because of some bonus stats.

“Okay, the 7 Attributes Balance!”

When Ark raised his voice, the 7 attributes started spinning around and scattered to every corner of his body. Then a new skill window floated in front of him.

Elemental Sword (Special, Active): It is possible to temporarily imbue your sword with one of the five properties Fire, Ice, Earth, Wind and Lightning. Once the sword has been imbued with the attribute, it will afflict additional damage and an abnormal state to the enemy. But if you’re not a magician who deals with elements, you can draw out all the elemental power dwelling in your body for a period of time before becoming extremely vulnerable.

<You can imbue your weapon with an attribute in exchange for lowering your resistance to it by 100% for 24 hours. (It isn’t possible to imbue an attribute to our weapon if the resistance is in a ‘minus’ state)

Once your weapon is imbued, the damage increases by 10% for 30 minutes. A critical hit will also activate an abnormal state. But the nature of the additional damage will depend on the enemy (When used on an enemy with the same attribute, damage= 20%. When

used on an enemy with the opposite attribute, damage +20%)

Mana consumption: 300 >

Hiding in Shadows (Special, Passive): You can use 'Stealth' if there is any shadowy place in the daytime.

However, you can't use it when you're in a battle state and it will be released if you touch sunlight.

'Elemental Sword increases my damage by 10%! And I can hide in shadow! Okay, this is good!'

Ark had been anxious looking at the information window and now he sighed with relief. Fortunately, the 'Elemental Sword' and 'Hiding in Shadows' was worth giving up the bonus stats. He was especially pleased with Elemental Sword. It raised his attack power by 10%, depending on the resistance. Also, a critical hit will also give an attribute related state! Since it was a strong skill, of course it would have a penalty. After giving the attribute to his weapon, his related resistance will decrease by 100%. For example, his ice resistance was 25% so he would have -75% ice resistance for 24 hours. In other words, he would be especially vulnerable to ice magic for 24 hours.

'But if I'm dealing with an enemy who uses ice attacks then I just won't use that attribute. I'll use the fire attribute and have my fire resistance fall instead. I can restore my resistance after 24 hours.....if I pay attention when using it then it shouldn't be a problem.'

Ark nodded with a satisfied face. After a life and death situation in the snowy mountains, he had found a hidden dungeon! And he spent two weeks grinding there! The rewards were indeed worth it.

Snake evolved into Radun and he received an enormous bonus for completing the immortality pill set. There was also Elemental Sword which added magic properties to his sword and 'Hiding in Shadows'

which allowed him to use Stealth in daytime! He felt breathless after fully repeating everything he received.

‘It really is a huge bonus!’

He received all these compensations after entering the new dimension. And there were still more quests and compensation waiting. Because only 10 people had found this place, it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the possibilities were endless.

“Now, should I start exploring this dimension?”

Ark grinned and pulled out the claws. He placed in on his shoes and stepped firmly on the ground. It was the shoe modification item, Galgashi’s Claws. He had been worried about how he would leave the crevasse after defeating Galgashi. Even though he had explored the entire huge cave, the crevasses were like a maze and the whole area apart from the dungeon was dark on his map. But Galgashi’s claws had neatly solved that problem.

“Radun, pick up all the items until you’re full!”

Ssak ssak ssak!

Radun used its tongue to swallow the items at the campsite. Although its capacity had doubled, it wasn’t possible to swallow everything gathered.

“They’re all worth some money but it can’t be helped. Deimos, transform!”

Ark made Deimos transform into the saw blade. After stretching his body, he ran towards the ice wall.

“Sprint!”

Pak, pak, pak, pak!

Galgashi’s Claws made it easy to dig into the ice. Then he began to climb up the sheer 90 degrees wall. The duration of climbing with Galgashi’s Claws was 3 minutes. But since he didn’t rest and used Sprint, Ark managed to climb up in 2 minutes.

“Achoo, c-cold……..!”

Once he was on the snowy mountain again, the tremendous chill immediately began. Dedric screamed and quickly hid in Ark’s mantle.

“Oh, this is paradise!”

“Radun, Radunma transform!”

When he used the skill, Radun’s body began to swell. Although Radun wasn’t as big as the Alamone in the refrigerator, it reached the size of a pony. Radun also grew 4 legs in its chest and legs. Its transformation looked like a large lizard.

“Now let’s go down. It is time to explore the new dimension!”

Ark got on Radunma while wearing Galgashi’s Fur and shouted.

Pa pa pa pa!

Radun moved its four legs and ran down the snowfields. While the stubby legs looked funny, it was faster than it seemed. Therefore, Ark and his summons broke through the snow storm and crossed East Moon. After a few hours, the snow storm gradually disappeared and he arrived at a wide plain.

This was the real beginning of his expedition.

Different World? Netherworld?

“Now there’s a little bit more money to spare.”

Raiden leaned back in his chair and let out a long sigh. He had been the Lord for 3 weeks. It had been a terrible time. There was 0 gold in the castle’s public funds. In addition, Ark had given all the public funds to the residents of the castle inside of fixing the infrastructure. Therefore the estate was already on the verge of bankruptcy when Raiden became the Lord.

‘That Ark bastard……!’

Raiden snarled as he recalled how Ark had fooled them. However, he couldn’t go tear Ark apart. Although he wanted to chase after Ark, he was still the Lord of Silvana. If he left it as it was, the infrastructure would be inoperable and half the territory seized by the government. In the end, Raiden had to raise the taxes to prevent this from happening. Then the residents started complaining.

“The previous Lord gave us a bonus for completing the trading post. But this one raised the taxes as soon as he became the Lord! Isn’t it terrible?”

“Why are they so different when it comes to money management?”

“We’re not going to be the slaves of the Lord!”

“If he continues treating us like this then I won’t endure it anymore!”

‘God dammit, I have to raise the taxes because of the former Lord!’

Raiden inwardly screamed. How on earth was he supposed to rectify what Ark did? Because of that, Raiden needed to raise the taxes. Yet he received unfair abuse and complaints from the residents until he was almost in tears. But he didn’t dare tell the residents that. No, he knew that the NPCs didn’t consider him that highly based on Berami’s attitude.

“It’s difficult. If this continues then there really might be an uprising.”

In New World, the ‘rebellion’ system also existed. If he raised taxes too quickly or mishandled the infrastructure, his intimacy with the residents would fall. And once the intimacy fell below a certain amount, the residents would start to rebel. If he experienced a rebellion then it would be a serious issue. He couldn’t collect taxes while quelling the rebellion. But if he didn’t quell the rebellion then his estate would be in anarchy. If that happened then other guilds would be able to attack the castle without going through a formal siege. If other guilds flocked like bees towards Hermes, there was no guarantee that they could defend the castle. Eventually Raiden had no choice but to lower the taxes after a few days. But the immediate problem wasn’t the necessary funds. Raiden received information that the Grey Wings guild had bought the challenge rights and would siege the castle next.

‘Hang in there. It will be the end if I lose the castle!’

He had barely obtained the castle after paying Ark 4,000 gold and rare shoes. But was that all? In order to maintain the estate, he had to clean out all his savings and sold his car. If he lost the castle then he would vomit in a vase. In addition, it was obvious that Hermes was having some problems. Raiden had to shake up the guild members for money to repair the castle walls and defense towers. Fortunately, he was able to repel the Grey Wings’ attack. And after 10 days had passed, Raiden could finally take a break. The tax was lowered, the urgent funding issues solved and the Grey Wings’ power had weakened thanks to the failed siege. Of course there were numerous guilds in Silvana, but none of them were a threat except for the Grey Wings.

So after 20 days, the area finally managed to become moderately stable. But he had only barely managed to enter the safety zone.

“3 weeks! I poured a considerable amount of money into this estate during those 3 weeks!”

His anger rose again once he managed to rest. He didn’t receive any profits in those 3 weeks, only debt.

“That Ark bastard, I can’t forgive him for what he did!”

“Of course!”

Duke also exclaimed.

“When I think about how my shoes were stolen by that guy…….”

Duke looked down at his leather shoes. Raiden had promised that he would buy better shoes after he became the Lord. However, Raiden was in a crisis situation where he had to sell his car to raise some money. In this situation, the guild couldn’t afford to buy Duke new shoes. Thanks to that, Duke was wearing shoes sold in shops. Although the shoes Raiden bought as an apology were still quite expensive, they couldn’t compare to his rare shoes.

“Recently the castle is operating on track. But we had to sacrifice so much to reach this point. And all this trouble was because of Ark. I can never forgive him!”

“I agree!”

The guild members shouted in unison.

“He deliberately tricked us.”

“That Ark will see that he can’t just mess around with the Hermes guild.”

“If I ever encounter him, I won’t be able to sleep until I’ve killed him many times.”

“But do we know where he is hiding?”

The guild members became gloomy at those words.

“He’s not an idiot and he would’ve already ran far away.”

“What if he crossed the border and entered another kingdom?”

“You don’t have to worry.”

Then Jewel interrupted with a confident face.

“Do you think I would’ve obediently handed him Duke’s shoes?”

“What do you mean?”

“Before handing over the shoes I used ‘Mana Perfume’ on it.”

“Mana Perfume?”

Jewel grinned and explained about Mana Perfume. Mana Perfume was an exclusive skill of Jewel’s class that could detect traces of mana left by a curse engraved on the item. If she used Mana Perfume and tracked it using ‘Memory of Perfume’ then Jewel would be able to track the item no matter the location. Of course, this curse didn’t appear in the information window. Since the item didn’t change while under the curse, it wasn’t easy for a user to distinguish. Jewel’s Mana Perfume was still an unknown skill. So a user wouldn’t notice anything strange even if they checked the item again. In fact, Mana Perfume was a curse a magician created after he got robbed by a chaotic player. Jewel used the curse and then handed the shoes to Ark. Jewel had a hostile relationship with Ark and saw a chance for revenge.

“It is possible to find him wherever he is in the game.”

“.....Then it’s decided.”

A bloody smile flashed on Duke’s mouth.

“I’ll teach him what it means to antagonize a pioneer.”

“I’ll regain my shoes.”

Raiden thought of something and unfolded his arms.

“The remaining question is who will go. It won’t be safe if Jewel tracks him alone.....Duke?”

“Of course. I’m going no matter what.”

Duke growled and replied. Raiden judged that he couldn’t be stopped and nodded.

“Okay. But I still can’t be relieved with just two people. He also has his colleagues in Dark Eden. The war has ended so the NPC mercenaries won’t be with him anymore. So he’ll probably have 10

users with him.”

Raiden thought for a moment before nodding again.

“But I can’t just gather an excessive crowd to hunt Ark. Although the crisis has been handled, I can’t just assume that the situation is stable yet. Therefore I’ll ask for some pioneers outside Hermes to help Jewel and Duke.”

“Will the other pioneers listen to Raiden’s command?”

Yes, the Hermes guild had 30 pioneers. Naturally they didn’t have all the pioneers. There were hundreds of users called pioneers. And a number of the pioneers had superior skills and levels compared to Duke, Jewel and Raiden. Although Jewel and Duke were pioneers, they were only in the intermediate rank of pioneers. But most of the other pioneers went around high level hunting grounds by themselves and didn’t attract any attention. However, there were several pioneers that Raiden was acquaintance with and regularly kept in contact. And if they joined Duke and Jewel than 10 opponents would be nothing. No, even 20~30 enemies wouldn’t matter. Then Jewel snorted and said.

“They’re not necessary to beat Ark. I’m not going to just sit down and wait for them. That Ark bastard won’t be a match for me and Duke. And those other guys that he gathered are only low level. Bringing a bunch of low level members from our guild will be enough to take care of them. The lower ranking members in our guild are not that weak.”

“Gathering the lower level members.....is that okay?”

“What do you mean? They’re more than enough against Ark.”

Jewel replied with a trivial laugh. Indeed, most of the Hermes guild had recently passed level 200. Excluding the pioneers, even the lower ranked guild members had an average level of 180~190. It wasn’t a standard to be worried about.

“Okay, although it is not necessary, that Ark had made an enemy of the Hermes guild. If possible, I would like to use our strength to get revenge. Duke, Jewel. I’ll give you 8 guild members so go and

destroy him.”

“I understand.”

Therefore Jewel and Duke along with their guild members started to track Ark. After a few days, they arrived at the cabin in the red wilderness.

“The mana trail leads inside this picture.”

Jewel said, pointing to a picture on one side of the cabin. Then a guild member investigated the picture and said.

“This is a gate. The gate leads to a place pretty far away. And judging by the mana pattern, it is a one-way movement. I’m slightly uncomfortable.....what should we do?”

“Is it even necessary to answer?”

Duke plunged into the picture without any hesitation.

“We’re going to stab Ark to death. So we have to follow no matter what.”

“Our journey for revenge won’t end until he dies.”

“Okay, let’s go!”

Jewel and the rest of the guild entered the picture. So once again a group of foreigners headed towards the other dimension.

“What the hell, this is?”

At that moment, Ark was looking around with a stupid face. In fact, he hadn’t felt like he was in a different dimension while wandering the snowy mountains. No, he had been too busy trying not to freeze to death to question it. After he left the snowy mountains, he finally

realized that the world was completely different.

“Just before it was snowing but now it is a heat wave?”

The weather was the most amazing thing in this world. After leaving the snowy mountains, he encountered a wilderness with sweltering heat. But after a moment, the sky became dark and it started pouring with rain. Then a cold wind started blowing and hail began falling from the sky.

“What crazy weather.....”

The weather was not the only thing hard to adapt to. The surrounding terrain was also strange. The trees in the forest were all made of stone, the desert consisted of iron powder, the river seemed dyed in multi-coloured paints and the sky kept on going round and round. He became even more confused when a flower garden started laughing. He felt like he had travelled into the mind of a person with a mental disorder. The monsters were also weird. There were monsters that would ambush from the sand and there were also ghosts wandering in broad daylight that could not be harmed by normal swords.....it was all monsters he never heard of before.

Kaaaaaaa-

Now, there was a group of monsters resembling a stingray flying above his head. It was enough to make him dizzy. In addition, the monsters in this dimension were much stronger. Their abilities were quite high and they would often use unique skills that made the fight difficult. If it was in the past then he would've struggled. But Ark had greatly raised his abilities in the snowy mountains and passed through the wilderness without any difficulties.

“I'm finally accustomed to this landscape.”

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted.

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

Radun's legs that had been busy moving suddenly slowed down.

“It is already this time? Stop Radun.”

Radun slowed its pace and stopped. Then it contracted like a balloon after Ark got off its back.

“You cutie, you must have suffered.”

Ark stroked its head and murmured as Radun’s eyes lit up. His travel speed increased dramatically thanks to Radun transforming to Radunma. But it couldn’t be used without restriction like a normal mount. Radunma consumed 5 mana every 10 seconds until it ran out. Ark had 3000 mana so they had to take a break approximately every hour. In addition, Radunma consumed a tremendous amount of energy and needed 4~5 servings of food to recover. However, these downsides were no problem. While Ark’s bag had no empty spaces, he had gathered a lot of ingredients in the snowy mountains and had a surplus of ingredients.

“Well let’s rest here for the moment.”

Ark started building a campsite. He instantly made 5 servings of food using a variety of ingredients and spices.

“Eat, and tell me if you need more.”

Ssak ssak ssak? Ssak ssak.....

Radun swallowed its saliva and looked up at Ark. The look in its eyes indicated that Radun felt sorry for increasing the food expenses.

“It’s okay. You’ve done enough to eat as much as you like.”

Finally Radun began to wave its tail and consumed the food.

Even after growing, Radun was completely loyal to Ark. It was different from Dedric who started behaving badly as soon as he evolved. Therefore he talked to Radun like Roco talked to a puppy. Ark gave it a warm look and took out more ingredients.

“Now, are you guys eating?”

The Dedric began grumbling complaints.

“Sheesh, is this also an experimental food? Damn, you give Radun all the delicious food.....this is favouritism!”

“What’s wrong with new food? It makes you stronger. What more do you want? Are you going to keep complaining about the dishes?”

After Ark shouted, Dedric became frightened and retreated. And then he swelled up like a ball before saying.

“I’ll be delighted to eat that dish!”

“So now you’re happy about eating new dishes?”

“Ey, stop talking.”

Dedric turned his head with a sulky look. In fact, there was a good reason from Dedric’s complaints. While crossing the wilderness in a different dimension, he had seen many ingredients for the first time. Ark cheered because of that but Dedric and Deimos screamed instead. Besides, now the situation was different from before. In the old days, he had to look for a chance before making them eat new dishes. But now there was no free space in his bag. If he wanted to gather new ingredients, Ark had to make space by cooking a dish and forcing them to eat it. Dedric had been hit with bad penalties a few times. But he didn’t dare resist violently now.

There were 3 reasons. The discipline he engrained in them at Lancel Village still hadn’t fallen. And Dedric finally knew how precious food was after starving on the snowy mountains. Even eating spoiled food that could cause diarrhoea was better than starving to death. Ark made two different types of dishes and held them out to his summons.

“These are new dishes. Eat them with gratitude.

“Okay, I get it. I’ll eat.”

Dedric licked the dish and looked relieved before pouring it down his mouth. The last reason Dedric didn’t complain severely was because of this. When using ingredients from this dimension, there was a high probability that dishes with good effects would be cooked. Thanks to that, his summons were able to raise their stats to level 130.

However, there wasn't a guarantee that there would be a good result. As always, survival cooking was a system that relied on luck!

Clack-! Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack.

Deimos swallowed the food without thinking and trembled.

-Deimos has been struck by a headache!

You have made a 'Rancid Soup' using Survival Cooking. The terrible headache will last for 10 minutes and no action will be able to be performed.

It also gave these types of dishes.

"Hahaha, stupid, you just blindly ate that dish!"

Dedric rolled around laughing. He was acting spiteful.

"Soon it will be his turn and he won't be able to act so spiteful."

Ark shook his head and laughed.

'But how long will it be until I find a town? No, does this place even have a town?'

Radun had been crossing the huge wilderness for 6 hours. With the 500% movement speed taken into consideration, it was more like 30 hours. But he still hadn't seen a person or a village. Normally it wouldn't be a problem if there were no towns in this dimension. He wanted to dispose of his items, but his main goal was to obtain a clue about Magaro. He didn't want to just blindly walk around the whole dimension.

'The gate on the snowy mountain has closed so I have no choice but to continue.'

"Now the break is finished. Let's prepare to leave."

Ark got up and shook off the dust. Suddenly the ground started vibrating before something burst out of the earth and sand in front of him. And a huge monster that looked like a slug emerged. It was nearly 20 meters in size!

“Predator!”

Ark drew his sword and shouted. He had met this monster several times in the wilderness. They were monsters that would hide underground and then emerge to swallow their prey. Level 300. Furthermore, their body emitting acid poison with hundreds of maggots sticking to it. Without the darkness attribute bonus, there was a 70 level difference! But Ark’s face was confident.

“It is good to exercise after a meal.”

Ark had been frightened when he first met a Predator. But after the fight started, it didn’t feel that difficult. The Predator looked like it was moving in slow motion. But he had raised his abilities in the ice cave so much that even a 70 level difference wasn’t that hard.

“Wasn’t this guy weak to fire? Elemental sword, Fire attribute!”

Ark used the skill and flames wrapped around his sword. The black sword spewing flames looked truly spectacular! The penalty occurred at the same time and his fire resistance fell to -75%, but he didn’t have to worry because the monster had an acid attribute.

“Okay, let’s see how fast it can be caught. Go, Dedric, Deimos!”

“Yes, leave it to me!”

Clack clack clack clack!

Dedric and Deimos split up and besieged the Predator from both sides. While the Predator faltered for a moment, Ark quickly approached and swung his sword.

Peng, peng, peng, peng!

After the flames exploded outwards, the Predator flinched and was pushed backwards.

-You have dealt a critical hit with Elemental Sword (Fire).

-The Predator is ‘Burned.’

<It will receive 10 damage every 10 seconds for 1 minute>

Since the Predator was vulnerable to fire, it received 20% more damage. And since he dealt a critical hit with Elemental Sword, it received an abnormal state. The Predator screamed as its body was surrounded by flames.

Roaaaaar!

Then the fight truly started. The hundreds of maggots stuck to the Predator was not a decoration. The maggots turned to his direction and spat. It was the acidic poison. The maggots' poison only did 10 damage to him. But the problem was the number. If one hundred maggots spat at him then he would receive 500 damage. Of course, feeling dirty was also a powerful combat motivation. Anyway, these maggots stuck to the Predator frantically continued spitting. Even a warrior with high defense wouldn't be able to endure for long. But the maggots weren't a problem for Ark.

"Spirit of the Cat!"

Nyahhhh-!

The form of a giant cat with golden eyes appeared and roared. Then the hundreds of maggots stiffened and fell to the ground.

"Dedric, Deimos! Kill all of it!"

"Hehehe, ppok ppok. Ppok ppok ppok.....Ha, this feeling while killing. It is really addictive."

Dedric smirked and happily killed the maggots.

When the maggots were crushed, the Predator shrieked with fury and spat. The maggot's spit couldn't even be compared to the amount that the Predator spat out. If hit, his health and the durability of his armour would decrease. But Ark wouldn't be hit by such a simple attack. He used 'Slide' to move sideways and swung his flaming sword. The predator's slow movements couldn't catch up to Ark and it failed to block the attack. After stabbing it a few times, the Predator quickly reached a critical condition.

"Good, go Sprint!"

Ark shot forward like an arrow and swung his sword. He used Drastic Measures and split the Predator in half. All sorts of odd items as well as a yellow liquid splashed onto the ground. It was the prey the Predator swallowed in the wilderness.

“Ugh.....it ate a lot. Eh? The deceased are also here.”

Ark murmured while wiping off all the filth stuck to his body. Something that looked like a person emerged from the Predator. It looked like the zombies that wandered the wilderness. NPC? Monster? They were ambiguous and all they did was wander around. When he first discovered them, Ark thought they were inhabitants of the dimension. The name was also displayed in blue. Although he tried to speak to them, the dead just wandered around with stupid looking eyes. The souls that hadn't been digested by the Predator just scattered again with stupid looks.

‘Well, they’re just like the background.’

“It didn't seem to have collected any items.”

Ark surveyed the corpse of the Predator and clicked his tongue. Normally he would receive quite a lot of items from the Predator whenever he used Drastic Measures. But most of the japtem were half rotting flesh. They weren't items that he would put in his bag.

“Phew! Where is this? Is this hell? Or Heaven? Ah, is it heaven because I'm so nice? Eh? Isn't this outside? Oh, am I alive? Hahaha, I survived! Out of all the people eaten by a Predator, I must be the first one!”

Ark had been moving away when he suddenly heard laughter from the Predator's body. It was the first time he heard a human voice since coming here! He reflexively turned his head. Then he stared with a foolish expression. Something that looked like it belonged to the cockroach species was emerging from the Predator. When he crept out and looked around, he saw Ark and quickly shook his hand.

“It's you. Isn't it? You're the one who defeated the Predator and saved me?”

“Who are you?”

“Me? Ah, my introduction is late. I am called Reid. I am a proud member of the Galgin clan. Do you know the Galgin? We are peddlers who travel around the country. I came to this land because of my curiosity. I wanted to see it just once. But how did I know that I would be swallowed by a Predator? Hahaha, but I’ve managed to live.”

‘Galgin clan? Does that mean that several more races live in this dimension?’

But to have a race that looks like a cockroach.....Anyway, it was clear that the talkative cockroach was one of the races that lived in this dimension. He had finally met an NPC after being in the dimension for half a month. Furthermore, didn’t his profession mean that he could buy Ark’s japtem?

“You said you were a peddler?”

“Yes yes, if you need anything than ask, ah, why didn’t I see it? Usually the Galgin family will not trade when there is a possibility of a fraud but I’ll strike a good deal for my lifesaver.”

Reid untied his bags and pulled out his items. When the dead showed an interest and approached, Reid picked up a stone and threw it.

“Shh, Shh, go to the other side! Damn, stupid things.....”

“What are the Dead called?”

“I don’t pay attention to such things. They’re just idiots. So how about it? Do you like anything?”

“No, I want to sell some items not buy anything.”

Reid shook its antennae in confusion.

“Sell? What are you talking about?”

“I want to exchange my items for money.”

“Money? What is that?”

Reid seemed to be hearing it for the very first time. Ark took out 1 copper and showed him. But Reid just looked at the copper coin with uninterested eyes.

“Well, that’s just a piece of metal. Even if you saved my life, I wouldn’t exchange any of these items for that.”

“Yes? So you’re not selling these things for money?”

“I don’t know what money is, but why would I need useless stuff like that?”

Reid naturally retorted. Exchanging items for items. In other words, Reid was talking about a barter system.

Reid was a peddler who went around the dimension trading. Since he didn’t understand the concept of money, didn’t that mean bartering is the normal system in this dimension? So no matter how much japtem he gathered, there was no method to change it into gold! Ark had expected to be able to exchange japtem for gold and his mood instantly became dark.

“I’m screwed. How will bartering help reduce my bag capacity? Do I have to keep on carrying around japtem? No, there might be something I don’t know.’

Ark thought for a moment before something else popped in his head. What if he managed to exchange a few garbage items for expensive ones? If he kept on doing that then it might be possible to reserve some bag space. Ark asked Reid.

“Then can I briefly look at some things?”

“Look as much as you want. All of them are useable. If the deal is right then I’ll trade.”

Reid proudly pointed towards his items. But Ark was disappointed at the items. Unknown leather, chunks of meat, mushrooms and nuts.....they were ingredients that Ark left behind when crossing the wilderness. Some equipment items caught his eye, but they were made of cloth and the defense was low.

‘Damn, you’re like a cockroach carrying a pile of trash.’

Then Ark suddenly found strange items.

Hollow Steel Dentures (Magic)

Weapon type: Dentures

Durability: 13/50

Attack: 10~15

Weight: 30

User restrictions: Exclusively for vampire summons.

A hollow pair of dentures. These steel dentures were made to replace vampire fangs when the vampire became old and lost their teeth. Only a vampire can use it and it allows them to suck blood more easily. <Option: When Vampirism is used, the skill absorption rate +30%>

Shigashi’s Leather Cloak

Armour type: Mantle

Durability: 13/50

Defense power: 10

Weight: 20

Use restriction: Available for all summons.

A leather cloak made from the leather of the Shigashi goat common in the Netherworld. The Shigashi is an animal known for living in harsh environments so its leather is high quality. Although the workmanship is rough, it is still useful in protecting the body.

The stats weren’t that different from the japtem Ark found. In middle earth, he would receive approximately 1~2 gold for them. But the problem was the user restrictions attached to the item. There were items available for summons? He have never seen that kind of user

restriction before.

“You mean that summons can wear this?”

“Summons? Ah, is that what middle earth calls our races? Huhuhu, were you surprised? The Galgin family knows everything. That’s right, they were made for our species. Although it looks like this, it is a very valuable thing. Normal clothes won’t be able to pass through when something is summoned to middle earth, but these are different. The materials were designed to cross over. Not a lot of species cross over to the other dimension from the Netherworld anymore. So they won’t exchange anything for these items.”

Reid grumbled.

‘Netherworld? This is the Netherworld?’

There was a sudden flash in Ark’s face. So far, Ark only knew that it was a different dimension. But this as the Netherworld? Wasn’t the Netherworld where Dedric, Deimos and Radun lived?

‘I see. That’s why there was an Alamone in the ice caves. I should’ve noticed when talking to the Alamone.....’

Now Ark realized why he couldn’t summon or recall his pets since getting here. Although he opened up a door to summon Dedric and Deimos using Spiritual Power, this was the original world where they lived. It would be impossible to summon them. That’s also why the penalty for dying wasn’t forced recall but losing stats.

‘Radun had been with me since it hatched so it is understandable, but why didn’t Dedric and Deimos know where we were?’

“Eh? You don’t understand. This is the first place we saw. But it’s not where I live. In fact, there is a restriction to the distance we can move when Master summons us from the Netherworld and when we return.”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack.

Deimos nodded and agreed with Dedric’s explanation. It was simple. In the Netherworld, his pets were limited to a particular area and

couldn't leave it. In Dedric's case, he was limited to the vampire area. Because of that he never visited the outside world. As a skeleton, Deimos was restricted to a cemetery. But now they were wandering around the Netherworld.....because they were travelling with Ark, they were probably able to overcome the restrictions. It sounded complicated but it was actually pretty simple.

‘Anyway my pets can use some of these items?’

Equipping items on his summons. He had never thought of it. Then wouldn't it be another way to make his pets grow?

“Will you sell it to me?”

“Well, I'd like to see your items. I said it a while ago, but I'll only trade if the items are worth it since it is difficult to find these items in other places. But I promise to trade if I see something worthy.”

Ark quickly gathered the japtem in his bag and showed Reid. Reid looked around and identified a few items.

“This is good. The leather is high quality. I'll trade you Shigashi's Cloak for 100 of them. And it's not easy finding these bones and herbs. Okay, I'll give you the dentures for 50 of each.”

Reid had pointed to the Mongoose leather and bones and the Seolmocho. He had gathered 1,000 of each item.

“I accept. Let's exchange.”

Ark nodded and exchanged the items. Then he gave the steel dentures to Dedric and Shigashi's cloak to Deimos. Dedric wore the dentures and cheered.

“Oh, this is great? All of a sudden I feel like sucking blood!”

Clack clack clack! Clack clack clack clack!

Deimos also seemed satisfied with his cloak and started jumping. Ark also felt like skipping. He never imagined that he would be able to exchange japtem for items. If he managed to find more items in this dimension then Deimos' and Dedric's stats would go up tremendously.

‘Okay, let’s try to find my pets a full set of equipment before leaving here.’

“Well well, that was a good deal. Now what are you going to do?”

Reid asked after packing his bags with a satisfied face.

“Reid, you said that you’ve travelled all around the Netherworld? Have you ever heard of the name Magaro? He should look similar to me.....”

Ark got to the point. Reid thought for a moment then shook his head and replied.

“Magaro.....I’ve never heard of that name. But I know people who look similar to you that live in a town.”

“There are clans that look similar to me here?”

“Well, it’s the Myutal race. Although originally they were quite ferocious, the Myutal that live here are relatively tame. Ah, that reminds me that, I know a very old man who lives in the mountains there. You might find out a lot of information if you go there. Just tell him that the peddler Reid sent you and you’ll be welcomed.”

“Where is the town?”

“If you travel for half a day then there will be a valley. The Myutal village is there. Anyway, I can’t go to the village so we’ll go our separate ways. I have business elsewhere.”

Reid carried his backpack with a moan and began walking.

“Okay, the town is over there? Radun, transform!”

Ssak ssak ssak!

Radun’s body turned large again and its legs appeared. Ark got on its back and began to run through the wilderness again. The different dimension.....no, the sky in the Netherworld spread out around him.

The Tragedy of the Three Pig Brothers

Pa pa pa pa! Pa pa pa pa!

A large lizard running through the wilderness caused a cloud of dust. It was Radunma carrying Ark. After separating from Reid, Ark traversed the wilderness without taking a break. While ignoring the background and the weather, he ended up running for 1 hour. Finally he found the valley that Reid mentioned. After going a little bit further in the valley, there was a small village.

“Is this a village in a different dimension?”

It was approximately 2~3 times the size of Lancel Village. However, the development appeared quite shabby as the buildings were falling down. The houses were covered with leather and looked like tents. When looked at closely, the tents looked like a refugee camp. Since there was no currency, it could be difficult to gain supplies through barter.

‘I can get the necessary information from this village.’

“Radun, good work.”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

Radun became smaller and attached to his waist. When he walked up to the entrance, he saw the guards wearing leather clothes.

“Blue skin, blue skin. Hahaha, look at that.”

Dedric saw the guard and burst out laughing. Just like Reid said, the Myutal was a race that looked similar to humans. But oddly, their skin colour was blue and the eyes were golden yellow. They looked like a smurf in one of those children’s musicals and Ark felt like giggling as well. But since it was a species he was meeting for the

first, he refrained from laughing and smirked instead. He had to refrain from dropping any intimacy or else he might not obtain any information.

“Dedric, shut up.”

“But it’s funny. Don’t you thing that they look funny?”

“Do you want to become like that?”

“.....I’ll shut up.”

Dedric mimed zipping his mouth up.

“Excuse me.”

The guards tensed up as they saw Ark approach.

“Who are you? I’ve never seen your face around here before.”

“Yes, I’ve only just arrived from an incredibly distant place. After wandering the wilderness for so long, I was wondering if I could take a break here?”

“Hrmm, it doesn’t seem that dangerous.....”

“Of course, we’re a little reluctant to let a stranger into town.”

The guards looked Ark up and down and muttered. The atmosphere seemed a little bit unwelcome. When first arriving in a new village, the degree of intimacy depending on fame or alignment. But those numbers didn’t apply in the Netherworld.

“Do you perhaps know Reid?”

“Reid? The peddler of the Galgin clan?”

“Yes, I came because of his recommendation. He said that the Myutal in this village were brave and tough, but they warmly welcomed visitors with softness and pride in their hospitality. Can’t you spare such generosity for me who has travelled such a long distance?”

“Oh, Reid said that?”

Although Reid hadn't said that, the residents of the Netherworld were quite simple. The guards contemplated for a moment before nodding.

"Indeed, we won't turn away a weary traveller. Okay, you can enter the village. But you'll be kicked out if you cause any trouble."

"Thank you."

Ark smiled and entered the village. But he didn't hear the low voices of the guards speaking from behind him.

"He seemed to have travelled quite a difficult path."

"Exactly. But I didn't know about a tribe where the youths lacked colour."

The Myutal species was divided into a number of tribes. Because Ark looked similar to them, they determined that he was from another Myutal tribe. So they pitied him because he wasn't blue.....so the residents treated him like a handicapped person. But because of their pity, Ark was able to receive a lot of information from the residents.

There were many species who lived in the Netherworld. The Galgin who he met in the wilderness was one of them, and Dedric's clan of vampires and Deimos as a undead were also residents of the Netherworld. In other words, the difference between NPCs and monsters was unclear. An NPC might look like a monster, or a monster that attacked was instead a chaotic NPC.

'Then should I travel around this town with Deimos?'

Except for when there was a battle, Ark always carried around Deimos in his sword form. It was in order to lighten the burden on Radun. And he wanted to prevent the intimacy with the NPCs from being decreased. None of the NPCs would get a good impression of him if they saw a skeleton. In fact, he often had his intimacy decreased on middle earth if he travelled around with Deimos. On the other hand, Dedric was often useful for increasing intimacy. His character was bad, but he could transform into a cute little boy. So he was quite popular among adults and the elderly. But it didn't seem

to be a problem when he looked around the village. He saw some monsters that he would instantly use Dark Blade on if he encountered them in the wilderness. Deimos was nothing compared to them.

However, the most common species among the NPCs was something resembling a human. The Myutal was a species that most resembled humans in the Netherworld. The Myutal were scattered all throughout the Netherworld. Most of them live in their tribes, but there were some Myutal that built a kingdom.

" I once met a traveller who talked about money. But they weren't very tolerable because they didn't like other species. Some tribes don't like the Myutal and are even hostile against us."

The shopkeeper near the village entrance said. The easiest way to get information was to find a store. Since travellers tended to visit the stores first, he could obtain a lot of rumours from there.

"I've listened well. Then can I see a few items?"

"Okay."

The shopkeeper nodded and pointed towards the shelves. It was a village with small development so he didn't expect much. It looked like commonplace japtem but Ark inspected them carefully. Although Reid had a lot of japtem, he had managed to find some items for his summons. Reid said that they weren't that common to find. But Ark was able to find a useable item.

Umma's Sap

Umma's Sap is obtained from an ancient plant.

Even though dozens of Umma trees were picked, it was only enough to fill one bottle. The high density nutrients dissolved inside has the effect of instantly restoring fatigue of the mind and body.

<+400 health instantly restored. But there is no effect when in an abnormal state such as poison or disease>

Nadingka's Fruit

The ancient plant Nadingka is notorious for its grabbing ability. If walking through a forest, you might find yourself yanked by the Nadingka's roots. However, the Nadingka will exert no harm. It will just touch the body of a passing traveller then go away.

<When used on an enemy, movement speed decreases by 50% for 1 minute>

Since the development was low, most of the items were consumption related. However, the effects of the plants were quite good for a primitive world. Umma's Sap recovered as much health as an intermediate recovery potion.

'This item could be sold in middle earth for money.'

But the quantity of the consumable items wasn't abundant. There was only 5 Umma's Sap and 50 Nadingka fruit. Ark exchanged it for some of the leather, bone and japterm he collected in the snowy mountains.

'Damn, there are too many overlapping items taking up bag space. I won't be able to barter recklessly.....I can't grasp whether it is expensive or cheap in terms of money. But if I've managed to obtain useful items that could be sold then I won't complain.....'

Ark finished in the shop and got to his main point.

"By the way, I heard that a wise old man lives in the vicinity of this village."

"Ah, you're talking about Beseutyu-nim."

"Can you tell me where he lives?"

"Just look for the biggest house. That is Beseutyu's house."

Ark left the store and walked on the main path looking for it. It was a small village so it wasn't difficult to find the house.

"Anyone here?"

Although he called from outside several times, nobody answered. Ark waited a while before sneaking a peek through the open door. When he entered, the wall was filled with full shelves. Bundles of crisp parchment was piled on the shelves like a mountain. They seemed to use bound parchment as a substitute for books in the Netherworld. Ark looked at the scrolls before going inside.

“Ah.....damn, unbelievable. What on earth happened? Why haven't they come back yet? Did something happen? I don't know what to do.....”

In a corner, an old man pulled his hair and muttered.

“Excuse me.”

“How am I supposed to do my work now? I really can't endure it.”

“Uh.....I wanted to ask you something.”

“Ah, I'm really anxious and concerned.....I don't want to go ask the stupid guards but I'm so worried.....if something happened then I won't be able to handle it.”

“Excuse me.”

Ark lightly tapped his shoulders, causing the old man to flinch and turn around. With a white beard and hair, the old man had an appearance like Papa Smurf's.

“Hah, what the? Who are you? Why did you just come into someone's house?”

“No one answered no matter how much I called from outside.....”

“So you just came in without permission?”

“No, it's not.....”

“What the hell? What do you want?”

The old man quickly asked without giving him any time to answer.

“I heard that Beseutyu-nim is the wisest person in this village.”

“What the? God dammit, get out! I have no time for a chat!”

“It will only take a short time. Do you perhaps know someone called Magaro.....”

“I said I don’t want to hear it!”

Beseutyu wildly shouted and shook a cane at him. But the next moment, Beseutyu stopped and reached out for Ark’s mantle. Then he asked Ark with surprised eyes.

“You, did you perhaps cross the East Moon?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“So this is Galgashi’s Fur?”

“That’s right. This is Galgashi’s Fur that I got from a mongoose.”

Ark nodded and Beseutyu’s face immediately changed. Beseutyu suddenly spoke in a very friendly voice.

“Ha, Galgashi is very notorious so you must be a great warrior to be able to take him down. Yes, a great warrior deserves kind treatment. Sit down here. But what were you here for? You were looking for a person?”

Did he have dementia? His demeanour changed in an instant.....elderly people didn’t adapt that quickly. Anyway, he was lucky because the atmosphere seemed to be better. Ark nodded and asked.

“Yes, I’m looking for someone called Magaro. Have you heard of him?”

“Magaro.....did he also come over from middle earth like you?”

“You know where I came from?”

“I’m not an elderly person for no reason. I know much more than you do.”

Beseutyu laughed and replied. As expected, the elderly really did know a lot.

“Yes, that’s right. I came here to look for him.”

“When did he cross over?”

“I’ve heard that it’s been hundreds of years.”

“Then I personally wouldn’t have seen him. But there are ways to find out.”

Beseutyu indicated the scrolls piled up.

“My family has recorded everything that’s happened through the generations. That’s right, those scrolls are records of the Netherworld’s history. Isn’t it great? If he ever passed through this area then records of him should be here. You might find the information that you want.

“Can you examine it for me?”

Ark asked in an urgent tone. Then he waited for Beseutyu’s reply.

“Of course. If you accept my request.”

“Yes? Request?”

A person he met for the first time was asking for a favour? Ark looked bewildered as Beseutyu sighed and said.

“Actually, I’m in a very big predicament at the moment.”

“.....Predicament?”

“You probably saw the existence of the dead when you came here.”

“Yes, I’ve seen it a couple of times.”

“Other people don’t know this, but the dead play a very important role in the Netherworld. They’re responsible for keeping the flow of power in the Netherworld balanced.....anyway, the deceased are an indispensable existence in this world. But recently, the deceased in this area have started disappearing.”

Beseutyu said with a serious expression when scratching his beard.

“I told you before that I record everything that happens around here.

In order to confirm if the rumours were true or not, I sent an assistant to Hagel Forest where the dead had been disappearing. But my grandson became curious and persistently followed. I agreed but.....”

“He has not come back yet.”

“That’s right. He hasn’t come back yet so clearly something happened. I was relieved because my assistant is very experience. Ah, Bona.....if something happened to Bona.....I’m so worried about my grandson to the point that I can’t do any other work. But I can’t go after them myself.”

Beseutyu grabbed Ark’s hands and begged.

“Now my request. Could you please find my grandson? If you’ve managed to defeat Galgashi then it shouldn’t be that difficult. Yes? I’ll do anything you want as long as you do this for me.”

‘A quest!’

Ark’s eyes twinkled. The first quest received in the Netherworld. Who knows what kind of compensation it would give. And he could also find some clues related to Magaro’s quest as a bonus. There was no reason to refuse.

“I understand.”

He nodded and the quest information window appeared.

Beseutyu’s Worries

You’ve received a request from an old man in a small village.

Beseutyu records the events that occur in the vicinity. Recently, he sent his assistant and his grandson to Hagel Forest to investigate an event. But some time has been and they haven’t returned or contacted him. Find them in Hagel Forest and return them back safely.

<Difficulty level: C>

‘It’s been a long time since I’ve received a quest.’

Ark stared at the information window. He thought back to the siege, killing Alan and the Dark Brothers incident.....he really hadn’t received any essential quests. But the highlight of a game was its quests. A complicated quest could completely change the pace of a game.

“Then shall I leave?”

Ark left Beseutyu’s house and headed towards the entrance. But there was work to do first before leaving for Hagel Village. The quest had a C rank difficulty. When considering Ark’s level, the difficulty wasn’t that high. But he didn’t know the rules of this world. So he had to update the resurrection point in case he died.

‘My current resurrection point is the red wilderness on middle earth. Since the gate is closed, if I update the resurrection point to here then there is no way to return to middle earth.’

When he first arrived in the village, he hesitated at the idea. But since the beginning of Magaro’s quest was in the Netherworld, he couldn’t proceed with the quest in such a dangerous state. A totem made of bone and leather was placed at the village entrance. He had seen a similar totem in the jungle near Cairo. Although the resurrection point was at the Quartermaster’s in human villages, the totem build at the village entrance took the role of the Quartermaster’s instead. A message window appeared when he touched the totem.

-Would you like to register the ‘Valley Village’ in the Netherworld as your new base?

<Your previous base will be cancelled and it is possible to revive at the totem with a death penalty>

Ark finished the registration and unfolded his map. The red dot which Beseutyu indicated was blinking from a place not that far away. If he used Radun then he could get there in 10~20 minutes.

“Now shall I leave? Radun, transform.....eh?”

While Ark was ordering Radun to transform, he looked at the valley's entrance in surprise. Three shadows emerged from where a sandstorm was raging.

"Wait.....those chubby figures are.....?"

"Huk huk huk, it's a village!"

"Sob, I thought I would freeze and die."

"We also couldn't sleep properly after being chased by monsters....."

"I'm hungry Hyung-nim."

"Hang in there. We'll be able to rest once we enter the town."

The 3 merchants emerged from the sandstorm and approached the village. Yes, it was the Three Little Pigs who had chased after Ark and entered the Netherworld. They dived into the picture full of dreams. They had dreamed that they would find stacks of treasure piled up like a mountain.

"Huhuhu, now all the suffering is over. We'll wait for a chance to hit Ark in the back of the head and intercept the treasure!"

They hadn't chased after Ark with no plan. If the 3 of them tackled Ark then it wasn't possible for him to win. That's because they wandered the auction room, for several days and got their hands on a bag of weapons and tricks. Very few people were aware of the fraudulent weapons so they were positive the weapons would hit Ark in his head.

"Now our suffering will end and we'll live happily!"

Puk puk puk!

The three pig brothers literally became buried in snow. After leaving the gate, they didn't find the treasure they expected. Everything was snow! Only the freezing cold greeted them. And they couldn't even

see Ark who came before them. In fact, the dimensional door to the Netherworld in the cabin changed location every time someone entered it. In other words, the three brothers used the door after Ark and landed in a different location. Then their desperate struggle for survival began. They were merchants more used to handling money. However, they were dumped into the snowy mountains covered with snow and ice. Fortunately, they had prepared to chase after Ark and filled their bags with all sorts of travel related goods. They had thick coats and also bought enough food. And since they had the 'Camping' skill, they were in a relatively better position than Ark. But they were still merchants.

After coming down from the snowy mountains, the wilderness was too dangerous for them. No matter the distance, they would flee from monsters and after repeating this, they finally arrived at the village after running out of food. Meanwhile, Ark had rushed forward on Radun and arrived before them.

"Let's ask about Ark in this town."

"But he's already been here for more than a fortnight."

"He may have already grabbed the treasure and gone home."

Ulmeok cried out in a worried voice. In fact, that was what Buksil was most concerned about. If Ark already grabbed the treasure then all their suffering would be in vain. And after a fortnight had passed, there was no way of tracking Ark since his location was unknown.

"We can't just go back after we came here. We have to see it through to the end."

"Yes, but....."

So the Three Little Pig Brothers arrived at the village.

"It is good to meet you in a place like this."

Then they suddenly heard a familiar voice. Buksil lifted his head and barely swallowed his scream. Surprisingly, it was Ark looking at them with folded arms. Ulmeok swallowed his cry and said to his brothers in a desperate voice.

“Huk, A-Ark. Hyung-nim. It is Ark.”

“I can see that. Damn. Although we were looking for him, to encounter him like this.....”

“What do we do? Should we run away?”

Buksil muttered.

“No. This is fine. After all, it would be over if we couldn’t find him. And it’ll be useless if we run away after being caught. If he has doubts then it would be difficult to secretly follow him to the location. He’ll have suspicions and it’ll be impossible to hit him in the back of the head.”

“But will he accept?”

“Huhuhu, I have an idea. He is simple. He believed us when we previously told him we were fans. He’s definitely the weak type against those kind of things. If we keep on praising him then he’ll be easy. Just watch me.”

Then Buksil poked himself in the eye and turned around. His eyes became bloodshot and tears suddenly flowed from them. Buksil ran towards Ark in that state.

“Aigoo, Ark-nim! It’s so good to see you!”

“Hrm.....what are you guys doing here?”

Ark squinted his eyes and stared at them. Buksil answered with a heavy sigh while tears dripped down his face.

“We’ve been looking for Ark-nim.”

“Me?”

“Yes, actually. Isn’t Ark-nim being supported by the fan club?”

“So what?”

“So what? Our fan club formed thanks to the excellent fighting scene Ark-nim showed. But our members have started declining because they haven’t seen those scenes anymore.”

“So? You want to stop the donations?”

“N-no! Absolutely not. Anyway, we respect Ark-nim so much that we went through a lot of suffering to meet you again. We were wondering if we could promote Ark-nim in order to get more members? So we came up with an idea. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we accompanied Ark-nim on an amazing adventure? If we show a video of the amazing adventure then our members will be impressed. And our donations will increase if the number of members increases.”

Buksil clasped his hands together and entreated.

“How is it? Isn't it a great idea? After gathering the member's ideas, we began to search for Ark-nim. We looked up Ark-nim's achievements as a form of evidence. Then by chance.....it really was by chance.....we heard rumours that you went to the red wilderness and ended up following you here.”

Buksil wiped the tears with his sleeves with a pitiful expression.

“Sob, you wouldn't know how much trouble we went through just to get here. But we endured thanks to our commitment to meeting Ark-nim. It is something I'm truly proud of.”

“Hyung-nim!”

“Younger brothers!”

The three pig brothers embraced each other and cried.

‘How did these children shadow me?’

Ark stared at the three pig brothers playing around with a frown on his forehead. Ark couldn't even laugh at the unbelievable excuse. He already knew that those guys were targeting Magaro's legacy from a long time ago. Ark didn't know how they followed him, but their ulterior motive was to hit him in the back.

‘I should just kill them.’

Although there were 3 of them, they were still merchants. But the problem was that if he killed them, he would obtain a chaotic

alignment. But they wouldn't go away even if he requested it.

‘How.....wait, aren't these guys merchants? Then.....’

Ark suddenly came up with an idea of how to take advantage of the three pig brothers. After organizing it in his thoughts, Ark approached them.

‘I'm really impressed.’

‘Yes?’

‘To think that my fans have such a high impression of me.....but granting your request is a burden for me. Frankly, this place is quite arduous by myself. I won't be able to complete my task and protect you at the same time. In this situation, you might even die because of me.’

‘You don't have to worry about that.’

‘Yes, we are not afraid of death.’

‘We would be willing to die for Ark-nim.’

‘We'll do anything for you, even if it's running errands!’

‘You'll do anything for me?’

A sinister smile then emerged on Ark's face.

‘Okay, then let me ask you something. Have you updated your resurrection place to here?’

‘No. This is the first time here. We were just about to do it.’

‘Don't do it.’

‘Huh?’

‘In fact, I was just in a difficult situation. I've gathered a bunch of items in order to sell it and my bags are full. Unfortunately, I can't sell it in this village so I have a surplus of items.’

‘T-then?’

The three pig brothers suddenly felt anxious for some reason.

“It is simple. 1 of you should sell it instead.”

“You can’t sell the items here?”

“No, so one of you will have to return to middle earth and sell it there.”

“Eh? B-but we don’t know the way back.”

“Didn’t you say your resurrection place hasn’t updated yet?”

“.....!”

The three pig brothers now realised Ark’s intention and became terrified. Yes, if they didn’t update the resurrection point in this world then wouldn’t they revive in middle earth if they died? In other words, Ark was saying to die while holding his items. In fact, this method was often used in online games. It might take some time to get back to the village, so people just died. But it was more used in other games. Most users wouldn’t use such a method in New World since they would lose experience and stats if they died.

“You said you were my fans? Wouldn’t fans who came all the way here do such a simple favour for me?”

“B-but.....”

“Don’t you want to take a video of my adventures? In this situation, I would have to return to middle earth to sell my things. If I have to go back then wouldn’t that be a boring video? Anyway, you don’t need 3 people to shoot a video.”

The three pig brothers had nothing to retort.

“We need to talk about it for a little bit.”

Finally, Buksil took his brothers and withdrew to talk about it. Ulmeok let out a frightened cry.

“H-hyung-nim. What do we do?”

“Um.....He is an evil guy. He obviously considers our lives

worthless. But it's not necessarily a bad thing. Anyway, that guy has extraordinary senses so he might become aware of our goal before we reach the destination. We'll have no chance if that happens."

"Then.....?"

"Ulmeok, you might have to go through a little bit of trouble this time."

Buksil said as he placed his hands on Ulmeok's shoulders.

"You mean I'll be the one killed?"

"We have no choice. If we don't give into his demands then he'll leave. And we can't secretly follow him because he's seen us. We have no choice but to accept the requirements if we want to go with him."

"Sob.....it is terrible."

Tears dripped from Ulmeok's eyes.

"I'm sorry. But Hyung won't let your sacrifice be in vain. I'll do whatever it takes to steal the treasure. When that happens, you'll be laughing as you talk about what occurred today."

"Sob, I understand."

"I'm sorry. Don't cry!"

The three pig brothers burst out crying as they embraced each other.

"Okay. Because we respect Ark-nim. We'll accept your request."

After a while, the three pig brothers returned with swollen eyes.

"Ah, I can live now. Thank you. I won't forget it. So let's sign the contract."

Merchant's agreement.

<Contractor: Ulmeok=Ark>

Ulmeok will sell the items given by Ark and then send the money to Ark's registered mailbox at the Magic Institute. There will be no sales charge and everything will be handled for free.

Ark handed over his japtem after receiving the contract.

"Then.....I'll be going."

Ulmeok looked at his brothers as he spoke tearfully but turning around and went off to die.

"Sob.....Ulmeok, your sacrifice will not be in vain....."

Buksil and Sapjil teared up as they watched their brother get further away. However, there was a wicked smile on Ark's face.

'Heh, they dared to attempt cheap tricks in front of me?'

Ark had no intention of finishing it like this. A lot of monsters in the Netherworld dropped japtem. In other words, once he's filled his bag then the situation would be repeated again. Buksil and Sapjil will be his emergency bags for the moment. Every time he filled up his bag then there would be an excuse to send them away. No, he didn't have to give a serious reason. As long as he received the contract then he might even just let them die during a fight.

'With two guys, I can use it twice in the future!'

Now he didn't have to worry about bag space for a while.

'I'll get rid of them before I search for Magaro's laboratory.'

It wasn't an exaggeration to say that he was truly wicked. Ark was ruthless once he's sunk his claws into an opponent. But there was one problem. He didn't know whether they were serious or not, but Buksil was really recording while he accompanied Ark. If he posted on the public bulletin board then he would reveal Ark's whereabouts. It could become quite a problem for Ark who didn't want to catch people's attention. But if he refused then there was no reason to take them along with him. However after thinking about it, there was no reason to worry for the moment.

“But how are you going to record me?”

“Yes? Well, I’m using an item for video capture.....”

Buksil brought out an item similar to a telescope. In New World it was possible to purchase an item to record videos.

Reggie’s Magic Projector

A luxurious magic projector launched by the Magic Institute.

Using the information from the ancient memory crystals, this magic projector has to technology to record things. However, the memory only lasts for 1 hour and it is sold separately from the projector.

It was a relatively expensive item for a hobby but it was quite popular among the dating couples in New World.

“Really? Then I have to transform myself. Because my fans know me as Dark Wolf.”

Yes, if he turned into Dark Wolf then he would become a different person from Ark. Then there would be no problem if the video became public!

“Now, let’s go?”

Ark transformed into Dark Wolf and smiled, revealing his fangs. The wolf and the pigs.....their relationship was fated.

Hunting the Dead

“Hmmm.....this is also useable.”

Darkness began to spread in the forest. One wolf was shaking his tail and collecting fruits. A wolf with flowing black fur, it was Ark who had transformed into a wolf. Ark had arrived at Hagel Forest 1 hour after he left the village. The distance would only take Radun 20 minutes, but Ark walked there. That was because Radun wouldn't be able to carry Buksil and Sapjil as well.

“Huhuhu, I can now relax and scrape as much items as I want.”

For more than a fortnight, he had been worried about bag space and hadn't been able to pick up everything. Because of that, his stress had piled up. But now he didn't have to worry about his bag thanks to the pigs. No, he had to collect as much items as possible and kill them before finding Magaro's laboratory. So Ark kept on singing as he scraped up items. He found various magic ingredients using 'Magic Detection' in the forest and he couldn't just give it up.

Grrrrrrr.....!

Monsters also appeared in the dark forest. However, Ark would just neatly slice it up before piling the items in his bag. After passing through the ice caves and the wilderness, Ark had raised his stats and there was also the dark attribute bonus.....the monsters in the vicinity weren't capable of threatening Ark. Regardless of the level, but there weren't a lot of people with Ark's stats. Therefore he had an edge while hunting. Every time Ark's bag became heavier, Buksil's and Sapjil's face became increasingly gloomy. Once Ark's bags became full then they knew one of them would have to go and die. The two pigs trembled at the idea of becoming the wolf's lunch.

“Now I've collected most of the ingredients here so shall I earnestly begin the quest?”

Ark cracked his furry hands and began to explore. But the forest

was huge and it wasn't easy to find a clue. Then Radun who had been snooping around licked its tongue and pointed in one direction. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-Radun has used 'Stalking.'Radun has found suspicious footprints leading into the forest.

When Radun used Stalking, the outline immediately became clear.

'Footprints? Beseutyu only sent his grandson and assistant. Yet these footprints indicate at least 20 people. Did I find something unrelated to my quest? No, you never know so I should check it out anyway.'

Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun nodded proudly and indicated the front. The footprint tracks were headed in that direction. Ark followed Radun and tracked the prints deeper into the forest. How far did he go? He was walking along a wide road when he suddenly heard a feeble groan from ahead of him. When he approached, he saw that someone injured was leaning against a tree trunk.

'Blue skin.....a Myutal. Perhaps.....?'

Ark came closer and shook his shoulders.

"Are you okay?"

"Ugh.....w-who are you?"

"I'm here at the request of Beseutyu who lives in the Valley Village."

"B-Beseutyu.....teacher sent you?"

The person raised his head in pain and looked at Ark.

"What on earth happened? Where is Beseutyu's grandson?"

'Dammit.....'

Ark knew what he needed to do in this situation. Usually when he met injured NPCs during a quest, the NPC's health would not

automatically recover. He had to use recovery potions or magic to heal them. The NPC might be holding a clue for the quest so he couldn't let him die. Ark felt like crying and handed him one of his Umma's Sap. After the person recovered their energy, he began to explain the whole story.

"Thank you. I'm called Guran and I work as an assistant for Beseutyu Teacher. I recently received Teacher's request to investigate this forest. But suddenly I met the Nakujuk clan....."

"Nakujuk?"

"They're the Myutal that dominates the Northern region. Unlike us, they're aggressive Myutal and won't hesitate to kill people. I don't understand why, but they have something to do with the disappearance of the dead that Teacher was investigating. I witnessed them putting the deceased onto a wagon with an iron window and leaving. Then.....while I was looking for a way to inform Teacher, I ended up being attacked."

"So what about Bona?"

"I don't know. After they hit me and I collapsed, they seemed to have dragged him somewhere. Ugh, I don't know what those guys are doing with Bona....."

"I have to hurry. Please guide me."

Guran became surprised at Ark's words.

"You're going to help?"

"Why would I come here if I wasn't thinking of helping?"

"B-but those guys are the Nakujuk. There are also 20 of them. Even though I've experienced all sorts of hardships, I was easily defeated by them. You don't know me yet you're still offering to help?"

"How can I let them go when they are capturing innocent people?"

Guran looked at Ark with foolish eyes. He seemed quite impressed. Indeed, it was natural to be impressed with someone who suddenly appeared and offered to risk their life to help him. But

Ark had no interest in Bona's life. He was willing to risk his life because of the quest. And the reason for the hurry in his voice.....

"Okay, the appearance of the hero who can't tolerate injustice. Ah, good. Now moving on to the next scene."

Buksil was standing behind the magic projector and gave a thumbs up. It was the excuse he used to follow Ark, but Buksil was actually filming. When Ark killed the monster, Buksil filmed it on the projector. Unlike a professional who needed to cut and edit, all he needed to do to film a dramatic scene was turn the projector on and off.

At first, Buksil was quite annoying. However, Ark came up with an idea after watching the recordings. It was the first time Ark had seen a scene of his gameplay. But the scene of a black wolf swinging his sword against a giant monster surrounded by trees looked quite cool.

'Wouldn't it be the same with other people watching this scene?'

Once he got the idea, Ark started to become greedy. Since he was transformed into Dark Wolf, his identity didn't matter. So he started putting on an act. Guran looked at Buksil and asked with a perplexed face.

"What's that?"

"It's nothing."

Ark smiled and shook his head.

"Over there."

Guran hid in the bushes and pointed in front of him. After accompanying him for a few minutes, Ark was able to find the Nakujuk clan. Located inside the forest, a group of approximately 20

Nakujuk were gathered around a campfire.

‘They’re not blue?’

The Myutal had different skin colours according to their tribes, with the Nakujuk being red. And next to the carriage Guran mentioned was a cage. It was dark but he could clearly see the deceased souls that were trapped. Of course, he had no interest in the dead. He was there to rescue Beseutyu’s grandson, Bona. Guran looked at Ark with a worried expression.

“It is impossible by yourself. I’ll help as well.”

“No, aren’t you still recovering? Please leave it to me.”

Ark shook his head with a confident expression. The level of the Nakujuk clan was between 290~300. Meanwhile, Ark had reached level 238 in the wilderness. With that dark attribute bonus, that was level 333. Now it was time for Ark to judge his combat power. Since he got quite a lot of stat bonuses, his abilities were higher compared to his level. And the darkness attribute bonus didn’t simply raise his level. It also increased all his stats by 40%. That meant that the stat bonuses he received were also similarly applied. When considering users with 30~40 levels more than him, it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that his combat power was a lot higher.

‘But I can’t just blindly rush in.’

“Dedric, go lure five or six guys.”

“Understood, Master.”

Dedric flew towards the Nakujuk’s campsite. Usually it wasn’t easy for a monster to approach campsites. However, Dedric specialized in these sorts of things. And since he was always luring enemies during battle, he developed new professional skills.

<p>-Your pet Dedric has learned a new skill.Taunt (Beginner, active): Rile up your opponents and induce a strong hostility in them towards you. The angrier you make your opponent, the longer the duration will last and there will be a wider range of effects.</p>

<Range of 10 metres. Mana consumption: 30>

It was a perfect skill for Dedric. Dedric waited patiently for some of the enemies to patrol the perimeter. And after 7 people left the camp, he immediately threw a small stone.

“What the?”

The Nakujuk members turned around and saw Dedric taunting them. They started to feel dirty as soon as they saw him! The Nakujuk warriors pulled out their weapons and rushed towards him. Dedric flew through the branches and lured them into the forest while Ark followed. While the others were paying attention to the noisy fight, they didn’t notice Ark at all who had hid himself with ‘Stealth.’ He aimed for a backstab with the first blow!

“Ugh, what the?”

One of the Nakujuk collapsed and the battle began.

“7 people. It is a little tight but I can handle it!”

Ark swung Gwisal’s sword and plunged among the Nakujuk. The Nakujuk were certainly stronger than normal monsters. Their strength and stamina weren’t that high, and their defense was low since they wore leather clothes. However, their agility and attack speed was beyond imagination. They all used a thin rapier and the speed at which they wielded it was dazzling. Three or four attacks would instantly hit if he looked away even for a moment. But a relaxed smile spread on Ark’s face and he just laughed.

“Shall I test this out? Good, take this, Flash!”

At that moment, Ark shot out a stream of light. Then he moved in a zigzag pattern like lightning in a dark sky and stepped among the Nakujuk.

Susasasasak, Puaaak!

There was a ringing sound, and at the same time a terrifying fountain of blood rose in the air. The 7 of them had been struck at the same time and their health steadily decreased. That was the power of the

new skill set Ark learnt, 'Flash.' Learning as much skills as possible was good. He never knew what combination of skills would create a new skill set. And Ark agreed with this idea. The effect appeared when he raised 'Sprint' and 'Dark Dance.'

The rating of 'Sprint' has been raised after a lot of experience. There is a limit to increasing the chances of survival with a strong weapon or sturdy armour. Escaping is not a shameful behaviour. Indeed, it is foolhardy to continue to face the enemy because of being ashamed by running away. Sometimes having quick legs is more useful than a sword or armour. Since Sprint has reached intermediate, you can consume more mana for a more explosive dash.

<For 5 seconds, speed +75%, Mana consumption: 30>

*Thanks to the combination of 'Sword Hand Combat', 'Dark Dance' and 'Sprint', you have learnt the set skill 'Flash.' (Pre-requisites: skills in the sword (Sword-Hand Combat) series, footwork (Dark Dance) and dash (Sprint) series) Once all the skills in the set reaches intermediate rank, you can learn a new skill (The type and effects of the skill depends on the profession)>

Flash: A mana explosion will raise your attack speed and movement speed to the limit. Your blade can attack any enemy in the battlefield in a flash. However, the technique's focus is on speed so the attack will fall. Thanks to your reaction rate and reflexes increasing, your evasion and critical hit will rise dramatically.

<During the flash movement, you will deal 70% of your attack power to all enemies within a 20 metre radius, and your evasion and critical hit probability will increase by 30%. Mana consumption: 500>

'Dark Dance' and 'Sprint' had a large growth rate after he registered them as major skills. When he swung the sword, he could deal damage to all enemies within a 20 metre radius. It was a wide area

skill using a sword. Although it only did 70% damage, it didn't matter when he used 'Blade Maintenance' and 'Elemental Sword.' In the wilderness, monsters only appeared by themselves. So he never had the chance to use Flash and relied on Dark Blade for damage. But if he was dealing with multiple enemies then it was a 180 degree change.

"Flash, Flash!"

When Ark continuously used Flash, the 7 people had their health decreased to 40%. It was to the extent that it was raining blood!

"Uhh, m-monster!"

The Nakujuk's morale immediately shot down to the bottom.

"Now they're ripe for the picking. Dedric, Deimos, crush them!"

"Bring it on, these red skinned bastards!"

Clack clack clack clack!

Since the start of the battle, they've lost half their health. Under the wave of attacks by Ark and his summons, the Nakujuk warriors collapsed in vain. When 4 people died, the rest became frightened and ran away.

"It's impossible with our skills. Call for help!"

"Not a chance."

Ark took out the Nadingka's fruit and threw it. When the fruit hit them, vines starting wrapping around their limbs. Thanks to that, their movements slowed down until it seemed like they were in a slow motion video. In a blink of an eye, Gwisal's sword cut into them and they collapsed.

"This is unbelievable!"

Guran burst out when he saw Ark handle Nakujuk in an instant. Buksil who was holding the magic projector was speechless and just stared with his mouth open. But in fact, the most surprised person was Ark. His landslide victory against the Nakujuk was completely

unexpected. Since he had an easy time fighting the monsters in the wilderness, he hadn't realised how strong he was now. No, this was much stronger. Even though the 7 Nakujuk was level 290, he only had his health decreased by 40%. In addition, Dedric and Deimos had almost none of their health decreased. It meant there was no burden.

'Perhaps the Nakujuk are incredibly weak?'

He contemplated the thought.

'If it's to this extent, dealing with 10 people.....no, the remaining 15 people will be enough. But will it be boring repeating the same battle? I have to finish it perfectly. What should I try out this time?'

Ark spoke towards the magic projector like he was in a play.

"Well, those guys are too weak. Although I'm certain I can win, a warrior should always be prepared for every situation."

Ark immediately took out his pot and cooked a dish. He mixed the Icecap's Decisions from the snowy mountains with some ingredients and created a survival cooking dish.

-Snowy Ice WaterThe coolness of the icecap has dissolved into the water. It is possible to change the properties when mixed with food. However, if you eat it carelessly then the temperature of your stomach will decrease.

<Additional effects when mixed with food: For 10 minutes, Cold resistance -50%, Fire resistance +50%>

Ark used 'Stealth' to hide close to the campsite holding the ice water. Then he waited until the Nakujuk finished preparing dinner. Ark crept closer and poured the ice water into the pot. Then he withdrew and watched the situation.

"Mmmm, what a delicious smell. Let's eat."

"Hey, it is time for dinner everybody!"

"The guys patrolling still haven't come?"

“Let’s just leave some aside for them.”

“Eh? Somehow the soup tastes better today.”

The Nakujuk warriors started to ravenously eat the soup. Then a little bit of time passed.

“Eh? I’m eating soup but why do I feel more cold?”

“Ohhh, it’s not a joke. Why is it so cold?”

‘Now!’

Ark who had been watching suddenly bolted forward. Buksil hurriedly turned on the magic projector.

“Ark-nim, we’ll cheer you on! I’d like a nice scene!”

Ark didn’t forget to laugh a little bit, revealing some of his fangs.

“Radun, transform! Let’s go Dedric, Deimos!”

Ssak ssak ssak!

Ark assaulted the camp while riding Radunma.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Radunma rushed into the camp and it instantly became a mess. Burning firewood went flying everywhere as the pot overturned.

“What, what the? A black wolf and a lizard?”

“It’s an attack!”

“That’s it! Radun, come back!”

Ark quickly jumped off Radunma who transformed back. In fact, he had rushed forward riding Radunma for the sake of the scene. Of course, Radunma could be used for combat. When fighting on Radunma, he got a 10% increase in attack and defense. But at the same time, there was a fatal disadvantage. His forward thrust was 500% faster, but stepping backwards or changing directions was quite slow. While his ‘Riding’ skill was slowly rising, it was still at a

beginner level. Therefore, it was quite a disadvantage in a battle like this. In a large scale battle, only a knight wearing heavy armour would have an advantage fighting on a horse.

‘Anyway, I wonder if that scene looked good?’

Ark pulled out his sword with a grin.

“Elemental sword, Ice attribute!”

After he used the skill, Gwisal’s sword was wrapped in a white frost. With the Nakujuk in an abnormal state, their movements obviously slowed down.

‘Okay, as expected the effects are showing!’

“Flash!”

Ark moved between the Nakujuk clan like a flash of lightning. He instantly struck 16 of them with his sword and they turned a pale blue. Ark had been aiming for this. Since they already drank the ice water, their cold resistance went down by 50%. When struck with his frost sword, they received further damage and obtained the ‘Frozen’ state.

‘A devastating effect!’

The great thing was that the ‘Frozen’ state overlapped. Every time they obtained ‘Frozen,’ their movement speed decreased by 15%. If three or four of them stacked up then movement speed would decrease by 50%. In addition, once the ‘Frozen’ state stacked up 100% then it was impossible for them to move anymore. That was the main reason a weapon with the ice attribute was incredibly expensive. However, Ark could use his skill to freely add an ice attribute to his sword whenever he wanted. In addition, the use of ‘Flash’ meant that all enemies received the ice damage at the same time. Of course, the chances of a critical hit also increased in this state. Ark was originally a user who relied on his tremendous agility and critical hits. In addition, Flash increased the chances of a critical hit so when he struck 16 enemies, at least 5 of them would receive a critical hit. It was a combination of Survival Cooking, Elemental Sword and Flash! Ark swung his sword five times in a row using

Flash.

“Keuak!”

“Ooooh, c-cold.....”

“I can’t move my body!”

The Nakujuk’s health quickly fell to 50% and they all had the ‘frozen’ state. He had completely sealed the Nakujuk’s amazing speed. The only one who could move at his original speed was Ark.

“Let’s do this before the frozen state wears off. Demonic Opening!”

Kyaaaaak!

Once the seal was lifted, the ghosts jumped out wildly. Although Elemental Sword, the use of Demonic Opening made Gwisal’s damage transcend imagination. The Nakujuk were frozen and smashed to pieces when attacked. Once in a critical condition, the Nakujuk were split open using Drastic Measures like a frozen mackerel. Meanwhile, some of the Nakujuk unfroze and rushed towards Ark but it was already too late. Gwisal’s sword flashed three or four times and they eventually collapsed to the ground.

“Sheesh, didn’t you do too much? We didn’t get a chance to do anything.”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack.

Dedric and Deimos started complaining.

“Heh, I poured cold water on your fighting spirit. Sorry. But you’ll get another chance to fight.”

Ark started saying a monologue while putting his sword away. He was still paying attention to the filming of the movie. While his heart was excited, he deliberately put on a casual expression. 1 against 16. Until recently, it was something he never would’ve dared try. He only had his health decreased by 60%. So it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that it was a landslide victory.

“Indeed Ark-nim. You really are awesome!”

“He handled those many warriors alone.....it is the romance of a true warrior!”

Buksil and Sapjil clamoured together. Indeed, when would a merchant get to see such an incredible sight?

“This is not the time. Please hurry! I have to rescue the innocent people!”

Ark quickly searched the bodies of the Nakujuk warriors. As a humanoid enemy, they had dropped some equipment items.

Myutal's Rapier(Magic)Weapon type: One-handed Rapier

Attack: 20~25

Durability: 23/25

Weight: 20

User restriction: Level 120, Agility more than 200

The sharp rapier used by the Nakujuk clan of the Myutal species in the Netherworld. As a lightweight weapon, it is very easy to use. When equipped with this and the Nakujuk's agility, no enemy's defense can hold out.

<Option: Attack Speed +20%>

Dirty KeyA public key that can open the Nakujuk's iron carriage.

‘Myutal's Rapier? Although the attack is bad for its level, the option of addition attack speed it quite good.’

The reason for the Nakujuk clan's incredible attack speed was influenced by the rapier. When equipped with two weapons with +20% attack speed, it would increase to 40%. With that incredible speed, Ark wouldn't have been able to hold out against a barrage of attacks. It was an excellent choice to use the ice sword.

“Bona-nim, Bona-nim. Are you okay?”

At that time, Guran ran out of the forest towards the carriage. Then a boy who was sitting calmly in the carriage lifted his head.

“Guran, you’re alive!”

“Yes, the warrior Teacher sent helped defeat the Nakujuk clan.”

“Grandfather!”

Bona grabbed the iron window and stared at Ark with eyes filled with respect. Ark smiled and walked towards the carriage. He was looking for the lock when a sudden movement made he flinch. Inside the carriage was a woman wearing a white robe. She was not a Myutal. It was a user like Ark, and a woman that Ark was familiar with.

“La-Lariette-nim?”

Ark stuttered as he looked at her with a stupid expression. Lariette.....the Lariette that he had last seen in Silvana was in the iron carriage. Lariette jumped and looked at Ark.

“Uh, how do you know my name?”

“Huh? What is that?”

Ark was puzzled until he belatedly realized that he had transformed into Dark Wolf.

“Ah, it’s me. I’m Ark.”

“A, Ark-nim?”

“Yes, thanks to several circumstances I’ve transformed myself into a wolf.”

“How did Ark-nim get here?”

“That’s what I want to ask you.”

Ark and Lariette looked at each other with bemused eyes. They never expected this chance encounter to occur. But wasn’t it more

intense because it was unexpected? So far, 8 people have entered the Netherworld. No, it was 11 people if he included the pig brothers. 11 people out of millions of users. Who knew that they would meet each other in such a place? It was indeed a twist of fate.

“I’m here because of a quest.....chasing after the dead.....”

“Oh, wait a minute. I’ll open the carriage first.”

“Huk, w-what the hell? Ark-nim! Above! Look above!”

Ark had been taking out the key to open the carriage. Then Buksil suddenly shot out of the forest screaming. Ark reflexively raised his head. A dark shadow came shooting down out of the night sky. The huge monster roared and blocked Ark’s way.

“What, what the?”

“D-Draken!”

Guran yelled after he lifted his head. The Duerakan was a wyvern like monster. However, it was several time bigger and looked more ferocious than a wyvern. The Draken looked around before opening its mouth and shrieking.

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

Buksil and Sapjil screamed and flopped down onto the ground. Guran also became stiff. This was due to the immense pressure Draken used. However, one of the characteristics of Ark’s profession was a 50% resistance against Fear. With his passive skill ‘Courage,’ his immunity increased to 60%. Ark didn’t shrink away from the shriek at all.

“This bastard.....Dark blade!”

Ark jumped and swung Gwisal’s sword. The Draken grabbed the carriage and flapped its huge wings. Then the whole carriage was lifted. All Lariette could do was cling to the bars.

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

“Lariette-nim! Sprint!”

Ark tried his hardest to catch up but the Draken disappeared into the darkness. It all happened in an instant. Ark looked at the dark sky blankly. Then Buksil walked over and muttered.

“Yah, this time the scene is good. A fateful encounter and a kidnapping, how exciting!”

Ark’s lips crept up and then a cry echoed through the darkness.

“Do you want to go to hell?”

“Ready. Summon the slime!”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members took their positions. Then Jjak-tung tore the scroll.

-Slime’s Time NO.2 scroll has been used.<All slimes within a 500 metre radius will be called. The called slime with help any allies attack enemies for 10 minutes. However, this will be deactivated with the first strike.>
--

A huge slime appeared after they used the scroll.

“Here’s one. Let’s deal with it before another one comes!”

Owaaaaah!

The rehabilitation members flocked around it carrying weapons. After leaving Ark at Salrin’s Towers, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members proceeded with the plan of mass producing Slime’s Immortality Pill. The Meow and thieves had already started gathering the ‘Fangs of a Hook Bat’ while the raccoons were gathering the ‘Roots of a Mandragora that has received moonlight.’ Thanks to that, Lancel Village had already gathered a considerable amount of ingredients. The remaining ingredients was the ‘Unicorn

Horn' and the 'Corrupted Fairy Wings.'

But Ark was procuring those ingredients, so JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members started hunting for the Slime's Essence in Cairo's underground labyrinth. In fact, 'Slime's essence was the most important ingredient that they couldn't obtain using money. So Ark made copied of the skill onto scrolls and the rehabilitation group went hunting slimes. However, the pollution slime had a property that allowed them to evade most physical attacks. Since the rehabilitation members didn't have a magician, it was a difficult opponent for them. So they came up with this method.

"Now, start. Everybody ready! Haaayaahh!"

JusticeMan grabbed the slime with both hands and ripped it apart. Then something fell out of the slime onto the ground. The form of the slime was similar to a water balloon. Once it broke apart for a little bit, the viscous liquid fell to the ground along with the nucleus.

"Now, all together!"

The rehabilitation members stampeded towards the nucleus. Once it was destroyed, the slime exploded everywhere.

.....It was definitely a crude way of hunting!

Anyway, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members manages to defeat the slime using this method. The great thing about Slime's Time was that the slimes were friendly unless they were attacked. Therefore they could leisurely handle one slime at a time. In addition, sometimes the slime would handle the polluted skeletons that appeared.

"Wah, here's another one!"

Roco was gathering the japtem and lifted up a Slime's Essence.

"Hehehe, then that is the 5th one?"

"Once the rest of the ingredients are gathered then we can create 5?"

"Besides, the slimes give quite a lot of experience."

One rehabilitation member yelled.

“Yesterday I’ve dropped by Lancel Village and they’ve gathered the rest of the ingredients. All that’s left is the Unicorn Horn and the Corrupted Fairy Wings.....”

At the moment, Roco suddenly felt a chill as she trembled.

“Roco, what’s wrong?”

“I don’t know. I just suddenly felt a chill.”

“Are you getting a cold? The weather these days is quite chilly.”

JusticeMan said with a concerned voice. Roco muttered in confusion.

“Really? Somehow I don’t think so.....”

“But what if it is a cold? Today you should exit early and take a rest.”

“Hrmm.....”

Roco scratched her head and looked uncomfortable.

‘That’s weird. Why do I feel so anxious? Somehow I feel like something very unpleasant happened.....perhaps something happened to Ark oppa? Don’t tell me he attracted another shrew fox? It can’t be.....ah, I can’t leave Oppa alone. The world is filled with too many foxes.’

A woman’s intuition truly was scary. It was particularly fearful when it came to another woman.

‘I have to stop it. This weekend I’ll drag him out on a date no matter what.’

The girl vowed to do so.

Stabbing Ark to Death

Rain poured from the dark skies. With an abrupt roaring, thunder and lightning flashed among the dark clouds. While following a shadow, lightning ripped through the darkness. Black and white shadows were seen flying through the sky.

Kaaaaaaa-!

Four stingrays were flying through the heavy rain.

“Sheesh, this weather is insane. Guran!”

Ark shouted as he clenched the stingray’s reins tightly.

“If the thunder hits then a serious incident will occur. Let’s fly lower between the valley.”

“I understand. Hiyah!”

Guran twisted the reins forcefully and the stingray folded its wings and shot downwards. The rest of the stingrays followed closely through the valley. Ark could hear Buksil and Sapjil screaming from behind him.

“Hieeee, we’re falling!”

“Hold on tight! I-I-I-If they miss then it’s the end!”

“Kikikiki, look at those faces crumple. It’s just like looking at a balloon deflating.”

Dedric cackled and laughed. Yes, Ark and his companions were flying through the air on stingrays.....let’s try to explain how this happened. If we revert to the moment Draken stole the carriage away, Ark sent Dedric chasing after it. But after a while, Dedric returned with a tired face.

“I made a mistake, Master. It is impossible to catch up with it.”

“This good for nothing fellow!”

While Ark was berating Dedric, Guran interrupted him.

“I know where the Draken is going.”

“You do?”

“Yes, the crest of the Nakujuk clan was stamped on the Draken’s neck. Obviously the Nakujuk had been breeding the Draken. Then he must be going to the Hill of Despair. The Nakujuk have a base there.”

“Do you know the location of that place?”

“Of course.”

Guran nodded and added.

“But no matter how fast you are, it’ll take two full days on horseback to reach the Hill of Despair. Furthermore, there is a steep mountain that blocks the path and it is too dangerous to cross it. The Nakujuk clan aren’t afraid of threats because of that mountain.”

‘Damn.....’

“I have a way. But I have to return to the village in the valley.”

So Ark returned to the valley with Guran. Beseutyu also heard that his grandson Bona had been captured by the Nakujuk.

“Aaaaah, I knew it! I knew it would be like this! I shouldn’t have let him go.....now it’s all over. Ah, Bona!”

Beseutyu was plucking his hair and crying when Guran said.

“Please relax Teacher. It’s not the time for this.”

“How can I calm down now? Huh? This is all because of you. You couldn’t defend Bona.....”

“I’ll receive any punishment you want. But before that, don’t I need to rescue Bona-nim?”

“You idiot! You think you can rescue Bona from the clutches of the Nakujuk?”

“It is possible with that person.”

Guran looked at Ark with eyes overflowing in trust.

“I saw his skills with my own eyes. A normal Myutal can’t compare to that person’s unusual martial arts ability. He’ll definitely be able to rescue Bona-nim from the Hill of Despair.”

After Guran’s description, Beseutyu wept and grabbed Ark’s hands.

“Oh, yes. I can only believe in you now. Please rescue my grandson.”

“Don’t panic. I’ll bring him back no matter what.”

Ark nodded and the quest information window updated.

Quest has been updated.

Beseutyu’s Worries= Rescue Bona!

Although you have found Bona in Hagel Forest, he has been kidnapped by the Draken of the Nakujuk clan. Beseutyu is on the verge of insanity worrying about his grandson Bona. He might really go crazy. If you want to obtain information from him, you should chase after Draken and rescue Bona. But this mission won’t be easy. Since the Hill of Despair is the base of the Nakujuk clan, there is no guarantee that you or your colleagues will live.

<Difficulty level: B>

It connected to a B ranked difficulty quest. It was the first time he saw a B ranked quest. But Ark had no choice. He had to complete it if he wanted to receive the desired reward from Beseutyu.

‘I can’t believe I met Lariette-nim here.’

His mind was very confused. She was a special existence for Ark.

Love at first sight.....the expression was a little bit exaggerated, but from the first moment he felt something strange that was difficult to put into words. In that situation, the simple hand that she stretched out meant a lot more to him. But his feelings was closer to

admiration or idolizing than love. But he had given up when he saw her with Alan. However fate was truly weird. After all that had happened, to meet in a place like this.....

‘Anyway, I can’t just pretend I didn’t see her.’

He had to complete the quest and rescue Lariette.

‘Since it requires the same actions, I don’t have to choose between the two goals.’

“Now you have to hurry. Come over here.”

Beseutyu lead them outside the village to a place close by in the valley. He belatedly realised that there were a lot of Myutal trainers. Their job was to capture wild animals and tame them. That was the reason why there were many monster NPCs in the Valley Village. It was in order to use the tamed skyrays flying through the sky. Ark had often witnessed skyrays flying above him in the wilderness.

“I’ll guide you until the Hill of Despair.”

Guran said as the skyray rose towards the sky. So the desperate Ark and his party rode the skyrays towards the hills. They quickly passed through the wilderness, the stone forest and the river of light. After 1 hour the storm erupted and they reached the final hurdle, the steep mountain.

“When you pass through this valley, you will see the Nakujuk’s home.”

Guran shouted as they flew through the storm. The skyrays quickly passed through the valley where sharp rocks rising out of the ground. And just as they were leaving the valley, a loud shriek was heard above them.

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

Guran reflexively lifted his head and paled.

“D-Drakens.....!”

“The attack is coming. Move!”

Two Drakens shot towards their party. Ark quickly pulled the reins and stopped the skyray. Then the claws of the Draken passed right by him. Guran also sharply turned and avoided the Draken's attack.

"Damn, I never thought I would be attacked in this situation."

Ark glanced around him. In order to avoid the lightning, they had flown downwards towards the valley with sharp rocks. Now there was no space to land on the ground. In other words, he had to fight against the Draken in the air! But it wasn't easy to ride the skyray, let alone swing his sword properly.

"I have no choice but to try. Dedric, while I deal with this guy, go and distract the other one so that it doesn't attack Guran and the pigs!"

"M-me?"

"Isn't that obvious? Just hold on until I'm done!"

Ark yelled and flew towards the Draken.

"Dark blade!"

Ark wrapped the reins around his body and swung Gwisal's blade. However, this was the sky and it wasn't difficult for the Draken to avoid his attacks. This aerial combat would be more difficult than he thought. Unlike the ground, it could suddenly narrow the distance at a tremendous speed before increasing the distance again. Attacking when the gap was only 1 metre was more difficult than he thought. And while he had been riding Radun, his 'Riding' skill was still only beginner level. It was hard to control the skyray and catch the timing to attack. On the other hand, the Draken could freely attack Ark while flying through the sky.

Snap!

The Draken's claw scratched his shoulder and he immediately lost some health. But the problem wasn't his health. Draken now knew Ark's weak point. It was the skyray! Draken quickly turned around and attacked the skyray. After a few minutes, the wings of the skyray were severely ravaged and torn.

‘Ugh.....I won’t be able to survive in this situation!’

The wounded skyray struggled to stay in the sky. One of its wings was almost torn off and its altitude gradually decreased. After two more attacks, the skyray screamed and started falling. Ark completely lost control of it and the Draken immediately rushed towards Ark.

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

‘Oh my God!’

Ark felt dizzy looking at the fangs rapidly approaching. If he fell into the valley where the sharp rocks emerged like needles, it would be the end. At that moment, Ark instinctively took out the saw blade. Then he swung the whip towards Draken. The whip wrapped around the Draken’s fangs and Ark kicked the skyray’s head and flew into the sky.

Kwadududuk!

The skyray was crushed in the Draken’s mouth. Meanwhile, Ark used the whip like a rope to climb onto the Draken’s back.

‘This bastard, it thinks it can fly around freely?’

Ark squeezed the Draken’s neck with his legs and changed weapons to Gwisal’s sword.

“Take this, Demonic Opening. Dark Blade!”

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

After Ark used Dark Blade, Gwisal’s sword was buried between the sensitive ears! The Draken yelled and rampaged like crazy, trying to throw him off. After a few seconds, gravity grabbed hold of his body and he started to slip. However, Ark was already crazy. He bent his neck backwards while trying to grab on and stabbed the head. The continuous backstab steadily drained the Draken’s health. After it fell into a critical condition.....he used Gwisal’s sword to slit its throat. A tremendous amount of blood poured out like a waterfall. The Draken reflexively flapped its wings and struggled to

stay in the sky like a headless chicken.

[-Your level has risen.]

In the midst of it, he also gained one level.

“Aaargh, M-Master! I’m dying! Ack!”

On the one hand, Dedric had lured the remaining Draken and was currently dying. Although Guran was steering the skyray and trying to help him, the situation was still dire. Dedric was in a critical condition, while the wings of the skyrays that Guran and the baby pigs were tattered and barely hanging on.

“Aaaaah, help me!”

Even in this situation, Buksil showed his professionalism and turned the magic projector on. However.....Ark was also falling down with the Draken. It was truly a desperate situation!

“Radun, pick up Draken’s items.”

In these circumstances, Ark still didn’t forget about the items. Radun flicked its tongue and collected the items on Draken’s body.

“Dedric, fly towards me!”

“U-understood! Ack, it is coming!”

Dedric approached Ark with the Draken chasing close behind him. At that moment, Ark flew towards Dedric and the approaching Draken.

“Eh? M-Master.....stepping on my back.....that’s impossible.....ugh!”

Ark used Dedric’s head like a stepping stone and landed on the back of the chasing Draken. The situation that unfolded was similar to before. He grabbed onto the Draken’s neck using his legs and used Dark Blade like crazy! The health of the Draken quickly became low. But this guy was braver (?) than the first Draken. When it fell into a critical condition, it immediately shot towards the needle valley. Instead of having its throat slit by Ark, it chose being impaled by rocks as its method of death.

“Ark-nim-!”

Guran screamed and flew towards him. However, the Draken was already about to hit the ground!

“I’m not going to die together with a guy like you!”

Ark grabbed the Draken’s head and turned it. The Draken instinctively opened its mouth and bit Ark’s hand. No, it actually bit Ark’s sparkling sword.

“You stupid lizard, Riposte!”

He used counter attack against the fangs! Then his chain skill Riposte was activated. It pushed the enemy back 10 metres. But when Ark unwound his legs from the neck, he was pushed back and thrown into the air. On the other hand, the Draken accelerated and crashed into the ground at an even greater speed.

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

The needle like rocks skewered the Draken.

“Ark-nim. Here!”

Guran finally reached him and shouted as he stretched out his hand. Ark grabbed the hand and Guran looked at him with admiration and respect.

Ark just gave a sigh of relief and climbed onto the skyray. The skyray had its wings torn by the Draken so it was difficult for the stingray to carry 2 people. No, even without Ark, Guran and the pig’s skyrays were gradually flying lower.

“Please just hold on a little bit more. Once we leave the valley then it’ll be the Nakujuk’s home!”

Ark used ‘Nursing’ to help the skyrays regain some strength. And it spread its wings to glide for a little bit.....and they finally escaped the sharp valley. Then he saw a huge building with some demonic statues.

“We did it! It’s the home of the Nakujuk clan!”

The place that Guran pointed to was a building with a strange architecture. It looked like a tower built underground..... A hole was drilled into the hill like a huge crater. And the buildings were arranged around the edge and spiralled underground. Looking from the sky, he could see an altar deep underground.

‘This is the destination?’

That was what Ark thought. The skyray suddenly fell out of the sky and crashed into the ground. Fortunately, the skyray used the last of its power thanks to Ark’s nursing and managed to avoid giving them any fall damage. When Ark got off the skyray, a message window appeared in front of him.

Abyss of Despair

After passing through the sharp valley, you have arrived at the Nakujuk’s home. This place is called the Abyss of Despair and it used to be the Holy City before the Nakujuk came. But the Nakujuk caused bloodshed and carnage. The tragic history of the Holy City is evidenced by the bloody smell that permeates this place. Even those armed with sword and shield cannot be assured in the Land of the Dead. To enter here, tenacity is needed more than courage.

<Explorer’s Knowledge: New dungeon discovered bonus (Skill points: 10)>

“Phew.....this seems to be the destination.”

Ark ignored the threatening demon statues and took out his pot. After releasing Deimos’ transformation, Ark cooked a variety of dishes to restore the health and mana of Ark and his pets, as well as increase their stats in preparation for the dungeon. There was no time. He couldn’t afford to hesitate.

“Let’s go, now it is time for the real threat.”

Chiing.....

Once again the magic projector was busily filming behind Ark.

“Flash!”

A ray of light shot through a group of Nakujuk warriors. 10 Nakujuk instantly had their health decreased. Not only did the Nakujuk lose some health, they also became ‘Frozen’ and had their movements slowed. It was the ‘Flash’ and ‘Elemental Sword’ combo attack.

“Now, Dedric, Deimos. Gather all of them in one place!”

“Okay! Over here stupid!”

Clack clack clack clack!

Dedric and Deimos gathered the Nakujuk into a corner. Deimos’ shield was quite effective in cornering an opponent.

Daeng kang!

When Deimos hit them with the shield, the Nakujuk wobbled and retreated. In fact, normally Deimos’ focus in a battle was more defensive than offensive. His offense wasn’t high and he needed to block any attacks when Ark plunged into a group. While protecting Ark’s back, he normally prevented any enemies from escaping. But using a shield to block also needed its own tricks. He had to effectively use the shield in order to cut off an enemy’s retreat. And after repeating those sorts of battles, Deimos finally realized the trick of using a shield.

You pet ‘Deimos’ has manifested the ability of a Skeleton Knight.

Shield Stroke (Beginner, Passive): Deimos has inherited Skeleton Knight Warwick’s abilities. After accumulating more experience, he will have the opportunity to learn Warwick’s diverse skills. One of the most basic techniques is using the shield to strike an enemy.

<Damage to enemies when using Shield Stroke +20%. When pushing an enemy, +10% chance to trigger stiffness>

While Dedric awakened his vampire ability after fighting Dunphil, Deimos awakened the power of a Skeleton Knight. Perhaps if he awakened more skills then Ark would be able to utilize him more in a battle. Therefore, Deimos became more aggressive in a fight after he evolved. Since Ark insisted on him defending, 'Shield Stroke' was the first offensive skill Deimos learned. However, Ark didn't care even when he learnt the skill. Honestly, Ark felt like the skill he had learnt after much difficulty was quite trivial. He didn't need to push an enemy with the shield skills. When Deimos used the skill, his damage only increased by a little bit and there was a 10% chance of causing stiffness. It was also a basic skill for anyone with the warrior profession.

'Still, any attack skill would be helpful at the moment.'

Deimos went around hitting the Nakujuk with his shield. Normally their speed would be too fast to follow, but after 'Frozen' stacked up many times, their movement speed was at the lowest possible.

"That's it. Radun, sword! Blade Storm!"

The sword in Ark's hands exploded. The sharp sword fragments wrapped around the Nakujuk, causing a whirlwind. The Nakujuk were struck and collapsed one after the other. Only 4 Nakujuk barely survived.

"Demonic Opening!"

Kiiyaaaaaak-!

A piercing wail emerged as Demonic Opening was used. Thanks to the enormous damage, the Nakujuk couldn't hold out and eventually died. It was an amazing skills parade! The scene was repeated dozens of times. The Abyss of Despair was home to a large number of Nakujuk. He came across as little as 10 and as much as 30 troops at one time. In addition, the distance between troops was small so he other ran into other troops while fighting.

'I have to lure a suitable number and take care of them with a lightning fast battle.'

He urgently moved forward. Whenever he thought of Lariette, Ark became more urgent and proceeded quicker into the dungeon.

‘I should avoid fighting too many enemies.’

Therefore Ark used ‘Stealth’ to wander around. The structure of the dungeon twisted like a pretzel and led downwards. It was a simple structure but the inside was complicated like a maze. Since he couldn’t see around the corner, there might be a unit of Nakujuk warriors waiting there. In order to figure out the terrain, he hid using ‘Stealth’ and checked every corner to see if there was a unit. Once he figured out the terrain and enemy placement, he used Dedric. Dedric was excellent at provoking using his ‘Taunt’ skill! If two units were too close to each other than Dedric would lure one away. Then Ark and Deimos would block their escape.

“Guran, Buksil, Sapjil, stay in the corner!”

“Yes, yes!”

The three of them immediately went to the corner and Flash was used. Ark used Flash three or four times. It wasn’t just Flash. It was the combo of Elemental Sword with the ice attribute and Flash! Using that combo, the group instantly lost 40~50% health. Then he followed up with the incredible damage of Blade Storm or Demonic Opening. A truly powerful combination! Of course, using so many skills immediately made his mana drop to the bottom after each battle. But he had a surplus of food so it was no problem. In addition, didn’t he have Umma’s Sap to restore health in an emergency? Thanks to that, Ark had no obstacles. It was possible to do down to the 20th floor of the basement in only 1 hour.

‘There’s only 3 more floors to go down.’

Ark was able to confirm this thanks to a balcony in the middle of the floor. While flying on the skyray, he knew that the altar was on the bottom floor. And there were iron doors on either side of the square. Bona and Lariette were probably trapped somewhere behind the doors. And because of the difficulty of the quest, there was likely to be a boss.

‘It doesn’t matter if I just jump off here, but I have to take care of the Nakujuk or else they might attack me from behind.’

“Okay, you can put away the corpses.”

Guran and the little pigs began to clean up. Since it was an enemy’s stronghold, sometimes Ark would randomly come across people patrolling. If they saw bodies then the enemy troops would attack from behind. Therefore he needed to hide the bodies at an appropriate place. In the meantime, Ark checked his equipment and used maintenance where needed.

‘I got quite a bit of experience and items from handling those troops.’

Since he killed an average of twenty people at once, his experience shot up like crazy. In addition, he used Drastic Measures approximately 50% of the time and got an extra 1.4 experience. Thanks to that, he raised his level several times in a few hours.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +350		
Fame	9,075 (+500)	Level	242
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Battlefield, Jackson’s Hero, Great Adventurer		
Health	3,795 (+150)	Mana	3,985
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	460 (+28)
Agility	620 (+55)	Stamina	710 (+20)
Wisdom	85 (+10)	Intelligence	768
Luck	100 (+30)	Flexibility	92
Art of	46	Affection	131 (+10)

Communication			
Resilience	276		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
* <King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Wind Spirit's Boots (Shoes): Agility + 30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Slide' available			
Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.			
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available			
Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%			
Mind's Eye (Ring): 'Mind's Eye' enabled			
Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds			
Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%			
* 40% increase all skills in the dark.			
* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)			

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* Skill points: 10

Ark was level 242! When he applied the dark attribute bonus, he was level 338 which was a lot higher than the Nakujuk warriors. And 60% of his bag was already filled with japtem.

‘I’ll have to send one of those guys back soon.’

Ark glanced at Buksil who was turning on the magic projector. He had to protect them until then. Ark was also acting cautiously because of them. If he was alone then Ark would be able to escape, but it was impossible with Guran and the baby pigs.

“Well, wait here please. I’ll go and scout the area.”

“I understand.”

Ark completed his maintenance and scouted around using ‘Stealth.’

‘That path leads down the 3 floors.....it should take 10 minutes to reach the bottom.’

Dong, dong, dong, dong!

Then, there was the loud ringing of a drum. Ark felt his heart suddenly fall.

‘What, what the?’ Has a patrol found the corpses?’

The problem he was worried about occurred. If they found the dead bodies then the entire dungeon will enter emergency mode. The monsters would become more alert and the battles more difficult. In some cases, all the monsters in the dungeon would gather where the bodies were discovered.

‘Damn, how many times have I told them to put it away carefully.....’

Ark was torn about what to do.

“Oooh, it is time for the ceremony.”

“Tamura-nim has called us.”

“Gather all the soldiers around the altar.”

The Nakujuk clan rushed down the stairs.

‘Ceremony? What is going on?’

Anyway, the situation he was concerned about hadn’t happened. But clearly something else was occurring. Ark immediately looked down at the altar from a balcony.

“We finally caught up.”

Jewel muttered as she stood in front of the demonic statues.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, there’s no doubt. He’s in this dungeon.”

Jewel checked the radar of Mana Perfume and nodded. The red dot in the middle of the screen blinked and a grid was drawn as a scale. Because Mana Perfume was applied to the Wind Spirit’s Boots, the red dot indicated Ark’s location. After entering the Netherworld, they moved in a straight line according to the radar and caught up with Ark.

“He descended the mountain and is at the bottom of this dungeon.”

“There is only one exit as well.”

“Now we’ve caught him.”

Jewel, Duke and the Hermes members smirked as they looked at the entrance. They had only been in the Netherworld for a few days. Because they were using the radar to chase Ark, it was possible to move in a straight line and no wander. That didn’t mean they had no trouble. Although it wasn’t as much as Ark and the Three Pig Brothers, they also suffered in the Netherworld over the last few days. Because of that, they completely looked like beggars.

“Still, we were quite lucky.”

“That stupid old man in the village. He just handed over the mounts once we said we were friends of Ark.”

“Thanks to that, we’ve managed to catch up while he’s still in the dungeon.”

That’s right. The reason they were able to catch up with Ark so fast was because of Beseutyu. When they looked for rumours about Ark in the village, Beseutyu came running. And when they said they wanted to help Ark, he immediately lent them some skyrays. Then Duke spoke in a slightly uncomfortable voice.

“But isn’t it a little weird?”

“What?”

“We encountered quite a lot of monsters coming here.”

“So what?”

“So weren’t most of the monsters level 300? Moreover, isn’t this the lair of the Nakujuk? Then how could Ark get past all those monsters and enter the dungeon?”

“That old man said that he only lent 3 skyrays to Ark. His previous colleagues weren’t there. They must be people he helped in this dimension. No, that is obvious.”

Duke's mouth twisted at the answer.

"He has two users with him. If we include the NPC then it is 3 people. Meanwhile we have 10 people. It shouldn't be a problem. Since they're colleagues of Ark, we can't leave them alone."

"It is like you said."

Duke nodded. Apart from Jewel and Duke, there were 8 other members of the Hermes guild. Since their party had a combination of classes, they easily dealt with the groups of Nakujuk.

"That guy cleaned out most of the monsters in this dungeon. We just have to smash any of the remaining people."

"I hope he hasn't killed the boss yet."

"I don't care. As long as we catch Ark."

Jewel laughed and took out a bunch of scrolls. The first thing they did when leaving Silvana was obtain some scrolls. [Robbery], [Seize], [Peek], [Unlucky].....all the scrolls were designed to steal items. Now all they had to do was kill him.

"Come on, let's go. It is time to pay him back."

So the group intent on stabbing Ark to death entered the Abyss of Despair.

'Phew.....How did this happen?'

Larriette sighed and looked around. She was trapped in a carriage with dozens of the dead stared at the sky. Larriette stared at one of

the deceased.

‘This must be him.’

She knew the identity of this deceased person. The reason she came to the Netherworld was because of the boy ghost. Thanks to Alan, she had to go to the Netherworld to rescue the soul of the Holy Knight.....at the gravestone, the boy ghost said that he would guide her to where the Holy Knight was. So she saw the deceased in front of her as soon as she entered the Netherworld. She could recognize the ghost of the Holy Knight with one look. Unlike the other deceased, he had a beautiful silver necklace hanging from his neck. But he remained silent no matter how much she used ‘Sensitive Soul.’ He just wandered around while drooling. Eventually, Lariette had no choice but to follow him. She didn’t know what would happen if he died because of monsters. So it was the first time she fought to protect others in the game. Therefore there were many things she had to learn that she was unaware of. But luckily, there were only wild animals in the forest that the dead were wandering around. Of course, some of them were strong monsters so she had to run away but she also learned new skills and raised her level. Then the Nakujuk clan came hunting the dead and caught her.

‘Now what?’

Sob, Sob.

Then, she heard some helpless cries from the side. After she was caught, a little boy was also captured.

“I’m afraid. I miss my grandfather.”

“It’s okay, it’ll be okay.”

Lariette soothed the boy as she hugged him.

“But my grandfather called the Nakujuk the most brutal of the Myutal clans. We’ll be eaten.”

“No it won’t. Didn’t you see? There are people trying to rescue us. That person won’t leave us like this. He’s probably already close by.

No, I have no doubt that he is near.”

“R-really?”

“Yes, that person.....he is really strong.”

Lariette smiled brightly as she said that. Then, there was the sound of drums and the iron doors opened.

‘What on earth? This seems bad.....’

In the meantime, Ark had been looking down at the altar from the balcony. There were 200 members of the Nakujuk clan congregating around the altar. Then like a cult, the Nakujuk all bowed on the ground and chanted.

“Tamura!”

“The absolute Myutal!”

At that time, the iron doors on one side of the altar opened and someone emerged. It was a 10 metre giant. The giant wearing a robe crossed to the altar and shook a stick made of bone. Then he lifted back his hood, revealing red eyes and raised his stick.

“Finally the time has come!”

A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

[-The boss monster, Master Necromancer ‘Tamura’ has appeared!]
--

‘Boss monster!’

Just like he expected, there was a boss monster in the Abyss of Despair. Level 500. It would be a tough battle. Anyway, Tamura

brandished his cane and made a grand speech.

“We have been living in the darkness for a long time. But now, our period of suffering and perseverance has ended. Today the power of the great darkness will be awakened! Using this power, the Nakujuk will once again rule the Netherworld.”

“Oh, Tamura!”

“In order to obtain the power to rule the Netherworld, we must grasp it using the Festival of Blood and Flesh! Then no one will be able to stop us! Behold, this is the crystal that contains the true darkness! The form of the God that we serve!”

Tamura forcefully struck the floor with his cane. Then a small area of the square disappeared. A form emerged from the endless darkness.....the dark shape moaned and began to squish together. An incredibly ominous aura swirled in the square. Tamura raised his head and looked at the sky through the open ceiling.

“Today is the first day of complete darkness to occur in 10 years! Even the celestial gods are swallowed by the darkness. This is the perfect opportunity to resurrect the darkness! Now, prepare the sacrifices!”

‘Huk, that is.....!’

Ark abruptly flinched. The doors on the other side opened and the Nakujuk came in dragging 30 carriages. The deceased were trapped inside the carriage. And somewhere in the midst, the carriage that the Draken kidnapped contained Lariette and Bona.

“Start!”

At Tamura’s command, one of the carriages fell into a hole. After a moment, the black spirit bubbled up and swallowed them. With a violent sound, the dead people melted down and were absorbed in the darkness. At the same time, the aura became even more sinister.

‘What, what the? How am I going to do this?’

Ark became baffled. If he left Bona and Lariette trapped then they would soon fall inside the pit. Ideally he wanted to save Lariette but Bona was the more urgent problem. Although Lariette could resurrect, Bona was a NPC. If he died then the quest would fail. But he couldn't just blindly jump into the square. There were 200 Nakujuk and the boss. No matter how strong he was, it wasn't possible for Ark alone.

'Dammit, why did he appear before I killed all the Nakujuk?'

After looking at the situation, it was obvious that Tamura appeared after certain conditions. This condition was probably midnight on New Year's Eve. If he had killed all the Nakujuk before Tamura appeared then it might be possible to fight him. But now he had to deal with 200 Nakujuk and the boss monster.

'Now I know why this is a B ranked quest. It is a party quest!'

Ark became gloomy. Did he have to give up on the quest and Lariette even though he came all the way here? It was at that time. Suddenly he stumbled and a warning message appeared.

- 'Stealth' has been released thanks to a Ranger's 'Sixth Sense.'

- You have received a critical hit from 'Precise Shot.' Damage 400!
<Under the 'Bleeding' status, you will receive 30 damage every 10 seconds for 3 minutes>

'Huk, what, what the?'

Ark panicked and turned his head.

"As I expected, 'Sixth Sense' turned it off."

"Ark.....No, isn't it Dark Wolf?"

"Since you're alone, have all your colleagues died? How disgraceful, peeping while hiding your form....."

Ark became even more confused.

"Y-you.....what are you guys doing here?"

"Did you think you would never see us again?"

Amazingly, it was Duke, Jewel and some of the Hermes guild lined up behind Ark. Of course, Ark realized that those guys would track him down someday. But he could just move to another kingdom to get away. He never imagined that he would see them so soon. Jewel didn't give him time to think as she said.

"You're finished now!"

"I'll teach you the price of messing around with Hermes! Target Ark!"

Jewel activated all the scrolls at once.

-The [Unlucky] scroll has been applied.
-The [Robbery] scroll has been applied.....!

10 warning messages appeared.

'Oh my god! A scroll combination.....!'

Ark felt a chill go down his spine. Ark understood the power of the scroll combination more than anyone else. He had almost become a beggar when Andel used it on him. If he got caught then the quest would be unrecoverable. And no matter how strong he was, he stood no chance against Jewel, Duke and 8 of the Hermes members.

'I'm not the same as before. If there were 5 Hermes members then I might be able to handle it. But I can't deal with the 10 of them including Jewel and Duke. I have to run away!'

As soon as the idea appeared, his body automatically moved. Ark was standing on the balcony. If he made one wrong move then he would be surrounded by 200 Nakujuk and the boss. The only way out was the corridor Jewel was blocking!

"Dark Dance!"

Ark immediately used the skill and plunged between the gaps. Although the speed of Flash was overwhelmingly faster, Dark Dance was better for defense.

"Not a chance!"

Duke lowered his stance and used 'Rapid Fire.'

"Slide!"

"Damn, son of a bitch!"

Ark used 'Slide' to avoid the arrows. Duke's face contorted angrily. While Ark was avoiding the attacks, Jewel boosted her magic 'Mana Explosion' and shot a fireball.

"Now. Flash!"

Ark wrapped his mantle around him and headed straight for the fireball.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Jewel had calculated the gap and used a fireball. She used fire magic because the damage was reliable. But when Ark rushed forward using 'Flash,' the fireball exploded in front of Jewel. The narrow corridor was swallowed with flames and Jewel and her allies received the full brunt of the damage. Even with Ark's 75% fire resistance, he still received 400 damage. Those guys didn't have fire resistance and received double the damage. Thanks to the damage also inflicted by Ark's continuous use of Flash, they quickly lost 30% of their health. However, someone used recovery magic and they recovered 10% instantly.

'Damn, they have a magician, ranger, warrior and clerics. Their party is prepared.'

"Ugh, how impertinent.....kill him!"

Jewel ordered and they rushed forward in formation. However, Ark blindly used his skills and stopped their approach. He managed to penetrate their encirclement and make an escape route. Ark took out some Nadingka's fruits from his pocket and threw them. When they touched the bodies, vines sprouted around Jewel and her party.

"Eh? What is this?"

"Sprint!"

At the same time, Ark started to run away on the other side and never looked back.

“Catch him!”

“Damn, Freedom from Chains!”

A shaman shook off the vines using recovery magic. However, Ark used Sprint and had already disappeared from their sight. Fortunately, Ark had already handled most of the monsters and the remaining Nakujuk were surrounding the altar so there was no one to block him. But it only lasted for a few moments. Although he used Sprint and knew the dungeon, he couldn't outrun their pursuit. No matter how complicated the path, Jewel always managed to catch up.

‘I'm using the map created by my ‘Cartography’ skill.....so how do they know the way? In addition, they're accurately chasing in the right direction. No, how did they manage to track me through the Netherworld to this dungeon?’

Even though they shadowed him, the Three Pig Brothers had managed to lose Ark for a while in the Netherworld. So how had they found Ark so quickly? Even if they came to the Netherworld before Ark, it didn't explain how they found him.

‘They're clearly using a method I don't know about. Something to find out my location.....what is it? The [Track] scroll doesn't detect outside a certain distance.....no, they have something that works well on me.....wait, perhaps?’

Ark briefly stopped and took off the boots.

‘It has to be something to do with these shoes!’

“Discerning Eye!”

He used Discerning Eye to look at the information window.

-Wind Spirit's Boots has been cursed with Mana Perfume.

<Items cursed with Mana Perfume radiate a unique wavelength. This wavelength allows the user to track items cursed with Mana

Perfume>

‘Indeed.....!’

If something difficult to understand was encountered in New World, it was most likely because of a skill.

‘Not just unidentified items. I should also check items taken from other people. Damn, I never thought there was this skill. But I can cleanse the curse using Purification Restoration.’

Ark was already cornered. Getting rid of the curse wouldn’t help him escape the crisis. Still, it would be better than broadcasting his location while running away. But just as he was about to use Purification Restoration, an idea popped into his head.

‘Wait, they can find my location using the boots. Then.....this might be a chance. Okay, with my low mana I wouldn’t be able to evade them with Sprint anyway. This is the only way to escape the crisis.’

Ark used Sprint to return to the room where Guran was hiding.

“Ark-nim, you’re safe.”

“We were worried when we heard the strange pounding drums!”

“I don’t have time to explain in more detail. Sapjil, please write a contract!”

Ark hastily handed over his items when he received the contract. Then he looked carefully at the surroundings and said.

“There’s no time. Run to the place I told you to!”

“Yes, but what’s going on.....”

“There is no time to explain. You’ll know later so just run!”

When Ark raised his voice, Sapjil became surprised and immediately ran. When Ark confirmed that he was running, Ark gave a wicked smile and handed Dedric the boots.

“Dedric, follow Sapjil while carrying this.”

“This way!”

Jewel looked at the radar and ran.

“Damn, he’s pretty fast. That bastard!”

“But he won’t be able to keep up that speed forever.”

“And he still hasn’t noticed my magic. What a foolish guy, he must be hiding somewhere. Since earlier, his dot hasn’t moved. Does he think we can’t find him if he’s hiding?”

Jewel murmured and smirked. Ark had stopped for a while but now he started moving again. However the speed wasn’t as fast as before.

“He’s finally run out of mana. It’s not far so we can catch up!”

Jewel and her party chased after the red dot. And how long did they run for? After turning a corner, they heard the sound of footsteps running away. The Nakujuk were gathered so the only ones left were Ark and Jewel’s group. Jewel tracked the red dot closely and saw that it went back to the balcony where they first met.

“Hah, trying to hide in the dark? But it won’t be enough to fool me. Ark!”

“Huk!”

Ark who was hiding at the end of the balcony turned around and panicked. No, the person with a frightened face wasn’t Ark. It was the dwarf merchant, Sapjil.

“What, what the? Who are you?”

“It makes no sense.....the radar clearly shows.....”

Then, Jewel’s eyes saw the bat flapping behind Sapjil. The bat was firmly holding the boots.....the Wind Spirit’s Boots with Mana Perfume on it.

“Oh my god, did he notice? So where is Ark.....?”

“Here I am you damn bastards!”

Ark’s voice was heard behind them. Jewel and Duke flinched and turned around.

“You guys can go through some trouble on my behalf. Radun, go!”

Ssak ssak ssak!

“What, what the! This lizard is?”

Radun turned into Radunma and rushed towards Jewel’s group. Jewel and her companions were gathered in groups of 2~3 and completely filled the narrow corridor. Thanks to the blockage, they were literally pushed towards one direction. The warriors tried to swing their swords.....but it was a stupid idea.

“Riposte!”

Ark used Riposte to counterattack. The group was shoved towards Sapjil at the end of the balcony and they all fell overboard. Since it was only 3 levels, the fall damage wasn’t that high. However.....they fell with a large crash and the eyes of the 200 Nakujuk and Tamura concentrated on them.

“Who are they?”

Tamura’s face hardened.

“How dare you interfere with the sacred rituals.....kill them! Tear them down and offer them as sacrifices!”

“Ooh oh oh oh!”

The Nakujuk clan stood up and rushed forwards.

“Huk, run away!”

“We’re already surrounded. There’s no way to run!”

“Hang in there! We can’t die without killing Ark!”

Jewel and her group used magic and skills to attack the Nakujuk. So the battle between the 10 Hermes members and the Nakujuk took place. And Sapjil who also fell was killed by the Nakujuk at the beginning of the fight.

“Sob, Sapjil.....”

Buksil turned on the magic projector and recorded the noble (?) end.

‘Now there’s only 1 left of the Three Pig Brothers.’

His sacrifice was necessary to deceive Jewel.

“Master, take it.”

Then Dedric flew closer holding the boots.

“Huhuhu, such crude methods suits someone like you.”

Ark cleansed the boots using Purification Restoration. The skill ended up being in his favour. If they chased after Ark using the [Track] skill then he wouldn’t be able to use such a wonderful trick. Thanks to those guys, the fight against the 200 Nakujuk wasn’t so hopeless anymore.

“Fortunately Bona and Lariette are still safe. Guran, Buksil, come along.”

Ark led his group and descended towards the altar.

Innocence Knight

“Mana Explosion! Magic Harmony! Go, Blizzard! Hellfire!”

Kwa kwa kwa bang.

When Jewel used the skills, fire and ice emerged from both hands. The Nakujuk to one side were engulfed in ice while the other side was burnt by the flames. It was a display of high levelled magic that swirled around the area!

“Magic arrow, Arrow Shower!”

Duke also continuously shot magic arrows into the sky. The shower of arrows normally only seen in movies hit the Nakujuk surrounded by flames. Thanks to the strong wide area skills, the Nakujuk in that area quickly lost 50% of their health. Then the 6 warriors rushed forward swinging their swords.

“Heroic Strike!”

“Warrior’s Strength!”

The Nakujuk fell one after the other thanks to the wave of sword attacks. Indeed, the Hermes guild showed increased strength and organization. However, there were 200 opponents. Jewel and Duke, the two pioneers used their strongest skill’s and killed around 30 of the opponents, but the Nakujuk quickly filled the vacant spots.

“Kill them!”

“Death to the foreigners who dared to interfere with the sacred rituals.”

No matter how much they tried, the numbers did not decrease.

“Ugh.....in a place like this.....”

“To die without resolving the guild’s feud.....it is vexing!”

The shamans and clerics used recovery magic continuously and eventually ran out of mana. Eventually, 2 warriors were unable to cope with their wounds and collapsed. The remaining warriors decided to focus on attack and removed their shields but the situation was still the same.

“Feel the wrath of the darkness! Touch of Darkness!”

Then, a dark hand fell out of the sky onto one of the warriors. The warrior’s face drained like a mummy as he instantly lost all his health. Tamura who had been watching finally decided to use his magic. With the addition of Tamura’s magic, Jewel’s party started collapsing.

“Damn, I can’t die like this. Volcano!”

Jewel was persistent and used her most powerful spell. The earth cracked open and rocks shot out, striking the Nakujuk. Once again the Nakujuk suffered a devastating blow but Jewel’s mana became low. Meanwhile, Duke had been surrounded by the Nakujuk and eventually died.

“Ugh.....If only I had my Wind Spirit’s Boots.....”

Anyway, he died with a lot of regrets.

“Duke-! Damn, Ark.....you, you bastard.....!”

“Jewel-nim, we’ve run out of mana.....”

“Hang in there, we can’t just die like this!”

“Kuaaaaak!”

The gleam of the sword and blood! Cries and screams! The blazing fire magic! It was truly a bloody and spectacular battle.

“Lululala.....”

But Ark didn’t pay it that much attention. While everyone’s gaze was on the battlefield, Ark hummed and sang as he strolled among the carriages.

“Hey, who are you?”

One of the Nakujuk standing by the carriages lifted his sword. While the majority of the Nakujuk were fighting Jewel's group, there were only 10 Nakujuk guarding the carriages.

"A warrior of justice, what else?"

Ark cheerfully swung Gwisal's sword. And the fated reunion took place.

"The angle and situation looks good.....action!"

After Buksil gave the signal, Ark and Guran ran to the carriage.

"Lariette-nim!"

"Bona-nim!"

"Ark-nim!"

Lariette had been standing close to the bars and watching the battle.

"Please wait a moment. I'll open it immediately."

Ark unlocked the carriage using the key he found in Hagel Forest. Then Bona and the deceased trapped in the carriage came pouring out. Guran ran forward and hugged Bona tightly.

"Bona-nim!"

"G-Guran! Sob, Guran! I was scared."

"I'm really sorry. I couldn't protect you....."

Yes, it was definitely a touching sight. But why didn't he hear the sound of his quest completing?

Finally, Lariette left the carriage and approached Ark. She stared at him with mixed emotions before she blushed and started speaking.

"You've come. I knew you would."

"Of course I came."

Although more than half of his decision was because of the quest. However, Ark knew enough not to mention that in this

situation. He was playing the role of a knight rescuing a princess from danger. Although he got goose bumps from the idea, the major projector was filming so he whole heartedly portrayed it.

“I would never leave Lariette-nim in a horrible place like this.”

And Lariette was suitably impressed.

“To go so far just for me.....!”

“I have a lot of things I’d like to ask and also some things I want to inform you of, but the detailed talk will have to come later. Right now, my ‘friendly’ colleagues are taking care of them but I don’t know how long they’ll last. Guran, Buksil! Take Lariette and Bona to a safe place.”

“Yes, I understand.” Bona-nim, Lariette-nim. Follow me.”

Guran nodded and went up to the 2nd floor. However, Lariette just looked anxiously at Ark.

“Ark-nim isn’t coming?”

“I have work to do. How can I just run away leave that guy who tried to sacrifice Lariette, Bona and other innocents alone? Even if it ends in tragedy, I have to punish him.”

Ark lifted his sword and spoke in a determined voice. Bona was saved so there would be no problem with quest completion even if he ran away. But Ark couldn’t be satisfied with just completing the quest.

‘Are you crazy? How can I just leave without attempting to catch the boss? In addition, he is a boss monster where certain conditions have to be met for him to appear! He would likely drop more than one rare item. Even if I die, I’ll just revive in the Valley Town!’

That was Ark’s true purpose. But he couldn’t show his greed since people might end up watching the video. Lariette hesitated before making up her mind.

“Okay. Then I’m going to help as well.”

“Huh? Lariette-nim?”

“Yes, it’s a request. Please let me help Ark-nim.”

“.....I understand.” But please focus on supporting me from behind with your magic.”

He intended to use the ‘Flash’ technique like before. However, the thought ‘I can’t put Lariette in danger’ was present in the back of his mind.

‘So far I’ve only troubled Ark-nim by helping Alan.....but he has been thinking well of me since the interview.....! In addition, those colleagues sacrificed their lives for Ark-nim.....that is different from Alan, with Dawn Blade disbanding as soon as he was in a crisis. Ark-nim is just like I imagined!’

Lariette interpreted the situation in this wrong way thanks to her misunderstanding.

“As expected of Ark-nim.....”

“Huh?”

“Oh, it’s nothing. I’ll be assisting Ark-nim from behind.”

Lariette blushed and shook her head. While the drama was occurring between Ark and Lariette, Jewel’s group was collapsing one by one. But they didn’t go down without a fight.

“These bastards, I have to kill as much of them as possible before dying!”

A recovery shaman and Jewel were the only ones remaining.....and in the last 1 minute, Jewel began to chant a desperate spell. The Nakujuk gathered around and Jewel completed the spell just as the shaman restored her health.

“Hahaha, this is a pioneer’s very last move, Self-destruct!”

Pepepepeng!

At that moment, Jewel’s body exploded. The Nakujuk in the surrounding area quickly lost all of their health. Even the boss

Tamura was pushed back a few metres by the explosion. Indeed, the name of a pioneer wasn't shamed by Jewel's last action. However, Jewel's fierce death was all in vain. If Jewel knew that Ark was aiming for this opportunity, the group probably wouldn't have fought against the Nakujuk. However, the number of Nakujuk was too much and they couldn't spot Ark among the crowd. Without knowing this face, Jewel just exploded and died.....

'The Hermes guild's party.....was more fantastic than I thought. Now it is possible to finish this!'

Ark used Eyes of the Cat to examine Tamura and the Nakujuk. The number of Nakujuk was reduced from 200 to 90. Jewel's group took care of 110 people. Furthermore, the remaining 90 Nakujuk had approximately 30% of their health left thanks to the wide area magic.

'This is indeed an experience field! I'll thankfully accept all the experience left behind!'

"Elemental sword, Fire attribute!"

Ark used the most destruction attribute and applied it to Gwisal's sword. While Ark was making preparations, Lariette also gave him some secondary protection.

"Sword Aura, Ghost Armour!"

The secondary magic boosted attack and defense!

"Lariette-nim, unleash a wide area magic on these guys!"

"Yes, Blades of wind, Tornado!"

Lariette's wind blades swept past the Nakujuk clan. However, Lariette's magic wasn't as strong as Jewel's. It only decreased the health of twenty Nakujuk by 5%.

"That is sufficient, let's go!"

Ark shot forward along with the wind magic.

"You dare.....!"

Tamura swung his cane and approached. But Ark's goal was not

Tamura. Ark used Slide to avoid Tamura's cane and then shouted.

"Demonic Opening, Flash!"

At the moment the sword, a ray of light instantaneously penetrated the Nakujuk. All enemies within a 20 metre radius were hit by Flash! The remaining 90 Nakujuk were closely bunched up behind Tamura. When Flash penetrated that group, a tremendous amount of blood appeared and the ninety Nakujuk all had their health decreased. Ark used Flash twice in succession and Lariette also used her magic, causing twenty Nakujuk to collapse. And when he used Flash again along with the flames, the remaining people died. Using the skill 3 times annihilated 90 people! In addition, he successfully used Drastic Measures forty times.

[-Your level has risen.....]

He gained 2 levels just by killing the henchmen.

"A-awesome! This is the first time I've seen such a scene!"

Buksil was recording from the 2nd floor and had his mouth hanging open. Lariette also looked at Ark with an enraptured expression. She was not the only one surprised. Tamura could not believe his eyes and he looked at the sea of blood.

"Ugh, this is unbelievable.....!"

"Now, now it is your turn Tamura."

Ark released Demonic Opening and turned around. Demonic Opening should only be used when dealing with something quickly. Using it for a long time was detrimental to his health.

"Damn you, I'll crush your bones and eat your flesh!"

"How are you going to do that? Dedric, Deimos. It's time for the main part!"

"Hehehe, I've been waiting for this!"

Clack clack clack clack!

Ark, Deimos and Dedric attacked Tamura from three different directions. When Tamura tried to chant a spell, Dedric clung to his face while Deimos stabbed him. Then Deimos bumped him sharply with the shield and the spell was released. At that moment.....!

“Radun, sword! Elemental Sword, Lightning!”

Ark used Elemental Sword and sparks gathered around the sword Radun gave him.

“Take this, Blade Storm!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The sword was crushed and the pieces swirled intensely in the air. However, this wasn't a simple Blade Storm. Since it temporarily took on the lightning attribute thanks to Elemental Sword, lightning flashed among the debris.

“Kuaaak, this bastard!”

Tamura screamed as sparks hit his body. Tamura was a level 500 boss. But monsters that were magicians had low defense. Thanks to the various wide area magic from Jewel's group, his health had already decreased to 40%. He then lost a further 10% thanks to the damage from Blade Storm.

‘Okay, I can win!’

But he couldn't relax just yet. A magician had low defense and attack speed. But the reason many users preferred magicians was because of their incredible magic, which could change the situation with one attack.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Tamura started using his magic and it wasn't a joke. When the cursed black fog of the Necromancer spread, he received incredible dark attribute and deadly poison damage. However, Ark possessed 100% resistance to the dark and 50% resistance to poison. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that with his resistances, he was the natural enemy of dark magicians. But the black fog still dealt 300 damage.

Also.....!

“Rise, Children of the darkness!”

Tamura spread out both arms and a dark aura emerged from them. Then the Nakujuk were resurrected as zombies. However, half of them were completely smashed or cut open by Ark. They only numbered 50 zombies. And they were revived with less than 50% of their health and stats.

“Damn, this is the special magic of the Necromancer? Flash!”

Ark used Flash and shattered the zombies. They only had 50% health, and the 50% of stats meant that their defense was incredibly low. Thanks to Flash, he severed them with one stroke and the zombies were converted to experience. However, Ark had 4,000 mana and it was running low because he used Flash continuously.

‘It will become more disadvantageous the longer it takes. I have to make a prompt decision!’

“Dedric, don’t stop disturbing him and prevent him from using magic!”

“Understood. Wait you bastard! Dark Dash!”

“Deimos, constantly strike him with Shield Stroke!”

Clack clack clack clack, daeng!

“Ugh, these guys are so annoying.....!”

The life of a magician was concentration. While it didn’t do that much damage, both Deimos’ and Dedric’s techniques induced stiffness. It was minor but those disturbances slowed down the rate of his magic spells. Lariette also used her magic attacks.

“Ark-nim. It’s dangerous. Thunderbolt!”

Lightning flew from Lariette’s fingertips towards Tamura’s nose.

Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack!

At that time, the wrong situation occurred. While Tamura stumbled, Deimos stood in front of Lariette and started talking to her. When

Lariette became puzzled, Dedric translated for her.

“I can’t attack Tamura’s face?”

“What? What does that mean?”

“I don’t know. Huk!”

Dedric shrugged before quickly avoiding Tamura’s attack. He couldn’t understand why Deimos said those words. But they had no time to worry about such a trivial matter when facing a boss.

‘It’s almost done!’

But Ark miscalculated. Tamura eventually fell into a critical condition.

“I can’t believe this. Losing to this guy.....no! I can’t die!”

Tamura rushed wildly towards Ark. Ark quickly used Slide and swung his sword. However, Ark wasn’t Tamura’s goal. He continued running forward and jumped into the pit of darkness. Then a massive black aura appeared from the pit.

“W-what is he doing.....?”

Did the boss monster commit suicide? Ark was devastated at the thought.

Ku-Kung!

Suddenly a black arm emerged from the pit. The wet hands soaked in sticky oil.....Tamura unexpectedly climbed up from the pit covered in a viscous black liquid. His red eyes turned towards Ark and he smiled. Dedric became freaked out and retreated.

“Hik, what is that?”

Tamura has absorbed the ‘Evil Spirit Fragments’ and has gained the Demonic attribute.

The protective coat protects Tamura by 500% while his abilities have increased by 100%. In addition, it invalidates the bonus damage of all skills. However, the demonic attribute is weak against weapons with the ability to exorcise evil spirits. These

weapons will invalidate the special abilities of the protective coating.

<Demonic Attribute: According to legend, the demonic attribute was passed down by a malevolent deity. The demonic attribute is the most predominant among all evil attributes>

‘Evil Spirit Fragments?’

‘Huhuhu, power.....the power of darkness.....ruin.....destroy everything.....everything.....destroy.....!’

Tamura murmured as he lifted both hands.

“I feel unpleasant. Dedric, Deimos. Plan A!”

“Yes Master!”

Clack clack clack clack!

Ark, Dedric and Deimos tackled Tamura. Even if his stats were at 100%, he only had 10% health left. If they concentrated their attacks then the fight would be over in 1 minute. At that time, Tamura turned and struck a carriage with his stick. Then the trapped deceased started pouring out. Tamura snatched up one of the deceased and swallowed it. Then, little by little, his health was restored.

-Tamura has used the ‘Life Absorb’ skill.

<When swallowing and chewing an enemy, you can absorb some of their health>

‘What, what the?’

Ark burst out with surprise. Now the boss who he almost caught was slowly recovering? What kind of absurd situation was this? Ark panicked and immediately attacked, but Tamura just withdrew and swallowed the rest of the deceased. Once his health had been restored to 30%, Tamura smashed another wagon.

‘Oh my god.....what is this nonsense.....!’

Ark's face paled. Now he had no mana left. Ark's health was also at 30%. The stats of the boss was 100% and now he was slowly recovering his health? In addition, he could continue restoring his health with the remaining carriages.

"Dark blade!"

Ark panicked and used Dark Blade, but Tamura's health did not decrease at all. His demonic attribute overrode the additional damage of all his skills. Dark's Blade biggest strength was that it ignored all defense, but that made no difference with Tamura.

'If he manages to recover 100% health.....then it is the end. Somehow I must stop the recovery! But he doesn't even blink at my attacks.....although attacks with the Holy attribute can damage it, only the shamans and temple priests can use that attribute.....damn!'

Ark starting losing his spirit and stared at Tamura devastated.

'Wait, perhaps there might be a way to stop the recovery!'

"Please come to your senses. Even if you're dead, your lives are still valuable to this world. Don't let your existences be eaten by an evil demon. Oppose the devil with your willpower and protect yourselves!"

Ark used the power of Nursing.

Pepeng-!

"Kuaaak.....!"

There was a white flash of light from Tamura's mouth where he was chewing another deceased. Then instead of recovering his health, he received considerable damage and stumbled.

'It is like I expected! I can use Nursing to stop his healing! No, I might even be able to defeat him!'

Tamura received damage after eating the deceased. This was due to the side effect of Ark's Nursing. The additional effect of Nursing that Ark had forgotten about.....was the blessing. Blessings had a

holy attribute. If he ate the dead who had a holy attribute, he would receive damage instead. They weren't injured, so the deceased couldn't receive the Nursing effect. However, Tamura had to chew on them in order to absorb life. At that moment, the dead became injured. Ark aimed for that moment and used Nursing. While avoiding Tamura's attacks, he concentrated on the movements of the deceased. And the moment Tamura tried to swallow a deceased, Ark would stop the recovery using Nursing and Tamura would receive damage. He managed to stop the healing using Nursing three or four times. When he used Nursing once again, an intense light appeared around Ark's body instead.

The Miracle Nursing was successful.

Your sincerity in regards to the dead had surpassed the limits of space and species.

Life has no ranks. Whether they be the kings who rules a kingdom or the stray beggars who wander the streets, all life is precious. Many people, even priests don't realize this fact. But you have taken care of countless lives and realized this truth. Although the deceased are just wandering around the Netherworld, it is still their lives.

Abandoned by everyone, you are the only one who did not forsake the deceased! You have become an inspiration through your achievements and have received a higher rank of caretaker.

* Due to the success of miracle nursing, all stats increase by 1.

* Affection increases by 10.

* Alignment towards Good increases by 50.

* The blessing effect is applied to all the deceased for 2 hours.

The Miracle Nursing was a success and you have acquired the title 'Caretaker of the Abandoned.'

Your fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many patients.

* As a title bonus all stats will increase by 2.

* Fame increases by 50.

‘This is truly a miracle!’

Due to the effects of Miracle Nursing, the blessing effect was applied to all the deceased. In other words, Tamura’s food has been poisoned. Thanks to that, Tamura’s recovery stopped at 50%. Although the recovery was stalled, the situation didn’t become better. Tamura’s demonic attribute was still nullifying his extra attacks and Ark had no more mana, so there was no way for him to attack.

“Ohhhh, this guy.....how dare you interfere with my meal.....!”

Tamura became furious at the interruption to his meal. Hundreds of black hands made of the vicious liquid formed around Tamura. Dozens of the deceased were suddenly caught by those hands. Then the deceased had all the health drained and they turned into ashes.

-Tamura has used ‘Hand of Death!’

<When caught by the Hands of Death, they will lose 10 health every 1 second>

“Huk, what the? Slide! Deimos, Dedric! Avoid it!”

Ark shouted as he slid all over the place trying to avoid the hands. Fortunately Deimos and Dedric instinctively sensed the crisis and either dropped to the ground or flew in the sky to avoid the black hands. Thanks to that, only the deceased were turned to black powder. At that moment, something he never imagined happened. The place Lariette was standing was out of reach of the black hands. But when a black hand reached towards a certain deceased standing near her, she shrieked and plunged forward.

“N-no!”

“La-Lariette-nim?”

Ark lifted his head in surprise. Instead of the deceased, Lariette was being held by Tamura's hands. Lariette's health quickly began to drain out. And her health reached the bottom in a blink of an eye.....!

Suddenly there was a blinding glare of light. Ark frowned and stared at the strange sight. The dead person who had been saved by Lariette was suddenly surrounded by a beam of light. Then a knight holding a sword and shield emerged from the light. He shot towards Tamura like an arrow while holding his sword thrust in front of him.

Booom!

Tamura stumbled from the attack and became stunned. Then the knight appeared next to Ark holding Lariette.

'What the? What the hell is going on?' Who is this guy?'

Ark couldn't get a grasp on the situation. Then, Lariette muttered with a pale face.

"Holy Knight.....!"

"Holy Knight? What about a Holy Knight? Are you talking about Alan?"

Ark asked with a stupid face. However, the Knight just ignored Ark and spoke towards Lariette.

-Lady, with a pure heart like a white jade.....I pay my respects to your heartfelt sacrifice.

The Knight bowed his head before continuing.

-I am known as the Holy Knight Ronian. After the person I was soul linked fell into darkness, I was corrupted and became a nameless dead wandering the Netherworld. If it wasn't for you, I would've been a deceased lost in the darkness forever.

"I received a request from your squire. So....."

– I know. Johnny.....poor boy. It was because of Johnny's request that you found me. And you were willing to sacrifice yourself to

keep your promise with that child. I've regained my sense of self because of you. I was desperate to overcome the darkness. But I couldn't win by myself.....

Ronian clenched his pendant with a pained expression and closed his eyes for a moment. But he soon opened them again and laughed.

-But you've allowed me to regain my hope after everything was lost. My spirit could return slightly thanks to that man's blessing. And you protected me with complete sincerity. By sacrificing yourself.....your beautiful heart was enough to completely awaken my spirit. Now that I've regained my will, I'll be able to return to heaven.

Ronian released the pendant before holding it out to Lariette.

-Beautiful maiden.....will you accept my legacy? If you accept then you be known as Holy Knight but will receive the title 'Innocence Knight.'

You have received an invitation from Holy Knight Ronian to become an Innocence Knight.

If you accept Ronian's offer then you will lose your previous profession and become an Innocence Knight. Innocence Knight is a women only profession in the Holy Knight series. An Innocence Knight has the same characteristics as a Holy Knight. However, the attack and defense applied to weapons and armour is weak. Instead, a lot more bonuses from Holy magic will be applied.

If you accept, your current profession 'Magician' will be automatically cancelled and all your skills and characteristics will be reset except for level and stats. Instead, Ronian's special abilities will be added. 50% of your current skill points will be returned. You can invest the returned skill points in any skill to raise it.

Would you like to accept?

Lariette hesitated as she looked at the information window before nodding.

“.....I’ll change my profession.”

-It will be done!

Ronian scattered like a mist and merged with Lariette’s body.

“Ugh.....this guy.....how dare he.....death.....!”

At that time, Tamura was finally able to move and rushed towards them. Lariette quickly looked through her skills list before instantly casting Holy magic.

“Pure Shield!”

A shield made of light formed in front of them. Boom. A violent impact shook the room. Of course, the hastily cast shield of light could not completely stop Tamura’s attack. But the amazing thing was Tamura’s reaction. Tamura received damage from the attack and wobbled.

‘Yes, his weak point is Holy magic!’

He had no interest in what went on between Ronian and Lariette. The important thing was that Lariette could now damage Tamura.

“Lariette-nim, can you add Holy magic to my sword?”

“Ha, I think I can.”

Lariette looked through her skills list again. And she used her points to raise ‘Pure Sword’ to intermediate before walking towards Ark.

The Holy attribute has been applied to Gwisal’s sword using Pure Sword.

<Damage +15%, it will invalidate the protective dark attribute shield and additional damage +15%>

“Okay, Demonic Opening!”

Ark used Demonic Opening and struck Tamura.

Pepepepeng!

There was a crack in the black slime and Tamura stumbled. So far, no matter how much he stabbed, Tamura would not shed even one drop of blood or lose any health.

‘It works!’

Ark’s eyes brightened. Meanwhile, Lariette eagerly read through her skills and invested some points to make them intermediate.

“Pure Soul, Warrior’s Strength!”

Pure Shield was able to reflect any attacks with the dark attribute! Pure Soul raised the defense against dark attribute attacks by 30%! Warrior’s Strength increased health by 20%! The Innocence Knight could also overlap buffs 3 times like a Holy Knight. Lariette raised those skills to intermediate and continuously stacked them on Ark. Thankfully, he could now overcome Tamura’s demonic attribute. So after the battle continued for several minutes, the crack in the black slime widened further. Then a red light blinked from inside. Eyes of the Cat had found Tamura’s underbelly. Ark instinctively realized what the symbol giving off the murderous intent was.

“Blessing of the sea!”

Adelaine’s Necklace increased his defense and mana.

‘Radun, Myutal’s Rapier!’

Ssak ssak ssak!

Ark grasped Myutal’s Rapier and made it crack with Blade Storm. There was a violent ringing sound as the sword cracked.

“Take this, Blade Storm!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

He shoved Myutal’s Rapier into the black aura just before it exploded. Then the black slime swelled up like a balloon. After a while, the black slime fell off Tamura’s body. When Tamura’s appearance was revealed, he looked like a skeleton with only bones left behind. Ark immediately drew Gwisal’s sword and attacked. When Drastic Measures was used, the head was cut off

and fell to the ground.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

Message windows continuously popped up. He quickly rose 9 levels! It was thanks to the bonus experience applied from Drastic Measures.

“This, unbelievable.....darkness.....the power of the Lord of Darkness.....”

Tamura’s head muttered as he died.

“The power to resurrect.....when I obtain absolute power.....I will destroy the world with the power of the great darkness.....he, he.....he said.....it was a lie.....”

‘He?’

Ark was puzzled by the words. Then black beads emerged from Tamura’s mouth and rose towards the sky. Ark flinched and went to grab his sword bag.....

Biiiiik-!

A black eagle flew down from the sky with a sharp sound. And it grabbed the beads before soaring into the sky again. It happened so quickly that there was no time to react.

“What, what the? That eagle?”

While the eagle soared to the top of the Abyss of Despair, Ark was able to spot one man at the top. The man was standing obscured by the moon. Although he couldn’t confirm any details of his shape, the red hair and white mask was unusually visible.

‘It can’t be.....the Red Man!’

The Red man that appeared in Yggdrasil’s video!

‘Then Tamura was referring to the Red Man before? If so.....the

Red Man was even behind this situation? Then that bead must be a clue!’

Ark was about to jump up with he suddenly stopped.

‘Damn, there are items still here……!’

There were items from the 200 Nakujuk scattered around the underground. In addition, he still hadn’t checked the items Tamura dropped! He couldn’t give up everything just to chase the Red Man. And even if he ran now, there was no way to catch up. The Red Man muttered something when the eagle approached before grasping a claw and flying into the sky. And he soon disappeared into the darkness. Even Dedric wouldn’t be able to catch up with that speed! Ark and Lariette just stared with their mouths open. How much time had passed? Suddenly Lariette raised her head and embraced Ark.

“Kyaaa, we won! We defeated Tamura!”

At the same time, his thoughts about the Red Man flew towards Andromeda.

“La-Lariette-nim?”

When Ark spoke, Lariette blushed and moved her arms.

“I-I’m sorry. I was so excited…….”

“Ah, no. You can hold on…….”

“Huh?”

“No.”

Ark closed his mouth and shook his head. There was an awkward silence between the two of them. After a while……Lariette looked at Ark before saying.

“I……I finished all my work here. But I don’t know how to return to our original world. After I entered, the gate disappeared.”

Ark seemed to have been expecting something else and replied with a disappointed face.

“I also haven’t found a way to return yet. The gate I entered was one-way. I’m sorry I can’t help.”

“No, it’s not that.....can I stay with Ark until you find the gate?”

“Yes?”

Ark stared at Lariette with wide eyes. Continuing with Lariette. It was what he had been hoping for since the start of the game. In addition, he saw the value of having Lariette along after fighting this boss. But the idea of sharing items weighed heavily on his mind. A crush was a crush, but didn’t reality also matter? It was necessary to make the part clear. It would be a problem if he lost half of his income because of a crush.

“I’d love to have you help me. But before that, the items.....”

“I just want to accompany you for a while. I don’t care about anything else.”

Lariette had been accompanied by Alan from the beginning of the game and didn’t know the pain of starvation. So she didn’t really need items. Or maybe she thought Ark would give her any items with her specifications? If she thought so then she was wrong. Although he would concede japtem to some extent, he wouldn’t even concede valuable items to JusticeMan.

‘Yes, she’s changed her profession from a magician to a knight. She’s been wearing magician equipment until now so I’ll give her some knight items from the japtem.’

Anyway, now there was no reason to refuse Lariette’s request.

“I understand. I accept.”

“Thank you. Then I’ll be organizing my skills for a while. Since my skills have changed, I need to perform some maintenance.”

Ark nodded and Lariette went up to where Bona was waiting. Ark felt something strange because of her attitude but shook his head.

‘She’s probably relieved not to be wandering the Netherworld alone.’

But now wasn't the time to be concerned about her inner thoughts.

'Tamura's items!'

The rewards after so much suffering!

"Okay, Radun. Look around and swallow the japtem."

Ssak ssak ssak!

Ark released Radun and approached Tamura.

Necromancer's Essence

The essence of a Necromancer who inhabited the Abyss of Despair.

*The information regarding the monster's essence has been grasped using the excellent intuition of an advanced Survival Cooking chef.

This essence belongs to Tamura, a Necromancer of the Nakujuk clan who ruled the Abyss of Despair. The culmination of his power resides in this crystal that contains a mysterious knowledge. After completing the immortality pill, you will be able to acquire some of the knowledge.

<Monster Essence Rating: A>

"Huk, an A rank essence.....!"

Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped. This was the second time he found an essence in the Netherworld. And this time it was an A rank essence! As an A rank essence, it should have a stronger effect than Slime's Immortality Pill. The bonus would be unimaginable.

'Is this the effect of Drastic Measures? Or do essences have a higher probability of dropping in the Netherworld?'

Well, it doesn't matter why it appeared. Ark made himself calm down and confirmed the next item.

Death Engraved Stick (Unique)

Weapon type: Staff

Attack: 35~40

Durability: 55/90

Weight: 40

User restriction: Level 200 or more Necromancer

The Necromancer Tamura's staff. An evil artifact made by extracting the bones from a large number of bodies. Powerful death magic is imbued in this weapon.

<Option: Mental Power +30, Intelligence +20, Health +200, Necromancer's skills +10%>]

<Special Option: The Necromancer only skill 'Power of Death' is applied. 'Power of Death' gives a bonus 30% to the stats of all summoned undead creatures>

Ark's eyes widened after he saw the item. It was also an amazing item. Most rare items had a skill attached as an option, but it was hardly ever a passive option. The effect increased the abilities of the summons by 30%! Plus there was the general passive option of increasing all necromancer's skills by 10%. It was an item that every necromancer would want to get their hands on.

Since it took a lot for necromancers to summon, they would offer a lot of money to buy this item. Any user who raised their character over level 200 would have the kind of money to buy this item for an expensive price!

The Netherworld was an unexplored area where only 10 people have come. Most of the monsters and bosses killed by Ark would've died for the first time. Therefore, the probability of monsters dropping their best items was quite high. With the use of Drastic Measures, the Netherworld had become a gold mine for Ark.

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack!

Then, he heard Deimos approach the place where Tamura's head

fell. Ark became shocked when he turned around and saw what was happening. A horrific scene was unfolding in front of Ark. Deimos had been ripping the flesh off Tamura's head. Deimos had revealed a skull in an instant and cradled it with a warm look on his face. Then he placed Tamura's skull with the rest of his skeleton. A blue flame appeared in the eyes while red sparks started spreading on the new skeleton.

'W-what is going on? Oh my god.....Is this the reason Deimos didn't want us to attack Tamura's head.....?'

He coveted Tamura's skull? Although he knew Deimos had a 'bone collecting' hobby, but to even change his head? It was a bizarre sight. But Ark hadn't assessed the situation correctly. Deimos intention wasn't simply to change the bones.

The new skeleton merged with Deimos as he was engulfed in a red glow. A message window immediately appeared next to Ark.

Deimos' Profession?

The player's pet 'Deimos' has reconstructed all the parts of his body!

Usually the undead is formed because of a strong grudge or a curse. These are the sources of their power, making them jealous of the living. The undead cannot live anywhere because of that hostility. Unfortunately, Deimos' evolution wasn't completed because of the roughly assembled body made of cheap bones. But now it can be exchanged for 208 bones and the 'Perfect Skull.'

Now that all the parts are fused together and is optimized to fit the body, Deimos will get a chance for a new evolution.

'Roughly assembled? Cheap bones?'

Ark's face distorted oddly. There was the old saying that said people should not bite at sore fingers. Ark also felt that way about his pets. He had lovingly cared for his pets. He gave them good food and built them a body. Educated them and treated them like his children.....

But even though he treated them well, his children didn't act the same way. As the parent, he put a lot of affection into raising his children. Although Dedric was a little careless, he was a cunning fellow with a strong survival instinct from his childhood as a bat. Radun was always wound around his waist and never caused trouble. On the other hand, Deimos was just a skull when they met for the first time. He had no skills except for rolling around. Didn't he used to be thrown at monsters in order to deal some damage? Ark was the one who made him a complete skeleton body. Of course it was no easy task. He had to memorize a book JusticeMan lent him on the human body for several nights. But was that all? He looked through hundreds and thousands of skeleton bones for pieces that would fit together like a jigsaw puzzle in order to create Deimos.

Deimos was truly Ark's creation.

'Has any other summoner suffered so much in order to raise their summon? But it is not all bad. I'm filled with a sense of pride when I look at what I created.'

He secretly felt proud whenever he looked at Deimos. But now he had to suffer through the disgrace of his hard work being called a loosely assembled body? He felt furious at an information window for the first time. No, it wasn't just the information window. Even though Ark made it with difficulty, Deimos didn't like it and decided to just get rid of it using Bone Collecting? To the extent that he completely changed 208 bones? He had accepted it since changing the bones meant raising his stats, but now Ark completely felt betrayed.

"Deimos, it's good that you might evolve.....but were you so miserable that you had to change all the bones?"

"Oh, have you finally realised Master?"

Dedric sensed the mood and teased as he approached Ark.

"I told you so from the beginning. From the very first, this guy did not like the body that Master endured so much suffering to make. In order to obtain a stronger body, he was pretending to like it while patronizing you. He is that type of guy, a cunning child! Although he appears outwardly loyal to Master, you really can't trust the undead. Don't you know they only think about bones?"

Dedric smiled as he continued bad-mouthing Deimos.

"I didn't want to mention this, but do you know how many times I've heard him swearing at Master?"

Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack!

Deimos was astounded and rushed towards Dedric. However, Dedric expected it and quickly hid behind Ark.

"Look at this, he's revealing his true colours! He's trying to cover up the truth! He said that Master was a tyrant who treated us like

trash.....cough, M-Master?"

"This child, did you think it was settled?"

Ark grabbed Dedric by the neck who immediately screamed.

"C-choking! Why are you doing this? I'm just repeating what that skeleton said!"

"Do you think I'm a fool? If you want then I'll really throw you in a body bag and use you as dog trash!"

"Eh? Is that so?"

Dedric became frightened and avoided Ark's eyes.

"Hey, why are you scared? I just gave you an example."

"Oh, really?"

"You're not angry? Master's heart is like the sea. It is spacious."

"No, I am a stingy tyrant who treats you like trash."

".....Master, you knew?"

Dedric faked a pitiful expression.

However, Ark just nodded with a cold look.

"I know very well."

"Dammit, whatever! I'm free to say whatever I like so just get it over with!"

Dedric desperately lay on the floor and closed his eyes. There was no need to bother describing what happened afterwards. When Ark showed an upset countenance, Dedric immediately took the chance to drive a wedge between Ark and Deimos and was punished for it.

Ssak ssak ssak ssak! Clack clack clack clack!

Ark was also Radun's dad (?). Radun became upset at Dedric's words and stepped all over his feet. In addition, Deimos also smacked him with his shield before he evolved. Thanks to Ark and

the two summons, Dedric was crushed in a matter of seconds.

“Waaaah, okay, I’m the bad guy.”

Once Dedric was in a critical condition with tears dripping down his face, he huddled in a corner and shouted.

“Bah, Deimos, you hit me as well? Are you already acting so arrogantly before you even evolved? Don’t be ridiculous. You’ll see in the future! I’ll soon evolve into a great pet. When the time comes, neither you or Master will be able to treat me like this!”

“At any rate, that guy…….”

Ark smiled sourly and shook his head. So far, Dedric’s abilities have never been lower than Deimos’. Since he evolved first and was punished more often, he ended up eating more new dishes than Deimos. Thus he was always ahead. But now the situation would be reversed when Deimos evolved. Dedric didn’t like this. Dedric was cunning but that was his limit. So his behaviour was understandable.

“Well, he has to evolve anyway.”

Ark stared at Deimos.

Since it had come out of nowhere, it still hadn’t sunk in. In fact, Ark thought that the evolution of pets was only available through a Magic Sword. It was the reason he often browsed the auction site for Magic Swords. If he could evolve his pets then he considered buying it. As his pets were important, Ark was determined to evolve them.

‘But I never imagined that he could evolve in such an unexpected way……. Will he evolve into something different from the Magic Sword? Or did he have to evolve first using Magic Sword before evolving through different methods? Will it also depend on the pet’s stats, skills or alignment?’

He was unsure about what would happen. It was one of the bad things about hidden professions. A hidden profession was different from normal classes. All information related to that profession was unknown and had to be discovered first hand. Ark had no choice but to play it and learn. This was particularly true in regards to his

summons. Of course, New World had other professions with the ability to summon. The main professions were necromancers or shamans. Initially, Ark looked at their information as well. However, both professions were completely different from Ark and his summons. For a necromancers, summons were just like disposable items for them. They could summon a large amount but once the duration was over then they disappeared. The concept of growing their summons didn't exist. By growth, he meant raising their skills and stats.

For a shaman, they were similar to Ark in that they summoned a spirit and raised it. However, the spirit grew when the user's related skill grew. In other words, if the shaman's summoning skill reached intermediate then their spirit would also become intermediate. So the information on necromancers and shamans weren't useful for Ark at all. Anyway, Ark's profession was not focused on summoning. So the Dark Walker's complex pet system felt like a significant penalty. But he soon saw that there was some merit to it.

'I thought it was natural to give my pets battle training.....'

That wasn't the actual case. The necromancer's and shaman's summons had no will of their own. If their master didn't give a command then they wouldn't move. When their stats rose, they could learn a few simple patterns. But they couldn't participate in a battle on their own like Dedric and Deimos. In addition, using food to raise stats did not work.

'Their ability to grow and think is also an advantage.'

Ark laughed as he looked at Dedric still complaining. It was also a busy atmosphere. At first he found it quite annoying, but now he couldn't imagine playing New World without his summons there. Spending a few days and nights soloing was also possible because of his pets.

'Ah, now is not the time to be thinking of these things.'

He had become distracted because of Dedric. Ark shook his head and looked at the information window again. The question about whether to evolve was flickering in front of him.

“Since I don’t know what will happen anyway, Evolution!”

Deimos was finally going to proceed with his second evolution..... that was his thought. But New World wasn’t that simple. When the information window disappeared, a huge disk appeared in front of Ark. It was a giant roulette wheel made of bone that was divided into colours, with one single finger bone attached at the top as a pointer.

“What is this?”

Ark was perplexed as another information window appeared.

Deimos’ ‘Special Evolution’ will now begin.

At present, Deimos’ bones is composed of 32% warrior, 27% thieves, 8% magicians, 15% undead and 18% other things. The number of professions he can evolve to is 17 types. However, the player won’t be able to choose the occupation of the summon. The great power who watched over the Netherworld will choose the most suitable profession for Deimos depending on his stats and alignment.

“What, what the? He can evolve into 17 different types of professions?”

Ark muttered with a silly expression. When they evolved using the Magic Sword, they received the profession of the former owner. But now there was no owner of the magic sword to give a profession. Instead, the profession was gathered from the bones. Thanks to that, Deimos had the opportunity to change into many different types of professions. Indeed, there were the names of professions written on different sections of the roulette disk.

“This means that he can change professions into one of these?”

Ta da da da da!

Then before Ark could read the names written on the roulette, there was a strange sound and it spun around. The roulette gradually slowed until it landed on one point. The roulette board was divided into small and large spaces, and it had landed on the most spacious

part. The problem was that there was no name written on that portion.

“Why did nothing happen?”

Ark became anxious.

Pepepepeng!

Deimos suddenly wobbled and kneeled down after the noise. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

The great power that oversees the Netherworld did not recognize Deimos' evolution.

<Unfortunately, a 'Fail' has appeared. As a penalty, Deimos will permanently lose 200 health. All stats are destroyed by 10. There is 3 evolution opportunities given every 20 minutes. If all 3 attempts fail, the evolution will end and he will receive an additional penalty. However, there is no penalty if you cancel the evolution>

“Huk, what is this?”

Ark stared in astonishment at the information window before looking at Deimos. Just like the message said, he had his health and stats decreased.

‘Dammit, what is the great power who watches over the Netherworld? Isn't this just luck? Is Luck the true identity of the Netherworld's great power?’

Before he could even understand the situation, he had lost some stats painstakingly gained through meals and bone collection. Fury rose in his throat but he pushed it down and endured it for the moment. Although he couldn't tolerate it, what could he do?

“Fortunately there are 3 chances to evolve. If it fails then the opportunity to evolve will completely disappear and a penalty will be received....!”

“There's still 2 chances. No, is this the second time?”

Ark repressed his anger and looked at the roulette. If was necessary for him to understand the situation. He could choose a profession. And obviously it had to suit Ark's profession. Even if he couldn't select the job, he could still examine the options and decide which one suits Deimos the most. The roulette wheel had many types of professions scratched on its bones. Skeleton Captain, Immortal Skeleton, Skeleton soldier.....occupations associated with warriors, magicians and thieves were all present.

"It is quite vague....."

Ark scratched his head as he looked at it. It was difficult to choose a profession. Ark's level and stats were considerably higher compared to Dedric and Deimos. Dedric had the ability to fly so he could avoid a monster's attack if he kept to a reasonable distance. But Deimos' position was different. He didn't have the ability to fly like Dedric, nor was he clever. Yet he inevitably ended up fighting monsters head on. Even so, Deimos was capable to keeping up thanks to his knight profession. His defense and health increased and he could block using the shield. No, there was no particular way to utilize him right now. No matter how high his defense became, it wasn't possible for him to fight head on with higher level monsters.

'If I look at Deimos' overall stats then a warrior or knight profession would add that much. Even if he gained more health and defense thanks to the evolution, the level of the monsters is so high that it wouldn't be enough. The skills associated with warriors are difficult but.....'

Becoming a warrior was still relatively good. The problem would be serious if it landed on a thief profession. Thieves needed to be surprisingly clever. If Deimos switched to a thief then he would be in danger all the time. A magician profession was also impossible. Deimos' intelligence was so low that he might not be able to learn magic and he didn't have enough mana to use it. Naturally magic ate up a lot of mana. A magician with 7,000 mana would run out in one battle. As a new magician, Deimos wouldn't be able to use those skills or be of any benefit to Ark.

'In addition, a thief and magician has no defense. With the level

difference, he wouldn't even last one or two hits before being forcefully recalled. When that happens, I will receive half of his health as damage. His evolution might make a battle even more difficult.'

While thinking about it, Ark came to the conclusion that a warrior or knight was the best option.

'If he becomes a warrior then his stats will become much higher and I'll be able to utilize him more.'

But the problem was the number of choices. It was at that time. Ark sighed before a surprising profession caught his eye. The job accounted for 2% of the total roulette.

"Huk, that's.....Death Knight!"

Ark's mouth dropped open. He had never directly seen a Death Knight in New World yet. However, of course he knew the name Death Knight. It was the strongest among the undead in all online games, a knight wearing dark armour. The Death Knight!

'As expected from something that relies on luck.....it is right next to the 'Fail.' This is it. The target to win. A smaller assigned space meant a rarer profession. With the bonus stats from evolution, this clearly is the best possible choice for Deimos! With the proper armour then he could fully utilize my pets!

Ark clenched his fists.

-The time limit of 20 minutes has been completed. We will spin the roulette wheel.
--

Ta da da da da!

The roulette began to turn.

This time Ark was not confused. He had no choice but to pray that it would land on the Death Knight.

"Please.....Please.....Land on it, Death Knight!"

Ark looked like a man holding a lottery ticket as he stared at the

roulette wheel. After some time passed, the roulette gradually slowed down.

Bump, bump, the roulette wheel reached the Death Knight area and advanced past.....it did not stop at the last moment.

‘God dammit.....!’

-Congratulations. The great power that oversees the Netherworld has acknowledged Deimos’ evolution.

The chosen profession is ‘Skeleton Merchant.’

This is a very unique profession as the ‘Skeleton Merchant’ can trade goods with villages and monsters. He will also become more discerning about the various bones and leather used to make new items. However, the pet cannot carry the items directly. Since the Skeleton Merchant cannot deal directly with merchants, it can assist the user with making the various calculations on profit and loss. And the undead cannot trade with hostile NPCs.

<If you choose to cancel the evolution, a penalty will be applied and you can try again>

A Skeleton Merchant.....It was definitely a ridiculous profession. In addition, the merchant could not hold its own goods. Ark would have to store it and listen to him while trying to calculate a price while trading in stores. How was he supposed to do that? If Deimos became a merchant, wasn’t it just like carrying around a portable calculator?

“I would rather have him not evolve!”

Ark would rather have him not evolve then become a merchant!

Ark cancelled the evolution without even considering. There was another boom and Deimos stumbled again.

“Dammit, one by one.....is it going to end up like this?”

Tears gathered as once again Deimos’ stats and health were cut. No wonder so many rewards were given at the same time. This could

mean the difference between a crisis and an opportunity. After 2 failures, Deimos had permanently lost 400 health and 20 points on all stats. A fortnight? A month? All the stats he raised with great difficulty was gone in over 10 minutes.

‘There is one chance left. What if the merchant profession appears again?’

His stats would once again be cut. The worst result! He would’ve discarded a bunch of stats for nothing.

‘If I give up the evolution here then I’ll be able to keep the remaining stats.’

But he couldn’t regain the stats already lost. In addition, he had just obtained the long-awaited opportunity to evolve. Since it was so valuable, he might suffer a bigger loss if he gave up.

‘And to give up the chance to evolve into a Death Knight.....’

It was a huge dilemma. Was this how people who gambled felt like?

A cold sweat started forming on Ark’s forehead. Ark wasted time while hesitating. Dedric had been watching from afar and he finally walked closer and mumbled.

“I told you. As an undead, that fellow has no luck. Do you think that an undead has any luck? Lucky would only look good on a noble vampire like me.” 앎.”

“You really are.....!”

“Ah, no, I was just talking.”

When Ark glared at Dedric, he became surprised and immediately closed his mouth. Although anger swelled up inside Ark, there was no time to punish Dedric. 4 minutes had already passed. During the remaining 16 minutes, he had to decide whether to give up or gamble again. But Ark’s heart had already made a decision.

‘This opportunity is too good to give up.’

If he knew all the information then he might’ve given up before

spinning the roulette wheel. But he had already begun. He had to continue to the end.

‘Who is to blame? If the stats are cut again then I’ll just feed him food.’

Ark closed his eyes tightly and made the decision to turn the roulette. Then, all of a sudden Dedric’s words struck his frontal lobe.

‘Wait? Luck? Deimos’ luck?’

After receiving a shock, Ark’s frontal lobe began to actively work. Ark had thought the results of turning the wheel was due to luck. However, this place was a game. And coincidences don’t exist in games.

‘Yes, that’s it!’

Ark’s eyes brightened. These days Ark was exceptionally lucky and found good items. But looking back, there was an explanation for this. He had received the ‘Sacred Branch’ from Popo. The option was especially worth noting, with an extra +30 to luck and a +20% chance of finding magic items. Ark had received it before Nagaran and then forgotten about the effects. Then the effect came into play in the Netherworld. Yes, monsters dropping items depended on the results of numerical calculations. And the thing that could be applied in this situation was the.....luck stat!

“Character Information Window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +350		
Fame	9,125 (+500)	Level	253
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Abandoned, Jackson’s Hero, Great Adventurer		
Health	3,910 (+150)	Mana	4,050

Spiritual Power	200	Strength	503 (+28)
Agility	663 (+55)	Stamina	733 (+20)
Wisdom	87 (+10)	Intelligence	781
Luck	103 (+30)	Flexibility	98
Art of Communication	46	Affection	141 (+10)
Resilience	285		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics	138		
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
* <King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Wind Spirit's Boots (Shoes): Agility + 30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Slide' available			
Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.			
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available			
Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%			
Mind's Eye (Ring): 'Mind's Eye' enabled			
Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5			

every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense

Ark's luck was currently 103....

With the effects of Sacred Branch, it was 133. However, all his stats increased by 40% thanks to the dark attribute bonus. In other words, the final value was 186. It's quite high compared to other games where the luck stat was generally low.

'It is too weird. My luck is 186, yet first I received the 'Fail' option and the next time it landed on a useless profession for me? If so, my luck isn't applied to this roulette wheel.'

Then the answer was that Deimos' luck stat was applied to the roulette wheel! He opened the information window and saw that Deimos only had 26 luck. In fact, when he first evolved Deimos had 50 stat. But when he used bone collecting, stats like strength and agility went up while luck fell. Ark hadn't really cared about the luck stat. No, he had welcomed it when Deimos' strength and agility went up. Therefore he was caught off guard by this situation.

'Dedric's complaints are sometimes useful.'

If Dedric had not mentioned it, he never would've thought of the undead's luck.

'The waiting time for the roulette is 20 minutes. I had wondered why it required waiting time.....but it turns out to be needed. It is for a skill that can change the rules of the game! If there was 20 minutes available, wasn't there time to change the rules? Anyway, once I know the problem then solving it isn't difficult!'

Ark's face, which had begun to look despairing, brightened.

"There is no time. Survival cooking recipe list!"

A list containing hundreds of different recipes appeared in front of Ark. The remaining time was 14 minutes. Ark used filters to get rid of the unnecessary dishes. There were approximately 40 dishes that gave a 'lucky' effect. But he could only make 5 at the moment.

'Creating 5 dishes can boost the luck by 60. With Deimos' current luck, he would have 86 at most. But there is only a 2% probability of landing on Death Knight. Damn, if I knew that luck was this important then I would've packed extra ingredients to raise it.....'

It was too late to feel regretful.

'There might be a way to raise the luck above 86.'

Ark took out all his ingredients and made a dish. He paid attention to the pot's thermostat and added expensive spices. Then a brilliant light exploded from the pot and a stunning dish was created.

The best 'Four-leaf Clover Pancake' has been completed using Survival cooking!

The pancakes decorated with four-leaf clovers have been cooked well and symbolizes good fortune. Because of the decoration, eating the pancakes will make you feel more lucky. Although it is a relatively simple dish, your sincerity has create an a la carte dish.

<Recovers 400 health over 3 minutes. Luck +15 for 1 hour>

<A la carte bonus: 200 health recovered. Luck +10>

‘That’s it!’

That’s what Ark was aiming for. A la carte dishes provided extra bonuses through sincerity! It wasn’t easy to receive the ‘A la carte’ or ‘Miracle Nursing’ effects. But now it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that life or death rested on the luck stat. The brain scanning unit detected this and he was able to create an ‘A la carte’ dish.

“What is this? Ah ha, have you finally realized that you treated me poorly? Huhuhu, it isn’t necessary for you to cook for me.....well, I did receive some unfair treatment. Since it’s already made, I’ll eat it well.”

Dedric approached after smelling the fragrant dish.

“Don’t be annoying and go away!”

Ark kicked Dedric aside and fed the pancakes to Deimos.

“Eh? “M-master! Are you really going to act like that?”

Dedric obtained a bruise on his eye and once again started complaining. But he had no time to pay attention to his pet’s feelings.

‘There isn’t a lot of time left. I have to create all the dishes and feed it to him before then!’

Ark quickly made the rest of the dishes. However, he rushed too much and failed to make an ‘A la carte’ dish.

“Damn it! No, it can’t be. Let’s calm down. I can’t rush too much. Come, Dedric eat these dishes.”

“I don’t want to, you petty and dirty....ugh!”

Ark crammed the failed dishes into Dedric’s mouth and took a deep breath. After several more failures, he was able to make an ‘A la carte’ dish.

“Ugh....am I a rubbish bin for food? Gag, I’m about to burst.”

Dedric’s stomach swelled so much that it looked like it was going to burst. Anyway, after making the ‘A la carte’ dishes he was able to

raise Deimos' luck to 140.

"That's it, this is the best that I can do. 140 is not a small number in regards to luck. I hope it lands on Death Knight.....if not, at the very least a skeleton warrior, Deimos!"

Clack clack clack clack!

Deimos also nodded nervously. At that time the message window showed up.

-The time limit of 20 minutes has been completed. We will spin the roulette wheel.
--

Ta da da da da!

Ark, Deimos and Radun looked at the wheel anxiously. Dedric was distracted by rubbing his bloated stomach and picking his nostrils. Well, he couldn't break the tense atmosphere as the roulette wheel spun and the bone rattled loudly. Once the wheel start to slow, a sense of anticipation was seen in Ark's eyes.

"Okay, okay, it looks good. Just a little more....a little more.....!"

Ta da da....da da da....da da...da.....

The roulette was close to the Death Knight area. If he measured the distance and speed, there was a high probability that it would land on Death Knight. The atmosphere became expectant like a jackpot was going to appear! Ark, Deimos and Radun tensed up while Dedric rubbed his nose and his body shook violently. The roulette wheel attracted all their eyes as it stopped. Ark's eyes lit up.

"T-that's it....Death Knight!"

"Hu, r-really? A, a, a.....achoo!"

Dedric freaked out with his fingers stuck in his nostrils and sneezed. Then, was this fate's joke? The roulette which had landed perfectly on Death Knight, made a noise and moved onto the next section. Instantaneously, Ark and his summons all froze.

"What, what the? Dedric you.....!"

“It’s not me! My sneezing couldn’t have possibly moved the wheel!”

Dedric screamed spectacularly. Of course, Ark was also aware of that. If he could’ve controlled the random roulette that Ark would’ve already done so. But the roulette had a semi-transparent form and couldn’t be touched with his hands. It was just bad luck. But it was still an emotional problem. Since he had been picking his nostrils for no reason, as soon as he sneezed then anger welled up. Dedric sensed the mood and kept quiet.

“My wish!

Ark cried out.

‘Dammit, this was a perfect opportunity to evolve into Death Knight..... What other profession is after Death Knight? Skeleton warrior? That is still good.’

Since it was a useable profession, he would still accept the evolution. But when he thought about the Death Knight, Ark couldn’t shake off the feeling of tremendous loss.

At that time the message window appeared.

The great power that oversees the Netherworld has acknowledged Deimos’ evolution.

The chosen profession is ‘Death Master.’

The Death Master is a profession Deimos can evolve into using the knowledge obtained from the necromancer Tamura’s skull. There is no public information available on Death Master. After the pet’s evolution, a significant bonus will be applied when the player learns skills related to death, and they can even exert power over death sometimes. It is an occupation highly recommended for an undead summon

<This is the player’s last chance. If you cancel the evolution then the evolution attempt will end in failure and a penalty applied>

“Yes, a Skeleton Warrior is also useful.....eh? What? Death

master?”

Ark murmured in a stunned voice.

“What is a Death Master?”

He hadn't seen that profession on the roulette. Ark thought it was a mistake and approached the roulette closely. Then he realised there was a part he never saw. Between Death Knight and Skeleton Warrior, there was a small gap that wasn't easy to see unless looking with a magnifying glass. And the occupation Death Master was written in a straight line.

“Death master? ‘What’s this?”

He had never heard of this profession.

‘The space assigned to Death Master is only 0.5%. Since the probability is so low, it is an even rarer profession than Death Knight.....that means.....the good luck was applied after all?’

Ark looked at the roulette wheel with a strange expression. Although he picked a lot of targets, it was amazing that he ended up with this absurd situation. And the problem was that Ark wasn't aware of what type of profession Death Master was. He couldn't tell by looking at the name or the information present.

‘It is a profession with a low probability but.....’

He was somewhat hesitant to choose it.

‘But I don't have a choice. If this evolution fails, Deimos will lose 600 health and 30 points in each stat. And the chance to evolve will disappear.’

Although the profession was ambiguous, he couldn't accept the penalty. There was also Deimos' reaction. Although he looked grouchy when Skeleton Merchant appeared, his eyes were lively once he saw Death Master. It was similar to when he trained Deimos in Bone Collecting and Dedric in Vampirism. Based on previous experience, his pets would listen better when it was something they liked.

“Okay. Let’s just do it. Evolution!”

In the end, Ark choose to evolve and closed his eyes.

Oduduk, Oduduk...!

At that moment, there was the eerie sound of Deimos’ bones changing dramatically. Until now, Deimos had been made up of different parts. The ribs of an ogre, the shoulder bones of a gnoll.....there were various bones of monsters mixed together as well as Andel’s bone. Since it was from different species, the appearances of the bones didn’t match. He was also wearing a ragged cloak and just looked like a pile of trash. But once the evolution started, his bones became shiny and black. A skeleton made of black bones.....and his eyes flowed with a red gleam.

Clack....clack clack.....clack clack clack.....

The sound of his bones also changed and became gloomier than before.

The evolution was successful.

All the components have been optimized to a form suitable for a Death Master’s growth. The great power who oversees the Netherworld has granted the name ‘Razak’ to the Death Master. Razak can now acquire the knowledge necessary for a Death Master.

Razak

A resident of the Netherworld who has evolved after collecting bones. After absorbing the fragment of knowledge from the necromancer Tamura’s skull, his understanding of death has deepened. Although arrogance is in his nature, his loyalty to his Master means there will be an additional bonus applied after learning death related skills. In addition, the performance of his blade has gone up.
--

Species: Undead

Alignment: Dark

Ranking: Lower class

Health: 1,724 (+ 250)

Loyalty: 620 (+ 30)

Strength: 253 (+ 20)

Agility: 95 (+ 20)

Stamina: 279 (+20)

Wisdom: 58 (+ 50)

Intelligence: 76 (+ 50)

Luck 26 (+10)

* Damage as a blade increased by 7, Durability +50, the range of the whip has increased by 5 metres.

* You have learned the skill 'Death's Equations.'

* You have learned the skill 'Pledge of Death.

Death's Equations (Beginner, Active): After understanding Death's Equations, you will be able to return the soul of the monster to their body after dying. However, this technique requires the exchange of Razak's bones in order to be successful. The number of bones sacrificed will depend on the status and ranking of the target. In addition, if you offer more than the set value then the stats obtained will rise. The life force of the resurrected target will be restored by 50%, but Razak will not be able to move while controlling the target or the contract will be released.

<A rank resurrection: 3 bones consumed. B rank resurrection: 2 bones consumed. C rank resurrection: 1 bone consumed>

Pledge of Death (Beginner, Active): The Pledge of Death is a way for the pet to show loyalty to its Master.

If the player dies, the Pledge of Death will be activate and the pet

will exchange his health with his Master's. However, the pet will die instead and will receive his Master's death penalty of -1 to all stats.

'This is.....should I be glad?'

Ark read the information window with a dumb expression. After evolving, his stats rose considerably. 170 points were added to health and loyalty. The effect had raised Deimos 17 levels. But as expected, Death Master had a magician characteristic. It focused on wisdom and intelligence rather than strength and agility. However, it was unreasonable compared to a magician. Since he evolved holding the sword and shield, strength, agility and stamina all increased a little bit. Naturally, his defense and attack also rose a little bit. Although Deimos would grow along the path of a magician, fortunately Ark had raised him as a warrior.

'The increase in blade damage isn't really meaningful. An 7 point increase in damage meant an attack of 30~42. It is a lot weaker than Gwisal's sword. While a one-handed sword is quite strong, I'm familiar with Gwisal's sword so it isn't necessary to change it.'

But since he sometimes used the whip, the increase in damage was great. The problem was the skills 'Death's Equations' and 'Pledge of Death.' He could resurrect dead monsters and use them freely. It sounded amazing but when thinking about it, the technique required sacrificing Razak's bones every time it was used. It meant that it would cut the stats obtained through bone collecting. Of course, he could always regain the stats back through bone collecting but he didn't want to sacrifice stats just to raise monsters with 50% of their abilities.

'Well, it might have a huge effect if I resurrect a boss.....'

But resurrecting such a monster would require 3 bones. Furthermore, it wasn't possible to go someplace else because Razak couldn't move. There was also 'Pledge of Death.' Instead of Ark dying, he would share Razak's remaining health. However, it was only good if Razak had a lot of health remaining. If Razak's health also decreased then Ark and Razak would just lose some stats.

‘I can’t grasp whether the profession and skills are good or bad.’

Ark thought with a strange expression. Prior to the evolution, bone collecting was used to raise the stats. But now the skills created after evolution only decreased the stats.

‘I can’t just excessively use the remaining bones.’

Although Deimos finally obtained new skills, Ark didn’t want to test them out.

‘Overall it is not that bad. Death Master seems like a mix between magician and warrior. Since the attack and defense wasn’t lowered, I’ll be able to use him sometimes to tank. And the peculiar skills could be surprisingly effective in some situations. Well, now I need to create some dishes to regain the stats.’

Ark was satisfied with the results. The fact that he didn’t evolve into a Death Knight was still inconvenient but at least the Death Master profession was somewhat useable. Wasn’t it a hundred times better than a Skeleton Merchant? Ark smiled and looked at Razak.

“Okay, now you’ve evolved. Deimos.....no, now it is Razak?”

Clack clack.....clack clack clack....

Razak leisurely nodded. In fact, this was what he found disagreeable about the evolution. When Deimos was made out of a patchwork of bones, he had a lively feeling. That was his charm.....but now Ark couldn’t find that feeling after the evolution into Death Knight. Although it was quite intense, the atmosphere felt more gloomy and drab. Dedric also shot a dissatisfied look towards Razak.

“Sheesh, this conceited child has now completely changed his atmosphere?”

Clack clack? Clack clack clack.....

“What the?” Ha, just because you’ve succeeded recently? Don’t be ridiculous. All you did was pick up some bones in order to evolve! I have inherited the noble blood of the vampires! I can’t be judge with

the same standards as a brainless child!”

Clack clack clack, ttaak.....clack clack clack clack!

Razak laughed (?) and shrugged his shoulders.

‘What, what the?’ This bastard, do you think it is settled? Not too long ago you were rolling around on the ground and now you’re ignoring me? Do you want to experience that again?”

Dedric huffed and burst out angrily.

“Dedric, stop. Why haven’t you calmed down and kept on talking so noisily?”

“What the? Now even Master is ignoring me?”

Dedric’s face contorted at Ark’s words.

“Are you going to keep on acting like this?

“Yes, I am. Why? Are you going to beat me again? Go ahead! You think that I’m a vampire who can’t evolve? Ha, good, good! Hit me! Tear my stomach!”

‘Why is he behaving like this?’

Ark sent an absurd look towards Dedric.

Then, a thought popped into my head.

‘Wait? Maybe this guy.....aha, this is good.’

Ark noticed something about Dedric and burst out laughing. If he returned to the past, their relationship when there were a bat and a skull wasn’t that close. Dedric could talk from the beginning and he had a flying ability. So he just ignore the skull rolling around on the ground.

Ark> bat > skull > snake.

That was the ranking in Dedric’s mind. In addition, Ark evolved him first so he really became smug. And that relationship continued even after Skull evolved into Deimos. But this was the first time that the

ranking sequence was broken. Dedric naturally thought that he should've evolved first. But now Radun and Razak had evolved first, so his sense of security had started to collapse. As a vampire, Dedric was exceptionally proud so this cut like a knife.

"Laughing? Am I funny? Dammit, don't laugh! I am Dedric!"

'Okay, it is a very good reaction. Why didn't I think of that?'

Ark finally noticed why Dedric was grumbling like a little kid. He tried it out. Even if Razak had a high degree of loyalty, he still made them eat food. There were no problems. Dedric was the one who always complained but that didn't happen this time.

'That's right, trying to balance the two of them might've been a mistake. Now Dedric's pride won't allow him to complain about food just in case the gap with Razak widens. Kukukuk, this is an effective new method.'

Thanks to his show of weakness, Ark had caught the rebellious Dedric in his claws.

'This guy is clever but he still acts like a little kid.'

Ssak ssak ssak!

At that time, Radun who had been wandering around returned. There were 200 dead Nakujuk in the underground square. Radun had swept through every corner and obtained 300 japterm. Although there were no special items, the overflowing number of items was still worth a large amount of old so Ark was happy. After finishing everything, Ark went up to the 2nd floor where everyone was waiting.

"Now, let's go."

"Bah, pah, sheesh!"

Dedric grumbled and followed behind them.

Deception

Guran, Bona, Lariette and Buksil were gathered on the 2nd floor. Guran and Bona were talking about what happened in the previous days while Buksil was looking at the footage on the magic projector. And Lariette was still organizing her skills, with the relevant information window open.

“Ark-nim, have you finished your business?”

Guran stood up when Ark approached.

“Yes, it is finished.”

“I have to thank you once again. If it wasn’t for Ark-nim....Bona-nim.”

When Guran looked at him, Bona immediately bowed his head.

“.....Thank you for saving me.”

Although he hadn’t noticed it before, Bona was quite a cute-looking boy. But when he wore a white hat, he really looked like a smurf.

“Are you uninjured?”

“Yes.”

“Then I am even more thankful. I’m glad you’re safe.”

Ark gave him an affectionate look and ruffled Bona’s head. Dedric looked like he was going to vomit at Ark’s words, but Ark was being 100% sincere. Since Bona was safe then Ark would be able to receive the compensation for the B difficulty quest.

‘Huhuhu, now I can obtain items from the smurfs.’

Ark seemed to drool as he looked at Bona. However Bona didn’t know Ark’s true feelings and blushed so red that he could be mistaken for a Nakujuk.

“I.....I.....I’ll be a great warrior just like Ark-hyung. I’ll defeat the Nakujuk that threatens my clan.”

He had no interest in that. But treating NPCs well was Ark’s slogan. Ark nodded his head as if he was proud of Bona’s words.

“Yes, if you stay strong then you’ll be able to become a great warrior and hunt the Nakujuk. But shouldn’t we reassure your grandfather first?”

“Yes!”

Bona nodded excitedly and quickly hugged the embarrassed Guran.

“Come, let’s get out of here.”

“Yes, I’m ready.”

Buksil finished with the magic projector and got out of his seat. However, Lariette was still looking at the skills window and couldn’t hear Ark’s voice. She had been a magician, but once she changed to Innocence Knight then all her magic was deleted and new skills registered. She was so preoccupied distributing the 50% stat points that she paid no attention to her surroundings. Ark knew the circumstances but couldn’t wait for her.

“Lariette-nim?”

Ark approached Lariette who became surprised and jumped.

“Ah, Ark-nim.”

“Have you still not finished redistributing your skills?”

“I took a bit of time checking every skill. But I’ve just finished.”

Lariette smiled and replied.

Ark was speechless for a moment. He had been too busy fighting the boss to pay attention, but Lariette was really beautiful. Of course, all females in New World altered their appearance to become prettier. Roco had also altered her character to the point that she could be in a CF (commercial). But Ark knew. Unlike the other users, Lariette didn’t have a big difference between reality and

the game.....so other people might not understand, but Ark felt like her beauty was even more special.

‘Are we really going to continue together in the future?’

Even though Ark had promised to let her accompany him, he hadn’t realised he would feel this way. He had been caught up in completing the quest and beating the boss. However, Ark was still a healthy Korean man. It was impossible not to like going forward with a beautiful woman. No, it was what he had been dreaming of since he first saw her in Jackson. But when it became real like this, it was actually a burden. His heart felt on edge like it was being stabbed.

‘That’s strange, why do I feel like this around you?’

Although he questioned it, there was an obvious reason. However, 99% of his brain was occupied with making money so he couldn’t work it out. Nevertheless, the world seemed extremely fair. If someone became too cunning then he would end up being excessively stupid.

‘But I don’t know how to treat Lariette-nim.’

Ark was worried about it since he was inexperienced with girls.

‘Well I’ll work it out somehow.’

Ark eventually gave up on finding an answer and turned towards her.

“That....what is your new profession like?”

“I’m not sure yet. Luckily it doesn’t seem that different from Alan’s Holy Knight. A lot of the skills I looked at seemed similar to a Holy Knight. Ah.....”

Lariette covered her mouth and studied Ark’s face.

Ark was confused by her attitude at first before shaking his head.

“You don’t have to worry. My feelings against Alan have been settled.”

It was true. Killing Alan last time was sufficient. He had gotten enough payback that it didn’t really matter to him anymore. Although

Alan might still hold a grudge against Ark.....No, there was a 100% chance but Ark had no emotions left about Alan.

Yes, after the business ended then Ark was an easy-going person who won't pay any regards to other people's grudges.

'Alan is also in prison. He won't be able to move even 1 muscle in the next month. And there will be a huge difference between us once he leaves. Huhuhu, it has ended perfectly. There is no reason to pay him any regard.'

Online games were an endless competition. No matter how high the level, someone else would catch up if the user was careless. This wasn't a one or two day difference, but a whole month spent in jail. But was that all? Although Ark was a fool in regards to women, he was about a 100 in regards to the game. Based on the conversation between Ronian and Lariette, there was a penalty applied to his profession of Holy Knight. One month of prison and a penalty to his profession! In conclusion, Alan had surely reached his end. Paying attention to that sort of guy was a useless waste of calories. However Lariette had no way of knowing what happened.

'I know that he received a lot of damage from Alan.....but it is wonderful that Ark-nim is able to shake off that grudge.

Thus.....the misunderstandings just deepened. Lariette send him a subtle look of respect.

'What the? Why is she looking like that?'

Ark was confused about her expression.

"...That's right, I remember now! You were the girl always with Alan!"

Dedric shouted after staring at Lariette.

"Even if Master is fooled, my eyes won't be deceived. What the? Why are you trying to approach Master? You couldn't have approached Master for no reason. Obviously you've received orders from Alan!"

Clack clack? Clack clack clack!

Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Razak and Radun both looked at her with wary eyes after those words. Lariette had no idea what to do after Ark's pets suddenly became cautious towards her. Then Dedric approached Ark and started cursing.

"Master, you didn't know? Look, it's the girl who was with that sissy! That beep-beep from the siege who used her -beep- magic!"

Ark was appalled and blocked Dedric's mouth. But his bad words had already been spoken and heard. Lariette became pale as this was the first time she heard such words. Guran, Bona and Buksil couldn't understand the situation and just observed with bemused expressions. Then Dedric who hadn't grasped the situation just pushed the hand back and continued talking.

"Pah, Master! Why won't you let me talk? Don't you understand? I said....."

"Please shut up and stay quiet, yes?"

Ark muttered with a murderous gaze. Just like usual, Dedric flinched and shut his mouth.

"I'm really sorry. For my pet to say such words....."

"Ah, it's nothing."

Lariette struggled to smile with a stiff face. Ark was silent for a moment before sighing.

"Hrmm, well let's return to the village in the valley for the moment."

"You don't have to explain. Because I'll just follow Ark-nim for the moment."

Thankfully, Dedric's rant hadn't changed her mind about accompanying him.

".....Ah, yes. Then let's go."

“Yes.”

So Ark led the group and headed upstairs. However, the atmosphere was a bit tense unlike before. Needless to say, the atmosphere had gone down to -100 with Dedric’s words.

‘Damn, the atmosphere was so good and now because of this guy.....’

Ark glared at Dedric. Dedric was still unaware of what he did wrong as was wondering ‘What mistake did I make?’ Dedric’s attitude worsened even more. But he had keen senses and kept quiet after noticing Ark’s mood. Then Buksil approached from the rear.

“Ark-nim, this scene might be worth more than I thought.”

“What do you mean?”

“What am I talking about? The brave warrior who risked his life jumping into the enemy’s hideout in order to rescue the kidnapped girlfriend! This scene isn’t easy to produce intentionally.”

What was he saying? Ark became uncomfortable at those words and bluntly said.

“My relationship with Lariette-nim isn’t like that.”

“Aye, it’s completely obvious.....”

“It’s not like that.”

“Huh? But.....’

Buksil was still disbelieving. But after thinking for a moment, he seemed to firmly grasp the situation.

“Then Ark-nim and Lariette-nim don’t often meet?”

“I’ve only met her once last year. And there were a few more times in New World.”

“Aha, I see.”

Buksil grinned and nodded.

“What are you saying?”

“Huhuhu, Ark-nim is surprisingly slow.”

“What the?”

“Please watch this.”

Buksil pulled out the magic projector and played a recorded scene. It was the fight scene between Ark and Tamura. Since he forgot about the filming while fighting, the footage looked fairly plausible. However, that wasn't the reason Buksil showed him the scene. Buksil stopped the scene on an image of Lariette and muttered quietly.

“Take a good look. Now do you see what I'm trying to say?”

“Am I meant to see something?”

“Ah, it's really frustrating. If you're this slow then it's rather pitiful.”

“What? What did you say? Huh?”

Ark was still in his Dark Wolf form.

When the black furred wolf showed his fangs, Buksil freaked out and explained.

“Ah, no. This is what I've been trying to say. Look here. Ark-nim, please look at the way Lariette-nim's expression changes. Look at the feelings being expressed. I don't know how Ark-nim feels, but there is a 100% chance that Lariette has a good impression of you.....”

Ark blocked Buksil's mouth with an astonished face. He had no idea of what would happen if Lariette heard those words in this atmosphere. Fortunately Guran, Bona and Lariette were 10 metres behind the two of them and couldn't hear their conversation. Ark sighed and glared at Buksil.

“Stop talking nonsense you idiot. There is no such possibility.”

At the same time, Ark sneaked a glance at Lariette's image still showing on the magic projector. Lariette's silky hair flowing down

her back.....feelings of worry as well as delight and surprise was expressed on her face, and it was all directed towards Ark. The obsidian like eyes never looked away from him. His face became hot as he noticed what Buksil was saying. At the same time, his heart was thumping in his chest.

‘Perhaps Buksil’s words are correct.....?’

Ark muttered before shaking his head.

“No. Lariette-nim.....it’s definitely not like that. After being kidnapped to a place like this, it is natural to look at your rescuer like that. And you would feel anxious if the person who came to help you is in danger. Such reactions are normal.....”

“Well of course it wouldn’t be visible to you.”

‘What? This bastard!’

Ark frowned at Buksil’s words.

Why was his attitude so irresponsible? But Buksil was uninterested and just scratched his head before muttering.

“In fact I don’t really care. The most important thing is the ‘atmosphere.’ Although Ark’s current form is good, it leaves a somewhat dreary impression. But the atmosphere changed after Lariette-nim decided to accompany you. Even if the two of you aren’t in a relationship, it’s fine as long as there’s a good impression between you. Like I said, I need a ‘plausible’ atmosphere.”

‘This cheeky bastard....!’

Ark became upset but he didn’t show it. Since somewhat unrelated spoke about the relationship between Ark and Lariette, wasn’t it natural to become upset? Furthermore, the video was very important to Ark. In fact, there was a reason Ark was actively cooperating with the filming.

“The battle against the Nakujuk to rescue the boy and the fight against the Draken in the rain! I got better shots than I thought I would. If I put this on the official site then it might enter the top 10.”

Buksil said in an excited voice just before they entered the Abyss of Despair.

“Official site?”

“Yes, the official site of Global Exos. The videos of the game on there are ranked every month. If it reaches the top 10 then it has at least 50,000 hits. It is only a matter of time until Ark-nim is a big star.”

Ark felt a lightbulb light up as he listened. It was unnecessary to say again, but Ark’s final goal was to join Global Exos. Although the exact acceptance criteria was unknown, it was clearly evident that he had to be better than other users.

‘If my video becomes popular on the site then it’ll help my entrance examination.’

Ark was currently in his Dark Wolf form. But Ark mistakenly thought that Global Exos was reading his reports and would know that Dark Wolf and Ark was the same. In other words, if the movie became popular then he would secretly appeal to Global Exos without other users knowing his identity.

‘This chance doesn’t come along every day. Now that I know the benefits of the video, it won’t be easy for me to send him away.’

Therefore, Ark changed his mind about sending Buksil away once he had an opportunity. Accompanying him to the destination should have a satisfactory result. So instead of delaying the shoot, he cooperated with Buksil while filming. Come to think of it, Buksil seemed to have become a little cocky since then.

“Did you hear what I just said? Anyway, atmosphere is the most important thing. But Ark-nim doesn’t have to worry about that. I’ll make it so that both men and women have a good impression of you. I’ll take care of it through careful editing. Oh, and please don’t mention this to Lariette-nim. Because I’ll start filming secretly from now on.”

“What? Why?”

“Does Ark-nim want Lariette-nim to become a celebrity as well? If Lariette-nim becomes uncomfortable towards Ark-nim while filming then it’ll feel awkward. Furthermore, scripted films are common nowadays. These days the realistic videos are the ones that become popular. The magic projector is still not widely known. I’ll take the videos carefully so Ark-nim shouldn’t pay any attention to me.”

Buksil was surprisingly an expert in this area. According to Buksil’s words, the movie-like videos were extremely popular. But people soon tired of the same contents and now realistic videos were the trend. Well, even variety shows were the trend on TV.

‘In the end, Lariette-nim will have no idea so I’ll be acting the fool by myself?’

Ark looked uncomfortable as Buksil confirmed this.

“All this work is for Ark-nim. Making a cool video that will reach the top 10 isn’t an easy thing.”

“.....I understand, I’ll be careful.”

Ark sighed and nodded. Although he agreed without thinking, it had suddenly become much bigger. And now he had to conceal it from Lariette while they were filmed secretly. However, Buksil’s words made sense.

If he explained then the relationship between the two of them would feel even more awkward.

‘Yes, it’s not a bad thing.....and Lariette is also a candidate. It won’t be bad if both of us catches Global Exos attention with the videos. But can I do well?’

Ark turned and looked at Lariette. It was unnecessary to mention it again, but Ark had more than a crush on her. Every time he met her during the game. His heart trembled. But those sentiments weren’t feelings of love. It was similar to the feeling that the general public felt when watching celebrities.....Ark had been thinking that all along. Lariette was very beautiful. If Buksil saw her in real life then he probably wouldn’t be able to act so calmly. And her education was enough for her to have a job at Global Exos. Meanwhile Ark

was struggling with medical bills and living expenses every month. It was the reason why he hesitated in her presence.

‘Lariette-nim suits a guy like Alan.’

A bitter sigh emerged from Ark’s mouth. In New World, Ark had removed Alan’s position as the Lord. But in reality, Alan was still nobility while Ark was just a common person. And Lariette was a woman more suited for nobility than a general person. In fact, at this point Ark still believed that Lariette and Alan were dating. She was probably wandering around alone because Alan was in jail.

‘Yes, I don’t need to have complicated thoughts. The reason I have a crush on her is because she was the only one to reach out a hand to me when I was feeling nervous about the interview. That’s it. Lariette-nim is probably kind to me for the same reason. Since meeting acquaintances inside the game is not that common. Of course, what other reason would there be?’

Ark had that thought and finally cleared his mind. Like it was mentioned earlier, Ark only used 1% of his brain on such worries.

Since Buksil’s words had made his head all complicated, Ark had been worrying about it too much. He had to quickly finish his <Rescue Bona> quest. He had to complete it to proceed with his <Genius Alchemist’s Laboratory> quest. And there was also the Red Man who appeared after defeating Tamura. Although he couldn’t pursue him, he needed to find out more information about why he was in the Netherworld. But that would be a problem for later. He had a more realistic problem to think about after exiting the Abyss of Despair. In order to complete the job, he had to return to the village in the valley. But all of Ark’s skyrays had been wiped out by the Draken. Fortunately they could still walk back to the village. It was a straight path when flying through the sky, but navigating the complicated terrain would take a considerable amount of time.

“Guran, how long will it take to return to the village from here?”

“I don’t completely know but it should take approximately 4 days.”

He naturally sighed at Guran’s words. 4 days was approximately 1 day in reality. But Ark just looked gloomy. He forgot for a while but

this wasn't a situation where he could afford to waste time. Ark had wiped out Jewel's party who came to the Netherworld. It meant that Jewel would resurrect after 24 hours.

'If Jewel followed my path then they probably updated the resurrection place at the village. Then they would have resurrected before I reach the village.'

It was a serious issue. He was lucky before but Ark couldn't deal with Jewel, Duke and their group by himself. He wouldn't stand a chance if he encountered them in the field. No, he was unlikely to succeed and they probably wouldn't let him run away either.

'But there isn't another way to return to the village....'

He couldn't cram his 4 companions on Radun's back.

Kaaaaaaa-!

Then Ark suddenly heard familiar cries from above his head. He looked up and saw skyrays flying above him.

'Skyrays? Wait, the Myutal living in the Valley Village are the only monster trainers.'

Ark looked expectantly at Guran.

"Guran, can you tame those skyrays?"

"Monster taming is a special talent only a few Myutal have. Bona also has the talent. But taming a monster requires a lot of time. Even an experienced trainer would take one month to tame a monster. Even if Bona managed to train one, it would take some time to tame two."

Bona nodded at Guran's description.

'Damn it, I'll grow old before that monster will be tamed.'

"But it's strange. This area is the habitat of the Draken so normally the skyrays wouldn't approach.....eh? Wait, that is.....?"

Guran focused his attention and seemed to have found something.

“Indeed, these skyrays have already been trained.”

“They’ve already been trained?”

“Yes, it is definitely hooked up to some reins. There are approximately 10 of them? Why are 10 trained skyrays here.....eh? Perhaps Teacher.....”

The circumstances suddenly became clear in Ark’s mind.

‘That’s right, Jewel’s group arrived at the abyss shortly after I did. They must have taken 1 hour to reach the abyss from the village. Even if they knew my position thanks to the curse, they wouldn’t have been able to reach me so fast by foot. If that’s the case?’

Jewel’s group must have chased him using the skyrays.

‘They must’ve stopped by the village while chasing me.’

Now the circumstances made a lot more sense. And a way to solve his problem emerged.

“If the skyrays have already been trained then perhaps they can take us?”

“It is possible but....the seal on the skyrays has loosened.”

“Seal?”

“Yes, originally the monster and the trainer wouldn’t be able to move a certain distance away from each other. That’s because the dominance would weaken and they would return to the wild.”

“Eh? But we came here riding the skyrays.”

“That is the effect of the seal.”

Guran rolled up his sleeves and demonstrated. There was a black pattern on his wrist. Before they left the village, Beseutyu had stamped the pattern on Ark’s and Buksil’s wrist.

“The person stamped with the pattern will be recognized as the monster trainer for a certain period of time. Therefore the effects of the dominance won’t disappear if there is this seal. Now the people

stamped are dead so the skyrays are in a state of confusion. It is impossible to tame them again.....”

Then Bona interrupted.

“They haven’t fully returned to their wild state yet. If we update the seal before they return to the wild state then it’ll be fine.”

“But the seal of the original owner.....ah, that’s right!”

Guran tilted his head and shouted.

“That’s right. If these skyrays are Teacher’s then we can renew the seal. Because we have one if Teacher’s seals. Of course we need to update every person’s stamps, but it shouldn’t be hard for Bona since he has the makings of a trainer. The problem is how we can catch the confused skyrays.....”

Guran muttered in a small voice while staring at the skyrays flying above. The rest of this situation was up to Ark.

“I’ll take care of it. Dedric, it’s your turn.”

Ark ventured forward with a smile. The skyrays were flying dozens of metres above him but it wasn’t a problem with Dedric. However.....no answer was heard. Dedric was looking at the distant mountains and couldn’t seem to hear anything.

“Hey you, what are you doing? Can’t you hear me?”

There was no reply.....

Dedric yawned and scratched his neck.

‘This guy, is it because I beat him earlier?’

Ark’s eyes sharpened. It appeared that he had to train his pets first before the skyrays. However, one or two beatings wouldn’t work when Dedric was rebelling so openly. His ego was so strong that beating him wouldn’t fix the habit. Dedric had to be in a critical condition three or four times before paying attention. But now there were too many eyes watching. Not only was Lariette watching, but doing violence in front of Bona might make him lose respect for

Ark.....In addition, there was no time to waste on beating him so much.

‘Damn, this guy must be aware of the urgency in this matter.’

Ark glared at Dedric.

‘Wait? Wasn’t his bad mood because Razak succeeded in the evolution? Then.....’

What should he do.....Ark concentrated for a bit before he smiled and said.

“This time I’ve gathered so many ingredients that I’ll probably be able to make at least 10 new dishes. Unfortunately it’s not possible anymore.”

“.....?”

Dedric tilted his head in confusion. Normally he would beat them until they ate new food but now he said it wasn’t possible?

“Aren’t most of the ingredients gathered good for the body? Well, at least 70% of them will have a good effect. But I can’t force you if you don’t want to. I’ll just feed all of it to Razak. I will probably continue like that in the future.....but then wouldn’t Razak become even stronger?”

Then Dedric pricked his ears and began to look around.

“What, what the? It will also be like that in the future?”

“Yes, I’ve changed my policy. After thinking about it, I realised that I’ve been acting terribly. I’ve reflected deeply. If you don’t want to eat food in the future then I won’t force you. I’ll only feed Razak who wants to become stronger.”

“It’s a different story!”

“Why is it different? It’s what you always wanted.”

“It is, but.....”

Dedric stuttered with embarrassment. He certainly didn’t want to eat

disgusting new dishes. But not eating at all was a problem. Since Razak stats increased after going through his second evolution, wouldn't the difference become even bigger if only Razak ate the food? His position might even fall beneath Radun and Razak. No, it was almost certain. Then wouldn't it go back to the days when he was bullied as a bat? Ark smiled like a wicked adult while watching Dedric shake his head.

‘Huhuhu, he really is childish.’

Ark actually learned this approach from his mother. As a child, Ark never took his medicine even when he had a high fever. He was so stubborn that his mother couldn't force him. His mother abandoned it half-way and used a trick.

“If you don't eat this then there is no possibility of becoming an adult.....no chance. I'll just give it to the children next door. The children next door will grow rapidly while Hyun-woo will stay as a little kid. When the neighbourhood kids are playing at school, Hyun-woo will be playing by himself. Ah, our Hyun-woo is so pitiful.”

Then his mother burst into tears and Ark took the medicine. It was a bitter pill. Ark was also aware of this. That's why he decided not to eat even if he died. But there was a movie that said loneliness was the hardest thing for a child. Since then Ark was a good child who took his medicine. He hated it, but he wanted to become a man.....

Anyway, Dedric wasn't that different from when Ark was 4 years old. He didn't like eating new dishes. But if he was ignored and everything given to Razak then he would become lonely. Then just like his mother, Ark approached Dedric and whispered in a gentle voice.

“I'm only saying it now, but don't you think its better that Razak evolved first?”

“.....Huh?”

“Think about it. Who do you think had really been useful so far?”

“.....Who?”

“You frustrating guy, of course it is you. In fact, I actually regard you as the number 2. That is why you’re punished when there is a problem. It is standard for the boss to punish the upper rank as a demonstration to the subordinates. Then the rest would also follow. Why you ask? In their hearts, Radun and Razak also think of you as number 2.”

“.....Really?”

“Of course. That is why only you can such crude language.”

Was it really like that? No, Radun and Razak simply couldn’t talk.

“Anyway, you evolved first so you’re higher up in the hierarchy. Since you evolved first you were even more helpful in battle. Do you understand? If you don’t help this time then it won’t be possible to catch the skyrays. Razak is no use even though he evolved. I couldn’t give up the opportunity for Razak to evolve but I didn’t really feel like it.”

Ark shook his head in regret.

“So I wanted to make you even stronger than Razak by feeding you new dishes.....but I can’t help it if you don’t want to. You can just give up your number 2 spot to Razak. I’ll also only give food to Razak from now on. How about it?”

“Who said I didn’t like it?”

Dedric shouted loudly. Then Ark silenced Dedric and whispered in a low voice.

“Shh, please speak quietly. Radun or Razak can’t hear this.”

“Why?”

“You fool, those guys don’t realize that I’ve been treating you in a special manner.”

“Special?”

“Yes, special.”

Ark enunciated it clearly. Then Dedric smirked and laughed.

“If Master says so.....okay, Razak is useless even though he evolved right? Huhuhu, of course it is like that. It is a skeleton that evolved. It is incomparable to a noble vampire. I didn't know that Master was aware of it. Huhuhuhu, as the number 2 I'm supposed to show an example to the lower ones. Will you give me a new dish from now on?”

“Of course. You are special.”

“Okay, should I lure those guys towards Master?”

“As expected, I can only rely on you. I don't have to explain it.”

“I'm not number 2 for nothing.”

Ark was laughing when a message window appeared.

Your pet 'Dedric' is looking at you with more respectful eyes. <The loyalty of your summon has increased by 10>
--

The effect was immediate. Dedric behaved himself and flew up at an incredible pace.

“Hahaha, I am the number 2! Take this!”

Dedric narrowed the distance and quickly approached the skyray. And boldly.....after digging his fingers into his nose, he flicked it at their face. He fiercely used his 'Taunt' skill. The skyray instantly rushed towards Dedric with angry cries. However, the opponent was Dedric who was in extremely good spirits! Dedric avoided the attack and led the skyray towards Ark.

“Master, the number 2 guy has attracted a skyray!”

“You're indeed the best! Razak, transform!”

Razak's body transformed into a sword like a robot. The blade that Razak changed into also had a different appearance. There were some vertebrae sprouting from both sides and a black aura covered the blade. Ark picked up the saw blade, changed it into a whip and threw it towards the sky.

Chwararak!

Thanks to the evolution, the whip became 5 metres longer and shot into the sky. Even though Razak evolved into the saw blade, he was still conscious. It was the reason why Ark could use the whip to wind around things even when he didn't know how to use the whip. Razak knew Ark's intent and aimed towards the skyray before winding tightly around it.

Kaaaaaaa-!

The skyray shrieked and twisted its body.

"Now. Please help!"

"Yes!"

When Ark called out Guran, Bona, Buksil and Lariette who had been idly watching rushed forward and helped pull. However they were facing a flying monster. It wasn't easily taken down even with 5 people.

"We shouldn't just blindly pull. When it tires from struggling then we'll quickly pull. Please control the pace according to my commands. Release.....pull!"

"Heave-ho, heave-ho, heave-ho!"

5 people tugged on the saw blade.

"This bastard, where are you looking? A skyray dares defy me? I am the number 2 summon!"

Dedric also helped by stepping on the skyray from above. After a few minutes.....the skyray became exhausted and was dragged down. Using Dedric as bait was a great success.

"Huk, huk, huk, be good now. Bona, it's your turn. Please change the stamped pattern."

"Yes."

Bona said while gasping. He brought Ark's wrist with the pattern close to the skyray and chanted a spell with his eyes closed. After a

while, a message window floated in front of Ark.

-The trainer's seal has been successfully renewed.

The skyray will continue to follow Ark for the duration of the effects of the sealing.

<Remaining Time: 2 hours>

"Okay, we can't take a break!"

Ark grabbed the reins and got on the skyray. The now docile skyray flew obediently into the sky.

"Dedric, lead the skyray to me coolly just like before!"

"Was I cool? Hehehe, okay. Master!"

He danced like a fool from the praise. Dedric felt good and shot across the sky like an arrow. Then he led them towards Ark who immediately wrapped his blade around them and drew the skyray to the ground. It wasn't easy for 5 people pulling, but it wasn't a problem if Ark utilizing the tame skyray. So Ark immediately caught all ten skyrays. Only 3 people were stamped so the skyrays could only follow their commands.

"Hehehe, how was it Master?"

Dedric strutted forward and said after capturing the skyrays ended.

"Yes, as expected from the number 2. I'll feed you new dishes until your stats climb higher than Razak's. You have the appropriate qualifications."

"Really? You promise?"

Dedric confirmed a few times. He was truly deceived. If a monkey was fed 4 times in the morning, he would be upset when only fed 3 times in the evening. But if he fed the monkey 3 in the morning then he would be satisfied with 4 in the evening.

"Somehow this seems not right....."

Dedric was more intelligent than a monkey so he was a little cautious. But when Ark mentioned the number 2 position and flattered him again, Dedric immediately forgot and laughed again.

He was indeed simple.....it was really pitiful.

“Ark-nim, I’ve finished updating all the seals.”

Guran approached after he finished stamping.

“Then let’s leave quickly.”

Ark and his companions walked towards the 10 skyrays. Guran and Bona were familiar with them and got on their backs. Buksil had suffered through the skyray dying during the storm and hesitated, but he eventually got on. But Lariette just stopped a small distance away.

“What’s wrong?”

“No.....are we flying in the air on these creatures?”

Lariette shuddered and shook her head.

“I, I’m.....because I’m not familiar with this.....no, flying in the sky.....”

“It isn’t very risky.”

Ark murmured to try and calm Lariette down.

“It’s not that.....I.....this might be bad.....I’m a bit afraid of heights.....”

Surprise showed in Ark’s expression. The skyrays were trained to obediently follow commands. Buksil was a merchant who would often travel long distances and had the riding skill. Ark also had the riding skill and was used to travelling on Radunma. It was possible even without the riding skill, but asking someone afraid of heights to fly on a skyray was definitely impossible. Then Guran shrugged and made a suggestion.

“It is okay. Lariette will just have to travel with someone since she’s afraid. There are 10 skyrays so we can’t afford to change when it

gets tired. But as you can see, Bona is not yet familiar with the skyrays.....”

Bona was seated in front of Guran. Ark looked at Buksil who pretended to stare at the distant mountains. Buksil didn't want to travel with someone afraid of heights. Ark scratched his head before shrugging.

“Then please get on behind me.”

“.....”

Lariette hesitated for a moment. However, she had no choice. Eventually she grabbed Ark's hand and got on the skyray. And just like a girl riding on her boyfriend's motorbike for the first time, Lariette grasped the edge of his shirt with a red face.

“Now, let's go! Guran, please guide us.”

“Yes, hiyah!”

Guran grabbed the reins and ordered the skyrays into the sky. It rose in an almost vertical line!

“Kyaaak!”

Lariette screamed and hugged Ark tightly. Ark was so shocked that he almost dropped the reins.

“Lariette-nim?”

Ark burst out in embarrassment but Lariette was already in a state of panic. All she could do was bury her head and scream. Meanwhile Buksil was filming the whole thing. He flew sideways holding the magic projector and made the OK sign with his fingers. But Ark was also falling into a panic.

‘If I laugh then I won't be able to stop.’

Lariette had switched to a knight but she was still wearing a robe. Her soft touch and warm body temperature was clearly transmitted to him. Apart from his mother and Roco, Ark still had 0% resistance against women. Ark's brain became paralyzed from the

situation. Meanwhile the skyray was flying through the Netherworld's spinning sky. Ark's head was also spinning.

"I'm a little bit uneasy....."

Dedric was following behind him while still being confused.

Lee Myung-ryong's Humiliation

"What on earth did you do?"

A grey haired middle aged person asked with a sharp glance. He was the section chief of the Police Agency's SWAT forces, Cho Young-hwan.

"Nothing much."

The person replied in a curt voice. Bad dress, bad posture, bad attitude.....the man was the captain of the number 1 SWAT team, the number 1 hooligan known as Lee Myung-ryong. Cho Young-hwan shot Lee Myung-ryong an annoyed look and said.

"Are you really going to act like this?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know the circumstances but did you bark at someone at the top?"

"Barking wouldn't change anything."

Cho Young-hwan approached the desk.

".....That is why this situation happened."

"I never denied that. I just didn't want to say it."

"Hey, Lee Myung-ryong."

Cho Young-hwan pressed a finger to his temple and rebuked him.

"Don't I know you? Don't you know me?"

"We've gone to the public baths together so of course I know you."

"Don't joke around. But yes, there are many members of the Police Agency who knows all the scars on my body. It is a part of our lives. In the field, one mistake can mean being unable to dodge a bullet or

having a sashimi knife stabbed in your back. And everybody in the police force is prepared for that.”

“You should’ve gone to the National Assembly. You would gather all of the police’s votes.”

“Don’t joke around!”

Cho Young-hwan struck the desk with his fists. The fists which hit the desk were covered in scars. Although he was now sitting at a desk, a few years ago he was also a member of the SWAT team. The Bear of the National Police Agency. It was the nickname the delinquents gave to Cho Young-hwan.

“I’m a public servant. Wearing wound dressings is useless. But it’s done. Someone at the top aimed a bullet at me and it hit.”

Lee Myung-ryong replied coldly.

“Hwa-rang sunbaenim also exited the Police Department with a limp.”

“You really!”

Cho Young-hwan jumped and blushed. Lee Myung-ryong noticed this and glared while muttering.

“I don’t need to complain to section chief. Don’t you know? It is an amazingly accurate hit to be random. No, it is like they’re trying to make it look accidental.

“.....”

Cho Young-hwan was silent for a moment before pulling out a cigarette. Before the smoke reached Lee Myung-ryong, the cigarette butt was pressed into the pile of butts on the ashtray. Cho Young-hwan took a deep breath and inhaled the smoke into his lungs.

“I know how you feel.....but there are quite a few people you’ve offended.

“Offended? Yes, I am furious.”

Lee Myung-Ryong gave a cynical smile and nodded. Yes, fury was building up in his throat even though he was laughing. He wanted to search for the criminal but he was quite cynical.....An incident took place this morning. He had exited the gym after finishing his usual workout. All of a sudden he was summoned to the section chief's office and told that he would be joining the Special Crimes Countermeasures unit.

‘That asshole....!’

Lee Myung-ryong had a quick mind. No, he wasn't smart in the conventional sense. He had entered the police force thanks to his history as a national taekwondo representative. He had barely passed the test to enter. But he had a keen sense of smell about shady dealings. Special crimes countermeasures.....

It was the name of the department which dealt with violent crime. However, it wasn't the 'investigation' but 'measures' unit. That meant gathering information at a desk about the criminals before they committed an incident. And then handed over the clues to the investigation department. It was a paid position which required little work. The normal workers would've graduated from college, but to have a SWAT team member join it.....yet the announcement was that Lee Myung-ryong would join that department. However, Lee Myung-ryong immediately understood the situation when the section chief explained it. No, he had actually been expecting it for several days.

Lee Kyung-Ho. Not long ago, he went to Hyun-woo to visit Andel's father. He used to be a part of the prosecution office and was extremely close to the chief of the police force. And Lee Myung-ryong happened to not get along with the police chief. He had confrontations with the police chief after Gwon Hwa-rang was forced to retire. Therefore Lee Myung-ryong was an eyesore to the Chief of the National Police Agency. But since Lee Myung-ryong had good results, he couldn't openly punish him. So Lee Kyung-Ho used his police connections to help smooth the way. This situation was rigged by those two people. It was obviously the wishes of those two humans. They wanted Lee Myung-ryong to either become angry and disobey or resign.

‘Those civil servants.....I would love to beat him up.....’

Lee Myung-ryong definitely wanted to go to Lee Kyung-Ho and throw his letter of resignation in his face. Since he knew all the circumstances, Lee Myung-ryong wasn't just going to follow their plan. If Lee Myung-ryong left then Hyun-woo would definitely notice.

‘That guy calms me down pretty quickly.’

He smiled while thinking about Hyun-woo. He felt a sense of pride. He was a teacher after all. He didn't want to involve his disciple in this kind of dirty situation.

“Dammit, it's impossible. That bastard.....is the police force his playground? You must know something since you're not arguing about it.”

Cho Young-hwan smoked his cigarette with annoyance.

“Anyway, that's it. Don't write the resignation letter immediately. I'll wait and observe the situation a little bit more. Please think of it as a couple of months holiday. I'll look for something in the meantime.”

“Yes.”

“I've contacted the section chief there. That fellow will find you a suitable position. He's a friend so he'll look after you. You can go now.”

“Yes, I'll return if possible.”

Lee Myung-ryong replied and left the section chief's office.

He talked roughly but it seemed like Cho Young-hwan had been truly worried that Lee Myung-ryong would resign. So he contacted the Special Crimes Countermeasures department beforehand to organize a position.

“A desk job.....I don't know how long I can endure it.”

Lee Myung-ryong sighed and slowly headed towards the Special Crimes Countermeasures department. At this point, Lee Myung-ryong never imagined the work that he would be undergoing.

“Ah, you’re the one Section Chief Cho mentioned.” I’m Choi Deok-pil and I’m in charge here.”

Someone approached him as he entered the Special Crimes Countermeasures department. He had the appearance of a typical white-collar employee.

“Yes, I’m Lee Myung-ryong.”

“Hahahah, no need to be so formal here. I understand that this announcement must’ve been very unpleasant for you. But after seeing Section Chief Cho’s reactions, you shouldn’t be here that long. Well, I hope we bond as a family while you’re here.”

“What do I need to do? Copy? Coffee errands?”

“Hmm, I think I can put a SWAT team member to better use. Just as well. A position recently became available and I was worried about it. It might suit you. Come one.”

Choi Deok-pil led him to a small corner office. Even though it was called an office, there were none of the usual machines. There was just a big circular capsule.

“What’s this? A newly excavated dinosaur egg?”

“Is this the first time you’ve seen it?”

“Yes, I’m not interested in archaeology.”

Choi Deok-pil looked at him before letting out a burst of laughter.

“This machine is a game unit. It is a computer designed to connect to a virtual reality game. This unit is dedicated towards the game called New World.”

“New world?”

Lee Myung-ryong’s eyes widened.

“Don’t tell me you haven’t heard of it?”

“No, I’ve heard of New World.”

“I’m glad. You almost seemed like a caveman just then.”

Choi Deok-pil nodded his head. But Lee Myung-ryong had no interest in the middle aged Choi Deok-pil. He was curious about the unit after listening to Hyun-woo’s words and asked in an inquisitive voice.

“But what does this have to do with the police force?”

“You don’t seem to understand yet. These days it isn’t very rare to investigate online games. And it increases the department’s results.”

Choi Deok-pil gave a brief explanation. Those who commit a crime tend to have an excessive amount of free time. Since they can’t carelessly wander around, they’re forced to stay in a dimly lit room all day. It is surprisingly hard to endure. Sometimes the criminals even become depressed from hiding and surrender themselves to the police. A virtual reality game is a good way for a criminal to escape their lives. They don’t have to risk themselves going outside and they can wander around a different world.

“Most of those guys are satisfied living through virtual reality games. They even have a guild in the game.....ah, meetings as well. Those guys even have regular meetings where the exchange criminal information and laugh. In that case, findings clues for the meeting is not that hard.”

That’s because police personnel were also sent into the game. These investigation methods had been started 10 years ago and were getting satisfactory results.

“Then this unit is.....?”

“Yes after the commercialization of New World, we’ve received information that those fellows have flocked towards that game. So a few months ago, we requested support from Global Exos and received a few test models. This is one of those.”

Now he knew why there was a unit in the police agency. But there was still a part which didn’t make sense.

“As far as I know, I heard that you need to create a user ID to

access the game. And the ID must list the social security number and personal information..... If so, couldn't you simply request the information from the company?"

"Ah my friend, we can but it is not that simple."

Choi Deok-pil shook his head like he had a headache.

"You said that they must enter personal information to create an ID. But that's in the old days, now they create an ID using retina scans. Personal information is more hidden than ever. So it has become much more challenging. But that is exactly the problem."

"That's the problem?"

"Don't you know? Ever since companies have changed security measures to body data a few years ago, the human rights laws have made it incredible difficult to access that data. Currently, the privacy-related data that is stored in the black boxes can't be accessed unless it is related to terrorism at a national level. So the police has to work even harder to get that information."

Choi Deok-pil scratched his head. His mind became complicated just thinking about it.

"But what will I be doing?"

"That's simple. It shouldn't be that different from actual investigation. Just look for the suspects or the guild based on the information that we give you. Once you've found the suspect then please approach and discover as much information as possible. Their address, telephone number, information about the incident..... The game also has the ability to videotape such information. Once you record such information then the rest of the team will take care of it."

"You want me to investigate in New World?"

"That's right.....isn't that what we do?"

"But I only know how to beat people up."

"That's the reason why you're suitable."

“Yes?” Lee Myung-ryong was bewildered and Choi Deok-pil explained with a grin.

“In fact, I’ve never tried it out so I don’t know. According to your predecessor, New World is different from traditional virtual games. The game is said to be not that different from reality.”

“Isn’t it still a virtual reality game?”

“That’s right. But New World has a different meaning. The user can utilize their previous knowledge and experience. It isn’t 100% of course, but the person with a developed physical ability will be more advantageous. That’s why you were recommended. Although you’ll only have a little bit of time to learn the game, your physical abilities have been developed over many years.”

“What are you saying.....?”

“Like I said I don’t know. It is something your predecessor said. So just learn the game step by step and identify the suspect. Since we can’t check their personal information, you won’t know who is a suspect inside the game.

Choi Deok-pil handed him a thick stack and papers and continued.

“The problem is that all these people have been in the game for a long time and having a considerably high level. With the level difference in online games, even you would have a hard time if you met them. Your predecessor lived in the game for two months and didn’t spot even 1 suspect. So we thought of you who is a member of the SWAT team.”

Choi Deok-pil took a deep breath and tapped Lee Myung-ryong’s shoulder.

“However, we want you to play the game casually since investigations inside the game are a supplementary method. For now just casually get used to the game.”

“Hrmmm.....”

Lee Myung-ryong rubbed his chin and looked at the unit. Choi Deok-

pil wore a subtle smile and asked.

“How is it? Will you try?”

“Well, it is better than fetching coffee.”

Choi Deok-pil nodded and tapped his shoulder.

“I thought so. The first time isn’t that difficult. Because your predecessor raised the character to level 150. The money earned is also quite high. Your predecessor even shed tears when he was forced to go to another game. The porridge has been cooked and given to you. The other employees have more things to do so I’ve been quite impatient. Frankly, this is a special employment.”

“Huh?”

Lee Myung-ryong’s expression showed that he didn’t understand.

“Didn’t this game use raw data? But how can I inherit a character that someone else raised?”

“Yes, that is usually the case.”

Choi Deok-pil nodded.

“But like I said earlier, this is a Global Exos test unit. It is used by maintenance staff who check the system, so it is designed to connect with a common username and password. The username and password is written on this piece of paper.”

Choi Deok-pil handed him several more pieces of paper and left the office. Lee Myung-ryong and the unit were the only things left in the office. Lee Myung-ryong crossed his arms and stared at the unit.

“You’re the controller for New World?”

The work that he had to do felt strange. New World.....Hyun-woo had raised his curiosity so he tried to play it once. However, he was also called back whenever he tried to enter the game room. He never thought that he would end up playing the game like this.

“Well, okay. It isn’t bad for a holiday.”

Lee Myung-ryong finally entered the unit. He emerged in a small town filled with users.

“Oh, is this really the game?”

The man looked around curiously. It was a small town, with houses scattered around and a few people visible. The scenery was also different. It was a quiet mountain village surrounded by forest. It was a place for users to rest while travelling around New World. But the commonplace landscape seemed entirely new to the man.

‘This is a virtual reality game? The earth, wind, and smell.....everything feels real.’

His worn clothes and heavy bag proved that he wasn’t a novice in New World. However, he acted like he was accessing the virtual reality for the first time in the way he touched everything and moved his limbs. Yes, it was Lee Myung-ryong who logged in from the police department’s unit. The documents he received included the variety of materials left behind by his predecessor. But looking through documents was not his style. Wouldn’t a person who tried soybean paste understand it better than having it explained to them? Therefore Lee Myung-ryong shoved the documents into a corner before accessing New World. Lee-Myung-ryong’s reaction when logging into the game was similar to a normal person. Most novice users would marvel at the amazing technology of New World. Even with a dozen years of training his keen sense to the limit, he was still unable to distinguish the difference between reality and the game.

‘Huh.....Hyun-woo really wasn’t joking when he was talking about the game. How did they manage something like this? I’m freely moving my limbs so am I really sitting in the unit?’

Lee Myung-ryong froze for a moment. He had entered the game but he didn’t know what to do. Then, a semi-transparent object flickered in the corner of his eyes. Character information window, bags, etc.....it was the icon to view the related information. In fact, most users set these icons as ‘hidden’ in order to maximize the realism and used commands to open them. However, Lee Myung-ryong’s predecessor set the icons for him. Luckily Lee Myung-ryong knew these icons even if he was an idiot with games.

‘I have to know what type of guy I am. This is?’

Lee Myung-ryong touched the icon of a person with his fingers. The character information window showing various numerical values opened. Usually the information of a user who first started the game was simple. However, Lee Myung-ryong’s character was level 150. The various additions and changes in the meantime had made the information window complicated. The only things he learnt was his name ‘Isyuram’ and that he was level 150.

“Isyuram.....the name is not bad. It somehow seems strong.”

Although strength, agility and stamina were all common stats in RPGs, they were simply numbers to Lee Myung-ryong. He didn’t know what was high or low.

‘Sheesh, I don’t know what any of this means. I’ll slowly examine it later.....’

Lee Myung-ryong clicked on the icon shaped like a bag. This time the bags opened and a huge number of items were shown. He also saw that he had 800 gold. Although the bags were filled with all kinds of items, he didn’t know what they were used for or why he had them.

‘800 gold? Is this a lot? But what are all these things? Bunch of Rapana leaves? Unicorn horns? Pearl sand? Why the hell am I carrying around things like these?’

Other users would’ve drooled if they saw the bag full of expensive items. But Lee Myung-ryong didn’t know the value of goods in New World and just saw it as trash.

‘Oh, I don’t know. Let’s do something. According to Hyun-woo, you can catch monsters in New World. Will it be similar to a real battle? Okay, first let’s look for a monster. But where can I go to find a monster? I just ask someone.’

Lee Myung-ryong.....no, Isyuram closed the window. And then he roamed around the village for someone with information. Then he saw an old man at the entrance of the village grabbing several people.

“You really can’t?”

“.....I’m sorry.”

“It should be quite quick with everybody’s skill.”

The old man begged with a pleading look in his eye. However, the people wearing leather and holding a sword shook their heads.

“We’re aware of that.”

“We’ve often fought that monster when we came here.”

“We’d love to help you if we have enough time.....”

“But we’ve been hastily summoned by the guild.”

“We’ll help you next time we drop by.”

“Hey, we have to hurry.” We’ll be late for the summons.”

“Okay, let’s leave.”

The warriors hastily left the village.

“Ah, even though they were the first warriors I met after several weeks....”

The old man muttered in a desperate voice.

At that time, Isyuram who had been watching the situation approached the old man.

“Did you mention a monster?”

“Huh? You look familiar but who are you?”

“Oh, I’m Lee Myung-ryong.....no, Asura. No, Isyuram? No, wait a minute.”

Isyuram still hadn’t adapted to the game and opened the information window again.

“Oh, yes I am Isyuram. I heard you mention something.....there is a monster?”

The old man was confused about the names and just stared at Isyuram. But he just sighed and then nodded.

“I’m tired of those monsters. They came here several weeks ago and started threatening us and hunting our herds. Therefore it is dealing considerable damage to the village. But as you can see, not many adventurers come to this mountain village. Those were the first warriors I saw in a while and asked them to exterminate the monster. But as you saw, they were too busy and refused to talk to me. Now I don’t know what to do.....”

“Then this game really has monsters?”

“Are you making fun of me?”

The old man stared at Isyuram strangely.

“Shouldn’t you be experienced with monsters?”

“Anyway, there really is a monster?”

“Uh huh, but will you be enough? Yes, it’s a monster. So what do you want?”

Annoyance showed in the old man’s eyes. However, Isyuram ignored it and spoke quickly.

“Since this is a game then shouldn’t I deal with it for you?”

“What?”

The old man looked Isyuram up and down. And then he asked incredulously.

“Were you serious just now?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Ah, no.....I honestly would love any help just now.....if you get rid of the monsters then I’ll be grateful....ah, right. Do you have any colleagues with you?”

“No, I don’t need any.”

“Eh? There is no one?”

“Just leave it to me. Where is it?”

“That hill over there is where they first appeared. If you dispose of 50 then I’ll be grateful.....”

A message window appeared in front of Isyuram after the old man finished speaking.

Gnoll extermination (Repeatable Quest)

You’ve met the old man in the unknown town who is in a predicament.

A group of monsters has appeared and is threatening the safety of the village. If you kill 50 gnolls and collect their tokens then the old man will compensate you. But you shouldn’t expect a great reward since it is a small village. You can expect warm food, a bed and some silver.

<Difficulty level: D>

Would you like to accept the quest?

‘Oh, so this is a quest. It’s similar to the complaints that the police receive. Then the old man is not a real person. A NPC? He is created really well.’

Isyuram paid close attention to the old man. The old man looked at Isyuram suspiciously and his body trembled.

“W-why are you looking at me like that? I-I have a wife and a child. Such a strange hobby.....”

“It’s nothing. Then I’ll be going!”

“Eh? Hey, wait a minute!”

When Isyuram turned around, the old man was surprised and immediately shouted. However, Isyuram had already shot out of the town.

‘Huhuhu, I know enough. Hyun-woo has already told me how to complete a quest. Now, where are those monsters?’

Isyuram had often heard about New World through Hyun-woo. While he didn’t know everything, Isyuram understood enough. More realistic battles than reality! In addition, the practical techniques in reality can be applied as skills in the game. Hyun-woo was not the only one. Some of the members in his SWAT team also played New World. When they gathered, they exchanged information about how actual fighting techniques could be applied to New World. Even though he heard those information, Isyuram hadn’t felt the attraction of New World yet. He possessed the old fashioned way of thinking that ‘the game=for children.’ Why would he want to fight with a character created by the computer? Even if it was realistic, it couldn’t actually compare to real life. However, Isyuram underwent a 180 degree change once he was actually in New World.

‘The old man was just like a real person!’

After seeing the environment and the NPCS, he was looking forward to the battles! Since it was a game, wouldn’t the levels of the fights also increase?

‘Hmm, okay. There is nothing different about moving my body. No, it feels even better than reality. In this condition I shouldn’t have any problems killing the opponent. Huhuhu, I don’t have to stress about it. What kind of standards are the monsters in New World?’

Isyuram smirked and quickly climbed the hill.

“Kyaaaaak, a human!”

“Grrrrrr, he came up here alone to die.”

“Then I’ll kill him!”

“Kikikik, let’s eat the fresh meat to our heart’s content.”

Ugly voices were soon heard from the hill. The ugly voices continued as they stepped through the forest. Their faces resembled a huge dog while their mouths were filled with sharp fangs. Their appearance would be frightening if this was a dream. Normally

people's hearts would jump if it was the first time they saw such monsters. However, Isyuram just slightly raised his eyebrows.

"Oho, this is a monster? A dog.....these guys are actually quite shocking to see. They would look good served with boiled soup and soju.... It is possible to eat real food in New World, so can I possibly eat them?'

An unimaginable response! There weren't many users who would look at a gnoll and think of dog soup. Instead of Isyuram flinching, the gnolls ended up jumping instead.

"Grrrrrrr. What the? What is this guy?"

"This guy.....is he actually a tremendous warrior?"

"Grrrrr, no look at him....that is....."

"Isn't it? Isn't it?"

While they were busy talking, Isyuram rushed up to them.

"Okay, shall we begin?"

Isyuram said as a gnoll raised its arm. It was definitely a very threatening attack. But who was he? He was a former member of the national taekwondo team and the captain of the number 1 SWAT team, someone who fought against gangsters and criminals every day. He was the owner of a steel heart who wouldn't blink an eye at that attack in reality. So Isyuram was convinced of his victory.

'Those guys at the village earlier said that it wasn't very hard. So these monsters are very weak.'

The warriors who had rejected the old man's request seemed like children to him. With Isyuram's eyes, he was able to grasp if someone was strong or not. Even though it was in a game, their posture and gait wasn't too different from reality. So he could sense their strength using such aspects.

'If these monsters are easy for them than the difficulty is clear. These are my first enemies but aren't they too weak? Well, when I return to the old man then I'll search out stronger opponents.'

Figuring out the pattern of attack was so easy that Isyuram yawned.

Kuaaaak!

It approached closely and swung the axe.

‘Kukuku, this dog head tried such a simple attack.’

Isyuram laughed and quickly used some footwork to dodge the attack. Then he closed the gap to the enemy and.....wuduk!

‘Eh? Wuduk?’

Isyuram’s body suddenly stopped in the middle of his counterattack. Then his ankle collapsed and he tilted sideways. An information window then appeared in front of him.

Your action has gone beyond the limits of your strength and agility and sprained your ankle!

<For 30 minutes, your speed and reaction rate -30%>

It was a truly ridiculous information window.

“Eh? Ankle sprain? Ouch!”

What did it mean? Isyuram was able to run wearing a lead bag but now his ankle sprained from this little movement?

But he didn’t have time to be amazed. There was a red gauge visible on the lower left corner. But that was not the problem. Just like the message window said, his movement became incredibly slow. Although he could move 10 metres in his mind, he wasn’t even capable of moving 1 metre. In the end, Isyuram had to roll onto the ground to avoid the subsequent attacks.

“Dammit, why did my ankle sprain all of a sudden? Is it because I didn’t warm up before the fight?”

The same physical state in reality was also applied to New World.....that was what he thought, but Isyuram was still ignorant of the problem. And there was no room to worry.

“Huh, look at the ankle. My ankle sprained going against such insignificant dogs!”

If his movement was slowed then it would be better not to move. Isyuram took a light step and relaxed the muscles in his body. Then a gnoll rushed forward and swung a club. Isyuram rocked his body, avoided the attack and then transferred the power into a counterattack.

Bakak-!

There was a loud sound as flash and bone collided. The allocation of power, timing, posture.....everything was perfect for a counterattack.

‘All right, it is perfect this time! Huhuhu, that is stunning!’

Isyuram had a look of satisfaction on his face.

Grrrrrrr!

Isyuram’s fist quickly took down a 2 metre tall figure! A blow to the temple turned the dog’s head 90 degrees.

You have no knowledge of Hand-to-Hand Combat so the unreasonable attack has broken your wrist!
--

<100 damage, for 30 minutes your attack power and attack speed is -50%>

You have no knowledge of Hand-to-Hand Combat and the movement has caused your spinal discs have slipped!
--

<100 damage, for 30 minutes your upper spinal disk movement is restricted>
--

“Huk, what, what the hell is this....!”

Isyuram couldn’t understand what was going on. It was also the same afterwards. Even with an ankle sprain, broken wrist and restricted spinal movements, Isyuram’s fighting spirit burned until the end. But after 13 more fractures, he became dog food within 2

minutes.

“What the hell is going on?”

After a while, Isyuram revived at the town’s quartermaster.

“Tsk tsk tsk, as expected.”

The old man standing at the entrance to the village clicked his tongue and muttered. Isyuram became very embarrassed and tried to explain.

“Old man, this time was a mistake.”

“You failed and now you want to try again? If you’re an experienced adventurer then you wouldn’t have any trouble with an opponent like that. As an adventurer you must have some experience. But an experienced warrior is an expert at swinging a sword. With a poor body like that, how can you even lift a sword?”

“Eh?”

Isyuram now looked at his body properly. Since his movements were normal, he thought his body was the same. He had spent years training his body and optimizing it for his techniques. However, this body was completely the opposite of his real body. Bony arms and legs stuck out from his leather clothes while his ribs were slightly sunken. Although it was a model-like body, Isyuram just thought that he looked malnourished.

“Huk, what is with this body?” Well, it is quite a decent body for a merchant.....”

“A merchant?”

Isyuram once again opened his information window. He hadn’t checked it properly before, but ‘merchant’ was written down as his profession next to his level. Isyuram had no way of knowing but merchants were users who carried around goods. It was a job that dealt with trade and contracts. So his contract related skills were higher than other merchants while his strength and stamina was lower. The old man couldn’t understand Isyuram and muttered.

“I thought your face was somewhat familiar and I finally remembered. Weren’t you the merchant trying to gain exclusive contracts with our village last week? But you’re acting like this is the first time. Did you bump your head and lose your memory?” That’s right, Lee Myung-ryong had taken over the character of Isyuram from his predecessor. He changed the profession to a merchant because it was easier to gather information trading than hunting monsters.

Since he was level 150, as a merchant he invested his stat points into wisdom, intelligence and luck. It was reasonably decent stats for a merchant. Then suddenly the owner of the body changed. And he tried to move the poor merchant like he had a superhuman body. In other words, it was similar to a F-1 racing engine being installed into a truck. So Isyuram’s body couldn’t keep up with Lee Myung-ryong and broke. It was the difference between reality and games.....

If Lee Myung-ryong started off at level 1 in the novice village then he would learn the knowledge naturally and be experienced in the movements. That was the reason why the novice village existed. However, he just took over a level 150 character with no experience.

“I’m thankful that you wanted to help but please stop.”

The old man said before turning away. Isyuram couldn’t speak and stood there dumbly. He had imagined New World like a playground. As a SWAT team member, he was experienced with all sorts of martial arts. When he went out on police business, he was the power of the ‘tyrannical authorities’ and would pull out the teeth of hooligans. Of course, the police agency wasn’t a tyrannical force. No, really. However, there definitely were victims who received damage.

While most people considered New World a paradise where dreams come true, it was here that a martial artist was suffering frustration. He was not aware of what happened.....a disgraceful merchant? It was the reason why he couldn’t experience the allure of a real battle in New World? The captain of the number 1 SWAT team, feared by other gangsters and he couldn’t fight because of

this body? Hyun-woo and the other team members.....no, even a child was able to defeat a monster that he couldn't damage?

"I can't! No, there is no way!"

Isyuram clenched his fist and shouted. His pride had been damaged and he couldn't possibly accept it.

'A poor body? A merchant? I am the captain of the number 1 SWAT team, Lee Myung-ryong. Am I going to run away scared because of this merchant body? Don't be ridiculous. I'll just create a proper body.'

Just like he helped train Ark's body, Isyuram believed that hard work would strengthen a body.

'There are some differences between a game and reality. If it's too easy then it wouldn't be a challenge. I will become the winner and beat this game! Who cares about investigation. I won't leave this place until I can defeat those dogs!'

Isyuram ran to a corner of the town.

"First I have to create a body. 5,000 punches! 5,000 kicks!"

And he began to exercise like crazy.

"What, what the?"

"Who is that merchant?"

The NPCs flocked around and started gossiping. However, Isyuram ignored them and only concentrated on remodelling his body. No matter how many times he broke his ankle or wrist, Isyuram just clenched his teeth and continued hitting the pillar. But this was Isyuram's mistake. Actually, only the commercial version of the unit for New World had the option to regulate the pain. Normally the system determined the amount of impact the user received after being attacked by a monster.

But the red gauge on this unit was set to 'reality.' 'Reality' meant the pain was similar to reality and was the highest option. In other words, he really felt like his arm was broken.

“Jajaja, shoryuken!”

Wududuk, snap!

Ouch! It is a virtual reality game..... but it's really painful like my arm actually broke. But Hyun-woo and the other members also suffered this much. I won't die from this much! Hiyah!”

His character was experiencing flesh and bone remodelling.

Working Part-time at the Village in the Valley

“Phew.....we’ve finally arrived.”

Around dawn, the skyrays finally set down at the village entrance. Even then Lariette was still clinging tightly to Ark with her eyes closed. Her arms wrapped around his waist still trembled even when they landed.

“Lariette-nim, it’s fine now. We’ve arrived.”

Lariette opened her eyes and looked around quickly. After seeing the ground, she let out a relieved sigh and said in a quivering voice.

“S-s-scary. It was really scary.”

“.....You endured it well.”

“I’m never riding double again. I’m getting off.”

Lariette dismounted from the skyray with a pale face. But she couldn’t even walk a few steps before her weak legs collapsed.

“The heavens and earth is spinning.....ah, I still feel sick.....”

‘Well, isn’t it reasonable?’

Ark scratched his head with an embarrassed expression. In fact, riding the skyrays wasn’t that great. If he looked at the appearance of the skyray, the whole body was its wings. In other words, the whole body would shake every time it flapped its wings. Furthermore, there weren’t any safety devices attached like amusement park rides. Even holding onto the reins, your body would still rock up and down with every flap so of course someone afraid of heights would fear for their life. That wasn’t all.

The Netherworld wasn’t a place where someone could rest

peacefully while flying through the sky. Storms would randomly occur and they were even attacked by wild skyrays once or twice.....they experienced all of that during a 1 hour flight. In order to escape the many crises, they have to fly using complicated manoeuvres which tortured Lariette. Thanks to that, Lariette had a new phobia of skyrays and heights.

“Scary.....do you know how scary it was? Really, really, really scary. Sob, I’m never riding it again. Never ever. Do you understand? Sob.”

Lariette muttered tearfully like a maniac. She was probably quite serious. But.....she looked like a little kid whining.....and he thought it was kind of cute. Anyway, she was in a panicked state for a while. In fact, this was actually an opportunity. Anyone would know that their impression would become more favourable if they spoke comforting words during this situation. Unfortunately, Ark didn’t have a knack for such things. Dedric was much better at it compared to Ark.

“Sheesh, they can’t understand the romance of flying.....women....”

Dedric pouted and muttered as he passed by.

“Well, I’m sorry for what happened a while ago. Although you’ll be accompanying Master from now on, I’ll recognize you as a colleague. But you better not mess with the number 2 person.”

He seemed like a 4 year old apologizing to the girl he teased. Ark burst out laughing. But the childish words were unexpectedly accepted by Lariette. A faint smile appeared on Lariette’s pale face. At the same time, her impression of Dedric which was at the very lowest 1 hour ago skyrocketed.

‘Eh? What scene is this? That apology actually worked?’

Ark couldn’t comprehend it. If Ark was in Lariette’s position, he would immediately punch Dedric the moment he said something sassy. Men and women really were shaped differently.

‘Well, at least Dedric and Lariette reconciled.’

“I’m going to take the skyrays to their kennel. Teacher is waiting so

Ark and Bona should go there first.”

Guran said before herding the skyrays to their kennel. Ark and Bona entered the village. When they entered, Beseutyu who had been waiting anxiously in front of his house rushed towards them. His complexion was haggard from a night of worrying without any sleep. Bona had been behaving calmly so far, but he burst into tears when he saw his grandfather and ran towards him.

“Grandfather!”

“Sob, oh.....ooh...B-Bona!”

Beseutyu and Bona embraced each other while shedding tear. It had been two long days....eh? Come to think of it, it had been 16 hours since Ark arrived in the village which was 2 days game time. Their reaction made it seem like it had been a whole week. Well, anyone would be thrilled that their grandson came back alive after being kidnapped.

“I’m glad.”

Lariette muttered as her complexion seemed to return to normal. She felt a lot of affection for Bona since they had been captured together. Of course, Ark was also thrilled about the reunion. He had rescued the baby smurf from being eaten by Gargamel. Now it was time to be rewarded by Papa Smurf. Why wouldn’t he be thrilled? After a few moments, Beseutyu collected his feelings and led them towards his house.

“I’m sorry. They said that they wanted to help you. I didn’t realise they were villains targeting you.....my heart was so worried that I couldn’t see the motives.”

He was referring to when he leant Jewel’s group some skyrays. Ark just smiled and shook his head.

“No. I received their help anyway.”

He wouldn’t have been able to overcome Tamura without the help of Jewel’s party. Beseutyu’s head tilted but he didn’t question it. He only cared about the fact that his grandson was rescued.

“.....Honestly, I thought I was making a mistake when I heard that he was captured by the Nakujuk. I thought I would never see my grandson’s face again.....I don’t know how I can repay the favour.”

“It was my pleasure. I couldn’t just stand by and watch as a little boy was sacrificed by a wicked group. But I won’t reject Beseutyu’s sincere heart.”

Ark replied modestly. He was mindful of his words since Buksil was filming it on the magic projector. He didn’t want to make it obvious that he was aiming for a reward. Ark was smart and danced around the subject. Beseutyu nodded with an impressed face.

“You really are like the incarnation of Rarukan.”

“Rarukan? I’ve heard Guran say that before.....who is Rarukan?”

Ark didn’t ask this because of mere curiosity. Guran had mentioned the name Rarukan once. When an NPC mentioned something, there was a high possibility that it was important information. For example, it could be related to a quest or related to a quest compensation item. That’s right. It was similar to the bold letters in the NPC’s dialogue in the old RPG games. Beseutyu waited a moment before answering.

“Rarukan is a legendary warrior in our tribe.”

“Legendary warrior?”

“To be more precise, Rarukan is the god of abundance in our clan. But a long time ago we were driven from the North by the Nakujuk clan who tried to exterminate us. Then a warrior appeared and saved us. Although we tried to reward him, he disappeared without even telling us his name so we just called him Rarukan.”

Disappearing without compensation?

“Ah, indeed. That’s right!”

At that moment, Beseutyu jumped up. Then he began to rummage through a pile of boxes in the corner.

“It should be somewhere here.....no, it’s not. Somewhere.....oh,

here it is!”

Beseutyu returned holding a small jewellery box.

“I was wondering how I should repay you, but I remembered thanks to you asking about Rarukan. This will be useful for you.”

Inside the jewellery box was a ring. It seemed quite old but a faint light was shining from the stylish ring.

“This ring was specially designed with gratitude and respect towards Rarukan. Although our Baran clan is now scattered, we once had a lot of influence in the North. And this ring was created using the best materials we could find and the best workmanship. But Rarukan did not receive this ring. After that we kept it with the family of the Baran’s record-keepers.....as the incarnation of Rarukan, I think you have the qualifications to receive this ring.”

It must be a requirement to hear the story before receiving the ring. Although it was the latest technology, the common sense from old RPG games was really useful! With the words ‘ancient’ and ‘legend,’ it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the item should be one of the finest.

‘Huk, a level 200 unique ring!’

Rarukan’s Ring (Unique)

Item type: Ring

User restriction: Level 200 and more

A ring specially designed by the inhabitants of the Netherworld for the legendary warrior Rarukan.

This ring was designed a long time ago when the Baran clan still prospered. The size is small but it was made with a special type of ore that contains the rare magic of the Netherworld. In addition, the ring possesses a jewel which has the power to protect the wearer from darkness. The inside of the ring is carved with ‘Homage to Rarukan.’

<Option: Agility +10, Attack Speed +10, Critical Hit +8%>

<Special Option: You can use the skill 'Dark Protection.' When used in the darkness, your defense and magic resistance will increase by 20% for 5 minutes. Cool down time: 2 hours>

Ark's mouth dropped at the information window. He didn't need to explain it, but it was definitely a jackpot. This was his ring. Unlike weapons and armour, normally rings didn't have a secondary option. In fact, even the rare ring Ark was wearing now only had the skill 'Mind's Eye' without any added bonuses. However, three options.....2 of them were valuable options which increased his attack speed and critical hit. Those two options were difficult to find in magic items.

'My attack speed and critical hit probability dropped once I changed to Gwisal's sword.....but this ring increases my defense as well.....!'

But was that all? It even had 'Dark Protection' as a special option.

This increased his defense and magic resistance by 20%. The standard of the skill wasn't that high, but it only had a 2 hour cool down time. It was a skill that could be utilized actively.

'As expected, it was good to ask about Rarukan! It gave me a unique ring!'

Ark was delighted. He would explain it briefly, but there were 5 types of items in New World. General, magic, rare, unique and legendary. Anyone who played the game would know about these 5 types. General items were considered as japtem, magic items more common and it was extremely difficult to find rare items with a good option. A unique item was definitely unique. Unique items were similar to rare items but the performance was slightly better. In some cases, it might even have a lower performance. The reason it was more expensive on auction sites was because of its scarcity. While several of the same rare items could exist, there was only 1 of every unique item. In other words, Rarukan's ring was the only one that existed in New World.

Well, a legendary item had the best performance and options but it

was so rare that none had been seen yet.....anyway, a unique item was also hard to obtain. Of course, it was the best selling items on the auction site.

‘The Netherworld is the land of opportunity!’

Very few people had come to the Netherworld. A lot of the quests were being completed for the first time by Ark. It meant that he could grab the best rewards from the quests. It was natural. NPCs couldn’t get rid the items. So the first person to complete the NPC’s quest would probably receive his best item. Since it wasn’t possible to receive the same reward, other people who complete it would just receive a similar one. That’s why the biggest rewards were given to users who discovered a new area. Of course, such opportunities weren’t just given. If he hadn’t asked about Rarukan then it would’ve been replaced with another item. That’s why he had to pay attention to receive the best reward. Discovering the backstory was the whole point of a game.

“Omo, it’s a pretty looking ring.”

As a woman, Lariette was also interested in the ring.

“Uh-hum, thank you very much. I will use it well.”

Ark coughed and hurriedly packed the ring into his bag.

[-The quest <Rescue Bona> has been completed]

He increased 3 levels after the message appeared. Thus he completed the first quest he received in the Netherworld.

“By the way, the information I wanted you to check.....”

“Oh, about that person called Magaro?”

Buksil jumped when he heard the name Magaro. However, Ark deliberately pretended not to notice and continued talking.

“Yes, did you find anything?”

“I’m sorry. I’ve been so worried about Bona that I haven’t checked yet.”

Beseutyu pointed towards the large stack of scrolls.

“I’ll start looking for it now. But what you see here is all the records from the past hundreds of years. If it was related to a special event then it’ll be indicated separately and I could find it immediately. But looking for the record of a simple visitor is more difficult. So please wait 3 days.”

‘Three days.....but waiting is not the problem.....’

There was no doubt that Jewel updated her resurrection point to this village. It had been 11 hours since those guys died in the Abyss of Despair so there was still 19 hours until resurrection, but 24 hours in reality was 3 days in game time. Jewel would eventually resurrect here. Ark was worried for a while before he thought of a method.

“I understand. I will wait three days. But I have one request.”

“Request? What is it? I do whatever you say.”

His intimacy with Beseutyu had soared after rescuing Bona. And he grinned and nodded at Ark’s words.

“That won’t be difficult. Understood, 2 days later did you say? I will do it.”

“And there is something else I want you to check.

Ark briefly explained about the Red Man who appeared after he defeated Tamura.

“A man with red hair wearing a white mask. He also crossed into the Netherworld from middle earth. There is a high possibility that he had entered the Netherworld before. Please see if you can find any data on it.”

He was behind the events that happened in the Underground World. So he had been in middle earth until then. If he entered the Netherworld immediately then it would’ve been a couple of months ago. Ark was convinced that the Red Man held the key to passing the entrance examination. And he might have some ulterior motive if he ran away. He would continue to look for information while

completing Magaro's quest.

"I see. Don't worry and just rest comfortably."

Beseutyu raised his arms and headed to the stacks of scrolls. After summarizing the situation, Ark headed outside.

"Ark-nim, will you wait here until you receive the information? I'm going to log out for a little bit. Because of the earlier flight....."

Lariette said with an unsteady face.

"Yes, you can enter at this time tomorrow."

"Me too.....I've been playing the game for 15 hours so I'm sleepy....."

Buksil had stayed up all night following Ark so he also quit the game.

"So what will I do now.....?"

Ark murmured after being left alone on the street. He had stayed up all night so it was dawn in reality. Normally at this point it was time to go to the gym. But yesterday, Ark had received an unexpected phone call from Lee Myung-ryong.

"Hyun-woo, I won't be able to go to the gym for a while due to various circumstances. So don't come back to the gym until I contact you. Don't just play around and make sure to exercise properly. I'll get back to you after a couple of months. Don't ever go near the gym. Okay?"

The police agency had spread rumours of Lee Myung-ryong's demotion to the Special Crimes Countermeasures squad. Lee Myung-ryong wanted to prevent Ark from hearing those rumours at the gym. Thanks to that, Ark didn't have a set time to sleep or exercise.

"I can't just wait around town.....should I get some sleep or hunt in the area? Oh, before that....."

Ark took out Rarukan's ring from his bag. He couldn't wear it while Lariette was still present. Ark contemplated for a moment before

removing 'Mind's Eye.'

'Mind's Eye' was a rare ring but it only had a skill and no other options. On the other hand, 'Resurrecting Spirit' boosted his strength and mana recovery. So using the magic ring would be better.

'I don't use Mind's Eye that frequently so I should only wear it when necessary.'

With an excited expression, Ark moved Rarukan's ring towards his finger. And just as he was about to put it on....!

"Ark-nim!"

Ark suddenly heard a voice from behind him and dropped the ring.

"Huk, my ring! My ring! Ah, here it is. My ring!"

Ark scrambled for the ring on the ground and grasped it tightly. He looked like a hungry beggar picking up a three day old piece of bread. He had acted instinctively. When he raised his head and blinked, he realised that it was Bona who had sneaked up on him.

"Hum hum hum, the soil here is pretty good."

"Do you like pretty rings?"

Bona asked while Ark smiled awkwardly. Ark's face turned red at the sight of Bona's friendly face.

"Ah.....as the number 2 I am so ashamed."

Dedric sighed.

Ark awkwardly grinned and nodded.

"Well, that, that is....."

"Ark-nim, please follow me. I'll show you around the village."

"Visit the village?"

Ark said with an uncomfortable look. Ark was a human. What person would be able to play the game for 20 hours without getting tired? But now he had to go around the village instead of hunting? But Bona

just grabbed Ark's arm and dragged him along. Ark didn't dare reject Bona so he was inevitably dragged along. However, it wasn't a bad choice to follow.

'Eh? There was something like this in the village?'

Ark hadn't even explored 50% of the village.

"This is a sap refinery. There are a lot of trees with special characteristics in the forests near here. We extract the sap, refine it and then barter with other villages related to us. In addition, we have a variety of plants in our fields."

Bona guided him to a workshop he hadn't seen before. Since it was concerned with the village's production, outsiders were forbidden from entering there. However, he was able to access most areas if Bona accompanied him. After touring, Ark's opinion of the Myutal changed a little bit. The Myutal.....no, the Baran tribe was not as uncivilized as Ark thought. The Umma's Sap and Nadingka's Fruit that Ark bought were items produced by the village. Since most of the products were used to trade with other tribes, they only had a few of them.

'Is money not used because of the limited trading?'

If someone was trading multiple items from many places then it was recommended to use money. However, if the exchange was limited to the tribe and 1-on-1 then there was no reason to use money.

'They have no problem with production, but they are unable to sustain a large production system so the economy couldn't develop. If they were able to move freely between middle earth then they could develop a large profit.....'

Ark connected everything to making money. And there were definitely a lot of ingredients scattered around that would make money. The Baran tribe was not limited to just this village in the valley. There were a large number of them spread out over a wide area. If he was the intermediary for the villages which produced items, or create a currency exchange between the Myutal then the fees he could collect for doing it would be 3~4 times what he would

earn from a castle. But that was only if he could freely move between middle earth and the Netherworld. Since he was stuck in the Netherworld at the moment, he decided to contemplate the idea later.

‘Well, it’s not possible at the moment. I’m just fortunate to be able to monopolize the dungeons and quests.’

“Here’s the monster kennels.”

Bona said as he guided Ark towards a sparse cave with walls.

In fact, the biggest feature of the valley town was the tamed monsters.

“Ah Ark-nim, you have come?”

Guran waved his hand from inside the kennel.

“Guran helps look after the skyray for Grandpa.”

“Actually, that’s my day job.”

Guran laughed and nodded.

“There are a lot of monsters.”

“Yes, we have 20 trainers here including Teacher. Each trainer tames around 10 monsters so there are approximately 200 altogether.”

“Managing something like this must not be easy.”

“But if there were no monsters then we wouldn’t be able to settle in a place like this.”

Guran looked at the monsters with proud eyes. Of course, training monsters wasn’t cheap since they had to be fed and taught.

“You’ve seen it already but we use the skyrays to barter with other towns. And these monsters are good for field work.”

Guran explained the many ways the Baran tribe used the monsters. The Predator that Ark defeated while crossing the wilderness was used for field work. These monsters had similar

attributes to earthworms. Their excretion made a good fertilizer for the fields. The Predators were the reason why the Baran could harvest the crops in the barren land. In addition, a monster called Hellhound was a guard dog that protected the village. Since the Baran tribe's combat ability was low, the Hellhounds were the reason why they could repel attacks by other monsters.

"The relationship between the Baran tribe and the monsters is inseparable."

But Ark was full of wild ideas while looking at the monster kennels.

'These monsters are suitable to make a safari.....low level users can spar against them as practice.....and the skyrays could be used to create guided tours of the Netherworld....'

He came up with a brilliant business plan. However, Ark soon sighed and shook his head.

'I shouldn't get too ahead of myself.'

This business idea is under the assumption that people can move freely between middle earth and the Netherworld. And just the initial investment into the business would be astronomical. It would require far more money than Ark's 4,000 gold.

'I wouldn't even be able to attempt it with that much money.....'

Ark sighed as he stood inside the kennel. Then Bona looked at him strangely.

"Ark-nim, what happened?"

"A child doesn't need to know."

Ark muttered in a pained voice. Then he heard a rough voice not far from the kennel.

Meeeeeeeeeeee, meeeeeeeee.

"This guy, why can't he hold still?"

He turned around and saw a Myutal holding a knife and chasing after a sheep-like animal. Bona saw Ark's curiosity and quickly explained.

“That is the barn. It is where we raise edible livestock called Pepe. Ajusshi!”

Bona waved towards the barn owner who turned his head.

“Ah, isn’t that Bona? Guran told me what happened. Wasn’t it pretty serious? There is a lot I would like to ask but I’ll have to leave it to later. My stupid assistant got the payment date wrong so I have to catch two hundred of them by tomorrow. He couldn’t even come today so he became ill. It is really serious.”

The barn owner murmured in an irritated voice.

“Two hundred?”

“Yes, I need to deliver 200 meat and leather to Sandstorm Village in 4 days. Since I have to carry it there, I need to catch everything by tomorrow evening. Oh! Yes Bona, will you help me? You can’t groom the Pepe but you can hold them still. I’m so desperate that I would use any free hands.”

“Of course I would like to help.....”

Bona studied Ark’s face quickly. Then Ark had a brilliant idea.

‘Wait, meat and leather? Then perhaps.....?’

“Can I help Bona as well?”

“Huh? You are?”

“He’s the person who saved me.”

“Oh, yes!”

The barn owner looked at Ark with surprise and nodded.

“Good, right now anyone is welcome. Do you have any experience dealing with cattle?”

“No, but I’ll work hard if you teach me.”

“Well, you have the right attitude. Understood. Then I’ll catch the Pepe while you peel off the leather and parts of the meat. When you

finish then Bona will take it to the drying room. If we finish within the time limit then I'll reward you generously."

A quest window appeared after the barn owner's words.

Catch the Pepe in the Valley Village.

The owner of the barn in the village is in big trouble because of a mix up with the delivery date. You must obtain 200 Pepe meat and leather within the next two days. If you don't finish in time for the delivery then you will lose the barn owner's respect.

Difficulty: –

So Ark began a part-time job. In fact, the novice villages normally had such easy quests. They consisted of carrying stuff, cleaning warehouses or looking after a store for the owner. There was also significantly less compensation for the simple quests. But there was a reason why Ark accepted the job even though he was tired.

'Damn, who knew that I would need such a thing?'

Anger welled up when Ark thought about it. After defeating Tamura, he had received the 'Necromancer's Essence.' After making Razak evolve, he had taken out his pot and checked the necessary recipe.

'Necromancer's Immortality Pill' recipe.

Shining Jelly Necromancer's Essence 1/1

Heart of the Dead 0/2000

Skin of the Dead 0/2000

Ark was unhappy after seeing the information window. 'Heart of the Dead' or 'Skin of the Dead' were items that sometimes dropped from undead monsters. Since the drop rate was so low, he had collected them initially. However, they were just japtem. Even the stores wouldn't buy them. So he just disposed of the item whenever it dropped. But now he needed 4,000 of them?

‘Dammit, I’ve already thrown away 1,000 of them.....’

He had just thrown away 1/4 of the ingredients necessary. Although the results would still be the same even if he hadn’t thrown it away. The drop rate for these two ingredients was really low. Ark had killed a significant number of undead but had only found 1,000 of them. If he used simple calculations then he would need to kill forty thousand to make the immortality pill. A few days.....no, it would surely take months to make.

‘Oh, I don’t know. I’ll complete it someday.’

So Ark had given up halfway when he saw the recipe. But that changed after hearing the barn owner’s words.

‘Wait, if I work here then wouldn’t I be able to learn butchery and leather extraction? So it might be easier to collect the ingredients.’

Yes, Ark hadn’t accepted the job for no reason. Of course, it was possible to obtain leather and meat from monsters without these skills. However, the probability was only 20% while it would increase to 70% if he used these skills to collect meat and leather from dead monsters. He actually had the chance to learn these skills before but he chose to learn Ingredient Foraging since it was more useful for Survival Cooking. But now things had changed.

‘Heart of the Dead is meat while Skin of the Dead is leather. Learning the leather extraction and butchery skills will make my ingredient collection a few times faster.’

He had a lot of downtime so now was the perfect time to learn it.

“Come, let’s start straight away.”

The barn owner handed him a knife. Then Ark sat down and began to work.

“This one!”

Meeeeeeek!

The barn owner grabbed the first Pepe, cut off its head and peeled off the leather. He thought it would be simple but it wasn’t that easy

when he first started. He learned how to dismantle from the barn owner, but if he didn't do it properly then the leather would tear or the meat would be damaged. Indeed, doing the job without the skills was impossible.

-You have made a mistake using the dismantling knife and ruined the Pepe leather.

<The worth of the leather Pepe goods has dropped by 70%>
--

-You have made a mistake using the dismantling knife and the Pepe meat has become spoiled.
--

<The value of the Pepe meat has dropped by 40%>

The barn owner's face fell every time the messages appeared.

"Dammit, are you going to eat up my entire farm?"

"I'm really sorry."

"You can't decrease the commercial value of my goods. Don't you know how much I treasured them while raising them? Ugh, they're just cattle but I've raised them like they were my children. I shed tears every time I have to catch one. Yet now you're spoiling the precious leather and meat?"

Ark clenched the knife as he held it to the cattle's neck.....he felt like exploding but he endured it. It wasn't easy to meet NPCs that could teach these techniques. Luckily Ark also had some support.

"Ajusshi! Why are you saying such things? Ark-hyung is just trying to help ajusshi out. But the work is difficult which is why he is clumsy. In addition, Ark-hyung is a warrior. It is natural for him to be clumsy."

'Oh Bona, I'm really glad I rescued you! This hyung is strongly impressed!'

Bona's words were effective. The barn owner sighed and scratched his head with an uncomfortable expression.

"Yes I see. I'm sorry. I was irrational for a little bit....."

“No. It is because I am lacking. My chest also hurts after I ruined the leather and meat of the Pepe. Can you teach me some more tips?”

“I understand.”

The barn owner sat near Ark and explained to him the way to use the knife. Ark listened obediently to the barn owner and his understanding went up.

The only requirement to learn skills like these in New World was ‘Understanding.’ It was a number which showed how much he understood the work. If he repeated the work then it was possible to raise this number. However, learning from NPCs specialized in the work would increase the understanding at a much faster rate. Ark cunningly took advantage of this system.

“Whoops! Another one ruined! Damn, I’m really rubbish! I once again spoiled something that ajusshi raised like his child.....waaaah, someone like me should die!”

Ark blamed himself and crazily waved the knife when he failed again. The barn owner was so surprised that he couldn’t even be mad.

“What? Even though I taught you again....eh? Hey, please calm down. The Pepe is like my children but is it worth dying over them? Okay, I understand your heart. It is impossible to get used to it the first time. Sit down and I’ll teach you again from the beginning.”

The owner made Ark sit down and began to explain the tips from the beginning. Thanks to that, Ark’s understand rose quickly and 5 hours passed.....

You have learned a new skill.
Leather Extraction (Beginner, Passive): You can use a dismantling knife to extract leather from domestic animals, wild animals and monsters. The leather obtained can be used as material in the creation of leather armour. However, the probability of success depends on the skill level and the monster’s level.
You have learned a new skill.

Butchery (Beginner, Passive): You can use the dismantling knife to obtain meat from domestic animals, wild animals and monsters. The resulting meat can be used as an ingredient in various dishes. However, the success rate depends on the monster's level and the skill level.

'That's it!'

He was finally able to learn the desired skills. Since the cattle was only level 1, he could peel off the Pepe's leather immediately. After that Ark's hands flashed as he successfully obtained the Pepe's meat and leather. In addition, the value of the leather and meat didn't fall at all.

"Oh, now you've got the hang of it."

"Huhuhu, it was thanks to ajusshi's teachings."

Ark could even communicate as he stripped the leather. Thus the production speed increased and he finished the remaining Pepe in 3 hours.

"Phew, I'll be able to make the delivery date thanks to you and Bona. I want to give you a gift since you've helped me with my work.....ah, right. I'll give you this. It is the dismantling knife although it is also good as a long knife. And this is the Pepe's meat."

The barn owner gave him the dismantling knife and meat as a reward.

Butcher's Knife

A professional knife used to obtain leather and meat.

<Increases the success probability of Leather Extraction and Butchering by 20%>

Pepe's Fillet (5)

The meat of the cattle Pepe who was raised in the Netherworld. The meat is so fresh that you can eat it as sashimi

<p>The quest <Catch the Pepe in the Valley Village> has been completed.</p> <p><Additional compensation: Leather Extraction and Butchering +20></p>

At the same time, the quest had been completed. Since it was a production quest, the bonus was always skill experience or proficiency.

‘A food item and bonus skill proficiency! The part time quest was really useful!’

“Thank you.”

“Hahaha, I am even more thankful. Please grill the Pepe meat and eat it. The taste is really amazing. That reminds me, shouldn’t I get going? I should eat before completing my delivery.”

Meeeeeeeeee, meeeeeeeee!

The barn owner turned wicked eyes towards the Pepe who cried out and trembled.

Hey, hey, wasn’t that his children? Didn’t he shed tears everything he had to catch one? So he would eat it even while shedding tears?

Ark wanted to get up but his calves were too tired. After receiving the quest to rescue Bona, he hadn’t had a chance to shut his eyes.

“Then I’ll take this and go.”

Ark said goodbye to Bona and the barn owner before terminating the connection.

Locate the Laboratory

“Damn!”

A dim light appeared at the totem as a magician appeared. It was Jewel who had self-destructed in the Abyss of Despair. Jewel checked her information window and clenched her teeth.

“That damn bastard Ark.....I’m going to pay him back several times!”

The self-destruct magic was critical against enemies but it was also lethal to Jewel. Although she dealt a tremendous amount of damage in a wide range, she received 3 times the death penalty. In other words, she lost 90% experience and all stats -3. Although she already knew such details, tears gathered when she actually saw it.

‘Dammit, it will take so long to recover that 90% experience.....in addition, how can I recover the 18 stats lost before levelling up?’

All this was because of Ark. If she hadn’t been tricked by Ark then she wouldn’t have needed to use that skill. If Jewel realised how much her self-destruct ended up helping Ark then she probably would’ve exploded again. Nevertheless, ignorance was bliss. So Jewel just furiously waited until the other members had resurrected. Duke rushed up to her and said.

“Jewel, where is that Ark bastard now?”

“Damn it, how should I know?”

“What do you mean? Check with Mana Perfume.”

“Of course I’ve already tried it. But there was no reaction.”

“What? He removed the curse?”

“What other explanation is there? He must’ve been carrying a [Curse release] scroll.”

“.....What now?”

Duke asked with a serious face but Jewel didn't know. The group dedicated to killing Ark sighed. Then Beseutyu who had been lingering nearby ran up to them.

“Ah, look, it is you guys....!”

“Eh? The old man who gave Ark the quest?”

“Please. My grandson, please rescue my grandson!”

“What is that?”

Beseutyu grabbed Jewel's arm and begged.

“You've already heard what happened. You guys appeared after Ark who just left. He said that he went to the Abyss of Despair and ran away when he saw it was hopeless. After seeing you appear at the totem, I know that you fought against the Nakujuk until the end. You're different from Ark.”

“That's right. That bastard Ark is no match for us.”

Jewel snorted before nodding.

“My hunch was correct. Yes, I knew I could trust you. Since you've returned, I must request this of you. Would you not go back to the Abyss of Despair?”

Jewel and Duke looked at each other after hearing Beseutyu's words. They exchanged looks for a while before Jewel spoke.

“That's right. Indeed, if we were all wiped out then he would have no chance. I understand. It won't be an easy opponent but we'll save your grandson.”

“Thank you, thank you!”

“But where did Ark go?”

“Why.....?”

“In fact, we suffered serious injuries while fighting the Nakujuk to

rescue your grandson because he stole our equipment and fled. We can't forgive such a lousy bastard. After rescuing your grandson, we want to find him and make him pay for his sins."

Beseutyu gnashed his teeth at Jewel's explanation.

"Such a dirty thing.....I knew he was strange. That's why he refused to wait for you and just ran off. I know. I heard him say that he would go to the city beyond the northern mountains."

"Was a mount used?"

"No. There is no reason to lend a mount to the person who abandoned my grandson. He went on foot so he shouldn't have gone too far. After saving my grandson, I'll allow you to borrow the skyrays and chase him."

There was a cold smile on Jewel's face.

"Duke, did you hear that? He went to the city on the other side of the mountains."

"Okay, everybody get ready. Let's depart."

"Eh? You guys. What are you saying? Then my grandson.....?"

"Who cares!"

Jewel pushed Beseutyu out of the way.

"Your grandson has already been eaten by Tamura."

"I have no interest in continuing a quest which already failed."

"I'm more concerned with Ark. Now, let's go!"

Jewel immediately used 'Quick' magic on the group. Their movement speed increased by 20% thanks to the spell and there was a billow of dust as they rushed towards the north.

"Grandpa, are you okay?"

After a while, Bona ran up from where he was hiding nearby.

"Bah, they're bad people just like Ark-hyung said."

“.....They have no honour.”

Beseutyu snorted as he turned to watch them disappear.

“That’s what they get for trying to annoy Bona’s saviour. There is no city beyond the mountains, only the territory of the main Nakujuk clan. They will end up suffering.”

“But the way, did grandfather find what Ark-hyung was looking for?”

“Of course. Well let’s return. Ark said he would be coming back now.”

Beseutyu and Bona smiled before returning to the village.

“Now it is safe. They have left for the northern mountains.”

“Thanks for the good work.”

“I acted just like you told me to.”

There was a wily smile on Ark’s face after Beseutyu’s answer.

‘Now I don’t have to worry about those guys. They’ll soon discover that they made a mistake, but without the help of magic they won’t be able to find me easily.’

Thus one of his worries disappeared. Now the only thing left was to find any clues related to Magaro. Ark looked expectantly at Beseutyu who smiled and nodded.

“I’ve found the information you need.”

“Something related to Magaro?”

“Yes, he came here approximately 100 years ago. Well, read it yourself will be faster than me explaining. It’s been translated so you can read it.”

Were the resources recorded using a special cipher to maintain secrecy? It was probably a countermeasure to ensure that users couldn’t abuse their knowledge of the Netherworld. Since Ark was entitled to the information, Beseutyu translated it onto a scroll and passed it to him.

‘I can finally discover the whereabouts of Magaro!’

Ark unrolled it with anticipation. It was recorded in first person format, just like a diary or letter.

.....He introduced himself as Magaro.

Magaro was an unusually polite and sincere person. It surprised me that he crossed from middle earth. I heard that people could pass freely between middle earth and the Netherworld a long time ago, but I thought it was just a legend or myth. But he proved that middle earth existed and that it was a much more advanced civilization. He was very clever. Although he only saw the flora and fauna here for the first time, within a few days he was able to understand their attributes and how best to use them. He taught us how to refine the sap of plants in order to heal wounds and how to live a more abundant life by raising cattle.

However, he was forced to leave the village after a month. He came to the Netherworld for a ‘special’ purpose and he needed more research materials for that purpose. I informed him about the ‘Forest of Life’ in the eastern wilderness where he could find those materials. He could obtain everything he needed from there. Unfortunately, I never saw him again.....

‘.....That explains it.’

Ark noticed some strange associations while reading the document. When he saw the sap refinery, the first thing that came to mind was the Magic Institute’s alchemy lab. The standard of the equipment was very different but the structure was somewhat similar. He discovered the reason after reading the record. Magaro was a genius alchemist so he taught them how to use the sap.

‘As expected from the alchemist Magaro. But I still don’t know Magaro’s secret purpose which is the reason he came to the Netherworld.....’

It definitely smelled like money.

“I was also surprised after reading this record. I didn’t realise that

the person who taught us how to use sap and herbs came from middle earth.”

“Where is the Forest of Life?”

“I’ve never gone there directly, but if you head to the eastern wilderness on the south-east side then you should find it.”

Then he opened up the map and indicated the area with a red dot. The location was close to the snowy mountains that Ark descended down.

‘It will take me a few days if I move in a straight line. But at least I know the location.’

Ark stored the map and asked.

“By the way, did you find any information about the Red Man?”

“Ah, you mean that?”

Beseutyu shook his head.

“I couldn’t find any information about that person.”

“Really?”

Ark was only a little bit disappointed. In fact, he hadn’t expected anything. He had received a quest to find Magaro’s laboratory. It was possible to receive information related to this because he received the quest. That’s because the clues for the quest were intentionally placed from the beginning. However, the Red Man had nothing to do with this quest. And Ark didn’t know what he needed to investigate. He only had a vague thought of finding the Red Man. If he didn’t know what he was looking for then there was no way he would receive a clue. Above all. He really needed to determine if the Red Man held the ‘key’ to passing the entrance examination.

‘It can’t be helped. There’s nothing for me to find at the moment.’

Ark finished collecting the information and packed for a new trip. He re-examined his equipment and stopped by the general store to barter for useable medicines. By that time Lariette and Buksil had

finished resting and connected to the game.

“Ark-nim, I’m not late?”

“Yes, you came right on time.”

“Where are you going now?”

“The Forest of Life in the wilderness to the east. The distance is quite far so we should leave quickly.”

When Ark seemed like he would leave straight away, Beseutyu spoke in a worried voice.

“Hmm, can you leave tomorrow morning?”

“No. I’ve rested so it doesn’t matter if it is morning or evening.”

In fact, evening was the best time for a Dark Walker to travel.

“Then how about you take a skyray and go?”

Lariette was so surprised that she flinched and turned pale.

‘S-Skyrays? Ah, Ark-nim....’

“Thank you but it is fine. I’ll walk this time.”

Lariette sighed with relief and laughed when Ark refused. But Ark didn’t decline just because of Lariette.

‘The skyray moves faster but that’s all.’

There were still a lot of ingredients that he hadn’t seen in the Netherworld. He would miss those opportunities if he flew on the skyray. In addition, he confirmed that there were quite a few wild skyrays in the east when he travelled to this village. If he flew on the skyrays then a battle was inevitable.

‘There are too many variables in aerial combat compared to ground combat. When returning from the Abyss of Despair, it was difficult to defeat four or five skyrays while protecting Lariette and Buksil. So I would rather walk even if it takes longer. Well, it’s not like anything is urgent at the moment.....’

“Then we’ll be going.”

“Please feel free to drop by. You are always welcome.”

“Ark hyung, Lariette-noona, please make sure to come back when your business finishes!”

Bona chased them to the entrance and shook their hands.

“Okay, I understand.” Now, let’s go.”

“Yes.”

Lariette smiled and nodded. Ark turned his head without thinking and looked at her. The sun had started to set and it dyed the surroundings red. It was dark but light, it felt regretful but his heart was also beating fast.....it was like she was standing in a mysterious space. Her whole body was dyed in a mysterious light and made her even more beautiful. It was difficult to express in words as elusive emotions rose in him.

‘Travelling in the Netherworld is unlikely to become boring.’

‘Something.....this isn’t something.’

A mysterious world with a woman who longed for adventure! It was like a movie where the protagonist had a fateful encounter with the heroine and they ended up exploring and fighting monsters together, with the hero sometimes saving the heroine. After overcoming numerous adversities, the two protagonists finally found the treasure and began a relationship with each other. Wasn’t it a dream that all men would aspire to? Although they hadn’t reached the ending, Ark was lost in the sweet fantasy after exiting the village with Lariette.

But reality wasn’t that superficial. Ark’s reality was not that superficial.

Ark sighed and looked at his colleagues eating a meal.

“Ah, this is really good?”

“It really is. Ark-nim is also good at cooking.”

“Really? It’s delicious?”

Dedric was ravenously licking the pot like a pig. After he refilled the pot, it was once again emptied as they continued chattering.

“Master, did you hear that? Another serving of this.”

It was a ridiculous situation. He had made dishes from the ingredients collected. In addition, Ark had lost 50% of his health but he wasn't even able to eat one spoonful. The pot was emptied yet he wanted another serving? And is such a demanding tone? Ark had a bitter taste in his mouth at the sight. No, he really wanted to punch him. However.....

“I'm sorry. We ate everything without leaving anything for Ark-nim.”

When Lariette spoke, Ark's fist which had been heading towards Dedric suddenly changed into patting his head.

“Ah, no. You should eat well. Hahaha.”

“Yes, don't worry about it. Master's hobby is feeding others.”

Dedric smirked at his words. And the naive Lariette just nodded.

“So your original hobby was cooking?”

“Huh? Ah, yes....that's right.”

Ark awkwardly smiled before whispering to Dedric.

“You, you bastard! Are you afraid for your future?”

“What?”

Dedric just whistled as he stared at the distant mountains. Something.....his instincts sensed that something was happening. Although he behaved for a while, that fellow was once again starting to behave hatefully and he even became worse than before.

‘Damn, I made a mistake. If I knew this would happen then I wouldn't have called him the number 2.....I forgot that he was a child and that it would go to his head.’

But who could he blame? This situation was due to his own

mistakes..... Ark sighed again and looked through his bag. Then he poured a few ingredients into the pot with tears in his eyes.

‘How much money are the ingredients I poured into this pot worth?’

Ark replayed the past events in his head. In the beginning.....everything was good when they left the valley village.

“Omo, look at that river. It is a rainbow of colours.”

“Have you seen this? If you blow the flowers then the wind will blow it back into your mouth. Hohoho.”

“That looks like a human face but it is creepy.”

Lariette explored the area with childlike excitement in her eyes.

“Please be careful. It is a monster that will attack anything that approached.”

“Huh? Really?”

Ark laughed at Lariette’s amazement and added.

“Hahaha. It won’t attack unless you approach so it’ll be okay.”

She had arrived in the Netherworld before Ark. However, she appeared in the Hagel Forest surrounded by the dead and didn’t have time to explore before being captured by the Nakujuk. So she was curious and excited about everything. Ark also enjoyed watching her. And he explained everything that she developed an interest in. For someone.....it was quite enjoyable having a girl interested in his words. Monsters appeared occasionally but it didn’t matter. Ark had already faced these monsters several times while heading to the village from the snowy mountains. The level was higher but no more than two appeared at once. In addition, Ark’s level was much higher than before. After killing hundreds of Nakujuk in the Abyss of Despair and completing the quest, he was level 256!

“Buksil, take it well.”

Ark whispered to Buksil before drawing his sword. Then he used

flashy movements to dispose of the monsters. The video was shooting, but how could he fight normally in front of Lariette?

“Wah! It’s fantastic! You took care of those strong monsters so easily.....”

Ark’s nose rose in the air at Lariette’s interjection.

“It’s not a big deal.”

Ark said with fake humility. After Lariette’s reaction, Ark immediately began to exaggerate his actions. Ark was generous when cooking food and pretended not to notice when his pets made a mistake. He couldn’t be an unpleasant person in front of her. So Ark’s normal behaviour was stopped by Lariette’s presence. It was indeed a pleasing scene when he recalled it.

But the good memories with Lariette only lasted until then. He was so entrance by Lariette then the trip through the wilderness passed without him noticing. They soon reached the south where the wilderness changed into dense forests.

“The forest continues from here. It seems to be a checkpoint which will lead to the Forest of Life. This is my first time here so I don’t know what the monsters will be like. Dedric, reconnaissance.”

“Understood. Master.

Dedric flapped his wings for the first time after several days. However, he couldn’t make it a few metres before he started gasping.

“What the, what happened?”

“I don’t know. Somehow I became very winded?”

Ark glanced around but couldn’t spot anything unusual.

Could it be.....? Ark looked uneasily at Dedric’s body. He finally noticed that Dedric was subtly different from normal.

‘What the? When did this child.....?’

While showing off his cooking skill to Lariette, Ark had used barrage

of ingredients. But Lariette was not a glutton. More than half of the meal remained every time so his pets and Buksil would eat the rest. On the other hand, only one or two monsters appeared at the same time in the wilderness. So he didn't need Dedric to scout or fight with him. As a result.....it was like Dedric received a holiday as he continuously partook in holiday foods. In other words, the excess nutrient intake and lack of exercise meant that he became bigger. It was also true for Razak and Buksil. Buksil.....well, he looked even more like a pig while Dedric's bones also thickened.

'Oh my god, why didn't I notice until now?'

Lariette had distracted him. Anyway, Ark finally noticed what was happening and became astounded.

Kikikiki! Kikiki, kikikiki!

The branches suddenly shook and they were surrounded by a mass of red pupils.

'Monster! There's around a dozen of them!'

"Buksil, Lariette-nim, step back! Dedric, Razak, defense formation!"

"Oh, it is hard.....understood Master."

Clack clack.....clack clack clack....

His summons replied in relaxed voices and took their stances. He wanted to say something but there was no time. A significant number of monsters had come running from different directions. The Kurun was a monster that looked like a combination of a monkey and a wolf. Ark relaxed a bit after confirming the Kurun's information. They were only level 200. Although he was surprised that there were a dozen of them, without the dark attribute bonus he would still be able to handle them by himself.

"Okay Lariette-nim, please buff me!"

"Yes! Heavenly Light, Immortal Aura, Pure Sword!"

Lariette's buffs increased his various stats.

“Now, you will be sliced in an instant. Elemental sword, Fire attribute!”

The sword was engulfed in flames when he used the skill.

Ark’s body then shot like an arrow towards the Kurun.

Flash-!

The Kurun screamed as they were suddenly wrapped in flames. Ark used the momentum to continuously attack until the Kurun’s health had decreased by half.

‘Okay, this is enough to deal with them.’

Ark smiled with satisfaction. Of course, Ark’s health has decreased after attacking the Kurun. But then Lariette used recovery magic and a situation he couldn’t predict occurred. Some of the Kurun who had been attacking Ark shrieked and turned to attack her.

‘What the? Why all of a sudden.....whoops!’

Ark suddenly realised what was happening. It was a familiar situation for anyone who played online games. Numerical numbers for a monster’s ‘Fury’ existed. If two users beat up the same monster, the system would attack the one who dealt more damage. There was one exception.

Recovery magic. Although the magic didn’t deal direct damage to the monster, it’s aggro gauge would increase considerably. Therefore, warriors in the party would have to time the use of ‘Provocation’ to coincide with the moment a priest used recovery magic. The most important part of fighting in a group was ‘aggro management.’ Ark had spent a year soloing so he never got the hang of it. Occasionally he fought with Roco but the rehabilitation members were there to tank.

“Kyaaak, please help me!”

“Huk, move it! Hiik!”

Ark rushed towards Lariette and Buksil who were in a crisis. Buksil was a merchant and Lariette just changed jobs so both of their

health decreased. In fact, the Holy Knight had less recovery magic than a priest and were inferior in combat compared to warriors. But they had higher combat capabilities than a priest and could use magic to recover. Since it was the best profession in the Holy attribute series, the Innocence Knight received bonus stats based on their reputation. So although she was level 160, her actual stats were over level 200. But the problem was that she had originally been a magician.

She was wearing a cloth robe..... Since she had been in the Dawn Blade guild, it was a pretty good magic item but it had low defense. She was also inexperienced in melee combat. When the Kurun ran up to her, she was too busy escaping to counterattack.

“T-this is.....Dedric, use taunt to disperse their attention!”

“Eh? Understood. Ya, you bastards, over here!”

Two Kurun rushed towards Dedric after he used taunt. Dedric flapped his wings and tried to run away.....but he could not. Dedric who had gained weight gasped as he flapped his wings and staggered after being hit in the back of the head.

.....Ah, he really was playing around.

“Dammit! Razak, take your defensive stance and protect both of them!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak’s fat bones clattered as he ran forward. Even though Razak gained some weight, he was still better than Dedric. He was a bit slow but managed to get in front of them in time. Thanks to that, Lariette and Buksil didn’t collapse. But Razak couldn’t block all of the Kurun’s attacks even in his defensive stance. Once again Dedric and Razak weren’t able to deal with monsters higher than them. Razak was around level 150 after evolving while Dedric was only level 130. His summons were able to fight with level 300 monsters due to a combination play that they perfected through many trial and errors with Ark. They would just die if Ark wasn’t there. It was even worse once their flesh became plump.

‘Dammit.....of all times to be fat.....!’

Ark cursed as he gave up on the Kurun with 50% health and ran towards them.

“Ma-Master, please help!”

Dedric rolled on the ground like a ball of fur and called for help. Ark snatched Dedric and instantly used ‘Dark Dance.’ He moved like a ghost and used the chain skill of Dark Blade and Dark Strike on the Kurun. Despite the intense and continuous attacks pushing the Kurun back, the situation became even more bleak.

His pets, Lariette and Buksil were all in a critical condition. Ark also only had 50% health left after attacking the enemy. On the other hand, the Kurun had their health decreased by Flash but none of them had died yet. The ones with low health retreated and started throwing stones.

‘I can narrow the distance and attack with Flash and then retreat using Dark Dance but.....’

Ark started to realise how unstable his party was. Buksil couldn’t help in battles in the wilderness but he was good at luring monsters in dungeons to the desired place. However, having too many enemies in a wide open place like this turned out to be a weakness of their group. Ark wasn’t a warrior so he couldn’t wear heavy armour with high defense. 낮다. So he had to reduce damage in fights by evading. But he couldn’t use those methods if he had to protect people. If he avoided the attacks then it might hit Buksil and Lariette. That was why he needed a warrior in the party!

‘Damn, I have no choice but to hold on.’

Ark took out most of the flying stones with Riposte. During that time Lariette had recovered her health to 60% using recovery magic.

“Lariette-nim, please concentrate your recovery magic on Razak from now on. Razak, use your defensive stance to protect Lariette and Buksil. Hold out for a minute!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak held out his shield.

“Sprint!”

Ark shot off like an arrow through the flying stones. Then he used Flash on the Kurun as soon as he entered in range. Once, twice, three times.....his mana was running out by the Kurun started collapsing one by one.

“Now it is time to finish this. Blessing of the sea!”

Ark used Adelaine’s Necklace to restore his mana and once again used Flash. He exterminated the remaining Kurun after using Flash a few more times.

“Huk huk huk, I barely won.”

Ark gasped as he ran out of breath.

After checking his health, he saw that he only had 5% left.

Since Lariette used her recovery magic, Razak wouldn’t have been able to hold out if the Kurun concentrated their attacks on him. Therefore Ark took most of the attacks by the stones while using Flash.

When it was over, Lariette and Buksil came running over to him.

“Phew, the crisis is over.”

“I’m sorry. We were just a hindrance.....”

“No, it’s okay. Let’s take a break first. We don’t know when a monster will appear again so we should restore our health and mana when there is a chance.”

Ark started to set up a camp. Both Ark and Lariette had run out of mana.

‘We had such difficulty against a group of level 200 monsters.....’

Ark sneaked a peek at Dedric and Razak who were lying on the ground. Dedric and Razak both realised that they had made mistakes. Ark became annoyed at the sight but just shook his head.

‘No, there is a more fundamental problem.’

Yes, he knew that neither Dedric and Razak would be able to handle dozens of Kurun just yet. Nevertheless, the reason they struggled so much and almost died was because they had to protect Buksil and Lariette. If it was just Buksil then he didn’t need to worry that much. But now there were two of them. The situation was different. Ark needed to concentrate on attacking while protecting those two. It was a significant burden on Ark who was not a warrior and couldn’t wear heavy armour.

‘This is a surprisingly serious problem. There were level 300 monsters in the wilderness and now level 200 monsters suddenly appeared. This means that most of the monsters move in groups. If there is a dozen at the beginning of the forest, that number will probably increase as we move further in. If there is more than a dozen then I won’t be able to handle it.’

The same was true for Razak. If they attacked only Ark then he could handle it, but if they concentrated on Lariette and Buksil then Razak would only be able to last for 1~2 minutes.

‘There must be a way.....’

Ark blew out a sigh while looking serious. After worrying about it for a long time, he clenched his teeth and made up his mind.

‘Yes, it really can’t be helped.’

“Lariette-nim.”

Ark went over to Lariette who was still restoring her mana. After a moment of hesitating, he opened his mouth.

“I think it is dangerous if we enter the forest blindly. If there are a lot of monsters then I won’t be able to block everything. Buksil is a merchant but since Lariette-nim changed to a knight, if you raise your defense then it will decrease my burden by a bit.”

“I know that too.....but I only have items for mages.”

“I know.”

Ark nodded and stuck his hand into his bag. That's right. If Lariette wore armour and raised her defense a little bit then it would decrease the burden on Ark. She was still lacking close combat skills, but if her defense rose then her would be decreased slower. However.....even if he was determined, his body didn't want to move. Cold sweat dripped down his face as his hand remained in his bag. But Ark was a man of his word!

"Please receive this!"

Ark closed his eyes tightly and took out an item. Lariette and Buksil looked at Ark strangely while he was sweating.

Battered Half-Plate

Armour type: Iron armour

Defense power: 0

Durability: 0/0

Weight: 10

User restriction: Level 100 and over

The half-plate armour can be seen everywhere. This one is so old that mould has started to form on it. No matter how great the craftsmen, they would not be able to repair this armour. You can attempt to sell it but you probably won't receive that much.

It was an item that clearly wasn't great once checked in the information window. The gloves, shoes and shoulder blades that were taken out afterwards was also similar to the armour.

'What the? He hesitated so much to give me items like these?'

Those were Lariette's and Buksil's thoughts.

'Huk, if I sell all of these then I would get at least 1 gold.....if I sell it as a set then I might be able to get 4 gold.....'

Tears gathered at the thought of 4 gold flying away. 4 gold was 40,000 won. It was like grabbing a shovel and digging for 3 hours.

One thousand won might appear. Of course, Lariette was a special person to Ark. But that was different. If Ark was just playing for fun then he wouldn't care about a few japtem.....no, even magic items wouldn't matter. However, Ark had a definite goal. To make money!

Thanks to that one goal, he couldn't even afford to lose 1 copper. It was a big decision for him to give up some japtem.

"Yes.....t-thank you."

Lariette couldn't bear to say no and received the armour set. In fact, the cloth armour that Lariette was wearing had pretty good defense. Alan had spent money and obtained it for her. The cloth armour had better defense than the armour that Ark gave her. A higher quality! But something called profession attributes existed in New World. In other words, if it wasn't restricted to profession then a magician could also wear metal armour. However, there would be a job penalty inflicted and they would not receive the full defense. That was why magicians wore cloth equipment despite having a lower defense. If knights wore a robe then they would have a 40% penalty in defense. But the items Ark gave was metal armour. It was a trivial item but it would be able to increase the defense.

'That's it. It is valuable but my burden so lessen a little bit.'

But Ark miscalculated. Once she wore armour, Lariette seemed to mistakenly think that she was a knight. When the monsters appeared, she stepped forward while holding her japtem sword. However, her battle sense was really bad.

"I'll help you!"

"Oh, no.....it is not necessary....."

"Ack!"

"Lariette-nim?"

Lariette blindly swung her sword and instead of hitting the target, she swung to wildly and fell onto the ground. So Ark had to stop fighting and rush to protect her. But that wasn't all. Because she was a magician for so long, she didn't understand how to fight as a

knight. When Ark swung his sword, she would also swing hers and almost damaged him.....it was truly a disaster. At least Lariette would focus on recovery when wearing a robe but now she was too busy trying to fight to support Ark. Therefore every battle was difficult. Ark was worn out. But it wasn't possible to approach and tell her off.

"I'm sorry. I haven't improved have I?"

What could he possibly say to such a lovely face? Ark smiled painfully while sweating.

"Ah, no. You've worked hard."

".....My satiety went down to 60% because I moved too much."

".....Eat this rice."

There was nothing more to say. When the battle started, Ark had to try not to die and when it ended he was forced to feed them. But now there were 5 mouths. He had to make servings for 5 people everything a fight ended so his ingredients were quickly running out. There were many times when Ark had to skip meals to go around and gather ingredients. Furthermore, once the situation repeated then Dedric started acting up.

'Eh? It is strange. Normally Master would've already punched me so why hasn't he said anything?'

The plump Dedric finally snapped his fingers.

'Aha, now I get it. That Master, his weakness is that girl. It is embarrassing that he is so attached to Alan's woman. And now he can't tell me and Razak off. Huhuhu, this is a chance to pay back all my sorrow! I'm going to show him how fearful I can be!'

When it was time for a break, Dedric transformed into a young boy and stuck close to Lariette. Then he started to harass Ark just like a mother-in-law.

"Hey, Master. What is this? I told you I wanted to eat meat dishes!"

He just kicked the pot and complained when more servings were

cooked.

‘How dare this child act like this.....!’

Furthermore, it wasn’t only Dedric. Buksil also started acting cocky once Ark was compliant.

“Ark-nim, somehow you’re not appearing too good on the screen lately? Was the exertion too much for you?”

Buksil placed his pig foot on Ark who was kneeling down to boil the soup and chattered on.

‘Do these bastards think they can treat me like this?’

Curses rose in his throat. His heart really wanted to kill something right now. But he couldn’t curse and strike at a young boy and a pig in front of Lariette.....no, he just had to fix the habit stealthily.

‘No. It’s not something I can endure!’

So his happy trip had turned into hell in a few days.

My Fair Lady

‘Ah, no.....it is impossible anymore.’

Ark’s patience was slowly reaching its limit. As Lariette became worse in the battles, Dedric started openly annoying them. He was still collecting ingredients for their meals.....

-Thanks to the player, your pets were able to eat comfortably and have become satisfied.

<Affection +2>

Wasn’t it understandable that the message window rubbed salt in his wounds? Ark’s stress continued to accumulate.

‘Is there another way?’ There must be a way to make Lariette more useful in battles and to fix that child Dedric’s bad behaviour! If I can’t find a way then I really will die.’

Ark groaned and glanced at Lariette. In fact, she was very difficult for Ark. It was difficult because she was a woman. He couldn’t openly tell her off, but he was suffering and almost died because of her.

‘Should I close my eyes just once and try to say something?’

He thought about it many times but just ended up going in circles. It wasn’t just another woman, this was Lariette. He was so natural with Roco that he would have no problem telling her.

‘Hah.....that reminds me of Lee Myung-ryong Teacher.....’

Ark thought of Lee Myung-ryong. There were a considerable number of policewomen present at the gym. But Lee Myung-ryong didn’t treat them any different from the other members of his team. Well, if he was bothered by acting violent towards women then he couldn’t be a SWAT team leader.

“If a woman wants to be treated nicely then she should stay at home doing laundry!”

That was Lee Myung-ryong’s thoughts. Of course the policewomen didn’t express their dissatisfaction. If they didn’t train properly at the gym then they would get yelled at.

‘Eh? Wait?’

Ark lifted his head at the thought.

‘That’s right, why didn’t I think of that?’

Ark had found a way to solve all his problems. He stood up and went to Lariette.

“Lariette-nim, I have something to say.”

“Please say it.”

“Lariette-nim is now a knight. Isn’t Innocence Knight similar to Holy Knight? Then holy magic is used more as support. Learning how to fight with swords and shields is more important than holy magic. Didn’t Lariette become caught up in the fights because you enjoyed it?”

“Yes.....”

Lariette replied in a small voice. Yes, Lariette already knew about it from watching Alan. So she learned combat skills and approached monsters because she wanted to be useful for Ark.

“But you’ve spent a lot of time as a magician so you can’t just suddenly master close combat. So let’s focus on supporting the battles using recovery magic while you slowly learn the basic combat skills step by step. If you like then I would be happy to teach you the basics.”

“Ark-nim will teach me?”

“Yes. I’ll teach you everything from using a sword to moving in combat.”

Lariette wavered for a moment before nodding.

“.....Let’s give it a try.”

A smile formed on Ark’s mouth. Yes, if she didn’t know how to fight properly then just teach her. Besides, Ark and Lariette were now mentor and disciple. He didn’t know how to speak to a woman, but if it was a disciple then couldn’t he say everything he wanted to?

‘I don’t know how good it’ll be but it is better than moving forward blindly.’

Ark brought Lariette to a suitable place and indicated.

“Now, let’s begin immediately. First swing your sword 1,000 times!”

“Huh? 1, 000 times?”

“Other warriors have swung their swords since they were level 1. If you have such basics then you can fight against level 200 monsters. If Lariette-nim wants to reach that standard then you need to swing that much every day.”

Ark was relentless once it became a mentor and disciple relationship.

“I’ll come back once you’ve done 1,000 swings. Then we will follow up with defense training.”

After Ark made Lariette train, he approached Dedric, Razak and Buksil who were at the camp. He grinned widely and opened his mouth.

“Hey, everyone follow me.”

“Huk, what, what?” Surely you aren’t taking us to a dark place to beat us up?”

“Beat up? It’s training. Lariette-nim is working hard to become stronger while you guys are just lazing around eating rice. Since we have to stay here a couple of days to train Lariette-nim, I’ll also make you guys do training. But everyone has already graduated from the basics so I guess it’s time for sparring.”

“N-no, I don’t want to!”

“I will not. Why should a merchant train.....”

“Noisy, just come with me!”

Ark dragged his pets and Buksil into the forest. Then.....he used the pretence of sparring to deal indiscriminate violence for a long time. 2 hours later, the faces of his pets and Buksil were completely swollen so Ark brought training (?) to an end and they returned to the camp. Lariette who had been brandishing her sword said with surprise.

“Omo, your faces.....”

“It was training. After seeing Lariette-nim, those guys were so motivated that they wanted to train as well.”

Buksil’s face contorted with Ark lied about training. But when Ark smiled and elbowed him, Buksil instantly nodded with sweat on his face. The effect of 2 hours of education appeared.

‘Ah, how refreshing! As expected, I have to break them to teach them manners.’

Ark was so refreshed that he felt like he lost 10 years. For the next few days, Ark stayed in that place and focused on training. Fortunately, Lariette learned her ‘Sword Mastery’ and ‘Heavy Defense’ skills while Buksil and his pets lost all the weight they gained. As a bonus, they once again listened to him after the discipline.

‘Huhuhu, I should’ve done this sooner.....once again the control is in my hands.’

After Lariette got the hang of basic postures, Ark immediately began the next part of the training.

“Now, I’ll be showing you the first party formation so please watch carefully. Dedric, Razak!”

“Yes, Master!”

Clack clack clack!

The disciplined Dedric replied while floating.

“The formations will range from plan A to D depending on the command. Go!”

Ark led his summons and began a battle against a group of Kurun. Lariette’s eyes widened. In fact, she hadn’t understood anything while watching Ark in the previous battles. The timing to evade a hit, sword angles and footwork! Everything was standard techniques, but she hadn’t been able to understand it since she wasn’t a trained warrior. But now she had a high level of knowledge thanks to Ark teaching her battle skills. In addition, she also learned a lot about party cooperation with the summons.

‘It is a level higher! Now I know how much of a hindrance I’ve been to Ark-nim. But he never expressed any of it.....he was afraid of embarrassing me so he taught me combat skills.’

Lariette now looked at him with a lot of respect. Anyway, Ark had given her a textbook which explained the standard pets formation. After the training, Lariette’s skills were around a level 30 warrior. So Ark instructed her properly using his pets. In fact, in the past he never would’ve imagined commanding her. But after they became a mentor and disciple, it wasn’t that difficult teaching her things. No, it was to the extent that he didn’t understand why he hesitated so much before.

‘Yes, she’s just another person I know.’

Lariette was no longer considered a ‘guest’ so he didn’t have to be so careful anymore. It was only traveling with a colleague. If that’s the case.....was there any reason to keep on feeding her? Once the relationship was established, Ark revealed his true colours.

“Lariette-nim, the Dawn Blade guild has been dismantled right? You don’t have to worry while accompanying me, but one day you’ll be travelling alone so you’ll require skills to take care of yourself. Among them, the most essential thing to learn is cooking. Learning how to collect ingredients will also be helpful towards cooking later on. I’ll teach you. Buksil, I’ll also teach you to collect ingredients.”

“Huh? But I have the mission to record Ark-nim.....”

Buksil said in surprise but shut up when Ark shook his head. So Ark forcibly taught him how to forage ingredients. Since there were mainly high grade ingredients in the Netherworld, there was a lot of failures. But after a couple of days of suffering, Lariette and Buksil managed to learn the Ingredient Foraging skill.

“Kyaaa, I’ve learned it. Ingredient Foraging!”

“Congratulations. But now’s the important part. We need to increase your proficiency in order to take advantage of the skill properly. You will always be looking for ingredients except when fighting.”

So Ark forced the collection of ingredients to Buksil and Lariette from now on.

‘Phew, now I can concentrate on raising Leather Extraction and Butchery instead of collecting ingredients.’

That was the reason why he forced ingredient foraging on the two of them. He had to raise Leather Extraction and Butchery in advance to be able to obtain the skin and heart of the undead. But he had been so busy trying to feed the five of them that he had no time to raise the skills.

‘It will now be a pleasant journey!’

Therefore all the stress he had built up flew away. But they encountered a new ordeal shortly after they resumed the journey.

“A-1 plan! Lariette-nim, attack from behind!”

Ark was allowing Lariette to practice the battle formations. When the A-1 plan was implemented Ark, Lariette and his summons attacked from 4 directions. Then the special Kurun that was twice as big as the others wasn’t able to last and collapsed. And it dropped an item.

Resilient Shield made of Garam Wood (Magic)
Armour type: Medium Shield
Defense: 250 (+40)

Durability: 320/400

Weight: 25

User Restriction: Knights level 150 and more

The shield covered in Garam wood is stronger than steel. Garam wood is taken from a sacred tree and is used in a lot sacred items. If used to create a wooden armour, a holy aura will protect the wearer.

<Option: Stamina +10, Wisdom +20, Defense +40>

<Special Option: Amplification of holy magic by 10%>

“A magic item!”

Ark’s eyes gleamed. But the performance of the item was a problem. It was a knight only shield and it also amplified holy magic. When Lariette decided to accompany Ark, there was an agreement that all items would go to him. But just by looking at this item, it was clearly an item that Lariette had to use. Even if they reached an agreement, the shield would definitely be coveted.

‘But it isn’t just a magic item. Shields that have a special option is rare! It will earn at least 1,000,000 won on the auction site so I can’t just concede it! But it is a lot better than all the japtem I’ve collected.....’

Ark struggled and avoided Lariette’s gaze until he finally lifted the shield. He couldn’t give up 1,000,000 won even if it pricked his conscious. Then Ark suddenly had a brilliant idea.

‘.....I might be able to avoid any damage and still get credit.’

“Lariette-nim, do you need this shield?”

“Huh? No, I.....”

Although Lariette used ambiguous language, she couldn’t take her eyes off the shield. Ark made a worried gesture before speaking in a serious voice.

“In fact, it’s been weighing on my mind. Even though you’ve changed your occupation, you don’t have any knight exclusive items. I only gave you japtem.”

“.....I already decided to concede all items to Ark-nim.”

“But if such an item dropped then it should definitely go to you.”

“But I’d feel sorry....”

Even though Lariette was glad, she still felt sorry. Then Ark muttered something.

“But do you know about the Baran’s trading methods?”

“Huh? Baran’s trading methods?”

“We should barter items of similar value. For example, Lariette doesn’t need the magician items anymore so you can barter with those items. Yes, we should do that.”

Buksil who had been watching from the sidelines felt his face heat up. He noticed the intent in Ark’s words. He was offering to trade the shield for an item with equal value of Lariette’s! Buksil was distressed at such a dirty method. But Ark was resolute.

‘I might be embarrassed now, but I would regret giving up money forever!’

Ark decided not to be worried about Lariette any longer. Of course, Lariette was still his ideal woman. Although he was more comfortable after making her train, his heart would still feel sick if she cried. But Ark braced himself.

‘What have I been doing so far? No, wake up!’

Ark didn’t know what was in Lariette’s heart. Although he felt a strange expectation at one time, Ark wouldn’t accept it even if Lariette confessed her love. That was because Ark already loved one person more than anybody else. He devoted his whole life and love to that person! It wasn’t some cheap feeling. He sincerely felt like that.

My love, my life, my past and future. My eternal fair lady!

‘Mother.....yes, the person I love most in this world is my mother. How can I feel shame if that money will pay for my mother’s medical bills or for slightly better food? I would do even worse things if it is for my mother!’

He was not ashamed. Everything was for his mother! That was one reason why Ark could act so dignified while behaving like this. But Lariette’s reaction was unexpected.

“Ah, that’s fair enough. Yes, I would feel sorry so let’s exchange it for my magician items. So we do this if any other knight items drop in the future?”

“Huh? Ah, yes.....”

Ark was puzzled by her reaction. In fact, Ark’s behaviour didn’t seem that good to Lariette. But she didn’t hate that attitude. When she was a part of Dawn Blade, Alan had been overly hospitable to her. At some point it became a burden and she decided to leave Dawn Blade. But Ark was different from Alan. He didn’t treat her well just because she was a woman. In reality she was a beauty so nobody had ever treated her like Ark did. So Ark’s actions in the last week was refreshing for her. The talk about beauties being attracted to bad boys wasn’t unfounded. Anyway, Lariette exchanged her wand for Ark’s shield.

“Then shall we continue?”

Ark smiled pleasantly after the transaction finished. Ark didn’t just ‘move on.’

“Buksil and Lariette, please move over there and gather ingredients.”

When the battle finished, he instantly forced Buksil and Lariette to raise their experience. Both of them ended up with sore backs from bending over to pick up ingredients. Ark’s bags were moderately full from their efforts so he said firmly.

“Continue collecting ingredients until your proficiency has increased.”

‘Do we have to live like this until it reaches intermediate?’

Lariette was scared by the thought. On the other hand, Buksil was frightened for another reason.

‘If the bag becomes full then I’m going to end up like my younger brothers....!’

But Ark was quite satisfied with the situation.

‘Hehehe, I really needed to do this. Now my stress has disappeared!’

Ark exploited the two people while entering the Forest of Life.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

“Fire wall!”

A barrier of flames erupted along the trajectory that Jewel pointed towards. They weren’t simple flames like a candle. The fire exploded from the ground with tremendous pressure! The dozens of Nakujuk was engulfed in flames and ‘burned.’

“Piercing arrow!”

Duke shot an arrow towards the Nakujuk through the wall of flames. It was a piercing skill that could only be used on steel arrows! The steel penetrated through the bodies of the Nakujuk and dealt tremendous damage. Jewel and Duke were pioneers and took care of 3~4 at once. Magicians and archers had a lot of wide damage skills so they showed their full power when there were plenty of enemies. The only drawback was that they specialized in long distance attacks and had low defense.

“Steel barrier!”

But the warriors used a shield skill and stepped in front of them. Therefore Jewel and Duke had plenty of leeway to maximize their skills. However.....there were too many of them. They had killed more than a hundred but the enemy numbers did not decrease

at all. It felt like they've only lifted a spoonful of sand in a desert.

"Damn, what the hell?"

"That Ark didn't appear at all....."

"Don't tell me he tricked us and went the opposite direction?"

Jewel muttered. After receiving the information, they had chased after Ark for a few days. Not long ago Jewel's group finally crossed the northern mountain. Of course, even that wasn't easy. The northern mountain was the one near the Abyss of Despair. They used skyrays the first time they went there, but now they decided to cross on foot. The monsters on the northern mountain were no problem. It was the unbearable terrain of the northern mountain....the ground, walls and ceilings were all covered in the sharp stalactites, making it difficult to grab and climb the rock cliff. They weren't able to cross the terrain using conventional methods. But Jewel's group didn't give up even despite being stabbed by the brambles.

"There is definitely a way to pass here somewhere."

"If that bastard Ark managed to cross then we should as well!"

Everybody was resolute towards getting revenge on Ark! They were able to use their vengefulness as an energy source and crossed the mountain. But none of them could've imagined the suffering that was waiting beyond the mountain. Was Ark waiting for them? No. Instead the group of red Nakujuk were gathered.

"Intruders!"

"Seize them, the Baran have clearly sent spies!"

"Huk, what is this?" Retreat!"

Jewel's group panicked and ran away. However, the northern mountain was blocking the path behind them. Why was there a group of Nakujuk instead of Ark? After a while, they realised that Ark wasn't there and he had led them towards the Nakujuk just like before.

“No, I can’t die like the previous time. Lure them into the valley!”

They didn’t know the circumstances inside the Abyss of Despair but this time was different. They might seemed stupid sometimes but they were still pioneers. Jewel immediately judged the situation and lured them into the valley. A traditional tactic of dealing with a lot of enemies was to use a narrow passage to bottleneck them. So even though there were hundreds of Nakujuk, there only faced around twenty at one time. Jewel stopped the Nakujuk’s rush using warriors at the front with support from ranged attacks. So there were able to deal with a hundred monsters without receiving much damage. But Jewel knew that it was only a temporary solution.

‘It will be the end once my mana runs out. We need to find a way to penetrate the siege and run away. It isn’t possible to come here and not kill Ark!’

Jewel bit her lips until it became bloody and started thinking. Then Duke exclaimed with black pupils.

“Jewel, their leader is near the valley entrance!”

It was the ranger’s advanced skill ‘Hawk Eyes’ which could see everything in a range of 200 metres! While looking around to determine the number of enemies, Duke had spotted the large figure of the leader.

“The distance?”

“Behind those troops over there. Level 350.”

“Okay, this is a chance to improve the situation!”

Jewel’s eyes lit up. In a battle between users and monsters, the existence of a leader was important. If the leader was killed then its troops would be in a state of panic for a while. Their morale would fall and their formation collapse. If that happened then it would be possible to penetrate the Nakujuk’s encirclement.

“If we kill him than those guys will fall into a panic!”

“Understood, let’s penetrate the enemy with the triangle formation.

The goal is 50 metres from the entrance!”

“Let’s go!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The warriors transitioned from defense to attack and pushed through the Nakujuk. Jewel and Duke used penetrating attacks while the warriors used their shields to push the Nakujuk away. Suddenly the only enemy in front of Jewel’s group was the elite leader. He was a giant with huge axes in both hands.

“Don’t pay attention to the followers and focus your attacks on the leader!”

“Ohhhhh, Heroic Strike!”

The ten group members surrounded the leader and enthusiastically used their skills. Although the elite monster possessed incredible strength and stamina, under the concentrated attacks his health quickly fell. Then Duke’s precise shot hit his knee and he kneeled down.

“Ugh, u-unbelievable……!”

“At last!”

Biiiiik-!

The warriors ran up for the final assault and swung their swords. Suddenly there was a sharp cry from the sky as a black eagle descended towards the battlefield. At the same time, a flash of light fell towards the leader. There was an intense shock wave that pushed the warriors back.

“Ugh, what, what the……?”

“Who is that? A person fell.”

Jewel’s group lifted their weapons. The form of a person appeared amongst the cloud of dust. It was a man with red hair wearing a white mask!

‘What is this guy? An enemy? But somehow the atmosphere……?’

Jewel couldn't determine how to handle it.

"You're the people from the Abyss of Despair. You did well."

The Red Man gazed at Jewel's group and nodded.

"How about it? Would you like to join hands with me? If you work for me then I'll promise a payment."

"What? Join hands? What are you saying after suddenly appearing?"

"Or.....would you like to die here?"

The Red Man moved his hands and gestured around. Jewel looked around dumbly. Jewel hadn't realised, but the Nakujuk had stopped attacking once he appeared. The leader had also stopped and wore a look of surprise. So the Red Man must have a lot of influence on the Nakujuk clan. If they rejected his request then it was obvious what would happen.

"Who.....Who are you?"

Jewel rolled her eyes and asked with a dissatisfied expression. Then there was an amused look in the eyes revealed by the mask.

"I'm a user. The same as you."

Galgin Clan's Disaster

Kuaaaang!

A loud roar rattled the forest. It looked like a Kurun but with 3 heads, a monster with 5 tails called the 'Chimera-Kurometin.' Level 250. There was a group of 4 or 5 monsters. They had high defense and attack so they were the toughest opponent he's faced so far, but he had become accustomed to their attack patterns after fighting them a few times. Although it was a little difficult in the daytime, once he had the dark attribute bonus then Ark could easily take care of it. But Ark didn't use his skills and just raised his voice.

"Plan A-3. Lariette-nim, lure two and take them out."

"Huh? Yes! Holy bolt, Holy bolt!"

Lariette attacked two of them with holy magic. However, only one of the monsters moved and chased after her. Then Dedric who had been sitting on her shoulder started lecturing her.

"How many times do I have to say it? Are you stupid? Distance is important when you are trying to lure! Even if you too far away when you 'taunt' then it won't work properly!"

"B-but it's too scary....."

"What? Are you kidding right now? Are you a princess? You're afraid of hitting a monster while holding a sword? You're too much trouble. Are you scared of hitting with your sword? Is that what you're saying? Don't use magic! Only use your sword and shield!"

"U-understood."

"Ah, what are you doing? Move closer to the monster! Sword, sword! Shield, shield!"

Dedric continually harassed Lariette.

‘That guy.....he’s acting like this again. Well, that’s why I entrusted it to him.’

Ark gave a wry smile after hearing the noisy Dedric. He had trained Lariette for a few days. In the meantime, Lariette had improved a lot as a knight. She could use recovery magic and attack the monsters from the rear. However, she still hadn’t met Ark’s standards.

‘Well, using a sword and shield is not something that can be learned overnight.....’

Yes, Lariette had the same issue as Isyuram. If she started the game as a knight, then she would’ve naturally learned the necessary skills to use a sword and shield. However, she suddenly became a completely different class at level 160 with no previous skills and knowledge. She could only use the holy magic exclusive skills of an Innocence Knight. Common skills such as Sword Mastery would have to be taught by mercenary NPCs after they were paid. But Ark was kind (?). After teaching her some tips, she was able to learn some warrior exclusive skills.

‘She has to adapt to fighting in a party in order to truly become useful.’

Of course, Lariette had participated in party teamwork with the Dawn Blade members. But her role was different as she was a magician. In addition, the Dawn Blade members always hunted with dozens of people. Even if one or two people failed in their roles then it wouldn’t be a problem. In a small party with 3~4 people, even one person could affect the battle. Fortunately, Lariette had a clear head.

‘I remember the basic plans.....but as expected, there are numerous variables in an actual battle. I have to have a broader view in order to learn every formation.’

So Ark determined what he should train Lariette in. Ark taught her how to use a shield, Razak tips on dealing with a shield and sword, and the tactical combat was left to Dedric to teach Lariette.

...It was an excellent choice.

In fact, Dedric had become slightly depressed after Ark succeeded

in re-education and forcing him on a diet. But after receiving the number 2 position and being entrusted with the 'tactics,' his mood and loyalty rose once again. His chatter was also more bearable than before and didn't annoy Ark as much.

"Oh, it's really crazy. Are you stupid? How many times do I have to tell you? Didn't I tell you not to move too far when luring? There may be other monsters in the vicinity. Will you shoulder the responsibility if other monsters attack and the party dies? Invite the monster and lead them around a small area!"

Dedric once again spoke roughly to a woman.

"You idiot, I told you not to do that! You have to maintain a distance that allows you to use recovery magic on your allies! Are you going to just blindly use magic? Is that acceptable? Your group might end up eaten. Ayu, hey Razak, time for a demonstration!"

Clack clack clack clack, daeng kang!

Razak pushed the Kurometin with his shield. Dedric nodded and said.

"Did you see? Take one step and then push! Okay?"

"Huk huk huk, u-understood. I'll give it a try."

"Do it right this time."

Dedric picked his nose and continued harassing her.

'It is crude but more effective than me teaching her.'

Thanks to that, Lariette gradually learned her role in the group.

'Now, should I finish it for the moment since Lariette is tired?'

"Dedric, Razak, gather all of them in one place."

Clack clack clack clack!

"Okay! Watch carefully trainee. I'll show you how to lure!"

Dedric displayed dazzling skills and lured the Kurometin straight

towards Ark. Razak also gathered around the monsters and used Shield Stroke. It was like dressing up a table for Ark.....and he continuously used Flash.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The flash of light moved around the Kurometin like a spider web and their health gradually decreased. When the Kurometin fell into a critical condition, Ark and Lariette finished it off. After the Kurometin died, Ark commanded in a hurry.

“Radun, swallow the items quickly!”

Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun shot off like an arrow and swallowed the items without checking it. Meanwhile Ark didn't relax and kept on looking around.

‘Phew.....fortunately it hasn't appeared yet.....’

Ark gave a sigh of relief. Then a cross pattern appeared on top of Lariette's head who screamed.

“Another level up! Kyaaa, I also got the ‘Shield Block’ skill!”

But the severe tactics training continued even now.

“What's the point of an uproar when you made so many mistakes? The techniques are not as easy as you thought!”

Dedric declared sharply causing Lariette to flinch and close her mouth. Then, Ark smiled and said in a friendly voice.

“No. In my view you've gotten a lot better. Although you still have the habit of relying on magic in a fight, if you fix that then you'll be a proper knight.”

“It's all thanks to Ark-nim.”

Lariette blushed at Ark's compliment.

“Bah, you're still a shameful knight. You're not there yet!”

“Stop it, Dedric. I can see that your skill handling a sword is very

good.”

Lariette’s face had darkened at Dedric’s words and now it brightened after Ark spoke. It was the carrot and stick! That was the secret reason behind Lariette’s quick progress.

“Let’s take a break and recover our mana.”

Ark made a campsite and collected the corpses of the Kurometin. He took out the ‘Butcher’s Knife’ and began to separate the meat and leather. After finishing those actions, Ark surveyed the area with a worried eye like when Radun collected the items.

‘Damn, I never thought a monster could make me so nervous.’

Annoyance showed in Ark’s eyes. It had been a week after they left the valley village.....they finally arrived at their destination, the Forest of Life yesterday evening. If it was just Ark, he would’ve arrived at the destination a long time ago. But Lariette was an office worker so she couldn’t access the game during the day. Whenever she disconnected, he would make a campsite and spend the time hunting in the vicinity.

‘Well, there is no urgency at the moment.’

It was taking longer than he expected but he wasn’t that impatient. There were many reasons why and one of them was that the monsters here gave quite good experience.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +400		
Fame	9,125 (+500)	Level	269
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Abandoned, Jackson’s Hero, Great Adventurer		
Health	4,111 (+150)	Mana	4,250

Spiritual Power	200	Strength	543 (+28)
Agility	703 (+55)	Stamina	773 (+20)
Wisdom	107 (+10)	Intelligence	822
Luck	103 (+30)	Flexibility	107
Art of Communication	46	Affection	152 (+10)
Resilience	305		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
*<King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Wind Spirit's Boots (Shoes): Agility + 30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Slide' available			
Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.			
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available			
Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%			
Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available			

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense

He gained 13 levels in a week. Lariette could only play 6 hours a day but still managed to gain 8 levels to reach 170. In New World, there was a penalty on experience gained if there was a large level difference between party members, with the penalty depending on how much the difference is.

‘The number of monsters and experience is acceptable. The speed is similar to levelling up in a dungeon.’

Ark quite liked the Forest of Life. Except for one type of monster.....

-You have succeeded in gathering ‘Kurometin Leather’ using Leather Extraction.

Thanks to his steady efforts, his Leather Extraction skill had reached the intermediate level. But the success rate of leather extraction on level 250 monsters was only 5%.

The effect of ‘Sacred Branch’ raised it to 15%.

Although it was a habit, he hadn't expected the result. However, Ark's face had a rushed expression instead of the normal look of joy.

'Huk, it is coming to take the soul away!'

Ark packed the leather in his bag and grabbed his sword. At that time, he heard the sound of rustling leaves coming from the forest.

'That bastard, you were hiding nearby!'

Ark glared with blazing eyes filled with anger at the dark forest. After a while, he heard the rustling sound of something moving away. It was definitely that guy! The monster who made Ark's blood tremble in fear!

'I never thought there would be a tough monster like that.'

Ark had only seen it two or three times. But it was the first time Ark had sensed that the monster would be a threat to him. The monster was called the 'Chimera=Bandit Fox.'

It was a thief fox..... Those guys hid themselves using 'Protective Colouration' and appeared out of nowhere to steal his items before running away. They had even managed to intercept him when Ark was holding the items. In addition, their speed was so fast that he wasn't able to catch them using 'Sprint.'

"There are also monsters like that...."

His obsession with the burglar fox was so much that even Dedric held his tongue. So Ark made sure that Radun swallowed the items as soon as the battle ended. Radun was responsible for collecting the items so it especially disliked the Bandit Fox.

'Damn!'

Ark cursed whenever he sensed them. Anyway, if he was careful then the Bandit Fox would have no chance of stealing his items. The problem was that there were ingredients scattered all over the Forest of Life. Just like its name, the Forest of Life was a place where lush greenery grew. There were a wide variety of plants that could be used as food ingredients.....and that was the real reason

why he hated the Bandit Foxes. Even though Ark searched the Forest of Life, he only managed to collect 3~4 ingredients. Every time a food ingredient popped up, it would be devoured by the foxes.

‘It is impossible to catch the Bandit Foxes inside this forest.....’

He had tried to catch them. However, whenever he got close they would use ‘Protective Colouration’ which was similar to Stealth. And the problem wouldn’t be solved by catching one or two. Who knew how many thousands of Bandit Foxes there were?

‘It is impossible. I just have to collect it first before the foxes discover it.’

“Okay, let’s go. It is time for Ingredient Foraging.”

Ark ordered while Buksil and Lariette stood up with a sigh.

“Now, Lariette-nim will search around here while Buksil will search to the north.”

“But what if the thieves have already collected everything and we find nothing. I would rather use that time to search for the laboratory. The Forest of Life is quite wide so wouldn’t it take a long time to walk around the whole thing?”

“You never know.”

Ark replied in a stern voice to Buksil’s complaint.

“There might be ingredients hard to collect because they’re foxes.”

“Hah.....I think we have enough ingredients.....”

“Food is plentiful now but there is no guarantee what will happen in the future. Think about it. I’ve already faced a situation when I’ve been exhausted from hunger. But did I just give up? I can’t let them take away what is ours. It is too vexing!”

“We’re not like Ark-nim.....”

Buksil murmured with dissatisfaction but started searching the forest when Ark glared at him.

“We have to scrape as much as possible!”

Ark used those reasons and forced the two of them into manual labour. But all they got for their efforts was back pain. How much time had passed?

“Kyaaa, what, what the? Huk, go away!”

Lariette screamed from a short distance away. Ark flinched and swung his sword in Lariette’s direction. Then she came screaming out of the forest with something wrapped around her head.

“Hik, s-stop! Don’t hit me!”

‘Eh? That guy is.....?’

The person hanging onto Lariette was an acquaintance (?). It was an NPC resembling a bug. It was Reid, the Galgin peddler he rescued from the Predator the other day. Lariette had mistaken him for an insect type monster.

“Lariette-nim, wait a minute!”

Ark stood in front of Lariette and blocked her. Reid moved his head away and saw Ark.

“Y-you are?”

“It is Ark. We met once before.”

“Oh, running into someone I know in a place like this.....God is really helping me. Help me!”

His eyes were brimming with tears as he spoke.

“Don’t worry. I’m not going to attack anymore.”

Ark looked at Lariette and smiled bitterly. The one who had turned pale with fear was Lariette. Of course someone like her would be scared of an insect like creature. In fact, it was the first time he had seen Lariette truly having an urge to kill. But Reid just shook his antennae and said.

“No, no. It’s not that. My entire family is clan is about to die.”

“Huh? Clan?”

Reid explained the situation while crying.

“You know that we are peddlers. When an adult starts peddling, they don’t get to meet their family that often. So it a tradition to designate a place to travel to and meet once a month. The reason I was in the vicinity before was because this forest had been designated as the meeting place. Then.....then.....yesterday I’ve arrived at the meeting place and everybody was suffering.”

“Suffering?”

“Yes, all of them are dying. I hastily made several medicines but it had no effect. It’s obviously a mysterious disease. Although they are sick, they’re still holding on to their lives..... So I started searching for people who could help. Do you have ways to treat such diseases? Middle earth should have advanced techniques to cure diseases. You’re from middle earth.”

“.....”

Ark turned and looked at Lariette. It should be a technique similar to ‘Disease Recovery.’ After Lariette changed to an Innocence Knight, she happened to learn ‘Disease Recovery.’ But Lariette had an uneasy expression and said in a worried voice.

“Ah, Ark-nim. Are we really going to help this insect?”

Of course he would help. Why? In order to get a reward.

‘Isn’t Reid’s family the Galgin clan of peddlers? Well, they might not have that much but I might be able to get some items for my summons from Reid.’

It was difficult to obtain items in the Netherworld. There were only two or three bartering shops in the valley village. There were items like the ‘Umma’s Sap’ but the number was quite restricted. But this was a gathering of peddlers. The opportunity to take advantage of such a department store couldn’t be missed. Ark replied with a serious expression.

“Lariette-nim, although he looks like an insect Reid is still a resident of the Netherworld. The heart which regards their family is not that different from ours. But if we ignore a patient just because of their looks then isn’t it discrimination?”

Lariette gasped at Ark’s speech.

“Thank you, I never expected that you would regard the Galgin clan like that!”

‘This bastard insect, why is he holding my hands? I’ll have to use some hand disinfectant.’

It was impossible for Ark to like being touched by an insect. Anyway, he just had to pretend for the moment.

“B-but.....”

“I believe that Lariette-nim is not one of those people.”

Ark looked at Lariette with a trusting expression. After looking at Reid’s eyes, she couldn’t bear to refuse even if she felt disgusted.

“Phew, I understand.”

‘Huhuhuhu, another free quest!’

Ark inwardly grinned wickedly. An Innocence Knight had various kinds of recovery magic so it should be settled without any difficulty. When they accepted, a message window appeared in front of Ark and Lariette.

Galgin Clan’s Disaster

After a month, Reid and the other peddlers in his clan met in the Forest of Life. But when Reid arrived, his clan was suffering from an unknown disease. Help identify the cause of the disease.

<Difficulty: C>

‘They are still cockroaches.’

After a while, Reid guided Ark towards the meeting place. When

they arrived there, he noticed that they were plenty of cockroaches gathered. Just like the name suggested, the Forest of Life was a forest full of vitality. When walking around, there was plenty of lush greenery and warm sun. But the place where the Galgin were gathered had a sombre atmosphere. There were rotting trees everywhere with the Galgin scattered around. Just like Reid said, the situation seemed quite serious.

“Ooooh, c-cold....somebody.....”

“Mama, Mama.....stomach hurts.....sob.....”

“Huk.....my guts are twisted.....”

There was the sound of moaning everywhere. Some of the cockroaches had viscous liquid seeping from their arms and legs while others were vomiting. The terribly sick appearance of the Galgin clan made Lariette pale and she hid behind Ark in terror. When he arrived at the camp, the Galgin was in tears.

“Great-grandfather, great-grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, cousins.....!”

All of the cockroaches were Reid’s family. Yes, they really couldn’t ignore the proliferative capacity of the cockroaches.

“Darling, my sons!”

Reid went crazy and ran towards his family.

“D-Daddy.....It hurts.”

“Ooh, really? Don’t worry though. Believe in your father. I found someone to help you. Those people will surely make you feel better.”

Ark looked at Reid with a stupid expression.

.....He had a wife and children? Anyway, Reid’s wife.....the cockroach struggled to raise her body.

“P-please.....no matter what happens to me, my children.....”

“What are you saying? You should never give up!”

Reid ran to her and embraced her.

“You have to live no matter what. So you should never give up!”

“Darling.....”

Uhh, it was truly a moving scene. If only they weren't cockroaches.

‘In reality, I’ve killed plenty of cockroaches every day and they keep on multiplying.... Well, that would solve the problem but.....’

Ark could even be kind to cockroaches for a quest.

“Don't worry, you will soon regain your health.”

“Ohh, Ark, Ark! Please.”

Reid clung to Ark and begged.

“Yes, it is my mission.”

Ark looked at Lariette quickly while talking. In fact, there was nothing that Ark could do. Ark's only healing skill was Nursing. But Nursing was only an auxiliary skill. It was possible to extend the life but it couldn't treat illness. On the other hand, the Innocence Knight's 'Cure Disease' was magic to treat illnesses. Lariette hesitated before walking towards the cockroaches. She seemed a little bit afraid but spread her hands and chanted.

“Holy God, please get rid of the illnesses that dwell in this body. Cure disease!”

The body of the cockroach was engulfed in a white light.

‘Huhuhu, it's over. Now what reward will I get?’

Ark was celebrating. Then Reid unexpectedly shook his antenna and said.

“.....What is this? There's no change.”

“Yes, the disease is....huh? What is this?”

“Look at the eyes. I don't know what you did but there was no effect.”

The symptoms of the female cockroach didn't improve at all. The body remained the same and there was no sign that the health recovered at all. Lariette had a puzzled expression.

"I-it should have worked.....have you perhaps been cursed? Remove Curse!"

But the result was the same. She tried all sorts of cure diseases, release curse and even buffs but the state did not change. Meanwhile, the symptoms seemed to be worsening as they started gasping for breaths. Ark was distressed and used Nursing.

"Find your energy. Will the Galgin clan of the Netherworld be taken out this easily? You shouldn't collapse in a place like this because of some disease."

The 'Nursing' had an effect. The complexion of the cockroach eased slightly. When Lariette used recovery magic in this state, the health that had dropped to the bottom was restored. But that was the only thing that happened. The combination of 'Nursing' and recovery magic could only slow down the disease but nothing more.

'What the hell? They're ill but why does the treatment to cure diseases not work?'

For the moment, Ark and Lariette went around the campsite and recovered their health using Nursing and recovery magic. However, the fact that the cockroaches were still hurting was troubling. There were too many and it took one hour to recover to help all the cockroaches. The crisis had been averted for the moment. If Ark used Nursing appropriately then they shouldn't die. But it was just a temporary solution.

"What now?"

Lariette looked around restlessly. She shook her head and sighed.

"Maybe it's because my skills are only at the beginner level. I don't use 'Cure Disease' or 'Remove curse' that often. But I have no more skill points....."

She transferred her gaze to Ark. Ark couldn't think of a good idea. If

he used Nursing then he could prevent the illness from proceeding. But he couldn't just stay here to extend the lives of the cockroaches forever. Even if he stayed until Lariette's 'Cure Disease' skill reached intermediate, he would've invested too much time into this quest.

'I have to give up this quest.'

Ark sighed and shook his head.

"I'm really sorry. We can't do any more."

"Ah, ah, Ark! Ah, don't. It's a request. A bit more, a bit more! There must be some way. Do you understand? I don't have the time to find somebody else. If you give up then my family will die. Anything is good. I'll do whatever you want but please don't give up!"

Reid cried and hung onto him. He really had tried everything. He also wanted to complete the quest for the reward. Wasn't that why he had spent an hour using Nursing? But what was he supposed to do now? Ark started to become annoyed at the insistent cries.

"Stop it. Can't you see that there is no way to solve this?"

.....It was at that time.

He suddenly felt goose-bumps all over his body and sat down.

'What the? This feeling is.....?'

Ark felt perplexed at these incomprehensible feelings. Why had he suddenly felt so uneasy? While Ark was looking at Reid, he suddenly recalled a surprisingly memory. He suddenly realised why he felt so unpleasant as he thought back to the past!

-We did our best.

-There is nothing more we can do.

-You should prepare your heart for the worst.

The voices rang inside his head like thunder. Yes, those were all words that Ark had heard from other peoples' mouths. The doctors

had said those words when his mother was in the ICU. It was like that. They said so. Their faces had no sign of apology or pity as they straight up told Ark. As long as they received money, it was not their responsibility.....they seemed like they had no interest in the subject as they spoke about death so easily.

Did the doctors have any idea of the despair they made Ark feel then? The despair of that still was still like a cold knives stuck in his heart. He would sometimes wake up from nightmares of that event. When his mother recovered, he had somewhat forgotten about that incident but now it was ignited again in his heart.

‘But now.....’

Now he was talking with the same voice and expression as those doctors. His eyes showed no concern about the Galgin’s lives. The only emotion he felt was regret that the quest couldn’t be completed. He had talked so easily about his family’s death in front of Reid.

Ark became disillusioned with himself. Whether it was a game or reality wasn’t important.

‘The important thing.....I know the pain too well.....yet I dared to say such words so casually. It was me, not other people.....’

Then Lariette spoke to Reid in a tearful voice.

“You know, Ark-nim tried his best. But there is nothing we can do.”

Ark interrupted in a low voice.

“.....I haven’t finished.”

“Huh? Ark-nim?”

“I.....still haven’t tried my best.”

“What are you saying.....?”

Ark kneeled beside Reid and took his hand.

“That’s right. You are correct. Reid. I haven’t tried my best yet. Honestly, I can’t give you a definite answer on whether I can cure

the disease. I don't know if I can cure it. But I promise. I will never give up. Let's work together."

Yes, these words! They were the words Ark wanted to hear when he was in the ICU. Dangerous. He might have to prepare his heart..... Ark didn't want to hear those words.

He stood in front of the ICU doors all night waiting to hear the right ones.....he just wanted to hear a sincere word. Anyone was fine. Even if it wasn't the surgeon, a resident who was there for training would've been fine. He just wanted someone to have more interest in his mother. If that happen....Ark wouldn't think that the hospital was a place that devoured money.

"Ah, but Ark-nim....."

Ark replied in a decisive voice.

"I'm really sorry. I know that Lariette-nim is uncomfortable. But I'm not going to abandon them. I will hold their hands even if they become corpses."

Lariette was puzzled by Ark's firm attitude. But she smiled strangely after a brief moment and nodded.

"I.....what should be done?"

"It is ineffective but please continue to use Cure Disease. If it really is because Cure Disease is too low then you have no choice but to raise the proficiency. I will continue to use Nursing while investigating a different direction."

"Yes, I understand."

So began a fierce fight against a disease.

Ark's Responsibility

One idea could change the world. It was a commonplace phrase in CFs but it was certainly true. When his heart changed, Ark was immediately determined to help the cockroaches. Their appearance didn't matter once he changed his mind. That's right. Racism, religious wars, and even bullying were all social issues that occurred differently. But that all occurred from arrogance and different thoughts..... Anyway, Ark wasn't disgusted by touching the Galgin's hands and feet anymore. He forgot all thoughts of a quest reward. Ark examined the patients like hoped a doctor would. Then he wondered about new questions that he never considered before.

'There's something strange.'

There were approximately 50 Galgin gathered in the camp. But they all had different symptoms.

'They should have the same symptoms if they caught the disease from here. The Galgin are showing over 10 different types of symptoms. It isn't just some simple symptoms but a mixture of them. So it must not be a simple disease. There must be some other reason.'

Ark decided to interpret the events in a different direction. In the world, there was no effect without a cause. The Galgin became sick after entering the forest so they must've done something different. And that act might've evoked the disease. Ark asked the patients what they did after entering the forest.

"Forest....after coming....nothing unusual.....huk huk huk."

"Anything is good. It is important so please describe in detail."

"Just.....as always.....gathered to celebrate....ate some food....danced and played.....and not long after.....one by one we started feeling sick....."

‘Ate some food?’

Ark eagerly asked again.

“Did you use any different ingredients?”

No..... The ingredients here are scarce....we used a few obtained here....but we mainly ate what we normally do.....”

‘I got it wrong?’

Ark thought they might’ve eaten toxic ingredients. But if he thought again, they were professional travellers so the Galgin should be quite experienced with ingredients. They wouldn’t blindly eat mysterious ingredients found in a forest.

‘But there might be something that tricked them so I should check it out.’

“Where is the place you obtained the ingredients?”

“We couldn’t get any proper ingredients near this area.....so we went far away.....fortunately.....we found a few near the river.....we mixed it with our ingredients..... Just head in the direction of that large tree.....”

“Lariette-nim, wait here for a while.”

Ark left the patients with Lariette and Buksil and went to find the river.

“Dedric, head towards that large tree and look for the river.”

“I’ve found it.”

After a while, Dedric came back from scouting and directed him towards the river. It was a rainbow river commonly found in the Netherworld. But it wasn’t easy to find ingredients near the river. The foxes had a keen sense of smell and they would swallow the plants whenever it grew. Ark was patient and finally found one.

“Let’s have a look shall we? Ingredient Identification!”

An edible grass which grows naturally on the riverbank. The roots and leaves can be eaten and it can be used as a spice.

“Was it a useless thought?”

Ark sighed and shook his head. Then there was a lively sound as an information window appeared again.

The advanced effects of ‘Ingredient Identification’ had obtained further information.

The Asatarod you are currently holding has been deformed because it grew beside a polluted river. If a person with no resistance consumes it, the fatal symptoms of headache and fever will be displayed. However, the Asatarod can also be used as a medicine to treat the toxicity. Thus, depending on the processing method you can extract a medicine to treat the symptoms caused.

When Ingredient Identification became an advanced skill, there were no additional effects. He never paid it that much attention, but he never thought that it would help in this manner.

“What the, polluted river?”

Ark obtained some water from the river and used Ingredient Identification again.

Polluted River Water

Water from a river running through the Forest of Life, which can be used to make food.*Advanced Additional Information: It looks like ordinary water but a closer look shows that it has been polluted with an unknown mixture of chemicals. The effects of consuming too many kinds of chemicals are unimaginable, and the level of contamination even affects the surrounding flora and fauna.

“As expected, there was a problem with the food the Galgin ate.”

Ark was convinced of his reasoning after investigating. And he was able to guess the reason for the Galgins’ multiple symptoms. The

river had numerous chemicals mixed into it. Those chemicals could either be good or bad for the body. And the plants growing around the river would be deformed by those chemicals. If the Galgins had learned advanced Ingredient Identification then they probably wouldn't have eaten such dangerous ingredients. But the ingredients looked like normal ones so they just used it casually in their food. Therefore, the Galgin had a mixture of food poisoning and chemical poisoning. Therefore Lariette's Cure Disease and Ark's Nursing didn't have an effect.

'Even so, the Galgin have food poisoning.....'

The environment pollution was a more serious problem for them.

'Well, there's a solution now that I've found the cause.'

Ark recalled the information discovered using Ingredient Identification. The river didn't just have toxic chemicals mixed in. There were also some good medications. So he had to treat the food poisoning and toxic materials with the good medication. Medicine could also become a poison. So he had to extract the good parts while neutralizing the toxins using the same processing method. Ark looked at the river with a serious expression. He had figured out a method. But there were several problems implementing it. First, he had to investigate what ingredients the Galgin ate. It was in order to determine the cause of the symptoms and how to treat it.

'Hopefully the Galgin will be conscious so I can question them and figure out how to make the medicine.....'

The information window showed the method of processing the food ingredient to obtain the medicine. Soaked in water, dried, fried, steamed etc.....there were numerous methods to extract the medicine. He needed a large amount of time and effort to investigate the right methods one by one. But that was a problem for the future.

'The urgent problem is that I have to collect at least 20~30 samples of each ingredient in order to research it.'

Ark looked gloomily around the river. The river in the forest was quite large. But he couldn't find any ingredients no matter how he

looked. The Bandit Foxes ate everything. He barely gather one after 10 minutes so he couldn't imagine how long collecting 20~30 would take.

'I also have to keep using Nursing on the Galgin so I can't spend the whole time collecting ingredients. Lariette and Buksil's Ingredient Foraging skill is only at the beginner level so it would likely fail even if they find an ingredient.'

Ark was worried for a while before he thought of a method.

'That's right. It's a little expensive, but it is possible with that skill.'

"Dedric, Razak. Drive them out!"

"Understood, wooooo!"

Clack clack clack clack!

Dedric and Razak yelled wildly through the forest.

"Lariette-nim, drive them out with Buksil!"

Lariette and Buksil were swinging sticks at the bushes on the other side. Ark closed his eyes and concentrated everything on his hearing. After a while, he heard the sound of something stepping on leaves nearby. Ark opened his eyes and raised his hand.

"It's near, Mind's Eye!"

Then the eyeball ring on his finger rolled around and shot out sonic waves. At the same time, there was a blurry picture where previously he couldn't see anything. There were Bandit Foxes disguised with Protective Colouration. Even though it changed colour to camouflage with the surroundings, the foxes became surprised and ran away as soon as Ark headed towards it. If someone approached it, the Bandit Fox would use its enormous speed to run away.

That was why Ark was so worried about the Bandit Foxes.

'Huhuhu, it is still an animal despite its speed.'

Ark grinned and laughed.

Kaheong!

He heard the screams of the foxes after a few seconds. When he turned his head, Ark saw that the Bandit Foxes was struggling with the vine wrapped around its body. That's right. It was Nadingka's fruit! Ark had spread Nadingka's fruit around in advance in a similar method to land mines. Then Dedric, Razak, Lariette and Buksil pushed the fox towards the minefield. Thanks to that, Ark managed to reduce its movement speed by 50%. Although it was still fast, he could now catch it.

"That's it, Sprint!"

Ark narrowed the distance.

"Demonic Opening, Elemental Sword fire property, Flash!"

He swung the sword covered with ghosts and fire at the foxes. They were only level 100. And he increased his attack power using the skills. But Nadingka's fruit only lasted 1 minute so it was highly likely that the foxes would escape. This time Ark used Flash to increase the damage as much as possible.

"Whew, it isn't that difficult to catch them once I've made up my mind."

Fortunately, the foxes had low defense so he killed it with two shots.

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun jumped down and instantly ran to the fox's corpse. Just like Ark, Radun had also been stressed because of the foxes.

"Radun, stop. Move your body. Now we have a few of them."

Ark returned to the camp carrying the Bandit Fox's bodies. The camp already had the body of three foxes.

"Altogether we have 6. This should be enough. If there is too much then I'd be in trouble."

Ark gathered the bodies of the foxes together and looked at

Razak. Yes, that was the reason why Ark suddenly started catching them.

“Razak, now it's time to show the effect of your evolution. Death's Equations!”

Yes, it was the skill that Deimos learned after he evolved into Razak. Ark had never used this skill so far. There was no reason to use it when it consumed some of Razak's bones. However, this time Ark would accept the damage. Razak sighed and demolished 6 ribs. The ribs powder was then sprinkled over the corpses of the foxes.

Razak had offered his ribs to use Death's Equations.

<Stamina -2, Defense -1>

Due to 'Death's Equations' the Chimera=Bandit Fox A, B, C, D, E, F has been resurrected. The 'Chimera=Bandit Fox' will absolute obey every command while the spell is maintained. But if Razak moves from his current location or loses concentration then the spell will be disabled.

The bodies of the foxes trembled after the skill was activated. It looked like some kind of zombie was being created. But it didn't matter as 50% of the health and stats were restored.

“Okay, you will be named the processing unit. You will go around the riverside and search for ingredients. But you can't eat them. Bring all the gathered food to me!”

Kung kung kung kung!

The zombie fox unit saluted and ran to the riverside. It was why Ark hunted the Bandit Foxes. Even with 50% of their stats, it was equivalent to Ark's speed when he used Sprint. They also had a keen sense of smell and the ability to forage ingredients. In other words, the foxes could run around constantly at Ark's fastest speed to gather ingredients. That was the key point. Well, he had to sacrifice 6 of Razak's ribs but.....It would only take a couple of days to restore again.

Anyway, the six foxes ran around gathering ingredients. They scoured the river for ingredients.

“That’s it, now I just have to wait.”

Clack clack.....clack clack clack....

Razak had been deprived of his ribs and sat miserably in a corner of the camp.

Kung kung kung kung!

A fox came back with one ingredient. It couldn’t grasp it so the fox had to bring them back one by one. Sometimes they would come back wounded. They were branded as traitors by other foxes and occasionally attacked. But the foxes had absolute loyalty to Razak and diligently carried the food away.

‘Hmm, if they bite only one then bringing the ingredients isn’t that efficient. By the way, I’m actually a little bit sorry after seeing them wounded.’

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

When Radun saw the foxes, it stared at them coldly before running up and squeezing them. It was punishment for stealing from Ark. On the other hand, Buksil was terrified when he saw the scene.

‘Scary, he really is the god of exploitation. It isn’t enough to use our bodies to scrape ingredients..... Now he’s using the Bandit Foxes as well. If they don’t listen to him and collect the ingredients then he’ll probably just kill them. They can’t get away from that person even when dead.’

Thus, Ark planted a new form of horror inside the poor pig merchant. After 3~4 hours had passed, there were many ingredients gathered.

“Larriette-nim, write down every patient’s symptoms without leaving anything out. Buksil, write down everything I tell you on a notepad.”

“Huh? Yes!”

Faced with the thought of discipline, Buksil approached holding a notepad.

“Now let’s begin.”

Ark had been resting while the foxes gathered the ingredients and now he burst into action. He started with identifying the ingredients.

“Ingredient Identification!”

Karantatura

A moss which grows in the river. It can revive the body when added to soup.

* Advanced Additional Information: It has grown in the polluted water and has been contaminated with a lethal toxin. If a person with no resistance eats it, strong sores will attack the body. If purified in a special way, you can extract a soothing anti-inflammatory medicine.

As he guessed, all the ingredients in the river had been contaminated. The cockroaches who ate it with their food had no choice but to receive food poisoning. Now Ark needed to figure out what food they mixed it with.

‘If I compare the symptoms discovered by Lariette with the ingredients then I will figure out the answer. The problem is how to extract the medicine.’

Ark took several equipment out of the Galgin’s bags. He took several ingredients and tried a variety of methods such as burning, soaking it in water etc. and then checked with Ingredient Identification while Buksil wrote the results down. There were hundreds of ingredients but he stayed patient while testing our every method and recording it.

‘If I give up then the 50 Galgin will die!’

He felt a commitment to studying, just like someone learning medicine would feel. After 8 hours, Ark started to realise the best

method of extracting the medicine from the ingredients. It wasn't completely clear but he noticed a pattern.

'Well.....if I put most of the toxic ingredients in pure water and soak for 30 minutes before boiling then the poison would be neutralized. If steamed or baked, the toxin became stronger while boiling would weaken the toxin. If I baked it after boiling then wouldn't the medicine be extracted?'

It was the first time Ark had tried these cooking methods. Normally he just put them in the pot and his cooking skill would automatically make the food. But he couldn't use that cooking method this time. He had to check the ingredients manually one by one during the process. It would be lucky if the processing of ingredients created a good dish. With survival cooking, he would only know the results of the dish after eating it. It meant that Ark might also be stricken by poison. Anyway, Ark just concentrated on researching the ingredients instead of eating it. But he couldn't lose himself in the work completely.

"Ark-nim, it is time for your rounds."

Lariette said after checking the status of the patients. While he was researching, the Galgins' health was still falling thanks to their illness. So Ark had to occasionally stop his research to go around and use Nursing.

"My studies have progressed so please have courage. Once I've treated you then you'll become healthier and will be able to carry around a backpack again."

Fortunately they held up but the Galgin were getting thinner every hour. But the Galgin noticed Ark's sincerity and thanked him every time.

"Yes, thank you."

"We will believe in Ark-nim."

"I'll have no regrets even if I die."

Ark felt pained every time he heard such words. No matter how

different they looked, their images would overlap with his mothers who would bow her head in gratitude every time a doctor showed her kindness.

‘Yes, I can’t afford to be resting. The patients will suffer while I’m resting. I need to figure out the extraction methods faster.’

Ark didn’t take a break and just headed straight back into work. And he once again focused on researching the ingredients. How much time had passed? In the meantime, Lariette had disconnected and then returned.

A full day had passed. Ark however stayed in the game and only clung to studying, refusing to even eat or drink something in reality. Ark persisted even when he became dizzy. Then Lariette spoke in a worried voice.

“You’ll be in trouble at this rate. Please take a break.”

“No, I’m fine. The work is almost over. Please be patient.....”

Ark didn’t even look around and just stared at his work. Lariette looked at Ark with a complicated expression.

‘I don’t understand. That guy.....what type of person is he?’

She couldn’t understand Ark even after travelling with him for one week. She had been happy after meeting him in the Netherworld. Lariette was even more impressed after Ark ran to her rescue. If a man’s dream was a beautiful woman, a woman’s fantasy was a man who would risk their life for her. It didn’t matter if it was in a game. But now she was seeing a strange side to Ark. At first, he treated her like every other man. Then his attitude underwent a 180 degree change after entering a mentor and disciple relationship. In addition, he exploited Lariette and Buksil under the guise of teaching. Of course, such an image wasn’t bad. She had only been the receiver of over-eager attention in her life. However, she knew that their intentions weren’t ‘pure.’ She was a woman, but she only received attention because of her looks. Even after comparing his actions, she never saw those intentions in Ark. Therefore Lariette felt that it was convenient to be with Ark. No, she felt impressed

after he taught her combat skills. But she just had a vague good impression of him. Those feelings once again changed today.

‘How can someone do all this for an NPC? I didn’t want to help because I was disgusted by their appearance.....Ark-nim is different. At first I thought it was due to a quest reward, but.....it’s not.’

After working for a long time at the reception desk, it was possible for her to grasp people’s sincerity. Despite what people told her, she could tell through their eyes and voices. And it was obvious that Ark really wanted to help the Galgin. Otherwise, he would not invest Razak’s stats for a quest reward. He was different from the person who exploited her and Buksil.

‘I don’t understand. What is Ark-nim’s true self? When did he show it to me? Was it when he taught me combat skills? When he exploited us? Or maybe.....when he stayed up all night helping the Galgin?’

In Lariette’s head, Ark was increasingly becoming a person who she couldn’t understand.

‘Anyway, Ark is a much more affectionate person than he seems.’

The answer she came up with after a long time worrying.....was no answer. But she just looked at Ark and laughed.

‘Yes, I honestly like this more than someone pretending to be good in front of a woman. Furthermore, discovering the method after a small clue.....he is also very smart. Did he graduate from a medical college? He treats the patients skillfully.’

It was really different.....once again she had misunderstood.

Anyway, she couldn’t endure like Ark so she disconnected and went to sleep. The next morning she got up early and accessed the game. It had been 32 hours since he started. Buksil was dozing while holding the magic projector. And Ark was still engaged in research. She deliberately got up early but Lariette had nothing to do so she just sat on the side and watched. It was a somewhat comical scene as she could see Dark Wolf’s tail wagging around.

“Well, it would be better with his original face.....”

Lariette murmured and laughed. It was at that time.

“Hahaha! That’s it, that’s it! I’ve finally found the information for all the ingredients.

Ark suddenly jumped up and yelled excitedly. Buksil was shocked and picked up the magic projector.

“Huk, what, what the?” “Ark-nim, it’s over?”

“Yes, I’m done! Now I understand the extraction method for all the ingredients! All I have to do is adjust it for the patient and feed them. I’ll start treatment immediately so please follow me with the ingredients.”

“...Ark-nim, you have huge bags under your eyes.”

Ark had stayed up 32 hours and his complexion was like the zombie foxes. But Ark just shook his head.

“I won’t be able to sleep if the Galgin is suffering after I’ve finished my research. I’ll be able to sleep much better if I treat them first.”

Ah, wasn’t it a wonderful sight? Ark had always wanted to act like a doctor.

“Okay, that was terrific!”

Buksil filmed it with the magic projector and gave him a secret thumbs up without Lariette noticing. And soon the human medical drama began. Ark approached a patient with a calm expression and said.

“Now, please tell me all your symptoms and don’t leave anything out.”

“I have a splitting headache.....and my whole body is itchy because of boils..... I can’t swallow food and water without vomiting.....”

“That’s right. The ‘dried powder made of Rarona seed’ will treat the headache while the ‘steamed toxic Urana roots’ will treat the boils. Your stomach is injured from eating the food so you should eat the

‘Kalpana leaves’ which has been soaked in pure water for 24 hours.”

Ark murmured and put the ingredients into his pot. He used the pure water Buksil obtained from a faraway place and made the necessary dishes using Survival Cooking. The smell of herbal medicine drifted from the pot. The one unfortunate thing was that even though it 100% treated the Galgin’s injuries, it did not improve his pets’ stats as well. Then Ark filtered the dregs from the soup and fed it to his patient.

“Oh, my body.....my body is starting to feel better.”

“Some of your symptoms will disappear instantly. If you take the medication properly then the remaining symptoms will clear up and you will recover immediately. Now, what are your symptoms?”

Ark listened to every patient’s symptoms and administered the medicine. The cockroaches’ faces started clearing up. When Ark heard the symptoms and made the medicine, the Galgin’s illness disappeared.

“Wow, this, unbelievable.....!”

“So many symptoms are gone in a flash!”

“Daddy!”

Reid’s wife and children became better and got up. After suffering from the illness for so many days, all of the Galgins’ eyes were focused on Ark.

“It’s all thanks to Ark-nim!”

“Ark-nim is the most skilled doctor in the entire world!”

“I just combined the right food ingredients.”

Ark modestly exclaimed while the Galgin instantly shook their heads.

“Don’t say that. We are not blind. Everyone saw how hard Ark-nim worked. You’ve stayed up all night and constantly studied the ingredients.”

“We were able to endure because we could see Ark-nim. If it wasn’t

for Ark-nim.....we would all.....huk.....thank you very much.

The 50 Galgin bowed and expressed their gratitude. The campsite suddenly became a place with a lot of activity.

“Wow, it’s a very human documentary!”

Buksil was also shedding tears while filming with the magic projector.

“Master is so dumb, going to all that effort to save some cockroaches....sniff.”

Dedric muttered while sneakily rubbing at his eyes. Then, a message flashed in front of Ark with a cheerful sound.

After studying the ingredients deeply, the rating of ‘Survival Cooking’ has risen.

Survival Cooking (High Grade, Passive): After deeply studying the ingredients, you have reached a new level of cooking. Now you can draw out the effects of ingredients by 100% and change the effect through various secret ingredients. In addition, the more skilful handling of ingredients means that the expiration date will lengthen while the associated penalties will also increase.

In fact, his survival cooking skill had reached 499 a long time ago. But no matter how much he created, it would not reach 500. In order to reach the mastered stage, he needed a new type of enlightenment. However, that was not the end of the bonuses. A new information window appeared before the other one even disappeared.

Since ‘Survival Cooking’ has reached the ‘High Grade’ stage, you are able to choose it as a sub-profession.

<Food Worshipper>

Master Chef.

In the past, a medicine derived from nature was created by a foreigner. The secret to it was ‘Conscious Mobilization.’ Food and medicine to treat illness has the same foundation. In some cases,

medicine can be created using weeds on the side of the road. Survival cooking is a skill that has been developed using this knowledge. Now that you have become a master in Survival Cooking, you can actively practice that 'Conscious Mobilization.'

When you become a 'Food Worshipper', a bonus will be applied to a successful Survival Cooking dish.

Would you like to accept the 'Food Worshipper sub-profession?

Ark read the information window carefully. The sub-profession could be changed at any time. Prior to this, he received an offer to become a gladiator at the Evil Silrion but refused because it required him to participate in the tournament once a month. Furthermore, there was a bonus applied to survival cooking dishes?

"I select the Food Worshipper sub-profession."

You have chosen the sub-profession Food Worshipper.

* The requirement to become a culinary master in Survival Cooking is complete.* A bonus of 50 is applied to the proficiency of Survival Cooking and Ingredient Identification.

* 20% increase in the probability of making the best dishes.

* The profession-specific skill 'Herbal Decoction' has been learned.

(Herbal Decoction (Beginner, Passive): As a 'Food Worshipper,' you will be able to determine the medicinal effects of ingredients when using Ingredient Identification.

While you boil the ingredients using 'Herbal Decoction,' a special effect will be added to the medicine. The herbal medicines can show a variety of therapeutic and nourishing effects, and can be poured into an empty bottle and used like potions. Herbal medicines can be used in battles and there is no expiration date.

'Huk, what is this?'

He could use the ingredients to boil the ingredients and create a

herbal medicine? And he could use it like regular potions in battles? In other words, it was a skill to create potions like alchemy. He was also using regular food ingredients instead of the expensive magic items. Of course, his herbal decoction skill was only at a beginner's level so he couldn't make medicines that would rival recovery potions. It might even be better to cook more food. But there was a separate part that attracted Ark's attention.

'Since it doesn't expire, there is no need to discard it once it becomes spoiled!'

It meant he could sell the herbal medicines on the auction site.

"Ha.....ha ha ha! Ha ha ha!"

Ark released an involuntary burst of laughter. It was indeed New World! If he made an effort then the world would reward him! He had spent a few days submerged in this task. He suddenly felt dizzy after all the tension melted away. Lariette who had been watching from the sidelines and the Galgin flocked towards him. Lariette spoke in a concerned voice.

"Okay, it's finished now. Stop and rest."

But Ark shook his head with a firm expression.

"Not yet.....there is still something to be done."

"Huh? The patients are treated now."

"Isn't it? So....."

Ark murmured in a low voice as he approached Reid. Then he extended his hand and said.

"G-give me the compensation."

At that point everyone froze.

'Oh my God!'

Hyun-woo rushed through the hospital with an embarrassed

expression. How could he make such a mistake? He was amazed just thinking about it. He realized the mistake 1 hour before. After staying up a few days to rescue the cockroaches, Hyun-woo succumbed to sleep. Then he connected like usual to New World. Lariette and Buksil connected at the same time and greeted him with a smile.

“Ark-nim, Happy New Year.”

“Happy New Year!”

Hyun-woo was confused for a moment.

“That.....sorry but I don’t think I can play the game today. I need to go somewhere.”

His surprise continued after hearing Lariette’s words. Yes, New Year’s Day had arrived while Ark had been sleeping.

“Hehehe, Ark-nim, I’ve got a lot of time unlike Lariette-nim.”

“Then please continue gathering ingredients!”

Ark yelled before disconnecting. Then he got dressed and ran to the hospital.

‘Where on earth did I sell my spirit?’

Obviously he sold it to New World.....

After the end of year party, he had prepared for New Year. If he was still exercising daily at dawn then he probably wouldn’t have made this mistake. However he stopped exercising for a while and his sense of time had been distorted after staying awake for 32 hours to help the cockroaches.

‘Pathetic.....how could I forget about New Year’s Day?’

In fact, Hyun-woo’s melancholy was usually the greatest on New Year’s. Five years ago, his relatives and friends of his parents would flock and give him a lot of money. But it changed entirely after his father passed away. Were they scared to be associated with Hyun-woo? The acquaintances and his relatives didn’t even send a

greeting card on New Year's. He had become like that. A worthless thing.... At that time, Hyun-woo was a high school student who felt exhausted.

'I don't care. It's just a holiday.....'

But his mother was different. She never had anyone in her hospital room to celebrate New Year's Day with her. Therefore the sense of loss became even more magnified. And now her one child had gone crazy and logged into a game on New Year's Day. It was afternoon and he hadn't even shown his face? Was there anyone else like this in the world?

"Hey, don't jump in the hallway!"

A nurse exclaimed as he jumped onto the stairs. Their nerves were already sensitive because they had to work on New Year's. But why would he care about the mood of a nurse? Hyun-woo just sprinted towards the hospital room. Just as he was about to open the door, he flinched and stopped. His hands were empty. After he remembered and ran at full speed, he couldn't prepare a fruits basket. Although he was late, he rummaged through his wallet but it was empty. He forgot to withdraw money in advance.

'What should I do? Should I find an ATM to withdraw cash and buy a fruits basket?'

Hyun-woo stood in front of the room contemplating for a moment.

"Hahaha, that's right. He is certainly not that charming. We've talked about it before."

"Oppa, this is a hospital room. Keep your voice down a little bit."

"Well said Hye-sun. Such noisy guys.....do you think this is a market? Anyway, the problem is that they are unable to learn. That's why I told you not to come."

"Ah hyung-nim, you're terrible. Aren't you glad that we're helping?"

"Hehehe, don't be angry. We knew that Hyung-nim must've been excited about spending time with noona. We understand."

“Ohu, so that’s what happened earlier.”

“What, what are you guys saying....that, it’s not like that!”

“Oho, look at you blushing like a child. It’s not very convincing.”

‘Hye-sun?’ In addition, these voices are.....?”

Hyun-woo opened the door with a puzzled look. He never imagined the things that were occurring in the room. Gwon Hwa-rang and 10 rehabilitation members.....the big men were gathered in a small hospital room. And there were a variety of holiday food placed on the tables.

“Ah, Hyun-woo.”

His mother who was surrounded by rehabilitation members spotted Hyun-woo.

“Mother, this is....”

“They all came to see you.”

“Huh?”

Hyun-woo looked at the rehabilitation members with a foolish expression. And he felt very emotional at the sight of his mother laughing happily amongst everybody.

“Hyung-nims.....!”

Ark had only just realized it was a holiday and hurriedly ran to the hospital. Then he found that the rehabilitation members were one step ahead and already at the hospital. They even prepared hospital food.....It was the first time Hyun-woo had seen such an act of kindness after the accident. Now it felt strange to him since Hyun-woo wasn’t used to it. Was he upset at someone taking care of him? No, they didn’t give anything to Hyun-woo so he wasn’t upset. But it involved his mother so he was unable to express his gratitude.

“Oppa, you’re late!”

Jung Hye-sun said while sitting next to his mother. She made it seem like they had arranged to meet.

“Uh....Yes.”

Hyun-woo replied in an awkward voice and entered the room. At that moment Hyun-woo felt really strange. Gwon Hwa-rang, Jung Hye-sun and the rehabilitation members being at the hospital was really unexpected. So naturally he felt awkward interrupting. But Hyun-woo joined them in laughing and being noisy. How much time had passed?

Since they all played the game, naturally the topic turned to New World. The first to speak was Hye-sun.

“Hey Oppa.....you’re in the place called the Netherworld?”

“Why? Are you bored without me?”

“Bah, what are you saying?”

Hye-sun pouted at Hyun-woo’s words. But after a brief moment, she spoke in an anxious voice.

“I’ve heard rumours around Cairo. There’s a bounty on Hyun-woo oppa.”

“Bounty? For me?”

Hyun-woo asked bewildered. In New World, users could place bounties on other users. But the target had to be chaotic in order to get a formal reward from the government. It wasn’t possible to hang a bounty on someone who wasn’t chaotic in New World. Hyun-woo wasn’t chaotic so he couldn’t understand the bounty.

“It’s not a formal bounty through the government.”

“What? Then....?”

“The Hermes guild has offered a ‘Merchant’s Contract’ to the chaotic users.”

Hye-sun described the contents of the contract that she overheard.

<p>-Merchant’s Agreement.</p> <p><Contractor: Raiden= Unspecified></p>
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The person with this contract who gets rid of Ark will be paid a reward of 100 gold.

Raiden created a mug shot of Ark and scattered the contract among the chaotic players. Hye-sun often travelled between Lancel Village and Cairo where there were a lot of chaotic users so she heard the rumours.

“I heard they scattered quite a lot of contracts.”

“Bah, that Raiden.....he’s using cheap tricks like always.”

Hye-sun was worried but Ark dismissed it. If he was the same as before then it would definitely seem threatening. But Ark wasn’t worried about chaotic users any more. Chaotic players received various penalties so they had a slower growth than general users. Moreover, 100 gold was a large amount but it wasn’t to the extent that they would hang themselves. In other words, Ark’s high level meant that not many chaotic users would consider 100 gold worth the risk. He was able to handle pioneers like Jewel and Duke so 3~4 chaotic users wouldn’t be a threat. It didn’t matter if they formed a group and attacked.

‘Raiden also probably doesn’t expect the chaotic players to catch me. He already has evidence that I’m in the Netherworld but he’s not showing that information to the public.’

Hermes Guild.....the pioneers probably contacted each other off line as well. In other words, Raiden probably knew about the Netherworld through Jewel or Duke. He knew that Ark was there. Even so, he never mentioned the Netherworld to the chaotic users at all.

‘It is difficult to find someone in New World. The contract is in middle earth.....so my location will probably be identified quickly when I return to middle earth. If a chaotic user with a contract dies because of me then Raiden will be able to determine my location. This means that the chaotic users are hounds that Raiden released to find me in middle earth.’

In this situation, Raiden didn't have to waste 1 copper in order to obtain a large source of information. Indeed Raiden.....his ability to use cheap tricks was superior to everyone else.

'If the chaotic players stick to me then it can become a little annoying.....'

But if he killed someone with a chaotic alignment then there was a 100% chance that one equipped item would drop. If people wearing bank notes approached him then of course Hyun-woo would be glad.

'But the Hermes guild is occupying Silvana. They must have recovered if they're doing something like this. Huhuhu, well okay. If Silvana stabilizes and develops then it will be more rewarding later on. Until then they can run freely.'

Hyun-woo laughed and shook his head.

"You don't have to worry about those contracts. If the prize money is not officially offered by the officials then there will be a significant penalty."

At that time, Jjak-tung who had been studying Ark's face interrupted.

"Speaking of New World.....there is a slight setback in the Slime's Immortality Pill production plan."

Currently Gwon Hwa-rang, Jung Hye-sun and the rehabilitation members were collecting the Slime's Essence in the underground labyrinth. And the progress of the operation could be described as successful. They've collected quite a lot of 'Slime's Essence' and raised their level considerably as well. But an unexpected problem occurred when they tried making the Slime's Immortality Pill. First of all the 'Corrupted Fairy Wings'.....Ark was going to collect more while hunting. However, there was a sudden disruption to the supply since he went to the Netherworld. And the second more serious problem was the 'Unicorn Horn.'

"The 'Unicorn Horn' is more difficult to obtain than we thought. In the past it cost 700 gold but now the price has surged to 1,000 gold."

"Yes, I have heard."

Hyun-woo sighed and nodded. In fact, Hyun-woo had confirmed the information on the auction site. Surprisingly there were a lot of people trying to obtain unicorn horns on the auction site. That was because users had found a new purpose for the unicorn horns. In the past it was only used as an ingredient in the highest level potions, but now they found that it could add significant options to a warrior's sword or a magician's wand. But thanks to the indiscriminate catching, it was extremely difficult to find a unicorn these days. Due to the shortage it was natural that the price would soar.....but that meant his production line was interrupted.

'If I want to make a profit with Slime's Immortality Pill then I have to find unicorn horns for less than 700 gold. It would be difficult to make profit if it costs 1,000 gold. And I don't have the time to go around looking for the corrupted fairy wings. They might need to buy it from a store which will make the total earnings a deficit.'

If he couldn't make a profit then it was just a waste of time.

"Sheesh, I thought of such a good plan.....'

Ark sighed and replied.

"It isn't possible. The production of Slime's Immortality Pill will stop for the moment."

"Then we can leave the underground labyrinth?"

The rehabilitation members asked with great joy. In fact, the rehabilitation members' main problem was not the cost of materials. Ark had gone to the Netherworld approximately one month ago.....thus the rehabilitation group had been stuck hunting in the labyrinth for a month. At first their levels rose fast and it was interesting to obtain the 'Slime's Essence,' but that changed after a month.

"I don't want to look at slimes and skeletons anymore."

"Sunlight.....I want to see the sun....."

"I feel like I've been stuck in a cell."

Since Roco could ride the unicorn to obtain food, they couldn't even use that excuse to go outside. Thanks to Roco's consideration, they spent one month smelling like a sewerage plant. Now they felt sick if they even heard any mention of Cairo's underground labyrinth.

"Yes, but how many 'Slime's Essences' have you found?"

"....10."

"So if you find 2 more essences to make 12 then it will be enough for Hwa-rang ajusshi, Hye-sun and hyung-nims. Talk to Sid and ask him to obtain the unicorn horns and corrupted fairy wings when it is available for a cheap price."

"Yes, we'll check it when we have time as well."

"And we'll promise to pay you back the royalties once we figure it out."

"No, you already went to all that effort so some of it will belong to you."

Hyun-woo was very thankful to the rehabilitation members and promised them some of the royalties. Since he met up with the rehabilitation members, he asked them about Shambala. They had a unicorn horn that had been sent by Shambala. When Ark gave him the first scroll, Shambala had promised to exchange it for the unicorn horns and corrupted fairy wings.

As expected from Shambala. Shambala had already obtain the corrupted fairy wings and made the immortality pill. After seeing the effects, he sent the extra unicorn horn to the rehabilitation members. Of course....

It was placed on a credit note. Along with a similar message. Thanks to the relationship between Ark and Shambala, he was willing to give them the items.

'Anyway, we've obtained 2 unicorn horns from Shambala and now he is going to begin cleaning up the Dark Brothers organization. Then isn't he going to advance to the 2nd stage profession before me?'

Hyun-woo was aware of threat. While Hyun-woo was thinking, Jjak-tung suddenly scratched his head and said with an embarrassed look.

“I’m really sorry. We’ve just been talking among ourselves....are you bored?”

“It’s okay. It’s pleasant watching people have fun.”

His mother smiled at Jjak-tung while Gwon Hwa-rang glared.

“Ah.....we’re stealing precious minutes from Hyung-nim.”

“W-What the!”

“Don’t become so angry. We’re supporting Hyung-nim.”

Jjak-tung laughed and got up from his seat.

“Now, we have to say goodbye to the raccoons in the underground labyrinth so should we return to New World? Hyung-nim should stay a little and clean up. Hey, let’s go. You guys too.”

Jjak-tung dragged the rehabilitation members away from the hospital.

“Mother, I’ll come back in a few days.”

“I’ll go with Hyun-woo oppa.”

Hyun-woo and Jung Hye-sun followed the rehabilitation members’ example. Hyun-woo and Jung Hye-sun entered the hallway where the rehabilitation members were waiting.

“What, these people?”

“Are they here to get back some loans?”

“That ward is where the patients with large operations are.....”

“But to even visit the hospital on a holiday.”

People were gossiping at a distance. Since the 10 of them looked like gangsters, it was natural for there to be a misunderstanding. That was the reason Gwon Hwa-rang never

brought them to the hospital. Bul-kkun heard what the gossips were saying and sighed.

“Hye-sun, Hyun-woo, you should fall back a little bit.”

“Why?”

Of course, Hyun-woo also heard the voices. Perhaps if Hyun-woo didn't know the rehabilitation members then he would also gossip. But Hyun-woo proudly held his head high and walked side by side with them. Then he spoke in a loud voice.

“Hyung-nims, I'll pay for lunch today. There's a great restaurant nearby.”

The rehabilitation members jumped and turned to Hyun-woo. Hyun-woo nodded and smiled at them.

“.....Thank you.”

“We really, really appreciate it.”

The rehabilitation members laughed and put their arms around Hyun-woo's shoulder.

“This child, thank you.”

“Let's go!” Hyun-woo is paying for our meals for once.”

“I'm only going to eat rice. Then let's watch a movie.”

Jung Hye-sun grabbed his shirt and murmured. Hyun-woo left the hospital with a large grin.

.....On the other hand, Gwon Hwa-rang was left alone with Park So-mi. There was an awkward silence before Gwon Hwa-rang got up and started cleaning the mess.

“Those stupid guys.....I'm sorry. Normally they're not that troublesome.....”

“.....Why don't you sit down a little bit more?”

Park So-mi spoke in a low voice and grasped his hand.

“Thank you.”

“Huh? Yes? What is it?”

“Hyun-woo laughing like that.....I’ve finally seeing it after a long time.”

Park So-mi looked at the door where Hyun-woo and the rehabilitation members had exited through.

“It’s all thanks to Detective Gwon.”

“M-me.....no. You’re exaggerating....I mean.....”

Gwon Hwa-rang stuttered with an embarrassed face. Gwon Hwa-rang really felt that way. But Park So-mi just leaned her head on his shoulder. She had no immunity against the sight of Hyun-woo laughing with Gwon Hwa-rang. Even though he could clearly smell the alcohol, it seemed like Gwon Hwa-rang was surrounded by a garden of flowers.

The new year was bright. Gwon Hwa-rang was having a truly happy New Year’s.

Magaro's Laboratory

‘Huhuhu, it is a jackpot.’

Ark had connected after resting comfortably and started blowing and polishing the lamp again.

“Aigoo, you’ve become so beautiful.”

Ark rubbed his cheek against the lamp and happily smiled. Except for the skull carved on the handle, it looked like an ordinary old lamp but it was the reward for completing the <Galgin Clan’s Disaster> quest. Of course, the reward item wasn’t just an antique. It was a magic item with options! The problem was the special effect of the lamp was truly vague. But the smart Ark could tell with one glance. The rare lamp was more valuable than some rare items. Or it was for Ark who was a Dark Walker. He had finished the quest right before going to sleep.....but he asked for the compensation from Reid first.

“T-the reward.....”

Reid scratched his head with an embarrassed look. Although he had made the request with an urgent heart, he couldn’t think of a suitable reward. He trembled as Ark’s face slowly hardened.

“Of course. Reward! Of course I’ve prepared it. You’ve saved our lives so we have to give you the best thing we have. Please wait.”

Reid gathered the other Galgin together. And they huddled in a corner and conferred for a while.

“Aye, what do we have to give?”

“Let’s see? Do you know what the human’s middle earth is like?”

“How about this? I obtained it in the south.....”

“This is also acceptable. It is 300 of the Ranke fruit.”

Their opinions were divided as they showed Reid different options. Since 3 people completed the quest, three rewards needed to be given. In fact, Ark had used Discerning Eye on Reid in the past and knew that the Galgin didn't have many good items. So he didn't expect a big reward for this quest. But even so, this was terrible.

Reid confidently showed him the items <The Netherworld's Western Region eating competition victory token (The person who possesses this can eat food for free at any store in the Western Region>, <A carved sculpture of the Galgin Clan (If you possess this then your intimacy with the Galgin Clan will increase> and <Reid's proud collection of 10 species (A pile of trash that is no use>

Ark became angry after checking the compensation list.

'Eating for free? Is this a joke? Who cares about eating for free in the Netherworld? In addition, a statue of a cockroach? My intimacy with the Galgin is already the best thanks to this quest so what is the use of the statue? There aren't any good options. What the hell is this crap?'

When researching the ingredients, Ark had obviously wanted to help the Galgin. He accepted that he would suffer a bit. But that moment of emotion and delight had passed. Ark immediately returned to reality. He finally remembered about money. He had invested 32 hours into studying contaminated ingredients. He even destroyed 6 of Razak's ribs. But now they couldn't even reward him with an item he could use? He started to regret it while looking at the list of reward items. Ark stared at the list with a sour face and sighed.

"You don't like it? Then I could show you something else?"

Reid spoke immediately after seeing Ark's dissatisfied face. Ark had a sudden thought as he listened.

'Show me something else? Then I can select the reward for this quest?'

Ark thought that he had to pick one of those items as the reward. No, normally it was like that. But sometimes the system of compensation was different depending on the species.

‘Then I don’t need to decide hastily. The Galgin clan are peddlers. There might be something of use in their goods. Okay, I don’t need to decided straight away and can wait until a good item appears.’

Then, Buksil approached and looked at the statue.

“Eh? This is a pretty well made statue?”

Ark kicked the pig’s feet and smiled calmly.

“Like I said earlier, I didn’t do that much. It looks like these items are precious to you guys so I can’t accept it without feeling the burden. I ’m sorry but could you show me other stuff?”

Ark didn’t want to decrease the precious intimacy so he spoke gently but firmly. But Reid had good sense for a cockroach and notice.

“You don’t need to feel burdened. The items we gave aren’t valuable to you.”

“.....They’re still great, that, um, so.”

Ark was reduced to one syllable by Reid’s powerful force and retreated. And the cockroaches gathered again.....

“Hey, is this good?”

“But is there anything to give to our benefactor?”

After consulting for a while, Reid returned with three new items. However, Ark still returned them. They were just like the first few items. The situation repeated so many times that even the cockroaches became annoyed. Of course, Ark wasn’t feeling great either. He had been awake for 32 hours so his eyes were drooping.

‘But I might receive a surprisingly good compensation. I can’t just accept something useless because I’m sleepy. I have to receive something that can be somewhat useful!’

Ark desperately opened his eyes and persisted. The items Reid brought were completely random. In some cases, there were slightly useful items but they didn’t meet Ark’s expectations. When 2 hours

passed, his spirit surged.

‘Damn, okay. There will be nothing if this keeps on happening so let’s give it a try!’

“Pass, pass, pass, pass, pass!”

Ark didn’t look at the items properly and just called ‘pass.’ Reid who was tired from running back and forth with the items groaned pitifully. Now Reid started to realize that Ark’s reason wasn’t because of the ‘burden.’

“Hey, it seems impossible.”

“Didn’t he go four days without any sleep?”

“At this rate we might be doing this for the next few days.”

“It’s impossible. Take out all your collections.”

“If we don’t find something fast then we’ll collapse of exhaustion.”

“But the really good stuff.....”

The cockroaches hesitated and looked at each other. At that time, a young cockroach rubbed its eyes and said sleepily.

“Daddy, I’m so tired.”

“Darling! Take out the item you’re so proud of.”

Reid’s wife couldn’t stand it anymore and shouted angrily. Then Reid flinched and said in a frightened voice.

“Ha, but these are.....”

“Are those items more important than me and your children?”

“It’s not that, but.....”

“If you keep acting like that then I’ll divorce you straight away!”

“U-understood, I understand. But these can’t possible please Ark. Hik, okay. So don’t glare at me like that. I’ll show it to him.”

When his wife glared, Reid grumbled but took out a bundle. Yes, they were merchants. And as mentioned before, Reid was a peddler who didn't engage in any business that would lose him profit. Of course, they felt gratitude towards Ark. But the Galgin were born peddlers and couldn't give the best items for free, even to their benefactor. So Ark was shown general items. And they thought he would just give up if shown the same items. They truly were merchants to the bone! However, even those merchants were forced to wave the white flag before Ark. Well, half the win was thanks to the glare from his wife.....

"Ah Ark, how about this? You don't like it either? Then I'll show you something else."

Reid showed a quick glimpse of the bundle before taking it back. That was a mistake. In fact, Ark had almost reached his limit. So he was about to say 'pass' automatically. If Reid had showed it normally then Ark probably would've passed it. But his questionable behaviour stimulated Ark's curiosity.

"Wait. Please show it to me again."

"T-this? It's not a big deal. You don't need to see it again."

"Please show it to me again."

"Hahaha, there's no need. I'll bring something else immediately."

"Show, it, to, me, again."

Ark said firmly when Reid tried to escape. Then Reid turned around and looked at his wife with a desperate expression. He sighed at his wife's frown and put the items down. He added in a small voice.

"It's nothing much.....it's just a lamp I picked up when crossing the Urubasa Valley a few years ago. But it's broken and doesn't work. The other items are the same. They're just a toy and graffiti that I picked up....."

Dark Lamp (Special)Item type: Lamp
User restriction: None

An old magic lamp created by unknown people. Complex shapes are drawn on the bottom. This lamp is different from normal lamps, and will cause darkness instead of light when used. It is the greatest treasure of the Galgin who enjoyed napping but dislike bright places. As the owner of this lamp, Reid had been envied by other Galgin. However, you have to sacrifice magic ingredients in order to activate the dark attribute.

<When 10 magic ingredients are used as fuel, a radius of 10 metres will be plunged into darkness for 30 minutes. The same environmental effect as 'Night-time' is applied to the range of the lamp.

'W-what it this?'

His sleepiness quickly fled. He never imagined that there would be such an item. In fact, this item wouldn't be any use to an ordinary player. The cockroaches loved the darkness which is why they used the lamp. What ordinary user would take a nap? But this was much more important to Ark than a rare sword. The lamp would activate a 'night-time' effect in the area. Didn't that mean he could receive his darkness attribute bonuses even in the daytime? It was an item that could give him a 40% bonus at any time! What else did he need to say?

Thanks to his tenacity, he had found a pearl at the end of all his passes. The other two items were also vague but useful! They were far better than the ones shown previously.

Wisdom Ring (Special)

Item type: Special consumable

User restriction: None

This is a puzzle type item made of entangled wire and metal to create complex shapes. Although the history is unknown, it seems to be made by a pretty smart person. The solution is so difficult that it can raise wisdom depending on the level reached, with levels ranging from 1-5. But you have to be very smart to reach the 5th

level.

<Every time a puzzle ring is undone, wisdom increases by 3. But the bonus will not be given if you are told the solution to the puzzle.>

One Thousand Visitors

Item type: Collection

User Restriction: None

This is a collection that a very famous calligrapher wrote down a long time ago. If you placed this in your store then it will increase your business.

<If you operate a store then you can receive a bonus 3% profit on the selling price of all goods>

Ark's eyes lit up. The 'Wisdom ring' was meaningless to Ark. Every time a puzzle was undone it gave +3 wisdom. That was a total of 15 wisdom. But wisdom was a stat that didn't really matter to Ark. But Lariette used Holy magic so wisdom was more important to her than strength or agility. The effect of Holy magic would vary depending on her wisdom.

'Well Lariette also went through a lot of trouble during this quest.'

Ark decided to concede the Wisdom Ring to Lariette. But Buksil didn't help so Ark had no intention of conceding any items to him.

'The One Thousand Visitors is a surprisingly good item. I can't give an item like this to the pig. Fortunately, the item is not restricted.'

Ark grinned and received the items. It was definitely the best reward he could get from Reid.

"Thank you. Like Reid said, it is use a 'broken lamp,' a 'toy' and 'graffiti' so I won't feel burdened if I accept these."

“You’ll accept these?”

“Yes, I’ll think of the Galgin every time I see these items.”

Ark laughed while Reid gaped at him and tried to open his mouth. But the Galgin had been there for 2 and a half hours so they rushed to cover Reid’s mouth.

“It’s really admirable.”

“Take these items as a sign of our gratitude.....”

“Will you take these and go?”

“Let’s meet again in the future. Hopefully the distant future. In the really, really far future.”

Reid spoke in a tearful voice and ran away quickly. Ark had only been expecting to receive some pet exclusive items from the quest. In contrast to his expectations, he received some valuable items. Anyway, the touching quest ended with a funny skit.

“Lariette-nim, thanks for the hard work. This seems like an item that you’ll need.”

“.....Thank you.”

Ark handed the Galgin’s Wisdom Ring to Lariette. She had also inwardly wanted the Wisdom Ring so she accepted it thankfully. After Ark handed it to her, Buksil approached with expectant eyes. But Ark just turned his head and said.

“Then I’ll quit and rest for a bit. I’ll see you in 6 hours.”

Buksil grunted and exclaimed.

“Ah Ark-nim, aren’t you forgetting something?”

“Huh? What?”

“That.....3 people completed this quest. So.....”

“Ah, that? You’re referring to that?”

Buksil sighed with relief at Ark’s words.

“Hahaha, yes, that. Since you know.....”

“It’s okay, I don’t mind at all.”

“Huh? What are you.....?”

“Aren’t you sorry that you were no help in solving the quest? It’s okay, I don’t care that much.”

“No, it’s not.....”

Buksil noticed something strange and opened his mouth. But Ark hit first.

“I don’t mind keeping it. After all, I spent 32 hours not eating or drinking in order to complete the quest and you received experience from it. Even though you didn’t help and just napped while I was suffering, we’re still colleagues. I don’t have to feel offended by such little things, right?”

Every one of Ark’s words pricked Buksil’s conscience. And finally he couldn’t say anything. He could sense the hidden message ‘don’t be greedy for trivial items and hurt my feelings’ in Ark’s words. Buksil just laughed awkwardly.

“Yes, that.....that’s right. For understanding.....t-thank you.”

“Let’s stop this talk now. You’re my important colleague after all. Hahaha.”

.....So that’s how Ark received both the Dark Lamp and the One Thousand Visitors. Buksil’s mood was now gloomier but Ark had no interest in his feelings. He was still a guy aiming to strike at Ark’s back. He had no moral obligation to give items to someone disloyal. In addition, Ark had already considered a use for the One Thousand Visitors.

‘Huhuhu, I’ll sell it to Sid and make him place it in the trading post at Silvana. After the earnings increase then Sid’s monthly salary will also increase. Then I can receive the debt quicker and increase my secret funds!’

Currently the trading post at Silvana was earning thousands of gold.

With a 3% increase, the profits would go up. Then Wolkosu could add some of it to the secret set of books. Ark just had to wait until he became the Lord of Silvana again.....Selling it to Sid would increase his secret funds. It was indeed killing two birds with one stone! What reason did he have to give it to a pig?

“Then I should start.”

Ark placed the polished lamp on his waist. Lariette and Buksil stood up and asked.

“Are we collecting ingredients?”

Whenever Ark said ‘Let’s go,’ they automatically stood up to forage ingredients. However, Ark shook his head.

“No, we’ll go directly to the destination.”

“Huh? But you still haven’t found the lab.”

“I already know where the laboratory is. Follow me.”

Ark replied with a smile. Ark had roughly guessed the location of the laboratory while completing the Galgin’s quest. The culprit of the incident.....was the polluted river water.

‘The Galgin might’ve provided me with a clue to find the laboratory.’

When Ark investigated the river using Ingredient Identification, he found that the river was polluted from various chemicals upstream. That meant the cause of the pollution would be found upstream. But the Netherworld hadn’t developed alchemy so there shouldn’t be that many chemicals.

.....Now did they understand what Ark meant? That’s right. The genius alchemist who had come to the Forest of Life a long time ago! The chemicals polluting the river were probably coming from his laboratory. If so, the answer was simple. Just go along the river to find the source of contamination. Using that reasoning, Ark headed towards the river. How far did they walk?

River flowing through the Forest of Life.

The river in the Forest of Life is full of energy. It has various nutrients and abundant plant growth, which will have an excellent effect when cooking.

He was finally able to reach the point where the river was not polluted.

‘The river was polluted just before here. So the chemicals should be flowing into it somewhere around here.’

Ark mobilized his pets, Lariette and Buksil to search around. Soon after, they found a cave hidden in some nearby bushes.

Cave filled with the odour of chemicals

You have found a cave with a terrible smell in the Forest of Life. An abnormal cluster of plants never seen in the Forest of Life grows around the cave. An unpleasant mucus also sticks to your feet. For a long time, even monsters and beasts won't appear around here.

<Explorer's Knowledge: New dungeon discovered bonus (Skill points: 10)>

The message window flashed once he entered the cave. Then there was a look of elation on Lariette and Buksil's faces. They were also in the top 10 users who entered the Netherworld and received the title of Great Adventurer. So they also received the same skill bonus as Ark for finding the cave. However, it did not remove Ark's tension. There were unexpected risks in a new dungeon.

“Dedric, Razak, scout around the perimeter.”

“Okay.”

Clack clack clack clack!

His two experienced pets also looked around nervously. And one step, one step.....they carefully entered the cave.

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

How far did they go? Suddenly Radun blinked and surveyed the area with tearful eyes.

‘Monster?’

Ark and his summons focused their attention and took an attacking stance. Then a hazy image appeared in the darkness. Dozens of monsters appeared while he was creeping along the cave wall. But there was something weird. They were floating in the air and seemed dead.

‘Eh? That monster.....?’

Ark cautiously approached the monster. And soon witnessed a strange scene. The monsters.....were trapped in a place that looked like a big water bag. To put it more precisely, they were being grown. From young to adult monsters, they were floating in the water bag like the clones that floated in a capsule in science fiction movies. He saw common monsters from the Forest of Life like the ‘Chimera=Kurometin’ and ‘Chimera=Bandit Fox.’ Ark finally realised why their names were so peculiar after seeing the capsules.

‘Chimera.....that’s right, it’s a common term.....in fantasy, chimera is a word used to describe an artificial monster. And this is Magaro’s laboratory. If that’s the case.....all these monsters were made by Magaro?’

After realizing this, he understood the peculiar abilities of the monsters. The Kurometin was probably used to protect the lab while the Bandit Foxes were used to gather ingredients to study. But after Magaro grew old and died, the controlling power was destroyed and they returned to the wild.

‘Once thing is clear.’

Just like the Magic Institute said, Magaro was a genius alchemist if he could artificially create monsters.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter since he died of old age.’

“Ah, Ark-nim.....”

Lariette came close to him and stuttered in an uneasy voice. Of course she would be scared being surrounded by dozens of deformed monsters in the darkness.

“There’s no need to panic. They’re all dead.”

Just like Ark’s words, all the monsters in the capsules had been rotting for a long time. But that just made it seem even creepier to Lariette who shuddered.

“I’m aware of that. But.....”

Ark just laughed at Lariette’s reaction. He was now 100% sure that this was Magaro’s laboratory. He assumed that Magaro’s laboratory would have documents piled up like mountains. In order to receive the quest reward, he needed to give the Magic Institute the documents found in the laboratory. And understandably, Ark had no thought about splitting it with Lariette and Buksil. It was natural. Ark had suffered so much trying to find this place.

‘Lariette-nim doesn’t know that Buksil is after Magaro’s legacy. I can’t be careless even when finding the legacy. This is a good excuse to keep Buksil in this room.’

“Then please wait here with Buksil. Looking at the atmosphere, there doesn’t seem to be any monsters. I’ll go on my own to look at the situation.”

At the end of Ark’s words, Buksil jumped with surprise.

“What do you mean? I’ve chased Ark-nim here to record your heroic adventures. But you want me to wait during this historic moment?”

“No, I can’t promise that there will be no danger ahead. And do you want to make Lariette-nim more anxious? Who will stay with her? That’s why I’m getting you to stay here.”

“B-but.....”

Ark scowled at Buksil who immediately shut up.

“I’m sorry.”

Lariette spoke in an apologetic face while Buksil avoided her eyes. Anyway, Ark left the two of them there and ran towards the treasure. The cave became increasingly brighter as he entered. It was a magical place to study medicine. A faint light glimmered from the cave wall.

‘Yes, all that medication. It made the entire wall glow.....if I had this at home then I wouldn’t need to pay my electrical bills.’

The electricity required to power the entire cave....would be out of the reach of normal people like Ark. Anyway, it was a lot of light for a large space.

‘Finally.....I finally arrived. The Genius Alchemist’s Laboratory!’

Was this the feeling of discovering a new continent? Was this how the adventurers felt when they discovered El Dorado? Ark inwardly cheered as he surveyed the area. The space Ark arrived at had numerous machines and experiments hooked up. On one side of the wall was a bookcase which contained numerous scrolls, books and colourful liquid medicine bottles. He had finally managed to track down the genius alchemist’s lab using a few clues!

‘It was a good idea to use Buksil.’

The scrolls and medicines in the lab were now in Ark’s possession. He didn’t know what the effects would be, but since it was the work of a genius alchemist then it wouldn’t be a common item. No, he could convert it into a large amount of money even if it was the low recovery potions. But the problem was the quantity. Even if he emptied his bag, he wouldn’t be able to fit everything in!

‘I don’t know what Buksil is expecting but I’m not that easy. I will discipline him again and make him sign a contract, then pack it in his bags and send him to middle earth. But what about the materials needed to complete the quest? The quest log says that the research materials are necessary to complete it.....’

Ark entered the lab with a wily smile. At the same time, a shadow watching from the corner of the entrance trembled.

‘Bastard.....I knew what you were thinking as soon as you split the group.’

The person trembling in anger was someone who Ark considered as a walking bag. It was Buksil. Buksil wasn’t stupid and knew the reason why Ark had visited the laboratory alone. So he spoke to Lariette about recording Ark’s historical achievement and blah blah blah.....then sneakily shadowed him. And he found Ark laughing in the laboratory. Just looking at that smile. His body trembled with anger like a Pepe seeing a dismantling knife. He could imagine Ark’s devilish plan. But a wild smile flashed on Buksil’s face.

“Bah, do you think this will go your way? That Ark bastard, you dared to make me work so much? But even after all your abuse and exploitation, the final winner will be me. I’ll make you regret messing with me!’

Buksil put his hand into his bag and grabbed his ‘secret weapon.’

‘Sapjil, Ulmeok, my younger brothers.....! Please give me strength from heaven (?)!’

Buksil clenched his teeth and made a firm resolution. Suddenly a voice was heard from behind the bookcase that Ark was reaching for.

“Who is it?”

Ark was frightened and retreated. Buksil was also shocked and hid behind the corner again. Then an old man walked out from behind the bookcase. He was an old man with white hair and beard wearing rags.....He stared at Ark and looked him up and down.

“Who are you? How did you get here?”

“Can I ask how I’m talking to?”

“Huh, what an interesting friend. You suddenly came to my house and asked me who I am. Well, it’s not like I hung a nameplate on the front door.”

“Somebody’s house?”

“Yes, this is my house. To be correct it is my laboratory.”

“Laboratory? No way.....are you Magaro?”

Ark asked the old man in a surprise voice.

“How do you know my name?”

Ark’s mouth gaped open. Magaro? He was Magaro? What absurd thing was he saying? According to the Magic Institute, Magaro had disappeared many decades ago. From the records, he discovered that Magaro came to the Netherworld 100 years ago. At the time, Magaro was already older than 80 years.....if he was still alive then he would be over 200 years old. But the life expectancy in New World was 70 years old.

The granny Johansson he used Nursing on in the novice village died because her age exceeded 70 years. But 200 years old? Was he mistakenly looking for a dragon?

‘Oh damn.....what if he created the Elixir of Immortality using alchemy?’

Ark had no interest in whether he lived for 200 years or 2000 years. The problem was the piles of items in the laboratory! If they had no owners then Ark could just take the items. But if the owner was alive then how could he obtain Magaro’s legacy?

‘Dammit, dammit, dammit!’

Ark felt like grabbing the old man’s neck and squeezing. But even Ark wouldn’t kill an old man for his inheritance.

‘Then am I only able to receive the quest reward?’

Magaro had been watching him with wary eyes and asked again.

“You still haven’t answered my question. How do you know my name?”

“In fact.....I found you after being commissioned by the Magic Institute.”

“Magic Institute?”

Magaro was puzzled before he nodded.

“Ah, yes, that’s right, I think that answers it. After coming to the Netherworld, I jokingly sent some clues to the Magic Institute. Then you came here after putting all the clues together. I never thought anyone would get here.....how shocking.”

“Well, it was really difficult.”

Ark replied bluntly. Then Magaro clicked his tongue and muttered.

“But the Magic Institute is very strange. I know they have no patience, but I haven’t been missing for that long that they would send someone to look for me. Tsk tsk.....”

Ark retorted with an astounded expression.

“What did you say? As far as I know, one hundred and ten years had passed.”

“One hundred and ten?”

Magaro widened his eyes and burst out laughing.

“Hehehe, why are you joking? It’s only been 10 years since I’ve come to the Netherworld.”

“Huh?”

Ark replied with a stunned look. What did it mean? Had the Magic Institute lied to him? But why? No, it wasn’t only the Magic Institute. Even the recorded history in the valley village.....

Then Magaro continued talking.

“They must’ve also hired you to play a friendly prank. One hundred and ten? Pfff, even I’m still alive then wouldn’t I be a dragon? Well, apart from that.....yes, why did the Magic Institute send you? Did they want to say something to me?”

“They requested me to bring Magaro’s research to them.”

“Research material?”

“Yes, the research material that Magaro had been studying in the meantime.”

Ark spoke calmly. Then Magaro’s face twisted and the impression he was giving off completely changed.

“My study materials.....my research.....what I dedicated my whole life to.....”

The skin on his face started cracking and falling apart. The subsequent face that was shown.....looked like some monsters had been stitched together.....yes, it was similar to Frankenstein’s face in a horror movie that had been created with graphics. While Ark was shocked by the sudden change, Magaro grabbed his hair and howled. A metallic voice seemed to emerge.

“Research materials, research materials, research materials! I stomached the pain and degraded my flesh! The research material that I dedicated decades of my life to! You bastard.....you wanted to hide like a rat and steal it from me? Are you trying to take my life? I dare you to!”

“P-please relax. Your blood pressure.....”

“Shut up, kill! I’ll kill anyone aiming for my research!”

Suddenly Magaro shrieked. His body tore to pieces and a large monster emerged. The distorted body was painful to look at. Many spider eyes were nailed to the face, while the body looked like a lion with 10 arms attached. And there were bright coloured blister like things growing on the body. It was so horrific a monster that he felt like vomiting up his meal.....!

A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

[-The boss monster ‘Crazy Alchemist Magaro’ has appeared!]

Unfinished Quest

‘What is this? Magaro is a boss monster?’

Ark was unable to process the absurd sight in front of him. What type of 4D space was in that person’s body? How did the body of an old man suddenly become a 10 metre tall monster? Had the alchemist never heard of the law of conservation of mass? Ark was a modern man with common sense so he questioned it but Magaro was already talking.

“Huhuhu, I absolutely can’t lose. I can’t lose to anyone! All of this is mine. Only I can have it! I will kill everyone who tries to take it away from me!”

.....He couldn’t even try a conversation in this atmosphere. No, he had seen many boss monsters but this was the first time he dreaded looking at one.

It was like an experiment failed and he just stitched random monster parts to his body. Each eyeball rotated in a different direction. 10 different arms with colouring blisters covering it.....It was the first time he had seen such a scary monster. Ark wasn’t the only person to think so.

“Huk, w-what the hell?”

The cry emerged from around the corner when Magaro transformed. He turned his head and saw that the pig was sitting down on ground. Buksil had used ‘historical mission’ as an excuse to Lariette and followed Ark. He was about to use his ‘secret weapon’ when he saw Magaro and froze. Then Magaro’s eyes rolled around and focused on Buksil. Ark’s body instinctively moved.

“S-such.....such a stupid bastard.....!”

Ark used ‘Sprint’ and collided with Buksil.

Geul-!

Buksil was thrown into the air. At the same time, Magaro's arms moved in strange angles and attacked. Despite using his sword to block, Ark was pushed back a few metres. Sweat poured down his body at the fearsome monster's fierce attack.

"Ah, Ark-nim? You rescued me....?"

"You stupid fool, you can't die so selfishly!"

"Ark-nim!"

Buksil looked at Ark with tearful eyes. He had secretly followed Ark in order to use his 'secret weapon' and obtain Magaro's legacy. That is, to strike him in the back..... But he felt strange once Ark used his body to prevent him from dying.

'Ah, although Ark-nim is wicked, he truly regarded me as his colleague. Nevertheless, I....I....I was always aiming to stab Ark-nim in the back. Kuaak.....! I really am terrible. I'm not even human. I'm disqualified from being a human!'

But he was only impressed for a few seconds.

"I need you to pack all the items here before dying!"

'This son of a bitch, am I just a bag?'

Buksil's face wrinkled after Ark's comment. Anyway, Ark raised his body and stared at Magaro. But there wasn't fear or confusion on Ark's face. It was like someone finding a ray of happiness in the midst of despair.

'I don't know how it happened.....this is an opportunity. If I kill Magaro then Magaro's ownership of the items would disappear. And I can obtain Magaro's legacy!'

At first he was scared thanks to the horror like scene. But he couldn't forget the hideous appearance in the face of money. Even if the girl who crawled out of the TV or a nine-tailed fox begged him or the person from Friday the 13th held a chainsaw and threatened him.....he would welcome it anytime if they gave him more

items. Thanks to that, Magaro now appeared like a roll of bank notes to Ark.

‘I’m going to kill you.’ And even ‘I will inherit the legacy.’ Those were the only words he cared about!

At the thought of money, Ark became cool-headed in the battle.

‘Gauging from the previous impact, he’s not an opponent to be trifled with. In addition, he probably has some special attacks while I’m fighting blindly. The first rule of victory is to fight in the most favourable conditions!’

“Why are you just sitting down stupidly? Follow me! Dedric, Razak, run!”

Ark grabbed Buksil by the collar and bolted.

“That dirty rat.....I will not miss it!”

Magaro cried and pursued them.

However, Ark used ‘Sprint’ to escape the pursuit.

“Ark-nim!”

Lariette had been sitting near the entrance of the cave with a worried face and stood up when she saw them. Then she screamed at the ugly form of Magaro chasing them.

“Kyaaak, that, that is.....?”

“I don’t have time to explain in detail. Please buff me!”

“Huh? Oh, yes! Warrior’s strength, Virtuous Vitality, Pure light!”

Lariette stacked three buffs on him. Virtuous Vitality increased his strength and stamina for 3 minutes and increased his health while Pure light improved his mana regeneration.....

While the Innocence Knight had less combat abilities than a Holy Knight, its buffs were stronger. Of course, the skill level was lower so it wasn’t as effective as Alan’s. But it was a hundred times better than nothing. Furthermore, Lariette’s buff affected all her allied so it

applied to Buksil, Ark and his summons as well. The combat abilities of the whole party rose sharply.

‘That’s it.’

Ark stopped and turned around. Then he shouted while using Riposte against the approaching Magaro.

“A-1 plan. Dedric, Razak, take position on the right and left.”

“Understood!”

Clack clack clack clack, ttadadak!

“Lariette-nim, please attack him from behind. Virtuous Vitality is more concerned with attack than defense so we will concentrate on attacking from 4 directions.”

“Yes, I’ll try it!”

Lariette looked fearfully at Magaro but she wasn’t a child. In such a situation, it wasn’t possible to sit down and be scared.

“Buksil, retreat a safe distance!”

“Yes, let’s do it!”

Buksil answered boldly and ran away. While Ark attracted Magaro’s attention, Lariette and his summons got into their positions and surrounded him. Then Ark used his Elemental Sword Fire attribute, Dedric Dark Dash, Razak and Lariette Shield Stroke and attacked Magaro simultaneously.

“Kuaaak, these people.....!”

The attacks struck like a storm and instantly reduced Magaro’s health by 30%. Of course, Magaro wasn’t an insignificant opponent. He was level 500. The 10 arms also moved back and forth in a bizarre series of attacks. Perhaps Ark would’ve been struggling if he was alone. However, Ark wasn’t alone. He had been steadily feeding his pets food to raise their stats while Lariette had graduated with honours from Ark’s spartan training over the last 10 days.

‘Teaching is really rewarding.’

Ark smiled warmly at Lariette. Of course, looking from the viewpoint of the teacher there was still a lot more for her to learn. But it was still a rewarding experience since Lariette was useful now. The best advantage of an Innocence Knight was that they could use recovery magic while wearing heavy armour!

“Healing Touch!”

Lariette used healing magic regularly between attacking and defending. A warrior receiving recovery magic was the difference between life and death in a battle! Ark was able to concentrate freely on attacking without worrying about his health.

“These guys.....how dare these thieves.....I cannot forgive!”

Finally Magaro’s health was reduced to 50%. He once again received a critical hit from Gwisal’s sword and fell to one knee. At the same time Magaro’s body turned red.

‘Double critical chance! This is a chance!’

Ark rushed forward like a wolf. Something unthinkable occurred. The blisters on Magaro’s 10 arms moved and scattered. When it came back, he was holding potion bottles in each of his hands.

“You wanted my research materials? Huhuhu, okay, take it! This is the result of my research!”

Hwiririk, pepeng, pepeng, kukwakwakwang!

Magaro threw the 10 bottles onto the ground where multiple explosions took place.

Flames and poison gas, lightning and winds.....!

You have received lightning damage from the explosion. 150 damage.
--

You have received fire damage from the explosion. 250 damage.....

He received all sorts of attribute damage.

The bottles that Magaro threw were filled with explosive liquid of different attributes. Fortunately, Ark had some resistance to all the attributes thanks to the Mongoose immortality pill. But his fire resistance went down to -25% thanks to the use of Elemental Sword so he received 250 damage thanks to the additional damage. That was not the whole problem. Magaro swallowed a potion and his health increased. He also stored recovery potions.

“Kukuku, how is it? Stupid bastards.....this is the power of alchemy!”

Magaro went on a drinking spree of recovery potions.

“No, this son of a bitch.....!”

Magaro transferred the recovery potions to two arms while throwing the explosive potions with the remaining arms.

“Huk, Radun, swallow the potion!”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

Radun shot out and swallowed the explosive potions at Ark’s command.

[-Radun has acquired the Fire Explosive potion.]

But no matter how it tried, Radun couldn’t swallow 8 potions at once. Radun could only swallow one while the seven remaining exploded.

Kkukkukkukku, kkukwang, kwakwakwakwang!

It seemed like bombs were falling from the sky. Ark used ‘Dark Dance’ to avoid the blast range but it was impossible in a narrow cave. He barely managed to avoid everything and receive Lariette’s recovery magic. Then Magaro turned his eyes to Lariette.

“Bah! You dare.....botch my excellent work....!”

‘No, Lariette-nim is not at the level where she can avoid the explosive potions!’

Ark sprinted past Magaro to reach Lariette. Then he shouted while rotating his body.

“Lariette-nim! Raise your weapons!”

“Huh?”

Lariette automatically raised her weapons. At the same time, Ark ran up and hit her shield with Riposte.

“Kyaak!”

Lariette was pushed back 10 metres and fell. At the same time, an intense explosion took place in Ark’s vicinity. A message window appeared in front of Ark. He had lost 1,500 health from that attack.

“Oh Ark-nim! Healing Touch, Healing Touch!”

Lariette identified the situation and immediately healed him. However, Magaro’s damage was more than the amount she could recover. There was no chance to fight back properly. Even if he dealt a critical hit, Magaro would just restore his health using recovery potions. It was impossible for the minor attacks of his pets to deal any damage. He used the 10 different potions like water to deal damage.

‘Damn....how am I supposed to defeat him when he keeps throwing potions?’

With the potions exploding everywhere, his summons were already not following his commands.

“Ugh, fire, fire!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

They just ran back and forth trying to save their lives. And the potions also exploded against the capsule walls which smashed everywhere. The sticky fluid inside the capsules and the monsters’ corpses scattered everywhere.

‘Dammit, is he just going to destroy everything?’

Then Ark had a sudden thought as the chimera bodies scattered.

‘Wait! He uses potions.....then.....?’

“Lariette, please escape outside while I distract this guy!”

“Huh? B-but.....!”

“I don’t have time to explain, quickly!”

Lariette hurriedly exited the cave at Ark’s words.

“Dedric, Razak, you guys leave the cave too!”

“What? Master! What are you talking about? We’ll die together!”

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Dedric and Razak shouted ridiculously. Normally he would be disgusted but it was very praiseworthy in this moment. However Ark had an idea. He explained it telepathically to Dedric who grinned and nodded.

“Indeed! Master’s shrewd plan has started again!”

“Stop talking nonsense.....get out quickly. I don’t have the time. I can only hold on for 10 minutes. If you don’t do as planned in 10 minutes then I will 100% die. Do you understand?”

“You don’t have to worry!”

Dedric and Razak bolted out of the cave while holding the parcel Ark gave them.

“Now, let’s see what 1-on-1 is like. You’ll win if you kill me within 10 minutes!”

“Huhuhu, how dare....!”

Magaro smirked and threw the bottles. Ark gave up on counterattacking and used a combination of Slide and Dark Dance to avoid the bottles. Then he ran out of the cave at a suitable time. He had lost an extra 20~30% of his health from the explosive potions.

”Sheesh, jumping into a dungeon blindly was a mistake.’

His dark attribute bonus was unconditionally applied inside the dungeon. There was no reason to wait until evening so he entered

during the day. When he exited outside, his 40% attribute bonus was turned off.

‘But.....’

“Radun, give me 10 dark attribute magic ingredients!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun spat out one magical ingredient after another. Ark put the ingredients into the lamp and fuel and pulled the lever. At the moment, the surrounding area darkened like a curtain was pulled around it.

-For 30 minutes, the Dark Lamp will maintain the state of night-time.

A Dark attribute bonus (all stats + 40%) will be applied.

“Rarukan’s Ring, activate Dark Protection!”

When he lifted the ring and raised his voice, Ark was wrapped in a black aura. It was the option from Rarukan’s ring which raised his defense and magic resistance by 20%! Of course, this ‘Dark Protection’ could only be activated in the dark but that was no problem with the Dark Lamp. Ark used Slide and Dark Dance like crazy. The reason he exited the cave was because he couldn’t escape the range of the explosive potions inside the narrow cave. If he used the wide forest and two skills appropriately then Ark could minimize the damage. But it was raining and his clothes were wet. Ark’s health frantically decreased from the overflowing potions and he was soon in a critical condition. Thankfully, the Magic Protection from Galgashi’s Fur also activated and Magaro was frozen for a little bit.

‘Damn....It’s already been 15 minutes.....’

Ark glanced around but there was still no sign of Lariette of Dedric. Meanwhile, the flames decreased his health to 3%.

‘No, just a bit more!’

Ark watched the exploding potions with desperate eyes.

“That’s it Master! Go, Razak!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

He heard the distant sound of Razak’s voice. It was at that time. The surrounding bushes shook and black shadows emerged. Then the explosive potions suddenly disappeared before his eyes.

“Huk! W-what.....yes, you guys are....Chimera!”

Yes, it was the rotten Bandit Foxes that emerged from the forest.

Ark had seen the stiff bodies of the Bandit Foxes when the capsules broke and devised this plan. The monsters wouldn’t come close to the cave thanks to the strange smells. But it was different when controlled by Razak’s Death’s Equations. He had used Buksil, Lariette, Dedric and Razak for this plan. Previously, he had hunted the Bandit Foxes using Nadingka’s fruit. He was worried that Lariette would be unable to capture the foxes but thankfully they managed to hunt the Bandit Foxes and turned them into zombies. Well, poor Razak’s ribs also decreased again.....his abilities had started to decrease after evolving. Anyway, thanks to that the battle changed completely. Ark placed Gwisal’s sword across his shoulder and laughed.

“Now, let’s see if you can throw those damn potions.”

“This ...This bastard ...!”

Magaro once again threw the explosive potions. But the Bandit Foxes just rushed forward and swallowed them. Ark faked being startled.

“Eh? Where is the bottle? Wow, weird?”

“This, those stupid bastards.....don’t even know who their Master is.....!”

Magaro was furious at the betrayal of the foxes that he had created. But it didn’t matter if he was their creator. The really important thing was how he raised them. Ark had raised Dedric and Razak from a

useless bat and skull and Radun from an egg with affection.

“Are you finished? Now it’s my turn? Lariette-nim, recovery magic, please!”

“Yes, Healing Touch!”

Lariette belatedly used her recovery magic.

“Now, here I go. Demonic Opening!”

Kiyaaaaaak!

Ghostly wails emerged from Gwisal’s sword. Ark began to pound on Magaro with his sword. His health was sucked out. In an instant his health fell to 50% and Magaro retreated before pulling out a recovery potion. However, the recovery potion was a Bandit Fox’s favourite item. The foxes swarmed at the opportunity and swallowed the potion.

“This, these bastards.....go away!”

“Where are you looking? Your opponent is me!”

Gwisal’s sword continuously found Magaro’s bare flesh. His remaining life instantly went down to 10%. Without the explosive potions, Magaro was just a big hulking monster. However, Ark didn’t deal a fatal blow and just gradually chipped away at his life. Once it reached 8%, Magaro tried to escape towards the cave.

“You’re trying to run away? I’m sorry but I can’t allow that. Go, Sprint!”

Ark shot forward and swung his sword downwards. At the same time, Magaro’s body fell apart and black blood poured out.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

Thanks to drastic measures, a x1.4 experience was applied. Constant message windows appeared and he levelled up 7

times. In addition, the cross symbol appeared above Lariette's and Buksil's head. Despite the 100 level difference between them, they still gained 6~7 levels even with the experience penalty.

"That's it! Success!"

But Ark was more interested in the items than the experience. Ark looked at the falling items.

Magaro's Dimensional Movement Powder Bag <20 kilograms>

A genius alchemist, Magaro created many amazing magic items after long years of studying.

He refined this powder from a mysterious fairy which allows him to move between dimensions. If an appropriate amount of this powder is used to draw a circle, you can create a dimensional gate between the Netherworld and Middle earth. The amount of people able to be moved will depend on the amount of powder and the magic circle, with a larger circle requiring more powder. However, the effect disappears if the magic circle is damaged.

<Netherworld=Magic gate between Middle earth>

Magaro's Deluxe Alchemy Tools <Rare>

Item type: Magic tools

User Restriction: Advanced alchemy skill

A set of tools made by the genius alchemist Magaro a long time ago. These specially created tools are made using special materials and techniques and allow a higher standard of work compared to the normal tools. In addition, the high quality tools means there is chance of creating a more powerful effect in products created. A skilled alchemist might be able to make an amazing discovery with these tools. Not that many great tools like these are easily available.

<Passive effects for owners: Wisdom +20, Intelligence +20, Luck

+10>

<Special Option: Success rate of products produced +30% and probability of the best item being made +10%>

‘Alchemy tools?’

Magaro’s alchemy tool was a heavy bag filled with tools. Inside was filled with all sorts of equipment for experiments such as grinders or beakers. Alchemy was originally a profession that required a lot of money. The reason was that magic ingredients were expensive and the likelihood of failure was higher than blacksmithing or tailoring. Of course, if they kept on creating the same item then the proficiency would rise while the rate of failure would fall. Of course, they needed the related alchemy skills to create new prototypes. In that case, the failure rate was 3 times other professions. The failure rate was many times greater. So the items that alchemists needed most were ones that raised the success rate! A success rate of 30% was like creating an ‘A la carte’ dish with a 10% option attached. They were the coveted items that alchemists desired most.

‘I don’t know the prices of alchemist supplies.....but this is worth at least tens of millions of won!’

Next was the dimensional movement object that he obtained. Fortunately he could now return to middle earth anytime.

‘But the quantity is limited so I have to use it sparingly. If the information is released to the public then a swarm of people will gather. I have to take advantage of all the experiences and items in the Netherworld first.’

“Now all that’s left is the lab.”

There was a slight problem but now Magaro was gone. The laboratory was in Ark’s possession. Ark returned to the laboratory. And he brought his hand to the bookcase to find the first quest item. In the past Magaro had appeared and now Buksil let out a wild burst of laughter.

“Huhuhuhu.”

Buksil pointed the magic projector towards Ark and said.

“That’s far enough Ark. Honestly, I wavered for a moment but you’ve disappointed me. So now I will say it without any problems. I’m sorry but the things here.....”

“What?”

Ark unconsciously turned his head. And.....his outstretched hands felt something strange. He had extended his hand to reach for a book. But his hand just passed through the bookcase like it was a mirage.

“Eh? What on earth.....?”

Ark reached out again dumbly. But his hands just passed through the bookcase no matter what he did. He tried to pick up other stuff but it was the same. Stacked up potions, books or scrolls.....he couldn’t pick up anything.

“What the? What the hell is going on?”

Ark was perplexed and explored the laboratory. Then Lariette standing at the entrance lifted a think booklet and said.

“Ark-nim, I’m able to touch this book.”

Ark hurriedly ran and opened the booklet. The booklet.....no, to be precise it was Magaro’s diary. He had recorded the entire confusing solution down.

Page 157

It has been 30 years since I’ve come to the Netherworld.

But I still haven’t obtained the knowledge I desire.

No, I haven’t even figured out how to return to middle earth from the Netherworld.

What I want is just..... But I know I don’t have that much time left. But I can’t just die like this. What meaning will there be to my life if I

just die without anything to show for it?

Page 328

I've finally made my decision after long years of struggling.

I am going to synthesize the materials here and evolve into a chimera.

It's a forbidden technique that has been taboo to all alchemists for a long time! But this is not for my personal greed.

I'm now in the final stretch of my long research period. And I firmly believe that the topic I've dedicated my life to will change the world. I will do whatever it takes to complete my research.

Page 402

Fortunately, the first experiment seems to be successful.

I can finally feel some energy in my body which has been weakened for a long time. My spirit has cleared and I think I can bring an end to the research.

Page 420

There is something strange.

Sometimes I cannot repress my desires.

And it is difficult to remember the days.

Some side effects of the experiment?

I'm worried.

Page 459

Ah, what have I done?

Why does some of the laboratory 'not exist in this world anymore? It is clearly the effect of an experiment.

Perhaps this phenomenon is what took place in the Netherworld a

long time ago. If so, I have gotten one step closer to the answer. But I don't remember what I did.

Oh my god, now I can't touch the documents with my many years of research on it....! All I can touch is my diary.

However, even what I wrote in the diary is unknown.

Who am I? Why am I here?

What happened to me?

I do not know I....I.....Tricked?

By whom....?

'Then Magaro turned himself into a chimera?'

After that the genius alchemist just focused on his research.....no, he directly wrote down the process. After remodelling his body, he experience short-term memory loss and dementia as a side effect. Even if he was smart didn't mean his life was smooth-sailing. A message window appeared when Ark read the final part of the diary.

Quest has been updated.

<Genius Alchemist's Laboratory>=<Study the Mirage>

You've found the hidden laboratory by following in the footsteps of the Genius Alchemist. However, you could not touch anything in the laboratory despite all your efforts. Magaro has disappeared so you have no idea why this is happening. If you want to get your hands on Magaro's research then you'll have to figure it out on your own.

<Difficulty: ???>

'Dammit....it wasn't finished once I found the laboratory?'

Annoyance rose in his stomach. How much time had he invested to get here? Starting from the key in the Magic Institute to the arena

and Salrin's' Towers, he obtained all the clues to enter the Netherworld. And he finally came to the Netherworld. After suffering and almost dying in the Abyss of Despair, he had finally figured out the location of the lab in the Netherworld. And now it was an 'Updated' rather than a 'Complete?' What kind of absurd situation was this?

'So my great reward has just rolled away?'

It was to the extent that he wanted to give up the quest. But had he suffered so much just to give up now?

'I can only touch this diary in the laboratory. But Magaro wrote in the diary that he didn't know how to deal with the phenomenon that happened in the laboratory. Then I have to search elsewhere to figure out what happened here.....'

But Ark didn't worry for that long.

Ark knew only one village in the Netherworld, the village in the valley. And didn't it have the old man Beseutyu? His family business was to record everything that happened in the area so he might have some idea of this phenomenon.

'The phrase in the diary 'what happened in the Netherworld a long time ago' seems to be a hint.

So Ark decided his next destination. He would revisit the valley village.

'But before that.....'

Ark summarized the situation and glanced at Buksil.

"Yes, what were you going to tell me? Please say it."

"Huh? Oh, no.....that....."

Buksil rolled his eyes anxiously and said.

"As expected from Ark-nim. Hehehe, yes that's what I wanted to say. I only survived because of Ark-nim and Lariette-nim."

'Hrm, what a sneaky guy. He's definitely hiding something.'

Ark briefly glared at Buksil. Ark knew that there was something strange. Buksil was a merchant and had no chance of winning against Ark. Buksil probably knew this better than anyone else. But why would he risk death to follow Ark? Obviously there was something that Ark didn't know. Something that made him think he could steal the legacy from Ark..... But what was it? A skill Ark didn't know about? A scroll? An item?

'If I hit him then I might be able to figure it out.....'

Anyway, there was still some time before he could obtain the legacy. And Buksil could still be used for a variety of things. The pig could be used for picking up ingredients, as a second bag, for money transactions when he needed it and to also finish filming the video. After calculating it in his head, Ark just nodded.

"I'm thankful that you're admitting it."

"Aigoo, what kind of.....it is natural."

"Is that right?"

"Hehehe, of course."

Buksil rolled around giggling and beat at his forehead with his feet. Lariette didn't know the relationship between the two so was just confused.

"Now, let's return to the village in the valley. I've already figured out the way so it shouldn't take that long. Radun, can you carry 3 people?"

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun answered positively. So Ark headed towards the valley village on Radun.

But Ark couldn't imagine what lay ahead. While running towards the valley village, he never knew that this quest would not just affect the Netherworld, but the entirety of New World as well. And it would also have a huge impact on Ark's adventure.....

A Heartless City

“Huh? Nothing?”

“Yes, some came in a month ago but it was sold out immediately.”

“Then when will they come in again?”

The shabby looking merchant asked in a desperate tone. The specialty store owner just shrugged and shook his head.

“I don’t know either. Sometimes it might be a couple of months and other times it is six months. But it usually takes 4 months. Aside from the delivery date, the quantity might be very low so we would see out immediately. Well, it can’t be helped with rare items.”

“T-that can’t be.....”

When the merchant whimpered, the shop owner smiled and raised his finger.

“Although you’re quite lucky.”

“Huh?”

“Our store has a sale for guests visiting from distant places every year. All of the items on display will be sold for a 15% discount. Only until the end of this week. How about it? You’ve travelled all this way so why don’t you buy something? This place is small but there are many rare specialty items around. You’ll get a much better price than in other provinces.”

The shop owner made noises about a sale and slashed prices. If a stranger heard such talk then of course they would be tempted. But the merchant looked at the shelves and shook his head.

“.....No, thank you.”

There was a difference between a general user and specialty merchants. When trading with NPCs, the general users didn’t have to

worry about the price. The prices at stores such as general or weapon stores varied in different villages. There was no reason for the users to pay a big price. On the other hand, specialty merchants were different. The prices between areas were significantly large and the price would often soar or slump depending on different circumstances. Not only that, but NPCs at specialty stores would often deceive them and sell it for the previous slump price. And they didn't hesitate to push forward unpopular stock in a sale like now. The merchants who naively believed in the NPCs words would become bankrupt overnight. Transactions between a shop owner and merchant was like a sword match.

"Just think about it. It is difficult to get such quality stuff elsewhere. And isn't there a sale? Okay, if you buy items worth 100 gold even with the 15% discount then I will give you a special gift."

If the shop owner went this far then his inventory was 100% unable to be sold.

"That's okay. I'll come back."

"Hmm, too bad. I might've even given you 2 special gifts.... If you change your mind then come anytime."

The shop owner was truly persistent. The merchant shook his head and waved before exiting the store.

"Bah, who is he trying to scam? I can tell just by looking at the half price inventory. Anyway, even a remote country place doesn't have any."

The user grumbling was none other than the hobbit merchant, Sid. If it was the past then he probably would've been fooled by that sale. But now Sid was different from his old self. After tasting the bitterness and sweetness of Ark's friendly care (?), he had grown quite experienced as a merchant. No, Sid had also obtained a large amount of fame in Nagaran as a merchant. His hard work played a role in building that fame, but it was also because of Nagaran's complicated situation.

"Two months has passed since Ark-nim left Silvana....."

Sid muttered and recalled the past. In the meantime, there had been a lot of changes among the 12 estates. Thanks to the guild sieges, the Lords changes so many times that it was hard to keep track. But a time of stability came after all the confusion. Among the many guilds challenging the Lord's seat, many could not survive the war of consumption and several successful alliances appeared. And once the alliance captured the seat, they firmly held it. There were 5 alliances in Nagaran! Once the 5 alliances occupied a seat, the area completely changed. The majority of guilds were not satisfied with one castle.

The first target of a user was to occupy a castle and become a lord. Once they became a lord, they could earn an honorary title of Viscount. And that was just the starting point. If they used their forces to occupy 3 castles then they could earn the honorary title of Earl. The dividends from the castles would also increase. If they managed to obtain 6 estates then they would be promoted to Marquis. And if they managed to get all 12 estates in Nagaran then they would receive the honorary title of 'Public King.' Although the information about 'Public King' was unknown, it was clearly the best title available. The revenue obtained would be unimaginable! It was a place where money and fame was obtained from blood. So obviously Nagaran would be plunged into the era of 'War of Conquest.'

However, the forces of the 5 alliances were almost equal. None of them had the strength to capture another castle. No, there couldn't afford to show their ambitions even if they had reserve forces. If they revealed things too soon then the remaining forces would strike at them first. So the 5 alliances held each other in check while the lesser guilds engaged in a war of consumption for the other castles. In human history, the larger powers would be plunged into a cold war while the minor powers fought against each other. The necessary requirement to survive in this cold war period was economic power. The 5 alliances had already seen this and poured money into their estate and focused on development. They would then invest in military forces when the rating of the manor increased and they received more income.

So after one month....one of the five alliances rose to prominence. It was the Hermes Alliance which occupied Silvana directly. In the past, Alan and Ark had recognized the geographical advantage of Silvana. Once the Hermes Alliance firmly grasped Silvana, they invested a lot of money into it and became the first estate to be promoted to a C class estate. And the most significant contribution to their development was the trading post that Ark had the foresight to build. Once the lord changed, the trading post was renamed to 'Continental Commerce Firm' and received the tax from it, keeping them one step ahead of the other estates.

"Huhuhuhu, behind them is the Kerobon Sid."

Sid smiled with satisfaction. Sid got a job in the Continental Commerce Firm thanks to Ark. The chairman of the firm was the NPC with a fanatic belief in Ark, Wolkosu. Thanks to the escalator promotion, Sid was now the business manager. He handled the purchase of all good for the Continental Firm and oversaw the sales. In one week, Sid had already moved through 10,000 gold. Thanks to these enormous transactions, Sid's various skills went up like crazy. Thanks to the experience from each transaction, Sid had long passed level 200. And not too long ago, he received the title of Kerobon that every merchant fantasized about.

"Oh, that person.....Sid!"

"He's the legendary merchant who moved thousands of gold in one week!"

"In just two months he was promoted to the foreign department of the Continental Commerce Firm"

"Weren't his results recognized a short time ago and he received the title of Kerobon from the Midus Merchants guild?"

"That's right, the decoration on his chest is only provided to merchants who have received the title of Kerobon."

"Amazing, how many people have received the title of Kerobon?"

"But that's not all. A Kerobon merchant is able to receive VIP treatment from guilds and can get deluxe information. It is incredibly

obvious what would happen with the deluxe information. His funds are probably sufficient to create 1~2 guilds.”

Whenever Sid appeared at a trading place or the Merchants guild, he was the source of envy for all merchants.

‘Huhuhu, respect. More respect!’

Sid puffed up every time. But occasionally people in the street were puzzled.

“But why would someone with so much money dress like that?”

“Yeah. Doesn’t he smell like poverty?”

Sid was wearing low level clothes. Moreover, he was so busy that he had no time to wash them properly.

“I guess rich people don’t care about their attire.”

The merchants nodded and continued speculating. But Sid’s thoughts flared up at those words.

‘Are your eyes bad? How dare you take such a pretentious air when talking about me? Damn, I have no money to eat let alone buy clothes!’

Yes, he was the foreign business manager of the Continental Firm! The merchant who moved 10,000 gold in one week! The Kerobon recognized by the merchant guild..... These facts painted him in an amazing light. But the reality was that he only earned as much as a salary man in the firm. Of course, he now had a monthly salary consisting of his wage and bonuses. It was enough for other merchants to eat and even become rich if careful. However, most of those earnings were seized by Ark.

‘Huk.....that’s why I shouldn’t fall into debt.’

At first, Ark seized 50% of Sid’s revenue. But once his earnings became better, Sid was sent this message through Roco.

-I heard your salary climbed a lot? Shouldn’t you pay of your debt first before earning money? Tell Wolkosu to send 90% of Sid-nim’s

monthly salary to me.

.....A devilish human.

Thanks to that, his increased monthly salary withered and he became even more destitute. But was that all? He also often made Sid run errands. The reason Sid left Nagaran and came to this remote village was because of Ark. Not long ago, Ark once again delivered a message through Roco.

“Ark-oppa needs ‘Unicorn Horns’ for Lancel Village.”

“Huh? How many?” The rehabilitation brothers can only prepare 4,000 gold.”

‘Dammit, does he want me to lose my hair? My hands? Not once has he given me an expense fee!’

The reason Sid couldn’t lose his temper? He still needed to pay Ark back 3,600 gold....

“.....I understand. Give me the money.”

Sid sighed and replied. Then Roco asked him in a puzzled voice.

“What money?”

“I need the money to buy the items.”

“Oh, that? In fact, the rehabilitation brothers don’t have the money yet.”

“Then how do you want me to buy it?”

“I don’t know.....Ark oppa said that Sid-nim is a Kerobon? Isn’t a Kerobon allowed to borrow 4,000 gold from the Merchants guild? Just bring it to Lancel Village and we’ll settle the bill.”

“Eh?”

Sid was outraged. How could he accept that? Of course, as a Kerobon Sid was eligible to apply for a loan from the Merchants Guild. However, the loan was literally a debt. The procedure to apply was quite complicated and he needed to pay interest as

well. But was that all? Once he applied for a loan, his credit rating was significantly slashed. First he had to pay back Ark.....and now he was being sent on an errand without being given once penny and would end up in further debt?

But Sid soon changed his mind. The purchase requester was Ark. He wasn't evil, but he would always pay people back. So he wasn't worried about that if he received a loan.

The loan scheme administered by the Merchants Guild had rules. The merchants guild's loan wasn't exactly borrowing gold. If they used the Merchants Guild's name as a guarantor, they could purchase items without gold. That is.....when applying for a loan from the Merchants guild, they offered an credit note. The merchant would be able to purchase items from the NPCs with the credit limit on the credit note. However, there was one limitation. The person issued the credit not must have the equivalent amount in their possession, whether it be gold or goods.

In order words, the items had to be worth 4,000 gold. In this case, if the trader only had goods worth 1,000 gold then they needed another 3,000. If their remaining belongings and goods didn't equal 4,000 gold then they would become bankrupt until the guild could reclaim the loan. It was a situation to prevent selling the borrowed gold outside of the game. If he happened to sell at a loss (e.g. meeting a thief during the determined trading period) and wasn't able to pay off the loan, the merchant would become bankrupt. It was a bad reminder of the old days when Sid owed a debt to the Merchants Guild. Anyway, thanks to this rule he could afford to buy Ark's items at reasonable prices.

'The person I can believe in the most in this world is Ark-nim. If I get a bad credit rating from the loan then surely he'll rescue me? Yes, it should be safe to go on.'

So Sid went to Selebrid where he was issued a credit not and had his credit rating cut. Then he went to the auction in Giran to find the Unicorn Horns. Forgotten memories flashed through his head.

"Wait, it was Unicorn Horns? I think I've seen that somewhere before? Oh, that's right!"

Merchants often visited the NPCs in poultry stores or the Merchants guild to obtain information on specific items.

'It's just a rumour so it is up to you to believe it or not.' Those words were 100% associated with information to make money. Among them, Sid had heard someone mention Unicorn Horns a while ago.

"Aren't the prices of Unicorn Horns rising these days? So I did a little digging. In a mountain village not far from Giran, there is a specialty store that sometimes sells Unicorn Horns."

The NPC whispered as he came close.

"There isn't a lot of them, but you can buy it for a relatively cheaper price than the market price. Well, it's still very expensive but you can likely afford it. If you're near Giran then you should stop by once."

He had registered the information and then forgot about it. But it was a great opportunity if true.

"The money Ark-nim allowed to purchase the Unicorn Horns is 4,000 gold. The present market price is 1,000 gold so he intended to get 4. But if I can get it for cheaper than market price.....wouldn't I be able to get the remaining money? Even if I buy it for 50 gold cheaper, that is still 400 gold!"

Sid's eyes gleamed at the thought of gold. While purchasing items for the Continental Firm, everything was recorded down. Isn't this a chance to get around those records? He wouldn't feel remorse, even if the opponent was Ark. Sid immediately turned around and headed towards the village selling Unicorn Horns. However, the result was a total failure! Other merchants had been told about the speciality store and already bought it. Sid had been brought to reality from his land of dreams and sighed.

"Che, I thought I could pay off a lot of my debt....."

He owed Ark 3,600 gold. He became gloomy when he thought about it. Sid sighed and took out a big piggy bank from his bag.

"I can only believe in one thing."

It was an item he had obtained by chance on one of his merchant quests.

Lucky Pig of Good Fortune <Special>

Item type: Piggy Bank

User restriction: Merchant

A nice piggy bank surrounded by gold light.

An old item that had been gathering dust on top of a mountain. If you're aiming to become rich as a merchant, you can't forget the importance of small money. This piggy bank is important for people who cherish small money and the money won't be able to be withdrawn until it is full.

<You can save 1 gold once a day. When you reach the maximum amount of 100 gold, you can receive a bonus 10~30%>

1 gold every day was 100 gold.

After 100 days, he could receive a bonus 10~30 gold. The only pleasure Sid received while under this debt will filling the piggy bank.

"Huhuhu, it is half full. Yes, it's best to make money safely. If I can sneak one or two gold away from Ark-nim then someday I'll earn my independence."

The hobbit's grand dream of becoming the best merchant on the continent suddenly turned into gaining independence from Ark.

Clink, clink.

Sid felt better after hearing the sound of coins in the pig's stomach. Even though Sid was a Kerobon, he had lost his vigour.

"Now is now the time to be doing this. I have to hurry. If I'm late then I might suffer some criticism."

"Haaayaahh!"

Sid heard it as he was about to leave the village. All of a sudden, a

loud cry was heard from one side. Sid automatically turned his head and saw the person exercising in the moonlight.

“Hat, hat, hat, hat! The 5,000 yelling regime is over! Next is kicks!”

“What the? That man?”

Sid asked with a puzzled look. No matter how much he looked the user was clearly a merchant covered in bags. But somehow the shape was different. What sane merchant would yell and kick on a vacant lot?

In addition, what was that?

“Kuaaak.....damn, it broke again. Ugh!”

The merchant frantically kicking the tree groaned and grabbed his swollen ankle. In order to maintain a sense of realism in New World, users who received an injury would receive a shock. However, that shock was at a similar level to static electricity. It wasn't to the extent that it would be painful. But the merchant was really moaning like a person who broke his leg. Sid couldn't understand. The person suffering in front of him was really experiencing the pain of a broken leg.....

Yes, it was the only user in New World who suffered realistic pain! The merchant was Lee Myung-ryong, no Isyuram. Sid had visited the village where Isyuram was modifying his body. Thus Sid and Isyuram had a fateful encounter.....

“There really are strange people.”

.....It hadn't even begun yet.

Sid jumped and quietly avoided that area. It wouldn't be good for a crazy person to notice him. So he once again rushed to the road that headed towards Giran. He had left the village for 10 minutes.

Grrrrrrr.

The village was so remote that there was no path for Sid to walk along. So he was walking in the woods when a low cry was audible from a distant place.

‘Huk, gnoll!’

Sid panicked and jumped behind some bushes to hide his body. Soon enough, four monsters with a dog’s head approached.

‘Grrrrrr, strange. I thought it was in this area.....’

“No, I heard it too.”

“Maybe it’s that crazy merchant?”

At those words, the gnoll flinched and looked around with anxious faces. However, one gnoll shook his head and muttered.

“No, I would be able to smell him from a distance. Hold still. Kung kung kung, this is a different person. I think somewhere in the vicinity? It’s faint but obviously near.”

The gnoll sniffed and approached the bush.

‘Ugh, why is it coming here? Huk, don’t tell me.....?’

Sid quickly checked the information window frantically. After confirming that there was no lasting effects, his heart fell.

‘Oh my god, has the effect of the [Safe Travel] scroll worn off?’

Even if they were highly ranked, a merchant had no combat abilities. Even a level 300 merchant wouldn’t be able to beat a gnoll. That’s why merchants always needed mercenaries when travelling a long distance. However, hiring mercenaries for a low level area didn’t fit. He would obtain a loss instead of a profit if he hired mercenaries. That’s why the Merchants Guild developed the special scroll [Safe Travel]. The effect lasted 2 hours and there was a low probability of being attacked by monsters. Even if they were right around the corner, a monster with a keen sense of smell wouldn’t be able to notice him. Because of that, merchants only hired mercenaries when going to high levelled areas and just used the [Safe Travel] scroll in low areas. Sid was level 200. When he used the scroll, it was impossible for him to be discovered by level 100 gnolls. However, the duration was 2 hours so he had used it once and forgot about it.

‘I need to quickly use the scroll before being discovered!’

Sid hurriedly opened his bag. But he couldn't see the scroll no matter how much he looked.

'T-this is....I was so busy applying for a loan in Selebrid that I forgot to buy a scroll!'

"Grrrrr, hiding in a place like this!"

"Ohh, how long has it been since we saw a hobbit?"

"Hehe, you've done excellently."

The eerie voices surrounded the hobbit who looked up fearfully. Sid got up, screamed and tried to run away.

"Grrrrrr, do you think we will miss?"

"Take this!"

One of the gnolls threw his club. Pakak, the club collided with Sid's back with a heavy sound.

-You have received a critical hit to your head. 400 damage! <You are stunned and won't be able to move for 10 seconds>

Kung kung kung kung!

The merchant became caught in a stunned state. He couldn't see the approaching monsters but it was obvious. The gnoll swarmed around the stunned Sid and was about to beat him up. The stun lasted 10 seconds but Sid wouldn't even last 10 seconds against the gnolls.

'Damn.....my resurrection place is Selebrid.....'

Sid swallowed his bitterness. It was incredibly difficult for a merchant to reach level 200 and of course he didn't want to die.

'There's nothing good about selecting a merchant. First I get treated like a bag by Ark-nim, then exploited because of my debt and now I'm about to become a dog's food.....'

He was so miserable that he couldn't even cry anymore. It was at

that time. Just as he was in a critical condition, a voice singing ridiculous lyrics was unexpectedly heard in his ears.

“Where do you stand~ someone~ when anything happens.”

“.....?”

Sid turned his head puzzled. One man was slowly approaching with crossed arms.

‘Eh? That man is.....?’

The gnoll and Sid all gaped at that person. Sid had seen him before. It was Isyuram who had been exercising in the moonlight. Sid looked dismayed and sighed with disappointment.

‘Damn, I thought it was a warrior passing by.....but it’s just that strange man? I’m going crazy. That merchant just came here to be eaten.....’

Yes, there should be two bowls of dog food. However, Isyuram was still humming and didn’t grasp the mood.

“This, this, this, this, Isyuram~ tremendous energy~.”

In this situation, singing a 70s theme song.....he was indeed insane. But the gnolls’ reaction was surprising. The gnolls winced and retreated from the merchant.

“Grrrrrrr. T-that guy.....?”

“The Mad Merchant! The Crazy Merchant!”

“Dammit, we didn’t see him for a few days so I had hoped he went somewhere else.....”

“He is still a merchant. Kill him!”

Kung kung kung kung!

Sid wasn’t in a shape where he could run away so he just watched. The gnolls flocked to Isyuram and swung their clubs. Isyuram just curled his lips and said.

“Heh, these guys aren’t going to run away. Okay, then I’ll show you the results of my training!”

Then.....Sid witnessed an incredible scene.

“Haaayaahh, Shoryuken! Adododo, jumping kick! Somersault kick!”

Merchant. No matter how much Sid looked, he saw a merchant. Nevertheless, he was almost equal to the gnolls! No, he was overwhelming. He was a merchant so he lacked defense and attack, but he avoided their attacks with amazing timing and counterattacked which had a high probability of being a critical hit. It was also surprising that he was able to use techniques such as shoryuken and jumping kick.

“Take that, Pile driver (wrestling technique)!”

Kueeeeeeeek!

He even grabbed the gnoll, jumped and drove it into the ground upside down. After 3 minutes, Isyuram had taken care of all 4 gnolls. Then Isyuram approached Sid who was making a ridiculous expression.

“Boy, are you okay?”

“Huh? Ah, yes.....”

Sid looked at him stunned before asking.

“But aren’t you a merchant?”

“Well, unfortunately I have such a shape.”

“But a merchant against gnolls.....and four of them.....?”

“Huhuhu, Ryu and Ken, Chun Li and Zangief are all my teachers so of course the gnolls can’t compare to me.”

Isyuram rattled on in a smug voice. But after a moment, Isyuram’s body stiffened and he paled. Then he flopped onto the ground as sweat dripped down his face.

“Ugh, d-damn.....indeed....this pain....can’t get used to it.....”

“W-what’s wrong?”

“I-I’m okay.....this much..... I’ll be fine after a little bit.....”

Isyuram clenched his teeth and shook his head. No matter how he looked at the situation, it clearly wasn’t normal. He appeared suddenly humming a 70s theme song, said that Ryu and Ken were his masters and then suddenly he looked like he was having a seizure? Sid didn’t want to hang out with these sorts of people, but he couldn’t just ignore him after being helped. Sid hesitated before sitting in front of him and waiting for the attack to end. Fortunately, Isyuram returned to normal after 10 minutes.

“Phew.....I’ve survived. Aye, you shouldn’t have seen that in our first meeting.”

“Ah, it’s nothing.”

Sid shook his head and asked with uneasy eyes.

“But what was that just then?”

“Heh, a hero’s ordeal.”

Isyuram replied with a smile. He couldn’t understand as expected. But Sid didn’t question it anymore. He was scared of what insane answer he would receive. And he had other questions.

“Then how was ajusshi able to defeat them while playing as a merchant?”

“I told you. Ken and Ryu, Chun Li and Zangief are my mentors.....”

“Then who are they?”

“Eh? You don’t know those names?”

Sid shook his head and Isyuram sighed while scratching his head.

“Hah, kids these days don’t know about them? Hyu.....I really am old. To put it simply, they were people who burned martial arts into my soul in my childhood.”

“.....?”

“The gnolls were defeated after holding the images of my teachers in my heart. But it isn’t easy using those skills. My bones have really suffered because I’m a merchant.”

Isyuram recalled his memories of the past fortnight. Yes, he couldn’t forget the fortnight of humiliation and suffering every day. As soon as Isyuram became dog food, he was immersed in his training. However, Isyuram was a merchant. His limbs couldn’t keep up with his training and kept on breaking. That wasn’t all. Sometimes he would fight against the gnolls to confirm his training and really felt the pain of dying. Since the police’s training unit was set to ‘Reality,’ he felt 100% of the pain inflicted on his character.

‘Ugh.....it really is horrible. Why would anyone play the game while suffering such pain? No matter how fun the game is, isn’t it too much? They would surely be hit in battles.....maybe everybody is a pervert?’

Isyuram couldn’t understand it.

‘Anyway, I can’t just give up. Damn, this is a matter of pride. When will this body be able to defeat the gnolls?’

Of course, this problem would be solved if he just asked someone. However, who was Isyuram? In the game he was a merchant, but in reality he had been the captain of the number 1 SWAT team. How could he give up a game because of the pain when even a school kid could play it? It was a matter of pride now.

‘I don’t know anything about a merchant! I just have to try until I die!’

Every time he was hit by the gnolls, a cloud formed over his eyes. And he clung even more insanely to the game. One day a miracle happened. Once again he was fighting the gnolls with a broken wrist and ankle. Isyuram’s pride had been injured so much that he just persisted and clung to their legs, biting.

“Kuaaak! This vicious child, stop biting!”

“Hik, is he infected with rabies?”

Was this a joke? The dogs were talking nonsense so he continued

biting. Then a message window flashed in front of Isyuram.

-You have learned a new skill.

Self Defense <Beginner, Passive>: You have built up your body using basic training methods.

Self Defense is a skill that only non-combat professions can learn and it allows the user to show a minimal combat ability. It is possible to reduce the risk of injury using Self Defense <The battle penalty of a non-combat profession has been removed. Chances of injury is reduced by 30%.

-You have learned a new skill.

Invincible Spirit <Beginner, Passive>: You're a weed who never gives up despite the desperate situation. Even if a person with Invincible Spirit gets injured, it will not interfere with their action in battle. In addition, if your health is reduced below 50% then you will enter the 'invincible state' and a bonus will be applied to your combat power. However, all damage received during the fight will be applied after the battle finishes.

<Invincible State: When your health falls below 50% <Attack power and resistance to abnormal states +10%>

If your health falls by 70% <Attack power +15% and resistance to abnormal states +20%>

If your health falls by 90% and you're in a critical condition <Attack power +20% and resistance to abnormal states +30%>

'Eh? What is this?'

Isyuram wasn't used to playing games and couldn't understand all the information in the message window. But it wasn't necessary for him to understand. Even if he couldn't understand it with his head, he could sense it in his body.

'Eh? What kind of thing is happening?'

In fact, this was the first time Isyuram fully grasped the gnolls' attack patterns. The simple attack pattern of the NPCs wasn't difficult for someone who had experienced actual fighting. But he was being slaughtered thanks to his insufficient merchant's body. With his ankle broken he couldn't move quickly enough let alone deal damage with a broken wrist. However the situation completely changed with Invincible Spirit. If he was injured in battle then it wouldn't interfere with his actions. Isyuram's fighting abilities had such a huge effect that it transcended common sense. In addition, he learned a merchant only skill 'Self Defense' which was similar to the warrior's skill 'Sword Mastery.' Well, Isyuram was in a critical condition when he received these skills so he still died but now he could finally fight back.

"That's it, I can finally show the results of my training!"

Isyuram was completely delighted with the skill effects and went crazy. But that was Isyuram's mistake. In fact, Invincible Spirit was an illusionary skill. The additional stats were too fantastic. This skill couldn't be learned in a normal way. In the early stages of New World's production, there were a few skills that could only be learned using this method. However, feeling actual pain was too absurd so the development was stopped. Invincible Spirit was one of those skills. Of course, a general game unit could never learn a skill like this. However, Isyuram believed 100% in his training and didn't doubt the execution.

And Invincible Spirit was actually the most dangerous among the aborted skills. There was a reason for this. One reason was that they might become too accustomed during a battle and then suffered huge penalties after the battle ended.

-The battle had ended and 'Invincible Spirit' has been automatically released. 'Invincible State' has been released and all injuries received during the battle applied.
--

Your wrist has broken thanks to the impact!

Your ankle has twisted due to moving beyond its limits!

Your ribs have cracked due to a blow.....

“Kuaaak, w-what is this?”

Again, Invincible Spirit wasn't a skill where he would receive no injuries during the battle. The injuries just wouldn't affect the body until the battle was over. And all those injuries would be applied at the same time. Experiencing at the same time a broken wrist, ankle, ribs.....it was so painful it felt like a truck had run over him! The reason Isyuram suddenly turned pale and started sweating was because of this penalty. An average person suffering this would've probably just fainted! He had astonishing mental strength to endure it but Sid only saw that he was having something that looked like a seizure.

Anyway, Isyuram then spend time smashing the gnolls around the village. He had caught three hundred gnolls during that period. Thus Isyuram could now completely identify the patterns of attack. Furthermore, he was able to reduce the probability of an injury but quite a lot thanks to Self Defense. So Isyuram finally felt the serious feeling of martial arts. Then it finally reminded him of a street fighting game that had been released a long time ago.

“Yes, it's better to enjoy the game a little bit.”

Isyuram imitated the techniques of those characters and fought against the gnolls. So he made up some nonsense about Ryu and Ken etc. being his mentors.

“That.....are you okay?”

Sid's voice was suddenly heard from the side. Isyuram woke from his recollections with an embarrassed face and scratched his head.

“Well, I was a merchant at first but it was a fair bit of trouble.

“Indeed.”

Sid nodded and realized that he was just as strange as Sid expected.

‘I don't understand. If he would rather fight then why didn't he save

money and change to a warrior profession? Does he have to be a merchant because of some circumstances?’

In New World, if they paid a fee of 200 gold then the former profession could be cancelled and an initial profession selected. And his predecessor had told Isyuram this information in the pile of documents left to him. As well as information about the pain settings..... All of Isyuram’s efforts were indeed wasteful. But the information was so basic that Sid thought it was impossible for the level 150 Isyuram to not know it. If Isyuram became aware of the facts now..... Well, ignorance was bliss.

“Anyway, we’ve met like this so let’s share a meal together.”

Isyuram whistled and took out a pot. Sid was glad to hear those words. He had been so heavily in debt that Sid had only eaten wheat bread for a while. But he expected a proper meal after seeing Isyuram take out the pot. The joy only lasted a moment as Sid freaked out when he saw Isyuram prepare the ingredients.

“Hik, w-what are you doing?”

“What?” I’m making food?”

“N-no way.....you’re going to eat the gnolls?”

“Ah, you’ve never eaten dog meat?”

“No, I’ve eaten dog meat.....”

“Ah, your worried about eating the gnoll meat. I was wary at first but it turned out surprisingly fine once I ate it. It is really chewy like dog meat. And it’s also good for the body.”

Isyuram casually said as he sliced off the meat and placed it in the pot. Although Isyuram was a merchant, he had managed to discover a secret. It was impossible to make dishes with every type of meat in New World. However, the meat of a monster which wasn’t classified as edible was toxic. The meat of a gnoll was toxic. Therefore most users never even considered cooking gnoll meat.

However, Isyuram just abandoned common sense and ate the meat

of a gnoll. And the taste was really similar to dog meat. Isyuram was a fan of dog meat so he immediately liked the gnoll meat. Of course, the toxic gnoll meat caused an abnormal state but he didn't pay attention to such trivial problems.

"Well, this state won't cause me to die.....I will quickly recover. It's not like the meat has maggots. I can't abandon this taste just because of a little venom."

After making two hundred of the gnoll soup, he received an unexpected skill.

-You have learnt a new skill.

Bizarre cooking <Beginner, Passive>: You have an interest in making dishes out of bizarre monster meat. When bizarre cooking is used, it can neutralize the toxic monster meat. In addition, if you cook a certain monster more than a certain number of times then you will instil fear in the monster.

<After eating the flesh of a monster a certain number of times, you will instil fear in that type of monster. Fear will reduce their attack power in combat>

After eating all that dog meat, even wild dogs didn't dare come near him. The dogs instinctively felt afraid of someone addicted to dog meat. That fear was why Isyuram became a horrifying presence.

"Hrmm, everyone has ripened already. It won't take a long time to cook. Ah, this isn't supposed to fall in the soup."

Isyuram swallowed his saliva and pulled a bottle out of his bag. When he first started eating the dog soup, he stopped by the village's tavern and bought some drinks. Although the sake bottle cost 10 gold, Isyuram had no sense in regards to money. The expensive liquor soon spread through his whole body, making it feel hot. The glow made him feel rewarded for the pain he just suffered.

"Hahaha, being able to drink and eat dog soup is like heaven after everything I've suffered! After a little food and alcohol, my spirit will be purged until I feel hungry again. What the? Why aren't you

eating?”

“No....I....I’ll just eat my wheat bread.”

Sid said with a frown.

“I guess your taste buds are really picky. Then drink a cup of sake.”

“But I’m still a minor?”

“It’s fine to drink with an adult.”

“Yes, then just a little....”

Sid cautiously took the cup.

‘He’s not that strange after all.’

At first he only drank one cup, then it turned to two and three before he eventually ended up drinking five cups. Sid had become so tipsy that he confessed his problems to Isyuram.

“.....So you came all the way here for an errand only to have to return in vain?”

Sid nodded at Isyuram who frowned.

“But did you say Ark? He seems like a bastard or a crook. What kind of person would make you fall into a debt and then exploit you? In addition, it is 3,000 gold so the interest is 1,000 gold? Even if this is a game.....shall I lend you a hand?”

“Hik, please stop.”

Sid panicked and waved his hands.

“Ajusshi doesn’t know how scary Ark-nim is. Ark-nim won’t take it silently.”

“Is he that strong?”

“It’s not just that he is strong. Ark-nim is definitely not a bad person. When we first met, he saved me from Leo a chaotic player.”

And then he extorted the escort price out of Sid.

“.....And he helped me when I was in really bad debt.”

In order to treat Sid like a walking bag.

“.....He also left me in charge of the enormous profits from the business in Cairo.”

Which caused him to obtain a debt of 4,000 gold.

He felt even more miserable after he spoke. Sid sighed and shook his head.

“Anyway, Ark-nim is not a bad person.....I think. He even got me a job to repay my debt and thanks to that I climbed a lot of levels.”

“Well that doesn’t matter.”

“But I have a serious problem going forward.”

“What?”

“I carelessly didn’t buy any [Safe Travel] scrolls. They’re only sold by the Merchant Guild in large cities.....I don’t know how I can make it to Giran.”

“I’ll come along.”

“Huh? Isyuram ajusshi?”

“Yes, I’m a little tired playing here so I thought of going somewhere else. And I have a reason to go to where people congregate. Giran is the nearest city around here? Then it would be better to go with someone who knows the way.”

“R-really? I would like that.”

“Okay, then let’s go.”

Isyuram finished the remaining alcohol and jumped up. Then he escorted Sid towards Giran. Of course, it wasn’t an entirely pleasant trip. They were attacked a few times by monsters. But honestly, Sid was more scared of Isyuram after the fights than the monsters.

“Huhuhu, it’s no big deal. This small amount is....Kuaaaak!”

Every time a battle finished, Isyuram would turn pale and look like he was suffering from a seizure. After the seizure, he would just get up and cook the monster.

“Hmm hmm hmm, the meat of a troll is quite tough? But it’s good when I chew it. It’s juicy so it would taste a lot better once the meat softens.”

Any troll who heard that would be frightened. Anyway, the trip filled with terror and thrills ended after half a day. Sid sighed with relief after crossing Giran’s gates.

“Thank you. I was able to reach here safely thanks to ajusshi.”

“Hahaha, I wasn’t bored thanks to you.”

“What are you going to do now?”

“Well.....”

Isyuram scratched his head. Ever since starting the game, it was the first time he had been to a place with so many people. He had been buried in the mountains and now suddenly there was a busy city with lots of noise and people.

‘I can just wander around. But the problem is.....’

Money. When Isyuram received the character, his bag had 800 gold. But his funds was empty because he bought the 10 gold sake and went on a drinking spree.

He would drink a bottle whenever he ate a monster.

‘I suffer so much fighting the monsters so what fun will the game be if I can’t drink?’

Isyuram was finally able to drink during working hours so he went overboard. Isyuram explained the circumstances to Sid who sighed.

“I’m sorry. I don’t have any money right now.....”

“Ah, no. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not asking for money.”

“But.....”

Sid used vague language and lifted his head.

“Oh, then wouldn’t ajusshi have a ridiculously amount of japtem in your bags?”

He remembered that Isyuram would put the japtem from the monsters he killed in his bag with a grunt while they were travelling together. Then Isyuram nodded.

“Yes, then I can get money from selling those things?”

“Eh? Ajusshi, haven’t you conducted any deals as a merchant?”

“Well, there are circumstances.....”

“Hah, I really can’t understand you ajusshi. If you don’t like engaging in business then why are you a merchant? Well, in these circumstances I guess I can help you. Ajusshi can sell it directly, but if a merchant like me sells it then you will receive a lot more money.”

Sid had a conceited expression on his face as he spoke.

“Hehehe, my trading skill is actually quite high. I’d be able to get at least 30% more profit. Usually I would charge a fee but for ajusshi I’ll do it for free.”

“Oh, really? Then please.”

Isyuram’s expression brightened and he opened his bag. Sid became surprised and quickly shook his head.

“Don’t just hand your things directly over!”

“Eh? Why?”

“You really don’t know anything. I might run away with your items of course. Whenever conducting a deal, you should receive a contract first.”

Why did he have to explain this to a level 150 merchant? Isyuram really seemed to know nothing so Sid explained while drawing up the contract.

-Merchant’s Agreement.

<Contractor: Isyuram=Sid>

Sid will sell all the items received from Isyuram and return all the proceeds. The sale price has to be higher than the purchase price. There will be no sales fee for this service.

“Take a good look. Any time you give something to a merchant, you should always receive this contract. In some cases, the person will sell it for a lower purchase price just to raise his skill so you should always add the provision that it should be higher than the purchase price.

“How complicated.”

“You’ll soon get used to it. Now, please hand me the items.”

Sid smiled and began the trade. Sid was soon handed the items in the bag. Isyuram didn’t know how to buy or sell goods. Of course, most of what he carried was monsters’ leather. But Isyuram also handed over expensive trade goods and specialty products.

‘Where the hell did he get all these items? Coral silk, pearls.....aren’t these speciality items from the southern region? They’re worth 700 gold. No, I could receive 800 gold for them. What else will there be? Eh? T-this is.....!’

Sid’s face stiffened as he was handed something.

“Huh? What’s the matter?”

“Ah, it’s nothing.” You will sell all of these?”

“Yes, will it make money? I do not know.....”

“Well, let’s see? I won’t know until I sell it. I’ll check the market price for the moment and sell it at the right price. Let’s meet back here after 1 hour.”

Sid muttered before quickly running to the shops area. Then he halted in an alley and quickly opened the bag.

“C-clearly....is it that?”

Yes, the item that Isyuram gave was 'that.' The unicorn horns that Sid took out a loan to buy! And there were 4 instead of just one. To make matters worse, the purchase price was set at 850 gold when he investigated using his merchant skills. Currently the market price was 1,000 gold so that was 150 gold cheaper.

'Then the person who bought the unicorn horns before I arrived in the village was Isyuram ajusshi? If he doesn't know how to conduct business then he did he get the money to buy these?'

His heart had pounded as soon as he saw the unicorn horns. Anyway, Isyuram didn't know the market price for this item. Of course the contract said he had to sell it at a higher price than the purchase price, but wasn't 851 gold higher than 850? When considered Ark's quoted price of 1,000 gold, Sid would receive 149 gold. Then he could make a profit of 596 gold? But he had already written the agreement as the sales agent. Sid couldn't snatch the item in the middle. In addition, Sid had a credit note. He could use it in NPC run shops or auctions but it couldn't be changed to cash directly. And it wasn't possible to explain the situation to Isyuram. He would have to explain the market price value first..... What crazy guy would sell it for 851 gold when he knew that it was worth 1,000 gold?

'There is a way.'

In fact, Sid's chest pounded for this reason. He knew a method to snatch the unicorn horns for 851 gold. However, Isyuram had rescued him. And didn't it continue to accumulate on the way here? Even though money was at stake, to betray that person's trust.....

'No! Why wouldn't I?'

Sid wildly shook his head.

'Haven't I lived honestly so far? And all I ended up with was a debt of 3,600 gold. Just like Ark-nim said. Only fools get tricked in this world! Why can't I do as Ark-nim said? That's right, chances like this won't always come. I have to grasp the chance whenever possible!'

After being debt-stricken, Sid had become corrupted like Ark. Sid made up his mind and put the unicorn horns in a suitable size box before heading to a nearby store. He passed the box to the NPC of the merchants guild and said.

“I’m sorry, I have urgent reasons so there is no time to visit an auction. So can you put this item on the blind auction at the merchants guild? The condition is that it will be sold immediately when the asking price is met. And if possible, I don’t want to reveal my name.”

“It’s not a difficult thing. I understand. You just have to pay a handling fee and it will be put up for auction under the name of the merchants guild.”

“Thank you.”

Sid paid the fee and immediately ran to the blind auction room. After standing in front of the auction place, the NPC finally bought the box and registered it 10 minutes later. If he needed to explain again, nothing in the blind auction could be touched. In other words, there was no way to figure out what was in the box. However, Sid had set the selling price as 3,404 gold, the price of 4 unicorn horns at 851 gold each. Of course there was no way it would sell. Sid visited the auction house and quickly spoke to the NPC.

“I’ll buy this box!”

“Huh, this? You have no idea what the contents are and it is 3,404 gold.....that is a tremendous gamble. I understand. Then can you pay immediately?”

“I have this credit note issued by the merchant’s guild.”

“Well, you have enough credit. I understand. It will be addressed immediately.”

The salesroom NPC signed and deducted 3,404 gold from the 4,000 credit note. When Sid paid off the loan, he would only have to pay the 3,404 used at the auction and the interest. So he managed to obtain the unicorn horns without one penny. In fact, the person who came up with this method of deception was Ark. If he wanted to sell

his items in a blind auction then he would use the services of the merchant's guild. Even without any money, all he had to do was pay the handling fee to the merchant's guild and he wouldn't suffer an actual loss.

'What I learned then really worked!'

Sid carried the box joyfully. After selling the other items at the stores and visiting the merchants guild, he managed to obtain the 3,404 in gold. Even after paying the merchants guild 40 gold, he still received 556 gold. Now Sid would receive that money after passing the unicorn horns to Ark.

"Huk huk huk, I've finished. I got a lot more than I thought."

After a while, Sid returned to where he promised to meet Isyuram. Then he handed over the money made from laundering the japtem.

"Oh, 4,580 gold! Those items were that expensive?"

"Yes, if you look at the receipts then you'll see I got them for more than the market value."

"Hey, I'm lucky I met you! I'll treat you since I have money now. Where is the most expensive tavern?"

"No, that's okay. I have somewhere to be right now."

"Really? Unfortunately it can't be helped. Now, this is a tip."

Isyuram held out 100 gold. Ah, he really was scamming this ajusshi! Sid's conscious was poked.....for a moment. He was already scammed once. What use was feeling bad? Anyway, the world was filled with stupid, gullible people. Sid kept in mind Ark's words and took the gold from Isyuram.

'Hehehe, I did it! I earned 656 gold!'

Sid felt no remorse once he got his hands on the money. Ark's 2nd generation merchant was truly growing up in this heartless city of Giran. Hehehe, those useless things were worth so much money. I never would've known if not for Sid. I'm glad I met such a nice guy."

Isyuram was unaware that he had been scammed by Sid and muttered this. Well, merchants in Giran should always be aware of other merchants eager to fill their purses. The future of Isyuram who didn't know this world was still unknown.

New Hobby

Pa pa pa pa! Pa pa pa pa!

Dust rose in the endlessly stretching wilderness. Crossing the wilderness at a tremendous speed was a lizard kicking up dust! It was Radun transformed into Radunma. Of course, riding on its back was Ark, Lariette and Buksil.

“How long do we have left?”

Ark checked the map and answered Lariette’s question.

“We’ve gone about 1/3rd of the way. We should arrive in a day.”

“That’s awesome. It took a fortnight when we were going to the Forest of Life.....”

“It’s all thanks to this guy.”

Ark patted Radun’s neck with a proud look. Lariette also sent an admiring look to Radun.

“But I never imagined that your snake could change. He can store items and also change into a mount. Dedric and Razak.....are also uncommon. I’ve seen a lot of people summon but this is the first time I’ve seen such pets. Where did you get them?”

“How many times do I have to say it? This body is not a normal summon. I’m a nobleman! And what do you think I am? A bonus gift that can be given away? Those remarks are species discrimination!”

Dedric lost his temper and pulled Lariette’s hair.

“Yayayaya, sorry, I’m sorry.”

“Shut up, humans are just.....”

Dedric shouted in a rough voice. However, Lariette just poke her fingers into Dedric’s stomach and laughed.

“I said I was sorry. This child, don’t be upset. I’ll be careful next time.”

“Ugh, ugh, ugh! W-where are you touching? Don’t, don’t touch there! They are sensitive areas. That tickles! Ugh, ugh!”

“Then tell me you’re not angry. Or do you want me to continue tickling you?”

“This is really.....ugh, ugh understood. I understand!”

“Hohoho, thank you.”

“Huk huk huk.....there is no respect for adults these days.”

Dedric crumpled and gasped for a short time. But although he complained, his face seemed strangely satisfied. In fact, this was the part that surprised Ark lately. In the past, Lariette would hesitate whenever Dedric spoke meanly. However, Dedric had been training her in tactics for a fortnight. Now Lariette didn’t even lift an eyebrow at Dedric’s harsh tone. No, sometimes she dealt with his pet better than Ark. And he realised why Lariette dealt so well with his summons.

“My parents used to raise many pets at home. Ark-nim’s summons are similar to those pets.”

“Pets?”

“Yes, Dedric resembles a Chihuahua and Razak doesn’t speak so he resembles a Siberian Husky. And Radun looks like a chameleon.”

Luxurious names of animals worth millions of won emerged from her mouth. Ark never had a pet so it was incomprehensible to him why people would raise one. Of course owning a pet would be useful. He heard that it soothed loneliness and helped children talk. However, he couldn’t comprehend spending a few million won on one and then wasting money buying pet food for it. Besides once they were tired of them, they would discard it like old handbags. Humans were indeed despicable. Oh, his thoughts were wandering.

At any rate, it wasn’t a problem he would think too deeply about.

‘Well, Lariette-nim isn’t such a person.....’

Then, he sensed some movement as they passed a group of trees.

“Radun, stop.”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun stopped moving and breathed harshly. Razak was transformed while Dedric was in his bat form, but Radun had to carry Ark, Lariette and Buksil and became completely exhausted.

“Dedric, take a look at that copse of trees. I think I see some Tuntun?”

Ark immediately commanded Dedric once they stopped. Dedric checked out the thicket and flew back in amazement.

“Whoa! That’s amazing. How did you see them amongst all of that?”

“It’s money.”

Ark replied with a wide grin.

If they wound back the time a little bit.....a few days ago, Ark though he had finally complete the <Genius Alchemist’s Laboratory> quest.

It wasn’t necessary to say, but dealing with the sense of loss after all his expectations wasn’t easy. But Ark had found a clue so he was positive he would solve it soon.

Magaro had written in his diary that the ‘phenomenon happened a long time ago in the Netherworld.’ Didn’t that mean there would be more people who knew about what occurred in the laboratory? And Beseutyu was an expert in the history of the Netherworld. It must’ve been a great global event that happened all across the Netherworld. There had to be a record associated with it. So Ark was determined to hurry back to the valley village. His mind became really impatient to solve the quest. He couldn’t afford to be distracted from completing the quest. However, this was different.

Of course Ark was impatient. He wanted to return to the village as quickly and avoid combat if possible. But if he saw a monster with a

high probability of dropping the best items then it was different.

“Radun, let’s take a break here. Buksil, wait here while Lariette will come with me.”

Ark got off Radun and approached the thicket. While he called it a wilderness, it wasn’t simple an empty plain. In some copses, there were many monsters that lived together. Ark discovered that monsters called Tuntun were gathered in those thickets.

Puswi-! Puswi-!

They were huge boar like monsters with sharp fangs and a blackened snout. The Tuntun wandered the wilderness in groups and possessed enormous attack and stamina.

“Huhuhu, I’ve found some good guys.”

Ark mumbled as he confirmed the Tuntun and drooled. It was challenging to hunt the Tuntun but they gave a lot of experience. In addition, the fangs dropped by the Tuntun were items that the Baran clan liked a lot. It was possible to exchange 3~4 fangs for the ‘Umma’s Sap,’ which was equivalent to an advanced recovery item. They would be worth 20 gold in middle earth. The quality of the leather and meat was also better than other monsters.

“Discovering 6 Tuntun at the same time is lucky.”

“Are we using the same tactics we used last time?”

Lariette asked in a manner that showed she was accustomed to battle.

“Yes, me and Razak will enter from the front and strike first. Lariette-nim and Dedric help out from behind.”

“What buffs?”

“Well.....6 of them won’t be a burden so go with set of three offensive buffs.”

Ark thought for a moment and replied. Ark and Lariette had already become used to playing in a party. After training with Ark, Dedric and

Razak, her skill proficiency and level had steadily risen. Lariette had changed professions at level 150 and now her Innocence Knight skills rose every time she levelled up. She was now level 180 and had achieved all the buffing skills previously shown by Alan. Ark had access to a large variety of buffs depending on the situation.

“You should organize your buffs and have a system for them.”

Ark suggested to Lariette.

An Innocence Knight was a similar profession to Holy Knight. The biggest advantage of a Holy Knight was that its buffs could be stacked up 3 times. The characteristics of the party would be determined by how they utilized the buffs. Stacking defense buffs would make a party strong in an endurance battle while stacking magic amplifiers would create a party strong in magic combat. An Innocence Knight was an all-rounder profession with almost all types of buffs. Then shouldn't they be properly utilized?

Ark tested various kinds of buffs and the ones associated with them for research. He divided them into 3 types, offensive, defensive and average. After Ark's command, Lariette immediately used the offensive type buffs.

“The great warrior's soul.....Hero's Spirit, Warrior's Concentration, Storm Breathing!”

Hero's Spirit increased damage by 10%! Warrior's Concentration increased the probability of a critical hit by 20%! Meanwhile, Storm Breathing increased the attack speed of his weapon by 10%! When armed with those 3 buffs, his abilities quickly rose.

‘Well, I would rather use Dark Lamp but.....’

Ark looked down at the Dark Lamp hanging on his waist. It was an item that gave him the 40% dark attribute bonus during the day! At first he fell for its charm and used it recklessly. It consumed 10 magic ingredients but he didn't think it was that important since he gathered a lot. But when continuously used, it was a surprisingly expensive burden. In addition, he became so familiar with Dark Lamp that battles become more difficult if he didn't use it.

‘This is not good. The addiction is hard to break.’

Ark sensed the looming crisis. People who played the game would understand that it was like having good equipment and then suddenly changing to worse ones. Using the Dark Lamp was no different. It wasn’t an easy habit to break once he got a taste of it.

‘It’s difficult. Unlike food, magic ingredients can be sold in stores. Magic ingredients can be obtained in the fields but it is still wasting money.’

On the other hand, Lariette’s buffs raised his stats less but it was free. Besides, she had recovery magic so there was no reason to use the Dark Lamp.

“I’ll go first, Demonic Opening!”

Ark used demonic opening and immediately plunged into the copse of trees. That was the good point of Lariette. When he used Demonic Opening, it drained his health so he could only use it for a few minutes. Considering the damage dealt by the enemies, he could fight for approximately 5 minutes? However, it was different if there was a recovery user behind him.

Kiyaaaaaak!

Ghostly wails emerged from Gwisal’s sword. The eerie aura caused the Tuntun to jump and become aggressive. At the same time, five of the Tuntun rushed towards him. The huge wild boars ran up to him and it seemed like he would be tackled by a mountain. However, they just looked like a flock of lucky pigs to Ark.

“Okay, I’ll eat well. Elemental sword, Fire attribute. Flash!

A flash of light penetrated the Tuntun and they were engulfed in flames. Ark was especially fond of the Warrior’s Concentration buff. Ark’s critical hit probability was originally very high. When he attacked three or four times, it was highly likely that there would be at least one critical hit. When the additional 20% was added, two or three hits was likely to be a critical hit. The critical hits combined with the extra damage of Demonic Opening and Elemental sword was no joke.

.....Such skill combination was an basic example.

‘As expected, the effect of combining skills is greater with hero related professions.’

Ark realized that fact once again. The Saint Assassin Shambala, Holy Knight Alan, Dark Walker Ark..... So far, Ark had confirmed three hero professions. They were unable to wreck as much havoc if they grouped up with unrelated professions. The power of a hero related profession was only shown 100% when they partied with other hero professions. Of course that applied to other professions as well, but the synergy effect for hero professions was stronger as demonstrated in the Evil Silrion. And Lariette also had the Holy Knight hero profession!

‘I don’t know if it was intentionally created but the skills of the hero professions really complements each other. Indeed, the legendary 7 heroes grouped up during the Dark Century so it is natural.....’

“Razak, stop the Tuntun’s attacking from behind!”

Clack clack clack clack!

Ark trusted his back to Razak and plunged into the group of Tuntun.

Kweeeeeek, Kwaeeeeek!

His sword swung all over the place and the pigs squealed as some of them collapsed. It was at a level where he could stand picking his nose and still win. However, Ark deliberately drove two Tuntun with half of their health left towards Lariette. A mentor could not overlook their pupil’s growth. He had time to give Lariette more hands on practice.

“Lariette-nim, take care of those two.”

“Yes, I understand!”

Lariette had experienced this many times and replied calmly. She grasped her shield and stood, with Dedric shout coinciding with the timing.

“Now, Shield Stroke!”

Tak, daeng kang-!

The correct timing! The fiercely rushing Tuntun was stuck by the shield and retreated. But the eyes of the training assistant still saw it as lacking. Dedric lifted her curtain of hair and yelled into her ears.

“You idiot! How many times do I have to say it? Your weight was tilted too far forward. Then you won’t be able to connect your later movements quickly enough!”

“Oh? Ouch!”

Dedric’s comment was indeed very keen. While Lariette’s weight was tilted too forward, the other Tuntun rushed in and crashed into her side.

“Look, what did I say? You must always anticipate the enemy’s movements and calculate your next movement based on that. Hey, what are you doing now? You really haven’t learnt! Hey, pig. Look at me! Come one~”

While Lariette was on the ground, Dedric provoked the Tuntun. Of course it fell for the taunt. When the Tuntun snorted and turned towards him, Dedric instantly ran away. In fact, Dedric was only level 140 while the Tuntun was level 200 so he couldn’t face it 1-on-1. But he didn’t forget to show off.

“Okay, I’ll take care of this guy for now. Can you handle the other one?”

“Yes, thank you. I can do it.”

Lariette got up and wiped off the dust. Ah, what a complete attitude change! It was a big development compared to when she would become embarrassed about the situation. Seems like.....she truly grew up strong. But honestly, it was still difficult to expect much from Lariette in a warrior’s role. It was not simply a matter of battle sense. In fact, Lariette received an enormous penalty when she changed to Innocence Knight. Even with getting 50% of her skill points, her stats were still fixed based on her previous profession. In other words, the points that she invested in wisdom and intelligence were still intact even after she became a knight. Of course, she

needed strength, agility and stamina for close combat. Even after pouring all the points she got from levelling up into strength, agility and stamina, it still wasn't enough strength for close combat. That's why she fell down after the Tuntun just slightly rammed her. This problem wasn't something that Ark could solve. She had no choice but to level quickly and raise the stat points.

'Still, her force is pretty good compared to the first practice. But that's a little.....'

Ark smiled wryly as he stared at Lariette.

"Yap, yap, yap, yap!"

Lariette hopped around the Tuntun and brandished her sword. The problem was the movement. Taekwondo was the style Ark frequently used. He didn't know when but Lariette had somehow picked it up and her style of swinging the sword and evading attacks resembled Ark. Well, it was inevitably seeing as Ark was the only close combat warrior she had observed.....it was impossible for Ark's face not to become hot.

"Kyaaa, I did it!"

Lariette had finally defeated the Tuntun. However, she couldn't rejoice before Dedric who was being chased by the Tuntun shouted.

"Late! And slow! Huk huk huk, hurry up and deal with this guy!"

"Understood. Leave it to me! Yap, yap!"

Lariette couldn't recover her breathing before she was forced to swing her sword. At that time, Ark and Razak finished killing the rest of the Tuntun. And they leisurely sat around watching Lariette fight.

"What do you think Razak?" Hasn't it become a lot better from the first time you saw it?"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak folded his arms and nodded.

"Huhuhu, it's all thanks to hammering it into her body."

Then Lariette had transferred the monster off Dedric who puffed up and pretended to strut. And he threw sympathetic glances towards the last Tuntun.

“What a poor thing.”

Kweeeek-! Kweek-!

The Tuntun was bleeding heavily after the desperate struggle with Lariette. If Ark was his opponent then it would've already died multiple times. But unfortunately (?) Lariette's damage was low. Her swordsmanship was shabby. The Tuntun's level was also higher so she could only deal 50~100 damage with each attack. Thus she had to stab it a lot more than Ark before the Tuntun would collapse. Thanks to that, the Tuntun was hacked until it resembled mangled rag. Didn't it seem like the Tuntun was sending glances at Ark asking to liberate it? But Ark didn't see the pitiful look in the Tuntun's eyes. Lariette skipped around and imitated Ark. Ark laughed involuntarily and murmured.

“Isn't it quite cute?”

Then Dedric opened his eyes and winced.

“M-master, your character is gloomy..... No, frankly it is too evil. Being happy when you're not tormenting us.....somehow it is not normal. Anyway, now I know for sure! Master has indeed changed.....

“.....Say one more thing about my character and you're dead.”

Ark declared sharply, making Dedric jump and mutter.

“What the? What normal person would look at the mangled dying Tuntun and find it cute?”

“This idiot! Who would consider the boar cute? I mean.....”

“Kyaaa, I did it!”

Lariette's joyful shout was heard over the fierce scream.

‘Certainly.....’

Ark wore an unpleasant smile. The Tuntun had completely stiffened while its blood was scattered all over the trees. And in the middle of that bloody scene was a woman rejoicing while holding a sword. If dark and dreary music was used then it would seem like the climax of a horror movie. Yet she still seemed pretty.....was his head slightly off?

“What are you talking about?”

Lariette rubbed the blood off her face and approached. Damn, it's a foul. Why does that still seem pretty?

“No big deal. Just discussing how Master's personality.....hah!”

Ark grabbed Dedric's snout and awkwardly laughed.

“No, we were talking about how Lariette's skills has become a lot better.”

“Really? You see that?”

Lariette blushed at the praise. A little bit of Ark's soul was gone but he fiercely nodded.

“Yes, with a little more practice you can travel anywhere alone.”

“Alone”

Loneliness shone in Lariette's eyes for a moment. Ark was puzzled by the abrupt change in her mood.

“What's wrong?”

“Ah, nothing. By the way.....perhaps Ark-nim.....”

“Hey, thanks for the good work.”

Lariette hesitated before opening her mouth.

“Wipe off the blood with this.”

Buksil had been watching the battle from afar and quickly ran over with a towel. The pig clearly intended to flatter her.

“You were wonderful once again. In particular, Lariette's skills has

become noticeably better. All I could do was admire it.”

However, Ark ignored him and asked Lariette.

“What were you planning to say? You were wondering?”

“It’s nothing. Will we continued resting her before going?”

“Huh? Ah, yes..... Radun needs to rest for a bit and I need to recover my mana.....”

“Then I’ll go with Buksil to collect some branches.”

Lariette acted strange as she dragged Buksil away.

‘Eh? Why all of a sudden? Did I do something wrong?’

Ark gazed after her and scratched his head. This wasn’t the only time. A few days ago.....Lariette had also acted strange after exiting Magaro’s laboratory. She would study Ark’s face before suddenly changed the topic in the middle or running off to avoid him.

‘I thought we’ve become friends so why is she suddenly acting like this?’

Ark’s poor imagination could only think of one thing.

‘Maybe I’ve acted too freely and made her uncomfortable? That might be it. We’ve been travelling together due to various circumstances but Lariette-nim has a boyfriend. I’ve tried to be careful but I might’ve done something unknowingly which made her uncomfortable.’

However, it was a misunderstanding. Of course, Ark had a crush on her but it was far from romantic. At first she was a person to yearn after and then she became a reliable colleague.....he never imagined anything other than that. And Ark thought that Alan was Lariette’s boyfriend. Although Ark didn’t like Alan, he wasn’t going to act presumptuously. So Ark never said a word about Alan to Lariette. It would be impossible for Ark to say anything good about Alan. He didn’t want to become a person who talked badly about her man in front of the woman. In addition, talking about her boyfriend could also lead to a misunderstanding.

‘I don’t know if she had misunderstood my instinctive behaviour. When Lariette-nim returns, it is better to tell her indirectly.’

“Then shall I pack the loot?”

Ark went over to the Tuntun holding the Butcher’s Knife.

-You have succeeded in gathering the ‘Tuntun’s Leather.’ However, the leather had been too damaged so it will not be a useful product.
--

‘Of course.....’

Ark sighed as he looked at the tattered leather. Whenever he skinned the leather of monsters Lariette killed, it was highly likely that he would receive this message. The leather had been damaged because of too many injuries. However Ark didn’t mind that much. Although he was pained that the leather couldn’t be used anymore, skinning the leather still raised the experience for his skill. Ark would rather raise Leather Extraction then earn money because he wanted to make the Necromancer’s Immortality pill.

“We’re back.”

After a while Lariette and Buksil returned. Ark had finished gathering all the leather and meat so he opened his mouth.

“That.....Lariette-nim, what you wanted to say earlier.....”

“Oh god, it is already this time. I have to stop playing now.”

Lariette suddenly said. Then Buksil who had been building the campfire jumped and said.

“You’re leaving already?”

“Already? It is 3 a.m.”

“.....Okay. I’ll be waiting here.”

Ark once again missed the timing to talk and sighed before nodding. Then Lariette hesitated just before disconnecting.

“I’m really sorry.”

“Huh? For what?”

“Isn’t it inconvenient because of me? You’ve been teaching me and you have to wait for a long time whenever I disconnect.....”

“Aye, stop saying those things. I told you. You don’t have to worry.”

“But.....”

“I really don’t mind.”

Ark scratched his head as Lariette smiled and nodded.

“Thank you. It’s really lucky that I met Ark-nim. Then I’ll see you this afternoon.”

“Afternoon?”

“It is the weekend.”

“Ah, it’s already the weekend. I’ve lost track of time. Then I should go for a run this afternoon.”

“Hohoho, okay. I’ll see you as soon as possible.”

Lariette laughed and exited. After Lariette left, Buksil studied Ark’s face and jumped up.

“Oh Ark-nim, I’ll go and collect ingredients!”

“What? I have a lot saved so I don’t urgently need ingredients.”

“Then what will I do? I’m not helpful in a fight so I must do something to help out.”

“That attitude is quite desirable but.....”

“I will go straight away!”

Buksil ran into the forest without waiting for an answer. Then Dedric muttered with confusion.

“What’s up with that guy lately? He flatters you generously and trembles whenever you talk to him..... Master, did you beat him up again?”

“Am I a bully? Always beating people up?”

“Then why is he acting like that with you? It’s shameful to see.”

“Leave it alone. There’s no need to stop it.”

Ark laughed and shook his head since he knew the reason. A few days ago, Buksil had been full of complaints but now he was the model of a pig. The reason he changed was because of what appeared on the broadcast. This was why Buksil became strained. He was afraid that he had exposed his ulterior motive in Magaro’s Laboratory. In fact, Ark already knew about Buksil’s ulterior motive beforehand. He also guessed what Buksil tried to do. However, Buksil never dreamed that Ark already knew and thought that he had made the mistake of a lifetime.

‘That Ark bastard is quick to understand. Obviously he noticed something suspicious. What should I do? If he starts wondering about the situation then it will become complicated..... In the worst case situation, my ‘secret weapon’ might not even be used. That absolutely can’t happen!’

He had sacrificed his two brothers and his liver to accompany Ark. If Ark abandoned him then it would all be useless. Buksil felt the crisis so he was trying not to offend Ark. And he would avoid Ark as much as possible whenever they were left alone. Truly....it really was a painful effort. However, Buksil wasn’t only afraid of that.

“Then shall I begin?”

As soon as Ark was alone, he opened his bag and took out some colourful materials. Ark had started a new hobby. Yes, it was inconvenient that Lariette was an office worker so she would often disconnect. But Ark truly didn’t care. It might’ve been annoying hunting in the same area for several hours but that wasn’t a problem with his new hobby. His hobby was the Herbal Decoction that he learned from his Food Worshipper sub-profession!

“Huhuhu, this surprisingly has a lot of depth.”

Ark started making herbal medicines. At first he considered it a skill to make potions. But he changed his mind after trying a few tests. The results of Herbal Decoction could be divided into three types. The first time Ark used Herbal Decoction, he created a sticky mucus. Since it wasn't possible to eat it, Ark checked the information window.

-You have successfully made a 'Salve' for the first time.

Salve: a herbal remedy which can treat the simplest of trauma. Depending on the type of salve used, you can treat sprains, bruises, arthritis, bleeding and other status effects.

<When putting the relevant salve on the part that is creating a status effect, you can recover from that abnormal state. However, it has no effect on Stun or other mental type afflictions>

"A treatment that can cure abnormal states!"

Ark's eyes popped out. Bruises and sprains decreased his movement and attack speed. In addition, states like arthritis usually lasted for a few hours and were a nuisance. Of course, using potions would heal those states but the price wasn't cheap and he couldn't always carry the potions around with him. So Ark just suffered through it.

"But it's another story if I can make it directly. And I can also sell it."

The salves had different effects depending on the colour. Red and yellow, white, black etc... respectively, it would work on bleeding, bruises and sprains. Unfortunately, he couldn't really utilize it yet. They also had ratings. Of course a treatment would have ratings. Ark's current salves could only cure lower ranked injuries. On the other hand, the monsters in the Netherworld inflicted advanced status effects.

"I have to raise the skill proficiency before I can create higher level salves."

Since then, Ark created salves every time there was a break. Then he managed to create another form of medicine. It was a herbal

medicine which gave off a sweet, fragrant smell.

-You have successfully made a 'Tonic' for the first time.

Tonic: A herbal extract that was created after boiling the ingredients for a long time. A tonic is an effective supplement which can give long-term effects. However, you won't see much of an effect if you only take it for a short time. In order to see the effect properly, you must continue taking it over a long period of time.

<When you take the tonic steadily, your various stats will increase. However, you have to take it for a minimum of 30 days to 80 days in game time in order to see a proper effect. Taking the tonic will slowly raise your stats. There will be a penalty if you stop in the middle of taking the tonic>

"Huk, what the? Herbal medicines can also raise stats?"

Ark really felt like he had found a treasure. It was possible to make medicines that would raise stats? He never imagined it. In fact, there were alchemy recipes for drugs that would boost strength or stamina by 1~3. But such drugs were incredibly expensive because of the amount of magic ingredients required to create them. The expensive price was set at 100~500 gold. But he could create tonics using common ingredients!

"But it's a little vague."

Ark scratched his head and muttered. He wasn't able to create a useful tonic yet. Since his skill was still at the beginners level, Ark was only able to create tonics that raised his attack by +1. And taking it for a period of 30 days.....that was 10 days in reality. He had to produce it 30 times in 10 days in order to raise his damage by 1. In addition, he couldn't take overlapping tonics. He could only take one type at a time. But there was no need to be disappointed.

"After all, I can create it for a much lower price than alchemy potions. And once the skill increases then I will be able to make tonics that increase strength or agility. Then I can sell it in sets of 30 or 180 at the auction for a lucrative price."

Ark was already excited by the thought of selling the tonics. Of course, Ark registered all the tonic recipes before eating one. Eating it for 10 days would only increase his attack by 1, but it was still better than nothing. And the most problematic was the herbal tea.

You have successfully created a herbal tea for the first time.

Herbal Tea: One of the simplest and most convenient ways to create a herbal medicine. Unlike the tonic, the effect will immediately show after drinking the herbal tea. In addition, you can overlap and it is possible to drink several different types. However, the effect is only temporary and runs out quickly.

<The special effect and duration will depend on what you drink>

“What? The effect is similar to Survival Cooking? Then why would I bother to make a herbal tea?”

Ark asked with frustration. Ark’s survival cooking was at the master level. Once his skill rose, the effects of his dishes also rose. There were a few additional effects such as strength +20, magic resistance +20% and etc. It was to the extent that the battle would become easier once he ate some dishes. There was no reason to consume ingredients to create the low ranking herbal tea. However, Ark found a strange area in the explanation of the herbal tea.

“Eh? What is this? Why are my eyes drawn to the additional effects section?”

The side effects attached to the herbal tea was not raising strength, agility or damage. Thus his eyes stared at the description.

“What does this mean?”

Ark struggled for the moment while thinking. However, Ark knew from experience that variables in items existed. He couldn’t determine what it was until he drank it. Therefore Ark tried an experiment using livestock. The target was the pig he was raising.....Bukasil.

“How is it? Do you feel anything different?”

Ark asked after Buksil drank the herbal tea. However, Buksil just shook his head.

“Let’s see? I don’t feel like anything has changed.”

“Really? Strange? I understand. Tell me if you felt anything different.”

“Huh? What! Something strange? Did you feed me something suspicious?”

“No. It’s good for the body.”

Ark said with disappointment.

‘Damn, what the? Then it was just a standard tea?’

But after a while the effect of the herbal tea was clear.

“Huh? What’s this? What the? Why is it so easy to gather ingredients? Ohhhhh, and I can pick it this quickly.....! It doesn’t seem like my hands!”

Buksil burst out as he quickly gathered ingredients. When Ark went to look, he saw Buksil’s hands frantically move as it gathered ingredients. In addition, he continued digging without hesitation despite the high failure rate. With a flash, Ark realized what was happening.

‘This is the effect attached to the herbal tea!’

Ark finally discovered the secret of the herbal tea and immediately created another one to feed to Buksil.

“Oh, what is this? All of a sudden the ingredients look really good? There are even delicacies hiding in the shade of the tree. Ugh, what? Why have my steps become so fast? The ingredients are also very easy to dig. I feel like I’m the master of Ingredient Foraging!”

Buksil ran around all over the place like Superman and collected ingredients. Thanks to him, Ark’s supplies started to accumulate in his bag. The effects attached to the herbal teas was truly for beggars!

‘The herbal teas allowed Buksil to gather all the ingredients in the

vicinity. Okay, in the future Lariette will continue her training while I leave the ingredient foraging to Buksil.'

Ark decided to use the herbal teas after learning of its effects. However.....there was a side effect Ark never expected from this skill. He made Buksil drink herbal teas for the whole day. After drinking the herbal tea again, Buksil started to feel a tingling spread around his body.

"Eh? What is this? Ugh, itchy! Itchy! Ugh, I'm going crazy!"

Buksil screamed as he frantically clawed at his body. Ark examined Buksil's body with surprise and a message window appeared.

You have used the special nature of Food Worshipper to feel Buksil's 'pulse' and made a diagnosis.

Buksil's symptoms is due to poisoning from a drug overdose.

The herbal tea is weak but it is still a medicinal drug. If someone consumes too many varieties in a short period of time then they will suffer some symptoms until it is cleansed from their body. In the worst case scenario, it can permanently destroy a certain stat. Fortunately, Buksil's symptoms are not serious and he will recover in 8 hours.

'The effects are so severe it can damage a stat? Lucky I tested it out on Buksil.'

Ark really admired his foresight.

"Ah Ark-nim, what did you learn? My body.....Aigoo, why is it doing this?"

"Huh? Ah, it's no big deal. You should recover in approximately 8 hours?"

"Huk!8 hours? I have to stay in this state for 8 hours?"

Buksil turned pale at Ark's answer. Then he truly experienced hell for 8 hours. From then on. Buksil became even more afraid of Ark. Well, it's not like Ark made him abuse the teas after that. Buksil was sick

in the heart.....but it didn't make a difference. Despite his illness, Buksil was still forced to gather ingredients. The important labour needed good management after all.

'Huhuhu, this is just another weapon to intimidate Buksil with.'

So Ark's wickedness increased even more.

Buksil the House Pig?

“Character information window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good +400	
Fame	9,125 (+500)	Level	280
Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Abandoned, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer	
Health	4,360 (+150)	Mana	4,350
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	563 (+28)
Agility	723 (+55)	Stamina	823 (+20)
Wisdom	107 (+10)	Intelligence	842
Luck	103 (+30)	Flexibility	112
Art of Communication	46	Affection	152 (+10)
Resilience	305		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			

Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10

*<King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20

Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3

Wind Spirit's Boots (Shoes): Agility + 30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Slide' available

Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense

Ark had gained 7 levels after defeating Magaro and he gained 4 more on the way back to the village, raising his level to 280.

‘It is a lot better than hunting by myself.’

Ark nodded with a pleased face. He was quite satisfied with the current party. It wasn't necessary to explain, but Ark had been sceptical of hunting in parties. The reason was very simple. Just like most online games, New World provided additional experience when hunting in parties. Depending on the number of people in the group, it could range from 100% to 400%. At first glance it seemed like a bonus, but it was a problem once he considered that the experience had to be shared by the party members. Let's just say that a monster would give between 1,000-4,000 experience. When divided by 10 people, that was only 400 experience at most. Of course it was quicker and more sustainable than hunting alone.

That wasn't the only disadvantage of hunting with a party. The biggest problem wasn't when hunting but what happened after the monster was killed. Anyone with experience in online games knew that there were several types of item distribution. The most widely used approaches were the 'Turn and Roll' based methods. The 'Turn' method used rotated the members who would receive the item. And the 'Roll' method made players roll for the item if a magic or higher item dropped, with priority given to the related profession and the user who rolled the highest number would obtain the item. It was a system that seemed fair when looking at it. But the actual situation wasn't that fair. After hunting so many monsters and clearing dungeons, the items that monsters dropped weren't completely random. What he meant was.....for example, if he joined a party in order to clear the thieves in a mountain hideout. Thieves would mainly dropped weapons and armours for thieves.

So if a thief joined the party then they would end up monopolizing all the items. On the other hand, a different profession would only receive japtem. And they might even experience a loss since they had to buy potions and pay for repairs to their equipment. And those users would have no choice but to watch other people with the right profession take the items. A magic item dropping was better. If a rare item dropped and he was deprived of it, he would die from

envy. The sound of rolling a 10 won coin in that situation was the most fearful thing Ark could imagine.

‘In that sense, this party is truly ideal.’

Ark smiled warmly at Lariette and Buksil. Of course, in the beginning it was uncomfortable but now Lariette had eased into her role. And she accomplished her share alone as well. But was that all? Even though Buksil couldn't help in combat, he was valuable for gathering ingredients. However, Ark's favourite thing about this party was the substantial profit. While hunting in a party, Ark had to share the experience between the three of them. However, there was one loophole. The system to prevent low-levelled users from being power levelled. When there was a huge difference in levels in the party, most of the experience went to the highest levelled user. Currently Ark was approximately 100 levels higher than Lariette and Buksil. After they killed a monster, Ark got 50% of the experience. On the other hand, the party received an additional 100% experience. As a result, he received 50% of the 200% experience, which was a little bit more than when he hunted alone. * That contributed to why Ark gained 4 levels in three days. But was that all? They already agreed that Ark would get all the items obtained from hunting and harvesting. So items were more likely to drop in a party, Ark obtained more items than when he hunted alone.

‘Huhuhu, it can't be better than this!’

Since the party depended on Ark, it could truly be called Ark's party.

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

While Ark was thinking, Lariette and Buksil ran from the forest with a panicked expression.

“What's wrong?”

“M-monster, the red monster!”

Buksil shouted with a stricken face.

“Red Monster?”

Ark was puzzled until Lariette added.

“The Nakujuk we saw in the Abyss of Despair.”

“Nakujuk! In this area?”

“Yes, we saw more than twenty of them.”

Ark was confused by time Lariette finished speaking. The Nakujuk clan lived beyond the northern mountains. According to Beseutyu, the terrain of the northern mountains was so difficult that the Nakujuk hardly ever came to the south. The group of Nakujuk he met in Hagel Forest passed with the help of the Deurakan.

‘At that time, they came to hunt for the deceased. But after I disposed of Tamura, what reason would they have to come to the south? In addition, there is a hostile relationship between the Nakujuk and the Baran clan. So why are they roaming so close to the village? ‘What on earth is going on?’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted.

Grrrrrrr.

He heard a threatening beast’s cry from behind him. Ark and Lariette jumped and instinctively grabbed their swords. At the same time, a bush shook and an eerie dog with a red mane appeared. Ark’s forehead wrinkled when he saw its appearance.

‘Eh? Haven’t I seen this monster in the village’s kennels.....?’

The dog was the Hellhound that the Baran clan bred. The Hellhound Ark previously saw was black, so this one appeared red because it was tinged in blood. That wasn’t all. The faltering Hellhound was also carrying a boy with serious injuries on its back. Surprisingly the boy was....!

“B-Bona?”

Ark exclaimed once he belatedly figured out the boy’s identity. The boy flinched then he painfully lifted his head.

“Ah.....Ark hyung?”

“Yes, it’s me. What’s going on? How did you become like this?”

“Ah, Ark hyung.....help! The village.....Grandpa.....”

“Village? Grandfather? What the? What do you mean? What happened to the village?”

“H-help. Please help.....!”

Bona grasped Ark’s hands and mumbled before nodding off. At the same time, the Hellhound ran out of energy and collapsed. Ark approached quickly and examined Bona. Fortunately, the Hellhound and Bona were only unconscious because of their injuries.

“Ark-nim, what is going on....?”

Lariette asked in confusion. But Ark also didn’t know. The Nakujuk were also wondering around.....clearly something strange had happened. He shouldn’t act recklessly before finding out the reasons. Ark organized his thoughts for a moment before saying.

“Hurry and clean up. We have to avoid them and find a safe place.”

[-‘Shadow’ has been applied and ‘Stealth’ has been maintained.]

‘Those bastards.....’

Ark hid behind a rock and looked down at the valley village.

Rattle, rattle.

The people in shackles were moving rocks or wood while gasping. All around them were supervisors monitoring them with whips. The scene happening in the village seemed like a medieval movie. The Baran clan were reduced to slavery while the Nakujuk were the supervisors.

“That guy, what are you doing?”

“Can you move faster?”

The Nakujuk shouted and used their whips. Then, a big bull carrying

a big rock passed out. The bull was a monster called Bolkanasu trained to pull carts in the village. Not only the Baran clan members, but the monsters they trained were also being abused. When the Bolkanasu fell down, the Nakujuk ran towards it.

“How dare you fall down! Take this!”

“It is impossible. Hold on, please let it rest for a moment!”

A middle aged trainer appeared and fell to the ground begging. However, the Nakujuk just kicked him away and continue whipping the Bolkanasu. Then the trainer embraced the Bolkanasu.

“What? How dare this slave resist?.....Okay, I’ll let you taste it once!”

“Ugh, aaaaak, p-please....!”

The trainer’s back immediately became bloody as the whip tore it open. But the Nakujuk seemed encouraged by the screams and only whipped him harder, dealing deeper wounds. Just as the trainer reached a critical condition.

“Stop!”

A sharp voice was suddenly heard. Ark reflexively turned his head and flinched. The person approaching the Nakujuk was surprisingly Jewel.

‘It’s just like Bona said. But how on earth did those guys.....?’

Ark swallowed his saliva and replayed a memory. About 30 minutes ago, Ark had avoided the Nakujuk in the forest and hid with Bona inside a small cave. In fact, Ark could actually handle 20 Nakujuk by himself. But after checking Bona’s injuries, he instinctively sensed that the situation was more complex than he thought. Ark’s judgment was correct. After Lariette used recovery magic for a while, Bona delivered some shocking words. The incident occurred a week ago which was two days in reality. The peaceful village was attacked by 400 Nakujuk. They occupied the village in an instant and drove the Baran clan to slavery.

Ark still couldn't understand anything at this point. First of all, Beseutyu told him that the Nakujuk lived beyond the northern mountains. And the terrain was so steep and complicated that the Nakujuk couldn't move through it. Although a small group could penetrate using the Draken, it was impossible to move a few hundred troops. That's why the Nakujuk had never a threat to the Baran clan so far. But how did 400 troops suddenly climb over the northern mountains? Bona just shook his head.

"I don't know. But Grandpa said that it obviously had something to do with them."

"Them?"

"The foreigners that passed into the Netherworld along with Ark hyung."

Ark became even more confused. The foreigners that came to the Netherworld with Ark. In other words, Jewel's group dedicated to killing Ark. Then Jewel worked with the Nakujuk to attack the village? The Nakujuk was a species of monster in the Netherworld but it still had a chaotic alignment. But why did they ally with the monsters? How was that possible? And how did they manage to transport hundreds of Nakujuk across the northern mountains? There were numerous questions that popped into his head. But he didn't know any of the answers. All he knew was that it was a complicated and twisted situation.

'For users to ally with monsters in order to invade a NPC village.....'

He never imagined that such a thing was possible. However, it wasn't that impossible after working through it step by step. Of course, it would be absolutely impossible in middle earth. If a user did that then it would be impossible for the royal families of the Schudenberg, Sinus and Bristania kingdoms to just watch. The knights of the kingdom would be dispatched to smash them. But this was the Netherworld. While the Nakujuk had established a kingdom in the north, the south was filled with different communities and a major NPC force to protect the town didn't exist.

'Even so.....'

Ark thought for a moment before moving onto the second question. It was clear that Jewel's group allied with the Nakujuk to invade the village. The problem was why? He couldn't think of a reason for why they would do that.

'Even if Jewel noticed that Beseutyu tricked them, it's still weird that they allied with the Nakujuk to attack the village. They came to the Netherworld in order to catch me. And they already know that I've left the village so why would they want to occupy it? And what reason would the Nakujuk have to occupy this small village?'

Ark considered all the possibilities. He came to the conclusion that there must be some benefit for Jewel and the Nakujuk. Let's consider Jewel's group first. Occupying a village had clear benefits. However, they would have to share the profits with the Nakujuk. In addition, this world relied on bartering so there was no money. All they could obtain was at most japtem. Would they provoke a hostile relationship with the Baran clan who lived in the south just for some japtem? There must be something more than profit. The same also applied to the Nakujuk. Although they had taken over the town, they clearly couldn't go back and forth between the northern mountains yet. More than 400 troops would've come over if that was possible. It also wasn't easy to plunder the loot and then send it back home. There was no reason for them to travel over the northern mountains just to occupy the village.

"They took control of the town and are making the monsters and uncles collect materials to create something. But Grandpa didn't know what it was either."

Bona also couldn't answer this part.

'Create something.... That must be their other purpose.'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted. Bona shed tears and suddenly spoke.

"Ark hyung, please help us. If the villagers are harassed by the Nakujuk, they will die. They managed to escape with me but then Grandpa and Guran were recaptured....."

After the village was attacked, there were a lot of Baran survivors. The reason was simple. Jewel's group was just too strong. And there were also 400 Nakujuk combatants. With only 200 residents, the villagers couldn't afford to fight back. In addition, they used the children as hostages as soon as they attacked. So the villagers didn't dare resist and became prisoners. Guran and Beseutyu were trainers and they managed to use a Hellhound to escape with Bona. They planned to notify the other villages and ask for help. However, they were caught by the Nakujuk and only Bona barely escaped.

"Um....."

Ark saw the bruises on Bona's body and was speechless. Thanks to Lariette's healing, Bona had recovered but there were still injuries on his body. He had received those wounds after being chased by the Nakujuk. He didn't even know what happened to the village after it had been occupied. After thinking about that situation, something rose in Ark's heart.

"How dare they do such things to a child.....son of a bitch!"

"Huh?"

Clack clack clack clack?

Dedric and Razak sent Ark a strange look.

"What? Why are looking at me like that?"

"No.....Master talking like that....."

"What about it?"

"No, I was suddenly reminded of the past."

Dedric said while shrugging. After all, Dedric was actually younger than Bona when he transformed into a boy. When the person who kept on beating Dedric up said those kind of words, who wouldn't find it strange? Bona's wounds were pretty average compared to how Dedric looked after Ark was finished with him. But was that all? Didn't he also beat up a user like Buksil and exploit him? However,

Ark was strict to some people while generous with others. He believed his actions to his pets were 'raising them with love' while Buksil was 'give or take.'

"Those words....."

"Ah, I got it. I understand. I know Master is a 'good' person. We're 'really happy' that we met such a good Master."

Dedric insinuated sarcastically.

"This child really.....!"

"What? Do you intend to break me again? Fine, expose your true character. Buksil, you say something too."

When he saw Ark's furious expression, Dedric quickly ran away and Ark chased him.

"Ark-nim and Dedric should control yourselves. This isn't the time to be playing around!"

Ark and Dedric stopped moving at Buksil's shout.

"Hey, pig...?"

Dedric made a stupid expression and blinked several times. But Buksil just applied salve onto Bona's wounds without turning his head and said.

"Bastards, to a child....."

Buksil's serious attitude felt out of place. Ark's eyes asked 'why is he acting like this? Did he eat something bad?' A

nd Dedric replied silently 'How should I know? Stupid Master!'

So what was Ark's response?

'Stupid Master? Do you believe I can't do anything to you? You really want to die?'

He silently told Dedric.....

"Buksil-nim is right. We can't play around."

When Lariette sighed, the quarrelling Ark and Dedric became embarrassed.

“Ark-nim, what do we do now?”

“Let’s see.”

Ark sighed and shook his head. His thoughts had been wondering thanks to his conversation with Dedric but this situation was serious. A major problem was that if he didn’t save Beseutyu, how would he discover any clues to complete the <Study the Mirage> quest?

‘Somehow I have to settle this problem.....’

“Lariette-nim should stay here with Buksil to continue treating Bona. I’ll take a quick look at the village. We’ll discuss any further problems after that. Dedric, you stay here and contact me if anything happens.”

So Ark headed to the village from the cave.

‘A user is better than NPCs.’

Ark hid behind the rock and laughed as Jewel approached the Nakujuk. Although they were enemies with Ark, at least Jewel’s group had a conscience. But Ark miscalculated. Jewel pulled the trainer’s face close and said.

“You shouldn’t excessively injure the valuable labour force. Let’s see, you said you both needed a break?”

“Yes, Yes. Please..... The Bolkanasu.....is at its limit.... Even a little bit is good....”

“Okay, it can’t be helped. The rest to your heart’s content.”

“Huh? R-really?”

“Of course. If you can.”

“Huh? What are you saying.....?”

“Hey, bring his child here.”

The Nakujuk brought a young boy in shackles. Jewel kicked the boy and waited.

“Huk, w-what is this.....?”

“Hahaha, didn’t I tell you? You can rest for one or even two days if you want. Instead, your son will take your spots.”

“Ack, Father!”

“S-stop! Please don’t. I’m going to work. So please stop....!”

The trainer screamed and grabbed Jewel’s pants, who then spat on him and muttered.

“Bah, how dare you ask for a break? If you act like this again then I won’t leave you son alone. Take his son away.”

“Huh? Yes!”

Even the Nakujuk was amazed at Jewel’s viciousness. However the other Hermes guild members just smirked and gave a thumbs up to Jewel.

“Oh Jewel, you really were a villain this time.”

“Huhuhu, I was still restraining myself.”

Ark was outraged while watching.

“A S (Sadist)? Did those guys open their eyes and became a S?”

Ark was not a messenger of justice. Ark was more irritated then sick whenever he saw news about people dying in terrorist attacks. But.....but this wasn’t right. Even if the people were NPCs, how could they behave like that with no hesitation? And to even laugh as the father and son were separated.....

He wanted to run down there and punch them in the jaws. But the opponents were Jewel’s group and the 400 Nakujuk. In fact, the 400 Nakujuk weren’t a big problem. Ark had already killed more than 600 Nakujuk in the Abyss of Despair. Of course he couldn’t handle 400 at

the same times, but if he planned it properly then he could kill 400 or 600 Nakujuk. But the problem was the combined power of the players and monsters coalition. It was impossible to use such plans against a user.

‘Unbelievable. It’ll be better if Jewel’s group wasn’t in the village.....’

Ark was worried until he suddenly tilted his head to one side.

‘Wait, what on earth is Jewel’s purpose? Jewel and the Nakujuk wouldn’t be making them labour for no reason. So there must be some purpose....but what is it? Where are they moving stone and timber to? I suppose I’ll have to check it out.’

Ark walked along the outskirts of the village using ‘Shadow.’ After moving to the other side, he managed to see the problematic structure. It was a tower that was already 50% completed.

‘Eh? I’ve seen that structure somewhere before.....?’

Ark dug through his memories because there was a sudden flash. As expected, it was the tower in his memory. The tower seen at the Magic Institute in large cities on middle earth! Of course, it was a much smaller scale but the shape was approximately the same. An oddly shaped sphere was rotating with a hazy light around it at the top of the tower. Ark realised Jewel’s and the Nakujuk’s plot as soon as he saw the sphere.

‘That is the reception tower used for letter movement!’

That’s right. Jewel’s group was constructing a tower to receive letter movement. Letter movement was a spatial movement technique that the Magic Institute was still studying. It wasn’t something that users like Jewel’s group could make. Since their civilization was delayed, the Nakujuk wouldn’t have such knowledge either. So how the hell could they build a tower for letter movement? It was incomprehensible. But Ark could understand the reason for building it.

‘Oh my god, the Nakujuk are planning to conquer the Netherworld using the valley village as a base!’

Yes, that was the only reason he could think of. There was probably another reception tower in the Nakujuk's kingdom. With the two reception towers, they wouldn't have to march their troops through the northern mountains to reach the south. The Nakujuk could freely come to the south whenever they wanted. After occupying the valley village, they would spread through the south and the Baran clan wouldn't be able to resist.

'This problem might be worse than I thought.'

Ark's face became serious. Jewel would never make the decision to ally with the Nakujuk alone. Raiden the leader of the Hermes Alliance would definitely be involved. It was a high possibility that they made a contract with the Nakujuk to conquer the Netherworld together. It would be impossible in middle-earth, but is such a thing was possible.....?

'At present, there is no benefit to occupying a town in the Netherworld. But the Netherworld and middle earth is not completely disconnected. Although it would take some time, many users could enter with the passage I used.'

So what if the Hermes Alliance decided to enter the Netherworld and conquer some towns? Clearly the Hermes Alliance would undergo an incredible growth in a short amount of time.

'And all that power would be concentrated in Silvana.'

Ark knew about Nagaran's current state through JusticeMan. The 5 alliances each occupying a castle had similar forces and held each other in check. If one of the alliances tried to grab more power than the other four alliances would ally together to stop them. But it was a different story if one alliance could hide the growth of its forces from the others. That was Raiden's target. Hide in the Netherworld and conceal his strength. After raising it by a certain amount, return to Silvana and concentrate on conquering the rest of Nagaran. If the Hermes Alliance managed to take control of the Netherworld then that wouldn't be a dream anymore. And the Hermes guild was his enemy so it was like a death sentence to Ark.

'Oh my god, I wouldn't be able to handle it alone!'

Ark's face turned dark. If the Hermes guild had that kind of power then regaining Silvana was impossible for Ark. He would have to discard the secret tunnel in the dungeon and the two sets of books from the trading post. But was that all? The Hermes Alliance would spread throughout New World. They would have an influence in middle earth as well as the Netherworld. Ark would have no place to hide.

'It's the end if Jewel and the Nakujuk manage to conquer the Netherworld. I have to stop it somehow!'

But the opponent was the Hermes Alliance and the Nakujuk. The Hermes Alliance couldn't leave Silvana empty so they couldn't concentrate their energies on the Netherworld. But the Nakujuk had been aiming for the southern region for hundreds of years so they would use all their power. The Nakujuk were soldiers of a kingdom so they weren't simple monsters. Didn't that mean he would have to fight against a kingdom in the end?

'This.....I can't stop it..... I'm screwed.....'

Ark was feeling pessimistic. At that time, Bona's words came to his head.

'Wait? Didn't Bona tell me Beseutyu wanted to escape to ask for help from the other Baran clans? That's right, the Baran would definitely want to stop the Nakujuk from conquering the Netherworld. Although they are scattered, if the Baran knows about the situation then they might join forces to fight them.

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted. He suddenly heard Dedric's desperate voice in his ear.

"M-master..... Nakujuk have detected the group.....hurry..... quickly....."

Since they were quite far apart, the communication wasn't that great. However, he was able to understand the vague information. The Nakujuk chasing after Bona had probably discovered them. Ark felt his heart fall.

"Dammit. If Bona asks the other villages for help then it will be a big

problem. Of course the Nakujuk wouldn't easily give up on pursuing Bona. If I'd known in advance then I would've never left them....."

If Bona was captured by the Nakujuk then his one strand of hope would disappear. Ark hastily ran out of the village and shouted to Radun.

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark frantically rode Radun. Then he finally reached the forest near the hideout.

"Master.....this way..... Those guys are around.....be careful."

Dedric's voice was heard in the opposite direction of the hideout.

'Fortunately they're still not caught!'

Ark got off Radun, used 'Shadow' and followed the voice. He soon discovered Lariette and Bona hiding in some bushes on top of a hill.

"You're safe."

"Yes, but Buksil-nim is....."

"Buksil?"

Ark noticed that Buksil wasn't there. Then Lariette pointed down the hill with a dark look. Ark followed the finger with his eyes and frowned.

"That bastard.....!"

10 Nakujuk and one user were gathered in a group at the bottom of the hill. It was Duke! Duke had used his various tracking skills to supervise the search. And lying next to Duke was Buksil with half of his health already gone. His beaten face was swollen and bruised.

"What happened?"

"We were hiding in a cave when the Nakujuk suddenly appeared. Fortunately Dedric and I managed to stop the Nakujuk's attacks and ran away. But then that guy called Duke suddenly appeared. Dedric and I was no match for his strength..... We were almost caught

when Buksil who had been watching suddenly blocked him and allowed us to escape. But we would've been surrounded if we ran off so we just hid here.”

Lariette explained. Ark had seen dozens of Nakujuk in the forest when coming here and Lariette didn't have a stealth skill like him.

‘But even so.....’

It was surprising that Buksil threw his body to save them.

“This bastard, why won't you hurry up and talk?”

Duke was kicking Buksil at the bottom of the hill. Buksil screamed like a child and rolled around on the ground.

“D-damn.....I already told you that Lariette-nim and Bona have left the forest!”

“Bah, don't make me laugh. The forest is already surrounded. They wouldn't have been able to leave without getting captured. Obviously they're hiding somewhere around here. Foolish bastard.”

Duke pulled out a scroll and showed it to him. Buksil turned pale with terror after seeing the scroll.

The [Track] scroll.....that's right. It was a scroll that could determine the relative position of the target within a 1km distance.

“Now do you understand? They will be caught anyway. But I don't want to know about a girl and a child. Do you think I've forgotten? You.....were with that Ark bastard before!”

“Ah, Ark-nim isn't here!”

“I know that. I've already tried to use the [Track] scroll on Ark. But how can it find here when the Netherworld is so big? Tell me, where is that bastard Ark hiding?”

“D-dunno, I don't know!”

“Do you really want to die?”

Duke raised his hand and a Nakujuk immediately lifted its sword. But

he changed his mind with a light laugh and said.

“Okay, then let’s make a deal. In fact, killing you won’t do me any good. I’ll let you live if you tell me where Ark is. There is no point in being loyal to Ark. That guy is a despicable and vicious bastard.....”

“I know, I know! I know a 100 times better than you do. Ark is a gruelling task master and a really stingy man. He is a wicked person who uses violence after a meal and secretly poisons you. I have no intention of protecting such a person!”

‘T-that bastard is seriously backstabbing me.....!’

Ark’s face warped as Buksil’s words rang through the forest. But Duke was delighted and nodded.

“Oh, I understand. Then have you agreed to the deal?”

“But, but.....”

Buksil suddenly tackled Duke and punched him.

“Aish, he’s not vicious like you guys! He’s not unscrupulous enough to whip a child! Take this....you damn bastard!”

“T-this bastard...!”

Buksil had used to element of surprise to land a hit on Duke. But the fists of a merchant only dealt 1% damage..... When Duke kicked him, Buksil instantly rolled across the ground. The normal Buksil would’ve moaned and acted like he was dying. However, today Buksil was different. Instead of crying, he just got back up and rushed towards Duke.

‘Son of a bitch...!’

Ark clenched his teeth together tightly. He looked like a messy pig covered in tears and not but that didn’t matter. Ark was just grateful that Duke’s attention was focused on him.

But.....but.....why was his anger rising? Why? He had no loyalty towards the pig.....

“Aish, kill you! I’m going to kill you. You son of a bitch!”

“Are you crazy? Okay, if you really want to.....”

Duke cursed and got out his bow.

Then an arrow flew towards Buksil’s neck!

Jjeok-!

Duke’s jaw went back 90 degrees. Duke received massive damage and fell down. A man wearing a thick cloak stood in front of Buksil. Ark! Yes, Ark had jumped down the hill and kicked Duke’s chin.

“You.....this bastard.....!”

He glared at Ark. Ark smirked and murmured.

“Hey, Duke. Who told you to hit this guy?”

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

Buksil looked at Ark with tearful eyes.

But his joyful expression disappeared at Ark’s next words.

“This guy might look like this.....but he’s not a wild boar.”

“Eh? Wild boar?”

“This guy is a house pig that I’ve been raising!”

‘What is this? I don’t understand.....was I considered a house pig that could be eaten at any time?’

Buksil became seriously worried about his identity.

[Translator’s: The raws were missing the stats for resilience and affection so I just used their previous values but they’ve probably increased.]

Baran Family Rescue Mission

“Ku, kukukuku.”

Duke raised his body and giggled slowly. He alternated looking between Ark and Buksil.

“Hahaha Ark, you’re softer than I thought. Are you willing to die for a colleague?”

“What are you talking about? He’s a house pig.”

Ark blushed and declared sharply.

“Anyway you just did something stupid. I’ll make you regret it.”

‘Dammit.....you don’t need to say it, I’m already feeling regret.’

Ark inwardly sighed. Was he crazy? Plunging into enemy lines just to save a pig? By now, 50 Nakujuk had appeared..... The odds weren’t in Ark’s favour. It wasn’t something he would normally do when sane. But it had already happened. Although he acted unknowingly, Ark wasn’t the type to give up once a battle had begun.

‘I just have to get away from the enemy’s formation.....’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

“Everyone attack!”

The fifty Nakujuk rushed in unison at Duke’s command. Thanks to their momentum, Ark would be pierced by fifty swords!

“Slime’s Time, NO1!”

Tu tu tu tung-!

Ark’s body was wrapped in a yellow slime and the swords bounced off it. He couldn’t attack but he was invulnerable to all physical attack skills for 10 minutes. In fact, the Myutal were a race that couldn’t

develop magic. That's why he never saw any magicians in the Baran clan or among the Nakujuk at the Abyss of Despair. In other words, Ark could use Slime's Time if Jewel wasn't present.

'Okay, I can earn some time with this.'

But that was Ark's mistake.

"Bah, using that skill again.....but that's not enough!"

Duke ran and continuously shot arrows. At the same time, flames appeared where it hit Ark's body.

-You have been damaged by the exploding arrow. 450 damage! <Your magic resistance has fallen by 100% thanks to your state and you will receive 'Burn' damage>
--

'Ah, magic arrows!'

He forgot that Duke could use magic arrows. Magic arrows were granted a magic attribute! Thanks to 'Slime's Time,' he received 100% of the damage. But there was even more. When using Slime's Time, Ark's body was covered in a viscous liquid. So his sword became soft and he inflicted 0 damage. In that situation Ark couldn't even fight back.

"Kukukuku, did you think I would fall for this again?"

Duke sensed this and enthusiastically shot his arrows. Flames were rising everywhere and his health was decreasing.

'Dammit, I knew I shouldn't have done it. I accomplished nothing and only made the situation more complicated.'

Ark shot Buksil an angry look. Why did he have to suffer so much because of this guy? But there was no way to run once he took action. Ark grabbed Buksil by his collar and shouted.

"Why are you just standing here? Let's go!"

"Huh? Ah, yes!"

Buksil was surprised and ran after Ark.

“Do they think I will miss?”

Duke chased after them and shot his magic arrows, engulfing them in flames.

‘With these odds, I’m unlikely to be able to get away!’

Ark rolled on the floor with Buksil and clenched his teeth. Duke’s profession was a ranger. The ranger’s default movement speed was faster compared to other professions and he could also track their trail if the path split. Was that all? His ability to detect stealth was the worst for rogue type characters.

‘But there is a way!’

Ark grabbed Buksil and pushed through the Nakujuk with Dark Dance.

“Kill them!”

The Nakujuk swung their swords as Ark twisted among them. But Ark was invincible against physical attacks when covered with slime! Rather, he made it difficult for Duke by leaping between the Nakujuk.

“What the? T-these morons, get out of the way!”

Ark moved among the fifty Nakujuk who were hit by some of the flying arrows instead. But the magic arrows even triggered splash damage. The Nakujuk were caught in an explosion. The Nakujuk belatedly noticed this too late and scattered all over the place. But Ark didn’t willingly let them get away. He clung onto the Nakujuk like a leech.

“You rat bastard. But time is running out. You won’t stand a chance!”

‘It definitely will be tough to win this.’

Ark had to use the Nakujuk as shields until time ran out. Once Slime’s Time ended, the Nakujuk would be able to hit him with their swords. He would definitely not be able to avoid all those swords.

However, Duke was forgetting one thing. If Duke was acting more calmly then he would've noticed straight away.....

Even though he was cornered, Ark's pets who always followed him wasn't there and neither was Lariette.

'Slime's Time is almost finished. Are they almost done?'

Ark's stomach went tight as he determined the time remaining on his skill. There was only 10 seconds left when Dedric's voice flowed into his ears.

"Master.....ready.....it's finished."

At the same time, the slime disappeared from Ark's body. Fire burned in Duke's eyes.

"His skill has ended. Attack!"

"Ooh oh oh oh!"

As expected, the Nakujuk ran up and stabbed their swords. Ark used Riposte to push back the group of Nakujuk. The Nakujuk collided with their colleagues and fell down in a huge mass. Ark quickly stepped past the Nakujuk and ran towards the narrow gap between the hills.

"Kukuku, what a foolish fellow. You should've run away to some other place.....After him!"

The Nakujuk followed closely behind Ark and swung their swords. Ark confirmed that all fifty of the Nakujuk were coming and took out the Saw Blade. After converting it into a whip, he twisted it around them and gathered the group together. Ark held the Saw Blade and shouted towards the top of the hill.

"Now Radun!"

It was at that time. A giant lizard jumped out from the hill. It was Radun transformed into Radunma. Radun blocked the Nakujuk from the entrance of the hills, making them flinch.

"Huk, what, what the?"

“Radun, just push against them!”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun let out a sharp cry and pressed his body against the Nakujuk. Thanks to the narrow gap between the hills, the Nakujuk was pushed back.

“Damn! What, this lizard is?”

“Kill them, tear them apart!”

“Huk, wait a minute.....I-look behind you!”

The Nakujuk tried swinging their swords. Then one of the Nakujuk saw something behind it and screamed. Radun had pushed the Nakujuk inside a hill....there was a round circular shape that looked like a mirror. Then all the Nakujuk disappeared, making it seem like a lie.

“What, what the? What happened? Eh eh?”

While being pushed by Radun, the Nakujuk had been swallowed by that circular space.

‘Success!’

A satisfied smile spread on Ark’s face while he watched from the hilltop. Yes, this was the strategy that Ark thought of. He had jumped off the hill to save Buksil, but before that Ark entrusted Lariette with one item. She used the ‘Dimensional Movement Powder’ to draw a circle on the hill to middle earth while Ark bought some time. He didn’t have to explain the reason. The Nakujuk entered the hill and was transferred to middle earth. Fortunately, only 500 grams of the precious powder was used. While the Nakujuk were being swallowed by the dimensional gate, Duke came running.

“Grab that bastard Ark....eh? Where did everyone go?”

Duke looked around with stunned eyes. All the Nakujuk gathered in that narrow space had disappeared so of course he was puzzled. Ark just grinned from above and said.

“They were sent to a good place. They’ll probably receive a warm reception.”

“You, you.....what the hell did you do?”

“I told you. They were sent to a good place. But there is no space for you.”

“You bastard....!”

Duke lifted his bow. But Ark was many times faster. Ark pushed off a tree branch as he jumped down and his heels landed on Duke’s head. It was like a 10 metre thunderbolt dropping down. Duke’s face was smashed into the ground and he became stunned.

“Now, shall we fight fair and square? Of course, I’ll be fighting fairly.”

Lariette, Razak and Dedric stood around them smiling. Thus Duke’s fate was decided.

“Razak, prevent that guy from running away!”

Clack clack clack clack, daeng kang!

Razak pushed Duke back using his sword, while Duke couldn’t grasp the situation.

“Hahaha, didn’t you hit me with the exploding arrows before? It might’ve only hit this body for 3 seconds, but I store a grudge for 300 years. Take this, Dark Dash!”

Dedric chattered next and rushed into him.

“Ugh, those fellows.....!”

Duke remained baffled and fired arrows all over the place. However, nobody in Ark’s group was idiot enough to be caught by one of the blindly fired arrows.

No, there was one.

“Ugh!”

Buksil screamed as an arrow hit his bulging stomach. His health

was already low and he fell into a critical condition. It really was ridiculous.

“You idiot, don’t stay too close. Lariette-nim, the 3 piece set of offensive buffs please!”

“Yes, the great warrior’s soul.....Hero’s Spirit, Warrior’s Concentration, Storm Breathing!”

His damage, attacks speed and critical hits rose thanks to the buffs. However, there was no need for him to receive the buffs.

‘What the? Is this guy really Duke?’

Duke’s health dropped to 30% before he understood the situation. Even though the situation was bad, Duke was a pioneer and regrouped before starting a counterattack. When they fought in the Evil Silrion, every shot by Duke felt like a special move. But now they were too weak. Of course, it wasn’t like Duke weakened. If that was the case.....

‘Have I become that much stronger in the Netherworld? Enough to feel like a pioneer is nothing?’

In fact, it was the inevitable result. Duke had been engaged in the sieges at Silvana. And the biggest drawback of the siege was the penalties when dying and that no experience was received from defeated users. In the long run it wasn’t possible for him to grow that much and the same thing happened in the Netherworld. It wasn’t possible to hunt since they were chasing Ark. On the other hand, Ark had hunted in the ice cave and the Abyss of Despair after coming to the Netherworld. His level was already overwhelmingly above Duke. After being helped by Lariette, it was impossible for Duke to be a match. Duke realised it as well.

“T-this is impossible...!”

“Why is it impossible?”

Dedric smiled boldly and smacked him in the back of the head. Thanks to Ark’s overwhelming strength, even his pets were acting dismissively.

“Dammit, we’ll see! Cheetah Feet!”

Duke was eventually forced to admit the difference in strength between him and Ark. Once his pride was lost, he thought of escaping using Cheetah Feet. It was an escaping skill that increased his movement speed by 30%! But Ark had been aiming for that moment.

“Sprint!”

Ark shot forward like an arrow and slashed Duke’s leg. In his completely defenceless state, Duke received a critical hit. However, Ark wasn’t aiming for the abnormal state then the damage.

-The additional ‘Cutting’ effect of Drastic Measures had been activated.

<Duke’s Achilles tendon has been severed>

Cutting! When he succeeded in ‘Cutting,’ he could cut off a monster’s limbs. But against a user, he could only sever the tendon. Anyway, Ark succeeded in the using ‘Cutting’ and slowed down Duke’s movements. Rather than his movement speed slowing down, he couldn’t even move that leg. At the same time, the ‘Cheetah Foot’ skill was released from his legs.

“T-this is.....!”

Duke had suddenly become a 2nd grade disabled person and tried to counter attack. However, both legs were required for a ranger to shot his bow accurately and with a fast firing speed. Thanks to one leg being unusable, the firing speed of his arrows went down by 50% and kept on missing. Ark avoided the arrows and damaged the other leg. After a couple of minutes, Duke was forced to the ground as his other Achilles tendon was cut. But that was not the end of Ark’s brutality.

“Damn, just kill me!”

Duke shouted with desperation but Ark just smiled and shook his finger.

“I can’t finish this so easily. Now, this time is the arms!”

“What, what the?”

He moved around Duke and attacked his arms. After a while, Duke was down to 3% health while his arms couldn’t move. Thus Duke changed from a 2nd grade to a 1st grade disabled person with none of his limbs working.

“Y-you.....!”

Duke talked wildly with his face in the ground.

“Ark-nim, I know you’re angry.....but it is too much.”

When Lariette looked at him with pity, Duke’s face became hot. Indeed, a pioneer looking so shabby and being pitied would definitely injure his pride. But Ark wasn’t trying to injure Duke’s pride when he did this. There was a wide and deep meaning for his actions.....

Ark walked up with Buksil who had a swollen face and laughed.

“Buksil, now it’s your turn.”

“Huh? What?”

“What? Do you need to ask? You don’t know why I bothered slicing his limbs?”

“Well, let’s see? There’s a serious problem in Ark-nim’s personality.....”

“What the?”

“Oh, no, how could I possibly understand the deeper meaning behind Ark-nim’s actions?”

“Ah.....you’re right.”

Ark looked at Buksil with pity in his eyes before speaking.

“Is your head okay? Your memory? Don’t you remember what happened a few minutes ago? He beat you up. If I hadn’t stopped him then he would’ve killed you. But there’s even more. You brother

Sapjil had no choice but to die in the Abyss of Despair because of those guys. With your enemy so close to you, I had to make sure that a chicken like you could get some payback.”

“But I’m a merchant. I’m not strong like Ark-nim.”

Buksil sighed with a gloomy face. Ark wrapped an arm around Buksil and bent down. He then whispered a secret into Buksil’s ears.

“It’s okay. Now that guy is weaker than you.”

“Then perhaps.....?”

“Think of it as a New Year’s gift.”

Ark smiled sweetly. Buksil looked at Duke dumbly for a moment. But Ark was behind him whispering ‘Show me you’re a man, take revenge for you brother!’ and a slow smile grew on his lips. Then he finally took out a stick and started hitting Duke.

“Hahaha, didn’t you hit me before? Take this! This and this!”

Wouldn’t a weak man become more violent when he suddenly gained power? That described Buksil perfectly. After experiencing the taste of endorphins like adrenaline and dopamine, he went into a completely frenzied state and beat up Duke. His eyeballs rolled around and he went into a dangerous state. However, Buksil was still Buksil. The frenzied state did not last long.

“You....bastard.....Buksil.....I’ll remember your name and face..... You’ll soon see.... ”

Duke’s face was dyed with colours from bruises and glared at him with his full power. Buksil suddenly felt like cold water had been poured on his spirit.

“Ack, w-what have I done.....?”

Buksil realized what a huge mistake he had made at Ark’s urging. Buksil already knew Duke’s identity. He was one of the pioneers of the Hermes Alliance, one of the 5 alliances settled in Nagaran! It was no different from antagonizing the Hermes Alliance. If a mere merchant built up such a large grudge then he would have

to give up the game.

“No, I.....it’s not my idea....”

Buksil stuttered as he stepped backwards.

No, it was when he attempted to step back. Someone pushed him as he stepped back and he ended up stepping on Duke’s face.

.....It was a critical hit.

Duke’s health disappeared from the blow. Buksil jumped and quickly tried to give excuses. But Ark went forward and clamoured loudly.

“Indeed Buksil! That last blow was the best. I never thought you would end it by stepping on his head. You never even blinked an eye at his threat. Wonderful!”

“N-no, Ark-nim! I never meant to do that.....”

“Ugh! Okay, you son of a bitch.....! You’ll see.....!”

Duke eventually hung his head and died. A pioneer had literally been stepped to death by a merchant. Duke had been raging with anger when he was stepped on and died so Buksil’s immediate future was dark. But Buksil’s tragedy didn’t end there. With two dings, a new message window appeared.

[-Buksil has murdered a player and became chaotic!]

“Huk, c-chaotic!”

Buksil screamed when he saw his name turn to red. Ark smiled wickedly while watching Buksil.

‘Huhuhu, just as planned.’

Yes, that was the reason why Ark made Duke unable to fight and incited Buksil. Jewel’s group had stormed the NPC village and occupied it. Thanks to clever planning, Jewel, Duke and Hermes members managed to avoid becoming chaotic. In order to avoid becoming chaotic, they would attack and then avoid dealing the final blow. That was the problem. If Ark killed Duke then he would

become chaotic. Of course, users had methods to avoid becoming chaotic even if they killed someone. If he received the first attack then the opponent's alignment would temporarily fall and become grey. In that person was killed then he wouldn't become chaotic. But Buksil had been so excited it wasn't possible to think and he attacked Duke first.

'I'm level 280 so the chaotic penalty will be quite extravagant!'

He realised this while fighting Duke. So he made Duke unable to fight and forced the kill onto Buksil.

'Huhuhu, I've taken care of Duke and Buksil.'

Being chaotic was a disaster for a merchant. They wouldn't be able to freely enter or leave a village. In addition, their combat abilities were lower than warriors so they couldn't defend against hunters. They would have to stay in jail until their chaotic state was released. A chaotic user was also likely to be robbed by general users.

'And now he had a hostile relationship with the Hermes Alliance.....'

It wasn't possible for Buksil to live without Ark's protection anymore. Although he was acting a little suspiciously before, as a chaotic user would he dare attack Ark without any hesitation? So he was protected from betrayal until the chaotic state was released. Killing two birds with one stone. No, three birds!

'Hahaha, why am I this smart?'

Ark smiled warmly and approached Buksil.

"Well done Buksil. You are indeed a man!"

"Huh? I, I....."

"You proudly took revenge on your brother! Huhuhu, aren't you thankful? But don't forget whose protection you're under. You owe me one. Do you understand?"

The poor merchant was dropped into a hopeless despair while Ark patronized him.

'It was planned! That bastard expected this from the beginning! I actually felt grateful to him for a moment.....I'm so stupid!'

Buksil hurled curses at himself. However, the bus had already left. His weakness had been grasped and all he could do was suck it up.

"Ark-nim, now what?"

Then Lariette and Bona who had been hiding asked.

"Let's see....."

Ark sighed and shook his head. The problem regarding Duke was resolved.

'Let's organize my thoughts for a moment.'

Ark's main purpose was to save Beseutyu in order to find a clue for the quest. But it was close to impossible at the moment. Ark's present power consisted of Lariette, a pig, a child and a dog. Against Jewel's group and the 400 Nakujuk, it simply wasn't possible to him to rescue Beseutyu.

'If that's the case, the only remaining way is.....'

Ark glanced at Bona and asked.

"Bona, didn't you say that Beseutyu wanted to ask for help from other villages? Are there a lot of the Baran clan spread throughout the south?"

"Yes, very much. There are many several times larger than this village."

"Will they help us if we find them?"

That was the method Ark came up with. It was too difficult to save Beseutyu by himself. In addition, he didn't have the power to prevent the Nakujuk from taking over the Netherworld. After the Baran were told of the threat, they would have no choice but to rally against the Nakujuk. But Bona sighed and shook his head.

"It isn't easy to meet the Baran clans since they are spread

throughout the south. And visiting them to ask for help is ineffective. The Baran don't know how to fight."

"What? What are you saying? Then what you said earlier.....?"

"In fact, the Myutal with a warrior's lineage is the Baran clan. When the Baran used to live in the north, they would constantly fight against monsters and the Nakujuk. They would go out in groups and fight against the Nakujuk. But eventually the Baran were chased from the north by the Nakujuk and they dispersed in the south. The Baran won't move unless all the clans move."

"Then shouldn't we go and visit them?"

"It's difficult because the tribes don't interact with each other. There is a method to call them.....by lighting the Pledge Beacon."

"The Pledge Beacon?"

"Yes, it's a beacon on top of the Golgi Mountains. But the only one who can light the beacon is an elder of the Baran clan. And Grandpa is the only elder in our village."

.....In the end he still needed to rescue Beseutyu.

'Unbelievable. Why is it so complicated?'

Ark felt like his insides were burning. Jewel would soon figure out that Duke died. Of course Jewel would furiously leave the boundaries of the village in order to catch Ark. With Ark's current strength there was no way to defeat them. But he couldn't run away blindly.....

'Wait? That Jewel.....?'

At that moment, a huge exclamation point appeared in Ark's head.

'There may be a way!'

Ark raised his head and looked at Duke's corpse lying on the ground. An evil grin appeared on Ark's mouth.

"Shall I give it a try?"

“Huhuhu, it is moving faster than I thought.”

Jewel gave the tower being built a warm look. Jewel finally felt rewarded after suffering and dying.

‘I never thought I would get such a good fortune in the Netherworld.’

Jewel reviewed the memories of the past few days. Not long ago, they had been besieged by Nakujuk after chasing Ark. While Jewel’s group was desperately fighting the Nakujuk, they unexpectedly encountered a user with red hair. And there was an unexpected proposal. If the Hermes Alliance helped the Nakujuk conquer the Netherworld, portions of the southern region would be handed over to them. Jewel immediately informed Raiden of this fact. Since they had a way of contacting Raiden, Jewel hadn’t been concerned about entering the Netherworld.

“There’s no reason to refuse. Because I can break the alliance anytime with Trick.”

Raiden left full control of the Netherworld to Jewel. Thus the Hermes Alliance joined forces with the Nakujuk. After they allied, the Hermes members and Nakujuk immediately took over the valley village. The Nakujuk couldn’t conquer the Netherworld because they couldn’t cross the northern mountains. There could use the Draken to carry them across. But the Baran clan regularly patrolled the skies using their skyrays and they couldn’t bring across enough men to invade the south.

The reason 400 Nakujuk were able to move to the south was because of Jewel. In order to move the troops, Jewel used ‘Mass Teleport’ which was an advanced skill of the Stalker. Of course the movement distance wasn’t too far so it had to be used a few times, but the skill managed to move the troops safely to the south. And eventually they succeeded in invading the valley village.

“Once the tower at the outpost is finished, we can start conquering the Netherworld. Taking over the Netherworld would be simple with this tower!”

Jewel looked at the plans and smirked. That's right. Ark had already guessed that Jewel was creating the tower in order to use letter movement. And the tower in the north had already been completed by the Nakujuk. When the tower was complete, thousands of Nakujuk would pour into the south from their headquarters.

"How the hell did he manage to get his hands on these plans?"

Jewel was once again startled by the amazing plans.

Reception Tower for Letter Movement Plans (Architect: Magaro)

You can build a reception tower for letter movement.

When you build the reception tower, you will be able to teleport from connected towers using the 'Letter Movement Orb.' In addition, the technology in these plans is one step higher than the towers created on middle earth. It is probably because alchemy has modified the original design.

<Required skill: Magic (Advanced), Alchemy (Advanced), Architecture (Advanced)>

These plans were also given to them by the Red Man.

Jewel had advanced magic while the warriors had advanced alchemy and architecture so they were able to immediately build the tower. That was probably why the Red Man requested Jewel's help. He was able to control the Nakujuk and get a rare plan yet he passed it to some unknown users. But Jewel didn't think too deeply.

'I don't know what he's up to but he's only one person. We can easily defeat him after we conquer the Netherworld. And after Nagaran is controlled.....'

Raiden and Jewel were satisfied with what the Red Man gave them. Once the Netherworld and Nagaran were fully controlled, they would have time to obtain the treasures in the Netherworld.

'Raiden has entrusted the Netherworld to me so I have to conquer it!'

Jewel was dreaming about the rosy future. Suddenly someone

approached from far away with an odd gait. Jewel frowned with confusion.

“What the? Duke? How did it go? That kid?”

Yes, it was none other than Duke who went chasing after Bona a few hours ago. But why was Duke’s state so weird? His face was black with bruises and his eyes seemed like it couldn’t focus. He also didn’t have any of the Nakujuk that left with him.

“Why are you alone? And what happened to your face?”

Then Duke hesitated before bending down and writing something.

-There’s no time. Ark has come.

“What? A-Ark?”

Jewel asked with surprise while Duke nodded.

“Where? Where is he?”

-Near the eastern forest. We have to hurry. That guy returned to the village and ran away when he saw us.

“What, what the? So right now.....!”

-The problem is that he’s not alone. The reason he came back here was to take care of us. Do you remember the previous colleagues we saw at the siege? He brought them here.

“He gathered his colleagues? How?”

-I do not know. Anyway, the Nakujuk were completely killed by them. I barely got away. Thanks to that, they know we have an alliance with the Nakujuk. So he’ll probably run away again. If we don’t follow him quickly with our forces then we’ll lose him.

Jewel’s heart was frantic after Duke’s explanation. An opportunity to capture Ark had arrived at Jewel’s feet. There would be no time to catch Ark once they started conquering the Netherworld with Ark. They had to get revenge while the opportunity was still here. So Jewel quickly gathered some troops.

“They should have 50 people if he gathered his old colleagues. I’ll leave some troops in the village with everyone else chases after Ark. Hurry up!”

Jewel left 150 troops to monitor the residents while chasing after Ark with the rest of the Nakujuk and Hermes members. Then Jewel suddenly asked Duke something.

“Ah, but why have you suddenly bothered with writing everything?”

Duke flinched. After a moment he nodded and wrote.

-My throat is swollen badly after a cold.

Note: For people wondering why Buksil became chaotic is he attacked Duke first. Remember that Ark showed up afterwards and Buksil blocked Duke to allow Lariette and Bona to escape. We don’t know what happened then so Buksil might’ve attacked Duke first and got a grey name.

Attack X

“Elemental Sword Ice property, Flash!”

A bolt of light swept through the Nakujuk. At the same time, the surrounding chill slowed down the movements of the Nakujuk dramatically.

“Dark Dance!”

Ark used complicated foot movements to move through the gaps in Nakujuk. Then he attacked the Nakujuk with his Dark Blade chain skill. ‘Dark Strike’ and quickly inflicted critical hits. Ark used the element of surprise to inflict the constant critical hits, making the Nakujuk run around in confusion.

“Ugh, what, what the?”

It’s just one person! Just surround him and seal his movements!”

“Heung, do you think I’ll let you act freely.

At that time, Dedric flew down from the sky. Dedric shot at the Nakujuk like an arrow and exclaimed.

“Disciple, do it now!”

“Okay. I call on the Holy Land, don’t allow them to become corrupt. Innocence field!”

After buffing them up, Lariette used a wide area magic. An intense light swirled around the area. It was the Innocence Knight’s wide area magic which deals continuous damage and decreases the opponent’s defense. So the group of Nakujuk dissolved under the combination of Ark, Lariette and Dedric’s attacks.

‘I hope Razak is holding up well.....’

Ark had come up with a solution before attacking the Nakujuk. How could he rescue Beseutyu from the valley village? Ark had been

troubled by that until he remembered something Buksil said in the past. Buksil was lacking sleep thanks to Ark so he tended to doze off while moving. Then he would suddenly say 'ugh, Ark-nim please save me. Although you might not listen to me, please stop making the zombie foxes!' He was talking while sleeping.

Talking during sleep was a hint.

'Right, come to think of it.....Dedric 'Vampirism' skill was also effective on users. Then perhaps Razak's skill could also be applied to a user? Can he control that guy.....?'

Ark looked at Duke's body and visualized a brilliant manoeuvre. He could revive Duke using Razak's 'Death's Equations.' The current number of enemies Ark had to face was the 400 Nakujuk and Jewel's group. But the situation would change if he could lure Jewel's group and some Nakujuk from the village. Of course, using 'Vampirism' on a user had a low probability of success. 'Death's Equations' was also the same. In addition, Duke was high ranking so he had to use 3 ribs in every try. It was a huge damage. But there was no other way.

"Razak, use 'Death's Equations!'"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack.....

Razak sighed deeply and slowly removed his ribs. The unexpected profession he evolved to caused Razak to become gloomier. Anyway, 3 times.....he used 9 ribs before the skill barely succeeded. Yes, the Duke who lured Jewel out was a zombie.

'In the beginning it was a little vague, but isn't it an unexpectedly useful skill?'

Ark never dreamed that he could take advantage of 'Death's Equations' in this way. Anyway, Ark's operation to storm the village was a success. However, there were still 150 Nakujuk left in the village even after Jewel took some out.

'I can handle it if I attack small groups but.....'

He didn't know how long Jewel would be tricked. In fact, 'Death's

Equations' had some limits. The distance that the zombies could move away from the controller was quite far but it wasn't indefinite. So Razak hid and directed Duke to take Jewel's group around the area of the village. Thus there was a time limit on tricking Jewel's party.

'I have to quickly save the residents and get out.'

Ark was determined to take a risk. While Jewel was missing, he would focus on attacking one place with all his power. The place Ark aimed for was.....

"Keuahahak!"

"Surprise attack, surprise attack!"

The Nakujuk in the watchtower spotted them and sounded the horns. At the same time, a hundred Nakujuk flocked like a cloud. But Ark's eyes just searched the corpses without paying any attention to the gathering Nakujuk.

"Radun, quickly pack the items dropped by the Nakujuk.

Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun ran boldly and examined the corpses. The list of all the japtem Radun swallowed appeared before Ark. After a while, Ark finally found the item he was looking for in the list.

<p>[-Radun had acquired the 'Nakujuk's Crude Key.'</p>
--

"That's it Radun. Give it to me!"

Radun vomited out the key it swallowed on Ark's command. Ark picked up the key and held it to the iron door. The iron door opened and all the children of the village came pouring out. Yes, Ark attacked the jail where the children were being imprisoned. The children were the weapons Ark prepared to defeat the Nakujuk. The kids came out and rushed towards Ark who had food prepared. It was the dish that he cooked for Hae Gyeol-sa, the founder of the intimidation skill in order to increase his voice.

“Oh Ark-nim, those fellows are right in front of you!”

“Wait a minute. Have you ate everything?”

The children became quite hungry in prison so they nodded after the food disappeared in an instant. Ark waved his hand like a conductor and said.

“Now, do you remember what you have to say when I make this signal?”

“Yes!”

“Daddy! Ark-nim saved us!”

“Okay, good. One, two!”

“The Nakujuk are coming! Save us!”

The village shook with the children’s’ cries thanks to the food which increased the volume of their voices. Its effect showed immediately.

“What, what the! This sound is?”

“Children, the children’s’ voices!”

“Ark? Who is Ark?”

“He is the foreigner who rescued Bona not so long ago. He came back!”

“Oh, that person rescued the children?”

“But it’s seems dangerous. They need help!”

The adults involved in the construction of the Reception Tower stopped moving. Then the Nakujuk supervisor ran to them and swung the whip with a perplexed expression.

“This fellow, you’re not behaving? Do you want to die?”

“Shut up!”

“What, what the? Are you crazy?”

“You’re the crazy ones! Locking up our children and threatening us.....! Bolkanasu, strike!”

Roaaaaaar!

The Bolkanasu shrieked at its trainer’s command and crashed into the supervisor. He was not the only one. The other trainers also used their monsters to attack the supervisors. The Baran members also picked up pickaxes or shovels and swung them. Thanks to Ark rescuing their children, the Baran caused a riot at the construction site making the Nakujuk panic.

‘Yes, it was successful!’

Ark clenched his fists when he saw the disorder in the village. Yes, this was what Ark came up with. The Baran said that they weren’t warriors. However, Ark felt like this was just a simple excuse. While their strength and stamina couldn’t compare to the Nakujuk, they had the trained monsters as weapons. Yet they never thought about fighting back because of fear. They would still be the same even if Ark helped them.

‘But.....’

Ark knew. Parents would become so much braver when their child was at risk. His father who passed away was like that. Although he usually never got into arguments, if Ark returned after being hit his father would become furious and fear nobody. Despite her illness, his mother never lost her smile for Ark’s sake. And he learned that the hearts of the NPCs in New World was no different from humans. They would be willing to die against the Nakujuk for their children.

“That’s it! Buksil, Bona, take the children to a safe place.”

“Yes Ark hyung. Now, follow me!”

Bona nodded and retreated with the children.

“Come with me Lariette-nim!”

Ark led Lariette and the flock of Nakujuk towards the construction

site. A fierce battle was being waged at the construction site. However, there were a limited number of monsters that the Baran could use to deal with the Nakujuk. When the Baran rushed in at the beginning, it seemed like the Nakujuk was pushed back. After the formation remained intact and the battle prolonged, the Baran clan and their monsters were the ones collapsing. Reality was still reality. Despite fighting for their children, they couldn't become Superman. Currently there were 100 Nakujuk troops there.

On the other hand, there were 70 Baran and 120 monsters. Despite the Baran clan's overwhelming numbers, their combat power was a lot weaker. Furthermore, their only weapons were shovels or pickaxes. On the other hand, the Nakujuk were heavily armed with armour and weapons.

"Everyone please listen to me!"

Ark shouted towards the Baran clan.

"As you heard earlier, all the children are safe. But if you fall back here your children will be in danger again. You have to defeat the Nakujuk. You won't stand a chance at this point so rally to me!"

"That person is?"

"It's that person. That's Ark! The one who rescued the children! Didn't I tell you? The friend that worked for me once? At that time I already knew he wasn't an average person!"

The stable owner Ark had worked for jumped forward. Then the Baran clan flocked to Ark.

"Okay, follow my instructions."

"We'll do anything since you've rescued our children!"

"We'll do anything since you've rescued our children!"

Ark quickly took control of the Baran clan. However, Ark actually delegated the Baran to Lariette. That was all he needed to do to achieve victory in battle. And that simple action showed its enormous power. It was because of the special characteristics of a Holy Knight

and Innocence Knight. A Holy Knight's true strength shone on the battlefield. He was able to stack up 3 buffs on all his subordinates. But was that all? Thanks to the influence of the Holy Knight, the troops moral would also rise. It was indeed a profession that existed for war, a maestro of the battlefield!

That was the Holy Knight.

Compared to the Holy Knight, an Innocence Knight was stronger in holy magic.

"Oh, my courage is rising quickly for some reason!"

Roaaaaar!

The monsters of the Baran clan also had their morale increased. They weren't the only ones who changed.

"Everyone attack!"

Lariette lifted her sword and shouted. She rushed towards a Nakujuk and struck it with her shield. Yes, she had finally fully awakened to her profession. An Innocence Knight who couldn't lead her troops into battle and death would be considered useless. Ark's dark attribute bonus increased his stats by 40% while another Hero profession, the Innocence Knight applied stat bonuses to her allies. Currently her level was 180. However, she was the leader of a 70 people attack group and her level reached the mid-200s. The Holy Knight characteristics of Alan that had once pushed Ark to despair was now a strong ally.

"Yap, yap, yap, yap!"

Thanks to the small space, a Nakujuk fell to her attacks. With her black hair flying while fighting the Nakujuk, it looked like a scene from Joan of Arc. She was the embodiment of an Innocence Knight. Thanks to her, the situation was in their favour.

'But the problem won't be settled even if I win this battle. If Jewel's party and the Nakujuk return, everything is screwed. I have to save Beseutyu before that happens.'

However he was unable to find Beseutyu at the construction site. A Baran member replied when he asked about Beseutyu's whereabouts.

"Beseutyu-nim? He was caught shortly after he tried to escape and dragged back. The foreigners who came with the Nakujuk stayed at Beseutyu's house so he's probably trapped there."

'Beseutyu's house!'

Ark looked at the large house located in the centre of the village.

'I'll leave this place to Dedric and Lariette. I don't know how the situation will change so I have to rescue Beseutyu first.'

"Lariette-nim, I'm going to rescue Beseutyu."

"Huh? Ah, yes!"

Lariette replied while still fighting. Anyway, Ark left the battlefield and headed towards Beseutyu's house. Most of the soldiers were concentrated on the construction site so there were only a few sporadic battles inside the village. Ark assisted the Baran a few times while crossing the village. So Ark was able to arrive at Beseutyu's house after a few minutes. The mansion contained a maze of shelves and bookcases densely packed together.

"Beseutyu-nim!"

A familiar voice was heard after Ark entered the house.

"Ah, Ark's voice.....is it Ark? This way, this way!"

He followed the voice and saw a prison cage hanging from the ceiling. Beseutyu and Guran were trapped in there. Ark began to release the chains of the cage that were tied to a pillar. The Beseutyu touched an iron cane and shouted.

"How did you get here?"

"The explanation is too long."

"Perhaps, have you perhaps seen Bona?"

“Don’t worry. Bona is taking the children to a safe place. There’s a lot I would like to ask.....eh?”

Ark tilted his head to one side. Usually a key obtained in a specific area could be used to open all locks there. The key to the children’s prison also unlocked their shackles. So Ark thought the key would be able to open the cage. But the key didn’t match when he tried to use it.

‘What on earth is going on? Another key is necessary?’

Ark thought with an unbearable expression. Guran had been looking around with an anxious face and suddenly burst out.

“Ark-nim, behind you! Be careful!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

At the same time, the bookcases at the entrance collapsed like a domino and Ark was attacked. The bookcase was several metres high and had a tremendous weight! He would be completely flattened if it fell on him. Ark reflexively pushed the cage back and climbed on top of it. The cage tied with chains swung back like a swing and then swung forward and smashed into the bookcase. The hundreds and thousands of scrolls poured out like water.

“What the hell is this...?”

Ark asked with a bewildered expression when the shaking cage finally came to a halt. Then he saw a shadow approaching quickly before he felt a tremendous impact on his side. Ark flew back a few metres and crashed.

“Ark!”

Beseutyu and Guran called out from the cage. However Ark couldn’t hear their voices.

‘Oh my God...!’

Ark lifted his head and swallowed his saliva. The shadow was a giant armed with thick steel armour and a huge two-handed axe. The face peering out from the helmet gave off a terrible impression.

“Kukukuku, I thought you would come here.”

A warning message flashed as soon as the giant spoke.

[-The Nakujuk Commander Kaljapeu has appeared!]

But he didn't have time to confirm the warning message.

“You dared hinder the cause of the Nakujuk.....die!”

Kaljapeu's two handed axe fell downwards and caused a storm. Ark quickly rolled his body and narrowly managed to escape the attack. But he only had 50% of his health left. After leaving the construction site, he had been too busy to recovery his health. He never thought he would meet a mid-level boss.

‘But even so.....’

He still had 60% health when entering the house. He had only been hit by the surprise attack, meaning that one strike reduced 10% of his health!

‘Does that mean I can only endure five of his direct attacks? Damn, he's only level 350 but he has tremendous attack power. But he seems slow. With such incredibly high damage, his agility should be quite low. In addition, that thick armour will make him even easier to deal with.’

He had initially panicked but now Ark showed a confident expression. No matter how high, damage wasn't enough. In fact, Ark had no trouble with opponents that had high damage and defense but were slow. Andel and Leo were the first people he PKed and they were both warriors. It was because he could grasp the weak points even if the armour was very thick.

“Dark Dance!”

Ark used dazzling footwork to confuse Kaljapeu. As expected, Kaljapeu's movements were slow. Every time he took a thick armoured step, the whole house would shake. He couldn't overcome Ark's movements with such a heavy weight. However, it wasn't as easy to win as Ark thought.

Teteng!

He took advantage of the opportunity and swung his sword. A sound suddenly rang out and his wrists became heavy and dull. On the other hand, Kaljapeu only lost 1% of its health. The armour was too thick to deal any damage. In the meantime, Ark used his taekwondo skills which had defeated countless knights. He used a low kick to hit a place that would normally stun knights. However, the thickness of the armour was beyond his imagination and his kicks couldn't penetrate it. Kaljapeu just ignored the kicks and swung his axe. Ark had been careless and he became cornered in a few blinks of an eye.

'I'll get hit if I don't move!'

Ark used Riposte to push Kaljapeu back for the moment. No, he was trying to push. But a giant was the opponent. He was also a giant wearing several tons of armour. Rather than being pushed by Riposte, Ark flew back through the air.

'What is this bastard?'

Indeed, it was a tank. But there was still a way to defeat it.

'Even a tank has weaknesses. I just have to attack the place and this durable armour won't matter!'

He looked using Eyes of the Cat and spotted a red light in a gap in Kaljapeu's armour. It was Kaljapeu's weakness. Once Ark confirmed the weakness, he changed his strategy and used Dark Dance to spin around Kaljapeu with his sword. Once he reached Kaljapeu's back, he stabbed the sword in a gap in his armour. Then Ark witnessed an unimaginable scene.

In fact, Ark felt like something was wrong ever since Kaljapeu appeared. It was strange.....normal armour had different front and backs. However, Kaljapeu wore a rustic armour that looked the same in the front and back. It was a funny looking armour.....

Woodududuk!

When Ark tried to stab his sword, the armour completely twisted

around and blocked the gap. There was a ringing sound and Kaljapeu's head turned 180 degrees. Not only that, both arms completely turned to the back. In a moment, the front and back were completely changed. And the moment Ark thrust his sword, Kaljapeu grabbed the blade with his glove and smacked him.

<p>-You have received a critical hit, 550 damage!</p> <p><You have been stunned for 3 seconds></p>
--

Ark flew in an arc and hit the bookcase. The impact made his spirit feel like it was flying to Andromeda! But he was lucky that Kaljapeu was overflowing with strength. If he had fallen right in front of him because of the counterattack, he would be subjected to continuous attacks thanks to his stunned state. Fortunately he was released from his stunned state by the time Kaljapeu reached him but the situation had become worse. He had no chance in a frontal confrontation. The only way Ark could win was to attack the gap in the armour. However, if Kaljapeu could switch his front and back then Ark would have no chance of attacking the gaps. In addition, he would be vulnerable to a counter attack.

‘Shit, is he the T-400 Terminator or something?’

There was no point in standing around complaining. Since he couldn't attack the gaps in the armour, Ark had only dealt 3% damage at most. However, Ark was hit by the counter attack and lost 10% health. With his 30% health, if he took three more hits or counter attacks then he would definitely die.

“Kukukuku, have you run out of techniques?”

Kaljapeu started swinging his axe. But.....it was true. He had no chance in a frontal confrontation and his taekwondo didn't work either. Even his strategy to attack the weak point failed. Truly overwhelming! All Ark could do was run around. Fortunately he could avoid most of Kaljapeu's attacks thanks to his high agility. However, New World's combat system meant that he would still receive damage in a certain range even if he avoided the attack. Thanks to that, Ark's health slowly dripped down lower and lower. In fact, it

was natural that he would suffer. Kaljapeu was the commander of the Nakujuk Jewel's group met when they crossed the northern mountains. Although he was only level 350, Jewel's group needed 10 people to defeat him.

"I never thought I would meet such a tough ambush. The results of this encounter will be inevitable!"

Ark tightened his lips and felt like his insides were burning. The problem had become really serious once he encountered Kaljapeu. If Ark died then Razak's Death's Equations would be broken. So Jewel's group would return to the village once they realised they've been deceived. It was obvious what would happen to the battle at the construction site.

'My resurrection location is at the valley village. Jewel will not miss such an opportunity. Once the town is occupied, a constant watch will be set on the totem. If Lariette or I die then we won't be able to resurrect again!'

Ark used Umma's Sap and endured. However, Umma's Sap only recovered 400 healths.

He only had 4 left so he would only be able to recovery 1,600 healths.

"Kukukuku, it's no use even if you run away!"

While Ark was thinking, Kaljapeu had backed him into a corner and swung his axe. Ark lowered his body and hurriedly used Slide to escape between Kaljapeu's legs. He would do anything it took to live. But Ark surprisingly realized something thanks to this humiliating act.

"Ugh, this bastard.....!"

Kaljapeu jumped and showed signs of panic. Then he looked around briefly before finding Ark and approaching.

'What the? That response just now?'

Kaljapeu's reaction time was normally very fast. It was similar to Ark

never missing a target when he used Dark Dance. Because of that, he could immediately switch back and forth if someone attacked from behind and then counter attack. But Ark sliding through the crotch, for a brief moment he could not determine Ark's location.

'Perhaps that guy.....?'

"Slide!"

Ark once again used Slide to pass underneath Kaljapeu's crotch. Although he showed less signs of panic than the first time, he still had difficulty finding Ark's location.

'There's no doubt. That guy.....can't see properly near his feet!'

Yes, Kaljapeu was wearing an armour of great thickness. His helmet was also very thick! With such a thick helmet on, he naturally wouldn't be able to see properly around his feet. So his blind spot wasn't his back but his feet.

'Aha, that's it!'

Ark devised a plan and immediately communicated with Dedric.

'Dedric, what is the situation over there?'

"This.....it is a little cumbersome.....the battle is proceeding as planned.....over!"

'Okay, then fly towards Beseutyu's house right now!'

Ark commanded before running all over the place and pushing down bookshelves. The many bookcases filling up the mansion collapsed and scrolls came pouring out. The amount of scrolls was enough to fill up to his ankles. Then Dedric flew into the house after crossing the village.

"Master, I'm busy so why couldn't you wait to call....huk! What is that?"

"You've arrived?"

Kaljapeu who had been chasing after Ark turned his head and swung his axe. But Ark was one step ahead and grabbed Dedric before

diving into a roll. After avoiding the attack, the axe slammed into the ground and damaged it.

“This bastard, where are you? Cowardly bastard!”

Kaljapeu brandished his axe all over the place but Ark had already run far away. Dedric panted in another room and muttered.

“M-master, what is with that huge guy?”

“Shut up, there’s no time so listen to me.”

Ark quickly explained the operation. Dedric understood the majority of the situation and smiled before nodding.

“Oh, so that guy is just big and dumb?”

“That’s right.”

“Understood. I’m an expert.”

Dedric swam out among the scrolls. Even then Kaljapeu still couldn’t identify Ark’s location. His eyes had no way of reaching his feet and the scrolls also reached his ankle. Then he saw something rolling a few metres away.

“Are you there? You rat bastard!”

Kaljapeu approached and his axe fell. At the moment the scrolls scattered and a bat flew up to the ceiling. Dedric escaped the range of the axe and touched the ceiling while sticking out his tongue.

“Over here~.”

“What, what the? A bat? Ugh!”

Kaljapeu’s face stiffened as something attacked his sphincter. While Kaljapeu had been concentrating on Dedric, Ark dived between his legs and stabbed his crotch with a knife. Even though Kaljapeu realised the attack, he couldn’t do anything about it.

“This...this bastard...!”

Kaljapeu immediately tried to attack but Ark and Dedric had already

dived among the scrolls. After that Kaljapeu became completely stupid. Ark and Dedric hid among the scrolls and would emerge at different times to attack Kaljapeu.

“Over here stupid!”

Dedric would run away and yell while Kaljapeu concentrated his gaze on him. Then Ark would close the distance and attack X. Kaljapeu wasn't completely stupid so after a few repetitions, he would swing his head 180 degrees in the opposite direction that a shadow jumped. He determined that Dedric emerged first so Ark would attack from behind. But of course Ark would've thought of that response.

“You've misunderstood. I'm real this time.”

This time Ark smiled and ran away.

“Oh, that Kaljapeu didn't even move a muscle!”

“Ark-nim is the descendant of Rarukan like expected!”

Guran and Beseutyu exclaimed from where they were watching in the cage.

.....To be honest, it wasn't a nice enough fight that they could exclaim like that. They just stuck like a cockroach to the scrolls before emerging and either attacking or running away.

But this method had the best effect. Using this strategy, Ark was able to drive Kaljapeu into a critical condition. Then.....

“Time to finish this!”

Ark once again attacked Kaljapeu's sphincter. A dreadful scream emerged like a patient had haemorrhoids! Kaljapeu let out a huge scream and grabbed his ass as he died. The Nakujuk commander had pushed Ark into a corner several times and now looked pathetic as he died after having his sphincter attacked multiple times.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.

Despite the difficult, he only rose 2 levels.

“Isn’t it slightly pitiful now that I’ve seen it?”

However, Dedric just kicked his feet against the knife stuck in the Kaljapeu’s ass.

“Hahaha, that’s what you get for swinging your axe all over the place.”

Then Kaljapeu dropped two items.

-Kaljapeu’s Key
Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred (Magic)
Armour type: Plated Gauntlets
Defense power: 55 (+15)
Durability: 55/90
Weight: 40
User restriction: Level 200 or more Knight
Plated gauntlets used by the Nakujuk commander Kaljapeu. The Nakujuk clan has a history of intense hatred for other races. Their hatred is so dark and depraved that it seeped into the equipment they used. Moreover, Kaljapeu’s hatred increased beyond imagination in his final moments and has created a special option.
<Option: Strength +20, Defense +15>
Special Option: You can use ‘Berserk.’ When Berserk is used, your hatred is amplified and your offense will increase by 5% for 20 minutes. Not available for those without the ‘Hatred’ stat. Cool down time: 2 hours>

“Eh? What is this?”

Kaljapeu was a boss monster so of course he would drop a magic item. But Ark discovered something different when reading the information window. Kaljapeu died while he was furious and created

a new special option. Didn't that mean an item's properties could vary depending on the circumstances of death?

'Does that mean I can receive better items if I kill the Nakujuk while they're furious? Then I might be able to create special items in the same way with other monsters.

Items with better side effects would be sold at a higher price.

'I've discovered some good information!'

Attacking the X was a strategy which ensured the opponent would become furious. Ark become determined to refine his newly learned skill to attack X and picked up the key.

Near Miss!

“Where the hell is that Ark child?”

Jewel frowned and complained. It had been one hour since the group had left the village. Jewel had circled the outskirts of the village several times but never found any traces of Ark. However, the Ranger Duke kept on finding traces of Ark so there was no way they could return yet. But Jewel found something strange during that time.

-Nearly there. I've found traces that Ark has just passed by here.

“How many times have you said those words?”

-Nearly there. I've found traces that Ark has just passed by here.

Those were the only words Duke would say after leaving the valley village. In fact, Razak didn't know how to write. So he wrote down what Ark told him to in order to lure Jewel out of the village. However Ark had left for the village so he could only repeat the last sentence over and over.

‘What is with this guy? Did he eat something weird?’

Jewel didn't know the circumstances and just thought Duke was acting weird because he caught a cold. Well, his behaviour was still strange even with a cold..... Jewel calmed down and followed behind Duke. Then Jewel suddenly heard a harsh sound.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

It wasn't a sound in the game. The banging sound came from reality. But Jewel just ignored it. When connected to the game, she was Jewel the Stalker. Reality just irritated Jewel. Even if she disconnected, the person on the other end would just talk nonsense. Jewel had no intention of stopping for nonsense when Ark was on the verge of being caught. However, she heard the voice speaking

and had to exit the unit.

“Hey you! What the hell?”

‘Eh? This voice is.....huh, what?’

Jewel opened the door of the apartment with a confused face. And felt chilled when she saw the visitor’s face. The visitor was a friend who had been playing the game since the beta test. His ID in New World was Duke..... However, wasn’t Duke chasing Ark around in the game? New World used biometric data so no one else could control the character. Then who was with Jewel inside the game?

“Dammit, why didn’t you answer the phone?”

Duke asked with annoyance as he entered the room.

“That....who know I don’t answer calls while playing the game. Rather, how are you here.....?”

“How?”

Duke breathed out and started complaining.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. Anyway you have to hurry.”

“What?”

“Dammit, it’s Ark. While chasing after Bona, I happened to run into Ark and got killed by him so I frantically tried to call you. I wanted to let you know where he was. But you didn’t answer the phone. Now he’s probably already run away..... Anyway, I can’t connect for 24 hours.....so it’s really frustrating.”

“Ark! You encountered Ark?”

Jewel realized what happened. She was confident regarding aspects of New World. If someone encountered something they couldn’t understand in New World then it was most likely a skill!

‘Duke was killed by Ark. Then Duke’s ghost appeared and lured us out of town. Then.....’

Jewel didn’t know what method Ark used by he had deliberately

deceived them and lured them out of the village! In fact, Ark was guilty of one big error when thinking about his plan. When Duke was killed, he could've called Jewel straight away in reality. While thinking about a skill in the game, it wasn't possible to take reality into account. But fortunately, this strategy lasted for 1 hour despite its weak points because of Jewel's habit of not answering the phone. However, Duke ended up visiting Jewel directly.

"Damn! Duke you're dead!"

Jewel cursed and ran to the unit.

"What, what the? What are you doing?"

Duke was left scratching his head with a stupid expression.

"Grandfather!"

"Oh, Bona. You're all right!"

Beseutyu was released from the cage and wept while hugging Bona. He had seen the same scene not too long ago.....Deja vu? Well, it was a minor scene so Ark checked over the situation in the village. While Ark was stabbing Kaljapeu's sphincter with a knife, the Slave Liberation Army lead by Joan of Arc was able to defeat the Nakujuk after a fierce battle. But after the heat of the battle, they returned to the terrible reality. They sacrificed quite a few people in order to defeat the Nakujuk. The group Of 70 Baran was reduced by 30 people. The damage to the monsters was even further as only twenty of them survived. The difference in combat power between the Nakujuk and the Baran was huge. Therefore there were quite a few orphaned children.

"Sob sob, Father.....Mother....."

Ark felt his heart become heavier after hearing the children's cries. He was familiar with the grief of losing parents. Although they fought to save their children, Ark was the one who incited them to do it.

“It’s not necessary to make that look.”

Beseutyu seemed to guess what Ark was feeling as he tapped him on the shoulder.

“I heard everything while being locked in the cage. They intended to kill all of us once the tower was finished. Although 30 Myutal died, you ended up saving 40 of us. And their children as well. So don’t beat yourself up about the victims.”

Of course he would do that. Ark wasn’t a sentimental person who would dwell on his guilt. They were NPCs. Although the well-crafted NPC felt human, a NPC was still a NPC. And now wasn’t the time to be thinking about such things.

“Do you know what the Nakujuk are using the tower for?”

“I also heard it. I can’t believe that the Nakujuk can freely move across the northern mountains when the tower is completed. The purpose of those guys.....conquest of the Netherworld!”

Beseutyu made it seem like he was stating a huge discovery.

“I already know that. So if you pull down the tower.....”

Jewel and the Nakujuk conquering the Netherworld was a big deal for Ark. But since the Nakujuk utilized monsters to build the tower, Ark couldn’t pull it down by himself. Beseutyu just shook his head and sighed.

“It’s possible. But that would only buy some time. Those guys have the blueprint for the tower. While they possess the blueprints, their southern invasion is an inevitable fact.

“This.....”

“There is only one way left. The Baran must rally together and fight against them.”

“Are the odds in your favour?”

Beseutyu closed his mouth with a heavy expression. The meaning of his silence was obvious. Ark clearly knew about the huge difference

between the Baran and the Nakujuk's combat abilities. So the Baran would have to unite despite those differences. Besides, if the Baran joined the war then the Hermes Alliance was likely to send some forces. There was no way the weak Baran group could match them.

'I can't prevent the Netherworld from falling into their hands.....'

Ark sighed with frustration. Beseutyu was also frustrated.

"Anyway, there is only one way now. In the past, the Baran fled from the Nakujuk but there is nowhere else to run. We will be forced to fight, even if everyone dies. I have to inform my people as fast as possible to allow them to prepare."

'Ah, before that there's one thing I wanted to ask.'

Ark explained to Beseutyu what occurred in Magaro's Laboratory. Beseutyu frowned and muttered as he thought.

"It can be seen but not touched.....perhaps he is speaking of Underground?"

"Underground?"

"Yes, that's certainly it. My memory is vague but a long time ago a huge disaster occurred, the dimensions distorted and some areas were trapped in a dimensional gap."

"Trapped in a dimensional gap? Then is there a method to return it intact?"

"I don't remember all the details. The incident is similar to a myth or legend. But if they know the dimension distorting is a cause then there might be a solution. That's right, records of the legend are in the A bookcase....."

Beseutyu murmured and looked around before his face stiffened. The shelves had collapsed while fighting Kaljapeu, pouring thousands of scrolls onto the floor. In addition, Ark had swum around in the scrolls so they were all scrambled.

"Oh my god! How am I going to find the scroll in here?"

Beseutyu groaned as he looked around. Ark also thought it was an impossible task. How could they find one among thousands of scrolls? And time was of the essence. The time when Jewel and the Nakujuk would return to the village was unknown.

‘Razak hasn’t contacted me yet so there is no need to worry for the moment....’

Did they have to look for the scroll blindly? It wouldn’t be possible to obtain the clue once Jewel occupied the village again. Didn’t he also have to complete the quest before the Hermes guild occupied the Netherworld? Then, a perfect solution to find the scroll struck Ark.

“Are there any special markings on the scroll?”

“Marking? No, nothing like that. But all the records related to that legend is on the A shelf. So the strings closing the scroll would have the A symbol on it. As I recall, contents about ‘Underground’ seemed to be in the A-20 to A-30 scrolls.”

“I understand! Lariette-nim, call all the residents and tell them to gather here!”

Approximately 60 residents and children entered the house.

“Buksil, Lariette-nim, please distribute all of the Herbal Tea.”

Yes, he devised the idea of using the herbal tea. The herbal tea Ark distributed was the one to speed up their hand movements and improve their eye sight. Then he ordered them to search for the A-20 to A-30 scrolls. At any rate, Ark was the best at using people.

“Oh, what is this?”

“Why are hands are so fast?”

“And I can see that fine print completely from this far away.”

The effect of the herbal tea activated immediately. The Baran clan acted like pigeons picking up food and searched among the scrolls at an amazing speed. And someone soon found a necessary scroll.

‘Okay, five have already been found. Now only five more.....’

Ark was waiting anxiously.

Clack clack clack clack!

All of a sudden Razak ran into the mansion. Dedric lifted his head from where it was buried in a scroll and shouted.

“Master, those guys are coming back to the village!”

“What the?”

Ark jumped with surprise. He exited the mansion and saw a cloud of dust approaching in the distance. Jewel’s group was coming back to the village leading over 200 Nakujuk!

“Damn, how did they know? We should find the other five in around.....10 minutes. No, the work pace has quickened so it should be 7 minutes.....”

“Oh my god! So close....”

Lariette moaned as she also exited the house. If Jewel’s group noticed something strange then they would definitely try to catch Ark and the Baran. On the other hand, Ark’s group contained children so their escape speed would be slower. There was no guarantee that they could elude the pursuit even if they left now. No, to be honest there was a 30% chance. But it would be impossible if he delayed for 7 more minutes. The village would be surrounded and they would be wiped out.

“Ark, this is a request.”

At that moment Beseutyu approached and spoke to him.

“A request?”

“Yes, I’ve heard from Bona. You have a method to move to middle earth. As you know, the war in the Netherworld will begin soon. And win or lose, the Baran will suffer a harsh trial. It’s our inevitable fate. But.....”

Beseutyu turned his head and looked at the children moving in the mansion.

“I don’t want the children to experience that. And anyway, it is impossible to flee from the Nakujuk with the children. So can you escape with all these children and their caretakers to the safer middle earth?”

Ark’s eyes started flashing. Why had he never thought of that? That’s right. Ark had a method to return to middle earth at any time. So he could still look for the scrolls without worrying about being chased by Jewel’s group. It was like he had just opened a door and exited from a nightmare.

“It’s not just to save the children. We also think that this is the best way. There are only 7 skyrays remaining. If I’m there then Guran and the other trainers will be able to use the skyrays. The Nakujuk will be unable to follow them on foot. Therefore they can quickly tell our kin about the situation.”

Of course, Ark could also stay in the town until they found the scrolls. But there was one problem. The scrolls were all protected using a cipher passed down through Beseutyu’s family. If he didn’t go with Beseutyu then who would decipher the scrolls? But the clever old man had already thought of that.

“Although Bona is still immature, he can still solve the password for the scroll.”

“Grandfather!”

Bona stared at Beseutyu with surprise. But Beseutyu just stroked Bona’s head and laughed.

“You don’t have to worry. Ark is someone you can trust. No doubt he will take you guys to a safe place. Just wait there safely until we come to pick you up.”

Bona was tearful but did not protest. Beseutyu wiped off his tears with a sleeve and nodded.

“I promise. I’ll definitely come pick you up.”

“Right.”

Beseutyu nodded and walked towards the skyrays with Guran and some trainers. Then, Lariette who had been hesitating suddenly shouted.

“I, I’ll go too!”

“Lariette-nim?”

Ark’s eyes popped out.

“Isn’t Ark-nim going to return to the Netherworld?”

Of course. That was why he was looking for the scroll.

“Ark-nim has to take the children to middle earth. But someone should also stay here. It is important to understand the situation in the Netherworld. And there is no guarantee of safety even on the skyrays. I-I will protect them.”

Ark looked at Lariette with bemusement. Her suggestion was unexpected. Didn’t she promise never to get on a skyray again? So he couldn’t understand why she intended to stay in the Netherworld. But it wasn’t bad to have Lariette stay behind. Ark still hadn’t abandoned the Netherworld. If Jewel’s group occupied the Netherworld then there would be nowhere for Ark to hide. He had to do whatever it took to stop it. And the power of the Baran clan was needed to stop their ambitions. In the war Lariette would help the Baran clan tremendously so it was welcomed.

“I understand.”

Ark nodded and Lariette mumbled something.

“Then.....please tell me your phone number.”

“Huh? Phone number?”

“Ark-nim will be in middle earth but you will need to know the situation in the Netherworld. But you can’t use the Feather of Whispering to communicate between dimensions.....”

“Ah, yes....”

Ark nodded and told her his phone number. And Lariette blushed

before clenching her fist tightly. After that Beseutyu called from the sky ray, and she clenched tightly to Beseutyu with a pale face before vanishing with a scream.

‘She’s so scared but still volunteered.....Lariette-nim is surprisingly responsible.’

Ark thought Lariette wanted to stay behind because of a sense of responsibility towards the Baran. However, Lariette had a separate ulterior motive. Her feelings for Ark were still too ambiguous. Lariette wanted to confirm if her feelings for Ark was like a friendly colleague or something more. Every time she was alone with Ark.....she would become confused and change the subject. However, if she returned to middle earth then she would lose all justification to follow Ark. But if Lariette remained in the Netherworld then Ark would obviously have to contact her. Moreover, didn’t she naturally ask for his phone number? Lariette had a surprisingly smart plan.

Anyway, Ark once again entered the mansion once Beseutyu’s group left.

‘10 grams of the Dimension Movement powder can move 1 person. Currently, there are 50 remaining adults and children. I’ll have to create a magic circle using 500 grams of powder.’

Ark cleared the floor of scrolls and started making a magic circle.

“Ark-hyung, I’ve found another one!”

‘Okay, we can find everything and still leave in time!’

Meanwhile, the Baran had been busy finding the scrolls. By the time he finished drawing the magic circle, they had found nine scrolls. Now there was only one left so obviously the last one would be a huge problem.

“Ark-hyung, we’ve search everyone but we can’t find the last one.”

The 50 Baran had drunk the herbal tea and searched the mansion. Even so, they could not find the final piece. And Jewel’s group had already entered the village and was rushing towards the house. Beseutyu said that the Underground was written in one of

those scrolls. Couldn't the content be written in one of the nine scrolls?

'Nine scrolls are found so the probability is 90%. But considering my luck it would probably be in that one scroll....'

It was like missing just one number in bingo. But there was no more time to hold out. Ark clenched his teeth and pointed towards the dimly shining gate.

"It can't be helped. Leave the last chapter. Everybody go inside the gate. Children first! And then the adults. Hurry. Those guys are already reached the mansion.

The Baran plunged into the gate one by one under Ark's command. Then Bona who was one of the last ones to leave stood beside Ark at the gate and looked around. Then Bona's eyes brightened and he exclaimed.

"Ark hyung! Over there, A-7! It's the last chapter!"

"What?"

Ark turned his head. After a moment of concentrating, he was able to find the scroll. The last chapter was wedged between a fallen bookcase near the entrance. Then Jewel's group entered at the same time he saw the scroll.

"Ark!"

"Eh, that gate? The Baran clan are running away!"

"Dammit, the timing is really amazing."

Ark cursed.

"Dedric, take Bona first and enter the gate. Razak, transform!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak who had been waiting next to him changed into the Saw Blade. Ark picked up the Saw Blade and used Sprint to approach Jewel's cronies. Jewel obviously thought Ark was running away and tried to stop him. But Ark's special move instantly left his mouth.

“Ya, this.....would you guys like to be turned to meat? I’ll beep- and beep-to you!”

The vulgar words were shot out rapidly as their faces turned red. Under the effect of Intermediate ‘Intimidation,’ Jewel’s group stiffened. At the same time Ark ran up and jumped, smashing into a warrior at the front. Then he used the face as a stepping stone and continuously swung his blade while moving. The blade turned into a whip and grabbed a scroll underneath a bookcase. Then the whip returned and the scroll was brought to Ark’s hand.

‘I got it!’

Ark picked up the scroll and turned towards the gate. At that moment the stiffness wore off and a warrior grabbed his ankle. Thanks to that, Ark fell to the floor like a frog. His health was decreased as well. But that wasn’t the problem.

“Bastard, we’ve caught you!”

“This is our chance, smash him. Heroic Strike!”

“Stun him then drive his health down to the bottom!”

PVP after falling down in the middle of enemy territory? Wasn’t there a game that was briefly popular in the early 2000s where these kinds of situations were common? With such a memory, Ark didn’t have to explain his current situation. He was hit by a waterfall of skills! Jewel’s group and the Nakujuk surrounded him while his health quickly decreased.

‘Everything is finished if I die!’

Ark rolled on the ground and barely escaped the attacks but he was already in a critical condition. However, it was fortunate that he entered a critical condition. Thanks to that his ‘Adrenaline’ activated and his defense and reflexes increased by leaps and bounds. Ark used Dark Dance to avoid the attacks and run to the gate. And just as he was about to throw his body into the gate.... Suddenly, dozens of chains emerged from the ground and wound around his body. A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

-You have been caught by the advanced 'Restraint' spell.

<You can't move for one minute However, it will be automatically cancelled when attacked>

It was a magician's chain skill. The skill limited his movements but it would be released once he was attacked. It was a useful skill when dealing with a lot of monsters. However, Ark was in a critical condition so one good attack would kill him.

"Don't touch him, I'm going to handle it!"

Jewel moved forward and chanted a spell. Jewel used Magic Harmony to combine her two strongest spells. The incantation time was very long so it couldn't be used in a 1-on-1 battle. However, it was so strong that it would instantly reduce a warrior's health by 40%.

'D-damn.....only one more step....ah, no!'

"This is for messing with us! Blizzard, Hellfire!"

The two different kinds of magic left her hands in a spiral and Ark was hit with fire and ice. His body received an enormous shock and ran out of health. And.....a message appeared that he never wanted to see.

-You've been killed by Jewel-nim's attack!

"I did it! I got him!"

Ark collapsed while Jewel's group laughed and ran around like crazy. They had managed to avoid becoming chaotic when occupying the village but they were willing to become chaotic if it meant killing Ark.

"His resurrection point is at the valley village. Now he's caught like a rat in a trap!"

But Jewel was unaware of one thing. A faint smile appeared on Ark's mouth.....

'Okay, now's the time!'

Ark said in his mind. All of a sudden the Saw Blade in Ark's hand started vibrating. At first the sound was low and then it started building up. Then the vibration burst and Ark's health was restored.

-Razak's 'Pledge of Death' skill has been triggered.

Ark has automatically changed health with Razak.

Yes, it was a Death Master's special skill 'Pledge of Death!' When the summoner died, the pet would show absolute proof of its loyalty and exchange health with the Master. Thanks to that, Ark's penalty of all stats -1 was applied to Razak but Ark had his health restored by 3000 points.

'I never thought I would be assisted in this way!'

"Although it is urgent, I can't just leave like this. Demonic Opening!"

"Ugh!"

Ark pulled out Gwisal's sword and stabbed Jewel in the ass. It was the special move he used against Kaljapeu, attacking X. In addition, he used Demonic Opening so attacking X became even more painful. Jewel burst out screaming from the surprise attack and collapsed.

"Razak's revenge!"

Ark said with a cool smile before diving into the gate. Although Jewel's group realized that there was something one, the gate had already disappeared and they just ended up diving into the ground. The Hermes group looked around stupidly before turning to Jewel and saying.

"Sphincter.....is it alright?"

"Captain, hold on....."

Lee Myung-ryong was drinking coffee in the SWAT team's break room.

“What?”

“That.....a suspicious guy has come.”

The SWAT team member spoke in a low voice.

“It’s about the year-end party the other day. When Hyun-woo was attacked by those hoodlums.”

“So?”

“Someone watching the fight filmed Hyun-woo with a phone. Luckily it was blurry so Hyun-woo’s face wasn’t recognizable. Just now some guy brought a picture and asked us if we knew the person. The owner of the pub we were drinking in mentioned that we had a year-end party on that day.....’

“Who was he? Another policeman?”

“He doesn’t seem to be the police. Based on his conversation, he was looking for someone. He was similar to someone they’re looking for inside a game. He tried to ask me but I just rattled on and didn’t give any information.”

“He came to the National Police Agency and dared to act like that?”

“That guy doesn’t understand the world.”

The SWAT team member laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

“Anyway, it’s related to Hyun-woo so I thought I would tell you.”

Lee Myung-ryong turned the coffee cup and thought about it. A cell phone video with Hyun-woo. He didn’t know it was Hyun-woo. Yet that person sought the police just to find him. Then there could only be one simple answer. That person had a purpose for finding Hyun-woo and he was willing to use money to do it. In other words, the purpose couldn’t be good. But what was the purpose? He already knew the answer. If they were searching for someone in a game then it was someone with a grudge against Hyun-woo in New World. And just like Andel, he was looking for Hyun-woo to return a grudge.

“Hyun-woo, what are you doing in the game that is making you so

many enemies?”

Lee Myung-ryong scratched his head and muttered. Then, the SWAT team member opened his eyes and asked.

“Game? Didn’t the other situation also happen because of a game?”

“What about it?”

“Hah, I don’t understand it. Deliberately searching for someone because of a game.....”

“Hey, don’t ignore the game!”

Lee Myung-ryong huffed and shouted. In fact, Lee Myung-ryong didn’t understand it either when the situation with Andel and Hyun-woo occurred. It was only a game. Bringing any grudges into reality felt strange. However, he now understood after playing the game. Raising a character while suffering the pain of broken limbs.....Lee Myung-ryong truly felt like Isyuram was an alter ego. If something happened to Isyuram then he wouldn’t sit still either. Lee Myung-ryong suddenly thought of an unpleasant memory and became angry.

‘That child is dead.’

Not long ago, Lee Myung-ryong had saved a merchant called Sid.

And he gave the first user he became familiar with the unicorn horns worth 1,000 gold who sold it for 851 gold. Lee Myung-ryong became aware of this fact after spending several days in Giran. When he thought about it, he also felt like hiring a fixer and returning the grudge. But Lee Myung-ryong was still part of the Special Criminal Measures group and the fact that he was playing the game was a secret. Therefore he couldn’t mention it to the SWAT team member. So Lee Myung-ryong had to pretend ignorance even though he was aware of the situation. He understood the feelings but to put up multiple bounties for one target? That silly person was confusing the game with reality and thought 21st century Korea was the Wild West. He didn’t know what someone like Andel would do.

“So where is he now?”

“I left him at the waiting room near the gym.”

“The gym?”

Lee Myung-ryong smiled and spoke.

“Okay, then I should go to the gym and do a little work.”

“A tour?”

A twenty something year old man asked. The man neatly dressed in a suit was an employee of Global Exos, Ho Myung-hwan. He was visiting the National Police Agency on business. Not long ago, Ha Myung-woo watched a video and noticed that it was similar to the user fighting the boss Valderas in the Event Quest so he asked Ho Myung-hwan to find the protagonist of the video. However, it wasn't as easy to find the hero of the movie as it sounded. The face couldn't be identified properly in the video shot. He had been hoping that someone reported the violent incident at a nearby police station. Then, coincidentally he received information that the SWAT team was having a year-end party at a pub near there.

‘SWAT team....that's right, why didn't I think of that? The hero of the movie had considerable martial arts skills. Maybe he had been learning martial arts for a long time. That person might be a part of the SWAT team. It isn't strange that a SWAT team member would fight against hooligans.’

That was why Ho Myung-hwan came to visit the National Police Agency. But when he asked a SWAT team member, he was asked to wait here before the person disappeared somewhere.

‘I've come to the right place. His expression when looking at the screen indicated that he knew something. Huhuhu, who knew that I would find something from such a blurry video? Perhaps I have the mindset of a detective?’

While Ho Myung-hwan was praising himself, the SWAT team member returned.

“There is someone who knows. That person is currently out in the field....but it is almost time for him to exercise. Oh, do you mind taking a short tour of the gym while you’re waiting?”

‘Hmmm, the police are acting pretty nice.’

“I understand.”

“Come along.”

Ho Myung-hwan nodded and the SWAT team member showed him around the gym. When he entered the gym equipped with clean, modern facilities, he immediately heard loud sounds coming from around the gym. The atmosphere felt warm despite the winter chill and Ho Myung-hwan inwardly exclaimed.

‘Ah, the police train their bodies every day to protect the citizens!’

Ho Myung-hwan was glad to be called a proud citizen of South Korea. Ho Myung-hwan was guided around the various martial artists sparring and sat down. How much time had passed? Just as he was becoming bored, the SWAT team member arrived.

“Are you bored?”

“No, well.....”

“If you’re bored, would you like some hands-on practice?”

“Hands-on practice?”

“It’s not something hard. Just a light spar. In fact, sometimes the National Police Agency helps citizens get some experience in self-defence. It is different according to size and experience so you should just think of it as lightly sweating.”

Ho Myung-hwan’s shoulders shook at the end of the SWAT team member’s words. Ho Myung-hwan was a red belt in taekwondo so he was quite proud of his skills. He also watched mixed martial arts tournaments every week and polished his skills against a pillow.

“.....Shall I try it out?”

“Good choice. Then please sign here.”

The SWAT team member extended some documents. The documents stated that he wouldn't sue if he was injured during a spar. And the title on top 'Hands-on Experience Application' seemed like it was written in a hurry. Ho Myung-hwan was quite spooked but he trusted the police 100% and signed.

"Come, please change and leave your clothes there."

The SWAT team member accepted his application and smiled. After Ho Myung-hwan changed, the team member led him to where his opponent was waiting. A 170 centimetres tall man was visible. On the other hand, Ho Myung-hwan was 190 centimetres tall. And he also did some muscle body building in his spare time. Although his opponent was a SWAT team member, he was slightly embarrassed fighting against someone whose physique was so different to his.

"That.....shouldn't I be sparring with my weight class?"

Ho Myung-hwan scratched his head and asked tentatively.

"How much do you weight?"

"I don't know, a little over 90 kg so I should be in the heavyweight division."

"That's the same as me. I'm a heavyweight too."

The man grinned and replied. Ho Myung-hwan realised it wasn't a joke within one minute.

"Well, here I go."

The man's body flashed. No, Ho Myung-hwan just couldn't process his movements. Then he suddenly felt an impact like a hammer was hitting his stomach and became shocked. Although he didn't know if it was a kick or a punch, it was definitely the power of a heavyweight division.

...That was the beginning of an eventful police practice.

He couldn't even remember what happened. All he could remember was his body being repeatedly hit by powerful punches or kicks. His breath was stuff from the pain. But Ho Myung-hwan never called out

to stop the attacks. No, he wanted to yell out. But that man noticed whenever he was able to speak and kicked him in the stomach, making him unable to carry on.

'I-I'm going to die. This guy is going to kill me!'

Ho Myung-hwan clearly saw it at that moment. A scene where his grandmother who died in a flower garden beckoned....

"Hat!"

Ho Myung-hwan was surprised as his body automatically stood up. Then he automatically took a defensive posture thanks to his survival instincts. However, the terrible flying kick didn't come. No, the place where Ho Myung-hwan raised his body was the changing room. After being hit and fainting, he had been transferred to the changing room. Ho Myung-hwan looked stupidly around the changing room. Suddenly the door to the shower stall opened and a man emerged. Ho Myung-hwan's heart soared at the look on his face and he got goose bumps. It was the man trying to kill Ho Myung-hwan just then.

"Uh, you woke up?"

The man laughed and approached Ho Myung-hwan. It was like a terrifying envoy of the devil was approaching him. The man smiled at Ho Myung-hwan's reaction.

"Well, the training seemed to have shown an effect."

"W-what...?"

The man's face suddenly hardened and he whispered in Ho Myung-hwan's ear.

"Listen carefully. I'll only say it once. I have a copy of your ID card. If you look for the young man again then it won't end like this next time. Do you understand? If you have a complaint then you can visit the Special Criminal Measures division. But you signed the form saying we weren't to blame even if you died."

That is to say, Ho Myung-hwan made a mistake signing that

document. That man.....Lee Myung-ryong tapped his shoulders and left. Ho Myung-hwan just stared blankly after Lee Myung-ryong. Blame? A complaint? They were unexpected words. The consent form didn't matter. To be honest, he was just thankful his life had been spared. After Lee Myung-ryong left, Ho Myung-hwan speedily changed clothes and left the police agency. He could only sigh with relief after riding a taxi for a few kilometres. Now that he could relax, he suddenly felt all the pain in his body.

'Ugh, my body is aching.....but what on earth? The hero of the movie? Why is the police hiding such a person? D-don't tell me I discovered something I wasn't supposed to know? Is the young man possibly part of the FRB? CIA? Well, something like that?'

He had clearly seen too many movies.

Anyway, Ho Myung-hwan no longer dared investigate the young man's identity. Thus, the likelihood of Global Exos discovering Hyun-woo once again became lost in a labyrinth.

Ark's Trading Business

"Galen ajusshi."

"Huh? This voice....Ark, is it Ark?"

Galen instantly looked away from a pile of documents when Ark entered the Town Hall.

"Why are you here I never heard that you came back?"

"I only arrived a short time

"Anyway, welcome home. No, shouldn't I say it's good to have you back? You're now a resident of Lancel. Don't you also share a stake in the village? Oh, do you want a cup of tea?"

"It's okay. I actually wanted to ask for a favour."

"A favour?"

"Yes, I'd like you to take in a few people."

The place Ark thought of when drawing the magic circle was Lancel village. It was weird to see people with blue skin in middle earth, but Lancel village was a place that would unconditionally accept 50 people regardless of their race or past. After going through the dimensional gate, Ark arrived at the training centre a short distance away from the village. He had a reason for moving them to the training camp. The Baran hadn't come over for the purpose of immigration. It was tradition for Lancel to prepare empty land for people to settle it but that didn't apply to the Baran. Then Ark thought of the training school. Since the 300 thieves had already graduated and went to the village, it was very quiet. So Ark wanted the Baran to live there for the moment. But there was still one problem. There were plenty of beds at the training centre. But people also had to eat in order to live. However, Ark didn't have enough food to feed 50 people. And it was impossible to shut them

up in the training centre without introducing them to Lancel village so he went to find Galen.

“Can you help me?”

“Hmm.....I can't refuse since it is you asking. I also can't ignore it after hearing that their village had been attacked by monsters and they have nowhere else to go. After a good harvest the village is overflowing with food.”

It was thanks to Ark finding the Sacred Soil and pouring it into the fields.

“So there is no need to worry about food. The town's commerce has also developed a lot since you've been away. The town's finances can afford to look after 50 people with no problem. I'll decide once I've met them.”

Galen spoke frankly and stood up. Unlike the Netherworld where the weather was unpredictable, middle earth had normal concepts of seasons. And currently New World was in the middle of winter so the weather was quite chilly.

“The town has changed quite a lot since I've been here.”

Ark said as he looked around Lancel village. He felt like the village was truly developing now. Every time he visited, it felt like it was steadily growing. After the raccoon clan joined, the buildings in particular became incredible flashy and made it look like a theme park. And apart from the NPCs, there were also a considerable number of users.

“A rumour started to spread in the area so our number of visitors has increased a lot.”

“Rumour?”

Ark tilted his head to one side and Galen laughed before pointing. Despite the winter air, the Meow Elder Hassan was fast asleep on a rooftop. Users watched avidly as the tail moved or Hassan's nose twitch while snoring.

“Kyaaa, look. Over there as well.”

“The tail is so cute.”

Hassan.....where was the Meow’s pride?

But it wasn’t just Hassan. A group of users was also gathered around the sawmill where the raccoon clan was working. They pretended to do other things while gawking at the raccoons.

“Why are people gathered over there?”

“You’ll understand if you keep watching.”

One of the raccoons grunted and lifted a piece of timber.

Bbeong!

The raccoon’s tail suddenly popped out. Although they usually transformed themselves into the guise of a person, when they were surprised or used a lot of power than their tails and short beards would pop out.

“Did you see? Did you see?”

“Kikikik! I saw it, a round tail. The short beard also briefly appeared.”

The users were waiting for such a scene. When the raccoon turned his head at the sound of giggles, the users immediately turned around and pretended ignorance.

“We thought that the raccoons would go unnoticed. But foreigners sometimes visited our village and spread it around. Anyway, now our village’s specialities are the Meow and raccoons. To the extent that some people visit from far away just to see them. Thanks to that, the Meow’s leather and the raccoon’s business are selling like hotcakes.”

Galen said with a happy smile. Ark was also happier. He wanted Lancel village to develop into the intermediary point between Giran and Jackson. It meant the village’s value would also increase. Ark’s share in Lancel village and his real estate would then be worth more.

‘Popo also had a considerable influence.’

Ark looked at Popo situation in the town centre. Popo’s effect continuously raised the value and development of the town. Apart from users, rumours of Popo drew NPCs to the village. The Meow, raccoon clan, rehabilitation thieves and Popo.....all of it meant Lancel village had a deep bond with Ark. He was delighted every time he looked around Lancel village. Although he wanted to look around the town some more, he had to solve the problem of the Baran clan first.

“Oh, is that them?”

Galen asked curiously when he arrived at the training centre. Ark had explained the Baran’s blue skin to him but it was strange seeing it in person.

“Yes, Bona. This ajusshi is the mayor of the village.”

“Ah, hello?”

Bona greeted humbly while bowing his head. Galen nodded with a gentle smile before suddenly retreating in astonishment.

Grrrrrrr.

“M-monster! Hik, over there? There too? There too? Ah Ark, what is going on?”

Galen screamed and pointed at the Hellhound next to Bona. After the trainers left, most of the monsters in the valley village returned to the wild. But among the 30 children, there were 3~4 who had the trainer ability just like Bona. Just like Bona, those children were given little monsters as pets to raise. So when they left the village, they brought the monsters by carrying it in their arms. Ark explained that to Galen whose eyes suddenly lit up.

“Hooh, hooh! They have the ability to make monsters obedient? They’re blue and have such a miraculous talent? This is great.”

Galen had the hobby of collecting unusual people.

“Good, very good Ark. As expected from you. Where do you find all

these fascinating people? Okay, I'll take in this people. I'll take care of the residents to prevent any discomfort."

"No, like I said these people don't want to move here....."

"I know that. Of course I know. You said they came here to seek refuge from the war? It doesn't really matter. Naturally we will help. But are they truly attached to their homes? This is also a good place to live. Hahaha, I'll say it in advance but I hate people who discriminate against race the most. If they decide to settle here then they'll receive a job, welfare and even a house. How about it? Would any of you want to live here?"

.....Galen didn't pay any attention to Ark's words. He was like a businessman trying to entice the Baran clan with his promises. Then Bona approached Ark and murmured.

"Ark hyung, this ajusshi is quite scary."

"Well.....he's not a bad person. He just has a strange hobby."

Ark muttered while awkwardly smiling.

Dududung, and the quest information window popped up.

-<Find New Settlers> quest has been updated.

You have brought the children of the Baran clan from the Netherworld to Lancel village.

They've only fled the chaos of the Netherworld and don't want to migrate here. However, Galen's goal is to develop the village so he would want to accept this unusual species as a part of the village. There is a possibility that some of the Baran would want to become residents of Lancel village.

<New Settlers Found: 90% (+20%) complete>

You have found settlers with special skills.

Among the residents of the Netherworld, there are children of the Baran clan with the ability to tame monsters.

This is a very unique ability so if the children settle in Lancel village then it's 'Distinctiveness' and 'Rarity' will increase. Distinctiveness will affect the industrial value of the village while rarity will affect the value of the village. You'll have to incite them well if you want the children to become residents.

'Eh? The Baran clan can also become residents?'

Ark read the information window with shocked eyes. In fact, Ark also thought of this quest when gathering the Baran clan. Thanks to the thieves being rehabilitated, the achievement rate was 90%. There was only 10% so he needed to gather settlers somehow. However, Beseutyu shoved a nail in that idea by saying it was just a temporary evacuation.

'But isn't the valley village completely occupied by the Nakujuk? They'll have to find a new home even if they return to the Netherworld. And there are likely to be a lot of orphaned children!'

Even if he only delivered half of the 20%, this long quest was likely to finish. In addition, the town's industry and value would also increase.

"Yes Bona. This is an incredibly nice place. The residents are very kind and it is very safe. Now it is now cold because it is winter, it will be a very nice place to live in spring. Galen ajusshi is also welcoming you. If you ever want to live here then just mention it anytime."

Ark changed his attitude and immediately tempted the Baran clan. And Galen just laughed and nodded.

"Hahaha, that's right. You recognize it as well."

"If the Baran clan feels comfortable living here then please consider it."

Please trust hyung-nim!"

"We will receive you like a family."

"You can call me uncle from now on."

At the end of his words, Ark grasped the hands of the Baran children and smiled. When the thieves graduated, some of them left but most of them stayed behind. And the thieves possessed their own past pains. They called Ark hyung-nim even though they were older than him. Well, the bandits had eventful lives similar to a drama. On the other hand, there are quite a few children orphaned in the Baran group. It might turn out surprisingly well. Of course most of the children who lost their parents would want to heal the wounds in their heart not adapt to a new environment, so it would probably take some time.

‘Now that the problem of the Baran clan is solved.....’

“Bona, how long will it take to solve the password on the scroll?”

“.....It should take a few days.”

“Okay, please work on it. Hey, don’t just stay here and follow me.”

Ark stroked Bona’s head before ordering Buksil to follow him.

“Dedric, you return to the Netherworld.”

“Come to think of it.....isn’t it possible to return here?”

Dedric who had been dozing on Ark’s shoulders asked with amazement. Yes, it wasn’t possible to recall his summons in the Netherworld but now they were in middle earth. There was no reason for them to stay in town. Besides Dedric had felt quite melancholy after not being able to return home for a while.

“It must be great, that guy got to go home.....”

He had watched enviously as Razak died.

“Hahaha, I’m finally able to return. Master, don’t call me unless it is urgent. Understood?”

Dedric quickly returned to his home in the Netherworld. Then Galen had work to do and they returned to the Town Hall.

“I have to go. I would love to stay but the village has been so busy lately I’ve barely had time to look after my store. Let’s go and have a

drink later.”

So now only Buksil and Ark remained.

“That.....is it really alright?”

Buksil looked around the street with uneasy eyes.

“What?”

“I.....that.....I’m chaotic..... Coming to town.....”

“I told here, here is okay.”

At that time, the guards patrolling the village approached and Buksil panicked and hid behind Ark. A chaotic player was most afraid of a village’s guards because they would be sent to jail if caught. However, Ark said there was no need for such worries in Lancel village. As long as he was with Ark.

“Eh? Ark hyung-nim, when did you come back?”

“A little while ago. I had some errands to run.”

“Why didn’t you contact us? By the way.....the pig like guy hiding behind you.....”

‘T-they noticed. I’m screwed!’

Buksil trembled as he saw the guards frown. But the guards then smiled and nodded.

“A freshman?”

“He’s not a new student but someone who I am educating.”

“You still have a lot to suffer.”

The guards tapped Buksil’s shoulders as they muttered.

“There will be a lot of work so hang in there. Hyung-nim won’t treat you too badly.”

“Huh? Huh? Huh?”

“So hyung-nim, we’re going back to patrolling. If you have time then please visit the guards’ lodgings.”

Buksil was stunned as the guards left him and Ark. He never heard of a chaotic player being encouraged by guards.

‘Looks like it was because of Ark.....why kind of human is he? The village mayor didn’t even hesitate to accept 50 refugees. The villagers all recognize him.....and now the guards greeted a chaotic player?’

Ark was a very strange human. Buksil thought this as all the residents came to visit Ark. Shop owners, guards, construction workers.....not just Buksil but all the users visiting the village also looked at Ark with puzzled eyes.

‘It’s slightly inconvenient that there are so many users.’

Ark also felt awkward feeling all those gazes.

‘I should go visit my house and see what the extension looks like.’

Ark walked towards it with a sense of expectation. Then he suddenly heard a cheer from the side. He turned around and saw that users and NPCs were gathered in the centre of town. And a familiar woman was standing on a small stage. The woman had cat ears and a tail, it was the Meow shaman Jana. The cheers subsided when Jana closed her eyes for a while. And.....Ark witnessed an unbelievable scene. Jana’s body started slowly moving as the sound of an acoustic guitar was heard. Then a dim light appeared wherever the cat moved.

Nyang, nyanyang, nyanyanyang, nyang, nyang, nyang.

It was the dance of the Meow priestess! After the cat dance ended, the crowd cheered and threw a bouquet of flowers.

“The best!”

“That artful motion of ears and tail!”

“Oh, it never becomes boring even after seeing it a few times!”

“Damn, I’m impressed. I’m grateful I came to look after hearing rumours in the Sinius Principality!”

“Jana-nim, please look over here!”

‘What the hell is going on?’ What’s with that dance and those people?’

Ark looked at the scene with astounded eyes. Jana bent down to pick up the bouquet when her nose suddenly twitched.

“Omo, this scent is.....?”

Jana grinned widely and turned her face.

“As expected, it’s Ark. Hohoho, he came back nyang!”

Jana rushed towards Ark. Then like a cat seeing its owner after a long time, she wound her tail around and rubbed her body against him.

“Heung, heung, it’s been a while nyang. You’ve become even more awesome nyang. Did you see me show just before nyang?”

“Show? That was a performance?”

“Hohoho, this body is already a celebrity nyang.”

Jana twiddled her ears around and bragged. Not so long ago, some users so her dance and admired it before spreading rumours around. Thanks to that, she became a hot topic among cosplay enthusiasts and many fans came to see her show. Thanks to Galen’s request, she performed several shows a day.

“But what’s with that way of talking?”

“Hohoho, these words nyang?”

Jana confidently smiled and thrust out her chest.

“Elder taught me nyang. I didn’t realise that men would go nuts over it nyang. It is very effective nyang. Now Jana is the most popular nyang. Nyahahaha!”

That old cat, thinking of an idea like this.....

“Now the world sees the beauty of my ears and tail nyang.”

.....How is it? Are you now a little more attracted nyang? Are you going nuts nyang?”

.....Not at all, he was just a little embarrassed.

“Tell me what you think anytime nyang. Cats are quite stubborn nyang.”

Jana spoke towards Ark in a really sweet voice. Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped. Why? Because the members of Jana’s fan club were shooting death glares at Ark. No, it was to the point that they almost challenged him to a duel.

“Hey!”

It was at that time. A young lady walking suddenly shrieked. The screaming woman shoved through the crowd and pushed Jana.

“You naughty cat! Why are you causing an uproar every time you wag your tail?”

“Sheesh, I smelled a noisy kid and she appeared nyang.”

“Who’s a kid? Oppa, you don’t have to be so nice to someone like her. She just messes things up!”

“What nyang? Hey you! What did you say nyang?”

“Bah! Every day being surrounded by men.... Oppa, you should’ve visited your house first when you came back to town. Or contacted me beforehand. Do you know I had to find out after hearing gossip?”

The girl Roco pulled Ark’s arm. Since the rehabilitation group stopped making hunting for the Slime’s Immortality Pill, Roco had spent most of the time in Lancel village. Then she heard that Ark had come back.

“Sheesh, what an annoying girl.”

Jana glared at Roco and then waved to Ark.

“Come visit me when you get tired of a child like that nyang. A cat doesn’t care about the past nyang.”

“Shut up you erotic cat!”

“Hahaha, what does a little girl like you know about erotica nyang?”

He truly had no room to talk between the two women. Then he felt death stares in the back of his head as Roco dragged him away.

‘If you have a girlfriend.....if you have a girlfriend.....if you have a girlfriend.....’

It was the curse message sent by Jana’s fan club.

“Here is Oppa’s new home.”

Ark’s eyes widened at the end of Roco’s words. Ark had given money to the raccoon clan to expand his house while he was in the Netherworld. Of course, there wasn’t a mail system in the Netherworld so Sid had to pay the prices. Ark asked the funds Sid owed him for the debt to pay for the expansion. But the money didn’t come from his wallet so Ark had half forgotten about it. When he saw it, his expanded house was beyond his expectations. It was like the TV show where the shabby cottage had been transformed into a stunning two-storey house. A small but vibrant garden in front of the house and even a balcony on the 2nd floor.

‘This much is definitely enough.....!’

No wonder why the raccoons he met before mentioned that there wasn’t even a penny left. They didn’t just extend the house but also changed the foundations. It was definitely good to make friends with NPCs.

“Oh Ark-nim, is that your house?”

Buksil’s jaw dropped as he sent it an admiring look. Owning a house! That was a merchant’s dream. But Ark was a warrior type profession not a merchant so it was surprising that he would own a two-storey house. Roco tilted her head to one side and finally

noticed Buksil.

“Eh? That person is?”

“Let’s enter while I explain.”

Ark entered his house. The good looking interior was styled very well. The raccoons had also gifted him with several pieces of furniture. Thanks to that it didn’t feel bare and empty. Ark entered the house and explained what happened in the Netherworld to Roco. Since they’ve met or talked on the phone during that time, there was no need to explain everything. However Ark felt strange while describing it to Roco. It wasn’t something he intended. But he realised that he never mentioned Lariette while talking about the Netherworld. Although he often stayed in touch with Roco, he never thought of her as a girlfriend. In addition, Lariette was something else. But strangely he didn’t feel right mentioning Lariette to Roco. A man was indeed an unknown animal.

‘Well, it’s good to avoid useless misunderstandings.’

Ark scratched his head and asked about the present situation.

“Where are the rehabilitation hyungs?”

“Last night they managed to finally get 12 Slime’s Essence. I headed to Lancel first since I heard Oppa was coming back..... They’ll be going to Jackson now.”

Jackson? Why there?”

“JusticeMan originally left Jackson to build his reputation in the Evil Silrion. However, various things happened so that he couldn’t participate in the Evil Silrion. Thus he decided to go back and explain it to Lord Jackson.

“Jackson.....It’s been a long time since I was there.”

Ark became nostalgic as he thought of Jackson. Jackson was a special town for Ark. He spent most of his newbie days there. In addition, the Lord sent soldiers to help when Ark was in a crisis. He utilized Lancel as his base for various reasons, but in the game he

felt like Jackson was his real home.

“Sid?”

“Sid oppa is coming to Lancel.”

Anyway, he saw most of the people he needed to see in Lancel village.

‘But what now?’

He was lost for what to do after he suddenly came back to Lancel from the Netherworld. It isn't possible to go anywhere until Bona deciphers the scroll and hunting around the village was impossible. The monsters were around level 100 while Ark was level 282 so he wouldn't receive any experience from hunting. In addition, the level difference was so huge that he wouldn't be able to obtain any items. It would just build up his fatigue.

‘But I can't stop playing.....ah, making I can make the medicines?’

Ark could use the spare time to raise his Herbal Decoction skill. Herbal Decoction required certain conditions to be fulfilled before the skill proficiency would rise to advanced. He needed to make 100 to increase it by 1. Since he had been busy hunting, he could only make it in his spare time.

“There are a huge number of herbs around Lancel village. I'll make Buksil gather the ingredients and raise his Ingredient Foraging skill at the same time.’

Then Ark suddenly thought of something.

‘Wait? Aren't there a lot of users here compared to the Netherworld? So I don't have to take the herbal medicine. Herbal Decoction makes medicines that don't have an expiry date so it can be carried for a long time. Then can't I make the herbal medicines then sell them?’

Ark's spirit felt refreshed. In fact, Ark hadn't been thinking of its marketability when making the herbal medicines. At the moment he could make effective salves, tonics and herbal teas. The salve had a low rating so it couldn't treat anything beyond the intermediate level

while the tonic had to be taken for a long period of time in order to increase the stats. The herbal tea had peculiar effects but there was no draw for a user to buy it. But Ark overlooked one thing. All his thoughts about the items were based on his level. A low level user must hunt for low level monsters of course. And the abnormal conditions caused by low level monsters had a lower ranking. High-level users would require more advanced medicines to get rid of higher abnormal states. However, a beginner level state could be fatal for a low level user. Didn't Ark almost die many times when low levelled because he was affected by an abnormal condition? Eventually the Remedy became precious to low level users. That also applied to tonics and herbal teas. Taking the tonic for 30 days would increase the damage by 1, but that one point could have an enormous effect at low levels. In addition, low level users were still raising their production skills so they would be thankful for the effect of the herbal teas.

'And there are a lot of level 100 users around Lancel village. That means that Lancel village is the perfect place to sell such items. Why didn't I consider it until now?'

Herbal medicines required ingredients so it could be sold for much cheaper than alchemy potions. For low level users trying to save money, clearly the herbal medicines would be a better option. If Ark made money then wouldn't the commercial value of Lancel village increase even further?

'I thought of a good way to make money.'

However, there was one problem. It wasn't possible to sell low level herbal medicines for an expensive price. If he only engaged in business for one or two days then it wouldn't be lucrative. Compared to Giran, opening a street stall in Lancel village was a lot different. In order to make a huge profit, he would have to sell a huge variety of items in large quantities.

'So it is necessary to have a store and a part-time salesman!'

Ark looked around his extended house and smiled. He owned a two-storey house in Lancel village so there was no need to worry. And the part-time salesman Ark required..... It needed to be a merchant

who mastered the relevant transactions and accounting skills. And Ark knew of one such merchant. The hobbit Sid who was tied to him with a slave contract.

‘But Sid is my connection to the trading post in Silvana. I won’t gain any profit from tying him to a place like this. It would cause larger damage. Then the remaining merchants.....’

Ark smiled slyly and asked Buksil.

“Buksil, have you been in touch with your brothers?”

“Huh? Yes, that.....”

“Tell them to come here right now.”

“W-why?”

“I’ll introduce them to a good job.”

Ark laughed as he got up from his seat. Ark exited the house and immediately went to the town hall. In order to open a shop in the village he had to get permission from the mayor first.

“You want to set up a business?”

Galen became startled at Ark’s words.

“Yes, I think I need to open something in order to settle down properly in the village.

“Hmm, it’s not a bad idea but it won’t be easy.... Well, it’s not that hard to give permission if you really want to do it. But even though you own a house in the village, you need to possess 3% shares in the village before you can open a shop. Did you know that?”

Of course he knew. If a foreigner was able to easily own stores then there would be those sorts of shops in villages all over New World. A normal user would normally only be able to obtain 2% shares in a village. In other words, without contributions a user wouldn’t be able to open a store no matter how much money they had. Presently Ark had 2.5% of shares in Lancel village. Thanks to Galen’s promise, he could now increase it to 5% after expanding his house.

“How much to raise it by 0.1%?”

“200 gold.”

“Huh?”

Ark who had been rummaging through his bag exclaimed with shock. The price had increase by 80 gold from the 120 gold he used to buy his original shares. However, it wasn't that bad. The shares becoming so expensive meant that Lancel village was developing at a much faster pace than Ark expected. And Lancel village was still developing. Once he released the shares and sold it to users, he would definitely see a profit.

‘Okay, thanks to my bank balance I can afford to spend the money here.....’

Currently Ark carried 4,000 gold! Ark worried for a while before boldly handing Galen 3,500 gold. It would definitely become profitable so there was no reason to hesitate.

“So an extra 1.5% share and the store permit is 500 gold. Here's 3,500 gold.”

“Huh, you seemed to have received a lot of luck on this trip.”

Galen muttered at the sight of the money. Anyway, he received a certificate from Galen and a new information window showed up.

-<Relevant Investment Information Window>

Your shares in Lancel village have risen to 4%.

Once you have 3% shares then you are able to own a private store.

A player operating a store will affected the commercial business of the village. If your trade flourishes and the village thrives then more contribution points will be added and your upper limit on the shares will increase. However, if your business suffers a huge loss then it will decrease the reputation of the village. When this happens, your upper limit will go down and you might be deprived of your shop permit.

Currently owned shares in Lancel village (Owned/Upper Limit): 4/5%

Money was important whether in reality or in the game. Anyway now he had obtained the qualification to open a business. Ark visited the raccoons and asked them to remodel his house into a store. They easily agreed to create shelves and compartments inside the house. It cost 100 gold. After 10 minutes he only had 400 gold remaining from his original 4,000 but his heart was filled with pride.

“My store!”

Tears gathered when he saw the sign ‘Ark’s Comprehensive Store.’ His house, his store.....people who hadn’t saved their pennies in order to obtain a house or a store wouldn’t be able to understand.

Sometimes in life you could recognize a someone similar with just one glance. While Ark was in the midst of preparations to open the store, Sid finally arrived in Lancel village. And the moment Sid and Buksil met, they instantly understood each other.

‘That dwarf merchant, Ark-nim is also taking advantage of him.’

‘That hobbit merchant, he’s also been exploited by Ark.’

They didn’t even have to ask. They were people who suffered underneath Ark.....

The people with experience understood each other too well.

“Did you suffer a lot?”

“No, there is.....”

Sid sighed as Buksil clasped his hands and rocked on his feet. They stood facing each other before suddenly embracing. It was like meeting a friend after parting a long time ago, like they were deer licking their wounds. Although they were weak, the two merchants swore to someday plunge a dagger in that devilish person who exploited them.....

“Hey Sid. What are you doing?”

“Ark-nim!”

Sid automatically moved away when he heard Ark’s voice. No matter what he thought in his head, Sid’s weak body reacted first.

“Did you get what I asked you to find?”

“Of course.”

Sid quickly took out the unicorn horns from his bag.

“Ayu, it was nothing. These days it is so difficult to find unicorn horns that the price has increased to 1,050 gold. But who am I? If Ark-nim is in a desert then wouldn’t Sid go to collect ice for him? You asked me to buy 4 for 4,000 gold. Hehehe, now the loan price settlement.....’

Sid twisted his hands with an expectant look. Ark narrowed his eyes at Sid’s attitude. He knew Sid’s character. For a merchant to not show any dislike after going so far in order to receive a loan settlement was strange. But Sid had definitely bought the unicorn horns. And he already checked that the price rose to 1,050 gold on the auction site. Roco was also firmly clenching the rehabilitation group’s finances. The main reason Roco was in Lancel village was to receive the items and settle the payment with Sid.

“I’ll pay you right away. But the gold and items in your bag must be equal to the loan amount.”

“Ah, Ark-nim knows that as well.”

“Was it 4,000 gold?”

“Yep!”

Sid’s eyes brightened as Ark motioned to Roco to take out her wallet. Then there was suddenly a cold smile on Ark’s face. In fact, this was Ark’s trap. Ark knew about the loan schemes of the Merchants guild. He had picked up the knowledge while travelling with Sid. At that time, Sid mentioned that the interest for a loan was 5%. In other words, Sid received a loan of 4,000 gold so the interest

would be 200 gold. Yet Sid never even mentioned it. It meant Sid had no problem not receiving a handling charge for the 4,000 gold.

'I knew something was strange. I don't know where but he must've somehow purchased the unicorn horns for a much cheaper price. Ha, has that child grown that much? He even dared try to trick me?'

"Please show me the credit note issued by the Merchants guild first."

"Huh? W-w-w-why?"

Sid panicked and stuttered.

"You might not know, but haven't I decided to operate a store? But I can't operate it using a guessing system. I have to check it and record it well after each transaction. If you buy things with a credit note then how will I know you haven't taken anything? I want to confirm that you borrowed 4,000 gold."

"T-t-t-that....."

".....Do you want to die?"

Ark murmured in a low voice before Sid tearfully extended his credit not. It was recorded that he had spent 3,404 gold in an auction in Giran. He had bought it for 851 gold instead of the 1,000 gold he told Ark. He stared at it for a long time as the silence ticked away. Well, his profession was a merchant. Doing everything possible to receive a profit was worthy of praise. He didn't want trouble before the opening of his business so Ark pretended to tolerate it.

"You bought it cheaper than I thought. Well done. Here's 3,404 gold."

Sid had swelled up with anticipation and released it with a sigh as he accepted the money. Then he had a thought and quickly calculated the interest.

"Ah Ark-nim, the loan interest....."

"What?"

Ark's face twisted as he glared at him. He'll say it again but Sid

trying to gain profit was worth praising. But only if Ark wasn't his opponent.

"What the? Why were you silent when I offered you 4,000 gold before? However now you're mentioning it? Are you trying to scam me? Huh? Do I look like I'm easy to trick? If you keep on mentioning it then I won't let the problem go. Do you want me to become serious?"

".....Of course I will have to take care of it. Hahaha, of course."

"Ah, is that what you meant? Hahaha, then I'm thankful."

Ark laughed and tapped Sid's shoulder. Of course, the payment Ark received from Roco included interest so it was 4,200 gold. He paid Sid 3,404 gold while the remaining 796 gold obviously went into Ark's stomach. He only had 400 gold left after all the preparations for his store so he needed this gold. And Sid was forced to increase his debt by 200 in order to pay off the interest. Fortunately Isyuram forcefully gave Sid 100 gold but there was the 40 gold handling fee for the auction so $200-100+40=140$. So 140 gold still remained intact. He had crudely tried to use a shrew plan but it ended up backfiring on him. Isyuram to Sid, Sid to Ark.....in the end the pinnacle of the food chain was Ark.

'Hah, it's not my problem.

Buksil sighed and watched the gloomy Sid walk around the corner. He didn't know what happened but he could tell that Sid had been struck by Ark. It was at that time. He heard some marvellous voices from behind him.

"Hyung-nim!"

"Oh, Sapjil! Ulmeok!"

Buksil turned around with a wide grin and shouted. Buksil contacted Sapjil and Ulmeok and now he greeted them with tears. It was a poignant moment meeting for the first time after separating in the Netherworld. Buksil's face clearly showed signs of suffering and he was wearing shabby attire.

“Ack, how has that guy been treating you?”

“Hyung-nim, you must have suffered a lot.”

The three little pig brothers embraced each other with tears streaming down their faces. Then Sapjil suddenly looked at Buksil. His eyes blinked a few times before he winced and retreated.

“Ah, Hyung-nim.....this feeling.....c-chaotic.....”

“Oh, you saw it? I’ll tell you what happened.”

Buksil sighed and tried to explain. However Ulmeok just flinched and retreated from him.

“No, I’ll tell you the circumstances. It was actually revenge..... Sapjil?”

Sasasasak.

“Ulmeok?”

Sasasasak.

Whenever Buksil approached, Sapjil and Ulmeok immediately avoided him.

“Hyung-nim, I’m really sorry.” But no matter how it happened, you’re still chaotic.”

“Sob. Hyung-nim, you’ve become a bad guy in the meantime.”

“You, even you guys...!”

Buksil had believed in his two brothers and received a large shock from their attitude.

“Ya, why are you lingering over there? A chaotic player can’t be hanging around when my store is opening soon. Don’t wander around and get caught by a hunter. So you should shut yourself up somewhere until it is time to go to the Netherworld.”

“Even Ark-nim is treating me like this?”

In the end Buksil was crushed as well and entered up standing gloomily

next to Sid. Sid and Buksil, these two merchants would continue to receive misfortune thanks to Ark.

Anyway all the necessary preparations were finished. The interior had been changed and he even recruited a merchant as a salesman. Of course the two merchants didn't want to be salesmen in a small mountain village's store. But Ark managed to convince Sapjil and Ulmeok to stay until Buksil's chaotic status was removed. And the next day, 'Ark's Comprehensive Store' opened its doors.

"Now, I'm going to start raking in the money starting from today!"

Ark exclaimed after putting something up at the entrance. It was the 'One thousand visitors.' It was an item that allowed stores to receive an extra 3% value on their goods. Originally he thought to give it to Sid but now he used it directly for his own gain!

The grand opening of 'Ark's Comprehensive Store' in Lancel village!

It sells all items ranging from japtem to magic items!

Also selling unusual but inexpensive items that don't exist in middle earth!

Feel the efficiency of the herbal medicines only sold at Ark's Comprehensive Store!

Recommended for those who want to become a master at foraging! Herbal Tea: 1~3 silver

An innovation price for a remedy to treat abnormal states! Salve: 10~15 silver

Eating this food will make you become stronger! Tonic (30 days): 2~5 gold

Limited sale of 30 items to commemorate the opening of the store! Nadingka's fruit: 2 silver

Ark started his business with the herbal medicines as his main

product. But he didn't get an explosive response from the low-level users like he expected. The biggest problem was that Lancel village was much larger than in the past. The larger scale of the village meant there were 3 more general stores. In total there were 12 shops. And all the stores were concentrated at the entrance or in the centre of the village. On the other hand, Ark's store was in a residential area. There was no large population flow there so it was impossible to do business.

'What, this is? At this rate will I lost my investment?'

Ark watched the empty store for two days with impatience. There were quality items. The salves had the same potency as potions while being 50% cheaper while the tonic would be helpful in improving the stats of level 100 users. But what did it matter if the products were excellent? How could users try it if they didn't even know about it?

'As expected, I have to advertise the business. An idol is the best for effective advertising.'

So Ark visited the Meow section and requested Jana's help. With the usual Ark adoration Jana gladly accepted.

"Hello nyang. Everybody, do you know my wonderful boyfriend Ark? Nyang nyang, in fact he opened a store in the residential business. He has really good items to sell so please use it frequently in the future nyang."

Jana promoted the store to her fan club after she danced.

.....It had an effect.

-That bastard, get lost.

-I hope all your items are destroyed!

Curses and profanities were immediately written on the walls of Ark's Comprehensive Store. Ark decided to significantly modify his advertising strategy.

'Unbelievable. How the hell can I gather people.....?'

Ark frantically thought of new marketing strategies.

‘Wait? Isn’t there an easy way to get people to buy good items? Raising the price for low level users would be a burden so shouldn’t I go the opposite way? I’ll hide the store instead of advertising it.’

Ark instantly implemented his plan. Ark’s influence on the NPCs of Lancel village was enormous. So he couldn’t not take advantage of it. Ark put the sign and product list away and met with the Meow, the raccoons and the reformed thieves as he roamed the village. Then a strange rumour started to spread through Lancel village behind him.

“Hey, did you hear the rumour?”

“Yes I heard it. The one about the huge effects?”

“I’ve received an introduction so let’s go check it out.”

The Meow, raccoons and thieves gathered in groups of 2 or 3 and whispered together. Whenever the users approached them, they would panic and hurriedly shut their mouths. Users started to show curiosity once rumours of their strange actions spread. In RPG games, sometimes players would find a secret shop. Those stores weren’t available everywhere and sold unusual goods. All the users were game enthusiasts so they immediately thought of a secret store when they saw the NPCs reactions. The users would sometimes raise their intimacy with the NPCs to obtain the information, eavesdrop or even threatening the NPCs. And shortly after.....

“Hello!”

“What product are you looking for?”

Ark welcomed his first guest. The warrior glanced around at the items on display. Leather, bone etc.....all the japtan he gathered from the Netherworld was on display. However, the warrior wasn’t disappointed. He received information from a NPC that everything was disguised.

“Hmm hmm, I heard there were rare items only shown to people introduced here.”

“Huh? Uh, where did you hear such talk.....?”

Ark's tense expression completely convinced the warrior.

“A person I know introduced me. So can you show me?”

“But it's a secret so if can't just show it to anyone.....”

“That won't be a problem. I won't spread any rumours so just show me a little bit.”

“Hah, it can't be helped. I understand. I'll show you as long as you don't go anywhere else to buy it.”

“Yes yes, I understand.”

“Then first take a look at this note. It lists the inventory of items only sold to 'chosen' people. Don't say the names and just secretly write what you want and the quantity.”

When Ark spoke secretly, the warrior pretended ignorance like a hero in a spy movie and read the piece of paper. It had in depth information about the items and how to use them. If he were given this paper on the streets, the warrior probably would've thrown it away without looking at it. However, the warrior was tempted by the 'secret' and read the piece of paper several times.

“I didn't know there were such items. Give me 10 of this and this.”

“Oh, but those items don't have that much left in stock.....”

“I'll pay one silver more.”

Ark sighed and pretended to fret so the warrior became impatient and promised even more money.

‘Huhuhu, it is a success!’

Ark laughed as he watched the warrior carry out the goods he received. The 'secret' was the core of his marketing campaign. And being the first to know the secret was the original charm. But after a while.....anyone could know the secret. At first they would probably feel a sense of superiority. However, they won't be able to feel that sense of superiority if they didn't tell anyone. The people who looked

for Ark's Comprehensive Store were the same. They all nodded when Ark asked them to keep it a secret. But soon users would go to their friends and say 'that guy sold this to me.' And the surprised friends would confirm the effect of the items while the original buyer's face would say 'Huhuhu, how about it? I know this secret shop.' It was a domineering expression on his face.

The marketing was a great success! Although everyone knew about it, the users thought they were the only ones to know and secretly gathered in Ark's shop. And every time they would buy 10 or 20 after Ark mentioned that the items were almost sold out. Thanks to that the herbal medicines suddenly ran out.

'Wow, it's not a joke? All these ingredients supplied by Buksil have run out?'

The ingredients supply couldn't keep up with the sales so Ark visited the Baran at the training centre. The Baran gathered sap so most of them had the foraging skill. Ark shared japtem with them since they didn't have the concept of money and the Baran started gathering ingredients from around Lancel village. A new rumour started to spread that NPCs with blue skin similar to smurfs were living in Lancel village.....

Anyway, thanks to that Ark's 'secret' store became famous.

'Now my store is on track. But it's not there yet. Including the house, I invested approximately 4,000 gold into this business. I have to maintain this state for several months in order to make a profit. Well, Lancel village now has a mailbox so I can easily supply the goods.....'

Since the business became so good, Ark suddenly faced new challenges.

'I can't be preoccupied with the sales. I also have to connect with Sid's trading post in Silvana and engage in large transactions. But I have to rely on Sapjil and Ulmeok. Leaving the shop to them is a bit.....'

Yes, Ark wasn't satisfied with it just being the secret store in Lancel

village. He had the intention of connecting with the trading post in Silvana when he created the store. Connecting to Silvana was the first step in establishing a trade route between Silvana and Lancel which was Ark's grand dream. However, Ark couldn't become a merchant and stay at the store in Lancel village. But he was worried about entrusting it to Sapjil and Ulmeok.

'A trustworthy person.....'

Then Ark suddenly heard Roco's voice in his ears.

"Kids, what are you doing now?"

"Isn't the turnover rate for that one the best? Pile it up on the outside."

"Look at this dirt. Is that what you consider cleaning? The attitude is a problem you should get rid of."

These days, it was routine for Roco to stay in the store and nag Sapjil and Ulmeok whenever she connected. Ark snapped his fingers as he stared at Roco.

'That's right, why didn't I think of that?'

She was too close so I didn't notice. Roco had experience after handling the finances of the rehabilitation group and 300 thieves. Although she wasn't as strong in profit or loss as them, Roco had a firm controlling grasp on Sid, Sapjil and Ulmeok. Additionally, he could always take to Roco on the phone and get a grasp on the situation in the store and provide necessary instructions. Indeed, she was the best choice for a store manager!

"Roco, would you like to become the store manager?"

"Store manager?"

"Yes, there will be numerous times when I'll have to leave and I can only entrust it to you."

"I'll do it. I accept!"

Roco shouted when Ark finished talking.

“The pay is.....”

“You don’t have to worry.

Oppa’s money is my money.....’

Roco laughed as she twisted her body. A fantasy was already playing in Roco’s head.

“Oppa, I’ve earned all this gold!”

“Oh, indeed you’re the only one I can trust. My burning love, my darling!”

“Hohoho, let’s build a house of gold on that blue meadow.”

“Hahaha, let’s eat as much cotton candy as we want!”

‘Hehehe.’

Roco drooled while imagining things. Sapjil and Ulmeok winced and retreated.

“W-what’s with that woman? Why is she drooling while laughing?”

“Clearly her mind has gone away. Hyung-nim, we have to work for her?”

“A devilish owner, crazy manager.....why do we always.....”

“Sob, Hyung-nim I’m scared.”

Sapjil and Ulmeok cried as they embraced each other and trembled with fear. Anyway, Roco was appointed as the general manager for Ark’s Comprehensive Store.

Truth of the World Trees

“A remarkable event took place in Selebrid a few days ago!”

He heard an excited voice as soon as he turned on the TV. It was the voice of the female reporter in charge of the game scoops. It was the weekly corner that dealt with events in New World. This week the corner was on the monsters attacking Selebrid. The male reporter was an actual gamer and described it with a serious expression.

“As everybody knows, Selebrid is the capital city of the Schudenberg Kingdom where most users started. A large number of guards are concentrated around the palace, in the city and even in the suburbs. As a comparison, not even a dragon would be able to break into Selebrid.”

“But didn’t an event which tore apart common sense occur?”

“That’s right. Surprisingly dozens of monsters managed to break into Selebrid.”

“Let’s see the footage.”

Soon after the screen changed and the Selebrid square appeared. There were merchants leisurely strolling the streets, lovers dating in front of the fountain, people enjoying a nap on the benches....it was indeed a peaceful scene. But at that moment, an area in the square distorted and a gate appeared. And dozens of monsters with terrifying appearances exited.

“Ugh, w-where is this?”

“There are foreigners. So many foreigners....!”

“All of them are enemies. Kill!”

The monsters looked around and began to wildly attack the users. Fortunately, the emergency signal went off and the guards

were able to handle the mobs with no problems. However it left a deep wound in Selebrid who prided themselves on not allowing monsters to invade. The screen returned to the studio.

“A truly shocking scene. What is going on?”

“It’s difficult to say at the moment. The senior magicians immediately mobilized after the incident to investigate the gate but no official announcement has been made. I can only guess that the gate the monsters came through is connected to another dimension.”

The female reporter asked with a surprised expression.

“A different dimension? Other dimensions exist in New World?”

“Of course. Although it hasn’t be officially announced by the publishers, typically users know that there are several dimensions including middle earth.”

“That’s right. That must be why so many users are interested in this incident.”

“Yes, so far there have only been rumours but the different dimensions were confirmed for the first time. Opinions are also mixed on whether this might cause another Event Quest like the one in Jackson. But the production company Global Exos.....”

Hyun-woo never expected that it would appear on TV. Hyun-woo was the main cause for the monsters attacking Selebrid. While facing Duke in the woods near the valley village, he had created the dimensional gate using the Dimensional Movement Powder to get rid of the Nakujuk. Yes, that exit for that gate was Selebrid. He had gathered the Nakujuk and the pushed them through the gate. He had forgotten about it until it suddenly appeared on TV. Ark smiled wryly and sat in front of his computer. He wanted to confirm the situation in the auction.

-The auction is complete. Death Engraved Stick: 11,100,000 won.
-The auction is in progress. Magaro’s Deluxe Alchemy Tools: Currently 9,000,000 won.....

He received the best profit from the Netherworld items. As expected, they sold at exorbitant prices. No, to be honest he hadn't expected that much for the 'Death Engraved Stick.' He put it on the auction for 5 million won but the price went up to 10 million won in 1 day. The auction climbed so quickly that he even started to expect 20,000,000 won. But afterwards it only rose by 100,000 won and eventually it ended up being sold for 11,100,000 won.

"There aren't that many users raising Necromancers."

However selling 1 item for 11,100,000 won was clearly a jackpot. On the other hand, Magaro's Deluxe Alchemy Tools wasn't rising by a huge amount but it was rising steadily. There were still three days before the auction finished so he might end up receiving even more than the Death Engraved Stick. He expected it to sell at a higher price. Unlike the Necromancer, there were plenty of users raising alchemy.

"I might receive 20,000,000 won even with the handling fee."

Hyun-woo currently had 12,000,000 won in his bank account. He spent around 6,000,000 won every month so he had saved quite a lot. If he added this income then he would have 32,000,000 won. But for Hyun-woo it was strange to have money. He felt more uneasy. Money was a truly mysterious fellow. Whenever he gathered a little bit it always seemed like he needed more. Hyun-woo also felt the same. He started having many thoughts once he gathered some money.

'If Mother becomes a lot better in the future then she might be released from hospital. When the time comes I'll have to move to a more sanitary house for her..... And I should really put aside money for a game unit in case the entrance examination suddenly ends.'

But when he compared it to his past, they seemed like happy worries.

"Anyway, my income is unstable so I can't spend money recklessly. And I need to make more profit after thinking about my plans for the future. In addition, I spent 3,500 gold this time to create a store. Most of my spending is in investments. For the meantime I should

tighten my belt.”

Hyun-woo was moving the mouse when he suddenly stopped. He saw an unexpected message.

-You have received an instant purchase request. Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred: 4,000,000 won.

“Instant purchase? For 4,000,000 won?”

Hyun-woo’s mouth widened. He had obtained the ‘Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred’ from Kaljapeu. It was a magic item so Ark didn’t have high expectations for it. Of course, it had a special option but the defense wasn’t that great compared to the level required to wear the item. In addition, the ‘hate’ stat was necessary or else the special option wouldn’t be available.

‘It should only get around 2,000,000 won.’

When he checked yesterday, the bid was only 1,800,000 won. Now he suddenly received an instant purchase request for 4,000,000 won.

“What kind of person is this?”

The purchase price was so outrageous that Hyun-woo looked at the requestor’s ID.

“Eh? Huh? T-this guy.....!”

The ID for the auction site was ‘Charming Man!’ It was an ID that he had seen before. No, to be precise Ark knew the person with this ID. It was the person who bought the ‘Sacred Earth Shield’ in the past. And that shield was the cause of Hyun-woo’s crisis in Salrin’s Towers. Yes, ‘Charming Man’ was the ID for Alan. In fact, Hyun-woo suffered some embarrassment just before entering the Netherworld. Hyun-woo had registered as a bounty hunter before going off to deal with Alan. And he stopped by Selebrid before going to the Netherworld to collect the 500 gold bounty.

However, he heard some unbelievable words from the Supreme

Court judge. When the target died because of a bounty hunter they would be automatically trapped in jail. The NPCs would check and then pay a reward. But the judge said that Alan never appeared in jail. Thanks to that Hyun-woo still hadn't received the reward of 500 gold.

'What's going on? I confirmed that Alan died.....'

It was still an unanswered mystery. After that he hadn't heard any news about Alan. When the guy suddenly disappeared, Hyun-woo thought that Alan had given up on the game. He probably deleted his character so that the reward couldn't be received. But now he suddenly appeared on the auction site and wanted to purchase an item. New World didn't allow two characters so it was clearly Alan. But did it make sense that he raised his level so much that he could now buy a level 200 item?

'But that's not the only strange thing. Alan has a lot of money. He had so much that some of it is probably rotting. So why would he want to buy my items? Are there also a lot of rare gauntlets on the auction site? He could probably buy better gauntlets for 4 million won. So why....?'

He wouldn't have been worried about it if the person wasn't Alan. And Hyun-woo was soon able to guess the reason.

'I'm sure that Alan needs these particular gauntlets. I don't know exactly why but it must be important since he doubled the price on the instant purchase request. If that's the case.....'

A smile spread on Hyun-woo's mouth. His opponent was someone with a lot of money. And this was a necessary item for him. Then wasn't there a way he could use this? Hyun-woo immediately rejected the purchase request and called the rehabilitation members.

"Are hyung-nims using their IDs on the auction site?"

"Uh, no. Why?"

"What will you do?"

"Make some money."

Hyun-woo laughed as he replied. Normally the auction site directly connected to the account so they never informed others of their ID. However, the rehabilitation members didn't ask any questions and just gave their IDs and passwords. Thus Hyun-woo got his hands on 10 IDs and immediately started to manipulate the market price.

"The remaining auction period is 4 days. How far will you go?"

Hyun-woo used Jjak-tung's ID to bid 4,010,000 won. Sure enough, 'Charming Man' bid 4,500,000 won after 1 hour. Then Hyun-woo connected to Bul-kkun's ID after 1 hour and bid 4,510,000 won. So they played ping pong for 8 hours until the price for the gauntlets increased from 2 million won to 6 million won.

'Huhuhu, will you increase it even more? Keep on increasing. If you give up because of this amount of money than your pride will be injured. I'll use this opportunity to receive my bounty.'

Hyun-woo smirked as he bid 6,010,000 won. However, another bid did not come even after a long period of time. Hyun-woo suddenly became afraid.

'What, what the? Surely this guy.....did he just give up?'

It was a chance to sell the gauntlets for 6 million won instead of 2 million won. In fact, Hyun-woo would've been satisfied with 6 million won. But he had to be greedy and bid one more time to increase it over 6 million won.

'Please.....please just bid one more time.....'

Hyun-woo prayed as he glared at the monitor. If Alan gave up this bid then Hyun-woo would have to pay the 6 million won from his own account. Of course, that money would just return to Hyun-woo but he would still need to pay the 7% handling fee. 420,000 won would just fly away. Then he would have to sell the gauntlets and pay the fee again. It would end up harming Hyun-woo instead of Alan. However, a new bid did not come the next morning.

'Dammit, I'm screwed!'

Hyun-woo sighed and was about to exit the auction site.

-You have received an instant purchase request.

Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred: 8,000,000 won.

“8....8 million won!”

Hyun-woo was shocked and saw that it was indeed Alan. He struggled for a while before deciding to accept. This was probably Alan's limit. He didn't know why Alan wanted the gauntlets so much but he couldn't pass up the opportunity when the market price had increased by 4 times. Hyun-woo reached out and pressed the accept button.

“Huhuhu, Alan you were an easy mark!”

Although it wasn't New World, once again Hyun-woo had won over Alan. After a while, Hyun-woo confirmed the transaction and stared warmly at his unit before entering it. Hyun-woo heard the sound of the unit connecting to his brain. Then the land of New World which promised profit and trouble appeared.

“Hmm.....”

Ark was lost in thought as he stared down at the scroll. After logging into the store, Roco told Ark that Bona was looking for him. The deciphering of the scroll had been completed.

“I didn't know what information Ark hyung is looking for so I deciphered all the scrolls. You can read the separate translation I created.”

The ten scrolls Beseutyu designated mentioned the epic tale of the birth of the Netherworld. After reading it, Ark managed to obtain the desired information. There were a lot of expressions and abstract meanings due to the nature of the legend but he summed it all simply.

Surprisingly, hundreds of years ago the Netherworld was originally a

part of middle earth. However, suddenly a huge calamity which split the sky and earth occurred. Numerous species and land was swallowed by the calamity and disappeared. Among them was the Netherworld. A huge storm struck the Netherworld after its world tree disappeared. The Netherworld was caught in the storm and sunk into the dimension lower than middle earth. And the air currents from that storm formed the sky in the Netherworld. The spinning sky Ark saw in the Netherworld was actually because of the dimensional storm. Also the strange weather and terrain in the Netherworld was because of the influence of the storm on that dimension.

After all, not all of the earth that moved to the dimension was in an intact state at the time. Sometimes a small pebble or even a giant mountain would become trapped after the dimension distorted or it would be left in a non-existent form. This was the 'Underground' that Beseutyu mentioned.

Unfortunately, that was everything written on the scroll. It didn't state how Ark could return the Underground to its original form. But the decrypted contents of the scroll did give him an important clue.

'The Netherworld's world tree!

The scrolls recorded that the world tree was destroyed in the storm before the Netherworld disappeared. So wasn't the core of all these events the world tree? And if it was regarding the world tree then Ark had a source to find out information from.

"I didn't expect to use it like this."

Ark took out the 'Sacred Branch' from his bag. The 'Sacred Branch' had come from Popo's trunk. It had various effects but the one Ark wanted right now was to communicate with Yggdrasil.

"But how do I use communication with this thing?"

Ark turned the branch around but as expected he didn't see a dial or call button. He thought for a moment before putting the branch to his forehead and focusing his mind. He was visualizing Yggdrasil when the space in front of his eyes suddenly turned white.

“Ugh, w-where is this?”

Ark scratched his head and looked around. Surprisingly Ark was in an entirely different place. He had been at the training centre in the woods and now he was in a wide open place where the horizon couldn't be seen. But that wasn't what caused Ark's surprise. In the far distance, many gold coins were stacked up like a huge mountain. It was literally a field of money. He couldn't afford to wonder where he was right now.

“T-this is a windfall!”

Ark plunged wildly into the money field. And he collected the gold coins like crazy. However, the gold coins turned into sand and dripped through his fingers when he touched them. Ark was confused and tried it a few more times but the results were the same.

“What the? A prank?”

Ark let out an impressive stream of curses. Then a dim light appeared and revealed an old man.

-We've finally met after a long time Deliverer.

“Eh? Yggdrasil!”

Ark stood up and approached Yggdrasil.

“Where on earth is this?”

-Hahaha, this must be your first time here. This is your spirit world. All the scenery here is what your mind imagined. Even so.....your spirit world.....seems.....really....marvellous.

“Please don't tease me.”

-I'm not teasing! This is really the most amazing spirit world I've been to.

Yggdrasil said with a laugh. Even though it was a game, but a field of money? It seemed somewhat superficial. Ark sighed with a melancholy expression before Yggdrasil asked.

-By the way did you call me for something?

“Oh, I contacted you because I have a question.”

Ark finally remembered his original purpose.

-Question?

“Yes, it is about the Netherworld’s world tree.”

-What? The Netherworld’s world tree? Have you been to the Netherworld?

Yggdrasil spoke in a frenzied voice and approached Ark. Ark was bewildered by the violent reaction and nodded.

“Huh? Yes..... There were various circumstances and I ended up going to the Netherworld. But I ran into some trouble while travelling through the Netherworld. A necessary item I need is stuck in a dimensional gap called the Underground. It happened in recent years but it seemed like the cause was the original phenomenon which destroyed the Netherworld.”

Ark roughly read the contents of the scrolls.

-I see what you mean. But half of the contents of those scrolls are wrong. This explanation might be long but you need to know it.

Yggdrasil nodded before opening his mouth.

-I’ve said this once before but the world trees is the existence which maintains the balance. It does nothing but it also does everything. Indeed, the world trees have a large number of roles. And originally there existed 4 world trees. These four trees secured the North, South, East and West respectively.

Yggdrasil suddenly started explaining the history of New World. Anyway according to Yggdrasil, New World used to consist of a much larger continent than now. However, a great change took place on that continent hundreds of years ago. It was thanks to the hand of the Dark Lord.....

At that time, the Dark Lord plunged the world into darkness before

being defeated by the 7 heroes. However, the Dark Lord had one final weapon. He used a dark spell to drain the lives of all beings that belonged to the darkness in order to drive the world to ruin. It was the catastrophe written on the scrolls.

-It was horrible. Parts of the world literally vanished. But if there was darkness then there was always light to oppose it. The 7 heroes fought numerous battles before finding an ancient scroll filled with magic.

The 7 heroes were able to use the magic of the world trees to defeat the dark magic. The world trees which maintained balance poured all of their magic into the spell. But even such power couldn't fully stop the dark spell.

-It was possible to defend most of the earth and many lives. But the darkness at the edges of the world magic wasn't able to be stopped. A powerful curse swept through the ground and burned countless lives. The world trees used all their strength remaining to prevent it. It was power necessary to maintain the balance of the world.

Yggdrasil then looked at the horizon with a faraway look and sighed.

-Thankfully the life of the land was able to be maintained but all the world trees except for me lost their strength and withered up. At this point, the land they presided over wasn't fastened to the world and was unable to withstand the storm. Among them is the world tree Yuzuria, who maintained the land Seutandal.....which is the Netherworld you spoke of. This world is the lost continent.

Ark remembered seeing in the information window that popped up when he first entered the Netherworld. The 'Lost World=Seutandal' was clearly written on the Netherworld's information window. It meant that it was lost from middle earth. Although the history lesson on the Netherworld was interesting, it didn't contain the information he wanted to know.

"Then reverting the Underground back to the original dimension....."

-The only way to revert the Underground back is to stabilize the

Netherworld. And consequently there is only one possible method.

“What is it?”

-The world tree of the Netherworld that I mentioned earlier....Yuzuria is not completely lifeless. If Yuzuria's life hadn't been depleted then the Netherworld would've never sunken to the bottom dimension. But it cannot regain its strength while stuck in the dimensional gap. Then the answer is simple. If you revive Yuzuria then the Netherworld will rise back to its original dimension and stabilize.

“The world tree can be revived?”

-That's right. The key is already in your hands. The 'Sacred Branch.' It is a treasure which can restore the vitality of the world trees. I believe that Yuzuria will have a defined body that is deeply hidden somewhere. If you return to the Netherworld and restore Yuzuria's power then everything will go back to its original form.

Yggdrasil grabbed Ark's hands and said.

-Deliverer, I ask you. Yuzuria defended this world with his whole body. He has the right to exist and I firmly believe that you can help him.

“Hah, you're saying that to someone whose spirit world is like this?”

Ark was a narrow-minded guy. Although he said it in a sarcastic voice, Yggdrasil just laughed and pointed to the sky.

-I have such expectations because of this spirit world.

“What....huk!”

Ark raised his head to follow Yggdrasil's fingers and let out a small scream.

Ark's spirit world before was quite shallow. But now the gold coins were floating into the sky to form a sun which emitted a bright light. No, he thought it was the sun but when he looked closer he saw that it was a familiar presence. In the superficial spirit world of Ark, the

bright light which did not allow darkness to exist was...

“M-mother!”

-.....I've never seen such a bright light in someone's spirit world.....

“I accept. I'll do it! Even if I have to risk my life!”

Ark blushed and the words tumbled out of his mouth as he looked at Yggdrasil. Dududung, the quest information window popped up.

The Resurrection of the Netherworld's World Tree

You have listened as Yggdrasil conveyed a hidden history to you.

Finding the balance is the mission of all players in New World. The first step is to revive the Netherworld's world tree, Yuzuria. If successful then the lost world of Seutandal will re-join middle earth like before.

<Difficulty level: ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆>

‘A quest? And it is a special difficulty one!’

That meant it was a Lore quest! A Lore quest dealt with historical events that could have an impact on the entirety of New World. As he previously saw, it was extremely difficult and there wasn't any compensation for it except for the stars. It seemed fruitless. Besides, this was 4 stars so wouldn't it be way more difficult than in the past?

‘What a misleading description....what will collecting stars give me? Well, even without this quest I would still need to revive Yuzuria.....’

Ark sighed and exited the spirit world. He knew the method to complete the quest. But there was a serious problem when he thought about it. The Underground would disappear when he resurrected Yuzuria. But at the same time the Netherworld would move to middle earth. That was the problem. So far, Ark had monopolized the Netherworld but once it moved to middle earth then users would flock to it like a cloud. However, that was a problem for

the future.

What if the Hermes Alliance and the Nakujuk conquered the Netherworld while Ark was completing the quest?

‘Currently the Nakujuk and Baran are preparing for war in the Netherworld. It is most likely that the Hermes Alliance and Nakujuk would occupy the southern region if they conquered the Netherworld. If the Netherworld moves to middle earth.....’

The Hermes Alliance would gain benefits that he couldn’t even imagine. Without the Baran there was no hope of stopping the Nakujuk’s conquest. But like Beseutyu said, the odds weren’t in their favour even if the Baran joined forces and fought against the Nakujuk. Especially if the Hermes Alliance started to support them more actively. He couldn’t just sit and watch as the Hermes Alliance occupied the Netherworld. In fact, he had no time to complete the quest.

“But there’s nothing I can do.”

Of course Ark had his own forces. While fighting in Silvana, his attack group Dark Eden consisted of the rehabilitation group, the Meow, the raccoons, the reformed thieves and the soldiers from Jackson. Even if he called them again, he would only be able to gather dozens at most. On the other hand, this wasn’t a war between guilds or a siege. It was a race war between the Baran and Nakujuk. Dozens of reinforcements wouldn’t be enough. They wouldn’t be a match for the Nakujuk and Hermes Alliance. He needed forces equivalent to a species in order to solve this problem.

‘If I can’t gather enough forces to defeat the Nakujuk then it will be a failure. Anyway, I can’t allow the Nakujuk and Hermes Alliance to take over the Netherworld. In other words, I need to either stop the Nakujuk’s offensive or maintain it in its previous state. But the forces needed.....’

Ark slowly sighed before a thought came to him.

‘There is! There is something that could have enough power to change the battle situation in the Netherworld!’

“Shambala!”

Pets will grow with food and affection?

“Eh? What is this?”

Perplexity rang out through the dark cave.

“It was clearly here.....”

Ark looked around with confusion. He checked the features, looked at the map and thought back through his memory. It was impossible he went to the wrong cave. But he couldn't find a passage no matter how hard he looked. There were just rocks blocking the front.

“What on earth is going on?”

Ark sat down with a frustrated expression and was locked in his thoughts. Ark was currently located south of the capital city of Schudenberg Kingdom, Selebrid. There was a reason Ark left his new business in Lancel village and came all the way here to visit the organization with a long history in assassinations, the Dark Brothers. The trials which appeared in front of Ark.....he determined that the quests <Study the Mirage> and <The Resurrection of the Netherworld's World Tree> needed the Dark Brothers' help in order to succeed. Of course, gathering forces inside a game wasn't an easy task. But not long ago, Ark had helped suppress a rebellion which increased his intimacy with the Dark Brothers. He also grasped the situation in the Netherworld and came up with a justification to convince the Dark Brothers.

‘If the negotiations proceed as I expect then it will be possible to succeed!’

However there was an unexpected hitch in Ark's plan. He gained entrance to the Dark Brothers' hidden stronghold Salrin's Towers through the secret passage connected to Nabein's hideout and the location to receive assassination requests. That was also the cave

where Ark was currently sitting. But it wasn't there. The passage which was clearly there before wasn't visible anymore.

'It is impossible to move the towers and everybody inside.....so why is the entrance blocked? Did something happen in the meantime? Maybe they fled because their home base was found by a professional hunter organization.....'

If so, it was quite frustrating.

'No, it can't be that.'

Ark shook his head. The Dark Brothers had been active in the darkness for hundreds of years. If there were serious friction with users or another NPC organization then Selebrid which was close by would be buzzing like a beehive. However, he visited Selebrid before coming here and it was quiet.

'Then the Dark Brothers didn't suddenly flee somewhere else. They're still here. They just blocked the entrance for some reason. But if they blocked the entrance then how would the hundreds of people in their organization leave? In other words.....there is another passage!'

A smile formed on Ark's mouth.

'I don't know why they're hiding the entrance but I won't back off just from this.'

That's right. Although the entrance was blocked, their home base was still around here so the assassins would scout the forest. Of course, they used 'Stealth' in avoid to avoid most people's eyes. But it didn't matter if they could hide using 'Stealth.'

"Radun, search the area using Stalking."

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

When Ark exited the cave and gave the order, Radun instantly jumped down from his waist. Then it raised its head and searched the area with its tongue.

||-Radun has used 'Stalking.'||

Within an hour, the footprints of all the life forms passing through the forest were found. As expected after activating the skill.....no, more footprints appeared than he expected. Thanks to that Ark's expression became even more frustrated.

'That's right, this area is south of Selebrid.'

Of course there would be a lot of movement of users and NPCs. On the other hand, Radun's stalking couldn't specify a particular target and could only search for all the traces around. There were dozens and even hundreds of footprints all over the place so it was impossible to find the assassins' traces.

"Unbelievable."

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak?

Its skill had succeeded so Radun waved its tail expecting a compliment. However Ark had sighed so Radun's eyes seemed to convey 'Dad, did I do something wrong?' Ark laughed bitterly and stroked Radun's head.

"No, you did well. It's just troublesome seeing so many footprints."

'But it did not help? Right?'

"It's still better than having no clues."

'I'm sorry, Dad. I'm a useless snake.'

Radun was almost in tears at this point while Ark continued stroking its head. If Dedric or Razak saw this scene, they would complain but it was a common scene. His ten fingers would become sore from scratching. Sometimes it would become so sore that the senses in the fingers would dull. Therefore Radun's affection for Ark was always at 120%! Now he could guess what Radun was saying just by looking in its eyes. Of course, whether it was painful or not everybody needs 10 fingers.....

'Well, I can't just sit here staring at the footprints so I should look everywhere else.....'

Ark sighed and moved his body.

“Eh?”

Ark looked at the footprints and suddenly realised something strange. So far, Ark had never questioned the footprints Radun found. Thus he had never worn a doubtful expression. However, he realized something after seeing hundreds of footprints gathered in one place.

‘.....Some of the footprints look slightly different!’

Wasn’t it like looking for objects in a hidden picture? The first time it was hard to see the different before after a while it started to become noticeable. Ark was the same. Once he noticed that the footprints were different, the differences were clearly revealed.

‘That’s right, there are many different types of shoes in New World. And the physique of the user or NPC wearing the shoes is also different. It is natural for the footprints to look different depending on the physique and shoe type. If that’s the case?’

A scene he saw in a foreign drama flashed through Ark’s head. It was the US drama popular in a long time ago, CSI! In that show, the crime scene investigators looked at the killer’s physique, personality, habits etc. in order to figure out a lot of information. He remembered a scene where the investigator was smug and said ‘A footprint is like a second fingerprint.’

Couldn’t that also be applied to New World?

‘This isn’t CSI but I should be able to figure out some basic information.’

Ark surveyed the footprints again thanks to his idea and made some deductions.

“Let’s see.....the depth of this footprint is shallow but the form is still intact. It’s clearly a cloth shoe so the profession should be magician or merchant? On the other hand, this footprint is quite deep. They should be wearing clunky shoes with a lot of weight so it should be a warrior or knight profession. I’m looking for an assassin so they

should be wearing leather shoes. It isn't here. Radun, please search a little bit more."

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak!

Radun suddenly became lively at Ark's command and moved around while shaking its tail. And it found even more footprints in the surrounding area.

"Okay, this is it! For sure!"

Ark used the conclusions he previously figured out to eliminate the footprints one by one. He was looking for footprints that seemed to be from leather shoes. But leather shoes were worn by a lot of regular NPCs and users. Ark also wore leather shoes. However, Ark was looking for footprints with a narrow stride. Normal NPCs and users would not leave a narrow stride in the mountains. If such a footprint remained then it was likely.....

"It is because when scouting, they want to make as little sound as possible while using 'Stealth.' The Dark Brothers are the only ones who would use 'Stealth' in order to scout. Then I'll start the chase!"

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark used amazing forensic techniques! Radun watched the process and looked at Ark with even more admiring eyes. Then a new information window appeared with lively sound effects.

-Your pet Radun has gained a new expertise from its Master.

The pets understanding and application of various skills is poor. So it will not raise the skill through repeated uses unlike a user. In order to raise the skill proficiency of your pet the Master must understand the skill and then pass it onto the pet, stimulating their growth. Ark's understanding of Stalking has reached the conditions needed to raise Radun's stalking to a higher rating.

However, the proper training needs sincere affection to accomplish. In order to raise the skill levels of your pets, you need to pay a certain number of affection points.

<Affection needed to raise Radun's Stalking skill to an intermediate level: 50>

Would you like to raise Radun's Stalking to intermediate?

"Eh? What is this?"

Ark read the information window with shocked eyes.

"My understanding is necessary to raise my pet's skill levels?"

In fact, in the meantime Ark had been having some doubts about the skills of his pets. Each of his pets had two types of skills. For example, the first type is the fixed skill such as 'Radun transform.' This skill was a special skill that was learnt after Ark fulfilled specific requirements. It was finished and it was impossible to have any further types of growth. And the second type was general skills. Radun's Stalking, Razak's Shield Stroke and Dedric's Taunt were all skills that could raise its proficiency. In the pet skill's information window, they showed up as beginner which meant they had growth potential. But no matter how hard he looked, the skill proficiency did not increase.

'It's definitely strange. Those skills are still beginner but they should've increased to intermediate a long time ago. I can't even see how much the degree of skilfulness is rising. Is some other condition necessary?'

Ark couldn't understand that part. Now that question had been answered after seeing the information window. His pets didn't have the ability to think for themselves which was required in order to raise the skills. Without a proper education, naturally they wouldn't learn anything about their skills. Love and patience was required for education. That's why Affection was necessary in order to educate his pets!

"So this is how to use Affection!"

Ark's eyes brightened. Among his stats, Knowledge of Ancient Relics played an important role in identifying information about ancient languages and artefacts. Flexibility helped with evasion and

alleviating fall damage, Art of Communication persuaded NPCs while Resilience reduced the damage from blunt objects. However, he hadn't been able to figure out the role of Affection. He vaguely guessed that it applied to his relationships with his pets. But looking back, wouldn't that already be used by the 'Loyalty' stat? Furthermore, his Affection stat was high but Dedric still had a rebellious quality. In the end, affection did not affect his relationship with his pets. So Ark thought Affection just had a symbolic meaning.

'But Affection is like bonus skills points for my summons!'

Yes, if the pets didn't have enough affection for their Master then there was no reason for them to learn the skills. Raising the skills was meant to help their Master. In other words, they raised it in return for their Master's affection. Therefore the information window explained that Affection was necessary to raise the skills.

'Ha, there are no useless stats in New World.'

"Stat information window!"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +400		
Fame	9,125 (+500)	Level	284
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Abandoned, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer		
Health	4,460 (+150)	Mana	4,450
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	563 (+28)
Agility	723 (+55)	Stamina	843 (+20)
Wisdom	107 (+10)	Intelligence	862

Luck	103 (+30)	Flexibility	115
Art of Communication	46	Affection	167 (+10)
Resilienc	320		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics	138		

‘Affection 167.....damn, if I had known about the effects of Affection.....then Razak’s and Dedric’s skills would already be intermediate.’

It was unfortunate but luckily he knew it now.

“Okay, Radun’s Stalking. Rating up!”

He used 50 points of Affection in order to raise Radun’s knowledge of the skill. After seeing its Masters serious attitude, Radun was dedicated to learning.

-The ‘Stalking’ skill has risen to intermediate.

Stalking (Intermediate, Racial special skill): Radun has mastered the new application for the skill and will be able to take advantage of the colours. The search range and duration of use has been extended. After following its Master’s keen sense of observation, Radun will be able to grasp simple information after observing the target footprint.

<The search range has been extended to 300 metres. The search time available has increased to 1 hour and 30 minutes. If the rating rises then the search range and time will be extended. Mana consumption: 50>

Additional Intermediate Effect: Sharp Reasoning.

If this skill succeeds then simple information about the target will be grasped.

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

After the rating increased, Radun examined the footprints with more intelligent (?) eyes. The footprints were dyed in colour and were now easy to distinguish. The footprint Ark looked at was black. The information window divided the colours of the footprints.

-You have searched for information about the target tracks.

<Classification: Thief profession, Alignment: Normal user, Travelling time: 48 minutes ago>

'Thief? If I followed those footprints then I would've gone to the wrong place!'

Ark had almost followed the footprints of a thief. Perhaps he used 'Stealth' to hunt which is why that type of footprint formed. Naturally it wasn't the target Ark was looking for. Ark could now grasp the footprints more easily thanks to Radun and searched the forest again.

-You have searched for information about the target tracks.

<Classification: Assassin profession, Alignment: Chaotic NPC, Travelling time: 26 minutes ago>

"This is it! Radun, track this footprint!"

Radun turned around at Ark's command and travelled through the dark forest. In the evening light, the red footprints were clearly visible thanks to Radun. He followed the footprints and arrived at some rocks.

"Isn't this quite far away from the caves they were previously using? Anyway, the footprints have disappeared so there must be a secret passage leading to Salrin's Towers.

Ark carefully looked over the rocks. Eventually he put his hand in a crevice and was able to grasp a handle shaped object.

'I've found it, this device clearly opens the door!'

Cheng kang-!

Suddenly a sharp dagger passed next to his ears and produced sparks on the rocks. Ark flinched and when he turned around, some branches were shaking. The hazy shape moving looked like a 1900's star craft vehicle moving in stealth mode. Then a mocking voice seemed to ring out though the whole forest.

"Go back. This is not a place where anyone can enter."

It was a veiled threat on his life! But Ark just smiled and stepped forward.

"I'm Ark. I came because I have some business."

".....Ark?"

He heard the awestruck voice before there was a sudden moment of silence. Then the branches above him shook and a masked man dropped down. He looked at Ark for a while before running up and shaking his hand.

"It really is Ark-nim. How long has it been?"

".....?"

"It's me. I was number 358....."

The masked man laughed after Ark stared at him with confusion. Now Ark could recall where he heard the voice of the masked man. It was the Dark Brothers assassin Ark and the rehabilitation members had rescued when he was attacked by rebels. After Ark confirmed it, number 359 stuck his chest out firmly and spoke in proudly.

"Hey, everybody came out and greet him. This is the Truthseeker I mentioned, Ark-nim!"

After his words, 10 other assassins appeared in the forest. In fact, Ark had been concerned after he found the passage to Salrin's Towers was blocked off. However there seemed to be no need to worry based on the assassin's attitude. After checking Ark's status, the assassins were still friendly to him as shown when they kneeled down.

“We didn’t know you were coming. Please forgive our rudeness.”

After his name was revealed, the assassins treated him with a lot of respect. Meanwhile, number 358 manipulated the handle to open the passage and guided Ark in.

“Are they.....?”

Ark asked after seeing the assassins close the passage from the outside. Their standard looked higher than the previous assassins. Number 358 took out a torch and then answered.

“Ah, Ark-nim wouldn’t have seen them. They are the members under my direct control.”

“Direct control?”

“Previously I told you I was called number 358 right? Look at this. I’m now number 206. After being promoted, I was given control over my own unit. It’s all thanks to Ark-nim.”

358.....no, number 206 pointed to a number written on his forehead. Probably the number stamped on the Dark Brothers was a sign indicated their name and job title. The lower the number meant a higher position. When number 206 fought while Salrin’s Towers was ran over by rebels, he helped Ark prevent the rebellion and was promoted.

“Congratulations.”

“No, compared to Ark-nim there is still a long way to go.”

Number 206 blushed and scratched his head. The assassin was surprisingly innocent.

“But it took a while to find you. Why did you close the previous passage?”

“Huh? Didn’t you get the message?”

“What message?”

Ark asked with confusion and number 206 tilted his head to the side before replying.

“We closed the previous passage right after Ark-nim left. I thought that Leader-nim would definitely contact you.....maybe he forgot because he’s too busy these days.”

‘What the? That Shambala.....’

Ark became sullen at number 206’s words. Of course Ark didn’t receive a message from Shambala. It wasn’t that Shambala was too busy to get in touch, but that he probably did it intentionally. It was impossible to increase his intimacy with a NPC if Ark was there. Perhaps he was anxious Ark would increase his intimacy with Isabel when he had to leave Salrin’s Towers for a while.

‘That brat, don’t you trust you friend?’

But honestly Ark had no right to complain. In fact, his purpose in visiting Shambala and Isabel was to coax the Dark Brothers into a war. After he left here, Ark never bothered to contact Shambala either. He would be scrutinized too closely is Shambala accompanied him. Ark had been treated like a human for the first time by Shambala.

“By the way, you really are a descendant of the Truthseeker. We worked for a long time to hide that secret passage.....if there were more people like Ark-nim in the world then we would go out of business.”

Number 206 murmured as he opened another hidden door in the cave. The security was so much stricter than before that Ark asked in a doubtful voice.

“Why did you need to close the previous passage?”

“The surrounding area has become too noisy these days.”

Number 206 sighed and explained. The problem was Alan. Although Alan and Nabein’s revolt was suppressed thanks to Ark, Alan firmly grasped the location of Salrin’s Towers. Furthermore, Alan now held a grudge towards the Dark Brothers. The Dark Brothers couldn’t rule out the possibility that Alan had leaked their location to some government.

“If you look at the history, there have been a few nobles in the Schudenberg Kingdom who have been assassinated by the Dark Brothers. If they know the location of Salrin’s Towers then it will be a problem. In addition, the war between the Three Kingdoms has ended so there are a large number of soldiers sweeping the surrounding area for thieves.”

“Ah, that’s right.”

Ark nodded and number 206 continued.

“Recently a lot of foreigners have also travelled in this area.”

That’s the nature of online games. Over time, there were bound to be a lot more high level users. New World had already been commercialized for 1 year, so most users would’ve already left the beginner regions like Jackson and were now concentrated in Selebrid.

“Then if the existing location is closed, how will you receive requests?”

Ark tilted his head to one side and asked. In New World, NPCs also had to eat to live. In other words, an assassin received assassination requests in order to earn money. But wouldn’t shutting down the existing meeting place interfere with the business? Wouldn’t they have to scatter hidden directions to another location? Of course, whether an assassin ate or not had nothing to do with Ark. So he just asked the question without thinking but it was a surprisingly serious concern. Number 206 replied in a careful tone which wavered for a moment.

“The requests.....aren’t accepted anymore.”

“An assassination organization isn’t receiving assassination requests?”

“As you already know, the Dark Brothers organization is a descendant of an eastern race that lost its home and wandered around. Only a few of our ancestors survived by the time they reached this continent. That was when assassination became the Dark Brothers’ fate.”

“Yes, I’ve heard that story before.”

“But now our home isn’t lost anymore, it is this continent. Without anyplace to return to or any moral obligations, we’ve taken root in this continent. But if we stick to assassinations, after hundreds of years only the foreigners will be left.”

That’s why Isabel an elder of the Dark Brothers had been seeking an alternative method for a long time. And the catalyst for this was the appearance of the Deliverer Shambala. Isabel decided to place the fate of the Dark Brothers into Shambala’s hands. Shambala was looking for a way to end the dark history of the Dark Brothers in order to lead it into the sun. In order to do that, he judged that the bloody nature of the Dark Brothers should be erased.

“So now the Dark Brothers won’t take assassinations anymore?”

“But the elders are stubborn.....”

Number 206 let out a sigh.

“There’s a problem.”

“Yes, that’s why Leader-nim decided to stop what he was doing and return to the tower.”

“So Shambala is in Salrin’s Towers right now?”

Ark’s forehead wrinkled. Ark had deliberately not contacted Shambala before he came here. Of course, Shambala’s help was necessary when considering Ark’s purpose. But his problem was that Shambala was extremely picky. In addition, he would clearly be able to see through Ark’s proposal. So he had wanted to recruit the innocent Isabel while Shambala was away. If Isabel was convinced that Shambala would have no choice but to go along with Ark. But now Shambala had already returned to Salrin’s Towers.....

‘Damn, I know that Shambala’s personality and he probably won’t be willing to cooperate.....’

Ark was worried until he noticed something in number 206’s words.

He didn’t know everything, but the current state of the Dark Brothers

was clearly complicated. The art of diplomacy was to catch your opponent's weakness. There might be a chance for Ark to persuade them.

"I don't know everything but it sounds like some problems have occurred. I never thought something bad would happen to the Dark Brothers so soon after I left. I might be able to help you so could you elaborate on the matter?"

Ark spoke gently and the voice rattled on.

Netherworld GO, GO, GO!

Rattle, rattle.

“Come on quickly.”

“What do you want? Well, it’s not a big deal so just roughly pick something.”

The 3 merchants yawned and muttered when the bell rang. Their gaming life had become quite different since they’ve met Ark and thanks to their older brother becoming chaotic, the three little pig siblings were now salesmen at Ark’s Comprehensive Store for a low wage. Although they were semi-compelled to take the job, the three pigs didn’t hate it that much. In fact, the three little pig brothers were doing quite well thanks to the game system. This was because.....merchants raised their skills and levels through various transactions. If they sold a lot of things at once then their growth would naturally be faster.

When their level increased, they could buy items for a cheap price and then sell it for a more expensive price. The three pig brothers began by Buksil purchasing and selling rare goods. Therefore Buksil managed to raise his level faster than other merchants, which led to him buying items for a cheaper price and subsequently raising Sapjil and Ulmeok’s levels. Even if they were incompetent, they were able to become better merchants using this shortcut. But Buksil had accompanied Ark so the two of them couldn’t do that sort of work anymore. After they died, it was common for them to lose money and experience in transactions. Thus they were grateful when Ark approached with the offer of a job.

‘At least we won’t lose any experience working here. We also receive a salary. Yes, it’s not that bad to be a salesman here until hyung-nim accomplishes his historical feat. We can’t work in the meantime so this shop is good.’

That was the three little pig brothers' intentions. They had been a little uneasy about Ark's Comprehensive Store at first but now it was fully settled. Its revenue was around 1~2 times more than the other stores in Lancel village. Thanks to that, the three pigs were so busy that they barely had time to eat. However, the three pigs exercised patience and waited for a chance.

'That Ark is not a merchant. He prepared the store but he won't always be here.'

'He will end up going somewhere else in the world! We can just waste time during business hours!'

'It will be a win-win situation when that Ark leaves.'

Therefore they snorted when Roco was appointed as store manager.

'Bah, we have to listen to a girl's orders?'

'Huhuhu, we'll make her cry when Ark disappeared.'

'You're mistaken if you think we're innocent little pigs.'

The three pig brothers smiled sneakily and thought brutal thoughts. Roco definitely had experience from her part-time job at the mart. She was proficient at stock and cash counting as well as dealing with customers. However, she was still just a girl and would have insufficient force compared to Ark. So the three pig brothers thought up devious schemes while listening to Ark. They immediately revealed their true colours when Ark left the store. They were as heinous as planned! They didn't do inventory or cleaning, ate during rush hours and left the customers waiting.

"Huhuhu, you see? We can do this too."

"Hyung-nim, I'm a little shaky doing bad things like this."

"It's okay. Just think about hitting Ark. In addition, we should've got a salary for 12 hours of doing nothing which is 60 gold a month." But we didn't even get our shares!"

In fact, thinking about it that wasn't their actual salary. A month in

New World was 10 days in reality, so their monthly income in reality would be 180 gold. That was quite high for a part time job in the game. But that was Ark's trap. Ark previously seized a contract where the three pig brothers would provide him with 50 gold each month. However, the current balance of the three pigs had reached rock bottom thanks to the failed transactions so the payments had been put off. Thanks to the salary, Sapjil and Ulmeok could now pay Ark the support money. Therefore those two only got a monthly salary of 10 gold. With the money for food and boarding deducted, it was actually only 1 gold. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that it was exploitation.

"Huk, I've suddenly become sad."

"Don't cry, don't falter. Anyway, we're going to make Ark drink water."

Buksil, Sapjil and Ulmeok became more inspired and acted even worse. They pretended in front of Roco but once Roco left they would greet visitors with annoyed expressions. The sales which had gone up like crazy suddenly dropped after a few days.

"How much for this item? I don't know."

The three pigs murmured without even looking at their guests. Whenever they replied this way, the visitors would just look around and then leave. However, the reactions of the guests was different this time.

".....I definitely heard that."

"Maybe they need a decent education?"

The guests gossiped between them before 1 person suddenly approached the counter. He was a huge man with wide shoulders and bright eyes. He glanced at Sapjil and Ulmeok playing cards before suddenly hitting the counter and yelling.

"Attention!"

"Huk, why, why did you do that?"

“Why? Aha, that’s a good question.”

The man laughed before grabbing Buksil’s collar and lifting him up.

“I feel like beating up an unfriendly salesman whenever I see one.”

“Huh? What are you.....?”

“Noisy!”

Pepepek, snap, crunch, jjeok!

The effect of various forms of violence endured inside the store. The three pigs lost their spirits as they suddenly became punching bags. Of course, a user didn’t feel any pain when hit inside the game. But that didn’t mean they felt nothing. There was a jolt of static electricity every time they were hit. It wasn’t to the extent that they felt pain but they still suffered. In addition, a critical hit caused 3~4 times the shock so it really felt like they were dying.

“Huk, robbery!”

“G-guards, help us. These people are trying to kill us!”

The three pigs shouted as they barely managed to open the door. A few guards were patrolling so some of them turned their heads when they heard the SOS.

“T-that’s it. You unscrupulous people, you guys are now.....”

“These brats are really noisy.”

However, instead of running away the group of men just stepped on them harder. What was going on? Why weren’t they scared even though the guards were notified? They were even more amazed at the guards’ absurd reaction.

“Ah, Captain. When did you come?”

“Oh, it’s you guys?” I arrived a short time ago.”

“Why are you beating up those pigs?”

“It’s no big deal. Just doing some work.”

“I understand. If you need any help then just call us.”

The guards saluted before going away. What was with this absurd situation? They were good salesmen in the village so why wasn't the guards helping them? In addition, didn't they call for help? Yet the guards just left even after seeing the them being beaten up? It wasn't just the guards. The nearby residents also witnessed such atrocities yet they didn't care. Even the Meow clan elder Hassan waved to the leader of the group before disappearing after a leisurely chat.

‘What the? What on earth is going on?’

‘Are we invisible to the residents?’

The three little pig brothers couldn't understand their current situation. They were being beaten up for no reason yet no one came to save them. Why was this unfair thing happening to them? The three pigs shed tears while screaming with pain and chagrin.....

“Why are you doing this?

“Huk, please stop hitting us. We're good pigs!”

They were almost half crazy by the time they heard the voice of salvation.

“Omo? This is.....?”

Roco had gone to the training camp to receive the ingredients from the Baran clan and had finally returned. The three pig brothers caught the hem of Roco's skirt.

“S-store manager!”

“Save us. We didn't do anything wrong but those people are trying to kill us!”

The three pig brothers shouted as they pointed towards the group of men. The three pig brothers always treated Roco badly when Ark wasn't present. But in this situation they had no choice but to ask for her help. Roco had a regretful expression as she wiped off the three pigs' nosebleeds and protested towards the group.....

“Oppas, what is this? I told you not to hit their face so why did you hit their faces?”

“Uh, did you? I’m sorry. I unconsciously did it.”

“How can they engage in business when their faces are like this?”

Roco smiled as she meticulously polished the faces of the three pigs before getting up.

“Okay, it’s done now. Please continue.”

...What was she saying?

Buksil wore a stupid expression as he looked between Roco and the group. Which reminded him.....he had seen those guys before. They were the 11 people previously seen in Selebrid with Ark! That’s right, it was JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. He finally remembered. Then Buksil saw it. There was a light smile on Roco’s face..... At the moment, Buksil felt like it was the climax of a terrifying horror movie.

‘Oh my god, it was this. The thing Sid mentioned.....!’

He understood the entire situation after seeing Roco’s smile. When Ark left Lancel village, Sid also returned to Silvana. At that time, Sid and Buksil were familiar with each other and Sid seemed to have guessed his plan. After Ark left, they planned to ignore Roco and make a mess of the store..... Then Sid put his hands on Buksil’s shoulders and said in a serious voice.

“Whatever you’re thinking now, it is better to stop. You don’t know how scary Roco-nim is. Do you think Ark-nim won’t see what you’re doing?”

However, Buksil forgot about it as soon as Sid left. After Ark left, it was just Roco and the three pig brothers remaining. Roco was just holding the store until Ark returned. So the three pig brothers judged Roco to be too nice and did their own things. But he should’ve listened to his senior’s words.

‘Then Roco incited all of this.....devil, that woman is the devil!’

Buksil felt like he saw black wings flapping behind Roco. The Devil's girlfriend was also a devil. He realized this simple fact too late. After the three pig brothers were turned into mincemeat, Roco guided JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group to the 2nd floor. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members surveyed the store.

"Yah, I heard about it but that Ark really did set up a store."

"At any rate, when did that Ark managed to prepare this?"

"Isn't there quite a lot of items?"

"By the way.....you're managing this store for the moment?"

"Yes, the situation is like this."

Roco smiled and put on a mock-concerned expression.

"But didn't oppas act too severely just then?"

The sound of groaning pigs could be heard downstairs. In fact, Roco had suffered quite a lot because of the three pig brothers. She had to work hard to earn gold in order to build that house on the blue meadow.....but the situation turned bad as soon as Ark left. Thankfully the sales hadn't decreased that much after Ark left. Roco also had experience with this thanks to her part time job. Often the men working at the convenience store would pick on Roco after the boss left. But that wasn't all. Sometimes they would even start openly talking dirty. Of course, the three brothers didn't take it that far but they were similar in that they looked down on women.

'It would be resolved in an instant if I told Ark oppa.....'

But she didn't want to act weak when Ark trusted her with the store manager position. That's when she remembered that the rehabilitation members were coming to Lancel after they left Jackson. She explained it to JusticeMan who thought up this plan. While the three pigs were being beaten up by JusticeMan, Roco would appear and indirectly plant fear into them.

"You don't have to worry. Just do it so that those guys will notice."

"That's right, if they see signs that you're worried then they'll start

acting up again.”

“Daring to bother Roco and smashing Ark’s shop, they must be insane.”

“We’ll take care of it.”

“We’re professionals at disciplining guys like this.”

“Instead Roco, you finally did it!”

“Huh?”

“Huhuhu, aren’t you looking after Ark’s livelihood?”

JusticeMan smirked and muttered.

“If a man trusts his livelihood to you then it’s already over.”

“Have strength Roco. Now there’s only one step left. Oppa will cheer for you.”

“Aye, it’s not like that. By the way oppas.....”

Roco got up with a sulky face. She placed several different types of herbal medicines on a tray and placed it on the table.

“These are the goods in the store. Take a look at the flavour.”

Roco truly had a friendly personality.

“Oh, as expected of our cutie. We only have you.”

“Eat a lot. You probably didn’t eat properly while in the underground labyrinth of Cairo.”

“U-underground labyrinth!”

The rehabilitation members’ hands there were reaching for the food paused at Roco’s words. And their faces became gloomy as they looked at each other.

“That’s right, we couldn’t eat properly.

“It’s was three months. Never seeing sunlight, stomach starving while

hunting skeletons and slimes for three months..... Meanwhile we.....”

“When compared to the underground labyrinth, a jail cell is like heaven. At least you get to see the sun.”

“Ugh, let’s stop. I’m going to be sick if I think about it anymore.”

The rehabilitation members muttered as they started sweating. Yes, the rehabilitation members really didn’t want to be reminded of the underground labyrinth again. After going down into the underground labyrinth, the sewers smelt like rotting corpses. Their opponents were also skeletons and slimes. Although it was interesting at first thanks to gaining levels and items, after three months they felt like they were wondering the labyrinth in a dream.

-You haven’t seen the sunlight in so long that you’ve gained ‘Autism.’
--

<Your mental state will be at the lowest possible for 1 hour while your mana is continuously decreased.>
--

-You haven’t seen the sunlight in so long that you’ve become ‘Depressed.’

<Your motivation is gone and your attack and defense is reduced by 20%>

Anyone in those states would’ve given up out of tiredness. But the rehabilitation members had their own pride. Ark needed it so they shouted and endured. If the unicorn horn prices hadn’t soared then they would’ve probably still been in the underground labyrinth suffering from depression.

“I would rather be in jail then go back to that underground labyrinth!”

The rehabilitation members all nodded and agreed with Jjak-tung’s words. That atmosphere was too gloomy so Roco changed it to something else.

“T-thanks to that suffering we’re able to make some Slime’s Immortality Pill.”

“Indeed.....”

Fortunately, the rehabilitation members looked a little brighter.

“Didn’t Shambala send a unicorn horn and Sid bought 4 as well? Then we’ve acquired 5?”

“Six.”

“Six?”

“.....Ark oppa gained one more.”

Roco hesitated before explaining. Yes, before Ark left Lancel village he gained one unicorn horn from Roco’s mount, the Unicorn. While speaking with Ark, Roco summoned the Unicorn without thinking. But Ark suddenly looked at the Unicorn like it was surrounded by a golden light. He had cut off the horn six months ago and now it had grown back.

“Roco, that horn.....!”

“No.”

Roco outright refused. The unicorn horn had grown back thanks to Roco’s efforts for half a year. The horn also made the Unicorn look a lot nicer. During her spare time, Roco had read all the information on the unicorn and found it good food and basically took care of it. When Roco refused, the Unicorn snorted at Ark which made him angry. However, the Unicorn didn’t know a woman’s mentality that well.

“Roco, please. Yes? I’ll divided the earnings with you 7:3. And it’s not for me. The rehabilitation hyungs went through all that trouble yet we only obtained 5. You still won’t let? Okay, then 8:2. How about it? I’ll also watch any movie you want to watch this weekend in the evening.”

“R-really? A movie in the evening? Promise?”

Eventually, the Unicorn was abandoned for a movie and dinner.

“Now, this white horse, why don’t you have a short talk with hyung?”

Hihing? Hihihihing? Hihihihing!

Ark grinned as he grabbed the Unicorn's neck and led it somewhere else. After a while, Ark once again cut off the unicorn horn. After exchanging it with the rehabilitation members' funds for 20%, Ark was able to obtain 200 gold.

'I'm sorry. But Oppa and I haven't gone on a date for 3 weeks.'

A woman in love would often do cruel things with no hesitation. Of course, Roco couldn't explain everything to the rehabilitation members so she summarized it quickly.

"I'll temporarily give it to oppa for 500 gold. We'll decide if its insufficient later."

"Well done."

JusticeMan nodded as he packed the unicorn horn.

"But what is Ark doing that he left you in charge of the store?"

"Ah, that's right. Ajusshi and oppas wouldn't have heard yet."

"Heard what?"

"In fact"

Roco explained what Ark had told her. Currently the Hermes Alliance had joined up with the Nakujuk to conquer the Netherworld. Ark had gone to the Dark Brothers to ask for help preventing it. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group's foreheads wrinkled at the description.

"Those Hermes bastards...."

"They went all the way to the Netherworld to pick on Ark?"

"And they also raided the village and enslaved the Baran?"

"Hyung-nim, how can we leave these actions alone?"

"Yes, we can't keep watching while the Hermes Alliance acts like this."

"And I absolutely don't want to go back underground."

JusticeMan nodded at the end of their words.

“Of course. It would be didn’t if I didn’t know, but I can’t do nothing now that I do know. By the way, shouldn’t Ark have consulted us first?”

Then Roco grinned and replied.

“That’s why Ark oppa spoke to me before leaving. Oppa asked me to explain the situation in the Netherworld to you when you arrived. Of course he thought you would help.”

“Oh, is that right?”

“Probably. Huhuhu, Ark hadn’t forgotten us.”

“This war.....my blood is starting to boil.”

“It’s a good opportunity to try out our new professions.”

Roco’s eyes widened at the end of JusticeMan’s words.

“Change profession? Did you change your profession in Jackson?”

“Huhuhu, I did. I finally found the perfect job for us.”

JusticeMan struck his chest and laughed.

Then Roco noticed something different about JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members.

“Eh? Oppa, attached to your chest.....medal? It’s a medal?”

“Now you noticed.”

JusticeMan rubbed the shining medal on his chest proudly. Then he explained how he changed professions in Jackson.

Until recently, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members had no profession. Of course they hadn’t intended it that way. When they arrived at Jackson which was the first place they could switch professions, the Event Quest was triggered and there was no time. Then after the event quest, he received an offer from Lord Jackson which made him reconsider changing professions. He proposed that

if they built up their reputations in the Evil Silrion, when they came back they would be an autonomous force. Therefore JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members headed to Selebrid with hopes of success. But they tangled with the bandit group and got saddled with an unprecedented number level 200 freeloader thieves. That was why JusticeMan and his group went to pay Lord Jackson a visit. It had been over one year since the Lord Jackson made his proposal to them. Yet they never even stepped past the threshold of the Evil Silrion so they were extremely sorry towards Lord Jackson. So he deliberately went in order to give an explanation.

“.....It is an unpleasant thing.”

The young Lord Jackson spoke in a heavy voice. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members didn't give any excuses and just bowed their heads silently.

“We're really sorry.”

“You should be sorry. Do you think I'm so narrow-minded that I would blame you for that? In addition, wouldn't Jackson lose some great talents if I blamed you?”

“Huh? What are you.....?”

JusticeMan was puzzled by the end of the Lord's words. Then the watching Cross interrupted with a smile.

“Teacher, the Lord already knows the circumstances so you don't have to explain.”

“The thieves you rehabilitated live in Lancel village which is right near Jackson. And Cross mentioned that you helped Ark stop the disturbing plot of Alan and the Asyeosu church. Yet you thought I would be unaware of your deeds?”

The Lord gave an outrageous laugh. Then he tapped JusticeMan's shoulders lightly and spoke again.

“I am very happy yet regretful as well. I am glad because you brought true justice to the kingdom of Schudenberg. But it is regretful because I can't keep such wonderful people underneath my

command. Sir Cross, bring them to me.”

When the Lord beckoned, Cross handed something over to him. They were 11 medals with a blue gem inlaid in them.

“Although you don’t realise it yet, your fame and skills have already passed the point of an autonomous force. I went through a long process of appeal with His Majesty for these. You have already obtained the necessary honour and fame, so I wanted a guaranteed position for you. And His Majesty sent me the answer a few days ago. These are the Protector medals.”

With the Lord put the medal on JusticeMan, an information window appeared.

Protector Medal (Special, Locked)

Item type: 1st rank medal

User restriction: Propensity for Unemployment 100, Fame 6,000 in the Schudenberg Kingdom.

This Medal of Honour is awarded to a person with special achievements recognized by the King. The person with this medal will obtain the title of ‘Guardian.’ A Guardian is someone who is the true definition of justice. In the past centuries, it was an honourable title given to the militia who fought to protect the borders in the Dark Century.

Although the meaning has faded, people given the title of Guardian still receive respect. Those who own the medal will receive special treatment in the all government offices depending on their level of fame. In addition, if the nobility gathers a militia then they will give priority command to holders of the medal.

<Option: Holders of the medal will gain an addition 20% when acquiring fame>

JusticeMan read the information window with a puzzled expression. Then there was a ringing sound and a new information window appeared.

-You have acquired information to switch professions.

If you have not selected a profession when you have acquired a 3rd rank or more medal, you will be given the opportunity to select a new profession depending on the rank of the medal. JusticeMan has received a 1st rank medal so you can change your occupation to 'Guardian= General.'

JusticeMan has no current profession so there will be no penalty if you change professions.

If you change professions, you will have the opportunity to learn a variety of skills associated with 'Guardian=General.' However, 'Guardian=General' belongs to a special category of professions which can't be cancelled once they have been selected.

Would you like to change your profession?

"C-change profession?"

The rehabilitation members also murmured after receiving their medals. Just like JusticeMan, each of the rehabilitation members had their information updated when they wore the medals. When they read the description of 'Guardian' it sounded similar to a knight profession. However, it wasn't just a knight wielding a sword. Each of them had a specific type of job depending on their skill set. It was similar to a branch of service in the army. Just receiving the medal didn't make it possible to change to Guardian. The necessary conditions was 100 propensity for employment and 6,000 fame. It was a condition that users who normally changed professions between level 15~20 couldn't even imagine. In addition, there was a minimal strength, stamina and agility value set by the limitations of the professions. Before changing into a Guardian, they needed to exceed at least 100 points in each stat! Who on earth would wait to change professions until then? However, it wasn't a problem for JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members since they were over level 200.

"I am convinced that you are suited for these medals."

The Lord said with a warm smile. He was advising them to change to the professions available thanks to the medals. Those words convinced JusticeMan. Here was a good person who acknowledged them. And he gave a proper reward for that acknowledgement. They had halfway given up on reality and just lived in the game. JusticeMan wouldn't refuse the job even if it was ridiculously bad.

"I'll change my profession!"

"Pay your respects to the new Guardian!"

"Wah ah ah!"

The soldiers lined up on both sides and cheered at the Lord's command. At the same time, the profession information window floated in front of JusticeMan.

Guardian = General

Long ago, there was a famous general who led the militia during the Dark Century.

Since you've changed your profession to General using the Medal of Honour, you can't officially influence the Kingdom's soldiers. However, the soldiers will have a very favourable impression of you and will offer you a variety of amenities. In addition, you can learn more professional skills to govern an army. After changing to 'Guardian', there will be an added bonus and you can use a special strategy.

<Added Bonus: Health +200, Mana +200, Strength +50, Stamina +50, Agility +20, Wisdom +20, Intelligence +20 and Luck +10.

Normally only the warrior profession would receive an added bonus. However, the guardian's bonus for changing jobs was twice as high. The stat bonus was like increasing his level 16 times! There were also 7 different commander skills added. Since he already had skills like 'Strategy' and 'Command', the overlapping effect caused the skill proficiency to increase. The other rehabilitation members also selected according to their fame and skill orientation.

Guardian = Assaulter

The assaulter of the militia who fought in the Dark Century. Using powerful strength and stamina, the assaulter was able to cut down knights of the Dark Legion.

You can use every type of weapons except for the magic types and you can wear plate armour and shields.

Sword Mastery and defense are the basics of a 'Guardian=Assaulter.'

In addition, depending on your level there is a chance to learn a special assault skill or impregnable defense wall.

<Added Bonus: Strength +60, Stamina +60, Agility +15, Wisdom +15, Intelligence +5 and Luck +5>

Guardian = Scout

A scout who was in the militia in the Dark Century.

Using their exception agility, the Scout disturbed the Army of Darkness. Their main equipment are daggers, bows and leather armour.

The 'Guardian=Scout' has the basic skills of fencing, archery and stealth. In addition, depending on your level there is a chance to learn special skills related to intuition, concealing and obscuration.

<Added Bonus: Strength +30, Stamina +30, Agility +60, Wisdom +20, Intelligence +5 and Luck +15>

Guardian = Engineer

An engineer who helped out the militia in the Dark Century.

An all-round handyman who deals with a variety of equipment in order to assist the militia. Their main equipment is a spear, tools and chain armour.

The 'Guardian=Engineer' uses the basic skills of weapon construction of architecture. In addition, depending on the level you

can learn a variety of skills involving siege weapons, installing traps and supplies.

<Added Bonus: Strength +20, Stamina +20, Agility +20, Wisdom +40, Intelligence +40 and Luck +20>

Guardian = Strategist

A strategist who was in the militia in the Dark Century.

A strategists assists the General in improving the success rate of various strategies. Their main equipment is a long sword, a flag and fighting spirit.

The 'Guardian=Strategist' has the basic skills of Sword Mastery and evasion. In addition, depending on your level you can learn special skills such as deceit, geography and scheming.

<Added Bonus: Strength +10, Stamina +10, Agility +10, Wisdom +50, Intelligence +50 and Luck +30>

The 10 rehabilitation members finished changing their professions into the respective Guardian type. Every profession had Guardian attached as a title so the Guardian Unit was completed with the General as their commander.

"Huhuhu, we're no longer the rehabilitation group. Guardian has a nice ring to it."

"We should test out the newly learned skills."

"The Netherworld war.....we'll get to have a proper fight."

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members already had their blood boiling at the idea. Then JusticeMan suddenly spoke with confusion.

"But don't we have to wait for Ark before going to the Netherworld?"

"No. Oppa left a guide for us."

"Guide?"

“Hey, Buksil oppa!”

While JusticeMan and Roco were talking, the three pig brothers had finished their mental training downstairs. Buksil immediately jump up and obeyed when Roco called.

“Yes, you called Store Manager!”

“Do you remember Ark oppa’s words? These people are the ones you will be guiding to the Netherworld.”

“Thanks you in advance. I am called Buksil. Please let me serve you.”

Buksil dragged his body like it was gravy as he winced. It was the result of the mental training. Anyway, a user had to designate the target when using Dimensional Movement Powder. The rehabilitation members had never been to the Netherworld so they couldn’t use the powder. That was why Ark left Buksil in the store. Thanks to Buksil his younger brothers briefly showed signs of revolt, with the pigs ending up like dogs.....

“Okay, now let’s go!”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members shouted after the gate was created. Then Roco ran up to them and said something surprising.

“You’re going? Oppa, I have to calculate it before you go.”

“Huh? Calculate what? You already gave us the price for the unicorn horn. We decided that any new ones would be 500 gold.”

JusticeMan asked with a perplexed expression while Roco became frustrated.

“Please stop it. I have to collect the money for the tonics and food I gave you before.”

“Eh? Y-you want money for that?”

“What are you talking about? You ate the goods from the store so of course you have to pay.”

“B-but you have all our money.....”

A rehabilitation member muttered in a low voice, causing Roco to laugh.

“You thought I didn’t know about everyone’s emergency funds? Behave yourselves and take it out quickly. The business has become difficult thanks to Sapjil and Ulmeok so I can’t afford to feed you for free. You ate 30 days’ worth of tonics and 11 luxury dishes. Eleven cups of Herbal Tea. The total is 18 gold and 32 silver. I would be happy to receive items as payment. Ark oppa won’t let me. But he has already gone on the road. If you don’t have money then you can mortgage your armour.”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members froze at the end of Roco’s words. For a warrior on the battlefield to mortgage their armour.....wasn’t that impossible? In the end, the rehabilitation group had to quickly search through their emergency funds to pay for the food before going to the Netherworld. Ark really had chosen an amazing store manager.

“Hey friend! It’s been a while. Have you been well?”

Ark smiled as he entered the parlour. Shambala had been having a serious conversation with Isabel. His eyes seemed surprised when he first saw Ark before it became somewhat restless.

“What the? What are you doing here?”

“Yaya, give me a break to recover my breath. Miss Isabel, have you been well?”

“I’m fine but thank you for your concern.”

Ark knelt like a medieval knight before lightly kissing the back of Isabel’s hand. It was an awkward movement for a modern man but Isabel lived in medieval times so such gestures were natural to her. Shambala’s mouth contorted as he watched through eyes as sharp as a hawk’s.

“I asked you a question!”

Shambala nudged him with the hilt of a sword.

“Ugh! Why wouldn’t I come? I swore friendship to the Dark Brothers.”

“Since when have you sworn friendship to the Dark Brothers?”

“Of course since I helped defeat Nabein. Isn’t that right Miss Isabel?”

“Yes, Ark-nim is a rare guest.”

Isabel smiled beautifully and nodded. Ark laughed and threw his arm around Shambala’s shoulder.

“Don’t act so sour. Eh, Deliverer-nim?”

“Damn brat.”

Shambala declared sharply with a voice mixed with annoyance. However, Ark stayed close to Shambala and whispered in a low voice.

“Why are you so nervous? Aren’t things going well between you and Isabel noona? Did you want to consult with me?”

“.....Do you want to die?”

“Gosh, you really want to hit me? Okay, I’ll knock it off. Who knew you would be having so much difficulties that you would turn to violence?”

“Difficulties? Me? You’re the one making my blood pressure high.”

“Huhuhu, why are you like this?”

Ark retreated as Shambala held up a fist. Then he lowered his head politely to Isabel and began to talk.

“There actually was a special reason for my visit.”

“Please say it.”

“I wanted to confirm it first.”

Ark erased his playfulness and spoke seriously.

“I heard that the Dark Brothers is currently in a difficult situation. Is it true?”

Isabel and Shambala flinched at Ark's question. Isabel hesitated as she looked at Shambala. Then Shambala gave a little nod and took one step forward. It was a very short scene but Ark could guess the relationship between the two based on it. Isabel postponed answering a difficult question until she looked at Shambala. It meant she trusted and relied on Shambala. And Shambala took a step forward so he would be in a position to speak for her. Ark's keen eyes could sense the relationship between the two with that one move. So why he couldn't understand the girls surrounding him.....was unknown. Then Shambala nodded and answered.

“It's not to the extent that I would call it a difficulty. It is just a bit noisy.”

“You came back here because it was a bit noisy?”

“If seems like you've been poking around uselessly. Why don't you tell me what you want to say?”

Ark turned around at Shambala's annoyed voice.

“I'll do that.”

Ark laughed and nodded his head. He had heard about the Dark Brothers' problem from number 206 just then. It occurred while Ark had been playing in the Netherworld. During that time, the Dark Brothers went through many changes. It changed because of Shambala's profession quest. He was to wander to continent and unite the scattered branches of the Dark Brothers. Shambala's current quest achievement was at 60%. He had rallied more than half of the Dark Brothers' forces. It was the first time they had rallied that many forces since Salrin the Master Assassin during the Dark Century. It seemed like a prelude to achieving Isabel's dream of drawing the Dark Brothers into the light. If Shambala successfully achieved 100% then that would undoubtedly be his next goals. This

desire made him want to rally the Dark Brothers even quicker. But in the past people had rallied all of the Dark Brothers but it wasn't possible to achieve Salrin's goal. Then what did he have to do? Isabel was worried until Shambala gave her some advice.

"Do you remember the rehabilitation group who helped us the other day? They managed to rehabilitate thieves they subdued in the past. And now those thieves are living as ordinary people."

The ordinary thieves were living in a bright world. The rehabilitation members' achievements raised Isabel's hopes. Thus they decided to reform the Dark Brothers using the model derived from the thieves' rehabilitation. The first step was to stop the assassination missions. But Isabel overlooked one thing. The chaotic value of thieves who sometimes robbed and killed merchants was significantly different from those of the Dark Brothers who had assassinated nobility. The thieves only took 1 month to lose their chaotic status while the Dark Brothers would take a year. Furthermore, the thieves were a group of people with no professions. On the other hand, the Dark Brothers were assassins. They hadn't learned anything other than fighting. What could the Dark Brothers do if they stopped assassinations?

The thieves received help from Lancel village but that wasn't possible for the Dark Brothers. Thanks to rallying the scattered forces, their numbers had increase even more. After their income disappeared, the finances suffered and was stretched by the extra numbers. Of course, the assassination organization had a long history so they piled up a small fortune. However, there was no guarantee that the fortune would last. If their assets disappeared completely then what would Isabel do? Without any money left, wouldn't the Dark Brothers just be unemployed assassins?

"I understand Chief-nim's intention. Chief-nim is not the only one with that desire."

"But will motivation be enough?"

"Did you forget that we were forced to choose the assassin life?"

"We are a family. If we starve then we'll have to make the same

choices as our ancestors and start the bloody history again.”

The elders of each branch started expressing their dissatisfaction. It was to the extent that some elders insisted on returning to the independent assassin lifestyle. Thus Shambala halted his quest and returned to the tower. If this situation continued then there was no assurance that the people he rallied would stay.

Well, he was mostly worried about Isabel's predicament.....

‘Shouldn't it be better since Shambala has finally arrived?’

Shambala played the game quite differently from Ark. Ark was the type that would flatter the NPCs if there was any benefit to him. On the other hand, Shambala was the type to rush silently towards his goal. Thanks to that character the assassins trusted him but it didn't help in fixing this complicated situation.

‘I'm sorry Shambala and Isabel but this is a great opportunity for me!’

It was fortunate he met number 206 at the entrance. Ark had saved number 206's life so his intimacy was at the highest possible. If he hadn't met number 206 then he wouldn't have known the internal details. Because of that, Ark was in the best condition to start negotiations. Ark hesitated before making a suggestion.

“The Dark Brothers' problem, maybe there's a way I can help?”

“Yes?”

Shambala sent him a doubtful look. But Ark just feigned ignorance and continued.

“Let me sum it up. What's the current problem of the Dark Brothers?”

“We can't do any other work.”

“Yes, that's the point. You can't work. Thus you won't make money. In addition, stress will accumulate without anything to do. This is the biggest problem. You need to work to resolve this issue. But if you start the assassinations again then the Dark Brothers would just get

further from the light.”

“.....So what’s your suggestion?”

In a conversation, he had to make sure person A, B, and C understood the situation. After pointing out the situation, he moved one step closer to his goal.....if he just threw the body then they would cut it down coldly.

“You just have to create a proper job.”

“What?”

“That’s what you wanted to say?”

“You really.....”

Isabel interrupted when Shambala started frowning.

“Wait. A proper job? Tell me more.”

“Some people might not like it.....but they’ll do it at Chief-nim’s request. Now, I’ll explain it again. I discovered another dimension on my travels. And the residents of this dimension are being threatened by a hostile tribe. They desperately need someone’s help.”

“You want us to help them?”

“You’re very perceptive.”

“How will that help us?”

Shambala cut in coldly. Ark looked at him with pity and shook his finger.

“Tsk tsK tsK, so slow..... So you didn’t understand? Shall I explain? It is another dimension. In other words, the laws of middle earth don’t apply. The assassins from the Dark Brothers won’t have any problems living there. No, if you help the residents against the hostile tribes then they would welcome you. The Dark Brothers could set up a new base there.”

Now there was a slight change in Shambala’s face. But Shambala closed his eyes and thought for a moment before sighing.

“If it is enough to threaten the residents then shouldn’t the power of the enemy be quite considerable?”

“They wouldn’t need the Dark Brothers help if that wasn’t the case.”

“Even if it would work, our forces would take quite a hit as well.”

“Aren’t some sacrifices necessary to accomplish your purpose in middle earth?”

“.....”

Shambala was silent before opening his mouth again.

“Okay, I assume that is your purpose. But our dream is to establish ourselves in the world of light. Hiding in an unknown place would be just like hiding right now.”

Good, now it was progressing in the desired direction. Ark laughed and nodded his head.

“That would be true if my purpose ended there.”

“Purpose ended there?”

“If you interfere with the enemy’s attack then I can re-join the Netherworld with middle earth. Thus a new continent would appear in New World. What would happen then?”

Shambala just tilted his head with confusion, making Ark shake his head.

“Slow, you’re so slow Shambala, can’t you use your imagination to guess what will happen?”

Ark continued.

“So I’ll give some more hints. A new continent that didn’t exist until now appeared in New World. Then wouldn’t the residents of the Netherworld seem like aristocrats? What kind of behaviour would you receive?”

“You, you don’t mean.....?”

“Now you’re starting to understand.”

Ark nodded and Isabel’s burst out with surprise.

“I see, I understand what Ark-nim is saying! If the place Ark-nim called the Netherworld appeared in middle earth, it would be a new continent. If a new continent appeared then there would be two reactions. Hostility or friendliness.”

“.....Please continue.”

Ark looked at Isabel like she was awesome and nodded. Thus Isabel continued in an even more excited tone.

“But the relationship between the three kingdoms isn’t that great. After fighting in the Nagaran War for so long, they can’t afford something like that. Therefore their reaction will be friendliness. It’s difficult to believe.....if a new kingdom appeared then the balance of power in New World would change.”

“Well done. Then here’s the last question. What would happen if the Dark Brothers defeated the hostile forces and were firmly allied with the residents by the time the Netherworld appeared in middle earth? I’ll tell you beforehand. The society of the residents is less developed than ours so they won’t understand the politics of that scale.”

“Then the Dark Brothers would act as the representatives of the Netherworld and meet with the three powers for friendly talks.”

Isabel replied with a wide grin. Yes, that was the weapon of persuasion that Ark had prepared. Ark had actually sketched the contents while leaving Lancel village. But his persuasion method changed slightly after hearing number 206’s words. If he hadn’t know that and went to the Dark Brothers first, he would’ve worded it as a cry for help. Although the precondition changed, the results was the same.

‘Huhuhu, I’m in a position to ask something from the Dark Brothers.’

Ark’s knowledge in cheap tricks was increasing every day. However, Shambala made a slightly dissatisfied expression like expected.

“But Ark might just be telling a story.”

“Shambala-nim won’t believe in your friend?”

“Ah, it really is sad.”

Ark sighed and made a pitiful expression at Isabel. Thanks to that, Shambala was made to look like a bad guy and he spoke in an embarrassed voice.

“W-we still don’t know if there’s a place called the Netherworld. We also don’t know anything about the hostile forces threatening the residents.”

“Our ancestors also experienced that when they first stepped foot on this continent.”

“Of course. Didn’t the Dark Brothers inherit the blood of the ancestors with the courage to explore the unknown world?”

“Ark, you’re too noisy!”

Shambala raised his voice angrily and spoke to Isabel.

“Are you willing to give up Salrin’s Towers where you were born?”

“.....It won’t be a problem if it’s for the Dark Brothers’ dream.”

“That’s what I mean. Can’t you make your home anywhere?”

“Ark, I told you to be quiet!”

Shambala viciously glared at Ark like he was tempted to kill him. In a battle it might be different but Shambala couldn’t win against Ark in an argument.

-You have reached your goal through clever words.

<Art of Communication increases by 20>

His Art of Communication only rose when he successfully persuaded an NPC! Because of the information window, it was clear that Isabel had already made up her mind.

“We have to shake off our dark history in order to be truly reborn. This is the long-cherished desire of the Dark Brothers. We have to achieve it at any cost for the next generation. Deliverer-nim, I don’t want to miss this opportunity.”

With the situation like this, there was no way Shambala could go against Isabel. That was why Ark had concentrated on capturing Isabel.

‘Huhuhu Shambala. You still have a long way to go.’

Anyway, Ark’s purpose was accomplished but it wasn’t a bad thing for the Dark Brothers. No, it was an opportunity just like he said. In other words, every part was good so.....it was a win-win. Then Shambala narrowed the distance and bluntly told Ark.

“Okay, you got your way. Now tell me something. What do you want?”

‘I was waiting for that question.’

Ark knew that Shambala would ask such questions. In fact, while coming here Ark only thought he would be lucky to receive help. But the situation changed. Now Ark didn’t just get help, he also opened a way for the Dark Brothers to live. Meanwhile Ark would be able to complete the <Study the Mirage> and <The Resurrection of the Netherworld’s World Tree> quests.

“Well, that’s right. Of course I will receive some favours if everything goes well.”

Ark pretended ignorance and talked about compensation. It was impossible for Ark to go to all this trouble for no profit. He clearly had some other purpose. So Shambala’s doubts disappeared after Ark talked about rewards.

“I see.”

“We should be able to accommodate that much. It is for the fate of the family.”

Isabel accepted Ark’s request. Then she summoned a meeting and

began preparations to enter the Netherworld. Meanwhile Ark also checked his equipment and hurried to make preparations to return to the Netherworld.

“Summon Demon, Dedric and Razak!”

“Ah, damn.....my precious vacation has finished.”

Dedric’s complaints increased as soon as he was summoned. He hadn’t seen Ark for a while so he became undisciplined again. But Ark just stroked Dedric’s head and spoke in a gentle voice.

“Don’t be annoyed. I’ll give you another great holiday when this finishes.”

Then Dedric’s jaw dropped as he stared with bemusement.

“Huk, w-what is going on? Master, did you eat something bad?”

‘This brat.....’

Ark became angry but held it in. It was thanks to the Affection stat that Ark endured it. He knew how to utilize Affection now so it was important to refrain from any violence to raise it even more. If it was for that goal, Ark could see his pet’s rebellion as humorous.

“Now let’s create the circle!”

Ark created a very large magic circle on top of Salrin’s Towers with the help of his summons. The scale of the expedition was quite large since the Dark Brothers’ fate was tied to the Netherworld. There were 400 of the Chief’s elite troops. They also gathered 800 of the Dark Brothers finest assassins. Isabel had wanted to be the commander but conceded thanks to Shambala’s earnest persuasions. Instead, Isabel decided to stay at the tower to provide rear support while the rest of the Dark Brothers prepared to leave for the Netherworld.

“A long time ago our ancestors stepped on this continent to find a new hope and now it is our turn to take up the challenge. The place we’re going isn’t a comfortable land. A lot of pain and sacrifice will follow. But we have to go. For the sake of our future.

For the glory of the Dark Brothers!”

Isabel’s sword thrust into the sky while hundreds of other swords following. The war where the Dark Brothers’ fate was intertwined with the Netherworld had begun.

Show me the money!

“Have you been well in the meantime?”

After coming unharmed to the Netherworld, Ark and the Dark Brothers met up with Buksil and the rehabilitation members in Hagel Forest. Although he acted grumpy towards Ark, Shambala nodded and greeted the rehabilitation members politely. JusticeMan smiled and nodded.

“Oh Shambala, it’s been a while. Isn’t this the first time we’ve seen each other since Salrin’s Towers?”

Yes, I’m relieved to see hyung-nim.”

Ark stared at Shambala while muttering.

“What does that mean? You weren’t relieved to see me?”

“When are you done anything to make me trust you?”

Shambala declared sharply while looking scornful. Ugh, why was he acting like this? Ark could talk about how dependable he was for 4 days and 3 nights but there was no time. Jewel and the Nakujuk were still carrying out their plan to take over the Netherworld. They needed to join the Baran as soon as possible to discuss countermeasures.

“Shambala, we’ll have a serious talk later.”

Ark led the troops across the Netherworld.

‘That is the meeting place of the Baran?’

When they arrived at the Golgi Mountains, they saw the hastily set up tents and the armed Baran.

“W-what the? Who are you?”

Ark had been leading the troops but he was suddenly blocked by a

group of Baran. They saw the chaotic assassins and judged them to be enemies. Even if they weren't chaotic, the Baran was being invaded so they were naturally wary of strangers. In the meantime, someone rushed out and hurriedly waved. It was Lariette who had gone with Beseutyu to the Golgi Mountains first.

"They're not enemies! It's people who have come to help the Baran!"

"Came to help us?"

"Yes, this is Ark-nim who Beseutyu-nim spoke about."

The Baran quickly peeked at Ark after Lariette's explanation. Then Lariette turned to Ark and smiled.

"I've been waiting since I received your message."

Ark had called Lariette before coming to the Netherworld. So Ark already grasped most of the situation. Lariette and Beseutyu lit the 'Pledge Beacon', gathering the Baran clan's scattered warriors and now the tribe's elders were gathered to discuss further measures.

"But where are the Baran clan's warriors?"

Ark surveyed the area and asked, causing Lariette's face to drop.

"Why are you looking like that?"

"That.....they're all of the Baran clan's warriors."

"Huh?"

Ark looked dumbly around the camp. He blinked a few times before smiling awkwardly.

"Is this a joke?"

"....."

"Where are the other warriors?"

".....That's it."

Lariette sighed while Ark felt like he had been hit by a hammer.

“In the old days, the warriors of the Baran clan swore to regain their lost home in the north. After scattering, they disciplined themselves to train for that day. They are waiting for the moment when the Pledge Beacon would be lit up.”

That was the story Beseutyu told Ark about the warriors of the Baran clan. Wasn't it a wonderful story? After hearing the story, Ark had expected burly and muscular smurfs. If Gargamel appeared then strong smurfs would also show up. Thus Ark had been somewhat relieved. It wasn't a good situation but they might be able to do it with the help of the Baran clan's warriors. But the reality wasn't as wonderful as the legend.

“They look more like refugees than warriors. Have they even eaten anything?”

Dedric muttered while sitting on Ark's shoulder. This time Ark 100% agreed with Dedric's opinion. When he looked at the legendary Baran warriors, a sigh naturally came out. The Baran warriors were similar to the native people in a documentary he watched. Rather than having muscles like a warrior, they looked like they had been starving for 1 year. Of course, as a warrior they equipped armour and weapons but it was so tattered that it was difficult to tell it was armour. They looked more like descendants of beggars than warriors. In addition, there were only around 1,000 of them.....

“What is going on? It's different from what I heard.”

Ark burst out while Lariette explained with embarrassment. When the Baran had been driven out of the north, the south was truly a bleak land. The warriors weren't able to protect the Baran from being driven out so they felt a responsibility to help. So they left on a trip to harden and discipline themselves. The legend went up to there..... But the warriors forgot one important fact.

They were warriors. They didn't know how to do anything except fight. The warriors couldn't repair their own weapons or armour so they had to abandon it eventually when it was in tatters. Thus they were literally naked and lost in the wilderness. In addition, they didn't know how to raise livestock or grow crops. The warriors also didn't know how to forage ingredients. Even so, the warriors couldn't

abandon their pride to return to the clan. Fortunately, the Baran warriors barely managed to find sustenance every day. After 100 years, the barely surviving warriors looked like some African natives.

“When the Pledge Beacon was lit, the warriors quickly ran here and it is the first time they could eat a full meal.”

‘They’re similar to the refugee soldiers during the Warring states period.....how can it be okay if they’ve just started eating?’

Ark immediately became gloomy at Lariette’s words.

These soldiers were the main force fighting against the Hermes and Nakujuk Alliance? If he added in the combat difference between the two species then the result was already determined. No, the most likely scenario was that the Nakujuk would conquer the Netherworld. But an ‘absolute’ scenario did not exist in New World. The world would vary depending on the player’s choices, that was New World.

‘When the Dark Brothers entered the war then a number of scenarios were likely overturned. And the Baran clan is still here. I might be able to gather the ordinary soldiers to fight against the Nakujuk like I did the raccoon clan. If the trainers are used well then that would be considerably powerful as well. Yes, it’s still too early to be disappointed.’

Ark tried to think positively.

“But the problem isn’t with the Baran clan’s warriors.”

“Yes, there’s a bigger problem?”

“.....Follow me. The elders of the Baran clan are gathered in that tent.”

Lariette sighed and headed towards the tent. She looked so depressed that Ark started to feel uneasy. There was an even bigger problem than the disappointing warriors? Ark was about to trail after her with a concerned look when the rehabilitation members suddenly said.

“You, you, you, you, who is that woman?”

“Yes, what? I told you, she’s Lariette-nim.”

“The girl who was with Alan in the past?”

“Well, there are circumstances.....”

Ark scratched his head while the rehabilitation members clamoured around him.

“You rascal, so you’ve been flirting with women while in the Netherworld?”

“Salivating over the enemy? Is that right?”

“What about Roco at the store?”

“Unforgivable! I will judge you in the name of justice.”

“If you desert your first wife then you’ll receive punishment!”

“What are you talking about?” My relationship with Lariette-nim isn’t like that.”

Ark’s answer made the rehabilitation members jump.

“Ah, no?”

“Yes, I just happened to meet her here by chance. And what’s with the first wife? Roco also isn’t like that.....”

Ark complained but the rehabilitation members were already not listening. The group exchanged suspicious glances and muttered.

“Huhuhu, nothing between them?”

“Meeting a maiden in a mysterious dimension gives off a somewhat good feeling.”

“Hey, you saliva is dripping. That lady is mine.”

“What the? You think I’ll let you act freely?”

At any rate, the old bachelors squabbled among themselves.....

Ark sighed and shook his head.

“Please don’t get any ideas. Lariette-nim has a boyfriend.”

“Sheesh, I guess goal can’t enter if there’s already a goalkeeper?”

“Is that goalkeeper also a tycoon?”

Ark sank the rehabilitation members’ hopes with a few words and headed towards the tent filled with elders. The ambiance of the tent was even more depressing than the rehabilitation members. There were 10 Baran clan elders gathered in the tent, who would open their mouths before sighing and closing it again. When Ark entered, there wasn’t even a glance or a reaction. Beseutyu frowned at the elders’ apathetic expressions and approached Ark.

“Ark, I heard from Lariette-nim. You came with reinforcements?”

“Yes, they’re in front of the tents. But why is the atmosphere like this?”

“That is.....”

Beseutyu explained the situation in a rough voice.

“Before you arrived, we learned that the Letter Movement Tower had been completed in the valley village. After moving some troops, the Nakujuk currently have 2,000 troops stationed in the south. They’ve already occupied most of the eastern region.”

“2,000 already.....”

The number felt like chewing a grain of sand in his mouth. The current power of the Baran clan’s warriors.....numbered 1,000 beggars, 800 Dark Brothers, Ark and the rehabilitation group. On the other hand, the Nakujuk had 2,000 troops and that number would just increase thanks to the reception tower. Not only was quality a problem, but they were also inferior in numbers. The only way was to gather all the power of the Baran clan and oppose them.

“But what is being done here? The Nakujuk has already conquered the east so they have the materials needed to supply the war. Shouldn’t we gather more troops quickly?”

“That.....”

Beseutyu glanced at the elders. At that time, one of the silent elders tapped the table and opened his mouth.

“We have no intention of fighting the Nakujuk.”

Ark looked bemused and thought he heard wrong for a moment.

“What?”

“I said we’re not going to fight.”

“And I asked what does that mean?”

Ark became incensed and the elder continued talking in a rough tone.

“Aren’t you people foreigners? Why do you want to interfere in this matter between the Nakujuk and Baran? Of course, I roughly know the situation thanks to Beseutyu. I’m thankful you came from a distant place to help us. But as you saw, this is clearly not a situation where we can fight.”

The elders nodded in agreement.

“You said you brought 800 reinforcements? You want to fight against thousands of Nakujuk with 800 people? Besides you are foreigners. If the situation becomes bad then you will give up in a moment. We can’t entrust the lives of our clan to those kinds of people.”

“Hey, isn’t that too severe!”

Beseutyu shouted but the elders just turned their backs.

“That’s enough, we don’t want to hear anymore.”

“Didn’t you see? The refugees gathered outside the tents are the warriors we believed in. We believed in a fantasy. Their appearance is symbolic of our plight right now.”

“We never had a chance from the moment the Nakujuk came from over the northern mountains to invade us. If we fight then we’ll die. But we might be able to live if we surrender. I’m sorry but we’re taking the possibility where there is a slight chance that we’ll live.”

“Beseutyu, you’re an elder of the clan so don’t you think their lives should come above anything else? Sometimes it is brave to accept humiliation.”

Ark was lost for words after the elders spoke. Ark was able to leave the Netherworld so it wasn’t his problem. He thought that the Baran clan thought like him. But they only considered Ark as a foreigner. The Baran were similar to most NPCs. They had been looking forward to the warriors’ appearance, but once it disappointed them and the situation changed then they lost all their courage. The Baran clan was afraid of war, and just like the raccoons they would not risk their lives on a foreigner’s word.

‘It’s my fault for not thinking ahead. But.....’

If the Baran wanted to abandon the war then it was a serious problem. He would instantly fail the <Study the Mirage> and <The Resurrection of the Netherworld’s World Tree> quests. In addition, the Dark Brothers had followed Ark to the Netherworld so there was no guarantee what would happen to his relationship with them. It was also a life or death matter for Ark. No, he didn’t have time to worry so far ahead. Ark was just sighing in frustration when a message window appeared in front of him.

-Shambala has used the ‘Trill’ skill on you. Would you like to accept?

He accepted and Shambala’s furious voice shook his eardrums.

-You bastard, you dragged the Dark Brothers into this without confirming the situation properly? Raising Isabel’s expectations..... Anyway, you have to somehow resolve this. If the Dark Brothers advance into the Netherworld stops here and Isabel becomes disappointed then I will never let you go. You’ll be watching your back no matter where you go.

‘Damn, this guy is just rattling on and on.....’

Ark felt annoyance rise.

‘Damn, what can I do? The raccoons ate drugs but there is no way I can use that method. It makes the head strange. That Shambala will see through it instantly. If that happens then both the Hermes guild and Shambala will want to kill me.’

Then Ark felt a sudden flash of light in his head.

‘Wait, kill? Aha, I see. Okay, I might die either way so I’ll use a plan of desperation. Where everyone will die together!’

Anyway, he had been cornered. What wouldn’t he do?

-Okay, Shambala. I’ll do something. But you’ll have to help me.

Ark quickly explained his strategy to Shambala.

-.....I understand. I’ll believe in you for the moment.

Shambala answered before Ark suddenly struck the table with his fist.

“Shut up!”

Ark used ‘Intimidation’ and shouted in a menacing voice. ‘Intimidation’ had a 50% success rate of persuading NPCs. However, if Ark failed to persuade the elders then he would receive a dreadful penalty. It was a plan of desperation.

‘Now the dice has been thrown. I have no choice but to believe in Art of Communication and Intimidation.’

‘Intimidation’ also had the effect of causing stiffness so everyone in the room froze like a mouse. After a moment an elder opened his mouth and stuttered.

“.....W-what did you say?”

“I said to shut up.”

“What, what the? You dare.....!”

“Dare? How are you entitled to use that word?”

Ark spoke with an aggressive curl to his lips.

“Sometimes it is brave to accept humiliation? Ha, even a dog passing by would laugh at you. Okay, you can act like that. Feel free to surrender because of fear while calling yourselves brave for accepting humiliation. But can you speak those words with confidence in front of your children? Beseutyu, are you brave enough to tell Bona to accept being a slave?”

“Ah, no....I.....I’m not.”

Beseutyu stuttered as he shook his head with embarrassment. Ark turned his piercing eyes and spoke to the other elders.

“I know what happened in the valley village. The residents were also Baran like you. But they fought bravely and sacrificed themselves for the children. I looked at them and saw how great the Baran clan was. I want to help somehow so I gathered my colleagues and came. But then what? You want to yield? Dammit, don’t talk nonsense!”

Ark had thought of using ‘Intimidation’ to persuade them. But anger really started to well up when he began talking. He brought reinforcements for his own benefit and theirs as well, but now the original support army was so scared it wasn’t willing to fight? Who wouldn’t think it was absurd? Thanks to his frustration, Intimidation became more effective. Its effect showed immediately. Ark’s bloody atmosphere overwhelmed the elders who didn’t even dare to speak.

“I wonder what the children will see if they could see you now. Adults just giving up even though invaders are here to take their rights away.....just rolling over obediently like a dog. I hope you still consider ‘submitting to humiliation to be courage’ when you see your children being treated like dogs.”

Ark sent the elders a disgusting look before suddenly shouting.

“I’m sorry, I have a good personality but I can’t stand seeing such dirty actions. Dark Brothers!”

“Yes, Ark-nim!”

“Dispose of all of them!”

Everybody's face was shocked by the end of Ark's words. Confusion was seen on the elders, the rehabilitation group, Lariette and even the Dark Brothers' faces. But Shambala unexpectedly smiled and nodded at the command.

"The Dark Brothers will obey Ark's command."

All the assassins in the tent suddenly held a dagger to the neck of the elders after the command.

"Ah Ark, what are you doing? These people are the elders of the Baran clan."

Beseutyu looked at Ark with perplexed eyes. But Ark didn't even look at him and just stared at the frozen elders.

"Why am I doing this? Weren't you prepared to surrender to your enemies? That's funny. Why do you think I would spare you when you're giving up? So you can live to be a slave? Their purpose for invading is to exploit you for labour of course. But that will apply to young people and children. Old people like you will just be useless. What reason do they have to keep you alive?"

The elders flinched and thought 'we are quite old' as they looked at each other. Ark smiled pleasantly and continued.

"You're subservient yet you dare to mention courage. An old person like you would be thrown away like trash. How wonderful. Well, you're determined so there's no need to drag it out. You should die now so that your lives can be slightly useful. For my sake rather than the Baran family."

"What?"

"Why are you surprised? As you said, I'm a foreigner so I have nothing to do with the Baran clan. So there's no reason for me to help the Baran clan. It's easier to negotiate with the Nakujuk with your heads cut off. Don't worry, I won't kill the rest of the Baran clan since the Nakujuk need them as slaves. And I'll tell your offspring. I'll tell them they have to live as slaves because of your courage. Oh, your descendants will be talking about your courage for centuries. How nice."

“Why are you doing this to us?”

“Do you have a will? I’ll pass it onto your family. Get rid of them!”

“I understand.”

The assassins raised their swords with surprise at his shout.

“W-wait a minute. We were too short-sighted.”

“Too short-sighted? What does that mean?”

“Yes, of course courage is needed to surrender. It is necessary. But it also requires courage to fight back..... Yes, that’s right. We realized it after hearing your sincere advice. Isn’t that right?”

“Ah, that’s right, yes. You’re sincerely worried and care about us.”

The elders’ words went through a complete 180 degree change. If they heard threats while he was using ‘Intimidation’ then their tails would lower immediately. That’s because people like them only thought of themselves. If the traffic police made a small mistake and the road got blocked off then people would get out of their cars and start raging at the police. But it was rare for people to run wild because of a blockage in the road. That’s because people like that would turn around immediately if the police threatened them. It was reality.

“So it was just a joke and we don’t intend to surrender. Actually, we confirmed how determined you were to help us. That’s right, yes. Hahaha, it’s good to see such determination. Now we know. We’ll believe and follow you. The Nakujuk is our enemy! Of course we have to fight against them.”

...Now they were making excuses?

Didn’t they moan and complain towards Beseutyu? Anyway, the elders completely waved the white flag so an information window appeared.

-Your ‘Intimidation’ skill had a higher level of success so the proficiency has increased.
--

Intimidation (Advanced, Active): Intimidation isn't use cursing and scaring the opponent. It is also possible to persuade and threaten in the same conversation. You've become more skilful at adapting threats to the circumstances and can subdue the opponents using your charisma.

Mana consumption: 50

<The success rate of persuading NPCs is 60%. There's also a 60% chance of lowering a monster's morale and making them stiffen for 3 seconds. However, if you fail then hostility will increase by 60%>

Advanced Intimidation bonus effect: Charisma

<A dignified aura and experience dwells in your eyes. As a secondary effect of Intimidation, your ability to persuade NPCs in normal conversations will increase by 30%. Also, if you successfully intimidate a monster then there will be a 5% chance of the monster developing an 'Uncontrollable' state>

'Eh? What is this?'

Just like most of his skills, 'Intimidation' didn't increase after reaching 299 points. It was easy to reach intermediate level but some special enlightenment was needed to raise it to advanced. Using Intimidation to force the opponent to submit was necessary to raise its proficiency. Thanks to the elders, his Intimidation increased to advanced and he also gained the side effect of charisma. It was killing two birds with one stone.

At this point JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members realised Ark's intention.

"Ark, I know your heart but please stop this."

"Yes, they were just testing us."

"Now they'll actively help."

".....I understand."

Ark spoke in a weaker voice. But he didn't forget to say one final

thing to the elders.

“I’ll watch a little more.”

So the meeting proceeded after Ark’s sincere (?) persuasion. The assassins surrounded the elders as the meeting of the Baran=Dark Brothers Allied forces began with Ark presiding over it as the commander. Of course he made decision using the majority wins system, but it wasn’t that different from Ark reigning as a dictator as the elders listened to all his opinions.

“I understand the circumstances of both sides so I’ll take command of the soldiers for the moment.”

“I agree!”

“Like the elders said, the odds aren’t in our favour if we clash with the Nakujuk in our present state. The Nakujuk have occupied the east so we should give up on that and strengthen our power.”

“I agree!”

“Oh, before that I should get some rest.....”

“I agree!”

Ark’s power in the command tent was comparable to Hitler. They would all unanimously agree even if Ark suggested adding dog poo to the dinner menu.

‘Huhuhu, this is the effect of Intimidation? But I should still be vigilant.’

“For a smooth connect between the tribes, the elders should stay here until the battle ends. If the elders are at the forefront then the soldiers will be able to obtain more courage. Don’t worry. They’ll risk their lives to protect the elders.”

The elders’ faces darkened at Ark’s words. It meant they were being held as hostages until the battle finished. Shambala and the rehabilitation members held their tongues as Ark distributed the tasks. Ark concentrated and sent a message to Shambala through Trill.

-Huhuhu, isn't it wonderful? This is what I call administration.

-Really.....I'm lost for words.

Anyway, the Baran clan's war preparations accelerated under Ark's command.

Hyun-woo looked at the doctor with desperation. His mother had received her regular check-up three days ago. Patients with complex symptoms like his mother were subjected to a comprehensive examination once every two months. That's because there was a limit to the doctor diagnosis if they just looked at the patient. Recovering patients in the ICU would often develop internal problems so they needed to be checked. If they did then they would have to be given stronger medication or in severe cases, undergo another surgery.

'Fortunately, it has been 1 year since she's had any problems.....'

It happened 2 years and 3 years ago, when her health which seemed to improve suddenly deteriorated. Therefore Hyun-woo could never hide his anxiety whenever he came to receive the test results.

'It'll be okay. These days Mother's complexion has improved a lot. Obviously it will be fine.'

Hyun-woo placed his hands on his chest and prayed desperately.

"Patient number 809, Park So-mi....."

The doctor muttered as he looked through the records on the monitor. It took longer than previous times. Was there a bad result somewhere? Hyun-woo looked at the monitor nervously. However, he couldn't possibly understand any of the medical jargon. Doctors would normally use easier terms with patients and caregivers but there was no need for that on their records. Although things like 'Cancer, dying soon' were easily understood by patients.

"Hyun-woo ssi?"

Hyun-woo was interrupted while thinking useless thoughts. The doctor rotated his chair and faced Hyun-woo.

“Huh? Yes!”

Hyun-woo answered with a tense face but the doctor just smiled.

“Based on the results, your mother is improving at a very fast rate.”

“R-really?”

“Yes, after checking the records for the last 6 months I’m positive she’s entered a recovery period. There are no specific findings on the X-ray, MRI or blood tests. It is too early to tell if she can completely recover but at this rate there is some hope.”

“Thank you, thank you so much!”

Hyun-woo grasped the hand of the doctor and bowed. Fireworks lit up his head as he thought about the past few years. 5years.....this was the 6th year. He still remembered the first time he saw his mother lying in the ICU. His mother couldn’t even move a single finger by herself. No, she even relied on the doctors to blink her eyes. Hyun-woo honestly never believed that his mother could recover completely. He was just thankful that she was alive. That was 6 years ago. It was a short period but it felt so long. How much anxiety had he suffered during that short time?

But now the doctor told him there was hope. Hyun-woo normally didn’t like doctors, but in a hospital a doctor was like a god. The words of a doctor could beckon the patient and caregivers into either heaven or hell. Hyun-woo now felt like he was in heaven from the doctor’s positive words. And the doctor really looked like Buddha or God.

“It is thanks to the will of the patients and caregivers.”

The doctors also felt good when announcing excellent results. Thus the doctor spoke in a much lighter tone.

“It might be time to look at moving her to a hospital outpatient.”

“Outpatient?”

“Yes, we’ll continue to monitor the prognosis but if the results are maintained for the next check-up in two months then we’ll switch her status to outpatient. Fortunately, Park So-mi has been tolerating it well but sometimes a long hospitalization can be mentally exhausting. Changing the environment is often helpful in recovering. I’m hoping it’s the same for Park So-mi.

Your mother is also eager to reduce the hospital costs. Therefore, the doctor will recommend that she become an outpatient.”

If his mother continued improving at the next check-up in two months, she would be switched to an outpatient status. Hyun-woo’s head felt like it was spinning in circles from the good mood. He could live with his mother once again! How long had he been waiting for this? Hyun-woo flew out of the doctor’s office.

“Mother, did you hear? You might become an outpatient after two months!”

“Yes, I heard just now.”

His mother laughed and pointed towards the nurse holding a syringe.

“If it ends up like that.....”

Hyun-woo felt his heart rattle and sat down at his mother’s words. Wasn’t this like scattering vinegar on noodles?

“What are you saying? Of course it should be like that. Even the doctor is confident this time. Do you think living in hospital is better than living with me?”

“Don’t say such a silly thing.”

“So don’t sound so weak again. Then I’ll really be angry.”

Hyun-woo grumbled like a three year old child. His could fight gangsters in the street or persuade NPCs in New World with flattery, yet Hyun-woo was like a mere child in front of his mother. No, he wanted to be a child.

“Okay, I understand.”

His mother laughed and nodded his head. Hyun-woo's chest tightened at the sound of his mother's bright laugh. The happy energy swelling made him feel like he was going to explode! It really seemed like he was going to die from his heart exploding.

"What is it? What? Mother, what else do you want to have? No, what do you need as an outpatient? Ah, yes clothes! Clothes. Shall I buy a few things for you to wear?"

"What, already.....and there's still a lot of my old clothes at home."

"Those things have already gone out of fashion."

"It's fine. When have I ever paid attention to my clothes?"

'That's why I want to buy them.'

Hyun-woo thought with sadness welling in his throat. His mother had been hospitalized and stayed in one room for several years. He had to live in a one bedroom apartment which didn't allow deposits. Thus he had to sell or give away many second hand goods. It was when he was clearing his mother's clothes that Hyun-woo suddenly realized.

'These are my mother's clothes?'

They were vaguely familiar yet he wasn't used to seeing them..... Hyun-woo then started paying attention to his mother's attire. Mother, because she was a mother.....had no interest in what clothes she was wearing or what she ate. But tears fell when he looked at his mother's clothes again. They were clothes she bought at the market and instead of buying new ones when it got torn, he could see traces of stitch marks. It was the same for his father's clothes. There were many faded clothes with a musty odour that seemed to be over 10 years old.

.....His parents had been wearing those clothes. Their spoiled son would spend 200,000 won or 300,000 won on new jeans or ask for new clothes every season while his parents had been wearing those types of clothes. He hadn't known. Although he had been raised with love, he never truly realised his parent's love until he was eighteen. Their spoiled son was moody and didn't want to spend any

time with them until they were yanked away when he was eighteen. No, he hadn't tried to understand.

'I won't make the same mistakes.'

Hyun-woo had vowed on that day. He learned how to give up and how to stay down. He couldn't learn how to be tough from books or dramas. He had been taught it with force. All of it was for his mother. So what if they couldn't afford designer handbags? Or a new car?

"Mother, just focus on your health and don't worry. When you become an outpatient then I'll buy you delicious food and fashionable clothes. Understood?"

"Thank you for your words."

"They're not just words!"

"Okay, I understand." You've surprised the nurse."

His mother soothed him like a child when Hyun-woo raised his voice.

"I.....I'm fine. It's time for your physical therapy now."

"Ah, yes. Nurse-nim, thank you. Thank you very much. Take good care of my mother!"

Hyun-woo bowed many times and left the hospital room.

"You have a really good son."

"Yes.....that is my son. My only son."

His mother looked towards the door of the hospital room with tearful eyes after the nurse's words. Hyun-woo was still in an ecstatic mood as he left the hospital. He would do whatever it took for his mother. If his mother felt better than he would feel better as well.

"Ah, Hwa-rang ajusshi!"

The first person who came to his mind was Gwon Hwa-rang. Yes, Gwon Hwa-rang would be delighted by news of his mother's recovery. He would always call him after receiving the test results.

Hyun-woo didn't want to convey the news over a phone so he took a bus towards Gwon Hwa-rang's house.

"Ohhhh, is that true?"

"Congratulations!"

"Damn, finally.....Noonim(more polite way of saying older sister)!"

"Since it is like this. We need some celebratory gifts!"

"Yes, shouldn't we spend money on an occasion like this? Ya, the money!"

Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members were delighted. But the sight of the huge men running back and forth was quite funny. Although they wanted to go to the hospital immediately, Gwon Hwa-rang suddenly spoke.

"But Hyun-Woo, where will your mother live when she is an outpatient?"

"Huh?"

Hyun-woo was startled and looked at Gwon Hwa-rang. Come to think of it, that was the most important thing he needed. His mother was coming home. He had been too busy celebrating that he never thought about it. The place Hyun-woo currently lived in was rented. It was a box filled with a TV, computer, scattered clothes and the game unit. In addition, the bathroom was inconveniently outside. How could he bring his sick mother to such a place? If his mother was discharged then she also needed a bed. Of course, she also needed a proper sized bathroom that was indoors. And it should be close to a hospital and on the 1st floor thanks to her wheelchair. That was the minimum conditions. Obviously, he only needed it after two months but he couldn't prepare a new residence in just one or two days.

"I have to start checking from now on."

"It won't be easy finding a home that matches those conditions....."

Gwon Hwa-rang spoke in a worried voice but one of the rehabilitation members just laughed and came forward.

“Hyung-nim, have you forgotten what I specialize in?”

The person who said this was Yoo An-gook. He was a former real estate conman and his nickname in the rehabilitation group was Bu Dong-san (Real Estate).

“You can trust me.”

“No way, you better not practice a scam on our younger brother.”
“Just wait a moment. I’ll find you an amazing home in an instant. Bu Dong-san still has experience in this.”

Bu Dong-san started walking around on his phone.

“Ooh.....really? The conditions that I mentioned? Ah ah, really? Hey, isn’t that really good? Where? I understand. I’ll go with some other guys right now so please wait. Okay, I’m going now.”

After approximately 30 minutes, Bu Dong-san hand up the phone.

“Hyung-nim and I have to go now. Hyun-woo, you come as well.”

“Huh? Right now?”

“It’s good timing to find a nice house. So you should come along.”

Bu Dong-san, Gwon Hwa-rang and Hyun-woo visited a house near the hospital.

“President Kim, it’s me. Show me the house you mentioned earlier.”

It had only been an hour since he mentioned it yet Hyun-woo was already visiting a house. He always thought this, but Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members’ energy had always been unthinkable. The house President Kim guided them to was a house with a small garden and 3 floors.

“The main house is the 1st floor while the 2nd and 3rd floors are rented out. The owners have to be in a foreign country for a few years so they want to rent out the 1st floor while they’re abroad. It should fit the criteria you mentioned perfectly. I spoke to the owner

while I was waiting. Let's enter and I'll give a more detailed explanation."

"Uh, this house is.....?"

Hyun-woo tilted his head to one side as he followed President Kim inside. The house didn't look that different but when he went inside, he saw that the structure was strange. Iron rods were installed from the front door to the living room and on the walls next to the living room. The iron rods didn't ruin the interior but why would they even install iron rods in the first place? Hyun-woo had been thinking that when the landlord appeared.

"Have you come to see the house?"

"Yes, this is the young man I described earlier."

The landlord suddenly grabbed Hyun-woo's hand at the end of President Kim's words.

"I've heard about your situation. It's hard but please have strength."

"Huh? What are you.....?"

"I heard that you wanted a house you could live in with your sick mother. In fact, the circumstances are also similar to us. My father collapsed a few years ago and he still has limited mobility. We installed these rods to avoid any inconvenience for him when he lived here."

Now Hyun-woo could see the reasons for the rods. They were to help the sick father who had difficulties sometimes. It reminded him of the waist high railings he saw installed in the hospital hallways. It wasn't just the living room. The bathroom was also designed to be easy to use for a patient.

"My father is now going to live at a rehabilitation hospital in a foreign country for a while. It is a quite well-known facility. But I didn't want to leave the house like this so I've been looking for a tenant who could use it."

Hyun-woo was impressed by the landlord's attention to detail.

'I still have a long way to go!'

He was so busy celebrating that he hadn't consider the thing his mother needed most.... Anyway, Hyun-woo really liked the house. It might seem inconvenient but it was the best environment for people with disabilities to live in. Besides, it was also closer to the hospital than the place Hyun-woo was currently living in. Hyun-woo knew how difficult it was to find a house that perfectly matched all his conditions.

"When are you going abroad?"

"The weather is still cold so we'll be going in a month or two."

It was just in time! At this point, Hyun-woo knew that the house was perfect for his purpose. If he missed this chance then he didn't know when he would find a house like it again.

"I'll take it."

Then the landlord laughed softly and nodded.

"I guess your circumstances are similar to ours. I'm thankful that you will move in."

He couldn't remember what happened after that. Thanks to Bu Dong-san, President Kim cut the real estate brokerage fee and Hyun-woo and the landlord went over the contract. He had a satisfied expression but once he looked back, Hyun-woo felt like screaming.

'Ack, w-what have I done.....?'

He liked the house 100% There were no regrets in that regard. But the problem was the money for the house. It was 80,000,000 won. Normally it would be 90,000,000 but the landlord understood Hyun-woo's circumstances and took 10,000,000 off. It was still a considerable amount of money but Hyun-woo thought it was possible. Thanks to the deposit from the last auctions, he currently had 45,000,000 won in his bank account. He had to pay the hospital bills for the last two months so that was 20,000,000 won left for the deposit money.

‘I need 60 million won. Fortunately, Ark had 5,000 gold so I can cash that in at any time. I have to somehow save another 1,000 gold in the next two months.’

Hyun-woo thought this and signed the contract. But he was careless and forgot an important fact. Ark’s bag clearly had 5,000 gold. But a few days ago, he had invested 3,500 gold into creating a store. Thanks to that, his remaining money was 1,500 gold. His gold had recovered thanks to Sid and the unicorn horn he obtained. In other words, the amount he had to make in two months was 4,500 gold not 1,000 gold! If he didn’t earn the money in two months than the 20 million won he used to sign the contract would be taken away.

“Perhaps if you have insufficient funds....”

Gwon Hwa-rang had whispered to him while they were returning. And Bu Dong-san who was holding the steering wheel chuckled.

“Is this a trick to prepare a newlywed house?”

“This brat what are you saying....Hyun-woo, don’t misunderstand. It’s not like that.”

“I know. But I’ll save up my balance.”

Gwon Hwa-rang looked dissatisfied at Hyun-woo’s answer but he didn’t say anything else. Of course, the reason Hyun-woo refused Gwon Hwa-rang’s offer wasn’t because of Bu Dong-san’s joke. If his mother remarried then the only possible person was Gwon Hwa-rang. He hadn’t changed his mind about that. However, preparing his mother’s remarriage and renting a house was different. Hadn’t he vowed to do everything in his power for his mother?

‘45,000,000 won in two months....!’

Hyun-woo clenched his teeth together tightly.

Okay, he would do whatever it took to raise it! Hyun-woo’s tenacious spirit knew there was only one way to raise that money.

‘I didn’t just waste that 3,500 gold. It is investment. I’ll be able to

recover a certain amount after two months. And I'll receive a considerable amount of money when I complete Magaro's quest. Yes, that will possibly sufficient. I have to quickly earn money and save it from the Netherworld!

Hyun-woo entered the unit without changing his clothes when he got home.

'Money, earn money for my mother!'

The game unit vibrated and Hyun-woo was once again in New World. Ark's eyes when he returned to New World was even more thirsty for money.

"Show me the money!"

Ark's roar echoed through New World.

War is Business

[**TL Notes:** Some people were asking questions about the house situation from the last chapter. Gyopolife left an informative comment which explained it so I've copied it below. If you want more information then you can also go to this link: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeonse>

Gyeopolife: The 80 million won deposit is jeonse. Korea has a unique housing rental system in which you can deposit 50%-80% of the home/apt value and live there for 2 years. After the contract ends you receive your deposit back.]

“We don’t have much time.”

Ark had triggered a coup and established a military government. The Nakujuk had thousands of troops while the Baran clan only had 500~1000 warriors. However, Ark knew that the Letter Movement Tower had already been completed in the valley village. It was make it easier for them to move more troops to the south.

“But the letter movement has limitations on its uses. It needed the Letter Movement Orb was required for the reception tower. And the Nakujuk shouldn’t possess that many of the orbs.”

“Why?”

Shambala asked slowly. Ark kindly explained it to Shambala.

“There are various reasons but the main reason is that they only built one reception tower in the village. The Magic Institute previously determined that letter movement used some kind of radio waves. And it can only move a limited number of people until the necessary energy recharges.”

“I see what you mean.”

Shambala finally started to understand the circumstances.

“If they had enough Letter Movement Orbs then they would’ve constructed a lot of reception towers for fast transfer of troops. But there are no signs of that. In other words, there is no point in them constructing several towers. But the tower they constructed is sufficient for the Letter Movement Orbs they have.”

“That’s right.”

To put it simply, it was like constructing something in Starcraft. If there were overflowing materials then they could construct a lot of barracks. However, there was no point in increasing the barracks when there were only a few materials.

“That’s why there is no time. If there is a limit to how many troops they can move at one time then they’ll probably attack when they have the maximum amount. So the Nakujuk will probably attack in one week when they have 5,000 troops.”

“Wait, 5000 in one week? Where did you come up with such a number?”

“.....Of course I did some maths.”

Ark laughed at Shambala’s question with a twinkle in his eye.

“Beseutyu previously checked the rate of construction of the Reception tower in the valley village. It took around one week in reality. But the reception tower wasn’t finished yet. They just moved the Letter Movement Orb there after 1 week. So looking at tower’s degree of completion and the amount of troops they were able to move, I can estimate that they will move 300~400 in one day after the tower is completed.

“That means we have to be ready for war in one week. If they can increase their troops by 300~400 in one day then they’ll have an extra 2,100~2,800 in a week. They currently have 2,000 people so they would end up with 5,000 troops.”

“Does everything make sense now Shambala?”

Ark tried to act cool by pretending to raise invisible glasses. Shambala turned his face and snorted.

“Sheesh, what a smartass.....”

“I’m not being a smartass, just showing my brain’s incredible reasoning power.”

Anyway, the uncertain enemy troops now became known. It gave Ark’s group one week. In the meantime, they had to be prepared to fight 5,000 troops. But Ark no longer needed to involve himself in this. Ark’s usual code of conduct was to ‘entrust it to people who can do well.’ It was stupid to do it alone when someone else might be able to do it better. And didn’t Ark now have JusticeMan who was a military expert?

“JusticeMan ajusshi, can you do it?”

“Huhuhu, I was in a similar situation when confronting anti-government guerrillas in South America.”

Anti-government guerrillas in South America? The more he heard of it, the more he thought JusticeMan’s past sounded like an action movie. The fact that he wasn’t bluffing was more frightening. It was why people like Lee Myung-ryong were so respectful towards JusticeMan. Anyway, Ark delegated all authority regarding military matters to him.

In fact, Ark’s role as the Commander was quite mixed. In New World, dozens of people was classified as a party, hundreds of people as a raid and thousands of people separated into corps. In a party, everyone had the same authority. However, the configuration becomes complicated for a raid group. The raid commander could appoint a leader from each party. Then the organization became further complicated when it came to the corps. The leader of the troop would appoint two deputies who served underneath him.

Ark selected JusticeMan and Lariette to become the deputies. JusticeMan naturally took over all roles regarding military matters. And Lariette was an Innocence Knight so she could apply various buffs and bonuses to the entire corps. After leading Dark Eden, Ark

was already aware of the attack configurations so he knew how the special effects of the deputies appointed could be applied. And right now, the one with the most powerful special effect was Lariette the Innocence Knight.

“I’ll work hard.”

Lariette’s face became determined after she received the title. Once he chose JusticeMan, he left further military matters up to him.

“The most urgent problem is building defense military facilities and moving military equipment, as well as training the troops we conscripted from the Baran clan to fill up the insufficient numbers.”

“Have you considered a base?”

“Beseutyu gave me a rough map of the southern region of the Netherworld. Every region in the Netherworld is separated by mountain ranges. The Nakujuk in the valley village is currently stationed in the south-east. If they want to advance to the south-west then they’ll inevitably have to pass through here.”

JusticeMan spread out the map and pointed towards one spot. It was a canyon located in the lower section of the Golgi Mountains.

“I heard from Beseutyu that there was a long abandoned castle in this area. It is almost in ruins but it is better than nothing. Hopefully we’ll be able to convert it to a stronghold. Once we’ve repaired Haman castle then I’ll have to train the troops.”

“Will it be ready in a week?”

JusticeMan considered for a while before asking Ark a question.

“How long do we need to endure to achieve your goal?”

It might not be obvious but his goal wasn’t to win the war. The Baran defeating the Nakujuk who came to the south and then marching north to the Nakujuk was.....naturally impossible. In this war, his goal was to stop the Nakujuk conquering the Netherworld and gaining some time. Ark had to hold on until the right time.

“If we consume one week on war preparations then the remaining

time is one week. We'll have to hang on for a minimum of one week."

"We'll be able to do that much anyway."

Thus they moved to Haman fortress and began preparations for war. It was also the first time all the Baran tribes in the south gathered together. Thanks to Ark holding the elders hostage, there was no real issues. Thus they gathered 2,000 Baran troops in a matter of days. Combined with the warriors and the Dark Brothers, the combined forces were 3,800. It couldn't compare to the Nakujuk, but they might be able to fight against them with those numbers.

"But only the 800 Dark Brothers can be used properly. The rest were just extra. There wasn't enough time for proper military training..... but he might be able to train their individual skills.

Thus the Baran group was given full-fledged military training. JusticeMan also divided them into troops based on their specialities. And he left their training to the rehabilitation members with the right skills. The 1,000 Baran warriors were divided into the assault groups. Of course, the ones who took over their training were the 'Guardian=Assaulter' which was Bul-kkun and two other people. The members of the Baran clan experienced in cartography and hunting was organized into the scouting unit. Yapsab and two other members who changed to 'Guardian=Scout' took charge of this unit. And the farmers and architects made up the Engineer unit and they were led by Bu Dong-san and two others who had changed professions to 'Guardian=Engineer.' And finally, a number of old veterans like Beseutyu was trained by Jjak-tung who had changed professions to 'Guardian=Strategist.'

Ark felt a little worried about JusticeMan's decisions.

'JusticeMan ajusshi is an expert but the other hyungs have never trained anyone so will they be able to teach the Baran?'

However, Ark's worries disappeared on the first day of the training camp.

"The children can't get it straight?"

“If you can’t do it well then you’ll have to duck walk for two kilometres!”

“Hieeeeek!”

The Baran clan burst out screaming. The rehabilitation members had received personal training in tactics from JusticeMan. However, the rehabilitation members weren’t strangers to it. All the rehabilitation members had been called for the mandatory military training in South Korea. During those two years, they trained in tactics, discipline and drills. While it didn’t show in their social lives, all of the men in South Korea had military training. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that it was South Korea’s potential. In addition, the rehabilitation members were people with gloomy pasts who used to live in the dark. It was a requirement of those organizations to discipline their subordinates. Thanks to that, the Baran clan experienced a nightmarish training in the Netherworld under their dreadful instructors.

“Eh? What am I seeing?”

“You can’t die from this level of discipline.”

“Even the reserve corps in South Korea can train to this degree.”

“If you fall behind in this simulation training then brace yourselves!”

“The slogan of our unit is defeat evil!”

Each of the rehabilitation members led hundreds of troops so they burned with competition. They pressed the Baran hard because of that.

“Oooh, I’m going to die from this training.”

“I want to fight with the Nakujuk as soon as possible.”

The Baran were so tired that they were even saying those kinds of things. Anyway, the training was effective. Two days later, or 6 days in game time, the forces had managed to get used to the system and were able to somewhat take advantage of each other’s specialities. In particular, the assault troops showed tremendous

growth. Although they looked like refugees, they were people who had inherited the Baran's warrior lineage. The rehabilitation member's training developed their potential and strength and they were now able to match the Nakujuk warriors. Their forgotten battle skills also manifested quickly. In addition, the scouting unit and the Dark Brothers went through joint training while the engineer troops levelled up their skills by repairing Haman Fortress.

"Okay, now I don't have to worry about that."

Ark nodded his head with satisfaction after observing some of the Baran's training. But the next day Ark had to face a problem he never considered.

"Ark-nim, gathering the weapon supplies isn't as easy as I thought."

Lariette sighed as she spoke. While the rehabilitation members were assigned to training, Lariette had been responsible for requisitioning munitions from the southern villages. The Baran clan was a race which centred on farming, raising livestock or extracting minerals. So when the elders first started requisitioning, they were able to gather an overflowing amount of food and minerals. But they could not gather the most important military materials, weapons and armour. Of course, even the Baran clan had blacksmiths. However they were only experienced with rakes or shovels and had never created a weapon. Not only was there no weapons, the Baran clan's equipment was like the Bronze Age while the Nakujuk was the Iron Age.

Daeng kang!

"Huk! The handle broke!"

It was normal for the handle of a spear to break during training. If the handle broke then the spear or javelin wouldn't be able to be thrown. There was no need to explain the importance of weapons in a war. It wasn't an exaggeration to say the performance of the weapon affects the combat power in a game.

'Unbelievable. Every time something is fixed then another problem occurs.'

Ark continuously sighed. Weapons production was the most important problem that needed to be solved at the moment. Even if he started properly training a blacksmith now, it would take a while for them to be able to produce weapons. It took a great deal of time and money to become a skilled blacksmith.

‘Well, the Baran clan is able to obtain the ores necessary for production.....’

Wait, why had he never thought about that?

“Leave the problem to me.”

Ark immediately used the Dimensional Movement Powder to return to Lancel village. He visited the raccoon clan and showed them the ore from the Netherworld.

“This ore. What do you think about it?”

“Ohu, it is a very high purity ore. Where did you get it from?”

The raccoons were craftsmen so they felt greedier for the ore than money. As expected, the raccoon clan showed signs of desire as they were shown the ore. Ark grinned and made a proposal.

“In fact, I’m visiting with a request. Would you make weapons for me if I supplied you with this ore? As much as possible. I really need weapons so I’ll also supply the coal and whetstone. Please take the ore as payment for the weapons.”

“You’ll pay for all of it using the ore?”

The raccoon clan thought for a moment before nodding.

“We accept. Ore is similar to money for us so it’s not a problem. And this is a good ore so we’re quite greedy for it.”

That was the method Ark came up with. He took the ores from the Baran clan and commissioned the raccoon clans to produce weapons.

‘Now the problem of weapons supply will be solved. In addition.....’

Ark laughed after the raccoons entered into the weapons supply

agreement. The munitions were the property of the NPC. Although Ark was the Commander, he couldn't just embezzle it. So although Ark saw the munitions piled up in Haman Fortress, he could only swallow his saliva. Then he had a brilliant idea after hearing Lariette's words. Currently, Ark made all the decisions as the Commander. He couldn't take the war materials, but he could use the goods to barter for war preparations.

'I'm in the middle so I won't be able to profit if I deal directly with the raccoons.'

The raccoons signed a contract to trade one weapon for one ore and coal. There was no way for someone in the middle to profit. But who was Ark? Using cheap tricks, wouldn't Ark be able to obtain coffee from a well?

'Huhuhu, there's also a handling fee when trading through an intermediary agent.'

The method Ark devised involved Ark's Comprehensive Store in Lancel village. Using this method, Ark's store received 1,000 ores from the Netherworld. At this stage, the ores still belonged to the NPCs. That was the key. The store would pass the ores to the raccoons who created 10 weapons out of them. The deluxe weapons of the raccoon family had considerable value to the Baran who didn't have a method of developing advanced weapons. So during the war, he could barter and increase the value to 1,200 ores. Ark would then hand over the ores again for weapons production. In other words, except for the first time he paid 1,000 ores he was able to get an extra 200 ores with every transaction afterwards. It was like someone else arranging the table while he picked up the spoon. This was just his handling charge.

'I get 200 ores for every 10 weapons. It is enough to create one weapon. Presently, we need approximately 1,000 weapons and armour. All that work will give me 20,000 ores. I could make a profit of at least 2,000 gold if I could sell all the weapons and armours!'

All Ark had to do was go back and forth between Lancel village and the Netherworld carrying the ores. Of course, he had to use the Dimensional Movement Powder every time but there was still a lot

left. Besides, was the powder necessary once the Netherworld rose to middle earth? It would be like swimming on land!

‘Hahaha, war is also money!’

“Buksil, you will carry the weapons between Lancel village and the Netherworld!”

Ark made Buksil who was a profession merchant in charge of the trade route. At the end of the deal, Ark would be able to embezzle approximately 2,000 gold. In addition, the Baran clan’s lack of equipment was quickly solved. At that time, Ark also discovered that the weapons produced by the blacksmiths weren’t all the same. Just like Ark could create an ‘A la carte’ dish, the blacksmiths created 50~60 deluxe weapons. Of course, the stats for the deluxe items were significantly better than an equivalent item.

A Masterpiece Adamantium Sword (Magic)

Weapon type: One-handed sword

Attack: 33~38

Durability: 400/400

Weight: 50

User restriction: Level 200 and more

An adamantium sword created using the ore from the Netherworld. The craftsman put his heart and soul into it and created a rarely seen masterpiece. Compared to a regular item, the performance of the deluxe item is at least 10% better. In addition, it will steadily make fine adjustments to the user’s hand.

<Option: Probability of destroying armour +20%, Reaction rate +10%>

“Usually a masterpiece will be more expensive because of the labour put into it, but I will give it to Ark-nim for the same price.”

‘Jackpot!’

Ark purchased the deluxe items and then sold them to the rehabilitation members for a more expensive price. Even the rehabilitation members needed weapons and armour. There was no reason to sell a deluxe item for cheaper than the market price.

“It’s usually 40~50 gold but I’ll give these to hyung for 30 gold.”

The rehabilitation members’ eyes shone like lanterns at Ark’s words.

“As expected, we only have you.”

Thanks to that, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were able to purchase deluxe goods. The rehabilitation members received better equipment while Ark’s wallet became warmer.

‘But it’s still lacking. I need 45 million won in two months!’

In fact, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members knew that Ark would get a profit from it. But they didn’t care about something like that. They knew the reason why Ark’s personality was a little strange. Thanks to the lease contract, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members wanted to somehow help Ark. They also knew Ark wouldn’t accept such one-sided help so they wanted him to swindle them. It was a fair price for them. They bought it with the money they saved.

But Ark’s opinion was firm. It was the one part Ark was sure about.

“I’ll pay 50 gold for these items....”

“No, it is 30 gold.”

Ark thought of the rehabilitation group as brothers so he didn’t want them to lose money. However, he wouldn’t hesitate to swindle other users or NPCs. That was his firm standards for money. It was why the rehabilitation members knew that Ark wasn’t just about money, money, money. After a few days, he ended up securing 1,000 weapons and an information window appeared.

<Relevant Investment Information Window>
--

Thanks to Ark’s Comprehensive Store’s brisk trade, the commercial value of Lancel village has increased. The reputation of Lancel

village has increased and Ark's contribution has increased by 10. The maximum number of shares you can own has increased by 1%.

Currently owned shares in Lancel village (Owned/Upper Limit):
4/6%

'Huhuhu, it was worth the trouble.'

That was the reason why Ark did the transactions through the store. Trading the materials through Ark's store was a huge process. In addition, the raccoon clan who were NPC residents could also learn money. Thanks to his achievements, the commercial value of the town rose and his upper limit for shares increased as well. Ark nodded with satisfaction before looking at Dedric and Razak.

"Come on, do you think you can just play around?"

"Eh? We're going to train as well?"

Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack?

Dedric and Razak stepped back with a wince.

"Of course. Aren't you motivated watching the Baran clan become stronger?"

"What the, we've already gone through a professional course so why do we have to be compared to those things? We're resting and storing our power so that we can comfortably use it during an important moment in battle! It is better to hunt than go through basic training."

He couldn't say anything.....

Dedric's words weren't completely wrong. In fact, Dedric and Razak had increased their power several times through high intensity training. Therefore, their performance rate for the operations was over 90%. Their ability to adapt in a crisis was also considerable. That's why they were able to help Ark deal with monsters 100 levels above them. So there was no reason for them to receive basic training like the Baran.

‘But it’s a different story if they can raise their skill proficiency.’

Recently, Ark had discovered through Radun that using ‘Affection’ could increase the skills of his pets. However, the skill didn’t rise if he just invested Affection into it. Ark and his pets also had to gain an understanding of the skill in order to raise it.

‘I don’t have to increase the understanding of the skills through training. I can increase their understanding by utilizing the skills while hunting. The japtem and experience will also be a bonus. Furthermore, Affection might increase if I accept the opinions of my pets.’

“Okay, let’s go hunting.”

While the Baran were busy training, Ark dedicated himself to hunting around the area. He forgot himself and a week quickly passed by. While he was hunting, Shambala and the Dark Brothers had been scouting the Nakujuk and finally returned to the fortress.

“Ark, they’ve begun advancing into the western region.”

Finally the war had started.

Chae chang, seokeok!

The sharp sounds iron and flesh being cut rang out. An enemy appeared in front of him while swinging his sword. He blinked once and paid careful attention. Being able to detect the sharp sword would save his life. It was a battlefield.

‘How long will this battle last?’

Ark thought as he knocked down the group of Nakujuk. It was already the 5th day of fighting against the Nakujuk and dozens of battles had been fought. As expected, the Nakujuk had 5,000 troops. On the other hand, the Baran managed to gather a few more troops and increased their numbers to 4,500. The numbers were almost equal but the combat power between the Nakujuk who was a warrior tribe and the civilian Baran clan was completely

different. Despite the high intensity training, there was a limit to how much they could learn in a week. The Baran clan were defeated many times in the early stages and were pushed towards the first defensive wall they built in the canyon.

‘If it wasn’t for JusticeMan then the Baran clan would already be wiped out.’

Ark looked at JusticeMan who was standing on a hill overlooking the battle. In fact, JusticeMan had already foreseen what would happen in the early stages. Because the early strategy was to preserve the troops rather than maintaining the high ground. But their strategy changed to counter-attacking once the Nakujuk marched into the canyon. JusticeMan chose the strategy of ‘Backtracking.’ When the Nakujuk moved from point B to point A, they would backtrack and attack point B. The war of NPCs in New World was also similar to wars in reality. In other words, they had to secure a supply route if the troops wanted to continue marching. If they lost the supply route then they would run out of food and weapons and armour won’t be able to be repaired. In addition, the soldiers would feel anxious and their morale would start to fall. Of course, the Nakujuk had to move back to point B to secure the supply route again. Then JusticeMan would build a defensive structure at point A. Thanks to that, the Nakujuk were now only able to advance near the entrance of the canyon.

Of course, this strategy had been used since ancient times. The NPCs might not know about it so Jewel’s group would see through it immediately. However, ‘knowing’ about it and ‘stopping’ it were different issues. Thus the strategy they envisioned was a success! In the ever changing battlefield, it was difficult to make a RTS succeed but it was possible using real-time simulation games. Now to mention the field in New World was reminiscent of an actual battlefield. JusticeMan and Lariette also had an enormous impact on the battlefield. Without JusticeMan’s expertise and Lariette’s special abilities, it would be impossible to succeed. Of course, the rehabilitation members and the Dark Brothers also helped execute the strategy.

“Ah ah ah, I’m going to kill everybody!”

“The weak Baran are acting so arrogantly!”

The Nakujuk had thought the battle was going to be easy so they eagerly rushed forward. Although the Baran's line of defense collapsed, JusticeMan just waited and said.

“Heh, they've started to lose control after 40 minutes. Their flanks are spread widely thanks to them eagerly rushing forward. Dark Brothers, Intercept Operation!”

Lariette cast her 'glow' at JusticeMan's command. The Innocence Knight always caused a glow whenever she used a skill. The Dark Brothers had been hiding using 'Stealth.'

Kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang!

There was a huge sound as hundreds of Dark Brothers emerged and used backstab. The Nakujuk had already been missing quite a lot of health thanks to the battle so they quickly collapsed.

“Ugh, w-where did they come from.....!”

“F-fall back. Retreat from their attack range and rearrange the formation.”

“But we've already entered too deeply into enemy territory. If we retreat then all the troops will be isolated.”

“Send the Draken unit to support them.”

The shout emerged from the confused group of Nakujuk. And after a while, dozens of Draken rushed across the battlefield.

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

It was the Draken who could fly freely in the sky and had immense attacks! They were so strong that they were able to face 10 of the Baran clan's monsters. They always appeared in a decisive moment to cause a crisis among the Baran. However, this time emergence of the Draken was an opportunity for JusticeMan.

“Tactical units, intercept the Drakens!”

After the command was issued, hundreds of soldiers on the hills on

both sides of the canyon raised their bodies.

“Don’t spread the attacks. Concentrate on one target and attack.”

Jjak-tung used his skill to place clear signs above the Draken’s head.

“It’s this one for the moment. It is an all-out attack. Exterminate them!”

Tu tu tu tung, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Firing sounds were heard from the tactical unit’s hands as hundreds of artillery hit the Draken at the same time, causing it to spew blood and collapse. Ark had commissioned cannons from the raccoon family. The cannon was a perfect weapon for the tactical units. The tactical unit was smart but powerless so they couldn’t face the Nakujuk directly. This wasn’t a problem if they attacked from long distance. And cannons were classified as a machine rather than a weapon, so they showed higher performances when used by NPCs. In addition, the tactical units was led by Jjak-tung who was a ‘General=Strategist.’ One of the skills Jjak-tung learned was ‘Feng Shui.’ When used in battle, ‘Feng Shui’ increased the effect of terrain by 50%. In other words, the cannon had extra damage and accuracy when fired from a higher position. Feng Shui increased these effects by 50%.

‘Ugh, this, unbelievable.....!’

The Nakujuk could only watch as one Draken fell after another. Just like that, the tactical units instantly handled the Draken and started attacking the Nakujuk. They fired from the top of the hill towards the bottom. Also the Nakujuk were closely gathered in the canyon so it was easy to hit them! When shooting the cannon, there was no way it could miss. Jjak-tung shouted with excitement on his face.

“Attack, attack, attack! No signs are required for these guys. Just fire blindly!”

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

The artillery fell from the sky like a shower of rain, causing the Nakujuk’s camp to collapse. But this was still only a skirmish.

-The guard towers 1, 2 and 3 have been completed on top of the hill!

“That’s it!”

Ark had been waiting for that message to appear. While the battle had been going on, Bu Dong-san had split the engineer unit to construct three towers on top of the hill. Of course, they didn’t have that much time so the towers weren’t strong or durable. But the Nakujuk had to break through the 2nd line of defense in order to move up the hill and attack the towers. In other words, it meant they couldn’t directly attack the towers. Guard towers.....if anyone had ever played a Warcraft RTS game then they would know the strength of guard towers. There was a huge bonus applied to the range and attack power of arrows shot by the guard tower. Furthermore, the guards in the tower wouldn’t be hurt until the tower collapsed. Thus the guard towers were a necessary resource but it required a lot of resources and people to create. The guard towers and the tactical units with cannons! The shower of arrows and artillery immediately decreased the health of the Nakujuk.

A smirk formed on JusticeMan’s face.

“Okay, shall we throw something else at them? Assault units charge!”

“Wah ah ah ah!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

They rushed onto the battlefield which split like the Red Sea. The earth sounded like it was shaking as 1,000 mounted troops charged towards the enemy’s camp. This was the concentrated assault of the Baran clan. They were also riding monsters that the trainers had tamed. In fact, JusticeMan had struggled with how to use the monsters in the war. Four or five monsters could only deal with one Nakujuk. And when the battlefield became complicated, the trainer couldn’t handle all the monsters alone. To overcome those drawbacks, JusticeMan had decided to use them as cavalry troops.

The Hellhound, Bolkanasu and Kajel Wolves were ridden into battle.

The situation went through a 180 degree change. Thanks to the speed of the rush, the attack damage of the Baran clan and the monsters were greatly improved. It was possible to say that the battle once truly started with this assault. When the assault units appeared, Ark's eyes brightened and he shouted.

"Huhuhu, it's time Radun. Transform!"

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Pa pa pa pa, pa pa pa pa!

Radun finally had a chance to play an active role as he ran with Ark on its back towards the assault troops. There was a deafening noise as the assault troops collided with the Nakujuk and the Nakujuk went flying. However, Ark slowed his speed after a quick peek. Ark wasn't eager to fight and just followed behind the assault units. It was a battle involving thousands spread out through the canyon. While the soldiers were interlocked and fighting, many items also fell. But it was difficult to move easily in such a hectic battlefield. And even Ark was limited in his ability to grab items and store them. But the situation changed when the assault troops broke through the enemy line. Dozens of Nakujuk collapsed from the charge of the assault troops. And an empty space opened between the general Baran troops and the enormous speed of the cavalry unit. The person who picked up the items first was the owner. It was the moment Ark was waiting for! Ark ran after the assault troops and scraped up the items which had fallen to the ground.

"Over there, an item just fell!"

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark's eyes looked around and Radun instantly ran to that place when he shouted.

-Radun has acquired the 'Nakujuk's Spear.'
-Radun has acquired the 'Draken's Leather.'

'Hahaha, this is a field of items!'

Ark rode Radun and chased after the cavalry troops. On again, it was like someone else arranging the table with food while Ark picked up the spoon and ate it. He had to do it even if it was shameful. If he didn't do this then how could he raise 45 million won in two months?

“Ark, what are you doing? Is now the time to be playing around?”

At that time, Shambala passed by him and shouted angrily.

“Have you forgotten our mission?”

“I know. I'm looking for it so you don't have to tell me.”

Ark answered in a brusque voice while Shambala continued into enemy territory. Yes, Ark was the Commander so he wasn't in the battlefield just to pick up some trivial items. It was due to a special mission.

‘Although it is trivial, gathering a lot will still make me some money.’

Ark's sharp eyes looked over the battlefield. At that time, Dedric contacted him through radio from where he had been searching in the sky.

“Beep beep. Chiik, chiik. You hear me, Master.....the goal is found....over.”

‘Where?’

“Where Master is now.....in that place.....6 o'clock.....50 metres away.”

‘6 o'clock....okay, I found it!’

Ark searched the camp and discovered the target.

‘Oho, the opponent is Jewel? Lucky. Shambala was start complaining about it being unfair.’

Ark looked at Jewel throwing magic all over the place. The most annoying presences in the war were Jewel and the Hermes guild. Thus Ark and Shambala were given a special mission to handle the Hermes guild. Shambala and Ark were the only ones who could beat

them in a melee situation. Ark prioritized this special mission as the most important. The reason was because they had money. The Hermes guild was in a war against NPCs so they were all chaotic. When they died, they would receive 2x the death penalty and would unconditionally drop one item. In other words, they weren't different from a special monster. In addition, they commanded the Nakujuk so they were good prey for Ark.

'Now Jewel looks even prettier. What will I get this time?'

"Radun, to the right. Charge!"

Pa pa pa pa, pa pa pa pa!

Radun quickly rushed towards Jewel.

"Huk, t-that guy....!"

Jewel screamed as she spotted Ark running towards her. In fact, this was not the first time he met Jewel. He had met Jewel two times since the war began. At that time Jewel had rushed frantically towards him. However, the result was a complete defeat for Jewel. Now the pioneer Jewel couldn't match Ark anymore. Jewel was prideful but she finally admitted it after being defeated by Ark twice. The two defeats meant double the penalty and items dropped.

"S-stop him! Don't let him come!"

Jewel fell back and yelled at the Nakujuk. But Ark wasn't going to miss a source of money.

"Hah, trying to run away? Not a chance!"

Ark took out the Saw Blade and threw it. The Saw Blade flew through the air and landed in front of Jewel.

"Undo transformation, Razak Shield Stroke!"

The Saw Blade immediately morphed into Razak at Ark's command. Jewel flinched as Razak immediately struck her with the shield. This was the method Ark developed to hunt the Hermes guild. Ta da da dang, there was a continuous ringing sound as Jewel was pushed back towards Ark. It was the power of intermediate Shield Stroke.

-The proficiency of Razak's Shield Stroke had risen.

Shield Stroke (Intermediate, passive): your ability to handle the shield has become more precise and you can now push the enemy more effectively. You can also use Shield Stroke to strike three enemies at the same time. If all three attacks successfully hits one target then they will be pushed back an enormous distance.

<Interfering with the enemy's attack and attack power +30%, the probability of pushing and causing stiffness increases by 12%, intermediate Shield Stroke can also strike three times>

Ark had studied Shield Stroke during the one week dedicated to hunting. When the new technique was learned, he consumed 50 Affection in order to raise Razak's Shield Stroke.

"Ugh, t-this bastard...!"

Jewel muttered as she stumbled. However, the stiffness meant that Jewel was unable to move.

"Shut up and give me items! Demonic Opening, Dark Blade!"

Ark's enormous attack instantly decreased Jewel's health to 30%. The stiffness was released but Jewel from the strongest Hermes guild didn't dare to fight and just ran away.

"What are you doing? Block him!"

Jewel cried out and the Nakujuk came stampeding towards him. But Ark just smiled and murmured.

"This is all you have? Assault troops, push against them!"

The Baran assault troops heard Ark's shout and pushed against the Nakujuk. But some of the Nakujuk got past and came to help Jewel. At that time, Dedric flew down like a thunderbolt and spat towards the Nakujuk.

"Your opponent is over here you communist!"

He had also consumed 50 Affection points to raise his Taunt skill!

-The skill proficiency of Dedric's Taunt has increased.

Taunt (Intermediate, Active): Taunt can now be used more effectively. The effectiveness of your provocation has increased the range to 20 metres. In addition, the number of people it can be applied to has increased to 5. The angrier you make your opponent, the longer the duration will last and there will be a wider range of effects.

<It is possible to use within 20 metres. Mana consumption: 30>

"Kuaaak, that bat is spiting on us!"

"Hahaha, it's not just saliva. It is sputum!"

"Sputum? This freaking bat, I'll tear it apart!"

"H-hey you morons, where are you going?"

Because they were chaotic, they deliberately put away their best items. It wasn't possible for them to have a huge effect on the war wearing good items and the damage would be too large if they died. However, it was still more expensive than the items the Nakujuk would drop and it relieved his stress so he continued hunting the Hermes guild.

"Jewel's equipment is more expensive than that other guy. Wasn't the armour I got from that warrior only worth 100,000 won? These fellows are like beggars."

Ark clicked his tongue and looked around again.

"Anyway, I've caught more than Shambala at the moment."

Although he was hunting the Hermes guild, they weren't the only targets. The chieftains were often hidden in the back or buried in a group of Nakujuk.

'Shall I see how many Nakujuk I can kill while hunting their chieftains?'

"Dedric, use satellite mode!"

“Sheesh, don’t call it that name. It is surveillance mode!”

Dedric grunted and flew into the sky again. And soon they found another commander not far from there. Naturally a special monster would drop better items than a normal monster. Instead of killing the chickens, Ark wandered around and sliced up the Hermes leaders. Of course, it was determination for a jackpot but Ark’s achievements also contributed greatly to the military situation.

“Ohhh, Ark-nim has already defeated another leader!”

“Those guys aren’t a big deal!”

Thanks to Ark, the morale of the Baran clan went up while the Nakujuk’s decreased. Meanwhile, Shambala had finished hunting the Hermes guild and changed targets to the chieftains as well. The Drakens were completely destroyed and the Hermes members and chieftains were collapsing one after the other. After approximately 2 hours had passed.....

“Eeeugh, retreat, everybody retreat!”

The Nakujuk fled after suffering enormous damage.

Special Attack Corps

“Reinforcements?”

Raiden asked with a frown.

“Didn’t you tell me a few days ago that the Nakujuk would be sufficient?”

“T-that is.....”

Jewel stuttered an excuse on the other side of the handset. Well it was actually an excuse that he heard several times so far. Thanks to Ark, the rehabilitation group and the Dark Brothers, the Nakujuk’s conquest of the Netherworld had unexpectedly been halted. However, Jewel had refused Raiden’s support after they gained consecutive victories in the first few battles. That’s because Jewel would receive less shares of the Netherworld if she accepted Raiden’s help. But the situation had changed and the battles had become increasingly difficult. In addition, they didn’t have an extra Letter Movement Orb so they couldn’t accept reinforcements from the Nakujuk for the moment. But was that all? Every time Jewel, Duke and the Hermes guild participated in the battles, the situation became messy because they were smashed by Ark and Shambala.

“So now you need my help with these issues.”

“We’re really sorry.”

Jewel replied in a weak voice, making Raiden sigh.

“Okay, we can’t afford to have our forces currently leave Silvana. I’ll hire a few people from the mercenary guild and send them to you. But it’ll take them some time to go through the red wilderness. Can you hold out until then?”

“It is difficult to advance but they don’t have enough to take us all out.”

“Then be patient.”

Raiden hung up and immediately connected to New World. Then he used the gold reserves to hire mercenaries. He hired approximately 1,000 mercenaries which would be enough to change the situation in the Netherworld.

‘This is serious!’

At that time, there were eyes watching them leave for the Netherworld. It was the foreign business manager of the Silvana trading post, Sid. Raiden had secretly hired and gathered the mercenaries but there was no large transfer of funds in Silvana that could escape Sid’s eyes. Ark had already guessed that Jewel would ask for help and assigned Sid to watch Raiden. And he passed this information straight to Ark.

“Wah ah ah!”

“We managed to defeat those guys and retook Kurata canyon.”

“Commander JusticeMan, hooray!”

It had been a week since the Nakujuk war started.....

In the meantime, they had fought five times in the canyon and the momentum seemed to be with the Baran as they drove the Nakujuk back. In addition to Ark and Shambala, the popularity of JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members also increased.

“As expected, our decision to entrust this to you was completely correct.”

The elders had completely become Ark’s followers. He disapproved of the sudden change in the elder’s attitude but who was he to complain about a good thing.

“.....The victory in this battle is huge. Our approximate line of defense has been completed.”

JusticeMan spoke with a satisfied expression as he looked at the

map. Thanks to the victory just now, they could build ten guard towers on either side of Kurata canyon. The Nakujuk had no choice but to advance through Kurata canyon if they wanted to reach Haman Fortress. Of course, this didn't mean that the guard towers was absolute. If there weren't any soldiers stationed there then it would just be a normal building. But when the battle spread into the canyon then it'll show its powerful function and would improve the percentage of victory. In addition, the monitoring range would increase by a huge amount if they used the guard towers. They would be able to watch every move of the Nakujuk in the canyon.

"With Haman Fortress's extension, they won't dare attack it anymore. In addition, the supplies they gathered in the south east is already running out. With the guard towers blocking the movements of the Draken, they'll probably won't be able to hold out and will retreat to the valley village."

"Now we've overcome our inferior power and stabilized the region."

Shambala also nodded. Ark's party was now completely immersed in the Netherworld war. There wasn't that many opportunities to experience a massive war like this in the game. It was a matter of life or death for NPCs but it was just a game for users. They were able to experience a hot battle so they were enjoying it. In particular, JusticeMan and Shambala's motivation had increased by a considerable amount. It was a 180 degree change from the siege or battles they previously participated in. The siege was just a war. But this war had some justification. JusticeMan was helping the residents so he considered it a good cause while Shambala was looking after his precious girlfriend (?). Fulfilling Isabel's wish was his justification!

They faced this war with a different type of determination. Moreover, the opponents were monster-type NPCs. Unlike the siege where it was just a competition between users, this war would give fame, experience and items. In addition, the war gave additional experience to users with a title. The experience of JusticeMan and Lariette who were the deputies, the rehabilitation members who were the commanding officers of their units and even Buksil who was in charge of supplies went up dramatically. However, the one who ate up the most experience was obviously Ark who was the

Commander. As the commander of the Baran clan, he received a certain amount of experience every time a Nakujuk was killed. Thanks to that, Ark climbed 16 levels in a week and finally reached level 300.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good +400	
Fame	10, 725 (+ 500)	Level	300
Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Abandoned, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer	
Health	4,710 (+150)	Mana	4,700
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	593 (+28)
Agility	753 (+55)	Stamina	893 (+20)
Wisdom	107 (+10)	Intelligence	912
Luck	103 (+30)	Flexibility	119
Art of Communication	66	Affection	31 (+10)
Resilience	358		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			

Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10

*<King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20

Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3

Wind Spirit's Boots (Shoes): Agility + 30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Slide' available

Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark

* ~~You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)~~

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense

His fame also went up considerably as the Commander. The

average level of the rehabilitation members reached 220 while Lariette also became level 200. They received less experience than Ark but they were lower levelled so their speed was still fast.

‘Levelling up like this isn’t good. My experience gain will start slowing down.’

Ark was unexpectedly complaining. As expected, it was gold and money that made Ark happy instead of levels. Currently the percentage of Baran who’ve received the raccoons’ weapons was 80%. 1,000 was necessary but only 800 had been completed and passed through Ark’s hands. Thanks to that, Ark managed to receive ores equivalent to 1,600 gold. Of course, he made it into weapons and sold it in his store as cash.

‘The merchandise trade it huge!’

Ark was impressed by how much he gained from trading merchandise. He didn’t have to lift a finger in order to gain 1,600 gold. If he could monopolize dealings bigger than this, the profit would be unimaginable.

‘If I can monopolize the Netherworld after it rises, as well as Silvana and Lancel village then hunting for money won’t be a problem!’

Anyway, the people who were always ahead were the ones who grasped an opportunity. Ark was able to envision a more realistic aspiration thanks to his business. Ark had also picked up a significant amount of loot on the battlefield. Buksil had already moved the japtem to the displays in Ark’s Comprehensive Store. But even if all of it was sold, he was only be able to receive 300~400 gold at the most. The best items were the ones obtained from the Hermes guild. Even if it wasn’t their original items, it was still high levelled magic items. On auction sites he would be able to receive an average of 30~50 for it. So far he had secured 20 items from the Hermes guild which meant 600~1000 gold.

‘Kukukuk, being chaotic at that level.....stupid guys.’

After calculating, he earned approximately 3,000 gold in one week! That was around 30 million won earned.

'I've only just signed the lease contract and I've already earned 3,000 gold in a fortnight. It's a lot and there's still slightly less than 2 months left. If I keep this up then the rental amount won't be a problem!'

Ark really felt like he was flying. But no matter how much he liked it, he couldn't drag the war on forever.

'The movement of the Hermes Alliance is serious.'

Ark had received information from Sid that the Hermes guild had hired mercenaries. But there was no news of a siege beginning at Silvana.

'They are clearly bound for the Netherworld. They're sending in reinforcements.'

Currently the Netherworld war was 6:4, with the Baran being slightly superior. But there was no guarantee that the situation couldn't reverse. If the Nakujuk headquarters managed to produce a Letter Movement Orb in time then more reinforcements could come at any time. If there were joined by the Hermes mercenaries then the situation would spiral out of control. The canyon had 10 guard towers, but RTS games have proved there was a limitation when there were too many people. The side with a lot of numbers would win. Although bombs could be used in reality, the rule of numbers was absolute in medieval battles where people fought with swords and shields.

"What do we do now?"

Shambala asked in a worried voice after hearing all of the circumstances.

"This war couldn't be won anyway. I knew that from the beginning."

"What? What are you saying.....?"

"Me? I told you so from the beginning. Even if the Baran win here, it isn't possible to capture the Nakujuk's headquarters. Eventually the war will continue and they won't be able to win."

“If you knew that then why did you drag us into the war?”

Shambala stood up and glared at Ark. This guy, he was so immersed in the war that he forgot the true purpose. Ark looked at Shambala with pity in his eyes before speaking.

“It’s not finished, now’s the time to start the main point.”

“Main point?”

“Hah, do I have to explain it again from the beginning? Shambala, what is your purpose for coming here?”

“Purpose.....occupy a place here.....when the Netherworld rises.....”

“That’s it.”

Ark said with a smile.

“Did you forget? Our purpose is not to win the Netherworld war. Our goal is strictly to elevate the Netherworld to middle earth.”

“Wait a minute. What will happen to the Baran clan when the Netherworld rises to middle earth?”

Larriette’s question also wasn’t difficult to answer. Shambala also nodded and added.

“That’s right. The Nakujuk will still attempt to conquer the Netherworld even if it rises.”

Sometimes it was tiring talking to a person who wasn’t as clever. He was nice and handsome so couldn’t he solve such problems without Ark telling him? Ark shook his finger and spoke.

“Think about it. What will be one of the most significant changes if the Netherworld rises to middle earth?”

“The biggest changes.....?”

“The biggest change will happen to the Netherworld. Like Isabel said, the first change will be the visit from the Three Kingdoms and the second change is that users will descend on the Netherworld.

“Well I guess.”

“Won’t users show interest in the Netherworld’s quests?”

That was the solution that Ark thought of for the Netherworld. A huge number of users will surge to the Netherworld with no information. And the first thing they’ll see will be the Baran suffering from the Nakujuk’s invasion. When ordinary users saw it, they would think that the Baran clan were the good NPCs. On the other hand, the Nakujuk would be labelled as monsters. That is, the users’ enemy. He didn’t know how Jewel’s group allied with the Nakujuk, but ordinary users would feel obligated to help the NPCs and defeat the Nakujuk.

“If the Baran elders commission the users then the Nakujuk would be annihilated.”

It was just like a huge defense league had come to the Netherworld. So naive users would apply for the militia. If the Hermes guild sent reinforcements then their numbers would be nothing compared to the number of Baran. In addition, users couldn’t permanently die. So it would be possible to recycle the troops again and again. The Nakujuk wouldn’t be able to survive against that.

“If the users assist the Baran clan then the Hermes Alliance won’t be able to move excessively.”

If the Netherworld rose and the Nakujuk still tried to conquer it, wouldn’t the user help the NPCs against the monsters? If that happened, the users would publicly forsake the Hermes Alliance if they saw them allied with the monsters.

“That’s why I said we don’t need to win this war to win. If users appear then the elders can ask them to subdue the Nakujuk.”

“.....And they’ll do all the work.”

Shambala shook his head with a tired look. It was a strategy which manipulated users and NPCs. But this was only one part of Ark’s grand plans. The users who came to the Netherworld would form a defensive wall in the war. Of course, this required a person to supervise them. And JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and the Dark Brothers were already firmly established with the Baran clan.

Naturally, Ark's companions would be authorized to supervise the users. In other words, no matter how many users came to the Netherworld Ark's party would still have exclusive rights to the Baran's territory. If he was smart then there were endless ways to obtain a profit.

'The Baran clan's economy is still in the Bronze Age. But that will change once users start arriving. If the capital of the Dark Brothers is used to establish an economic system beforehand then I can also benefit from it.'

Even though they stopped the assassinations, the funding of the Dark Brothers couldn't be ignored. Nabein wanted to rebel in the past before he didn't want to lose his source of profit. If the Baran used that to build an economic system, he would gain huge profits as the Netherworld continued to evolve.

'Huhuhu, I'll be able to achieve all the plans in my head if I have the funding of the Dark Brothers. Naturally a large amount of soybean powder will fall in my direction.'

When Ark first entered the Netherworld, he thought he would be able to profit if he monopolized the quests and dungeons. However, this wasn't such a trivial amount. Ark recalled the various business plans he thought of while exploring the valley village. Guided tours of the Netherworld on the skyrays, tamed monster safari and even created a new currency system for a fee..... It wasn't just for users in the Netherworld, it could also be applied to trading with the Three Kingdoms. Ark was going to invest the Dark Brothers huge capital into all those businesses.

In fact, it was also necessary for the Dark Brothers. They would have the power to negotiate with the Three Kingdoms when the Netherworld appeared. If Ark used the Dark Brothers capital to initiate some projects then they would make the capital back and he would profit, And Isabel had already agreed and signed a contract before they entered the Netherworld. Yes, the eligibility to participate in Netherworld businesses. That was the reward for Ark's information he mentioned to Shambala and Isabel.

"Bah, you had such ulterior motives."

Shambala now realised that the conditions Ark presented weren't as simple as he thought. However Ark just ignored him.

"What are you talking about? I've been thinking of the Dark Brothers."

Ark paid no attention to Shambala's glare and continued.

"Well, well! Let's focus. Anyway, the important thing is to maintain the defense line until the Netherworld rises.

"Although you said it early, but I can't easily imagine it. The Netherworld will really rise to middle earth?"

"That is correct."

Ark had emphasized the word 'we.' Because Ark needed to complete the quest but the purpose for reviving the world was for 'them.'

"Then it would've been better to revive the world tree instantly."

Shambala spoke in a strange voice. Then why didn't he revive the world tree as soon as he came to the Netherworld?

It was a question with plenty of answers. But there were three reasons why Ark hadn't done it. First, if the Dark Brothers hadn't established themselves by the time that the Netherworld rose then Ark's profits would decrease. Secondly, reviving the world tree required a number of special conditions.

"The world tree is an existence which maintains the balance of the world. It gets its source of power from the Netherworld. There has to be a full moon in the Netherworld when trying to resurrect the world tree. The increase in power will increase the probability of success."

"Right. Isn't tomorrow a full moon?"

"Okay, that's why I mentioned that we needed to hold on for one week once the war started. That's the reason why I didn't want to push too hard against the Nakujuk. If they felt the crisis then Jewel might've called in reinforcements from the Hermes guild earlier.

Understood? And one last thing.....”

Ark pointed towards a section of the map rolled out on the table.

“This is the location of the world tree.”

Ark had pointed beyond the northern mountains where the headquarters of the Nakujuk was located.

“Yggdrasil told me that the world tree was worshipped by the Myutal. So naturally the Baran built a castle around it. The Baran were driven from that place and now the Nakujuk occupies it. Therefore, I have no choice but to lead the troops there to resurrect the world tree. But realistically it is impossible. And the Hermes Alliance has already sent the mercenaries so there is no time.”

“The Nakujuk headquarters.....then?”

“There is only one way left.”

Ark traced the path between Haman Fortress and the world tree with his fingers.

“I have to sneak into enemy territory with a small force and revive the world tree.”

“You’re going to organize a special attack corps?”

“That’s right, we’ll use the skyrays to fly past the northern mountains. Furthermore, the Nakujuk will be busy thinking about the war in the south. It would be difficult with a large number but I might be able to infiltrate with a small group. And I’ll have to do whatever it takes to break through the enemy lines and revive the world tree.”

“So this is the final and most important mission.”

JusticeMan nodded with a convinced look. Since the time in New World will triple the rate of reality, a full moon actually appeared every 15 days in reality. If they missed the opportunity tomorrow then they would have to wait another 15 days. But the Hermes mercenaries would arrive in a few days so there was only one chance.

“There’s no choice.”

Shambala murmured and turned to look at Ark.

“Of course, I’ll have to attend?”

“Naturally. The destination is the enemy’s stronghold. The odds aren’t in my favour if I go with a large force. We can hit and run with a small number of people. Thus I need a small and elite force that can move quickly. And as much as I hate to admit it, you are a strong ally.”

“Then I’ll go.”

“Me too, there’s no way I’ll miss this.”

The rehabilitation members immediately raised their hands when the strategy was decided. But like he said, it was better to have a small number for this operation. If they wanted to sneak in undetected then it required a maximum of 10 people. And Ark had already picked the people he wanted to infiltrate with in his head. Aside from the reliable Shambala, the one he needed most was Lariette with her recovery magic. JusticeMan was also a reliable person. However, reviving the world tree meant nothing if the fortress was taken so JusticeMan needed to remain at the fortress. He instead decided to choose the members with the highest levels which were Bul-kkun, Ddeok-dae, Jjak-tung, Yapsab, Hae Gyeol-sa, and Tazza. The level was necessary but they also needed to be able to work together. 10 of the Baran clan warriors also wanted to accompany them but that would be detrimental to his plan of sneaking in. Therefore, the Baran warriors were given the role of guiding them through the northern mountains. In the end, the ones who would sneak through the enemy’s camp to revive the world tree were 9 people.

‘This is the only chance!’

Ark began to prepare for the expedition and checked his equipment.

“The fate of the Netherworld rests on your shoulders.”

JusticeMan said firmly as he handed the rehabilitation members the

‘Slime’s Immortality Pill.’ During their spare time in the Netherworld, JusticeMan had created the Slime’s Immortality Pills but he hadn’t decided who should eat them first. But thanks to this situation, the privilege was given to the 6 people in the special attack corps.

“Oh, isn’t this thing awesome? My abilities have gone up!”

Bul-kkun’s mouth gaped open as he saw the effect of the Slime’s Immortality Pill. The remaining 4 people also reacted the same way. The special attack corps finished the preparations and climbed aboard the skyrays, with JusticeMan saying one final thing.

“The northern mountains have a lot of Drakens that the Nakujuk use to patrol. It’s not going to be an easy path. So in order to avoid the Nakujuk’s attention, you’ll go around the canyon to enter the northern mountains.”

“.....I understand.”

“Good luck.”

The special attack corps saluted and flew into the sky. Then JusticeMan stepped back and turned around. The thousands of Baran gathered in the fortress square lifted their arms and cheered.

“Wah ah ah!”

“Commander Ark-nim, we wish you the best of luck.”

Roaaaaar!

The sharp gust of wind blasted against their skin. The pressure felt like a huge beast was attacking them.

“Lower your upper body and lean forward. It’s the end if you get caught in the gust!”

Ark shouted as the skyray were pummelled by the wind. They had to avoid the eyes of the Nakujuk so Ark’s group made a detour around the Golgi mountains after departing from the fortress and finally arrived in the Valley of Fangs in the afternoon. In order to

cross the northern mountains, passing through the valley of fangs which connected the northern and southern parts of the mountains wasn't a popular path. It intricately crossed the northern mountains like a maze. And just like the 'Abyss of Despair,' the Nakujuk's garrison was situated in the middle. It would be unreasonable to break through that garrison on the skyways. In addition, they might inform the headquarters even if Ark managed to break through which would make things more difficult. That's why he had the Baran warriors accompany him in order to guide him.

"Fang Valley has a secret passage that the Nakujuk don't know about. It is a very, very dangerous place but you'll be able to go undetected by the Nakujuk."

The Baran warriors said it was a secret passage located in a deep cave in Fang Valley. It was situated in the middle of sky-high cliffs so they wouldn't have been able to enter without the skyways. And as soon as they passed through the cave, they would arrive at Ageiron the current headquarters of the Nakujuk and former castle of the Baran.

"Okay, let's do it."

Ark directed the skyways towards the cave and a message window popped up when he entered.

-A lava cave hidden in Fang Valley.

You have found the lava cave hidden inside the maze-like Fang Valley.

The Baran clan used this cave to escape when they were driven from the north a long time ago. But after a long time, the cave has taken a different form thanks to the lava flowing through it. And the faint cries of beasts could be heard from along the cave walls. It seems to be a very unsafe passage.

<Explorer's Knowledge: Hidden dungeon bonus (Skill Points: 10)>

"Eh? It's different from the stories?"

The Baran warriors looked around puzzled at the maze like cave complex. The information window stated that the lave had been flowing for 100 years so the shape of the cave would've changed a lot. Moreover, even the Baran warriors had never seen the cave. All they had were loose sheets of maps that their ancestors drew when they escaped from the north a long time ago. Thanks to that, the group spent a large amount of time wandering the cave. In addition, there were sharp fangs of rocks jutting out from all over the cave walls. It wasn't easy to fly through the cave while avoiding those rocks.

"But the most irritating thing is this heat....."

In fact, Ark was extremely tired from the choking heat. The cave the Baran warriors were guiding them through had lava running like a river on the ground. The gusts of winds also blew hot air like a hair dryer. It was to the extent that his skin became hot and sore after being hit by the wind. Ark wiped off his sweat and the information window once again updated.

-Due to the extreme heat, your fatigue has risen by 10%!

<For every 10% your fatigue rises, all stats, attack speed and movement speed will decrease by 5% and the amount of satiety when consuming food will decrease by 5%. If your fatigue goes above 50% then you will lose 10 health every 50 seconds. In addition, if your fatigue reaches 100% then you will lose all your health and die.

Relaxing away from the extreme heat or eating cold food can lower fatigue>

That was the information window that appeared shortly after entering the cave. It was an opposite effect to the 'cold' that Ark experience when he first entered the Netherworld. Fortunately, it was easier to recovery than the cold effect. Fatigue could be lowered simply by resting in a place away from the heat. However, the cave was filled with sharp rocks on all sides. Even lava was flowing on the floor. It wasn't possible to find a place to rest. Thanks to that, Ark's fatigue had already increased to 40%.

“Damn, if it wasn’t for these rocks.....”

If they were speared by the sharp rocks then they would be roasted like grilled skewers. No, even without the rocks it would just be like they were roasting in an oven.

“Ah, this place is indicated on the map. Fortunately it doesn’t seem to have changed that much!”

“We’re almost there now. Have strength!”

Ark’s companions gasped with exhaustion while the Baran cheered them on.

‘Damn, it’s easy for them to say.’

In fact, the Myutal didn’t feel heat or cold. The climate in the Netherworld always changed on a whim so they’ve adapted to those type of environments. Therefore the Baran’s cheers only seemed like someone was clawing at Ark’s thighs. But the real problem started now.

‘If I eat Patbingsu (shaved ice) then I’ll feel better....but there is no place to land.....’

Ark gasped while looking around. Then he suddenly saw a dark shape approaching rapidly from inside the cave. Ark stared at the dark shape blankly before suddenly shouting.

“D-Draken?”

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

Ark’s shout echoed along with the Draken’s roar through the cave. The warrior leading the party shouted with a perplexed expression.

“Huk, w-wild Draken!”

There were ten Drakens approaching them from the front.

“Damn, my breath is already choked up just from flying.....battle formation!”

Ark, Shambala, the rehabilitation members, Lariette and the Baran warriors lined up in their formation. It was one which protected Lariette in the middle with her recovery magic while still allowing them to fight. Ark took out his sword and asked the Baran warriors.

“How far is the exit?”

“Not far according to the map. It’s in approximately 1 kilometres. The Draken are settled here so they probably won’t chase us if we managed to get out through the exit.”

“Okay, Shambhala let’s just rush and penetrate through them. Dark Blade!”

“Okay, Meteor Strike!”

Shambala and Ark rushed forward like an arrow and swung their swords. Tazza and Jjak-tung attacked the Drakens from the rear with their cannons. However, they only managed to push back a few Drakens before they were surrounded by the rest.

“Dammit, our attack power is weakened.”

Ark swore as he turned around to avoid the Draken’s counterattack. Normally those attacks would’ve penetrated through the Draken. However, Ark’s group had accumulated fatigue thanks to the heat so they weren’t in a condition to exert their full power. It wasn’t simply a matter of the stats or damage decreasing. Every breath he took while swinging his sword sounded clogged like a man stuck in a sauna. That wasn’t the only problem.

“Ugh, I can’t aim properly!”

“I can’t fight and control the skyray.....”

Unlike Ark, Shambala and the rehabilitation members had no experience with combat on skyrays. It was taking everything they had just to calm the skyrays who were frightened by the Drakens’ attacks. It wasn’t possible to aim a cannon or bow while the skyray was running wild. In addition, the wild Drakens had higher levels and damage than Ark’s group.

“Heok, aaaaaak-!”

Eventually, two of the Baran fell into the lava thanks to the Drakens’ attacks. And another Baran warrior was caught by a Draken and died. The Baran warriors had their morale fall after seeing such horrible scenes.

“It’s impossible to fight against a bunch of Drakens. We have to get the hell out of here!”

“It can’t be helped. Shambala and hyung-nims, please gather the Draken in one place!”

Ark shouted and took a sword out of his bag.

“U-understood. Hik!”

The rehabilitation members avoided the attacks of the Drakens and flew all over the place. Soon the ten Draken were lined up. At that moment, Ark dropped his sword from above them and made it explode.

“Blade Storm!”

Kwakwakwakwa, kwakwakwakwa!

The devastating storm of sword fragments swirled with an intense glare! The Draken was pressed by the huge pressure of the storm and fell. He thought they might fall in the lava but the Drakens soon regained their balance and flew up again. However, it was possible to block the movements of the Drakens for a while thanks to Blade Storm.

“Now’s the time! Guide, you take the lead. Let’s break through to the exit!”

The Baran warriors and Ark’s group traversed the cave at a tremendous pace.

Kurwarwarwarwa-

The Drakens’ cries of fury quickly came from behind them. Their eerie cries felt like the Draken’s were breathing on the back of his

neck. But there was no room to look back. Ark's group leaned forward on the back of the skyrays like they were riding motorcycles and raced through the cave. Then they clumsily drifted around a corner.

"We'll arrive soon! All that's left is the exit in front of us.....huk!"

The Baran warriors turned the corner and screamed before suddenly braking. They stared in front of them with desperate looks and moans.

"Ugh, unbelievable.....!"

The exit the warrior mentioned existed. But it wasn't an exit anymore.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Large amounts of lava was flowing down from the ceiling like a waterfall in front of the exit. Even with his 75% flames resistance, Ark would still receive huge amounts of damage from one drop of lava. Shambala and the rehabilitation members would only have their bones remaining if the lava fell on them.

"Son of a bitch!"

"Ark, the Drakens!"

He turned his head at Shambala's warning and saw the Drakens come around the corner. However, now the Drakens weren't the problem. If they concentrated their energies then it might be possible to deal with the Drakens somehow. But if the exit was blocked then it was meaningless to deal with the Drakens.

'Soon it will be evening and the moon will rise for 4 hours, I don't have time to turn around and find another way.'

There wouldn't be enough time to reach Ageiron if they turned back through the cave to Fang valley. The time limit attached to this operation was until the moon rose. No, before that he would have to get past the Nakujuk's garrison first.

'Damn it, I should've started the infiltration earlier.....'

Ark avoided the Drakens' attacks while grinding his teeth together. The only way to enter Ageiron was through this exit.

'Is there a way to pass through the lava waterfall?'

It was impossible no matter how much he thought about it. He would need a steel umbrella with 1,000% fire resistance.....

At that time, an idea popped into Ark's head.

'Wait, umbrella.....? Maybe.....no, there is an umbrella!'

"Shambala!"

Ark immediately approached Shambala and explained the plan. Timing was crucial for the method Ark devised. And the only person who could match his timing was Shambala after fighting together in the Evil Silrion. Shambala's eyes lit up when Ark explained and he quickly nodded.

"It can be done. Do you have confidence?"

"We have no choice.

"Okay, I'll believe in you."

Shambala grabbed the reins and flew up towards the ceiling.

"The rest of you maintain a defensive formation in this area and please endure it!"

"Hik, u-understood. I really dislike aerial combat....."

The rehabilitation members and the warriors started flying around and screaming from the dizziness. Fortunately, one of Lariette's skills was 'Balance of Spirit.' When this skill was used, the person could accurately gauge their position even if they were on a rollercoaster. Thanks to that, they could avoid the attacks of the Drakens. So the Drakens and the Baran warriors engaged in battle, with two of the warriors being sacrificed. They weren't lacking in strength but their priority was to protect the rehabilitation members.

"We do not mind the sacrifice. The entire Baran clan depends on this mission."

It was truly praiseworthy. However, Ark felt even more tense every time he heard a scream. After the fifth Baran warrior had died, Shambala finally called out to him.

-Ark, I'm ready! There's enough room now.

-Okay, now wait for my signal. Don't forget, timing is crucial!

-Don't worry about me and steady yourself.

"Dedric, it's your turn. Lead a Draken near the lava waterfall!"

"Eh, what do I look like in Master's eyes?"

Dedric shouted as he avoided the Draken's snapping fangs.

"You're the only one I can believe in number 2! Razak and Radun aren't any help now."

"Sheesh, I understand. Ya, these lizard. Try to catch me if you can!"

Dedric used Taunt and cursed at the Draken. The Draken flew after Dedric who fled towards the lava waterfall. After a moment the Draken appeared in front of the waterfall!

-Now Shambala!

"Torpedo Sword!"

Shambala used Torpedo Sword while near the ceiling. Then the sharp icicle like rock dropped with a loud sound.

'Now, timing, timing, timing!'

Ark concentrated hard and glared at the falling rock. He had learned how to grasp the timing of moving objects in taekwondo. Ark calculated the timing in his head and rushed at full speed towards the rock. The moment he collided with the rock, Ark connect Parry and Counter attack to use Riposte.

Kkakakakaka, daeng dong!

The rock bounced off him like an arrow. It was the reason Ark rushed forward and used Riposte. If he used all his momentum to

push the heavy falling rock with Riposte, it would shoot off in the opposite direction like an arrow. Of course, the force of the impact wasn't small but Ark had concentrated and stared at the rock. The goal of the flying rock was the Draken chasing after Dedric!

Snap, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The rock penetrated the Draken's chest and lodged it in the wall. The Draken was like an insect specimen nailed to the top of the lava waterfall! The lava fell onto the Draken and split in half like it was an umbrella. And the exit was clearly exposed. The Draken started struggling as it took a shower in the lava waterfall. However, the rock was firmly lodged in the wall and wouldn't budge. So, that was Ark's plan.

"It's a success, now quickly go through the exit!"

"Oh, exit!"

The rehabilitation group and the Baran warriors turned away from the Drakens and charged in Ark's direction. Ark, Shambala and Lariette had already passed through the exit. Meanwhile, the Drakens health was quickly disappearing. Its skin had started to melt from the intense heat. Even the Drakens who lived in the lava cave couldn't withstand the heat of the lava.

"Hurry. It won't last for much longer!"

"Ah, understood!"

The rehabilitation members stopped aiming the cannons and arrows at the Drakens and went through the exit. At that moment, the sound of the Draken's skeleton was heard as it floated away in the lava waterfall. The lava waterfall was also starting to block the increasingly narrow exit. Hae Gyeol-sa had just came in that direction and cursed.

"Dammit!"

"Hae Gyeol-sa hyung!"

"Damn! It's not possible.....I'll have to stay here..... Don't worry

about me and just go..... The Baran warriors and I.....we'll return to Haman Fortress."

"We're sorry.....we believe in Commander."

The sound of Hae Gyeol-sa and the warriors' voices became lost thanks to the loud waterfall. But they were already surrounded by a bunch of Drakens. It was impossible for them to exit the lava cave and return to Haman Fortress.

"It can't be helped. They were too slow. Let's just think like that."

Jjak-tung said after shaking his head and patting Ark's shoulders. There was no way for them to go back and help Hae Gyeol-sa and the Baran warriors anyway. Ark looked at the lava waterfall for a brief moment before nodding and turning away. This was Ark's infiltration mission where the destiny of the Dark Brothers and the Netherworld was at stake, it wasn't possible to stop and worry about the people who had fallen behind.

Ageiron

-Ageiron.

A large city spread in front of you after escaping the lava cave. This is the ancient city in the Netherworld where the Baran used to flourish, Ageiron. The nature and peace loving Baran clan built the beautiful city around the world tree Yuzuria. But now it was ruled by the Nakujuk and the old beauty of Ageiron couldn't be found anymore. The whole city is covered rusted steel and grey rocks. The world tree Yuzuria stands in the heart of the city while letting out a dismal atmosphere.

<Explorer's Knowledge: Hidden city discovery bonus (Skill Points: 20)>

'We finally arrived.'

Ark looked at the distant city. The lava cave was like a tunnel piercing straight through the northern mountains. After going through the exit with much difficulty, they had managed to immediately move to the opposite side of the northern mountains. Luckily the Nakujuk hadn't occupied every part of the north. After moving through the northern mountains, they had managed to find Ageiron which was their destination. As Ark's group starting moving north, he noticed something strange. Beseutyu had said the northern forests were a lush, beautiful place. But the north was actually more barren than the south. Almost everywhere was a desert covered with coarse sand with occasional dry woods appearing.

'Is this the influence of the world tree?'

Ark recalled what Bona had deciphered from the scroll. The scroll stated that the Netherworld was initially an abundant place, regardless of north or south. When the world tree became deprived of its power, the south which was the furthest away from it started to become barren. This was the reason why the Nakujuk swarmed

to the north and occupied Ageiron. However, the world tree had been deprived of its power for 100 years. In addition, the Nakujuk indiscriminately killed the forests in order to build their garrisons and the north became devastated. On the other hand, the Baran's enthusiasm for nature changed the south into a better environment.

'Is the situation reversing the reason why the Nakujuk want to conquer to south again?'

This was a scene which clearly showed the importance of protecting the environment. Even though he now knew all the Nakujuk's reasons, he still resented them. Anyway, Ageiron was a larger city than he thought. It was like a medieval castle with several layers of walls spread out in a circular form, with various buildings in the region between the walls. And the heart of the city was the towering world tree Yuzuria which stretched out to touch the sky. Of course it had changed to a dead twisted tree with shrivelled branches.

'We have to cross the city in order to revive Yuzuria?'

The group naturally sighed as they saw the vast number of Nakujuk teeming in Ageiron. Currently they only had 8 people who were Ark, Shambala, Lariette, Bul-kkun, Ddeok-dae, Jjak-tung, Tazza and Yapsab. But Ark's purpose was to restore Yuzuria so there was no reason to fight every Nakujuk in Ageiron. He had to stay undetected by the enemy until he reached Yuzuria. It wouldn't be easy if they were users like Jewel but the opponents were NPCs. It was like an old gaming style popular with users 'Jikbo (a method of controlling the game but not fighting against monsters and only going up against bosses)' where using the appropriate skills would increase the odds in their favour.

'That's why I picked a variety of professions.'

"Everybody please eat this for the moment."

While taking a break, Ark created many types of cuisine and arranged them like a buffet. They were deluxe dishes generously made with a lot of ingredients.

"Oh, it is good to travel with you during moments like these."

The group were tired from the lava cave and quickly scraped clean the buffet. In the meantime, Ark collected the group's equipment and repaired it. It was truly a service which bled him! But in this situation he had to do everything possible to raise the strength of the party. Lariette's buffs also raised the stats of the group considerably.

"List of secondary effects."

<p>-Information window of secondary effects applied.</p> <p>* Food effects</p> <p>【 Energy Drink 】 【 Tuntun Roast 】 【 Sweet and Sour Past 】 【 Herb Salad 】 【 Shrimp Tempura 】</p> <p><Total stats raised by the food effects: Strength +45, Stamina +24, Agility +30, Intelligence +5></p>
<p>* Buff effects</p> <p>【 Storm Breathing (Attack Speed + 10%) duration: 30 minutes】</p> <p>【 Warrior's Concentration (Critical Hit Chance + 20%) duration: 30 minutes】</p> <p>【 Hero's Spirit (Attack power + 10%) duration: 1 hour】</p>
<p>* Special skills effect</p> <p>【Blade Maintenance (Sword Attack +3%) duration: 1 hour】</p> <p>【 Intermediate Laundry (Defense + 7%) duration: 4 hours】</p> <p>【 If the Innocence Knight becomes the leader than the party's defense and attack will rise by 7% 】</p>
<p>* Effects of Tonic currently taking</p> <p>【 Sipjeondaebotang (TL: type of Korean herbal soup) (Strength +1, Stamina +1) duration: 18th day 】</p>

Reading the combined effects really was amazing. Currently Ark's Survival Cooking dishes could be compared to the effects of the

finest cuisine. But with every good thing, there was always a downside. If there weren't any repeat dishes, it was possible to eat 10 different types of food. It was also subjected to one limitation. Satiety. If satiety reached 100% then they couldn't eat any more dishes. Even if the duration of a dish ran up, if his satiety was full then he wouldn't be able to eat another type. Therefore he couldn't cook excessively and his ingredients piled up.

This was the main disadvantage of Survival Cooking. The effect of the dishes on stats was better. But the increased effects also increased the amount of satiety. Quite a few dishes had their satiety over 30%. Thanks to that, only 3~5 of the finest quality dishes could be eaten at the same time.

'While the satiety and effects are highly effective, some of the ingredients are quite difficult to obtain.'

Ark looked at the few precious ingredients he had left and clicked his tongue.

'These dishes are worth at least 2 gold.....'

In this situation Ark had no time to worry about the expense of the meal. Anyway, thanks to his cooking the stats of the special attack corps rose by a large amount. But was that all? Using 'Blade Maintenance' and intermediate Laundry also increased his attack and defense. Just like a thief, Ark learned special skills which put his buffs on a level similar to Lariette's. Shambala checked the secondary effects window and murmured in an astounded voice.

"What on earth? It's the first time I've seen such a jumbled up character like you."

"I also wonder about my identity."

Ark replied with a grin. Once he finished the corps' maintenance, they descended the hill and approached Ageiron. They had left the skyrays while approaching. If they approached Ageiron on the skyrays then it would instantly be a beehive. From here onwards it was infiltration time. They paid attention and hid when necessary.

"The question is how to reach the world tree undetected....."

Shambala looked at Ageiron with a frustrated expression. Ageiron was the headquarters of the Nakujuk. Just like bacteria proliferating, there were a huge number of Nakujuk. Although they were residents of the city, 70% of them consisted of warriors. The sky was already turning dark and the edges of the full moon could be seen in the sky. While Ark, Shambala and Yapsab who changed his profession to 'Guardian=Scout' could use 'Stealth,' it wasn't something that could be used indefinitely. The duration time was 20 minutes so there was no guarantee that he would be able to remain undetected.

"Huhuhu, it's time to show our skills."

The rehabilitation members smiled and approached the front.

"Yapsab, sneak into Ageiron and determine the most common items."

Yapsab used Stealth to roam Ageiron and then returned to Tazza. Then he roughly drew on the ground and explained.

"It's the keg. They look like barrels to store wine. They were scattered everywhere."

"A keg? Good."

Tazza nodded and took out several pieces of wood and tools from his bag. Then he sawed at the wood and hammered away until he created 8 keg barrels.

"Now everybody please enter the keg."

Ark put on the wine keg and a message instantly appeared.

-The Nakujuk's wine keg has been reproduced using 'Clone.'

When using household goods to imitate hostile forces, a 'camouflage' effect is applied. Once 'camouflage' is applied, you will not be suspicious to hostile forces.

If the opponent shows an interest in you then the 'risk' will increase. 'Risk' will increase if you show certain suspicious behaviours in certain situations.

<Current risk: 0%>

Tazza had the 'Counterfeit' skill that he used in the past. After changing to 'Guardian=Engineer,' he managed to learn the 'Clone' skill.

"Feng Shui!"

After Jjak-tung said this an information window appeared again.

-The effect of Feng Shui is applied to the party.

Feng Shui is the unique skill of the Guardian=Strategist.' Using Feng Shui will increase resistance to all environmental and terrain effects. Attacking an enemy from a high place will increase your damage while attacking from a lower place will halve it. In addition, if you hide your body in the darkness then the chances of being noticed by an enemy will decrease.

<Decrease the probability of the enemy suspecting you by 30%.>

'The combination of professions is as good as expected.'

Ark once again admired the variety of skills in New World. But Ark also didn't fall behind when it came to odd skills.

"Now it's my turn. Dedric, satellite surveillance mode!"

"Okay!"

Dedric floated 100 metres into the air at Ark's command and looked around.

"In front.....there is a watchtower on the left and right..... One lookout in each tower.....this can't be ignored..... And there are Nakujuk patrols wandering around the buildings and alleys.....each one 50 metres apart.....moving in a clockwise position....."

The information that Dedric relayed was displayed as red dots on Ark's map. This was a new skill Dedric learned during the Nakujuk's war.

-Your pet Dedric has learned a new skill.

Satellite Surveillance Mode (Beginner, Species Characteristics):
You can observe the terrain for 50 metres and the enemy's movements within a 100 metre area. When the skill proficiency rises, it is possible to scout even further. The information relayed by your summon will also be displayed on the map. However, once activated the skill will consume 5 mana every 10 seconds.

<Information regarding terrain, NPCs and users will be shown on the mini map.>

Thus Dedric was consistently forced to use the satellite surveillance mode. Although Ageiron wasn't a huge city, it still wasn't easy to understand the intricate alleys of the city even with the keg's limited vision. In addition, there was a high probability of the Nakujuk noticed the kegs when they were moving around. They needed to understand the terrain and the enemy's movements. That was the main purpose of satellite surveillance mode.

"Now let's sneak into enemy territory."

The 8 kegs moved towards Ageiron.

Do do do do.....

"Stop! A patrol is approaching the corner."

Ark whispered in a low voice before entering Ageiron. The special attack corps stopped moving and held their breaths inside the keg. After a few seconds, 10 Nakujuk turned around the corner. They surveyed the area and murmured as they saw the wine barrels.

"Eh? Who placed some wine barrels here?"

"Hmm, I suddenly became thirsty after seeing the kegs."

-Risk: 20%

'Hik, t-these bastards! Just go away!'

Ark prayed the Nakujuk wouldn't look through the hole in the

barrel. Luckily one of the Nakujuk slapped his colleague's shoulder and spoke.

"Hey, do you want to get in trouble for drinking alcohol while on the job? Instead of doing it while on patrol, you can drink when there is a break."

"Okay, okay. I just wanted to try out the keg."

The Nakujuk looked at the barrel before turning away. When the patrol officer backed away, the risk level instantly went back down to 0.

'Phew.....that bastard, if you're just going to go away then why did you make us terrified for nothing?'

The special attack corps released the breaths they were holding and started moving again.

Do do do do, flinch! Do do do do, stand! Do do do do, slam!

The infiltration using the kegs was smooth. Ageiron had many buildings that seemed like they belonged in large cities. The topography made it easy to avoid the enemy's eyes. In addition, there were a lot more kegs once they entered the interior so the risk level hadn't risen. Every time they saw the Nakujuk, they would wait anxiously until the patrol went away.

'Isn't it exciting?'

Didn't it feel like they were sneaking around in the action game Metal Gear Solid? Observing the enemy's movements and the terrain using the mini map and then sneaking around was quite exciting. After sneaking through the enemy lines for approximately 20 minutes, the special attack corps arrived at the first gateway. The barrels huddled together near the checkpoint to the next district.

"This area has a lot of watchtowers so it'll be very dangerous."

The most annoying thing while sneaking through enemy territory was the watchtowers. NPCs in the watchtower had an incredibly wide surveillance range and anybody using stealth within that range would

have it automatically turned off if the guards looked at them. In fact, as soon as the special attacks corps entered the range of vision the risk level immediately went up to 50%. The guards would definitely notice them if they tried to sneak past. There were also 10 watchtowers in the vicinity of the checkpoint.

“But the watchtowers aren’t completely dangerous. If you stick close to the wall while moving then the only risk is another watchtower spotting you. But the watchtowers’ line of sight won’t overlap in the towers at 3 o’clock, 4 o’clock or 6 o’clock.”

“We can’t move forward like this so we’ll have to handle it.”

Shambala said in a low voice.

“Fortunately 3 of the watchtowers are at an appropriate distance. The both of us should take the ones at 3 o’clock and 4 o’clock, while the one at 6 o’clock has a low risk so Yapsab can take care of it.”

“You’ll have to take care of it while the guards in the other towers are looking in the opposite direction. Do you have confidence?”

“Who are you talking to? You idiot.”

They had to defeat the watchtowers in order to infiltrate the city. The only way to disable a watchtower in enemy territory was assassination. Shambala was more of an expert in this field than Ark. Ark laughed and nodded his head.

“Okay, let’s get started. Please maintain ‘Trill’ the whole time. I’ll tell you their movements.”

Thus 3 kegs approached the watchtowers. They stopped whenever a patrol approached and continued this until the 3 kegs arrived at the place where a ladder to the watchtowers was. Meanwhile Ark surveyed the mini map and calculated the timing. Because the situation in the watchtowers couldn’t be seen from the kegs, they had to solely rely on Dedric’s satellite mode.

-Shambala, the lookout has turned his head to the right.

-I saw it. By the way.....it sure is comfortable with your bat. Why

don't you give your bat to me?

Shambala teased as he agilely climbed up while the guard was looking away.

-I wouldn't give him for anything.

-Lousy child.

-Let's stop chatting and prepare yourself. Now. None of them are paying attention.

"Radun, poison attack."

Ark jumped out of the keg while using 'Stealth' and muttered. Radun spat out a green liquid onto his sword. At the same time Ark matched Shambala's timing and jumped onto the watchtower. Then he used backstab on the guard looking over the checkpoint.

-You have dealt a critical hit!

<The Nakujuk has been paralyzed by the poison and won't be able to use his muscles for 5 seconds.>

The poisoned guard stiffened and fell to the floor. There was a reason he used the paralysis poison. If the guard screamed for help then it wouldn't be an assassination anymore. Ark followed up with the continuous use of Dark Blade. The guard's health decreased in an instant. But after a while the guard's paralyzed mouth loosened enough for him to call for help. However, Ark continued striking critical hits and making the guard paralyzed. Ark was level 300 and thanks to his dark attribute bonus, he only needed 15 seconds to deal with the Nakujuk. Ark quickly took care of the guard and turned his head, feeling slightly conceited. However, Shambala had already taken care of his lookout.

'Sheesh, that brat.....'

Ark complained with pouted lips. He had grown like crazy in the Netherworld. Now even Jewel and Duke couldn't handle him. Thanks to that, Ark's ego inflated and he had thought there was a

considerable difference between him and Shambala. However, the difference didn't seem that much anymore judging by how fast Shambala took care of the guard.

‘Although Shambala is a profession assassin.....’

Nevertheless it didn't feel that pleasant. Then suddenly there was an exclamation mark on the map as a red dot moved. The red dots represented the Nakujuk and the exclamation mark represented a danger. Ark stared with aghast eyes as a Nakujuk arrived at the bottom of Shambala's watchtower.

-Shambala, right below you at 7 o'clock!

At the same time, Shambala's pupils turned in that direction. Then Ark stared with a slack jaw as a dagger suddenly drove through the Nakujuk's mouth.

It was Shambala's 'Dagger Throwing' skill! The Saint Assassin was primarily an assassin profession who could use poisons, daggers and swords. The poisons were even more powerful than the ones produced by Radun! The Nakujuk became stiff and rigid after the dagger hit him. Shambala then jumped off the tower like a gymnast and drove his sword through the top of the Nakujuk's head. The assassination damage was added to the fall damage and a tremendous amount of damage appeared. The Nakujuk was in a 'stunned' state and couldn't even cry out as it died.

‘What, what a scary guy....!’

He marvelled at the quick workmanship. It was lucky that he was Ark's ally. He would truly be frightening if they were enemies.

-Let's withdraw quickly.

They hid the bodies in the watchtower and quickly camouflaged themselves again. Ark had confirmed that the watchtowers could see each other. If the other lookouts noticed something unusual then there would be a problem. While Ark and Shambala took care of the front two watchtowers, Yapsab had taken out another lookout and joined them. The rehabilitation members smirked as they spoke to each other.

“Huhuhu, wasn’t it easier than you thought?”

“At first I was a little worried but it’s not that difficult.”

“Don’t be careless. If we’re discovered before we reach the world tree than it’s over.”

But honestly, Ark was also feeling a little relaxed. Just like the rehabilitation members said, it was easier than he thought. After becoming more experienced with moving in the kegs, their speed became even faster.

“Wait, someone is approaching.”

Do do do do, flinch, smash!

Once again the 8 kegs froze at Ark’s voice. After waiting a moment, a ten year old Nakujuk boy turned the corner.

‘What the? It was a kid?’

Ark sighed and relaxed. He naturally thought that kids were less dangerous than soldiers. It was a huge mistake. A child was even more curious than adults. And a child was someone whose actions could never be predicted. As expected.....the child suddenly stopped next to the wine barrels and stared.

-Risk: 50%

The risk level had risen to 50% after the boy showed an interest.

‘What, what the? What are you looking at? There’s nobody here. Just go!’

Ark stared at the boy and sent strong thoughts to him. But as expected, the child’s behaviour was impossible to predict. The boy suddenly hooked stabbed his finger through the hole in the barrel. Who the hell would stick a finger in a barrel sitting in the streets? No, there was no time to consider this. It was impossible to imagine that the finger would stab into Ark’s eye, making him give a short scream as he fell down.

“Kuaaak, what, what the?”

“Huk, g-ghost!”

The boy also freaked out and fell on his rear. It was at that time. The Nakujuk patrolling nearby focused their eyes on the kegs as they heard the scream.

-Risk: 100%

<Camouflage and Feng Shui has been released from everyone.>

“O-oh my god....!”

Ark groaned as he looked around with a swollen eye. Shambala rose from the wine barrel and glared at Ark.

“Thank you. You stupid brat!”

“Hey, you try to be quiet when you’re being stabbed in the eye. Of course I would scream! Damn, that child.....!”

Ark’s bloodshot eyes sent a murderous glare towards the boy. Then the boy winced and retreated behind the Nakujuk soldiers.

“Ark-nim, please stop. Despite being a Nakujuk, he is still a child.”

“You idiot, you’re going to take revenge on a child?”

“Ark, let’s act like an adult.....”

Ark turned his head away at Lariette’s, Shambala’s and the rehabilitation members’ words. It didn’t matter if they were an adult or child to Ark. However, there was no time to worry about the kid.

“Damn, let’s get out of here at once!”

Ark led the special attack corps and ran down an alley. The terrified boy suddenly changed his face and laughed.

“Kekeke, intruders. You stupid guys, you’re all dead now. Yes, we’ll tear those guys apart and eat them. In particular that bastard who frightened me, I’ll eat your eyeballs!”

The young boy continued chattering rudely. Thanks to him, the

special attack corps was forced to flee. How was this child brought up? He really wanted to see the parents' faces. No, the parents were chaotic NPCs so wouldn't they praise him?

"Ark!"

Ark's useless thoughts stopped after hearing Shambala's shout. Ark reflexively turned his head around and paled with fear.

"That.....there he is!"

Have you ever been attacked by an enemy in Starcraft? Have you ever received a rush attack by 200 troops? In a situation where there were only eight of you? That was how Ark felt just now.

"Intruders. Kill them!"

"How dare they try to break into Ageiron!"

An enormous number of Nakujuk were emerging from the surrounding buildings. They numbered in the hundreds.....! It was the first time Ark had experienced being surrounded by so many monsters in New World. The square and narrow streets suddenly became filled with Nakujuk. Then the many Nakujuk shot swords, spears and arrows towards the special attack corps.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, seokeok, snap, crunch!

The special attack corps instantly became 8 tattered rags. There was no time for them to stop or even block.

"Healing Touch, Goddess' Protection!"

Although Lariette used her recovery magic, it was like water just spilling out of a hole.

"Lariette-nim, switch to the set of 3 defensive buffs!"

Raising the damage would be no help in this situation. Enduring was the most important thing. Lariette activated the defensive buffs at Ark's command and raise their stamina, defense and evasion. Then she used her recovery magic again as the rate they were losing health at slowed down.

“Healing.....aaak!”

Lariette burst out screaming while using her recovery magic. Her healing and buffs made the enemy's aggro rise. Thus the Nakujuk concentrated their attacks on Lariette. Of course, Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae who changed their profession to 'Guardian=Assaulter' used taunt to get the aggro off her. But there were still surrounded by hundreds of Nakujuk. The two of them were unable to protect Lariette from the whole group.

‘Lariette-nim will soon be wiped out!’

Ark threw the Saw blade towards her and shouted.

“Undo transformation. Razak Shield Stroke!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak fell in front of Lariette and swung his shield. The group of Nakujuk was pushed back.

“XX Interception!”

Meanwhile, Ark stabbed his sword at an incredible pace around Lariette. Yes, Ark hadn't been idle while Dedric and Razak were learning new skills. He learned a new skill thanks to his steady efforts.....that name was XX Interception! This was the technique that had managed to defeat Kaljapeu, and Ark changed to nature of the technique while attacking the Nakujuk and finally managed to learn the skill.

-You have learnt a new skill.

XX Interception (Beginner, Active): a special lunge which concentrates the attacks on a specific area. When using XX Interception on certain monsters, your repeated attacks will increase the target's fury and change the focus of their anger. This particular area is extremely painful so their attack speed will also be slowed. The pain will reduce their movements.

<When attacking the enemy, there is a 5% chance that the enemy's movements will be slowed by 5%. Also, every time it succeeds the

enemy's anger will rise like you've used Taunt and they will attack you.>

"U-ugh!"

"What, what? This unfamiliar pain.....?"

"Euuugh, it seems to be tearing!"

"Ah.....I didn't go to the toilet this morning....."

The Nakujuk screamed when he struck their X spot. The Nakujuk's bums started swelling when X was hit. The pain the Nakujuk felt every time they tried to move couldn't be described in words. But that wasn't the effect Ark aimed for. The Nakujuk felt shame and anger after their X was attacked and they burned with intense hostility towards Ark. It was a 'forced Taunt!' Thanks to Ark attacking X, Lariette was able to escape from the crisis.

".....This lousy bastard!"

"What's wrong with fighting dirty? Flash!"

Ark passed through the group of Nakujuk and dealt damage to them. However, the situation was still bleak no matter what skill he used. The top right corner of the mini map was completely filled with colour. The red dots representing the Nakujuk covered the entire map in red. Even if his health managed to endure, they wouldn't be able to defeat all the Nakujuk before the defense buffs ran out.

"Ark, this way!"

Then he heard Shambala's voice from the rear. He saw that Shambala had defeated his group of Nakujuk and was climbing onto the roof. Being attacked on the roof was better than being surrounded by the Nakujuk on all sides. Ark stepped on the wine barrel on the ground and jumped onto the roof. Then he pulled Lariette and the rehabilitation members up. It would be easier to fight on the roof. The terrain reduced the advantage in numbers. But the situation looked even worse thanks to their wider field of view from high up. It wasn't just the alley the special attack corps were

in. Thanks to the emergency call, the whole area was strewn with Nakujuk.

‘We’re screwed, it’s all finished now!’

They couldn’t run away. If they ran away here then the world tree wouldn’t be revived. But it wasn’t possible to advance either. There was only on the outskirts of Ageiron so the number of Nakujuk would multiple as they advanced further. The fate of the special attack corps was about to be decided.

“Ark, jump!”

Jjak-tung shouted at that moment. When Ark turned around with a stupid look, Jjak-tung raised his hand and indicated the next gateway.

“There. You might survive if you manage to get there!”

“Huh? But.....”

“There’s no time to explain. It isn’t possible to survive for much longer in this state!”

How the hell would they be able to survive in such a situation? But there was no other way so Ark followed Jjak-tung’s words for the moment and ran towards the gateway. They jumped from roof to roof while avoided the arrows until the special attack corps arrived at the next gateway. There were no roofs around the gateway so they jumped off and crossed to the gateway on the ground. But the situation became even worse. Hundreds of Nakujuk had flocked in front of the second gateway.

400, 500, 600, 700.....the number of Nakujuks had grown exponentially.

“Jjak-tung hyung, how the hell.....?”

“Run!”

“Huh?”

Jjak-tung, Yapsab and Tazza shouted before turning their bodies

around. Ark stared at the scene with astonishment. He could guess Jjak-tung, Yapsab and Tazza's intentions. They intended to block the advancing enemies using the gateway. However, their professions were strategist, engineer and scout. They wouldn't even last 30 seconds when surrounded by hundreds of Nakujuk.

Then Jjak-tung smiled and clenched his fist firmly.

"Slime's Time, NO1!"

Gateway Breakthrough!

[**TL Notes:** I had difficulty with the name of Shambala's technique since they're only one character in Korean which could have a lot of meanings. Thus I just used the Korean pronunciation for it.]

Jjak-tung's body was covered with a yellow slime.

'Slime's Time!' Yes, Ark wasn't the only one with Slime's Time anymore.

Of course, the skill was created with the Vision scroll so the effects weren't 100% but the rehabilitation members had also eaten the Slime's Immortality Pills. It invalidated physical attacks by 100% so it was perfect against the Nakujuks who couldn't use magic.

"But....."

Ark looked at Jjak-tung with confusion. Jjak-tung's intent was perfectly clear. And it was the best way for now. If Jjak-tung died then he would just lose some stats and then revive again. He could take that penalty for the larger purpose. But it was the process leading up to death Ark was worried about, not the actual death.

'I hadn't thought the incomplete Slime's Immortality Pill would give such a penalty.'

The Slime's Immortality Pill that the rehabilitation members ate wasn't the 'genuine' product. Normally it would take 118 hours to create the Slime's Immortality Pill. Creating 6 would require 708 hours! Instead of the version made using Survival Cooking, the rehabilitation members were forced to eat the B grade products created using the Vision scroll. And only 70% of the original pill was applied. The problem wasn't the diminished stats. The penalty applied to the B grade Slime's Immortality Pills was unimaginable.....and it was attached to the skills learnt.

-You have learned the racial skill 'Slime's Time.' Slime's Time: Once a day, you can choose between two skills.

1. It is possible to cover your body with a coating of slime for 10 minutes. Any physical damage or fall damage will be 100% nullified. However, there is a 100% chance that magic will cause additional damage, with magic resistance decreasing by 100%.

(B grade product penalty: If you ingest an incomplete immortality pill and become covered with slime, your whole body will become sensitive and the pain felt when attacked will be amplified by 50 times)

2. You can call any type of slimes that exist within a 500 metre radius.

(B grade product penalty: When ingesting an incomplete product, the slimes called will not be recognized your allies. Instead they will attack all users.

It was a truly ridiculous penalty. When attacked in New World, the most pain they would feel was a mild shock. But this was x50 amplification.

"I can't use the 'Slime's Time' skill."

Shambala had complained when he ate the B grade product and saw the results. There was no point in using the skill when the pain was a few times worse than in reality. There would be a large cost if Jjak-tung and the others blocked the gateway for 10 minutes. They would have to withstand worse pain than in reality.

"For Jjak-tung hyung and the other hyungs to use Slime's Time....."

'Hyung-nims.....!'

Ark swallowed his rising emotions and shouted.

"I'll do whatever it takes to make sure the mission is successful!"

It was a really desperate dash.

‘Kekeke, I can’t miss such a fun scene.’

The relationship between Dedric and the rehabilitation members wasn’t that good. Before he was a summon, Dedric had been bullied in the past. Thus he was fixated on his status after growing a little bit.

‘I’m an aristocrat of the Netherworld.’ That was the motto he kept repeating to himself and he had an obsession with being the number 2.

Anyway, in the past Ark had officially declared Dedric was the number 2 so his obsession became even worse. So naturally he treated Razak, Radun, Lariette and Buksil as his subordinates.

“I’m a nobleman of the Netherworld and the number 2. I am the leader in Master’s absence!”

He acted like the leader whenever Ark wasn’t there. It was a trivial thing but Ark recognized Dedric’s arrogance. Anyway, while Ark was in the Netherworld his pets had to remain summoned. He could easily pack Radun and Razak away. However, Ark often left Lariette alone. In addition, he didn’t trust Buksil. So Dedric was the cleverest among the people Ark had left. That was the reason why Dedric’s number 2 position was solidified. And not long ago, a critical incident took place for Dedric. Ark had been sworn in as the Commander of the Dark Brothers=Baran clan alliance.

‘Wait, I’m the person immediately following Master? So I’m the actual number 2 among these thousands of allied forces? Finally.....I’ve come a long way! I’ve been rewarded for all my troubles!

The power crazy bat made a huge mistake. He revealed his true colours as soon as Ark wasn’t there.

“Huhuhu, Master isn’t here so I’m the Commander of this army! I’ll tell you in advance but I’m not as kind as Master!”

Dedric flew around Haman Fortress and stared interfering. At this

point some people wanted to tackle him..... But their clan elders were completely caught by Ark so none of the Baran dared to defy Dedric. And Lariette and Buksil saw his behaviour as normal. But Dedric was hot headed and crossed the limits.

“Hey you guys, what are you doing?” (TL note: talking informally which is considered really rude in Korea.)

Dedric talked like this towards the rehabilitation members. The rehabilitation members made a dissatisfied expression and glared at him.

“What? What did you say just now?”

‘Ugh, these guys.....Why do their eyes look so murderous?’

Dedric thought for a moment that he had made a mistake. But then he shook his head.

‘Ah, no. I can’t be scared. During the siege in Nagaran, Master was always the captain. These guys are Master’s minions. And I’m just under Master, the number 2! These guys are also below me! If they’re disobeying me then it means they’re rebelling.’

“What’s this? Where are you staring? Are you acting defiant? You really want to die?”

Dedric had finally pressed the switch for a nuclear bomb. And Dedric was literally flattened into a rice cake by the rehabilitation brothers. He was smashed in just a few minutes but Dedric still didn’t get it.

“Ugh. You bastards.....wait until I tell Master....you’ll die.....”

“Ha? Is that so? Hey guys, this bat wants to be hit even more.”

“Ouch, ouch! S-stop.....stop hitting.....no, no. I forgive you.....”

“Forgive us? Hah, his head has gone crazy from the pain.”

“Ouch, ouch! Huk huk huk, it hurts. Stop beating me. Please forgive me.”

In the end, Dedric was able to escape from the group assault with his entire body bruised.

‘Huhuhu, it serves you right!’

Dedric had suffered from the horrible experience a week ago so he felt pleasure as he saw Jjak-tung being beat up by the Nakujuk. However, Dedric’s laughter gradually disappeared from his face.

“Ugh, this is.....it’s not a joke?”

“Heok, being mangled by the sword.....it really feels like it.”

“Hell.....I never thought it would be this bad.....”

Jjak-tung, Yapsab and Tazza groaned. The pain amplified by 50 times was unimaginable. It really felt like they were being stabbed or a mace was smashing their skulls! Their health didn’t decrease by 1% but mentally they were in a critical condition.

“Heok!”

Eventually Yapsab was unable to hold out against the pain and kneeled down.

“No, steady yourself! Ugh, if we don’t survive.....Ark and the Netherworld will be screwed!”

“I know!”

Yapsab clenched his teeth and slowed raised his trembling knees. Then he dragged his body over and grabbed the Nakujuk’s ankles.

“This fucking bastard!”

The group of Nakujuk hacked at Yapsab’s body.

Although Yapsab screamed every time, he never let go.

“Kuaaak. Rehabilitation.....the rehabilitation group.....show your spirit!”

“We....for justice.....can’t give up....no!”

“Ooh oh oh oh! Let’s show them our willpower!”

Jjak-tung staggered before roaring and making an impassioned speech. Then he stomached the surging pain and muttered.

“Ku, don’t scream..... For my allies.....don’t fall.....”

“It’s tough to endure.....I’d rather sing.....”

“Oh, that’s good.... Hum, ku.....okay..... Bodies of my comrades....heok, exceed....exceed....forward....forward....!”

Jjak-tung stared at the Nakujuk with bloodshot eyes and started singing a military song. His voice became even louder as he felt more pain. Even the battle obsessed Nakujuk’s flinched and retreated a little bit.

“T-that guy.....I never realised he was like that....!”

Dedric stuttered as he watched the scene. Dedric could no longer deride or laugh at the rehabilitation group. It was like an 80s war film that even managed to tug at a bat’s heartstrings.

“Damn! Those guys.....why do they look so cool?”

‘Ya, what’s going on? Why isn’t surveillance mode working properly?’

At that time, Dedric heard Ark’s voice in his ears.

“Idiot! Now’s not the time for that. Don’t you know how brave Jjak-tung is by blocking the enemies? Huk, I.....I really can’t see in front of me because of my tears.....”

‘Noisy, if we die here then don’t you think Jjak-tung hyung’s sacrifice will be for nothing? If you don’t come right now then I’ll kill you!’

“Sheesh, Master really doesn’t shed blood or tears!”

Dedric rubbed his eyes and wiped away his tears. Then he looked at Jjak-tung still singing a military song and saluted.

“You guys are true soldiers!”

It was a really nice atmosphere thanks to the music when Dedric’s eardrums trembled from Ark’s shout.

‘Ya, do you really want to die? Why aren’t you flying right now?’

“Understood. I understand! Damn, a unit of archers is approaching

from 3 o'clock!"

Dedric looked at Jjak-tung for a moment before flying upwards. Anyway, Ark's group was once again able to receive Dedric's assistance with the enemies.

'That's the final gateway!'

Ark used Dark Dance to avoid the Nakujuk and headed towards the gateway. He had no reason to fight against the Nakujuk. If they fought then Ark's group wouldn't be able to reach the next checkpoint within 10 minutes and the Nakujuk would swarm and surround them. The area between the 2nd and 3rd gateways was packed with buildings and houses. Thus Ark's group had to break through the windows of building in order to get to the other side. Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae could rush and penetrate through the enemies while Shambala had footwork comparable to Dark Dance. However, Lariette's evasive skills were no match for the Nakujuk.

'It's not possible.'

Ark clicked his tongue and then carried Lariette.

"I'm sorry. But it's the only way for now....."

"Ah, no I'm fine."

"Lariette-nim please use Meditation and concentrate on recovering your mana."

"Yes....."

Lariette replied in a weak voice as her face became redder.

"Damn, one step too late!"

Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae complained as they stared at Ark with envious eyes. Honestly, there was nothing to be envious about. It was a game but he could still feel their weight when carrying someone. So naturally it became more difficult to use Dark Dance and the percentage of completion fell. But if they lost their healer

than the special attack corps would 100% be wiped out. Even though it was a burden, it wasn't possible to drop Lariette.

"That's it, let's break through the last gateway!"

Shambala arrived first at the gateway and shouted while defeating the Nakujuk there. Ageiron was a circular city built around the world tree. If they passed through the final gateway then they would appear in front of the world tree. There were no visible Nakujuk between the gateway and the world tree. The world tree was a sacred place so the Baran hadn't built any buildings around it.

"The world tree will be there once we go inside!"

There was a gap in the roots of the world tree where only a few people could pass. Yuzuria would no doubt be hidden inside it. Ark ran carrying his ally and jumped into the gap. When Jjak-tung blocked the gateway, the size was large enough that 3 people were required to block it. But the entrance of the world tree was small enough that Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae would be enough to block it from the Nakujuk.

"These guys went into the world tree!"

"Seize them, kill the bastards!"

Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae turned around and stared at the Nakujuk rushing towards the gateway.

"Now it's our turn."

"Huhuhu, if it's for justice then we're not afraid of death."

"Go Ark. Slime's Time, NO1!"

Thus Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae threw their bodies to block the advancing enemy. Thanks to their sacrifice Ark, Shambala and Lariette were able to enter the world tree.

".....Let's hurry up."

Ark immediately started running through the interior of the world tree. Although he didn't show it, Ark was inwardly grateful towards

the rehabilitation members. This was a game so they wouldn't really die. It wasn't anything irreversible. But it wasn't an easy task to willingly go to an unpleasant death. In addition, they had to suffer from brutal pain for 10 minutes.

"You don't deserve those hyungs."

"I think so too."

Ark answered with a laugh. So they ran without looking back. They had to revive the world tree within the next 10 minutes or the rehabilitation members' sacrifices would be for nothing. They quickly reached the centre of the world tree.

"This is the world tree.....!"

Lariette looked around with wide eyes. The centre of the dead world tree was rotted with hollow ceilings. The light of the full moon seeped through the hole and illuminated the vines, moss and mysterious glowing chestnut like fruits. In the centre a conspicuous bud was located with moonlight concentrated on it.

"Lariette-nim, it's fine now."

"Huh?"

Lariette looked confused at Ark's words. Then she blushed and quickly got off Ark. Lariette had been held in Ark's arms until then. Anyway, thanks to alleviating the baggage (?) Ark felt much lighter as he walked towards the bud. A similar bud had been inside Yggdrasil. And it also had a nucleus.

"Perhaps Yuzuria has a nucleus as well? Eh?"

Ark's face showed perplexity as he lifted the bud. As expected, a recessed pit was carved inside the bud. But the important nucleus wasn't there.

'What happened? Did the Nakujuk move it somewhere else?'

If that's the case then the problem was serious. Then the walls started shaking and a wooden sound was heard. Ark moved back and saw that one of the walls was moving. There were successive

sounds like the wall was being broken with an axe. The same situation repeated many times before there was suddenly a huge presence. It was a giant covered in wood, similar to the Plant Golem he saw in the Underground World! The black eyes embedded in the wood started at the group.

“.....How did humans get here? Are you ‘his’ colleague?”

“Who are you? Are you Yuzuria?”

“Yuzuria?”

The wooden giant shouted and raised his fist.

“These guys have come to steal away Yuzuria! How dare foreigners do something like this!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

He struck his fist and the whole room shook. A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

-The boss monster Chieftain of the Nakujuk ‘Wigurima’ has appeared.

‘Damn, I knew it. I knew it would be like this!’

Ark swore as he checked the information window. Ark had expected it thanks to his luck. First he had been stabbed in the eye by a child and now he was being blocked by a boss monster. It was also a level 600 Nakujuk chieftain! He didn’t know how a wooden monster became a chieftain but the situation was quite troublesome.

‘There’s approximately 8 minutes left. Can we defeat the boss monster in that time?’

He honestly didn’t think it was possible. If it was Ark alone.

‘.....I’m not alone!’

Ark was with Shambala, who had conquered the Evil Silrion arena with him as Blue Sword. And they also had Lariette to recover and assist. The users gathered were those with 3 hero

professions. Although it was impossible to escape from thousands of Nakujuk, 3 against 1 for a boss monster were good enough odds to try it. No, wasn't it 5 against 1 if he included Dedric and Razak? Huhuhu, there was a possibility that they could defeat it.

'The problem is that the time limit is 8 minutes.....'

"Master danger!"

Then Dedric's voice shook his eardrums. Wigurima had approached him while Ark was busy thinking. He was surprisingly nimble for a giant who was 10 metres tall. Ark instantly used Dark Dance and managed to avoid Wigurima's punch. It smacked into the floor and the whole space shook.

'The attacks are strong but its movements are pretty slow. No matter how powerful it is, we can still beat it. It won't be that difficult to hunt it.'

That's what Ark was thinking.

Syusuk, syu syu syu su suk!

Why did vines suddenly enter the ground when Wigurima's fist hit? At the same time, a sharp tree trunk emerged from where Ark's foot was. An attack he never would've imagined! Ark rotated his body agilely and managed to avoid the attack. But that was just the beginning. The trunk changed its angle and shot forward like a snake. In addition, every time he moved the branches would stretch out like a net around Ark. Then it managed to pierce his side.

-You have received a critical hit. 700 damage!

<You have been poisoned by the corrosive venom. You will lose 20 health every 5 seconds. If it isn't treated within 3 minutes then the wound will corrode and you will receive 1000 corrosion damage>

'Huk, this, this is.....?'

Ark couldn't understand what was happening. And he didn't have time to think about it.

“Huhuhu, I’ll rip you to shreds and make you into compost!”

Making into compost instead of eating him.....after being covered in bark, the monster really had become like a tree. Naturally Ark didn’t want to be made into compost so he avoided the branches. However, avoiding it aggravated the situation even further. Every time Wigurima punched the floor, sharper tree trunks would emerge.

“Damn, what the?”

Shambala swung his sword and cut one of the tree trunks. But it might’ve been better to avoid the attacks. When the tree trunk was cut, it looked like it used stem cell division to divide into ten more trunks. Then Shambala also received critical hits from the dozens of tree trunks.

“Ugh, I’m being hit by the trees.....!”

Lariette was also the same. The tree trunks would just change its direction by 90 degrees and moved around her shield.

“Ack!”

They never missed! Whenever Wigurima attacked, the tree trunks would not disappear until it hit its target. It constantly divided and would only disappear after delivering a critical blow.

“Damn, what is this....?”

“But there has to be a weakness.”

Ark murmured in a low voice and observed Wigurima’s attack pattern. Ark had dealt with numerous bosses so far. Bosses in New World usually had one ingenious technique. If users just jumped in blindly while trusting in their levels and skills, often they would encounter that technique and die. The high or low levels were of secondary importance. It was critical to identify the attack patterns and weaknesses of the boss. That was the key to defeating bosses in New World.

‘All boss monsters have a weakness!’

Ark, Shambala and Lariette carefully observed the boss monster. At

first glance it looked perfect but there was a loophole in Wigurima's technique. Ark avoided the incoming attack by a tree trunk and explained.

"Shambala, there is a chance whenever they attack!"

"What?"

"Look, the tree trunks can divide into tens or hundreds but they only attack one target. Even though I avoided the attack just then, it didn't bother to attack you when you were right next to me. It looks like the entire attack can only focus on one person. And once his arm is rooted to the bottom, he can't move."

".....Then the flashy attacks are just a trick?"

Shambala looked at the tree trunks again and nodded. That's right. There were dozens of them but they only had one goal. Even if Wigurima used both arms, he could only attack 2 people at most. Once he started the attack, he was vulnerable until the target was hit. He couldn't move whenever his fist was against the floor.

"Heh, he has such a surprising weakness."

"Now have you come up with a plan?"

Syu syu syu syu syuk!

Ark once again avoided the flying tree trunks and shouted.

"Lariette-nim, please step back as much as possible! You should only use recovery and healing magic from that place. Razak, stay in front of Lariette and defend her."

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak nodded and went over to Lariette.

"Dedric, you take one of the tree trunks. If you dodge as much as possible and Lariette uses recovery magic then you should be able to hold on."

"Eek, why? Why do I have to?"

“I don’t have time for your jokes. Just do it!”

Ark shouted while Dedric turned his head with a discontented expression. Although Razak had high health and defense, his agility was low. On the other hand, Dedric was agile and could take advantage of 100% of the space by flying. Dedric would probably last three or four times longer than Razak. Of course, his defense meant he would lose 50%~60% of his health, but with Taunt Lariette didn’t have to worry about being attacked and could focus on healing him. If she was all the way back there then recovery wouldn’t be a problem.

“Hey, this wooden bastard, bring it on!”

“Ugh, this bat.....!”

“I’ll go first. I want to test out some footwork.”

Shambala ran forward like lightning. As expected, Wigurima drove his fist into the ground and shot up the tree trunks as a barrier. The barrier was formed from dozens of tree trunks that all struck Shambala at the same time. But Shambala just moved among the tree trunks like a guided missile!

“Sun, Gae, Yeol, Seom!” *

Shambala spoke the short characters. And each character formed a symbol that his body moved along in order to avoid the trunks. Shambala’s characteristic footwork was ‘Blink.’ But his footwork wasn’t perfect. Blink was originally classified as one of the ‘Yeol’ footwork. Shambala’s currently had learned the remaining types of footwork. Needless to say, Ark wasn’t the only one who had been growing in New World. While Ark had been playing the game, other users had also been playing and learning new skills. Shambala was the same. He had received a quest from Isabel to rally the various sects of the Dark Brothers. In fact, this quest was a process where he could learn new Saint Assassin skills. The Dark Brothers had scattered around and after hundreds of years, they had developed different techniques. One clan was footwork, another fighting with short swords, the path of assassination.....thus Shambala learned the skills after visiting each clan and forcing them

to surrender. There was a strange fate between Ark and Shambala. That strange fate also existed with other users. Why? Because this was New World, a game originally created for users.

“Uhh, this bastard...!”

Wigurima cursed as Shambala avoided all the attacks. The tree trunks increased by hundreds every time an attack failed. Meanwhile, Dedric was also flying in the sky and desperately avoiding the tree trunks. No matter how much the tree trunks increased, they did not attack Ark or Lariette at all. Ark approached from behind and took out a sword before making it explode.

“There’s no time, Blade Storm!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The intense swirling fragments gathered around Wigurima. It caused tremendous damage to Wigurima’s health.....

“What, what the? Damage.....!”

Blade Storm had blasted the bark off him and Wigurima’s health went straight down. But after a brief moment, his health started recovering at an enormous pace.

“The bark!”

Ark exclaimed at the quickly growing bark. New bark was growing in the place where the bark had been torn out by the swirling debris.

“Ugh!”

In the meantime, Shambala had stumbled and received a critical hit. Lariette instantly used healing and recovery magic to restore his health and undo the poisoning. But Wigurima’s recovery was different from Shambala’s. There was no mana gauge on Wigurima. Didn’t that mean he could use the skill indefinitely since he wouldn’t run out of mana?

“Impertinent fellow!”

Wigurima struck the floor again with a huge fist. His goal was to

attack Ark. While Ark evaded using Dark Dance, this time Shambala attacked from behind using Torpedo sword. But the result was the same.

“Damn, what the hell is this?”

“Kukuku, you fools, do you know now? This body is invincible. Now you have no choice but to become compost! Come on, die! Die and feed me!”

Wigurima frantically extended the tree trunks like crazy. An attack which wouldn't stop until it hit the target! A boss whose health wouldn't decrease! In addition, Ark also had a time limit. There was 5 minutes before Bul-kkun's skill would run out. After 5 minutes, hundreds of Nakujuk would swarm here.

‘Unbelievable. Is there another way?’

While Shambala was being attacked, Ark sighed and looked around the room. Blade Storm was Ark's strongest attack skill. He had no choice but to look for another way after Blade Storm didn't do any damage. Just then Ark's wandering eyes noticed the huge hanging fruits. So far, he hadn't really paid attention to it.....but why would those things be hanging there? Was it really just a part of the background? Ark used his powers of observation and examined the nuts. The nuts had huge burrs on its surface like a chestnut. And it made a robust ringing sound when he attacked it with his sword.

‘Wait.....is there a way to take advantage of this?’

Ark's clever brain started to think.

‘Okay, trying won't do any harm. Let's give it a shot!’

“Shambala, please hold on a bit more!”

“This bastard, do you think it's that easy? Huk! Yeol, Sun!”

Shambala cursed and quickly avoided the tree trunks. As expected from someone who learnt Kung Fu, his movements and reaction rate was a lot faster than normal users. Anyway, Ark chose a suitable fruit that lined up with Wigurima and used Riposte. The nut with a

tremendous weight shook for a little bit and swung. At this point Wigurima had noticed Ark's intention. However, his arms were stuck to the ground so he couldn't move even when his eyeballs rolled around wildly. Ark used Riposte continuously while matching the timing with the swing of the nut. Finally, the nut accelerated enough that it slammed into Wigurima's side.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Wigurima roared as it hit his stomach and stumbled a few steps before suddenly flopping down onto the ground.

"Ugh, these cheeky bastards.....gag, cough!"

Wigurima had suffered enormous damage but the wooden bark was once again regenerating.

'Sheesh, he didn't receive damage even with this?'

Ark was staring with astonishment at the scene when he noticed something. When Wigurima coughed.....it was only for a little bit, but he saw something in his throat. It was a sphere the size of a watermelon. Ark had seen a similar sphere before.

'That's it, it must be Yuzuria's nucleus!'

Ark now understood Wigurima's special ability. Wigurima had swallowed the nucleus of the world tree Yuzuria. The world tree originally had power to adjust nature. Thus those skills become available to Wigurima after he swallowed Yuzuria's nucleus. Perhaps that was why his body was covered in bark. Thanks to the shock, he had almost vomited it out.

'Aha, that's why he mentioned stealing Yuzuria when he first appeared.'

If that's the case?

'There is a way to steal Yuzuria's nucleus!'

"Shambala, Lariette-nim, the fruit! Attack him using the fruits!"

Fighting bosses were enjoyable once a method was found. If they

defeated it then huge amounts of experience and items were sure to come pouring out. Ark used Riposte on the fruits near Wigurima. Shambala used a skill which pushed the fruits and even Lariette and Razak used Shield Stroke to shake the fruits. Wigurima used the tree trunks as a barrier but he couldn't stop the attacks. Wigurima was hit with all three fruits and shook. After getting hit by dozens of fruit, Wigurima sat down and vomited.

"Cough, ku.....oh no....!"

At the same time a sphere half emerged from his mouth. Ark threw his body, grabbed Razak and shouted.

"Now, Razak transform!"

Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack!

Razak instantly turned into the Saw blade. Then the whip flew across the room and grabbed the sphere.

"I'm sorry but its finder's keepers!"

The sphere flew into Ark's hands and an information window appeared.

-Yuzuria's Heart

This is the heart of Yuzuria, the world tree who maintained the balance of Seutandal.

Although all the life had drained from the previous body, Yuzuria placed the last remnants in this heart. If equipped with the necessary conditions, Yuzuria's heart can be used to revive the world tree.

As expected, the sphere was Yuzuria's heart.

"Huk, my.....my Yuzuria.....Yuzuria.....Kuaaaaak!"

Wigurima threw back his head and screamed as he lost the sphere. At the same time, his body was covered in a blue smoke and all the bark fell off. The monster that appeared.....looked like a relative of

the Nakujuk commander Kaljapeu who he defeated in the valley village. His level also dropped from 600 to 350.

“Oh, so that’s your real body?”

“T-this guy.....give it to me, that’s mine!”

“Don’t speak nonsense! Lariette-nim, the 3 set offensive buffs!”

“Yes, the great warrior’s soul.....Hero’s Spirit, Warrior’s Concentration, Storm Breathing!”

“There’s no time. Don’t worry about defense and just focus your attacks!”

The boss battle had started 8 minute ago. Now there were 2 minutes left. Although his level had dropped, he was still a middle-ranking boss. The 3 people concentrated their attacks without worrying about defense. Thanks to the rotation of Lariette’s recovery magic, all of their health was at 100%. Ark, Shambala and Lariette ignored their defense and used their deadly kills to attack Wigurima. Wigurima didn’t even dare to counter attack. He just screamed and hid behind his shield like a turtle.

“Aaaaak, h-help. Guards, guards!”

‘What, guards?’ Don’t tell me there’s another Nakujuk here?’

Ark flinched and looked around. However there was no reaction.

‘What the? Was he just lying?’

Ark snorted and used Dark Blade tirelessly. Suddenly a violent light appeared and an information window popped up.

-A new group cooperation has been registered.

Cooperation: When your profession-specific skill aligns by 70% with your allies, there is an opportunity to learn a cooperative attack.

The current cooperative rating of Ark-nim, Lariette-nim and Shambala-nim is 83%. In addition, the profession-specific skills have met the criteria and a new group cooperation has been

registered. However, the chances of activating the play are 5% and if any of the 3 people fail to connect the skills in the time limit then it will be cancelled.

* Currently available group cooperation

-Wrath of the Gods

Dark Blade (Attribute: Darkness) = Torpedo Sword (Attribute: Lightning) = Grand Cross (Attribute: Holy)

<Cooperation success: A chance to trigger +500% additional damage to each skill>

‘Eh? W-what is this?’

Ark read the information window with a surprised expression. While everyone was reading the information window, the light around them started flickering.

‘I don’t know what this is but there’s no time left.....this is a chance!’

“Dark blade!”

Ark activated his skill. At that moment it disappeared and a huge black sword appeared on top of Wigurima’s head. Shambala checked the information window and also quickly used Torpedo Sword. Then Shambala’s dagger also disappeared and a spark was added to the black blade. The skill attributes were being piled on. The cooperation had been progressing when Ark belatedly flinched and looked at Lariette.

‘Ah, for Lariette-nim to handle an unexpected situation like this.....’

“Grand Cross!”

But Ark’s worry was needless. Lariette immediately used Grand Cross like she was familiar with cooperative plays. Then the sparks floating around the huge black blade formed a cross and descended on Wigurima’s head.

Kwarararak, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

An intense sound rang out through the area. Each skill dealt an extra x500% damage! Wigurima's 30% health vanished instantly. They had defeated Wigurima with 1 minute left.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.

All three of them went up 2 levels.

"Yes, it was a success. Group cooperation!"

Lariette jumped up and down excitedly. Ark stared at Lariette stupidly and asked.

".....Lariette-nim, have you tried group cooperation before?"

"Huh? Of course. Most of my hunts had been in groups."

When users over level 100 hunted together, occasionally there was a chance to do a group cooperation play. Lariette had always hunted in a party so she was familiar with it. On the other hand, Ark had also hunted alone so he never knew such techniques existed. He had also only grouped up with NPCs and the rehabilitation members so the group cooperation couldn't be activated.

'I'll have to ask Lariette-nim about cooperation later.'

"But this is the first time that a group cooperation dealt so much damage. Normally 5 or more people who trigger the cooperation and they would only deal 200~300% damage at most..... And the special effects weren't that flashy either."

Lariette marvelled at the power of 'Wrath of the Gods.' It was natural since this group cooperation involved all hero professions. The cooperation between general professions and professions who fought against the Dark Lord in the past couldn't be compared.

'For the moment.....'

Ark looked around and picked up the item that Wigurima dropped.

Steel Shield of Hatred and Despair (Magic)
--

Armour: Steel Shield

Defense: 160(+30)

Durability: 55/100

Weight: 70

User restriction: Level 200 or higher with Warrior profession

The steel shield of the Nakujuk chieftain Wigurima. Wigurima was once the top commander of the Nakujuk and he was recommended to absorb Yuzuria's Heart by the other chiefs. However, its loss caused Wigurima to die with hate and despair. Wigurima's despair and hatred was so strong that it influenced the equipment and created a special option.

<Option: Strength +10, Stamina +10, Defense+ 30>

<Special option: You can use 'Desire for Survival.' In a crisis, you can use 'Desire for Survival' to change your hatred into defense. Defense will increase by 50% for 20 minutes. Not available for those without the 'Hatred' stat. Reusable time: 1 hour>

'What the, what is this?'

Ark frowned as he read the information window. It was easy once they discovered the method but they had still defeated a level 600 boss. But the compensation was only a magic shield? Just like before, the special option wasn't available unless the person had the Hatred stat. Who would want something like that?

'Dammit, in this situation even 1 penny is valuable.....yet all the boss dropped was an item worth 2 million won at most? In addition, only 2 levels was gained? Was this a joke? But he did change to a middle-class boss after the sphere was vomited out.....'

That's right. Wigurima had clearly been a level 600 boss. But he fell to level 350 after vomiting out the sphere. Because of that, the experience and compensation also lowered.

'Sheesh, if I didn't have the time limit then I would've searched for

another way to defeat the boss.....;

Ark sighed and picked up the shield. He had already covered ownership of items with Lariette. And Shambala wasn't a person who would make trouble over one item. Therefore Ark monopolized the item without any problems. Although he was dissatisfied with the loot, the whole thing was over.

'Now I just have to revive the world tree to complete Magaro's quest and the Lore quest!'

Ark tried to calm his pounding heart as he approached the bud in the centre. Then he flinched and stopped walking.

Red Man's Counterattack

"That Wigurima, serves him right."

Overlooking the world tree Yuzuria.....

A big, burly Nakujuk laughed and muttered.

"He's been so arrogant since he swallowed the heart of the world tree."

He was a Nakujuk warrior called 'Kuranka.' In fact, the original chieftain of the Nakujuk was Kuranka. But while he was away, Wigurima swallowed the world tree's heart and stole his position. Thanks to that, Kuranka had been demoted from a chieftain to an escort. However, their past wasn't the reason why Kuranka didn't help Wigurima.

"They're all performing to your will."

Kuranka spoke towards the man next to him. It was a man with red hair wearing a white mask! Ark had received <The Resurrection of the Netherworld's World Tree> quest which was a Lore quest. The boss of that kind of quest wouldn't collapse so easily. Yes, originally there were supposed to be Kuranka and 10 guards in order to supplement Wigurima's weaknesses. The last trial of the quest would've been fighting all of them..... That was the original intention. But the one who stopped this from proceeding and controlled the Nakujuk was the Red Man. The Red Man nodded and replied.

"Everything will be done according to the prophecy."

"Kukukuku, now we can accomplish the Nakujuk's 100 year desire. And the Netherworld will be in our hands....."

Kuranka made a smile of satisfaction as he stared at the Red Man.

"But what will you do about Jewel's group? Do they have any value anymore? Is it really necessary to keep the promise of giving them

the southern region of the Netherworld?”

“.....The Hermes guild that Jewel belongs to holds quite a considerable power in middle-earth. I can't use the Nakujuk for everything so they still have some value. I'll leave it just in case.”

“If my Lord says so.....”

Kuranka looked dissatisfied but bowed politely. Then he looked at Ark and muttered in a tense voice.

“But what is that guy doing?”

Ark was pacing in front of the bud while holding Yuzuria. The Red Man murmured in a voice which held a mixture of a laugh and contempt.

“He's probably savouring his joy now that he's reached this point. He came all the way here to revive Yuzuria after all. What else would he be doing?”

It was at that time. While the Red Man was speaking, Ark suddenly pulled something out of his bag. Then he began to draw a magic circle using the oddly glowing sand. The Red Man's eyes became distressed as he saw the scene.

“Oh, t-that is Magaro's Dimensional Movement Powder! No way, this guy.....stop, stop it!”

“Huh? What are you.....huk?”

Kuranka had tilted his head to one side with confusion. But then Ark finished the magic circle and a gate appeared. Then Ark, Shambala and Lariette jumped into the gate and it slowly faded away.

“T-this.....stupid! He took Yuzuria away? What nonsense.....no way.....did he detect my purpose? Such a thing.....”

The Red Man was unable to hide his confusion as he murmured before suddenly turning his body violently.

“He.....he wants to restore Yuzuria in the Baran clan's territory! I never thought he would come up with such a cheeky idea after

coming all the way here. I have to stop him or else it will disrupt my plan. Gather the troops. It isn't that easy to restore Yuzuria. There is still time. Catch him and recover Yuzuria's Heart!"

"Yes, I'll gather the troops!"

Kuranka hurriedly ran away.

"Kekeke, I came up with something good."

Ark smirked as he exited from the gate. In fact, Ark had intended to resurrect Yuzuria right there in Ageiron. No, he thought that he had to resurrect it there. But he noticed something when checking the information window for Yuzuria's Heart. It stated that 'the necessary conditions needed to be in place' in order to resurrect the world tree. If Yuzuria's Heart had been attached to the bud then he would've ignored that information. But he became aware of a different possibility when he saw that Wigurima swallowed Yuzuria's heart. In other words, didn't it mean Yuzuria could be resurrected anywhere outside of Ageiron as long as the necessary conditions were met?

'Of course it is limited to the Netherworld and there has to be the full moon shining but.....'

The place protected by the world tree received enormous additional effects. Popo was only a seed yet didn't he still bring huge benefits to Lancel village? If he resurrected Yuzuria in Ageiron then the benefits would go to the Nakujuk.

'Am I crazy? Why should I do something good for the Nakujuk? There was still time before the full moon rose completely. Meanwhile I have to make preparations to resurrect Yuzuria at Haman Fortress. Perhaps the necessary conditions in the information window.....'

Ark could already guess what was required to revive the world tree. It probably referred to 'Sacred Soil.' And Ark knew a place with sufficient amounts of soil. Lancel village.....the place where Popo was planted and the fields were sprinkled with Sacred Soil. Now that Lancel village's food shortage problem was solved, it shouldn't be a

problem to take some Sacred Soil. In addition, the effects of the Sacred Soil had been increased thanks to Ark using Miracle Nursing on it in the past. The effect was sufficient enough to raise vegetables.

‘If I resurrect Yuzuria at Haman Fortress then there will be a huge benefit.’

Yes, Ark hadn’t been aware of the Red Man’s presence or his plan. He just thought about the way to get more money and came to that conclusion.

“Ah, Ark nyang!”

When Ark showed up in the centre of Lancel village, Jana who had been in the midst of dancing flew towards him. Then she noticed Lariette and pricked her ears.

“What is this nyang? There’s a different girl this time nyang? You really are a flirt nyang!”

“Noisy, I have no time to be playing around!”

Ark pushed Jana and ran across the square.

“Nyang! He pushed me nyang? How dare he nyang? Ark is a bad man nyang.”

Jana then raised her eyebrows and shook her tail.

“Nyang nyang nyang, but Jana doesn’t hate a bad man nyang. I’m somehow more attracted nyang.”

And a suspicious look started to grow on Jana’s fans’ faces.

‘Isn’t a bad man too mainstream?’

‘Shall I try it once?’

Anyway, Ark paid no attention to things like that. From now on, it was a fight against time. He had to resurrect Yuzuria while there was still a full moon in the Netherworld. It hadn’t taken as much time to break through Ageiron as he thought so there was 2 hours left. He had to move the Sacred Soil and then make preparations to revive

Yuzuria.

“Galen ajusshi!”

“Oh, Ark? You have come. Your store.....”

“I didn’t come to talk about that. Please urgently gather people!”

“People? What is going on?”

Galen asked and Ark explained the situation in the Netherworld as quickly as possible.

“You mean the Netherworld where Bona and the children are from? I understand. The Baran clan are already valued customers of our village. In addition, you’re the owner of the Sacred Soil. I’ll immediately mobilize the villagers to gather the Sacred Soil from the field. How much do you need?”

“Around 2x as much as the soil used for Popo’s flower bed should be enough.”

“Then that’s around 3~4 fields. I’ll prepare it now.”

Galen immediately ran and gathered the farmers. Ark had greatly impressed the farmers in the past while moving the Sacred Soil so they obeyed without any complaints. After one hour had passed, there were four large wagons filled with sufficient amounts of Sacred Soil.

“Then I’ll take this and go.”

“I wish you success.”

Ark finished the preparations and drew the magic circle.

‘Wait, don’t I have to use several kilograms of Dimensional Movement Powder in order to move these wagons? Aie, it doesn’t matter. The powder will be useless once the Netherworld rises anyway.....’

Ark made up his mind and used the remaining powder to create a huge gate in a corner of the village. Then he entered the gate and Haman Fortress appeared.

“Ark, what happened?”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members rushed towards him when he arrived at the fortress. The rehabilitation group who fought against the Nakujuk had already returned to the fortress. Among them was Bul-kkun. They had instantly resurrected in Haman Fortress after dying in Ageiron.

“What the hell? Didn’t you say the Netherworld would rise if you were successful?”

“Did you fail?”

“No, I’ll begin now.”

Ark grinned and explained the circumstances. Then JusticeMan also laughed and slapped Ark’s shoulder.

“Hahaha, as expected from Ark. Who else would think of that in such a situation? Okay, there’s nothing more to say. Summon the soldiers. Let’s start working straight away!”

“Ohhhh, we get to see the resurrection of the world tree with our own eyes?”

Beseutyu and the elders raised their arms with a thrilled look. The Baran soldiers arrived not long afterwards and started shovelling. They needed to make a proper soil bed in order for Yuzuria to plant some roots. Ark regularly raised his head to look at the full moon while it was in progress. The huge full moon had descended enough that it looked like it was touching the hillside.

‘There’s still 40 minutes left. The current pace is sufficient!’

Ark started to feel more relaxed. But suddenly a huge black shape was seen in front of the full moon. It looked like a group of birds which gradually grew larger. Ark narrowed his eyes at it before they suddenly widened after a few moments.

“D-Draken....?”

Yes, the shape revealed in the moonlight were Draken troops crossing the northern mountains. It wasn’t a few like before. There

were approximately 500 Drakens approaching! In addition, there were many Nakujuk riding them while holding spears and swords.

“Drakens?”

JusticeMan burst out in surprise as he lifted his head.

“There’s so many Drakens.....! W-why? If they had these many Drakens then why hadn’t they been used in the war so far?”

It was incomprehensible to Ark and JusticeMan. There was no time to consider the reasons.

“Commander-nim, the Nakujuk have started to advance in the canyon!”

“What, what the?”

JusticeMan jumped up and ran to the walls. Just like the guard said, the Nakujuk were advancing into Kurata canyon. The Nakujuk had begun an all-out assault just as the resurrection of Yuzuria was in sight.

“Everybody hurry up. If Yuzuria is restored then considerable benefits will be applied to us. We have to restore Yuzuria before those guys arrive!”

“U-understood! Hurry!”

The Baran clan frantically shovelled the dirt at JusticeMan’s command. Thanks to that, they completed the soil bed before the Draken troops arrived at Haman Fortress. Ark took out Yuzuria’s Heart and ran towards the soil bed. And just as he was about to put it into the ground!

Biiiiik-!

Suddenly a huge black eagle flew over Ark’s head. In its wake, lightning struck down in front of Ark. An intense shock wave spread around the area. Ark was hit by the shock wave and was blown several metres back before hitting the ground. Thanks to the impact, Yuzuria’s Heart tumbled out of his hand.

“Ugh, what, what the?”

Ark wobbled as he raised his body. Then somebody started to walk out of the cloud of dust. The red hair like blood fluttered around as the man wearing the white mask walked forward!

“.....Red Man!”

This was the first time he had seen the Red Man close up. He had red hair while his whole face was covered by a white mask and blood was dripping off his red chain armour. In the centre of his armour was an embossed pattern shaped like the Indian god Indra. When the Red Man stepped closer, the chain armour rocked and Indra twitched like it was alive.

‘What, what the? Why is this guy suddenly here.....?’

Ark took one step back from the strange atmosphere. Ark thought that the Red Man held an important clue towards passing Global Exos entrance examination. Thus he had tried to figure out his identity several times. But Ark didn’t have the slightest idea even after making contact with him now. No, he couldn’t even understand why the Red Man emerged now.

‘Why on earth would the Red Man appear here?’

“.....I will be taking back Yuzuria’s Heart.”

“What?”

Ark asked with a stupid face.

“Ha, what’s with this guy?”

“He jumped in alone? What a bold bastard.”

“Hahaha, I’ll smash him before the others come!”

Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae suddenly rushed towards him and swung their swords. But the Red Man disappeared as soon as the swords were lifted.

“Take this.....eh? Huh? Where did he.....huk!”

Bul-kkun had been looking around with confusion when he suddenly sucked in a breath. What the hell? He didn't know how but the Red Man suddenly appeared close to Bul-kkun's side. Bul-kkun freaked out and retreated. But it was too late as something emerged from the Red Man's palm and a roaring sound like a bomb exploding was heard.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

"Heeeeeek!"

Bul-kkun's body flew back several metres. The Red Man was already moving towards Ddeok-dae before Bul-kkun even hit the ground. Ddeok-dae flinched and raised his shield. However, the Red Man just struck Ddeok-dae's shield with his palm once again and Ddeok-dae flew back several metres. What the hell just happened? Ark couldn't understand the situation. Regardless of their levels, Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae were former gangsters. They had professional fighting skills and their hobby was fighting against others. Although their levels and stats might be lower, their fighting skills were ranked in the A grade. But those two were defeated with just one touch. Moreover, the 'Guardian=Assaulter' had the highest defense among the rehabilitation group yet they still lost 30% health and were stunned from one attack.

"T-that bastard.....!"

"Everybody, grab him!"

The rehabilitation members and the Baran clan flocked towards the Red Man. But at that moment, black shapes fell around the Red Man like bombs.

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

It was Kuranka and the Nakujuk on the Drakens. Wind blasted through the Fortress as hundreds of Drakens landed. Thanks to the massive amounts of dirt, dust and gravel flying, everybody's field of vision was limited. There were occasional screams from the Baran as they collided with the Nakujuk.

"Huhuhu, slaughter all of them!"

“Stop them. There will be no future for the Baran clan if Haman Fortress is taken!”

‘Damn, what’s happening?’

Ark fumbled around in the dust as he searched for Yuzuria’s Heart. He didn’t know how this happened but the most urgent problem was to resurrect the world tree. It didn’t matter if he died here as long as the world tree was revived. If he failed then everything would be finished.

‘T-there it is!’

Ark soon found Yuzuria’s Heart stuck in the ground. It was rolling away thanks to being kicked by the many feet. Treating a world tree like this.....Yggdrasil would’ve wept if he saw the scene. Anyway, Ark hurriedly ran towards Yuzuria’s Heart once he noticed it. But the Red Man abruptly ran through the dust cloud towards him.

“.....!”

Ark reflexively turned his body and swung his sword. But just like when he took care of Bul-kkun, the Red Man disappeared and appeared at Ark’s side. He could sense the Red Man’s palm about to touch his side. At that moment, Ark got goose bumps as he felt an eerie feeling. It wasn’t his head, but his instincts gave him a fearful warning!

‘It is dangerous!’

Ark instantly used Dark Dance. His body quickly moved 10 metres.

‘To this degree.....huk, oh my god!’

Naturally he chased Ark. Just as Ark was about to sigh with relief, he felt the Red Man at his back. He had perfectly read Ark’s movements and followed. Ark was surprised and once again used Dark Dance but it was too late. Suddenly there was a huge explosion.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, jjejejejeok!

It sounded like something was breaking inside his body. There was a

wave of noise as a message window appeared.

-You have been hit by a 'Chakra Wave.'

<You have received the direct impact of 'Chakra Wave' inside your body. Defense is ignored and you have received 800 damage. The shock wave also ruined the balance of mana inside your body and you have lost 1000 mana. Thanks to the severe bruising, your attack speed and movement speed is reduced by 10% for 5 minutes. Your body is also rigid and you will be unable to move for 3 seconds>

'Huh, c-chakra wave?'

Ark was interested in martial arts and had seen the word 'Chakra' before. It would be too long if he explained everything, but Chakra was something that originated in India. In other words, 'Chakra wave' was an Oriental attack.....similar to a ball of energy used in street fighting games. It wasn't shot from a distance, but instead the palm of the hand was used to blow the shock wave directly into the body? Well, this part was common sense.....and the damage Ark received was dreadful. It was a technique which ignored defense and dealt 800 damage. He also lost 1000 mana thanks to the attack. In addition, his attack and movement speed fell and he became rigid.

'What a ridiculous cheat skill.....!'

Ark rolled as he fell and barely managed to maintain his centre as he raised his head. He knew this time. He couldn't deal with this opponent. In fact, he knew it even before he met the Red Man in person. Ark had seen the Red Man fighting in Popo's memory. He had defeated a whole village of raccoons by himself. Even the world tree Yggdrasil couldn't deal with the Red Man. It was common sense to think that such power was beyond a user. Therefore he had thought of the Red Man as an NPC but.....

'He is.....a user!'

Eyes of the Cat identified that his information window was different from a NPCs. However, there were only question marks next to his

name and level. There were two possible reasons for this. He either hid his identity with a specific skill like Shambala or his was more than 100 levels above Ark. He could guess the level difference between them even without seeing the information window.

‘But I can’t give up. I have to fight and defeat him!’

Ark clenched his teeth and grabbed his sword firmly. However the Red Man wasn’t interested in Ark. He had turned his back to Ark and was walking in the opposite direction.

‘Oh, that reminds me.....!’

Ark stared after the Red Man with stupid eyes. The place Ark had been heading before hit by the Chakra wave was towards Yuzuria’s Heart. Everything would be over if the Red Man got his hands on Yuzuria’s Heart. Ark struggled to raise his body.

Cheng, kwa kwa kwa kwa kwak!

Daggers suddenly flew through the air like a machine gun.

One was thrown towards Yuzuria’s Heart while the others headed towards the Red Man. The Red Man had been about to pick up Yuzuria’s Heart when he was hit by the dagger.

“Ark, what are you doing? Wake up!”

The distinctive form of Shambala came running through the dust cloud.

“Ohhhhh, Shambala nice timing!”

“Healing Touch, Goddess’ Protection!”

Lariette also ran towards him and used her recovery magic. Therefore Ark’s health was recovered and he could move his body.

“Ha, that’s it. Now let’s try this again!”

Ark regained his momentum when Shambala and Lariette appeared. That’s right. Ark had no confidence that he would win if he fought the Red Man by himself. If Ark was alone. However, it was

different if Shambala and Lariette were also present. It was 1 vs. 3, no with his summons it was 1 vs. 5!

“Dedric and Razak, protect Lariette. Shambala, you know what to do? Let’s go from both sides!”

“Okay. Let’s catch him. Ark.”

“I hear you. Dark blade!”

“Throwing daggers, Torpedo Sword!”

Lariette applied buffs to Ark and Shambala while they split up. They approached in a circular motion on both sides of the Red Man and fired their skills. Ark confused the Red Man using a combination of Dark Dance and Slide while continuously using his chain skill Dark Strike and Riposte. Shambala also used ‘Torpedo Sword’ and ‘Cross Wave’ to attack the Red Man. It was the combination of the two users who conquered the Evil Silrion!

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, jjeojeok, woorururung!

The people inside the dust cloud were difficult to distinguish and all that could be seen were lightning, flashes of light and roaring sounds. No, the battle between the Red Man and Ark’s group was of a standard where the bystanders couldn’t see it even without the dust cloud. There were rapid movements and explosion of chain skills! It was as if the scene of hundreds of people fighting was fast-forwarded at a x4 speed.

“A-amazing!”

Lariette murmured as she stood to the rear with the summons. In fact, the most surprised people were Ark and Shambala.

‘I had such tremendous skills?’

When playing the game, sometimes people would experience a strange awakening. Timing and control were needed in many games such as FPS and RPG games. It wasn’t easy to calculate the timing and take control in ever-changing situations. But occasionally there were times when people would surprise themselves. It was like a

new type of animation. Their adrenaline and concentration in this situation raised their judgements and abilities to 120%! That was Ark and Shambala's state right now. There were two kinds of people. People who become weaker in a crisis or people who exert more power in a crisis. Ark and Shambala belonged to the latter. If they met an overly strong opponent then their abilities would rise to a standard that they couldn't imagine.

'It's possible to win, the two of us can defeat him!'

Ark became convinced of their victory as he saw the Red Man's health go down. In the end the Red Man's health decreased to 50% and he stumbled before retreating. No matter how high his level or skills, there were still limits to how he could defeat them when Ark, Shambala and Lariette had hero professions. No, that was what Ark thought.

"It was your mistake for jumping in rashly by yourself!"

Ark lifted his sword when the Red Man's eyes suddenly narrowed. He instantly slammed his fist into the ground and shouted.

"Impertinent.....Shiva's Proclamation!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

It was at that time. Suddenly a huge stone statue rose from the ground. It was one of the three Hindu gods. It was a stone statue resembling Shiva with four arms, three eyes and a snake wrapped around the neck. The four arms made of stone moved strangely and the surrounding space became filled with a red light. A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

-The skill 'Shiva's Proclamation' has been activated.

Everything within 300 metres of Shiva's statue is within the sphere of influence of the skill.

<When the caster is within Shiva's sphere of influence, all stats will increase by 50%. In addition, his speed became amplified and a limit invulnerable effect is given. The caster will also be able to use the 'Deity' skills within the sphere of influence. The duration ends

when the statue is destroyed or the skill is cancelled>

“What, what the? What’s with this absurd effect?

The Red Man’s hand then moved towards his waist. Then an intense glare which burned his retinas appeared.....what had happened? While they were thinking, blood suddenly spurted from Ark and Shambala’s thighs.

-You have been hit with ‘Chakra Blade.’

<You have received 1,200 damage. The durability of your armour and sword has decreased by 20% and your defense has decreased by 20%. Your movement speed has also been reduced by 20% for 5 minutes>

“This is all the hero professions are capable of?”

The Red Man muttered while holding a black sword with a blazing red aura around him.

‘Huk, t-this is....oh my god, that reminds me....!’

Ark’s face became pale as he fell to one knee. The forgotten memories flashed through his head. He had felt like something was lacking for a while. The atmosphere of the Red Man he saw in Popo’s memories was different from the one he had fought so far. Yes, Ark hadn’t called him the Red Man just because of his red hair. The Red Man he saw slaughtering the raccoons had been surrounded by a red aura. At that time he thought it was just the special effects of the flashback.....

‘That’s not it, he must’ve activated this skill back then. He was able to massacre the raccoons thanks to this skill. In other words, this state shows off his capabilities by 100%! Then so far.....’

Although his previous thoughts had been heated, now it cooled down.

“Ark, he’s coming.”

Shambala's voice interrupted his thoughts.

Kiiiiing....kwa kwang!

At the same time, the Red Man crossed the space at an incredible pace. A dense cloud of dust rose everywhere the Red Man passed. There was a shock like a bomb exploding in his wake that continuously hit Ark. Ark was once again blown back several metres. Shambala appeared behind him and stabbed his back with a dagger, but the Red Man just shook off the damage and attacked Shambala.

"Kuaaaak!"

Blood spouted from his arms in the form of a letter X. The Red Man was confident enough that he didn't care if he was hit.

He just stopped every movement of their swords and countered right away with a wave attack. Ark and Shambala couldn't attack properly and all they could do was evade. Yet their health still went down to 30%.

"Healing Touch!"

Lariette hurriedly approached and used recovery magic.

"How futile....!"

Then the Red Man turned his head and instantly arrived in front of Lariette.

"Dedric, Razak, stop him!"

"Huk, u-understood." Hey bastard, your enemy is me!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Dedric and Razak rushed towards the Red Man. However the Red Man just moved his sword and an intense shock wave appeared, throwing Dedric and Razak back. The Red Man continuously used his 'Powerful Wave' attack and Lariette quickly fell into a critical condition.

'N-no, it isn't possible to stop him!'

It wasn't possible to handle the Red Man while he was within the sphere of influence of Shiva's Proclamation.

'The information window explained the weakness of Shiva's Proclamation. The first weakness is that the skill will be cancelled if the statue breaks and the second is that there must be a time limit to it. But that guy is almost invincible inside this area. If only the rehabilitation members and the Baran weren't busy fighting the Nakujuk then they could destroy the statue while we distract him.'

Fortunately, Shiva's Territory Proclamation was a spatial limitation skill. If he left the area of 300 metres then the abilities of the Red Man would return to his original state. In other words, the Red Man was only invulnerable inside that area. If Ark, Shambala and Lariette managed to leave the sphere of influence then the Red Man wouldn't be able to excessively attack them.

'We can just stay outside the sphere of influence until Shiva's Proclamation ran out. If the skill has this much effect then the cool down time should be at least 24 hours.'

There was a way to defeat the Red Man after analysing his abilities.

'But there's one problem.'

Ark squinted at the sphere rolling around in the dust. That was the problem. The Red Man's purpose was to obtain Yuzuria's Heart. And Yuzuria's Heart was within the sphere of influence. Even if Ark's group escaped safely out of the sphere of influence, what would be the point if the Red Man got his hands on Yuzuria's Heart?

'I have to secure Yuzuria's Heart first before escaping!'

"Shambala, attack him from the left and right! Lariette-nim, please help him!"

"Heh, what stupid people."

The Red Man smiled as Ark and Shambala once again attacked him from the sides. The moment the Red Man focused on the two of them, Ark gave a command in his head.

‘Now! Dedric, get Yuzuria’s Heart. Grab Yuzuria’s Heart and then flee!’

“U-understood!”

Dedric realised his Master’s intentions and flew towards Yuzuria’s Heart.

“Hahaha, I got it, I got it. Master! How is it? Aren’t I the best?”

Dedric bragged as he snatched Yuzuria’s Heart. Ark panicked and cursed.

“You stupid child!”

Ark and Shambala already had low health and they risked their lives to draw the Red Man’s attention. Dedric had been successfully thanks to the Red Man’s line of sight being drawn away. At that time, the Red Man’s eyes turned towards him.

“Where is that drivel coming from.....!”

“Run away, run away. Dedric, fly upwards!”

“Huk, u-understood!”

Dedric belatedly grasped the situation and flapped his wings upwards.

“What a bother. Deity skill, Indra’s Lightning!”

Four round spinning disks abruptly rose from the man.

Pajjik, pajjik, pajjik, flash-!

Sparks rose from the disks engraved with Indra’s shape and a huge lightning bolt headed towards Ark, Shambala, Lariette and Dedric. When Indra became angry he exterminated his enemies with lightning, and these lightning bolts tore through the area.

“D-Dedric.....huk!”

Ark saw that the lightning was flying up towards Dedric. A red light continuously flashed as the lightning bolts hit everybody.

-You have received 200 damage from Indra's Lightning!
-You have received 200 damage from Indra's Lightning!
-You have received 200 damage from Indra's Lightning.....

'It's still going on.'

Ark's head turned white as he seemed to burn. The lightning ate at the group's health at a tremendous rate.

'What a strong appetite. It's still eating more health?'

Ark felt an intense urge to curse but his mouth wouldn't open. Thanks to his rigid state caused by the lightning, he couldn't even move a finger. Meanwhile, Lariette and Shambala died from the lightning attack. And 20%, 15%, 10%.....Ark's health also eventually ran out.

"Ugh, t-this bastard...!"

Ark collapsed holding his sword.

Netherworld Rises!

“Hik, what, what, what the?”

Buksil wasn't in a normal state. He thought everything had finished when Ark returned from Ageiron.

‘Huhuhu, now all that's left to do is use my ‘secret weapon’ when the Netherworld rises and I can obtain Magaro's legacy. All the cruelty I've had to withstand will become worthwhile!’

Buksil had been happily daydreaming. However, the situation had changed instantly when the Red Man appeared. The resurrection of the world tree was stopped as the Red Man and the Draken troops invaded the fortress. In addition, the Nakujuk were also storming the canyon in order to invade Haman Fortress. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members did their best to command the soldiers and stop them, but the Draken troops had already broken in and slaughtered the Baran members that they encountered.

“T-take this....!”

Buksil watched as a Baran covered in blood died and gnashed his teeth. There weren't only soldiers in the fortress. General NPCs had been gathered to spread supplies so there were a number of young children. And Buksil was in charge of the warehouse and supplies so he had spent time with all of them. He had carried luggage and shed sweat with the residents and also played with the children. Yet now there were young children being slaughtered in front of him. His fury climbed as he saw the scenes unfolding.

“But there's still Ark, Ark will stop them!”

Buksil didn't like Ark. Although he sometimes showed a surprising face, he would quickly reveal his true colours. But Buksil recognized Ark's skill. Among the users he had met so far, Ark was the strongest one. Obviously Ark would somehow solve this problem. When Buksil looked through the cloud of dust to find Ark, he was

engulfed in despair. Ark, Shambala and Lariette were being hopelessly beaten.

‘Hiing, he looks so uncool. Let’s see him act smug now!’

Buksil didn’t know why he laughed. But his face became desperate as strange feelings rose in his heart after seeing fall and fall again.

‘.....What the? Why are you doing this? You’re not such a character. Doesn’t your expression always show confidence in winning? Get up. Where’s that handsome act that you used to exploit Lariette? Hurry up and be that person who exploited me!’

He couldn’t understand why he was feeling this way. Ark was hateful. Really hateful, but Buksil didn’t want to see him look like this. At that moment, the Red Man shot off lightning strikes and Ark was burned to death. Buksil’s eyes also being pained from the glare of the lightning.

“T-that bastard....!”

Buksil ground his teeth together as he stared at Ark’s collapsed form.

.....This feeling? Buksil felt something in his head come loose as he witnessed Ark dying. The quest would fail and he would die from the Nakujuk once Ark died. The whole situation mixed up in Buksil’s head and he became paralyzed. Then all that anger became aimed at the Red Man.

‘Because of him. Everything is because of him!’

Buksil glared at the Red Man leisurely approaching Yuzuria’s Heart. He pulled out a scroll and shouted.

“Take this you son of a bitch! [Banish]!”

When a scroll was activated, a colour would appear depending on what type it was. The light would hit the target and trigger the special effect. However, the light just floated in front of Buksil and didn’t fly towards the Red Man.

“What, what the? Why is this happening? Is it broken after such a

long time? No, it shouldn't have.....ah, that's right!"

Everything was so crazy that he forgot to specify a target. Buksil took out the [Low-level Insight] and used it on the Red Man. He needed to confirm the Red Man's ID before the effects of the [Banish] scroll was cancelled.

"Huhuhu, after I find out your ID.....huk, what is this?"

Buksil's smile of satisfaction turned into an expression of bewilderment. The Red Man's information didn't appear even when he used [Insight]. Rather, the Red Man discovered him thanks to the use of the [Insight] scroll. The Red Man flinched and turned around.

"What the, who are you?"

"Hik!"

Buksil screamed and sat on the ground. The Red Man had lifted his sword as soon as he turned his body around. It was a desperate moment! Buksil let out a terrified scream and shouted.

"Hell, I don't know! [Banish], the one about to hit me is the target! Activate! Activate! Activate!"

Buksil shouted with desperation after he was cornered. Once it was triggered, the light was unable to find a target and gradually weakened but now it entwined with Buksil's body. Just a few seconds afterwards, the Red Man's sword touched Buksil and the light soared up the sword towards the Red Man's heart.

Flash! Teteng!

"Ugh, what, what the?" Oh my god.....!"

A red light flashed from the scroll and the Red Man flew towards the horizon like a baseball in a home run. Buksil stared with bemused eyes at the Red Man flying away and stuttered.

"Oh, i-it really could be triggered this way?"

It was a new method of utilizing the scrolls that had never been considered!

“Hahaha, I-I did it! Neither Ark, Shambala nor the rehabilitation group could deal with him yet I blew that monster away! As expected, the scrolls really are the strongest!”

In New World, only 10 of these rare [Banish] scrolls had been found! It was a scroll which blew the target 10 kilometres away. Yes, Buksil’s secret weapon was this scroll. He had planned to use the [Banish] scroll on Ark after Magaro’s legacy when found and then flee after packing all the items. However.....

“Eh? W-what have I done?”

Buksil burst out as he realised too late.

“Ugh, now I don’t have a trump card to hit Ark with!”

Buksil grabbed his hair and screamed. But after a moment, Buksil acted like someone with schizophrenia and suddenly looked at Yuzuria’s Heart.

“W-wait? It’s not like that. There would be no way to get Magaro’s legacy if the Red Man won but luckily Yuzuria’s Heart is still here. And Ark died from a user so he won’t revive for 24 hours. If that’s the case?”

The preparations to revive the world tree were already finished. If Buksil managed to resurrect the world tree then wouldn’t he monopolize Magaro’s legacy? Those were Buksil’s thoughts as he ran towards Yuzuria’s Heart.

“Yes, once I occupy this then my plan.....”

But there were some things Buksil didn’t know. He needed Ark’s Sacred Branch in order to restore the world tree. And there was something else.....

“Hey pig. Isn’t that mine?”

“Hik, what, what, what, what.....?”

Buksil freaked out and fell on his rear as he heard the voice coming from behind him. Surprisingly, the person approaching was Ark who had died a short time ago. Yes, Ark had already died once. But no

matter how strong the opponent was, Ark wouldn't die just like that. The Red Man's lightning was only focused on Ark, Shambala, Lariette and Dedric. Meanwhile, Ark had made some preparations and sent Razak escaping to somewhere far away. Thus Ark revived thanks to Razak's Pledge of Death and waited for a chance to either strike the Red Man or take Yuzuria's Heart. Then he watched as Buksil blew the Red Man away.

"Now I understand. That was the 'secret weapon' you were hiding?"

Ark narrowed his eyes and glared at Buksil. Buksil winced and shouted as Ark approached.

"Now's not the time for this! The world tree, you need to revive the world tree!"

"That's right, the world tree!"

Ark flinched and looked around. The Haman Fortress was a place of chaos as the Drakens and Nakujuk ran everywhere. The Red Man had disappeared but the fortress was still in a dangerous state.

'Now I can only believe in the world tree. I can reverse the situation if I restore Yuzuria. And even if we're defeated here, Yuzuria will still rise. There's no other choice.'

"Buksil, we'll talk about the scrolls later."

Ark grabbed Yuzuria's Heart and buried it in the soil bed. Then he also drove Yggdrasil's Sacred Branch into the bed. A pale light emerged from the Sacred Branch as the soil bed started to shake.

"That's it, it is reacting. Now.....!"

Pyorong!

A sprout grew from the soil. A sprout....no matter how he looked, it was still a sprout Only two buds grew from the sprout. Ark stared at it but the sprout didn't change.

"What, what the? Why is it different?"

Ark raised his voice and an information window instantly appeared.

-You have planted Yuzuria's Heart in the Sacred Soil.

You have met the necessary conditions of full moon, Sacred Branch and Sacred Soil. However, Yuzuria's Heart is weaker than Yggdrasil thanks to Wigurima absorbing its power. Therefore Yuzuria needs more time to absorb the power of the Sacred Branch, Sacred Soil and full moon before it can resurrect.

<Time remaining until Yuzuria's resurrection: 2 hours>

Once something went wrong then everything would become worse. A 2 hour time limit when it was an urgent situation? Of course Ark couldn't afford to wait until then. The moon was already starting to set. The remaining time until daybreak was 20 minutes at most. If this failed then he would have to wait until the next full moon to resurrect Yuzuria. It was impossible for Haman Fortress to hold out until then.

"No way! It's impossible! Does it make sense for a world tree to have its power taken away by a monster? Just a little more power towards the bud. You can do it!"

Ark continuously used Nursing on the soil bed. It had been effective on the Sacred Soil in the past. As expected, Nursing didn't disappoint. Although Yuzuria's power was weakened by Wigurima, after he used Nursing the sprout shook and emerged a bit more.

-The growth of Yuzuria has sped up thanks to the use of Nursing.

<Time remaining until Yuzuria's resurrection: 1 hour and 55 minutes>

Although it succeeded, it only reduced the time by 5 minutes.

"Wooaaaaaak!"

"Stop them, ugh!"

Meanwhile one Baran member after another collapsed. The soldiers led by the rehabilitation members were being wiped out by the

Drakens. Meanwhile, the ones led by JusticeMan were barely holding on. Beyond the walls near the soil bed, the Nakujuk who advanced through the canyon were also getting close.

“Ark, find that bastard Ark!”

He heard Jewel and Duke’s voice from among the dust cloud.

‘God dammit, is Nursing not going to work?’

Ark’s current health was 1,500 and Lariette was dead so she couldn’t use recovery magic. The Drakens flew around looking for him at Jewel’s command. The resurrection of the world tree just became more difficult. Ark couldn’t see how it was possible in this state. Then a few Drakens rushed up behind Ark.

‘Is it going to end here?’

Tu tu tu tung!

Ark had lifted his head with a desperate look. The Drakens had been pushed back a few metres and wobbled.

“It’s Ark-nim, Ark-nim is over there!”

“Everybody help Ark-nim. Reload, fire!”

Ark looked around at the familiar voices. Ahead....the heavily armed raccoon clan emerged from the gate holding their cannons.

“I felt like something was suspicious nyang!”

“Ark oppa!”

The group was also followed by Roco riding her unicorn.

“Oh, is it a fight?” These days I’ve been so bored playing around the village. Meow, raise your claws! I don’t know what’s going on but let’s help our friend the Truthseeker!”

“Nyahhhh!”

“Our benefactor, help Ark hyung-nim!”

Hassan and the Meow and the ex-thieves began attacking the

Nakujuk.

‘How did they get to the Netherworld.....ah, that’s right!’

Ark saw the gate they came out of and understood the situation. He had used all of the remaining powder to create the dimensional gate. Even after moving the four wagons, the gate between Lancel village and the Netherworld was still connected. The residents must’ve seen Ark disappearing through the gate in a corner and went through out of curiosity while bringing reinforcements just in case Ark was in danger. This was possible because he had 100% intimacy with the residents of Lancel village. Even the users who came through the gate became involved with the war.

“What is this nyang? I’ll give all those who fight bravely a kiss on the cheek nyang!”

“Ohhh, really?”

“An opportunity to score a kiss from Jana! Let’s show them the power of cosplay enthusiasts!”

“Oh oh oh!”

“What, what the? Why do these guys have such disgusting eyes?”

The Nakujuk burst out as they saw the users. Thanks to that Ark survived the crisis, but it was only for a short time. In fact, there was a reason Ark hadn’t asked the inhabitants of Lancel village to join in the war. The NPC soldiers levelled up quite slowly compared to users. The raccoons, Meow and ex-thieves were all around level 150~180. That was much lower than his level 200 pets. The Nakujuk’s average level was 280 so it was impossible to make them enter the war. As Ark expected, the residents of Lancel village were quickly pushed on the defensive. While the raccoons fought from long distance and the Meow had high evasion, the ex-thieves quickly went down.

”Ah.....damn....!”

A moan emerged from Ark’s mouth. He was thankful but he didn’t want their help. Everything was disappearing right in front of

Ark. The Baran clan, the Dark Brothers, the residents of Lancel village.....everything he had accomplished was vanishing. Now it wasn't just a problem of the Netherworld any longer. When pushed like this, Jewel's group would discover that Ark's base was Lancel village. If Jewel and the Nakujuk went through the dimensional gate then Lancel village wouldn't be able to stand against them. Unlike users, NPCs only had one life. Jana who was always teasing Ark, the funny looking Hassan, Sarah who always followed him around and Galen who always supported him....he wouldn't be able to see them anymore. And Lancel village would return to its previous dilapidated state.

'It can't be, no, no, it can't happen!'

Ark knew the fear of losing someone better than anybody else. Ark frantically screamed down at the soil bed.

"Please, Yuzuria! You're the world tree needed to maintain the Netherworld's balance....right now you are needed. Please..... please wake up. Get up and help the Baran clan!"

Ark yelled in a cracking voice. Suddenly a light emerged from the Sacred Branch before the branch disappeared. At the same time, the sprout trembled and a huge world tree suddenly soared into the sky in front of him.

-The Miracle Nursing was successful.

Your heart which mourned the loss of innocent lives has moved Yuzuria. Your heart which wasn't thinking about yourself, but others has produced a miracle. At first you only desired the resurrection of the world tree but your heart changed when you saw the numerous sacrifices. Cherishing the lives of others is the true mindset of a caretaker. Even though the effort is the same, your heartfelt commitment has moved Yuzuria.

You have cherished all lives and even moved the world tree! Due to your achievement of reaching a true caretaker's mindset, your fame as a caretaker has increased even more.

* Due to the success of miracle nursing, all stats increase by 2.

* The Affection stat increased by 20.

*Fame increased by 200.

*Alignment to good increased by 50.

The Miracle Nursing was a success and you have acquired the title 'Caretaker of the World Tree.'

Your fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many patients.

* As a title bonus all stats will increase by 2.

* Fame will increase by 200.

His sincere prayers had achieved a miracle! The emergence of the world tree suddenly calmed the centre of the fortress.

"T-the world tree.....!"

The world tree rose through the cloud of dust and seemed to touch the moon! While everyone was watching, the image of a beautiful woman appeared in front of the world tree. The woman floating in the air smiled gently at Ark.

-The descendant of a great warrior, Ark. I have heard your prayers. You prayed for the resurrection of the world tree Yuzuria and it has been granted!

-The world tree Yuzuria has been resurrected at Haman Fortress.

The world tree Yuzuria is the sacred tree which maintains the balance of the 'Lost world=Seutandal.' Yuzuria who had lost its power and consciousness for a long time has received a new power and been resurrected.

Each of the world trees have their own attributes. Yuzuria falls under the property of the moon and brings comfort and peacefulness to women. In addition, it extends the protection to their offspring who cannot fight. As long as Yuzuria is protecting them, the Baran clan will gain the strength to withstand any

adversity.

* The durability of Haman Fortress and the surrounding buildings has increased by 50%.

* The probability of being attacked by monsters around Haman Fortress has decreased by 50%.

* The defense of Haman Fortress and any villages built around has increased by 50%.

* When users and NPCs 'rest' within Haman Fortress, their recovery rate will increase by 200%.

*The fame of Haman Fortress increases by 5,000.

Indeed, the effects of a mature tree were really different from Popo who was just a seedling.

Ku ku ku ku ku!

When the world tree was revived, thick vines immediately grew along the outer walls. They were the same type of vines that protected the outer wall of Cairo. The Nakujuk were forced out beyond the walls.

-My subordinates, punish these people who have become corrupted. Iron wall divine blessing!

When Yuzuria shouted, light from the full moon headed towards the fortress. Just like a cloud of dust settling down, it sunk into the bodies of the Baran clan.

-Yuzuria has invoked the 'Glory of the Full Moon.'

Glory of the Full Moon is a special technique that uses all of Yuzuria's mana and can only be used when there is a full moon. It can't be combined with any other defense related buffs.

* The health of all allies is recovered by 50%.

* The defense of all allies will increase by 500% for 30 minutes.

* The magic resistance of all allies will increase by 300% for 30 minutes.

“Huk, defense 500%, magic resistance 300%?”

It was a really scream worthy buff. Thanks to Yuzuria’s buff, the military situation immediately changed by 180 degrees.

“Now, shall we start this again?”

Ark turned his body and grinned. When the dust cloud disappeared, he was able to clearly confirm the battle situation. Most of the Nakujuk had been pushed outside by the vines but there were still hundreds of the Drakens troops remaining in the fortress. Meanwhile Jewel and Duke were surrounded by the Baran clan not far from Ark’s location.

“You, you bastard.....!”

Jewel and Duke cursed when they saw him. Even though the Drakens were helping Jewel and Duke, they couldn’t do anything against the Baran clan and their allies from Lancel village who had 500% defense and 300% magic resistance. In addition, the vines had divided their power in half. Ark lead the coalition of Baran=Lancel and literally stepped on them. When Jewel and Duke died, the situation became even more difficult and the Drakens ran away. The Nakujuk who were struggling against the vine wall also ran away.

“Waaaaaah, we defeated them!”

“Hooray for the Commander, hooray for Yuzuria!”

The Baran clan cheered when the Nakujuk ran away. With the situation under control, Yuzuria looked at them warmly before approaching Ark.

-Ark, thanks to you I have been able to perform the duties entrusted to me. I cannot deny that you are my benefactor. Now you are a friend of my heart so please take this token.

Yuzuria handed Ark a brilliantly shining branch from the world tree.

-Sacred Branch <Level 2> (Special)

The essence of Yuzuria has been added to the Sacred Branch.

Thanks to the addition of Yuzuria, the magic of the Sacred Branch has become even stronger. An additional bonus will be added according to Yuzuria's attributes.

<Continuous Effects for the Owner>

* Luck +30 (+30)

* The probability of succeeding all skills +10% (+5%)

* Probability of finding a magic item + 20% (+5%)

* When resting inside a house, Health and Mana Regeneration +30% (+10%)

* Addition: Defense +10%

* Addition: Remote communication with Yggdrasil and Yuzuria is possible.

‘Ohhh, jackpot!’

Ark's mouth opened as he received the Sacred Branch. In fact, his heart had sunk when the Sacred Branch disappeared. He didn't know how much profit he would gain from the Netherworld but he would receive enormous damage if he lost the Sacred Branch. But it was upgraded and then returned.....from the pretty looking woman to the reward, everything was different from Yggdrasil. Ark received the Sacred Branch and the Lore quest was completed.

-The Lore Quest has been completed.

Thanks to the completion of the Lore Quest, your information window has accumulated 4 ☆s.

In New World, a ☆ is a decoration provided for the player who has achieved a historical and great achievement which has an influence

on New World.

The player who receives a ☆ would become a legend in that area. In addition, the accumulation of a certain number of ☆'s would receive a very special reward.

Currently owned ☆: 7

Then the whole Netherworld started shaking like an earthquake had occurred. A thick crack spread through the sky and it started breaking off like a snake shedding its skin. Through the gaping space in the crack, the bright dawn of the middle earth's sky could be seen. Yes, after hundreds of years the Netherworld was finally emerging from the dimensional storm towards middle earth.

"Ah, all Lancel residents return to the gate!"

The dimension gate would disappear once the Netherworld rose. He didn't know what area the Netherworld would rise to so it would be a huge problem for the residents of Lancel village. The residents and users from Lancel passed through the gate at Ark's command. Then he suddenly heard the voice of the Red Man in his ear.

-Nice move, was it Ark? It managed to end in a tie this time. I've accomplished the most important objective. But next time I won't forgive you if you step in front of me.

"What the, this bastard? Why is he saying such things while hiding?"

Ark looked around with a frown. Buksil had sent him flying and now he was rattling on. And what did he say? Next time he wouldn't forgive him? Was he a second class villain? Hiding somewhere while communicating with him.....

However Ark soon felt his breath stop. He found the Red Man riding an eagle in the sky. But it wasn't the Red Man who caused Ark to become shocked. On the other side of the wide gaping space was a huge object.

Kaaaaaaa-!

'.....A colossal skyray?

Although only a small part of its form was shown through the dimensional crack, it was unmistakably a skyray. The skyray was dozens of kilometres larger than the giant white whale Gallic that they encountered on the seabed in the past! The long tail grazed against the crack in the sky. The more surprising thing was the back of the skyray. It appeared to be carrying a huge castle three or four times larger than Haman Fortress. It looked like a legendary castle floating in the sky.....an aerial fortress.

“Hey, check the system quickly! Hurry and collect the materials for Chief Kim!”

At that time, the New World planning department of Global Exos was in chaos. New World had been quiet for a while. Then the system fell into an impossible state last night and began feeding a large amount of power to start a new episode.

-The main system has completed the data update necessary for episode III.

<Episode III: Emergence of a New Continent>

“A new continent? What on earth?”

Ha Myung-woo pulled his hair and shouted. At the same time, Kim Gwon-tae accessed dozens of computer data and turned his head.

“Boss, I’ve found it.”

“What?”

“The reports submitted by the researchers in the early stages of making the game detail the conditions needed to trigger episode III. The new continent seems to be an area called the Netherworld. The official name is Seutandal. The place of emergence is approximately 250 kilometres in the seas bordering the Schudenberg and Bristania Kingdoms. The coordinates are X3489 Y5673.”

“Do you think I haven’t read the researcher’s report? I already know that!”

Ha Myung-woo yelled in an annoyed voice.

“I want to know why episode III started with no warning. Just yesterday there were no signs of this. Clearly I came to ask for the reason!”

“Well the researcher’s report stated that the condition for this is the completion of the Lore Quest associated with the Netherworld’s world tree.....”

“That’s the problem. It hasn’t been released yet but I’ve sent materials about each quarterly episode to the TV station. I told them that the next episode would be determined by the actions of users, not NPCs.”

That was the reason Ha Myung-woo needed the information. It was obvious that the media would focus on that. He could predict questions about the contents of the Lore quest and Seutandal rising. The person who needed to answer those questions was Ha Myung-woo. However, Ha Myung-woo knew no more than other users. Episode III had started. It was amazing.....but that was all he knew.

‘Damn, why do I always have to appear like a clown on TV?’

“Anything is good. For anything from the information site, bulletin boards or even false rumours!”

Ha Myung-woo felt like he was being bullied by the systems of New World. Then Ho Myung-hwan who had been looking at the information site shouted.

“B-Boss, I’ve found it!”

“What do you mean?”

“The reason why the Netherworld is rising.....I seem to have found it.”

“Really? Where? Where did you find it?”

“Look at this. I’ll show it on the main screen.”

Ho Myung-hwan manipulated the computer and an image appeared on the 120 inch screen. It was a video that had been posted on the bulletin boards of the official site yesterday. While the managers were looking in the wrong place, a huge number of users had already watched the videos and it had reached 13,000 hits.

“Is that the Netherworld?”

The staffs of the Planning Department were users in New World as well as employees of Global Exos. They had heard rumours of the Netherworld so they all stopped what they were doing and concentrated on the video. The title of the movie was the ‘Netherworld expedition of the Wicked Wolf.’ Just like the title of the movie, the main character was a black wolf. As the video began, the Wolf shook its tail and started to gather ingredients in the Netherworld. But after a few moments, the contents developed into fighting dozens of red monsters.

“Ach, oh no!”

The movie has elements to please everybody such as romance and action. They screamed when a dragon like monster flew off with the carriage containing the trapped beauty and felt admiration when the Wolf was able to save her. And they all started sweating and grasped each other’s hands as the boss transformed. An epic 2 hours later.....the Wolf who had overcome a large amount of adversity managed to revive the Netherworld’s world tree. Thus the dimension known as the Netherworld rose to middle earth. The last scene was the handsome Wolf being surrounded by blue NPCs in middle earth while they cheered him.

“W-who is he? That Wolf?”

Ha Myung-woo asked after staring blankly at the screen. But none of the staff in the Planning Department knew who the character was. Then Ha Myung-woo shouted towards Ho Myung-hwan.

“Video, look at the video.”

“The ID says Buksil.”

“Buksil? That’s the name of the Wolf?”

“.....It can't be. He wrote on his introduction in the bulletin board that he was a dwarf merchant from Schudenberg Kingdom.”

“Then Buksil must be the photographer. Call him now and find out the identity of the Wolf. And I don't have to tell you this but meet him as soon as he is identified. With work of this degree, we'll become closer to accessing the system. No matter what happens, he must be recruited to participate in the project!”

“I understand.”

Ho Myung-hwan connected to the site and examined Buksil's information. The user had to register with their personal information in order to upload videos on the official site. Supposedly the registration was to prevent abuse of the videos, but really it was to collect the user's information if they needed it. Using his administrator's ID, Ho Myung-hwan was soon able to determine Buksil's phone number.

‘There's no way Ark is the only black wolf in New World. In addition, Ark seems eager to hide himself. There is no way he would allow a video of himself to be uploaded.

Ho Myung-hwan gave a wry smile and picked up the phone. The tone repeated several times before he heard a voice.

“Hello?”

“Oh, excuse me. I'm calling from Global Exos' Planning Department.”

“Global Exos' Planning Department?”

“Yes, are you Buksil who uploaded a video onto the site yesterday?”

“Yes, what about it?”

“I would like to ask you more about the main character of the movie.”

“The protagonist.....are you talking about Ark-nim?”

“A-Ark?”

Ho Myung-hwan popped out of the chair at Buksil's words.

“Did you say Ark just now?”

The Whereabouts of the Last Three Marvels

<Episode III: Emergence of a New Continent>

In the high seas between Schudenberg Kingdom and Bristania Kingdom, 'The Lost World=Seutandal' has emerged. There are numerous legends thriving in Seutandal so please enjoy a new adventure.

That was the message every user in New World saw a few days ago. Of course, users responded to this news hotly. New monsters, new hunting grounds and new dungeons! The emergence of Seutandal lit a fire in users who were always thirsty for new things. But it wasn't just users with warrior professions who were stimulate. It was easy to understand when looking at the history of mankind. The appearance of a whole new civilization could possibly upset the normal economy. It was similar to the great navigational era in Europe's history where things like tea, spices and silk came pouring in. The merchants in New World would not miss such an opportunity. All anybody could talk about in the merchant city of Giran was Seutandal.

"Let's go to the land of opportunity, Seutandal!"

"We can't be later than the other guilds, hurry up!"

Thanks to that, the passenger ferries on the East coast of the continent became crowded with users. While many warriors and merchants were flocking to Seutandal, Ark had actually left Seutandal and arrived in Giran.

'Phew, everybody here is distracted.'

Ark dusted himself off and looked around. The NPCs and users in every village he dropped in at would only talk about Seutandal. So

many users flocked to Seutandal that the normally busy Giran felt empty. Ark realized how huge it was after arriving on the continent.

‘Well, it’s not a bad thing if people gather in Seutandal.’

Ark looked warmly at the users heading towards Seutandal. The hunting would decline thanks to the users flocking there. So far Ark had monopolized the dungeons in Seutandal and now he had more competitors.

‘But I can’t monopolize all the prey in Seutandal by myself. And the situation in Seutandal is now 180 degrees different from the previous month. More people gathering would naturally make it evolve faster. When that happens, the benefits would outweigh having the dungeons stolen by other users.’

Ark recalled what happened in the last few days in Seutandal.

‘Things have worked out better than I thought.’

Although Seutandal rising to middle earth was a big event, it was an even more tremendous event for the Baran clan. The world they knew for hundreds of years was changing. The Baran tribe elders were filled with fear and confusion of the unknown. Their reactions were natural. Although Asia was a new continent for the Europeans in the exploration era, to the natives they were just scary predators. Even though Ark only received 60 points in history class, he knew at least this much. So he quickly gathered the elders when Seutandal finished rising.

“Although Seutandal has finished rising, you can’t interact with the continent.”

“What kind of place is the continent?”

“It is a huge place many times larger than Seutandal. There is the Bristania, Sinius and Schudenberg kingdoms, with each kingdom having thousands and thousands of soldiers. In addition, the soldiers’ equipment is so developed that it can’t even be compared to yours.”

“T-then what will we do if they invade?”

“We’ve only just managed to prevent the threat of the Nakujuk.....”

The elders murmured with uneasy looks. Ark deliberately put on a serious expression and spoke once again.

“I definitely can’t guarantee that there is no risk.”

“Then isn’t this a serious problem?”

“But the Baran clan aren’t weak like before. Didn’t you manage to defend against the threat of the Nakujuk? I promise. If everybody unites together then not even the kings of the strong continent would dare invade.”

“Umm.....”

The elders still looked worried.

“I see what you mean. But we don’t know anything about them. We don’t know how to communicate and build goodwill with them.”

“There’s nothing to worry about. If you don’t understand then you should trust someone who does.”

Ark grinned and replied. In fact, the Three Kingdoms couldn’t afford to invade Seutandal. It was 100% that the ambassadors from the continent would be friendly. But there was a reason for him crating an uneasy atmosphere. It was in order to recommend Isabel who was the head of the Dark Brothers as the representative for Seutandal.

“Oh, that’s right. There is such a way.”

“Yes, we can leave it to the head of the Dark Brothers.”

The elders were so anxious that they all unanimously agreed to have Isabel represent them. Shortly afterwards, Isabel led all of the Dark Brothers and moved them to Seutandal. They settled at Haman Fortress which was renamed ‘Eastern Nation.’ Isabel and the Dark Brothers were finally able to break from their stained past and achieve the new home that they so desired.

‘Then the contract with Isabel has been completed.’

Of course, Ark didn't do this for Isabel's good. Isabel promised to give Ark two rewards if everything finished perfectly. He could now receive the rewards since Isabel was appointed the representative of Seutandal. So while Isabel was settled in Haman Fortress, the continent's delegation arrived in Seutandal. Although he would only briefly describe it, there were two reasons why the delegation came to visit the Baran clan instead of the Nakujuk. The first was that they were a chaotic race and the second reason was that the Nakujuk already tried to invade the continent. They boldly attacked the kingdom of Schudenberg. That's right. It was the event where Ark sent 50 Nakujuk from the valley village to Selebrid. So the continent judged the Nakujuk as threatening monsters and only sent a delegation towards the Baran clan. Although Isabel was chaotic like the Nakujuk, her beauty made a good impression on the delegates.

"We want to become friendly with all three kingdoms. The Netherworld isn't an evolved civilization like the continent but it has many resources that can't be found on the continent. It would be beneficial to everybody if we develop a good relationship. If you want to interact with us then please allow us to send somebody to each kingdom. All future negotiation will go through our ambassador."

"Yes, of course....."

So the Eastern Nation was able to establish an official branch in each Kingdom. Isabel also had a condition for the Schudenberg Kingdom.

"I would like you to build the Schudenberg Kingdom branch in Lancel Village."

The representative from the Schudenberg Kingdom showed reluctance.

"I don't understand. Lancel is a mountain village that doesn't have any adjacent villages and isn't close to the Royal Road. Why would you install a branch in such a complicated place?"

"I understand your point but I'm sorry. But Lancel village has already entered an alliance with Seutandal."

“Huh? How is that possible?”

“I cannot tell you all the details. Anyway, we have formed a connection with Lancel village which makes our relationship with the Schudenberg Kingdom even deeper. As a sign of friendship, we promise to trade more through Lancel village and give more benefits to the Schudenberg Kingdom than any other kingdom.

“If that’s the case, there is no reason to refuse.....”

The representative didn’t fully understand the situation but accepted her proposal after scratching his head. There was no reason to refuse when they would gain even more benefits.

“Huhuhu, that’s it. That’s it!”

This was one of the rewards Isabel promised Ark. It wasn’t necessary to explain again, but the centre of politics and diplomacy was bound to have commercial development. If Lancel village was designated as the communication place between Schudenberg Kingdom and Seutandal, a number of users of NPCs would rush there. Lancel village was only a mountain village but it would emerge as the new trade centre. Of course, the real estate would boom and Ark’s Comprehensive Store would enjoy more profit.

‘Now the items from Seutandal will be traded exclusively through Ark’s Comprehensive Store to the Schudenberg Kingdom!’

Of course, Seutandal still had a low cultural level so there weren’t that many products to trade. However, the Eastern Nation had already decided its capital city. And Isabel had already used her funds to build a variety of facilities around Haman Fortress. When the construction was completed and Seutandal’s development increased, trading would probably become active. If Ark’s Comprehensive Store monopolized the trade in Schudenberg Kingdom then obviously he would get a large profit.

“This is just the beginning.”

Ark opened his contract with Isabel.

<Contractor: Isabel=Ark>

The head of the Dark Brothers, Isabel will negotiate to use Ark's Comprehensive Store in Lancel village as the trading post between Seutandal and the Schudenberg Kingdom. In addition, Ark will also get the rights to establish and operate a trading post in Seutandal.

The right to establish a trading post in the Eastern Nation! This was the second compensation promised by Isabel. Thanks to the trading post in Seutandal, not only could he trade with the Schudenberg Kingdom but Bristania and Sinius as well. Seutandal was still an undeveloped place with few trading posts. If he considered the future, the real estate price would increase tremendously.....

Maybe it would be impossible to maintain a trading post forever. But while he had it, it made the difference between heaven and earth. If he was a normal merchant then it would take a huge amount of time and effort in order to obtain the rights.

"Owning the rights to the trading post is like owning a goose who lays golden eggs. If I regain Silvana later on then I'll also get a share of the Continental Commerce Firm...."

Silvana, Lancel village and Seutandal was like a triangular linked trading connection. Ark's desire to control the markets of Schudenberg and Nagaran wasn't a dream anymore.

'I'm out of range of the Hermes guild while in Seutandal and it's also possible to recapture Silvana.'

When one piece of the puzzle fit then the other pieces would follow. In fact, until recently he had abandoned his plans to recapture Silvana because the Hermes Alliance's forces were more than he expected. But this incident wasn't a small blow to the Hermes guild.

'Sid told me they wasted 3,000 gold hiring mercenaries and now they're almost broke. Huhuhu, that Raiden wasted his money. Moreover, the Baran clan aren't friendly with the Hermes guild so they'll never set foot in Seutandal.'

He assumed that Raiden was hitting the ground and weeping by now. Ark didn't even have to mention all the equipment he took from

Jewel's group. Therefore there was quite bit of discontent among the Hermes Alliance and Sid saw signs of division within the alliance.

'Well, their strength won't weaken that much but if there's internal dissent then I don't have to worry about them for the moment.'

Anyway, Ark considered all his problems amicably resolved. While everything was being put into order, the people around Ark also became more determined.

"The Nakujuk are still using the valley village as a base to threaten the Baran clan. We'll stay at Haman Fortress until the Netherworld regains its stability."

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members said that they would stay at Haman Fortress.

"We're going to train the Baran clan and gain some levels as well."

"What did the Red Man say? I'll won't leave him along the next time we meet."

"Train until we meet him again!"

The rehabilitation members said. Their one-sided fight against the Red Man had a huge impact on them. It was the same for Ark. Thanks to his time in Seutandal, Jewel and Duke weren't a match for him anymore. Therefore Ark inwardly became cocky. Meeting the Red Man smashed his ego.

'I still have a long way to go. I don't know what he's doing but no doubt I'll see him again. I have to raise my skills enough to fight him!'

Now Ark's goal was the Red Man. It was necessary to train even more to exceed his goal. Lariette also decided to stay at Haman Fortress. She was an office worker so playing the game with Ark made her quite tired. Although she regretted it, she couldn't keep up with Ark's pace.

'Well, if I stay with the rehabilitation hyungs then we'll often be able to meet.'

The one person who hadn't decided was Buksil. The one who settled

his problem was surprisingly Ark. After <The Resurrection of the Netherworld's World Tree> quest automatically finished, Ark immediately went off to Magaro's laboratory. With the dimension now stable, the mirage was back to normal.

.....And Ark found a financial windfall.

He finally got his hands on a large amount of potions and scrolls. He found 200 advanced potions and 150 scrolls! Of course, they were items that he could sell in Ark's Comprehensive Store. But these advanced items had level restrictions. The minimum level was 200. Users around level 100 gathered at Lancel so the scrolls wouldn't sell even at half-price. Therefore Ark left the sales for Buksil at Haman Fortress. A lot of users flocked to Haman Fortress after Seutandal rose. They were mainly high level users. Supplies were needed in order to travel New World. He would be able to get a higher price if he sold the advanced potions to higher levelled players. In the end, Buksil was envious of the items but he became satisfied with selling them. His handling charge for selling Ark's items was 10% of the gross sales! He had difficulty with Buksil in the past but Seutandal wouldn't have risen without the [Banish] scroll. Therefore Ark calculated a large commission. He expected a large income so he could afford to be generous.

'Huhuhu, I'll soon get thousands of gold in my hand when everything is put in order.'

Ark managed to get 900 gold from selling his japtem. There were also the ores he received from supplying weapons to the Baran clan and the 20 items he took from Jewel's group. Now Buksil was selling his potions and scrolls. It was equivalent to 5000~6000 gold. That was equivalent to the amount of money he collected during his first year of playing the game.

'Now all that's left is to sell them. If everything is popular then the remaining lease money won't be a problem!'

Thankfully Ark now felt much lighter.

'As expected, Magaro's quest led to a lot of money!'

He gained thousands of gold from this quest alone. And that wasn't all. He still hadn't received full compensation from the Magic Institute. It was why Ark came to Giran.

"Okay, now shall I officially collect the full compensation for this troublesome quest?"

"Welcome Ark. I've been waiting for you."

Shannen instantly welcomed him when he entered the Magic Institute. Shannen showed Ark into a room and looked at him with anticipation.

"My morning horoscope predicted that the person I was waiting for would come. So I just got a feeling. Yes, I think I'll be happy with your news judging by your bright expression."

"You really are a magician."

Ark smiled and pulled out the books he collected from the laboratory. There were 200 of them. 150 of them were Netherworld related books that Magaro had borrowed from the Magic Institute when he left while the other 50 was his research materials. Ark considered them trash since he couldn't sell it but to Shannen they were treasures.

"Oh, you did it. You really did it!"

As expected, Shannen praised his efforts while drooling over the items.

"Yes, so where did Magaro leave them?"

Ark explained the circumstances towards Shannen when he asked. Shannen sighed after hearing about Magaro's death.

".....That's right, Magaro was remembered for his single mindedness. His tragic end came about from such a personality. Based on his research, he was attempting to raise the Netherworld back to middle earth but his attempts failed and he became like that.

Thank you.”

“No, there is no need for thanks.”

Shannen waved his hand and spoke.

“The Magic Institute has been stagnant for a long time. But now that the research materials of the Magic Institute’s greatest genius has been returned, the Magic Institute might be able to regain its lost glory. I’m thanking you on behalf of the Magic Institute.”

The Silver Arrow and Letter Movement that the Magic Institute created were actually based off Magaro’s drafts. After the genius disappeared, the technology for the Silver Arrow and Letter Movement was left incomplete and the Magic Institute became stagnant. But now the Magic Institute could use Magaro’s research materials. Shannen explained that they could use the research to fill in their incomplete gaps of knowledge in order to create new potions and scrolls. Ark had an ecstatic look as Shannen continued chattering on. The research materials had a larger effect on the Magic Institute then expected so he was expecting a larger reward. Fortunately, Shannen finally stopped the chatter and talked about what he wanted to hear.

“Now, it is time to compensate the benefactor of the Magic Institute. Please receive this.”

Shannen held out a scroll.

“This is.....?”

“It is a qualification to become a member of the Magic Institute filled out by the Grandmaster himself. The Master has already accepted you as a full member of the Magic Institute once the request was completed. I’ll tell you first but you’ll receive very special rights with this.”

Ark received the scroll and the information window appeared.

-You have received the ‘Magic Institute Member’ title from the associated Master.

He has recognized your service to the Magic Institute and granted you membership. The Magic Institute has an impact on the entire continent. Being a full member of this organization is an honour only a handful of people enjoy. This honour allows you to receive a variety of preferential treatment from the Magic Institute.

<When you are a regular member of the Magic Institute, the organization will provide a personal warehouse and laboratory. In addition, goods can be purchased at any branch of the Magic Institute with a 15% discount and you can hire up to 3 NPC magician mercenaries from the Magic Institute. Usually it is a paid service, but it may become free depending on the amount of intimacy>

* As a title bonus all stats will increase by 5.

*Your friendship with the Magic Institute will increase by 200.

*Fame increases by 300.

A private warehouse and laboratory, and discounts on various magic items! It was an amazing reward for a magician. However Ark had no interest in magic. The +5 bonus to all stats was great. The compensation for the title was quite high. But it wasn't satisfactory compared to all the trouble he went through. Ark wanted a more substantial reward. To be frank, he wanted money.

"This..... Is that everything?"

"Oh, this reward isn't to your liking?"

"No, it's not that but....."

Ark showed some anxious gestures while Shannen laughed and nodded.

"Hahaha, I know. We've prepared a present to match the hero of the Magic Institute."

A young magician instantly approached when Shannen clapped his hands.

“Please guide this friend to the 15th floor.”

The young magician had a shocked expression. Then he stared at Ark before saying in a polite tone.

“.....Come along.”

Ark got up to follow the magician before hesitating and looking back at Shannen.

“Oh, I have one more thing I’ll like to ask.”

“What is it? If it’s you then naturally I’ll help.”

“Can you make two Summoning Ports?”

“Summoning Ports?”

Shannen tilted his head like he had heard the word for the first time.

“It’s among Magaro’s research materials. Was it book 13?”

It was the reason Ark dropped everything and ran to the Magic Institute. It was more important than his ambitions for Hermes and completing the quest..... There was one problem Ark never thought of when Seutandal rose. Ark realized it 24 hours after Seutandal rose and he tried to summon Dedric and Razak who died in the fight against the Red Man.

-The summon command has failed (Area Restriction).

<In the current area summoning/releasing your summons from the Netherworld is restricted. Upon the death of a pet, they will lose 10% of their total stats and it won’t be possible to summon them from middle earth. Instead, your mana will not be consumed while your pets are summoned>

“Eh? What is this?”

A red warning message appeared stating that he wasn’t able to summon his pets. He thought maybe 24 hours hadn’t passed yet but it was the same after a few hours.

“Even though it appeared on middle earth, isn’t it still Seutandal?”

Ark thought this and tried to summon them again on the continent. But the same message still occurred. Now Ark realised that the problem was more serious than he thought.

“W-wait? The reason I was unable to summon them on Seutandal was because we were in the same dimension. But now that Seutandal is a part of middle earth..... Huk!”

In other words, the Seutandal penalty was also applied to middle earth?

“What, what the? So in the future I won’t be able to summon my pets?”

Ark’s eyes darkened as he belatedly realised this fact. Hadn’t he spend 1 year raising his pets? And now they weren’t going to be there in the future.... It was too terrible to even imagine.

“N-no. It can’t be!”

From then on Ark started to wildly look for a solution. And he unexpectedly found a way through Magaro’s diary. Magaro’s diary stated that he applied the Letter Movement technology to a portable object after coming to the Netherworld. The ‘Summoning Port’ was a similar object to the Letter Movement tower where the target was registered to a particular location and could be summoned with no restrictions. It was a by-product of Magaro’s research to raise Seutandal. However, the Summoning Port only worked with contracted summons so he abandoned it.

“Phew, fortunately he is still helping me even after he died.”

He realized once again that it was a game. An unexpected problem would always have a resolution to it.

“Anyway, if I accomplish this then Razak and Dedric can be summoned again?”

But there were still problems remaining. There were no Summoning Ports manufactured in Magaro’s laboratory. He had the plans but

rare magic ingredients, advanced magic and advanced alchemy was required to create the Summoning Port. Therefore Ark commissioned the Magic Institute to create it for him.

“Ahh, here it is. Hoo, such a method..... As expected, Magaro really is a genius.”

Shannen made more exclamations as he browsed through the data and materials required for it.

“How long would you take to create it?” “There structure isn’t that complicated so it should only take one day. I’ll tell the workshop to produce it with top priority. But the necessary ingredients are quite rare so the price will be expensive. Let’s see, it’s 700 gold for 1 piece.”

Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped.

“C-can’t you give me a small discount?”

“I’m sorry but it’s difficult. As you can see, this requires a lot of rare ingredients. I’ve deducted the labour costs and this is just the price for the materials. If I added labour costs then it would be over 800 gold.”

Ark knew that as he had also seen the blueprints. ‘Eyes of Saraku,’ ‘Modified Breath,’ ‘Mana Power’ and so on.....all the magic ingredients needed for the Summoning Port were expensive. In addition, if a normal users asked for it then they would’ve had to pay 1000 gold. He thought he could get a discount since his intimacy was high but Shannen wouldn’t budge.

‘Dammit, the income needed as a side effect of Magaro’s quest seems like it is more than the reward.....’

As expected, living wasn’t that easy.

‘Two Summoning Ports will cost 1,400 gold. That is probably half of the revenue I’ve obtained from Magaro’s laboratory. His anger felt like exploding when he thought about it but he had no other choice.

His pets were worth 700 gold to Ark. They were an indispensable

existence.

‘But I’m still lucky. If someone else had raised Seutandal then I would’ve had to search for a way and then spend 2,000 gold. Fortunately, I got the quest to look for Magaro’s laboratory and found the Summoning Ports there. The value of the items in the laboratory will also cover the costs for the Ports.’

.....Thoughts like that were more beneficial to his mental health.

“I understand. I’ll calculate it when I come tomorrow.”

“Then we’ll start working on it straight away.”

Shannen smiled and headed towards the workshop.

“Come, follow me.”

The young magician sighed as he approached Ark.

‘Yes, I know. This is the Magic Institute’s reward.’

In the past Ark had gone to the 10th floor. There had been items worth hundreds of gold there. But this time it was the 15th floor. What kind of items would there be? Ark imagined the Magic Institute’s rewards and eagerly followed.

“It’s really amazing. This is the first time I’ve seen the 15th floor. Naturally it is also the first time a foreigner has been here. No, I’m sorry. You’re not a foreigner but a regular member of the Institute. Anyway, the 10th floor treasure is amazing so I can’t even fathom how much the treasure on the 15th floor will be worth.”

The magician spoke in a trembling voice as they appeared in front of the doors. He stared at Ark with an impressed and respectful look.

“I’d love to see it too but unfortunately I don’t have permission. I’ll wait here so please enter. As you know, there is only one choice. Once you select it, you won’t get another chance even if you are a member of the Magic Institute.”

“Did you hear that? Don’t eat something selfishly this time.”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun licked his tongue with an apologetic expression. Ark finally entered after giving the firm advice.

“Indeed.....!”

A sound of admiration naturally flowed from Ark's mouth. The number of items on the 15th floor were much lower than the 10th floor. Each type had only 1 item. But even with a glance, he could tell that the Magic Institute had put a lot of value into these items. As expected, it was like torture picking just one item. However Ark had experienced this situation before. Thanks to that, he had already decided in his heart.

“It must be a sword, a sword!”

It was the most expensive and frequently traded item! Of course, Ark had the very rare Gwisal's sword. It's attack power and performance were top of the line! On the other hand, the defense on his armour was quite low compared to his level. But it didn't matter. If he had to pick among all those items then a good sword would get him more money.

‘I have to choose carefully. Of course, the value of most items would likely be similar. That's only when selling to NPCs of course. The price is different when selling to NPCs compared to selling to users.’

In fact, if Ark sold Gwisal's sword to a NPC then he would only receive 600~700 gold. That's because NPCs only think of it as a rare level 180 sword. However it was different on the auction site. Depending on the buyer, he could receive between 1,000 and 1,500 gold for it. On the other hand, rare defense items would only receive a maximum of 1,000 gold. Although they gave a lot of defense, he didn't see the point of picking an item that would sell for 500 gold less.

‘There's two swords, a one-handed and two-handed sword.’

This section also caused Ark conflict. It was the 15th floor so it was guaranteed that both swords would be high quality. They both looked wonderful to his eyes. The one-handed sword didn't have any special decorations but seemed to have great damage. Meanwhile,

the two-handed sword had a glossy black surface that looked like the scales of a reptile. In general, warriors used shields so they preferred a one-handed sword. Naturally there would be many buyers so the price would increase. However, currently Ark was immersed in the charms of the two-handed sword. Also, his 'Drastic Measures' skill was one that could only be used with a two-handed sword.

'The one-handed sword is good if I only consider selling, but if the two-handed sword is similar to Gwisal's sword then it would be better. I'll be able to use it as much as I want and then sell it. And the rare two-handed sword has a higher chance of learning advanced skills than the one-handed sword.'

In any case, there was guaranteed to be a benefit no matter what he chose.

'Now, money or utilization.....'

He had to make a choice on which would be more beneficial. After worrying for a while, an item he had forgotten about flashed through his head.

'Oh, yes! Perhaps this will be useful.'

Ark took out a small copper coin. It was a 1 copper coin with scratches all over it..... Not long ago, a user visiting Ark's Comprehensive Store didn't have enough money and asked if this could be worth 1 gold. Ark honestly wasn't incline to agree, but it was the early stages so he accepted it to secure the customers. However, it was a very interesting item.

-Lucky Coin (Special)

Sometimes old coins that merchants carry around will become lucky.

With making a difficult decision, there is a 65% probability that this coin will predict a good outcome. But that is all it does. The merchant who blindly believed this coin decided everything using it and became bankrupt.

A 65% probability was quite vague. Although there was a benefit, there was also a 35% chance of receiving damage. However, Ark was guaranteed a benefit no matter what he chose. Then wasn't a 65% chance to get a better result worth it?

"If it's heads then I'll chose the two-handed sword while it's the one-handed sword for tails!"

Ark closed his eyes and threw the coin upwards. Then he caught it with the back of his hand and opened his eyes.

"Tails..... The one-handed sword?"

But Ark quietly frowned. It was a strange thing but the two-handed sword was definitely more tempting. Ark hesitated repeatedly before finally picking the two-handed sword.

"Isn't a coin just a coin? I've never believed in such things!"

The display cases closed with a mechanical sound after he picked his reward. At the same time, the information window about the two-handed sword flashed in front of Ark.

Promised Sword (Rare)

Weapon type: Two-Handed Sword

Attack: 40~50

Durability: 200/200

Weight: 45

User Restriction: Level 250, Advanced Sword Mastery skill

An ancient sword inscribed with complex magic symbols. The symbols engraved on the sword can't be decrypted using the current knowledge. However, the aura it gives off indicates that there is still an undisclosed hidden secret. There is also a space to fit something between the sword blade and hilt. It seems related to the sword's secret.

<Option: Strength +20, Stamina +10>

<Socket (4)>

“Eh?”

Ark became frustrated at the sight of the information window. Attack was 40~50. It was the same as Gwisal's sword which had a level restriction of 180. In addition, agility and reaction rate in Gwisal's sword was more rare than the common strength and stamina option. And there wasn't even a special option attached to the sword. The only suspicious feature was the four sockets.

“Damn, was the coin's choice correct?”

The value of a sword was its attack power. But to be on the same standard as a level 180 sword? It was a level 250 rare sword but it would be difficult to get a decent price for it. People would pay 2 or 3 times more for a better sword. On the other hand, there would be a lot of curious looks. That's because there have been no socketed weapons seen in New World yet.

‘Weren't socketed weapons common in the old online games? Then the performance should be able to be upgraded..... Yes, it is still too early to be disappointed. If you can socket items then the performance will definitely improve. Do you know? Wouldn't it be an awesome item if I filled the sockets?’

“That is your choice?”

“Yes.”

When he exited and answered the magician's question, there was a ringing sound and the information window appeared.

<Study the Mirage> quest has been completed.

<All the quests related to the genius alchemist Magaro have been finished>

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.

||-Your level has risen.....||

He started the quest at level 120 and finally finished it when he was level 300! The amount of experience for all that time invested was enormous. He reached the limit after going up 10 levels. After completing the quest, Ark exited the Magic Institute to look at his warehouse and laboratory.

“Character information window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +450		
Fame	11,425 (+500)	Level	314
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of the World Tree, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member		
Health	5,005 (+150)	Mana	4,995
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	602 (+28)
Agility	829 (+55)	Stamina	952 (+20)
Wisdom	118 (+10)	Intelligence	971
Luck	112 (+60)	Flexibility	127
Art of Communication	66	Affection	57 (+10)
Resilience	415		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics	138		

* Equipment item effects

Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.

Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%

Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10

*<King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20

Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3

Wind Spirit's Boots (Shoes): Agility + 30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Slide' available

Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

- * Shock absorption is increased by 20%.
- * Poison resistance has increased by 50%.
- * 10% increased attack and defense
- * Skill points: 30

After finishing everything, Ark was now level 314. He had finished a few large quests after the battle against the Nakujuk. Now there's only two remaining quests remaining, <Find New Settlers> and the <Home of the Fire Draconian> Well, <Home of the Fire Draconian> would be completed when he went to the Bristania Kingdom and the <Find New Settlers> quest was only a matter of time. After Seutandal rose, there were some Baran members who returned while others stayed at Lancel village. Thanks to Galen's enthusiastic persuasion, the quest completion was at 95%. The remaining 5% would be filled quickly if Ark actually went out looking for residents.

'Shall I receive the Summoning Ports and then return to Seutandal?'

The problem was that he could only receive the Summoning Ports after paying the required 1,400 gold.

'But that's not all. I have to visit that place that Razak and Dedric had been forcefully recalled to. Hah, it is somewhat pathetic. All the money I'm investing..... Now I have to act like a home room teacher and visit the homes of my pets.'

Ark sighed and walked around. He never thought things would become so difficult after Seutandal rose. But he couldn't move manually across the ocean every time his pets died.

"It can't be helped. I can't just leave them alone. Once I have the Summoning Ports then I can choose a location. Kekeke, eh? What, what the?"

It was at that time. Ark suddenly felt like he was being sucked into a vacuum cleaner. After a few minutes, he appeared in a place with lots of gold coins strewn around. Ark sighed with relief and shook his head. It was none other than Ark's spirit world. If he came here then

the culprit was obvious. Yggdrasil and Yuzuria were sitting nearby.

“What’s going on all of a sudden? Can you come into someone else’s spirit world without permission? I’m surprised!”

-Hehehe, I’m sorry.

Yggdrasil smiled with a spiteful face.

-I called a couple of times but you didn’t answer.

“Called?”

-Didn’t you feel it?

That reminded him that he felt his bag shake earlier. But he thought it was just his imagination so he ignored it.

But if it was the Sacred Branch then it was similar to a phone being set on vibration mode..... If they wanted to add such functions then they should’ve made a ringtone mode.

-Yggdrasil, there’s no time to talk about such things.

Yuzuria spoke in a curt voice.

Although Yuzuria looked like a young lady, she was actually the same age as Yggdrasil. But wasn’t Yggdrasil rejuvenated thanks to the newborn Popo? Yggdrasil nodded before opening his mouth.

-That’s right. Ark, I wanted to thank you once again for helping Yuzuria. But I’ve come to the conclusion that you’ve been tricked by the Red Man.

“Huh? Tricked?”

Ark’s face became tense as the Red Man was brought into the conversation. The Red Man was a powerful enemy who was unable to be traced. In addition, the huge skyray that disappeared after the dimensional storm was over weighed on his mind.

-Actually, it’s only after talking to Yuzuria that I know all the circumstances. In the past, the Red Man came down to the Underground World for the cursed dragon. But his purpose wasn’t

just to release Nídhöggur. His real purpose was to find a Sacred Branch.

“A Sacred Branch?”

-Yes, his purpose was to use it to revive Yuzuria. But at that time I passed all my power to Popo so he couldn't find it.

“Wait a minute. The Red Man's purpose was the resurrection of Yuzuria? Why?”

-That's what I'm going to explain.

Yuzuria raised her body after Ark made a confused expression.

-You've heard the circumstances behind why Seutandal sank to the bottom dimension? It's because I was drained of all my power stopping that horrible magic. But that's not all.

Yuzuria looked like she was going through her past memories.

-It's a stupid thing, but I had forgotten about it until Seutandal rose. The real reason I sealed Seutandal..... It was to seal the Dark Lord's strong aerial fortress, the Rwigenberg. If the Rwigenberg had remained on middle earth then the dark forces on it would have destroyed all the species in middle earth. The Rwigenberg had enough power to wipe out the torn middle earth.

“The aerial fortress Rwigenberg? Does it look like a giant skyray.....?”

-Yes, that's the body of the Rwigenberg where the Dark Lord's throne was. When the last magic was activated, the Rwigenberg was targeting Seutandal and I managed to seal it up with Seutandal in the dimensional gap. The Red Man's purpose was not to revive me, but to extract the Rwigenberg.

“Rwigenberg? Wait? Then the purpose of the Red Man is?”

-I don't know who he is but his goal must be the resurrection of the Dark Lord, that's the only thing I can think of. And now he will become more active after getting his hands on the Rwigenberg.

Ark's head started thinking wildly after hearing Yuzuria's description.

Now he understood the Red Man. The Red Man made a plan that had two purposes, the conquest of Seutandal by the Nakujuk and the retrieval of Rwigenberg. Thanks to Ark planting Yuzuria at Haman Fortress, he had blocked his plans for conquering Seutandal. But in the end, the Red Man still achieved his true purpose of recapturing Rwigenberg. That was why the Red Man mentioned that it was half a success.

'That cheeky bastard.....!'

His anger exploded at the idea. On the other hand, he was one step closer towards finding out the Red Man's identity. Even though he wasn't an NPC, Ark still thought the Red Man was a user related to the success or failure of the examination. No, he became even more convinced. He couldn't believe that normal users would have such incredibly high levels and skills and was proceeding with the scenarios in New World by themselves..... So wouldn't he be related to the game publishing company?

'I don't know but he might be the supervisor of the candidates and is scoring their examinations. I should try not to swear when I meet him again.'

Ark made a promise to himself. Anyway, if he was the supervisor then more information was needed.

"Do you know what he's going to do in the future?"

-I can't tell. And you have more important things than him to think about.

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

-This is the actual reason why we called you.

Yggdrasil spoke in a serious voice.

-Do you remember what I said in the past? That it's not possible to find the last fragment of Hero Maban's three marvels in middle earth.

“Yes, I do. It may be in a different dimension..... Eh? Wait? Different dimension?”

Yggdrasil nodded.

-Yes, it's exactly what you're thinking. I immediately felt the presence of the Three Marvels after Seutandal rose to middle earth.

“W-where is it?”

Ark ran up to Yggdrasil and asked. He hadn't been able to figure out whereabouts of the last Three Marvels. If he found it then he would receive enormous power. After the three fragments were collected then he could receive his 2nd stage profession. Then he might be able to fight against the Red Man. But Yggdrasil wore a slightly ambiguous expression.

-That..... I don't know the exact location. It's exactly 2,600 kilometres from me in Seutandal.

-Heung, are you familiar with Hero Maban? Apart from the raccoons, you're not familiar with any beast clans. Isn't that why you have to grasp the relics left by Hero Maban? It'll be wonderful if you are able to grasp the location without knowing the people who have it.

-Sheesh, don't talk like that.....

Yggdrasil stared at Yuzuria with an unpleasant expression. Ark listened to their conversation before quickly saying.

“Wait a minute. Then wouldn't Yuzuria also know the distance of the Three Marvels?”

-I know that much. It is roughly 700 kilometres from my location.

“That's it!”

Ark's eyes brightened and he nodded.

The world trees probably weren't aware of this concept but he could use triangulation. In other words, 2600 kilometres away from

Yggdrasil. And it was 700 kilometres away from Yuzuria. If he drew a straight line from those two places then there were only two possible overlapping places. The place where the two straight lines overlapped was in a triangular shape. In other words, using the map he could roughly guess the location of the Three Marvels. Ark applied this idea to the map and found two locations. However, it was a place that hadn't been displayed on his map (The Big Sea). It was an area on the other side of Seutandal.

-Huh, you..... You're smarter than you look.

What? Smarter than he looked? Wasn't it possible to learn this in primary school? However, there were no primary schools in New World and the world trees wouldn't have been educated.

-Now that it is certain the Red Man is trying to resurrect the Dark Lord, someone needs to stand up to him. There are numerous heroes on the continent, but only you who has inherited Hero Maban's legacy knows enough to thwart the plot.

Every word they spoke pushed him forward down the path. Well, good. It should be to this degree. Ark left the spirit world and returned to Giran.

"Now, his purpose has become clear. Anyway, The Red Man isn't just going to appear obediently when I want him to..... Before that, I have to settle my summoning problem and find the last Three Marvels. Let's go to Seutandal....."

He moved forward at a vigorous pace. Suddenly Ark heard a loud ringing sound in his ears. Why was somebody disturbing him when he had just enthusiastically started moving? Ark was very annoyed and was tempted to ignore it. But it might be a call from the hospital so Ark exited the unit and picked up the phone.

"Hello."

"Ah, is this Ark-nim?"

Hyun-woo frowned after he heard the voice on the phone.

The hospital wouldn't know his game ID.

“So what? Who are you?”

“I’m Ho Myung-hwan and I work in Global Exos Planning Department!”

Management's Special Target

‘What’s happening all of a sudden?’

Hyun-woo looked around with nervous eyes. It was 11 a.m. and the cafe was empty because it was before the lunch hour. The reason Hyun-woo was at the cafe at this hour was because of the phone call he received a little while ago. The person who called was Ho Myung-hwan from the Planning Department of Global Exos.

“I can’t talk to you over the phone. Let’s meet up. Where’s a convenient place for you?”

Ho Myung-hwan called him out without any explanations after confirming that his ID was Ark. It had been 1 year since he joined the company’s entrance examination and started New World. Global Exos had never contacted him once. In fact, he had been feeling quite restless about that point. After all, they were candidates for the entrance examination. Shouldn’t someone from the management level have contacted him at least once? Nevertheless, there had been no contact. If he interpreted it in a good way then it meant there wasn’t any problems with him. If it was bad then it meant the company wasn’t interested in him. There could also be a happy medium. That was why Hyun-woo was in his present location.

‘Suddenly meeting this way.....’

The sudden contact might be a good thing or a bad thing. Was it related to a business matter? At that time, there was an audible jingling sound and someone entered the cafe. It was a young man in his mid-20s with a stocky physique. He looked around restlessly until he saw Hyun-woo sitting near the window and approached.

“Are you Ark-nim?”

Hyun-woo replied with a serious expression.

“Ah yes, I’m Ark.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Ho Myung-hwan who called you.”

Ho Myung-hwan handed over a business card like it was a familiar behaviour.

“I’m sorry. I don’t have any business cards.....”

“It’s okay. Ark-nim’s telephone number is registered on my computer. Your real name is Kim Hyun-woo right? But I’ve read your reports so the name Ark is more familiar to me. May I call you Ark-nim?”

“Yes, I’m comfortable with that so it is fine.....”

Hyun-woo was now just as comfortable being called Ark as well as his real name. Just like most first meetings, it became awkward after the greetings were over.

“But you look a little different from my imagined image.”

“Huh?”

“I’ve seen Ark participating in New World twice. The first time was in the finals of the Evil Silrion and the second was a video posted on the official site some time ago. Both times you looked like a muscular black wolf. So I involuntary imagined a muscular user.”

Although he hadn’t gone to the police gym for a while, Hyun-woo had been consistently exercising. However, Hyun-woo learnt taekwondo and hadn’t built up his muscles like a bodybuilder. Of course, he had a muscular body from the exercising but it wasn’t obvious with his clothes. He also couldn’t ignore his lacking diet on the effects of his exercise. But that wasn’t why Ho Myung-hwan said it was different from his imagination. The Ark in New World that Buksil captured seemed like a lively and eloquent speaker. Compared to Buksil and Lariette, he was able to make the elders of the Baran clan succumb with a few words. However, he seemed to have an introverted nature after meeting in person.

‘Well, it’s not uncommon in online games for the personality of the character to be completely different from reality.’

Sometimes a quiet person would completely change when they

grabbed the steering wheel. Online games were similar. When a reticent person connected to a game for the first time, they might become completely talkative or specialized in PK.

‘There are also people like that. By the way..... Why is he vaguely familiar?’

Ho Myung-hwan tilted his head to one side as he looked at Hyun-woo’s face. Obviously this was his first meeting with Hyun-woo. But somehow he was slightly familiar. Was it the overall silhouette or atmosphere? He wasn’t able to grasp it so he just asked.

“Have we ever met somewhere before?”

“Huh? Met somewhere?”

“No, you just look somewhat familiar.”

“Well, this is the first time we’ve met. The only other possible time was when I went to the Global Exos interview.”

“No, it wasn’t then..... I’ve seen you somewhere very recently.....”

Yes, Ho Myung-hwan had seen Hyun-woo. Not as Ark who turned himself into Dark Wolf, but the real Hyun-woo. The incident he was trying to remember was when Hyun-woo’s fight scene was captured on a video. Ho Myung-woo thought that he was the same user who defeated Valderas in the Event Quest and made Ho Myung-hwan search for him. However, the phone quality wasn’t that great and the distance too far so Ho Myung-hwan wasn’t able to see Hyun-woo’s face. Thanks to that, Ho Myung-hwan couldn’t recognize Hyun-woo even when they were sitting across from each other. The only clue that connected the two of them was Hyun-woo’s report on the Event Quest and that had already been disposed of. Ho Myung-hwan had looked at that video more than a dozen times. So although he couldn’t see the face, he felt like Hyun-woo was somewhat familiar.

‘Something seems to be stopping me from remembering..... Where did I see him? I think it was important.....’

But Ho Myung-hwan did not pursue it further.

Bururu.

‘Huk, what, what the?’

While Ho Myung-hwan was looking through his memories, he suddenly started shivering and felt cold. He didn’t know why, but he felt like he shouldn’t pursue it further. His animal instincts had sent him a warning. This was dangerous! If he took one more step into the forbidden box then it would be irreversible! He was struck by such a fear. The person who had instilled such fear in Ho Myung-hwan was none other than the captain of the number 1 SWAT team, Lee Myung-ryong.

Ho Myung-hwan had been looking for the main character of the video and received a hot baptism from Lee Myung-ryong who misunderstood the situation. It was a threat to his life that he had received for the first time since he had been born! How many times had he been plagued by nightmares after that day? Thanks to that, everything related to the video was now a trauma for Ho Myung-hwan. Therefore Ho Myung-hwan never imagined that Hyun-woo was the main character of the video. No, he had completely forgotten about the video after that day. Nevertheless, the sight of Hyun-woo seemed to trigger the trauma so he slammed a brake on those thoughts. The mysteries of the human body were truly amazing. No, the truly amazing thing was the amount of trauma that Lee Myung-ryong implanted..... This was the reason that even violent gangsters would run when they heard the name Lee Myung-ryong. Ho Myung-hwan shook his head quickly and got rid of his anxiety.

“I’m sorry. I guess I made a mistake.”

“Are you not feeling well?”

Hyun-woo asked in a concerned voice after seeing Ho Myung-hwan suddenly sweating.

“Let’s see? It doesn’t seem like a cold..... Hahaha, don’t worry about it.”

‘Why do I have chills all of a sudden? Is my body a little weak these

days? Do I have to start taking energy pills?’

But Ho Myung-hwan didn’t know the real reason why he was feeling chills. Because the memories of that day and the video had been completely sealed. It was sad but under the threat of predators, herbivores had the ability to forget in order to live. Ho Myung-hwan cleared his throat in order to change the atmosphere.

“Hum hum, now what was I saying?”

“You haven’t told me anything yet?”

“Ah, is that so?”

Ho Myung-hwan scratched his head before looking through his bag. Hyun-woo watched him for a while and hesitated before speaking.

“I’m a little curious. Have you contacted any of the other original candidates?”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“The entrance examination has started over a year ago. In the meantime, I’ve never received one email from Global Exos. They never said anything even after I’ve sent in my monthly reports. Did that happen with everyone?”

“T-that is…….”

Ho Myung-hwan looked a bit embarrassed at Hyun-woo’s question. But after a moment, he grinned politely and nodded.

“Yes, that is the company’s policy. We wanted the candidates to play freely without feeling the burden of being in an exam. I can’t tell you all the details since it is confidential, but solving the challenges set by us is the core of the examination. If we contacted the candidates then they would have no choice but to feel burdened.”

It was a lie. It wasn’t already strange hiring new employees based on the game results. In addition, candidates taking the test were paid 1.5 million won every month. It wasn’t a large amount of for person but there were 2,000 people! The cost for 1 month would come out at approximately 3 billion won. No matter how high their

annual sales, even Global Exos couldn't invest that much money on a simple test. Global Exos initiated such a strange test because their project was more important than hiring new employees. The true purpose of the test was to find what the game developer Park Woo-seong had hidden..... To be more precise, it was to find all the keys to the lock on New World, in other words the master code! For now, no one knew what form it existed in. All they knew was that Park Woo-seong sent Global Exos an email stating it was related to the 'ultimate goal of the game' before disappearing.

That was why Global Exos was willing to spend all that money on an examination test. They only chose 2,000 people from all the ones that applied. The screening criteria was not based on their education background or previous history. Global Exos just looked at the candidates 'online gaming experience.' Gamers were more likely to find the master code for New World than businessmen. So even if the person only had a middle school education, as long as they were experienced gamers then they were invited to take the test. While Hyun-woo was faking his resume, he half-jokingly wrote down that he had '10 years gaming experience' so he was confident with games. But Global Exos were unable to watch over every step of this project. So from the beginning, the Planning Department had close contact with the candidates classified as the top ranking. On the other hand, they completely ignored Hyun-woo who was classified in the eliminated category. He would probably still be in the same situation if it wasn't for Buksil's video. Anyway, Hyun-woo now emerged as a viable candidate thanks to his actions in Seutandal. In such a situation, there was no need to offend him. As a viable candidate, the Planning Department desperately needed Hyun-woo's friendship and cooperation. Fortunately, Hyun-woo believed him.

"That's right. Then why have you contacted me today.....?"

"It is thanks to the mid-test check of the examination."

"Mid-test check?"

"Yes, one year has passed since the examination began like you said. But the period isn't that important. As the director discussed in the first interview, the company is placing a lot of time and funds into

this test.”

“I’m aware of that.”

“One year isn’t important, it could be 2 years or 3 years depending on the progress. But a year has passed and management has deemed it necessary for a mid-test check.”

“I still don’t understand what you are saying.”

“I’ll explain it simply. We mentioned that acceptance would depend on whether the candidate meets a ‘special condition’ in the game. So it’s not an exaggeration to say that everybody is in the same boat. But certain levels and standards is still required to meet the ‘special condition.’ It’s not like a lottery where the candidate could just meet the special condition.”

“Well I guess not.”

Hyun-woo nodded. It was natural when considering the format of the examination. Like Ho Myung-hwan said, some people might just coast along in the game in order to receive free money. If the examination assessed the understanding and application in the game, it was natural that a few checkpoints had to be cleared to reach the goal. Of course, Hyun-woo’s thinking and Global Exos’ was slightly different. Global Exos was just guessing at where Park Woo-seong hid the master code. So their viewpoints were different but they were still trying to achieve a similar goal.

“During this time, the Planning Department has been going over the candidate’s reports. Depending on their level, quest advancement or gameplay, 50% of the original group will be eliminated. You can think of it as the first test. All the candidates that have passed the first test will receive increased support.”

Ho Myung-hwan smiled and spoke.

“And Ark-nim has passed the first test.”

“R-really?”

Hyun-woo raised his head and exclaimed.

“Of course. Ark-nim is the one who raised Seutandal and started episode III. Is that all? The video taken of you by Buksil has received over 300,000 hits. Isn't the video also being broadcast as a special story on the game exclusive TV spot next week? There is no reason why a candidate who achieved such things would fail the first test. No, it just makes your application look even better.

“Huh? That video will be aired on TV?”

“Of course. The station has already paid for the copyright-related costs.....”

“The broadcast station is even paying money?”

“Yes, that's what I've heard. Didn't you know?”

“Oh, no, I knew. I'm just surprised to hear it from someone else.”

Hyun-woo said such things but anger welled up in his heart.

‘That Buksil bastard.....!’

He had thought it was strange. Buksil had gone through so much trouble and was still deprived of Magaro's legacy. Nevertheless, there had been no complaints even before the 10% sales fee and it was because he was receiving money from a back door! It was like he had been slapped in the back of his head out of nowhere. After all, Hyun-woo was entitled to a share. The video was taken using Buksil's magic projector. It also wasn't secretly taken but he had filmed with permission. And wasn't the main character of the movie Ark?

‘What a wily young pig, selling the rights to the video without even telling me.’

He had probably thought Hyun-woo wouldn't find out about it. Hyun-woo started contemplating how to cook the pig. Then he heard Ho Myung-hwan's voice again.

“Ark-nim's gameplay is very interesting when looking through your previous reports. There is a lot of appreciation this time for managing to raise Seutandal. Ark has passed the first test and will

receive the full support of the company for the second test.”

Ho Myung-hwan straightened his shoulders and laughed.

‘Isn’t that good? It’s good. Really good, huhu.’

“Well, I was the one who originally recommended Ark-nim.”

“Ho Myung-hwan ssi?”

“Yes, in fact your previous evaluation reports weren’t that good. In the past there was talk about eliminating you. But I strongly protested. I saw something different in Ark-nim compared to the other candidates. In many ways your performance was still immature, but I was sure you would pass. So I managed to defer your elimination. I’m just an employee but I have a little bit of power. In the end, it all went according to my words.”

Ho Myung-hwan said with a proud look.

“Thank you. Thank you very much. I’ll work hard!”

Hyun-woo bowed a few times and thanked him. He was angry at Buksil but now wasn’t the time for such thoughts. There were 2,000 candidates so the competitive rate of being selected was 200:1! While some people had just graduated from college, others like Alan were able to splurge a lot of money on the game. On the other hand, having spirit wasn’t enough to penetrate the 200:1 competitive rate which was similar to him winning the lottery. If he had to give up halfway.....

Hyun-woo’s thoughts were then interrupted.

“After passing the first test, the mode for the candidates has slightly changed. So far we’ve just checked the reports, but the number of candidates has decreased so we can supervise more closely.”

“How?”

“First, please receive this.”

Ho Myung-hwan pulled out an equipment the size of a hard drive.

“This is a device that can be attached to the game unit. While the

game is loaded after attaching this, all video feeds from the game will be automatically sent to the company's headquarters. We can monitor Ark-nim's gameplay without the need for reports. The video will be used for evaluation and publicity material."

"Wait a minute. All of my gameplay will be saved?"

"Yes, is there a problem?"

"A problem....."

There was one. It was a big problem. There were many parts of Hyun-woo's gameplay that couldn't be shown. If they saved all his gameplay then wouldn't they see his lousy actions such as threatening the Three Pig Brothers and Sid, as well as cheating the NPCs? Of course, Hyun-woo's conscience wasn't affected by his actions but he couldn't tell what other people would think. In addition, it might even cause problems for Hyun-woo's businesses. His method of setting up a trading post in Lancel village, Seutandal and even Silvana was close to fraud. Of course, it was rare for the game developers to interfere directly with the game but there was Alan's example in the past. Alan aimed for the loophole in the system and managed to avoid the challenge of other guilds. As soon as they were informed, the system was update and that method blocked off. Hyun-woo didn't want changes in the rules to affect his businesses. No, Hyun-woo might get punished even more as a candidate compared to normal users.

'It can't happen. All of my struggles.....'

How much trouble had he gone through to set up trading posts in Lancel, Seutandal and Silvana? In addition, how much money had he invested into it? Even now he was still pouring a huge amount of money and time into it, but it was a long term plan that would give him the goose that laid golden eggs. Hyun-woo would cry if there were any problems with any of his businesses. Of course, in the viewpoint of a candidate there were no big problems. But what would happen if he joined Global Exos? Cash transactions for game items were legally allowed but it was different if he was an employee of the company. That's why Hyun-woo hadn't mentioned his various projects and items sold on his reports.

‘While the annual salary of a Global Exos employee can reach 100 million, the first few years it would only be around 5,000~6000. With an income of 5~6 million won per month, it’s not enough for my living costs and the hospital bills.’

Of course, if Hyun-woo passed then he could make money separately in the game. But if all his gameplay was viewed by the company then it would be an issue.

‘Joining Global Exos or the online game. Needless to say, both are important.’

At first, he thought he would do anything as long as he joined Global Exos. But his thinking had changed a little while in New World. If Hyun-woo summarized his assets from his bank balance, the lease contract and the amount invested in Lancel village, he had approximately 90 million won. There was also the 5 million won he earned approximately every month for a year. It was hard to believe, but in one year he had managed to earn 150 million won from New World. Of course, the support salary from Global Exos was included but it was still more than the salary of an average Global Exos employee. If Ark completed his trade routes and planned then his income would jump even more. Still, the reason Hyun-woo wanted to join the company was because he never imagined it thanks to his educational background. In addition, the game was a game. He could receive that kind of income in New World now but he never knew when that would change.

‘Mother also asked Gwon Hwa-rang ajusshi how I was making all that money. She never expressed it but she wants me to get a decent job and have a stable life. If I get a job at Global Exos then the monthly salary will steadily rise and might become more than the income I get from the game.’

Hyun-woo had to pass the company examination somehow for his mother. He had finally passed the first test. 50% of the candidates had been dropped so the competitive rate was now 10:1. Was it possible to give up his current income when he didn’t know if he would pass the test or not? The other problem was that he wouldn’t be able to afford the costs of living and hospital bills if he gave up his

current income.

“What’s wrong?”

“No..... Are you sure I have to wear the equipment?”

“That’s the company’s policy.”

“But didn’t you just say that the company’s policy was to allow the candidates to play freely without any pressure? If you’re monitoring all my gameplay then of course it would be a burden.”

“Ugh, t-that is.....”

Ho Myung-hwan looked embarrassed as he was unable to refute Hyun-woo’s logic.

“I’m just telling you what my superiors have directed me to.”

Ho Myung-hwan panicked at Hyun-woo’s counterattack and was only able to say that he received instructions from his superiors. Hyun-woo thought for a moment before sighing and shaking his head.

“Then I’ll have to give up the entrance examination.”

“Huh? What do you mean? Give up on the test?”

“It’s just like I said. I don’t want videos to be taken of my gameplay. Thanks to Global Exos’ policy, I’ve been playing the game freely. It was because I played freely that I was able to pass the first test.”

“I understand what you’re saying. But we have no intention of interfering while monitoring you. It is literally just monitoring. All we will do is watch.”

“But I have a timid personality so if Global Exos is watching then I won’t be able to play like I do now. Eventually I’ll just fail the test. So it is better for me to give up early and play the game more comfortably.”

The choice Hyun-woo selected was inevitable. Playing the game with the device attached wasn’t a problem. However, if they saw Hyun-woo’s wicked actions then it would be impossible for him to receive a good evaluation. It was highly unlikely that he would make it pass

the second test and would end up failing. And they might apply sanctions or severe consequences to the projects that Hyun-woo currently had in progress. If so, it would be better to just give up and focus on his businesses.

‘Unfortunately it can’t be helped. I absolutely can’t give up the businesses.’

Of course, giving up the test also wasn’t a simple matter. If he gave up the exam then he had to return the game unit. Although putting everything in order with the lease business, he would have no money to afford a game unit.

‘For the moment, I’ll just have to use the game room while until I save enough money…….’

Hyun-woo sighed at the idea. But Ho Myung-hwan was even more frustrated than Hyun-woo. After an awkward silence, Ho Myung-hwan got up from his seat.

“Please wait a minute. I need to call someone.”

Ho Myung-hwan hurriedly exited the cafe, crouched on the stairs and took out his phone. After a few beeps, the voice of the Chief of the Planning Department Ha Myung-woo was heard.

“Is everything resolved?”

“Ah, no. That’s why I’m calling.”

“Why? What’s the matter?”

“That…… Ark wants to give up on the test.”

“What, what the? What are you saying? How the hell did he come to that conclusion?”

“He didn’t like the fact that we will monitor all of his gameplay.”

“Why is that a problem? Did you explain it properly? We’re just going to monitor and not interfere. Did you say something to offend him?”

“No, I explained it properly.”

Ho Myung-hwan replied while sweating. While Ho Myung-hwan made it sound like they were doing him a favour, monitoring Hyun-woo's game was incredibly important to the Planning Department. After the Planning Department watched the video and discussed it, they thought that Hyun-woo was actually the closest to their goal. Thanks to that, it was necessary to recruit Hyun-woo through any means possible. And the Planning Department was indeed finding prominent users and monitoring them while giving support money. All this painful effort was to find the master code. Thus Ha Myung-woo was willing to commit a significant amount of money to attract Hyun-woo. However, his attitude changed in regards to Hyun-woo.

"You don't have to bother giving him a lot of money. Just use any excuse to get permission to monitor his game."

Thus Ho Myung-hwan called Hyun-woo to meet.

".....Perhaps he has already been contacted by another company?"

Ha Myung-woo asked in an uncomfortable voice after thinking for a moment. The online gaming market had a tremendous capital beyond the public's imagination. And the most important thing in the gaming market was information. Thus various game companies were engaged in a fierce behind the scenes battle in order to obtain these information from the users. Global Exos was a corporate giant that controlled 30% of the online gaming industry. Therefore they were the target of many game companies. And recently Global Exos had no ability to control the main system of New World.....

So other competitors employed professional gamers to sneak into New World in order to obtain information. The so-called spy. Thus the Planning Department of Global Exos couldn't afford to relax. They couldn't imagine what would happen if the master code for New World landed in the hands of their competitors. In order to prevent that worst case situation, they needed to have access to the user most likely to find the master code. It would be a serious problem if Hyun-woo was in contact with their competitors.

"No, there are no signs of that"

"Then it makes no sense. If no one else is meddling then why would

he give up?”

“Well, let’s see. He simply wants to play the game without others watching.....”

“Damn, it can’t be helped. Let’s offer to increase the funding. Offer 1 million won more! That is how much we use when recruiting users that aren’t a candidate.”

“If it’s that much then there is no reason to quit.”

Ho Myung-hwan entered the cafe again with a confident expression.

“I just talked with my team chief right now. But we still need to monitor.....”

“Didn’t I say I was giving up the test?”

“That would be a problem. How about this instead? We’ll increase your current support funding of 1.5 million won to 2.5 million won. This is a privilege that other candidates don’t have.”

“But.....”

Hyun-woo struggled for a while before shaking his head. 2.5 million won a week was equivalent to his old monthly salary at the convenience store. However, it wasn’t possible to exchange it for his ability to make money freely in the game. No, the main problem wouldn’t be solved with an increase in the money.

“I’m sorry. I’m a free spirit.....”

Ho Myung-hwan’s confident face darkened at Hyun-woo’s answer and he excused himself again. Ho Myung-hwan crouched on the stairs and once again heard Ha Myung-woo’s voice on the phone.

“What the? He still wants to give up?”

“Yes, that’s..... He is a free spirit.....”

“Is this a joke?”

“No, that’s what Ark-nim said.”

“Dammit! That bastard, is he crazy? Are we handcuffing him? We’re just monitoring so what’s with this stupid free spirit stuff?”

“What do I do? Will we have to give up at this rate?”

“Don’t be stupid. You were confident about persuading him thanks to reading his reports. There must be another reason for him so stubbornly refusing.”

“What else would it be?”

“He is as cunning as a raccoon. He might’ve already been in contact with the competitors. The other side has probably presented their own terms. He is clearly weighing the conditions. And he became filled with confidence after you appeared.”

“Then.....?”

“Yes, he doesn’t know about the master code but it is clear that our competitors want ‘something’. Even if he’s not in contact with our competitors, it might be a problem if he gives up the test and then finds the master code.”

He heard the sound of Ha Myung-woo grinding his teeth through the phone.

“Okay, it can’t be helped if he is weighting the offers. The competitors don’t know that we are looking for the master code. They’re probably just going around stabbing blindly. In such a situation, they wouldn’t offer more than 3 million won. So we will raise the funding by one more million. And 300 points will be added to his test score. If 300 points are added then he’ll be the top candidate.”

“The test scores are posted separately?”

“Are you stupid? Just say it. Threaten to collect the support money provided so far if he still refuses!”

“But there is a clause in the contract.....”

“Shut up, just use any method possible! Make him accept!”

“Yes, I understand.”

Ho Myung-hwan wiped at his sweat and entered the cafe.

If Hyun-woo didn't give permission then his neck would be on the line.

‘Why is this happening?’

Hyun-woo was also puzzled by Ho Myung-hwan's attitude. He seemed to have met some type of condition after the events in Seutandal. But was it just that? It didn't exactly demonstrate any practical skills. So he couldn't understand why they were clinging to him.

‘I don't know why but 3.5 million won every month and points added to my score.....’

It wasn't something Hyun-woo could easily refuse. However, he still thought maintaining his businesses in New World was better than the support money.

‘Will they offer more money if I hold out?’

Hyun-woo's thoughts were then interrupted. Ho Myung-hwan added in a begging voice.

“This is the maximum amount we can offer.”

‘Looking at that expression, it seems they will not offer any more money.’

So he had no choice but to decline. Hyun-woo shook his head with a sigh and Ho Myung-hwan made a desperate expression.

“It's a request. You've already allowed one video.”

“But having all of my gameplay watched..... It would be different if I could take the videos and upload it.....”

“Huh?”

Ho Myung-hwan's eyes widened.

“Who said you couldn’t do that?”

“I can?”

“We just want to gather information about how a candidate triggers a scenario. Do you think we would watch videos of 1,000 candidates for 24 hours every day? We just want information about the candidate’s quests and how it affects the quest system. We can’t see all the details with the reports which is why a video is required. There is no need for anything except the main situation.”

Hyun-woo and Ho Myung-hwan looked at each other with stupid expressions. They didn’t know how but wasn’t the situation somehow resolved?

‘What the? There wouldn’t have been any problems if you just said so in the first place.’

Hyun-woo thought to himself. But he managed to get an extra 2 million won and 300 points from the misunderstanding. Hyun-woo felt like flying but he didn’t show it. If he hadn’t misunderstood and refused then he didn’t know what conditions would’ve been offered.

“Phew, it can’t be helped. There’s no longer any reason to refuse. I’ll accept as long as I get paid and am allowed to take and send in the videos.”

“Really?” Thank you. Thank you!”

Ho Myung-hwan got up and shook Hyun-woo’s hand. The role of the candidate and supervisor seemed to have changed. Now that things had been cleared up, Ho Myung-hwan wrote up a simple contract.

“There are a few conditions instead of the 24 hour monitoring. It isn’t required when taking a break in town or meeting other players, but you must shoot the scenes of your quests. And once the video has been filmed, it shouldn’t be edited.”

That wasn’t a problem. Apart from the information related to Seutandal and Silvana’s trading post, Hyun-woo saw no need to hide anything else. On the other hand, Global Exos believed that the master code was associated with a quest. Therefore there was a

need to grasp all the candidate's quests. In addition, the condition of no editing was in case Hyun-woo obtained information related to the master code and tried to hide it. So there were no problems because the part that Hyun-woo wanted to hide was different from what Global Exos wanted to see. Hyun-woo suddenly asked as the agreement was being drawn up.

"You said the videos sent could be used as promotional materials?"

"Yes, sometimes the materials is requested by the TV broadcasters or it is used in advertisements. Oh, if that happens then you'll be contacted and a separate performance fee will be paid. In this age, the game character could also be used as publicity."

"It nothing to do with that..... If possible, I don't want my real name of game ID disclosed. I hope for my face to be unknown."

"Do you have some problems?" Ho Myung-hwan asked with a doubtful expression.

"Like I said, I'd like to play the game freely. If other users know too much then I won't be able to concentrate on the game."

"You don't have to worry about that. Such provisions are actually common in promotional materials. I'll contact you in advance if there is ever such a situation."

Ho Myung-hwan was once again very cooperative with Hyun-woo. Then Hyun-woo asked Ho Myung-hwan in a coy voice.

"By the way..... Is the Red Man a character associated with the test?"

He had thought about giving up the test just then but now the situation had changed. Now he had a chance of passing the entrance examination and still getting his golden goose. It was difficult to question the company's staff so he wanted to get as much information as possible.

"Huh? Red Man?"

Ho Myung-hwan repeated in a strange voice. Hyun-woo had met the

Red Man twice on Seutandal. However he had been too far away in the Abyss of Despair to see his face clearly, and when the Red Man attacked Haman Fortress it had been so dusty that Buksil wasn't able to film. Thanks to that, the important Red Man didn't appear in Buksil's video. But Ark obviously thought that Ho Myung-hwan would know who he was talking about.

"There have been several hints. If he wasn't related to the test then it would be impossible to arrange the schemes in the Underground World or on Seutandal."

"Why don't you tell me more?"

Ho Myung-hwan listened closely to Hyun-woo's words. Hyun-woo explained his reasons for thinking that the Red Man was associated with the test. He mentioned his incredible skills and the plot to revive the Dark Lord.....

"Are my thoughts correct about it being one of the test challenges?"

"That..... I cannot tell you yet."

'Indeed! My guess is correct.'

Hyun-woo became even more convinced after Ho Myung-hwan's words. Why would he act like that if the Red Man wasn't a part of the test? But that was Ark's mistake. In fact, even Global Exos wasn't sure what they were looking for. Thanks to Hyun-woo mentioning the Red Man, they might finally have a clue.

'Although it wasn't clearly told, the Red Man clearly is associated with the test. That guy is sweating so much after I mentioned it. If we stay in touch then I might be able to figure out more about the Red Man.'

That was Hyun-woo's thoughts.

'Such a character is really running around New World. Maybe Ark-nim really will find what we are looking for. This is important information! If we use Ark-nim then we might be able to find out more.'

That was Ho Myung-hwan's thoughts.

"Ark-nim is now one of management's special targets so we'll be contacting you more often. I told you that I like the way Ark-nim plays. If you have any concerns then please get in touch with me."

Continue tracking the Red Man. That was the company's main concern now. Hyun-woo accepted Ho Myung hwan's number.

"You never know, we might end up working in the same company."

Hyun-woo and Ho Myung-hwan shook hands firmly before leaving. An incredulous laugh escaped from Hyun-woo's mouth on his way home.

'Huhuhu, what is with this incredible windfall? 3.5 million won in support money and an opportunity to get information from the employees of the company..... Not passing the entrance examination is not just a dream.'

He didn't feel tired anymore. Hyun-woo entered the unit as soon as he arrived home. Everything Hyun-woo wanted to achieve was in there.

Isyuram's Incident Records

"Huhuhu, we've finally arrived!"

An excited voice was heard in the darkness. The person laughing was a huge warrior wearing leather armour and holding a bayonet could be seen.

"Why are you giggling to yourself? Didn't I tell you? Don't relax just yet. If you made even one mistake then all our efforts will be in vain."

"Sheesh, you don't have to explain it again."

The warrior scowled at the woman standing to the side. It was a woman wearing white chain mail and holding a long spear. They were users called Bread and Redian.

"But aren't you excited? It's already been 10 days since we came to this dungeon."

"It's been so long since we've seen sunlight. My skin has become even paler....."

Redian murmured as she looked at the white skin between her collar. Then Bread glanced at her and smirked.

"Huhuhu, isn't it a good thing? You look somewhat sexier."

"Do you want to die?"

"What's wrong with it? It's a good thing."

"Do you want to fight?"

Redian raised her spear, causing Bread to quiver and retreat.

"Stop it, I hate that spear."

"Then why do you exist on provoking me every time? Don't you have a brain? Haven't you learnt your lesson yet?"

“It’s because of the piled up stress. This dungeon is so uninteresting. There isn’t even a common ogre in this thing. The Drakens are so boring. There was only a few of them. It’s so boring I’m about to doze off.”

“You’re just a barbarian..... You’re the only one who would think a few Drakens is uninteresting.”

“A boring thing is boring. Ah, why aren’t there any strong guys?”

“Stop whining and just look for the inscription. There’s not much time left. Fortunately we’ve seemed to have reached the last checkpoint.....”

“Okay. I understand.”

Bread grunted and started searching the nearby statues. The place where Bread and Redian was searching was an underground stone room in a complicated maze. The two people had entered the dungeon 10 days ago and it had taken them a lot of time and backtracking to find this place. Their long journey had begun two months ago when a document dropped from a high level boss called Kalropsu. A quest had been triggered when the document was picked up.

-Asyubell’s Notes

The travel diary of the legendary adventurer Asyubell. Everything is in code so ‘advanced text deciphering’ is required.

<Difficulty: C>

“Oh, Asyubell’s Notes?”

Bread was in the Adventurer’s guild and had heard of Asyubell before. He was such a legendary adventurer that a statue was built of him in front of the Adventurer’s guild. Bread realised the document wasn’t ordinary so he visited Redian and asked her to decipher it. Then he learned a surprising fact.

“This is..... Huge? You picked up something amazing!”

Redian explained in an excited voice.

“You’ve seen the explanation on Asyubell’s statue in front of the Adventurer’s guild? He travelled all over the world and collected items which he donated to the Adventurer’s guild before disappearing. But this document states that Asyubell didn’t donate everything to the guild. Asyubell chose the best items from his collection and hid it in one place. And he scattered hints to this place everywhere.”

The document that Bread found was one of the clues. In his old age, Asyubell wanted to hide all the treasures he had found. Then he sent out a challenge to new adventurers who had a lot of knowledge and experience.

“Then the treasures of the legendary adventurer Asyubell.....?”

“Clearly it would be the finest items.”

Redian smiled and spoke.

“Will you invite me as well?”

“I’ll have to think about it.”

“Don’t be stupid. You wouldn’t be able to find the treasure without my help. The clues Asyubell scattered are hidden behind puzzles. No matter how strong you are against monsters, it would be impossible for you to solve the puzzles. You can’t even decipher this document.”

“Sheesh, I understand. But it’s 7:3.” “6:4. I won’t accept anything less than that. It will be difficult to find a better magician than me. If they decline then wouldn’t rumours spread all over the place? More contenders for the treasure might appear. Isn’t that right?”

“Ugh..... You’re evil but okay. As long as you keep it a secret. Got it?”

“Hohoho, you might have a stone head but at least you can understand things like this.”

“Why does it sound like you’re taking advantage of me?”

“Calm down. Do you want to turn into a stone statue?”

“What the!”

Thus the barbarian and the magician started searching for the treasure. But finding the treasure of the legendary adventurer wasn't that easy. Asyubell's first clue gave a hint to the location of the next clue and they were hidden in absurd locations. Hidden deep in the nest of a herd of wyverns, a Medusa's temple where a person could be turned to stone with just one look and the lair of the horrifying Richi. They were areas that ordinary users wouldn't even dare go near. Bread and Redian had also died a few times and revived in the magic kingdom of Bristania. Every time they found a clue, the quest difficulty would also increase and now it was an +A difficulty. But the two of them became even more motivated as the difficulty increased. It was because the reward would become even bigger the more time and effort was invested into the quest. Just like that, one and a half months passed. The two of them had finally collected all the clues together and found the dungeon where Asyubell hid the treasure.

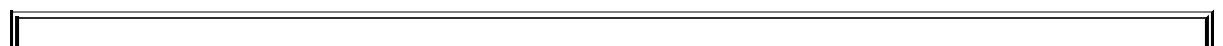
“Here? This is the place where Asyubell hid the treasure?”

Bread muttered as he saw the huge remains. In his later years, Asyubell had become senile and hidden his treasures. But the location was amazing compared to all the troubles they had gone through to reach the place.

“What the? There is nothing in the area. There are also no monsters. Is this really the right place?”

“It was recorded in the last clue document that it is somewhere around here. The place where three people are facing each other..... Ah, there it is. It should be the place where the gaze of the three statues is concentrated..... I've found it. This is clearly it. Advanced text deciphering!”

Redian found the ancient characters engraved on the ruins and used the skill. Then the characters started shining and a message window appeared.



-I am the nameless adventurer.

I have hidden the treasures found throughout my lifetime in the secret dungeon underneath the ruins. The person who has courage can visit it in order to get their hands on the treasure. But know this. I've used all my knowledge and experience to create this dungeon hiding my treasure. That's right. This dungeon is a challenge that I'm sending out to adventurers of the next generation. In order to obtain the treasure strength, stamina, wisdom and knowledge is required.

I'll say this in advance, but it might not be possible to obtain the treasure in your lifetime. If you make even one mistake on any of the puzzles..... The dungeon will remove all intruders and remained blocked until the next full moon. When it is opened, the location and answer to all the puzzles will be changed.

Now challenger, if you have confidence then you are welcome to try it!

"This annoying old man....."

"I've just smelled something bad."

Bread and Redian complained when they saw the message. But no matter how much they complained, Asyubell had already passed away a long time ago. Thus the two of them started searching the dungeon hidden underneath the ruins. Although there were no monsters near the ruins, there were an extraordinary number of high levelled monsters in the dungeon. However, the monsters weren't what annoyed them. The problem was they had to solve a puzzle every time they passed through a checkpoint. It was different from the typical puzzles seen in a dungeon.

"Oh my god, this gateway has a 5,000 piece jigsaw puzzle?"

"Huk, what's with the dots on the walls? We have to move them to form constellations?"

"Hik, this time we have to use an arithmetic equation to solve it?"

Although Redian had confidence in her intelligence, she felt like screaming with distress every time she saw a puzzle. But they've come this far so it wasn't possible to turn back. While Bread hunted all the monsters infesting the place, Redian searched through books and the internet for solutions to the problems. Luckily, she managed to find the necessary knowledge to solve the puzzles at each checkpoint. If it was just Bread then he wouldn't even know how the puzzle should be solved.

"Phew, it is really absurd. The puzzles are so difficult yet if I make a mistake then we'll have to start again from the beginning..... In addition, we would have to wait one month until the next full moon. Because the cycle of the moon is one month, just like in reality. If I fail then the dungeon will be locked..... If we came all the way here just to fail then I really will go crazy."

Redian's body trembled as she thought about it.

"So use all your power until the end."

"Sheesh! It's fine for you. All you have to do is swing your sword ignorantly. Ah, here it is. The inscription for the last checkpoint. Now, let's see. I hope it's a slightly easy puzzle this time..... Hik, w-what is this?"

"What is it?"

"T-this puzzle is a kabbalah."

Redian muttered with a sick expression. Of course the ignorant Bread couldn't understand what it was.

"Kabbalah? Is it similar to caramel?"

"You idiot, kabbalah is the cipher of the ancient alchemists. The characters are complicated..... No. Why am I expecting anything from you? Damn, what kind of dungeon did that guy create? To actually decipher a Kabbalah cipher in the game....."

Redian was about to have a fit of anger when she suddenly remembered something.

“It is fortunate. I know an older sister attending graduate school who is interested in the Kabbalah. Maybe I can actually solve it quickly this time. Wait a minute. I’ll go and check it.”

Redian wrote the inscription down and firmly instructed Bread.

“Please be quiet in the meantime. Don’t touch anything even if you are bored. If you touch something and get us kicked out then I won’t stay silent.”

“Understood. Do you think that I’m an idiot?”

“This situation is too serious for you to act like a fool.”

Redian declared sharply and cut off the connection. 2 hours passed before she connected again.

“Wow, I’m really tired.”

“Why? You haven’t figured it out?”

“No, I’ve solved it. When the person I know studying Kabbalah ciphers at the university saw this, she was speechless with admiration. It was the first time she saw something so complex. She asked me where I found something like this.”

“Anyway, you’ve managed to solve it?”

“Yes, now we will pass the last checkpoint.”

“Quickly, quickly open the door!”

Bread hopped impatiently around like a puppy after Redian’s confident reply. It was reasonable. They were finally getting the treasure two months after the quest was received. Redian made a determined expression and tensed up.

“Now, let’s start.....”

Redian looked at her notes and raised her hand to the puzzle inscription.

Ku ku ku ku ku!

Abruptly, the dungeon started vibrating and the stone statues' eye turned red.

"What, what? What's going on?"

Bread burst out with confusion before a red message window appeared.

-You have failed the puzzle operation.

<Everybody in the dungeon will be expelled and access blocked until the next full moon>

"Huk, f-fail? Redian! What happened?"

"No, I don't know. I didn't even touch the inscription yet!"

Redian shouted with distress. The light in the statues' eyes flashed and shot towards the two of them. They instantly felt like they fell into the darkness. After a while, Bread looked around with despair in his eyes as the area around them slowly brightened.

"Outside..... We're outside. We really were banished."

"Two months..... Our two months of effort....."

Redian murmured weakly as she looked around with a blank expression. The two people felt like they were completely soulless.

"Calm down. Now everybody drink something and gather over here. A staff will check it out."

'Eh? Somebody's voice?'

Bread flinched at the voice and turned around. Dozens of people had gathered in the ruins where the dungeon was located and were making a fuss. Bread became even more confused as a blue NPC approached.

"Eh? Why didn't we see you arrive? Are you tourists?"

"Tourists?"

Bread asked and the NPC smiled and explained.

“You must’ve wanted to visit here directly. Ever seen Seutandal rose, a lot of foreigners have appeared. That’s why we use the skyrays to let the tourists explore Seutandal safely. Would you like to try it out?”

For a while Bread couldn’t understand what the NPC was talking about. This was Seutandal, the place previously called the Netherworld. It was a perilous dungeon where one wrong touch would be disastrous so they would’ve set up countermeasures if it was on the continent. They would’ve hired mercenaries to prevent the entry of other people. But when the two people had entered the dungeon, Seutandal was still the Netherworld. Normal people wouldn’t find it even when walking around for a couple of days. Therefore Bread and Redian thought that countermeasures were unnecessary and just entered the dungeon without any worries. However, in the meantime Seutandal had risen and many tourists had flocked to the ruins.

“What did you say a while ago.....?”

“Ah, that? In fact, one of the tourists found a place that was similar to a dungeon. So they touched something..... All of a sudden this red light appeared and he was pushed out? Hahaha, don’t worry though. Fortunately, that person doesn’t appear to have any injuries..... Oh, please don’t misunderstand. Although there was an accident this time, I can guarantee that this place is safe for tourists.”

“Oooh!”

A moan emerged from Bread’s mouth at the NPC’s explanation. The stupid Bread hadn’t understood the situation until now. It was them. After two months, they had finally arrived at the last checkpoint. All that effort to solve the puzzles and obtain the treasure was undone by this stupid NPC and the tourists.

“Aaaagh, kill everybody!”

Bread shrieked and took out his bayonet. Although Bread had a stone head, he took pride in having the best combat power in

Bristania!

“Hik, what are you doing? Aaaagh!”

“What’s with that guy?”

“He killed the guide!”

“Huk, we were seen. Is he really going to kill us?” “Damn, is he crazy? Seutandal still has PK.”

“But there’s more than 10 of us. At most there’s only one crazy guy…….”

Bread reached the tourists and immediately swung his weapon. Among the tourists that came to Seutandal, some were around level 150 while others were level 250. It wouldn’t be easy for the chaotic player to defeat them. That’s what the tourists thought. However…….

“Huk, what, what the! What’s with this enormous damage?”

“T-this bastard……. What on earth is his level? My sword can’t even strike properly.”

“His defense seems extremely high. Magic. Burn him with magic!”

“U-understood.”

Then several magicians started chanting spells.

“Hohoho, take this! Damn, do you think I’m afraid of you? Do you know what you’ve done? How dare you say such things after what you’ve done? You want to use fire magic? Let’s see whose fire magic is stronger! High speed incantation! The flaming hell……. The rest is omitted, Volcano!”

After Bread went crazy, Redian also started chanting spells at an incredible pace. At the same time the ground split open and lava gushed out, swallowing the tourists. It was enormous damage! There were 7 circles of magical flames.

“Huk, m-monster! A witch and a monster!”

The tourists' health was depleted in an instant and they ran away in every direction. However, Bread and Redian didn't stop attacking and wiped them all out in a matter of minutes.

"Huk huk huk, damn! My anger hasn't been released."

Bread panted as he pulled his weapon out of a dead body. Redian also nodded and replied.

"Of course not. How dare they touch the nose of the sleeping witch?"

"Eh? Your nose hair was touched?"

"Shut up, you stone head! Is this the time to make jokes? Shall I wash your eyes with lava?"

"No, there's no need for the lava."

"Damn....."

Redian chewed her lips with a poisonous expression.

"Let's think of the future. We have to destroy the tourist company who lead those fellows here. No, we won't let them relax for even a minute. That's right, wouldn't there be a guy who made the Netherworld rise? Yes, he's the ringleader of everything. We have to find him and smash him."

"Eh? Wouldn't the tourist business be unrelated to the guy who caused the Netherworld to rise?"

Bread scratched his head while Redian shot him a sharp look.

"What the? Don't you ever look at anything beyond the obvious?"

"No, I don't."

"So don't be a fool and just follow me. Anyway, we were banished and became chaotic because of him. Anyway, now that we're chaotic..... We'll chase him until the end of hell for our revenge! Hohoho, I'll teach him clearly who the white witch of Bristania is."

'Ah, nobody can stop her when Redian is in this state.'

Bread looked frustrated as he scratched his head.

‘Well, I suppose it doesn’t really matter. I have to relieve my stress somewhere. And it’ll be good if I relieve it with someone strong. I don’t know who it is but the person who raised the Netherworld should be fairly strong. Huhuhu, okay should I go along with Redian’s plan for the moment?’

Swaaaah, kkiruk, kkiruk.

The cries of the seagulls and crashing of the waves could be heard in a small city. It was the harbour town Reuben located on the east coast of Schudenberg. This place used to be a small unknown harbour but that had changed in recent times. The latest topics were focused on Seutandal in the East Sea. And Reuben was the closet harbour to Seutandal. Thus numerous users and NPCs headed towards Seutandal naturally flocked towards Reuben and it started booming.

“The ferry heading towards Seutandal will soon depart. All travellers who have bought tickets for Seutandal please wait by the dock. This ferry is the final one for today.”

The NPC manager of the liner shouted in a ringing voice. The ferry could carry 200 people at once and if a traveller was late then they would have to wait 4 hours for the one departing in the morning. The users started gathering after hearing the NPC’s voice. Meanwhile, the tall and skinny physique of a merchant could be seen.

“Damn, that’s dirty.”

The merchant complained as he glared at several users standing near the front. The merchant was Isyuram, who was the captain of the number 1 SWAT team in reality. And the users Isyuram was staring at were the members of his current party. There were several reasons why Isyuram had joined a party with them. Let’s go back in time to when Isyuram arrived in Giran.

Isyuram spent some time exploring around Giran. He wanted to find Sid who had stabbed him in the back and then ran away. However,

Sid had left Giran as soon as his scam was finished so Isyuram had no choice but to give up.

“Damn, you’ll see soon. I’ll smash you the next time I see you!”

But Isyuram still didn’t know what kind of place New World was. Isyuram had inherited the character from his predecessor and had been stuck in a mountain village until now. So Giran was the first city he had been to. It was a merchant’s city. No, it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that it was the merchants’ battlefield! It was a city full of merchants who wouldn’t hesitate to run scams. The newly started Isyuram was just like food to them.

“Have you ever seen such good items?”

The merchant who approached him was one of those con artists. Of course, Isyuram might be ignorant but he wasn’t stupid. He was also a policeman so he knew various swindling methods. However, this was not reality. Although some swindling techniques were based off reality, others could only be used in New World. There were many scams using various skills or the game system! Isyuram didn’t understand skills or the system so he was completely helpless. Just like that he lost money, bought something, lost money, sold something, lost money, drink alcohol, lost money.....

Thanks to that, Isyuram managed to lose most of his predecessor’s money in just a fortnight. Isyuram sensed the looming crisis.

“If this goes on then I won’t even be able to buy porridge.”

Of course, there was a reason why Isyuram was hanging around Giran. Isyuram’s purpose for playing the game was to find information about suspects on the police agency’s list. However, Isyuram realized that he wouldn’t be able to find anything just wandering around Giran aimlessly. Reality was reality while the game system was necessary in the game.

“As expected, the basis of the game is martial arts.”

If he started from level 1 then he would’ve naturally learned the various skills and system information. But Isyuram started at level 150 with insufficient fundamental knowledge and money which he

didn't know how to use. So Isyuram came to the conclusion that he had to learn the fundamentals of New World in order to survive. Since then Isyuram hunted in the daytime while in the evening he would go around to taverns or guilds to learn information about skills and the game system. It was grabbing every opportunity to improve himself. After a month, Isyuram was fortunately able to learn the basics.

"Huhuhu, what the, it doesn't seem that good. It's definitely not special."

While hanging around the taverns, he had started his adaptation training. In fact, Isyuram kept going to taverns to drink alcohol under the pretext of investigation. But so far, Isyuram couldn't understand the other users' words.

"Oh, the healer selection (if they can't control it then we'll kick them). Everyone goes together (a power run) and use the (maximum health increase skill) when there is a mob. If things get too heated behind enemy lines then we'll use (forced expulsion) and run away. There's no need to die."

Isyuram initially thought it was Chinese or Japanese. But he made a lot of effort to learn the game terminology that players used and eventually he started to understand. And Isyuram became a little more confident. However, he didn't understand that it was still dangerous even when he knew the system.

"Hey, you, I often see you at this tavern..... Are you a merchant? I'm starting a business which will get a lot of money. Unfortunately, I lack a bit of capital. How about it? Would you be interested in investing? I promise that you'll get 30% of the profit after 3 days."

A merchant said after approaching him in the tavern. Of course, Isyuram wasn't as easily manipulated like he was in the past.

"I don't think so."

"Uh huh, please just listen to me. You're a merchant so don't you also need to live? Or is it that you don't believe me? That's probably it. But look at this. This is a contract officially signed by the

merchant's guild. When the deal is finished then all the proceeds will be paid from the merchant's guild. And even if I make a mistake and become bankrupt, all the money you invested is secured by the merchant's guild. Do you believe me now?"

The merchant persistently showed the contract and Isyuram couldn't spot anything suspicious.

'Hrmm, if the deal is written in the contract then there should be no problems. If I receive 30% of the profit then I can make money after a few days. Any profit is valuable to me.'

In the end, Isyuram signed the contract and handed over 200 gold. After a few days, he heard a sound that was like a lightning bolt striking him. Isyuram had invested a capital of 200 gold. He should've received 260 back. However, the money he received from the merchant's guild was only 26 gold. Isyuram went to the merchant and questioned him directly.

"What is going on?"

"What's going on? What do you mean?"

The merchant replied carefully.

"I've provided the money like the contract said. If you don't believe it then check again."

"The contract? What nonsense....."

Isyuram's face hardened and he took out the contract. The contract was clearly the same one as before. However, one zero was missing from the amount that Isyuram invested. Isyuram had actually invested 200 gold but the contract stated that he invested 20. Now Isyuram realized that he had been cheated again. When making the contract, the merchant had shown it many times. But he had failed to confirm the real income when making the contract. The contract the merchant convinced Isyuram with was different from the one he was given. It was a common scam, also known as switching contracts. Isyuram became blank as he saw the contract and the merchant smirked.

“Think of it as a good experience. Would a merchant ever give away money?”

“You bastard.... Am I someone you can pour water on?”

Isyuram finally exploded. He might've laughed it off if he just started the game. 200 gold..... However, the previous 200 gold and this one was completely different. When he first inherited it from his predecessor, he didn't know the value of gold. Thus he had casually drunk liquor worth a lot of gold. But after realizing the importance of gold, he had barely scraped together 200 gold.

“That was the money I earned in one month, while staying all up night and getting nosebleeds.....”

Isyuram grabbed the merchant's throat and glared. Although he was a merchant in the game, he was still the person who made even gangsters tremble! He experienced more than ordinary people and the merchant paled from the glare. But after a moment, the merchant just laughed and said.

“Hey, hey, calm down. This is a city. Are you really going to use violence in a place like this?”

“Yes, I really am going to use violence!”

Isyuram already couldn't see anything else. Isyuram instantly started beating the merchant up. When a fight occurred in the tavern, the guards immediately gathered. Then the merchant who was in a critical condition screamed and asked for help.

“Ugh, he, he..... He's crazy. Save me!”

“Hey, what are you doing? You'll be arrested if you don't stop it!”

“Shut up, arrest me after I kill this guy!”

Isyuram stepped on the shoulder of a guard at a tremendous speed. Then he rotated as he fell and stepped on the merchant's face.

“Cough!”

The guards could only watch with a dim expression as Isyuram

kicked the merchant using flashy moves. After a while, the guards stopped being surprised and shoved his spear forward.

“You, you’re arrested for murder!”

“.....Dammit!”

Isyuram cursed and flopped down on the ground. Isyuram was still a merchant in New World. Although he was undergoing superman like training, it was still difficult for him to reach the level of warriors. It was be impossible for him to defeat the guards in Giran. In addition, he didn’t want to fight the guards since they were similar to the police. Isyuram folded his arms and shouted.

“My revenge has finished. Go ahead!”

Thus Isyuram was arrested and imprisoned for 15 days. Isyuram now felt completely desperate after being scammed so many times. But the turning point for Isyuram unexpectedly occurred inside the jail.

“A newcomer? How long do you have to stay in prison?”

“.....15 days.”

“That’s pretty bad. It’s been 10 days since I arrived but I have another 20 days.”

“What did you do?”

“Well, let’s see. PK. There was a fellow acting conceitedly so I killed him. Anyway, I became chaotic and just spent the next two months killing even more and raising my chaotic value. Huhuhu, well I made some profit during that time so I haven’t lost any money. I spent most of the time in here sleeping. I was alone for 10 days so it was quite boring.”

The user with a huge figure said with a smile.

“I was captured after being sought after for ages. But I have a few high levelled friends. I gave most of my stuff to them so I didn’t receive any damage. Oh, I forgot to introduce myself. I am Garam.”

Isyuram's eyes suddenly flashed. The first thing Isyuram did before entering the game was confirming the ID of the suspects. Fortunately he had a good memory and he memorized the IDs of 100 users. Garam was on the list.

'To meet a suspect in a place like this.....!'

Wasn't it similar to picking up money?

'But it's not really because of luck. Isn't it a habit? Someone chased by police in reality was definitely attempt murder in the game and be eventually sent to jail if caught. Anyway, this is an opportunity!'

Isyuram thoughts raced quickly. It wouldn't have been easy to approach if they had met somewhere else. But this place was a prison cell. He was stuck here for the next 15 days. Thus Isyuram started to raise his intimacy with Garam. They quickly became friends thanks to the small space. He learnt a lot about Garam by the time his prison sentence finished. However he didn't get the information he wanted.

As expected, an escaped criminal was unwilling to give any personal information.

'Asking persistently will be suspicious. I have to wait for when we become closer and a situation arises where we naturally exchange phone numbers. Or.....'

In order to arrest Garam in reality, he had to at least know his telephone number. The best way was to figure out his location from the number and make him confess directly. Of course, there were other ways but the Special Crimes Countermeasures chief felt like they were too risky.

'I can't be hasty. Garam currently belongs to the same organization as the other suspects. If I bring in Garam then those guys will become even more suspicious.'

After Isyuram finished his jail sentence, he continued to visit Garam while bringing food. During one of his visits, Garam suddenly asked Isyuram.

“But why are you so shabby? Aren’t you also covered in blood? What’s going on?”

“No, I’ve just been hunting a little bit.”

“Hunting? Why is a merchant hunting?”

Garam mumbled around the food in his mouth as he raised his head.

“Wait, you.....you said you entered the jail because of a swindle but you’re still buying these foods for me..... Then don’t tell me you..... Bounty hunting.....!”

“Please don’t pay attention to it. I find it enjoyable.”

Isyuram scratched his head with an awkward expression. That’s right. Isyuram had engaged in hunting monsters and delivering them for money. As a merchant, Isyuram would need a certain amount of skills to catch the monsters. And he deliberately came to the jail covered in blood and dirt. It was one of his strategies to make Garam notice him. As expected, Garam was completely impressed.

“Ohhh, so there are also people like this.....”

“Please don’t sound like that. We’re cellmates.”

“Thank you, I will definitely pay you back. If I lose my sense of loyalty then I’ll be nothing but a corpse.”

“Things like that..... Are a little bittersweet.”

“Huh? What?”

“In fact, I’m not very sociable. Apart from you, I don’t know anyone in New World. That’s why I’ve been visiting you but you’ll be released in a few days. Later, I’ll be a lonely person again. Besides, my luck is so bad that I’ll probably be scammed again or PKed.”

Isyuram sighed while looking pitiful. Then Garam banged his chest and said.

“Don’t worry about it. Right? I’m a corpse if I lose my loyalty. I’ll shoulder responsibility for you from now on. Didn’t I tell you before? I know quite a lot of colleagues. Many of these guys are currently in

Seutandal which is a new area so there will be a lot of profit. I'm going to join them after leaving jail. You can come with us."

"I can come? Even though I'm a merchant?"

"It's okay. We also need a large number of bags so those guys won't say no. And who would say no to my friend? What do you think?"

"I'm very thankful!"

So Isyuram's 20 days of effort paid off. If they were Garam's colleagues then they would definitely be wanted criminals.

'Hopefully things will unravel smoothly.'

After several days, Garam finally left jail. After eating the tofu Isyuram prepared, he followed Garam to look for the suspects. The place where he arrived at was Reuben's port. Garam met up with two of his colleagues here. Takosu and Rokon. They were also wanted criminals on the suspects list.

"It's been a while, Garam. We've finished the preparations so were just waiting for you."

"But who is this with you?"

"A friend of my heart. I've decided let him accompany me in the from now on."

".....Can we trust him?"

"What the? Are you doubting a friend of my heart?"

Garam completely believed in Isyuram so he became angry at those words. Takosu and Rokon wore doubtful expressions but eventually nodded.

"Okay, if you say so..... Let's depart. Jepeteu hyung is waiting. The other guys have joined so only you are left."

Thus, Isyuram managed to join the criminals heading towards Seutandal.

'Huhuhu, my work is finally progressing. Isyuram's game is now

starting!'

Isyuram smirked and headed towards the boat.

"Hahaha, out of the way, out of the way! I'm first!"

Garam headed like a bull towards the boat. There was only one plank connecting the ferry and pier so there was no space to move with 200 people gathered. Everything became a mess after Garam ran for the pier. Although people cursed at him, Garam just stared at them and threatened them.

"What the? Do you have a complaint about me going on the boat first? If you're dissatisfied then come out!"

'That guy, he really can't give up his habit.'

Isyuram shook his head. It was going to be really tiring travelling with Garam and his colleagues. He was a guy who lived selfishly and would easily pick fights if dissatisfied. Garam's character was just as brutal as he was in reality and he was happiest when users were bleeding.

"Heh, none of them dare..... Huh? What the, that is?"

Garam glared as he noticed something. While Garam was being careless, somebody had started boarding the ship.

"That bastard..... Hey, you. Didn't you hear me? I said I was first!"

Garam snorted and grabbed the person's shoulder. The guy lost his balance and fell into the ocean.

"Hahaha, good. What an impertinent brat!"

Garam chuckled as he started to head up the ship.

".....Do you want to die?"

Garam flinched and turned his head as he heard the voice. The man who had fallen into the ocean and pulled himself out and was heading towards Garam.

'Damn! That Garam, he should learn some moderation. It has

become troublesome. I should stop it before it becomes bigger.'

Isyuram finally looked at the man with annoyance. But then his eyes became bigger than a pot lid.

'What, what the? T-that guy..... Don't tell me..... Hik, that's right. Hyun-woo!'

The one heading towards Garam was Hyun-woo, also known as Ark.

Mentor and Disciple

Isyuram reflexively hid himself. When he peeked stealthily at them, he saw that the person definitely resembled Hyun-woo.

‘That face is definitely Hyun-woo’s. Damn, to meet him in a place like this!’

He never even told Ark that he was playing the game. The reason he was hiding it from Ark was because he didn’t want him to know that Isyuram was a merchant.

“What did you say?”

Then Garam spoke in an intimidating voice. But Ark didn’t even blink and just muttered.

“Are you deaf?”

“What?”

Garam’s face hardened.

“Hmm, do you have a facial muscle disorder? Or maybe a person with disabilities. If I knew beforehand then I would’ve conceded.”

“Disabled person? H-h-how dare this bastard say that?”

“A stutter? This is serious. Oh, I am sorry. I never knew it was that serious.”

Isyuram marvelled at the sarcasm rolling off Ark’s tongue.

‘He had this sarcastic side to him?’

Isyuram had thought of Ark as a reticent person. Had Ark’s character changed in the game? Anyway, the situation was quite bothersome. In fact, Garam’s nature meant that he angered easily. And he had started fights a few times. Isyuram had thrown his whole body and managed to prevent the previous ones. Of course, it

wasn't because of Garam. Currently Isyuram was using Garam to infiltrate and investigate the suspects. If Garam killed someone and became chaotic then all his efforts would go to waste. It was also the same if Garam died. Luckily Garam called Isyuram a friend of his heart so he always stepped down when Isyuram interfered. But it was different if his opponent was Ark.

'If Hyun-woo calls my name then I'll be unable to infiltrate the group..... However, I can't just watch them..... Damn, what should I do?'

Isyuram looked at Takosu and Rokon to try and request help. But the nature of humans was for similar people to flock together. They just watched the scene with interest. So Isyuram was on his own.

"This mannerless brat!"

Ark had fully incited Garam's rage, making Garam throw a punch at him. Garam was a warrior who used knuckles with blades attached as his weapon. Wasn't the feeling of punching someone more exhilarating? Garam had proudly recited that in his jail cell. Garam was a hooligan familiar with street fighting. Isyuram remembered that Garam's criminal record was attempted murder after swinging his fist at people. As expected, that power was also applied to New World. The speed and power of that fist couldn't be underestimated.

Bakak-!

Ark's jaw was forced upwards as he was hit by the fist. At that moment a spark sprang into Isyuram's eyes.

'What is he doing? He was hit by a fist like that? What has he learned so far?'

No matter the situation, Ark was still Isyuram's disciple. Naturally he would feel angry after seeing his student being hit. Garam's fist was beyond ordinary, but it wasn't to the extent that Ark couldn't avoid it after training in the gym. He had the capabilities but he didn't avoid it. All he could think was that Ark had become dull because of fear. But why would Isyuram's disciple be afraid of a mere hooligan? It was because Isyuram still didn't know New World that well.

“You hit me?”

Ark rubbed his bloody mouth and laughed. The first attack had an important meaning in New World. The person who attacked first and killed the opponent would 100% become chaotic. However, the person who was attacked first wouldn't become chaotic if they killed that person. That's why Ark didn't avoid the attack. As expected, Garam's name became grey after he attacked Ark. Now it was counted as self-defence if he killed Garam.

“I hit you, what about it?”

Garam rushed back and threw a punch again. Ark instantly used some quick footwork and the punch missed. In a blink of an eye, he had managed to get behind Garam. At that moment, Ark used rapid-fire kicks. Low kick, high kick and spinning kick!

“Heok, t-this bastard...!”

Garam wobbled and grabbed Ark. But Ark had trained in wrestling against a bronze medal winner of a national tournament. The moment Garam's hand touched his shoulder, he instantly counterattacked by rotating his body and knocking Garam down onto the ground.

‘Right, right, well done. He is indeed my disciple. He must've been playing around earlier.’

Isyuram had forgotten the circumstances and inwardly clapped.

“Kuaaak..... Okay, now let's do this properly!”

“Properly? That's good.”

Ark smiled at Garam's words and took out his sword. Isyuram suddenly remembered when he saw the gleam of the sword.

‘Ah, now isn't the time for this. Damn! That Hyun-woo, he's stronger than I thought..... I'll be in trouble if Garam dies! Without Garam, Roco and Takosu would never bring me to their colleagues' meeting place. But it'll be over if I'm found by Hyun-woo.....’

Isyuram held his head and frantically worried. Suddenly an image of

a thin merchant was reflected off an onlooker's shield. Isyuram looked at the shield for a long time before realizing that it was his image. Yes, he had forgotten since there were no mirrors in the game but Isyuram's features were completely different from his real life image. Of course, there was no way for Ark to recognize him.

"Stop, stop, Garam!"

After having the thought, Isyuram immediately ran between the two of them. But Ark and Garam were already exchanging fists. The two of them tried to stop attacking when Isyuram got between the two of them but it was already too late.

"Heok, what is this.....?"

"Isyuram, it's dangerous!"

Ark and Garam both shouted with confusion at the same time. But what happened afterwards was the truly confusing part. Isyuram smoothly parried Garam's fist with one hand while raising one leg to raise Ark's wrist upwards. Even though Ark and Garam had tried to stop their attacks, it was still a merchant intervening between two warriors. In fact, sometime of this degree wasn't difficult for Isyuram. Although his attack and defense couldn't compare to a warrior's, he was unmatched in terms of technique. Of course, it was a game so 100% of his real life skills weren't applied. Thanks to the situations he had gone through, Isyuram had long ago mastered the evasion skill 'Parry.' Unlike other users, he felt the pain and consequently figured out how to parry with the least force while investigating the skill.

"A-are you okay? You're not injured?"

Garam hurriedly asked Isyuram.

"Yes, I'm fine."

"What are you doing? Why would a merchant interfere in a fight? Fortunately you were lucky this time, but if the blows landed then your life would be at risk. How could I live with killing a friend of my heart?"

Garam never even considered that Isyuram had managed to evade both of the attacks. That was because a common gangster knowing such a high standard of technique was impossible.

“I’m sorry but let’s stop this. Hey you, why don’t you let it go?”

“That’s.....”

Ark gave Isyuram a funny look before shrugging his shoulders. However Garam roughly shook his head.

“No, this time you can’t stop it. That asshole, I’m going to smash him!”

“It is a request. If you cause a disturbance here then you can’t meet your colleagues.”

“B-but that bastard.....!”

“Are you going to give up or fight? I’m a little busy.”

“Look, look! Did you hear him? That bastard keeps on insulting me!”

Garam’s shoulders moved up and down as he shouted while Ark yawned.

“Stop!”

At that moment, the harbour guards broke through the crowd and came running up.

“This is the harbour that Lord Reuben manages. If you cause a disturbance then you’ll be immediately arrested.”

“Dammit.....”

Garam frowned and spat out curses. Now Takosu and Rokon finally approached them.

“Garam, let’s end it here. I said that Jepeteu hyung is waiting. It’ll be annoying if you’re confined here.”

“.....Understood.”

Garam stared at Ark for a moment before heading onto the ship. Ark

also nodded and retreated when the guards looked at him. Thus the situation was cleared up for the moment. The other users also started to board the ship. When all the passengers finished boarding, the ship captain appeared and laughed as he spoke.

“Young ones, everybody listen up. My sailors won’t get involved in any fights on land. But they’ll tie you up and throw you into the sea if anything happens on the boat. Now we’re going to depart. Plot the course!”

The ship’s crew responded to their captain’s command and hurriedly rushed around. The sails were then opened and the voyage to Seutandal had begun.

“Sheesh, I feel dirty. If only the guards had come a little bit later.”

Garam grunted with dissatisfaction while sitting on the deck. Then Takosu grinned and muttered.

“You didn’t have to get so angry.”

“There are many schoolkids like him who don’t have manners. If I disregarded a schoolkid then wouldn’t you make fun of me? Ugh, I get mad every time I think about it.”

“It’s not the end.”

Takosu approached Garam and spoke in a low voice.

“We have the same destination as that guy. Do you understand? Even if the guards hadn’t appeared, if you killed him then you wouldn’t have been able to take the ship. But it’s different once we arrive in Seutandal.”

“What? Then?”

“Huhuhu, The harbour is separated from Haman Fortress, which is the heart of Seutandal. And there aren’t that many guards at the harbour. If we attack him as soon as the boat arrives, we can kill him before the guards show up. Anyway, Jepeteu hyung is in the field so it isn’t necessary to enter a city. Besides, if he’s killed in Seutandal

then wouldn't that guy be even madder when he is resurrected in Reuben?"

"Oh, that's quite good?"

Garam laughed with sparkling eyes.

"So in the meantime, let's get down to our cabin and play poker. We'll leave the revenge for later."

"Okay, as expected from you. Huhuhu, let's look forward to it."

Garam, Takosu and Rokon all smiled wickedly before standing up. Indeed, a bad guy in reality was still a bad guy in the game.

"Isyuram, do you want to play poker?"

"No, the inside is slightly uncomfortable for me. I'll prefer to stay on the deck where there is the wind."

Isyuram made excuses to separate from the group and headed towards the deck. Takosu looked at his back and asked in a slightly suspicious voice.

"That guy, isn't his behaviour suspicious? Doesn't that guy know our plans now?"

"What are you saying? I told you that Isyuram is a friend of my heart. There is no reason for you to doubt him."

".....Well, I suppose we'll know if he's a reliable guy when we arrive. Let's go."

Once Isyuram confirmed that they entered the cabin, Isyuram immediately acted like Takosu suspected and searched for Ark. After looking around for a while, he saw Ark waiting by the rails. Ark naturally glanced to the side when Isyuram approached.

'Hmmm, what should I say?'

Isyuram worried for a moment before muttering.

"That kick before was quite acceptable. What martial arts have you learnt?"

“Taekwondo.”

‘Eh? What a short reply.’

It was Hyun-woo’s face so Isyuram became angry when Ark spoke such curt words.

‘Well, he does only know me as Garam’s colleague. Huhuhu, yes, so this guy really doesn’t recognize me? I suddenly have a funny idea. Yes, this situation makes me want to try it out.’

“It seems like you’ve been practicing for a long time. After seeing that posture, did you stop for a while? Then you’ve started receiving training from a mentor for one year. Am I correct?”

“H-how?”

Ark flinched and turned his head around as he nodded.

“Well, I’m at a standard where I can tell just by looking at your posture.”

“Then it wasn’t an accident when you interrupted the attack before……?”

“Oh, you noticed it?”

Isyuram looked startled. Although it was slightly exaggerated, he was still surprised. Isyuram used an advanced technique because he knew that Garam wouldn’t recognize it or become suspicious. Only people with keen eyes could recognize the technique. He honestly thought that Ark hadn’t noticed.

“Although receiving no damage might be because of a skill, but isn’t the movement unrelated to the skill? Haven’t you also learnt martial arts?”

His words had instantly become longer. Isyuram deliberately shivered before replied.

“Well, I didn’t learn as much as other people.”

“Then why did a person like you pick a merchant?”

“Isn’t the warrior originally strong? I wanted to completely rule over my mind and body in the worst situation. My mentors are Ryu and Ken, Chun-Li and Zangief.....”

Isyuram once again started talking nonsense. Yes, Isyuram was putting on his crazy act that normal people would yell at him to retire already. But Ark listened seriously and immediately his gaze brightened when Ryu and Ken were mentioned. Ark loved street fighting games so he absolutely knew those names. Anyway, Isyuram became embarrassed and coughed before speaking.

“Hum hum, well anyway, your steps still seem a little weak. The foot which you are using as an axis to turn is more important than the kicking leg. It isn’t bad now of course, but your kicks will become more powerful when your legs are more stable. Didn’t your teacher also say this?”

“How did you know?”

“Huhuhu, any good teacher would’ve mentioned it.”

Isyuram answered playfully with a smirk.

“If I look at the disciple then I can determine the teacher’s skill. You apparently have a wonderful teacher. The accuracy and sharpness of your techniques is beyond the usual level. There aren’t that many people in South Korea with this degree of technique. What kind of person is your teacher?”

“Teacher.....”

Ark suddenly looked at the horizon with vague eyes. It had already been 3 months since he had seen Ark in reality. Although there was no time to consider Ark while playing game, occasionally he remembered Ark. Since Hyun-woo couldn’t recognize his face, Isyuram half-jokingly asked Ark how he felt about his teacher. But that feeling didn’t even last 1 minute.

“My teacher is a cruel man. His hobby is blindly beating me up and he won’t even raise an eyebrow if his student sheds blood or tears. Ever since I started at the gym, I’m constantly amazed that I’m still alive.”

“B-but all that is to forge the student. Isn’t that right?”

“That’s right. The problem is that he’s trying to turn a human into a superman.”

‘This, is this how that child normally thinks of me?’

Isyuram inwardly fumed at Ark’s answer. Isyuram now wanted to suddenly shout ‘your teacher is here!’ and beat him to death. Although his fury was like a big bang inside his head, he was forced to push it down.

“Isn’t there any good points? Think closely. There should be at least one. There is no way he has no good points.”

“Let’s see?”

Isyuram endured his anger while waiting for Ark’s reply, but he was still furious.

‘In the future, I’ll call him to the gym and flatten him into a rice cake!’

“I caught something! Oh, isn’t this a big fish?”

At that moment, someone shouted from one side. It took 4 hours to arrive at Seutandal. After observing the stunning scenery for a while, most players became bored and started fishing. Ark pricked his ears as he heard and waited for the fish to be reeled in before approaching.

“Wow, what a great scup. Could you entrust this to me? I’ll make sashimi and spicy seafood stew in an instant. Originally I would get a small fee for the labour but you’re the first guest so I’ll do it for free.”

“Eh? Really?”

The user expressed their joy and extended the fish. Fishing was a common skill learnt by users. That’s because a groundless rumour spread on the information site that master fishermen had rare accessories. On the other hand, a lot of ingredients were required for cooking and the dishes produced weren’t that much different from the ones sold in the stores. Therefore there were many users who learnt how to fish but hardly any who knew how to cook the

fish. Ark had waited on the deck because he was aiming for this market. Ark took out his knife and showed amazing workmanship as he sliced it into sashimi before boiling the rest. Start-ups were the most important thing in running a business. Thanks to the use of fresh ingredients and skill, he was able to create amazing sashimi and spicy seafood stew.

-The Survival Cooking dish 'Best Scup Sashimi' has been created.

Sashimi created from freshly caught scup. It is a relatively simple dish that heavily relies on the abilities of the chef. Thanks to the skills of an experienced chef, the best taste and sensation of the flesh has been produced.

<Stamina +10, Satiety +15%>

<A la carte bonus: Stamina +3, Mana +200, Satiety +10%>

-The Survival Cooking dish 'Best Scup Spicy Seafood Stew' has been created.

A dish using the boiled freshly caught scup and various other ingredients. It is a dish that can have an intense fishy smell, but the taste is simple thanks to the experienced chef.

<Strength +12, Satiety +20%>

<A la carte bonus: Strength +2, Health +400, Satiety +15%>

"Now, please eat."

"Wow, this is no joke."

The user immediately exclaimed after trying Ark's sashimi and seafood stew.

"Wow, this is unbelievable..... Although he dismantled the scup at an amazing speed, the flesh isn't damaged at all! The scup tastes as sweet as caramel! And this spicy seafood stew! Although I saw him put so many ingredients in, they're all perfectly balanced! It's also good for the body. What's with these astounding stat bonuses after

eating the dish? I've never seen such a large stat increase from food!"

The user who caught the scup clamoured away like he was the judge of a cooking show. The users watching started panting as they smelled the enticing scent.

"Hey, could you make it into sashimi if I catch a fresh fish?"

"Of course. Apart from sashimi and spicy seafood stew, I'll make anything such as sweet and sour fish and fresh fish soup. If you need the stat bonus then you can also carry it around as dried seafood. The spices are also easy to add."

"Oh, then you can create shark fin soup if we catch a shark?"

"Tuna? Tuna sushi?"

The questions from the players poured out. In fact, Ark had learnt all methods of cooking fish while travelling in the underwater world. There were no dishes made from fish that he couldn't produce. Ark smiled and nodded.

"All the types of cooking you asked are available. However, I need to use various ingredients and spices while cooking. So ordering the dish will cost 20 silver while any extra condiments will cost 10 silver."

Most of the players heading towards Seutandal were level 200 or higher. 10~20 silver was like the price of gum to them.

"That's not a problem."

"Fish, let's catch some fresh fish!"

The users started taking out their fishing rods. Since the users had no cooking skills, there was nowhere they could use the fish they caught. Although it was possible to sell it to a store, they would only get a few silver at best. Plus seafood had a quick expiration date so there were many times when it became trash ingredients. Now that Ark could cook it instantly, the users started frantically fishing.

"A fresh fish. I'll pay 30 silver for it!"

“I’ll give 50 silver.”

“2 gold for a red sea bream and halibut!”

The users who hadn’t learnt fishing frantically ran around the deck buying fish. Thanks to that, the silver value of the fish jumped by 10 times. Ark had timed his business strategy for the evening when the users were hungry.

‘What’s all this fuss?’

Isyuram looked at Ark with a perplexed expression. Due to the users constantly fishing on the deck, there was no time for Ark to rest at all. Thus 3 hours passed like that. The users on the boat had finally filled their stomachs. During that time, Ark had created over 200 dishes. He had earned 30 gold just from cooking the fish.

“Huhuhu, as I expected.”

Ark tapped his pocket and smiled happily. In fact, Ark hadn’t felt that good until now. It was because he had to waste 1,400 gold buying the Summoning Port from the Magic Institute in Giran. That wasn’t all. Initially it cost 7 gold for a trip to Seutandal but now it had increased to 12 gold. The price had gone up a lot thanks to all the users flocking. Therefore Ark only had a few copper coins left. Thus the weight of his pocket had changed. If he fell into the ocean when his purse was heavy then he wouldn’t be that angry. Of course, he would still be mad but he wanted to avoid attention so he would’ve endured it. Anyway, he now had 30 gold in his pocket so he was in a better mood.

“I’ll give you this fish so please make sashimi for me.”

At that moment, Isyuram extended a flatfish towards Ark. Once Ark made the sashimi, Isyuram tried it and instantly exclaimed in his head.

‘Ohh, who knew this guy had such a talent? Huh? What the?’

Isyuram suddenly tilted his head while eating the sashimi. After the customers had all disappeared, Ark crouched down and his gaze was riveted on the flatfish sashimi. While he was watching, an

audible growling sound was heard from Ark's stomach. Although he had cooked hundreds of pieces of fish, Ark had been unable to eat even one piece.

"What the? Are you hungry?"

Nod.

"Couldn't you also buy a fresh fish to cook?"

"I don't have any money.

Isyuram's face contorted at Ark's answer. He had just seen 30 gold enter his pocket so how could Ark say he had no money? Isyuram was already angry at Ark so he shoved the remaining pieces into his mouth. Ark just sighed with an even more pitiful expression. The idea had been petty so Isyuram felt even more sorry after he did it.

'Did I have to act so petty? That reminds me, isn't this guy playing the game to pay for his mother's hospital bills? Ah, damn. Of course it's not possible for him to part with his money.....'

Isyuram clicked his tongue with an uncomfortable expression at the idea that he hadn't behaved like an adult. How much time had passed? The sun had started to set and the horizon was dyed with red.

The starving Ark grabbed the ship's rail, looked at the sunset and spoke in a sentimental voice.

".....That's it."

"What?"

"The answer to the question you previously asked. Teacher's good points. Rather than a good point, it had been 3 months since I've gone to the gym. Teacher called and said there were circumstances. Now I'm just waiting for the day that Teacher will return. "

Isyuram's face became serious after hearing Ark's words. He could see the sincerity in the eyes and facial expression.

'Damn, this guy..... Being serious all of a sudden..... I feel even

sorrier.....’

Isyuram roughly scratched his head and turned around. Then he spoke like he just remembered.

“Oh, I had something to say. The guy you fought a while ago and his friends will ambush you in Seutandal. It will be difficult for you to handle three people alone. If you don’t want to die then you should stay on the ship when it is docked. If you’re with the sailors then they won’t attack you. Please trust me. I’m not their friend.”

Isyuram went to the railing after he spoke. Then he handed over 1 gold where a user was still fishing.

“Did you see the person cooking a while ago? Please give two fish to him and don’t tell him it was from me. Just say it’s a gift.”

Isyuram then hid next to the cabins and watched Ark. Ark instantly cooked the fish and ate it. In fact, Ark hadn’t bought the fish because of a lack of money. Even if they were inexpensive ingredients procured nearby, it was still wasting ingredients. In addition, eating inside the game wouldn’t fill his belly. One fish cost 20 silver so it was better to just eat rice in real life. Anyway, Isyuram also became satisfied after seeing Ark eat the food happily.

‘As expected, a mentor has to look after his disciple. Huhuhu, I really am a good guy. I’ve also warned Hyun-woo about Garam. Huh? Which reminds me, what was Hyun-woo’s ID? How did that happen? Well, I’ll just ask for his ID later.’

Isyuram headed towards the cabin with a cool expression. When he reached the cabin Garam, Takosu and Rokon were still playing poker. Garam was frowning as he already lost a lot of money. But Isyuram wasn’t interested in poker and just sat in the corner.

How much time had passed?

“All passengers please gather on the deck, we have arrived in Seutandal!”

“There it is!”

“Let’s go!”

Garam rose and ran to the deck.

“Wait a minute, that guy might sense we’re targeting him if he sees us. We’ll hide near the corner and attack once we confirm he got off the boat.”

Takosu hid his body behind the door of a cabin and looked carefully. Meanwhile, the ferry finally entered Seutandal’s port.

“Okay, all passengers prepare to leave the ship!”

The captain’s loud voice had the crew moving. As soon as the plank connecting the ferry and pier was lowered, the players began entering Seutandal. But Ark hesitated and looked around.

“What the, why isn’t that guy getting off?”

“Did he notice? Or maybe someone told him beforehand while we were in the cabin.....”

Takosu looked at Isyuram with suspicious eyes. Then Rokon who had been staring at Ark shook his head.

“He’s going down!”

“See, I told you to trust Isyuram.”

Garam complained towards Takosu who coughed and nodded.

“Okay, I’m sorry I doubted him.”

“No, its okay since today is the first time you’ve met me.”

Isyuram replied but his thoughts were confused.

‘Jeez, didn’t that Hyun-woo listen to what I said before? Why the hell is he descending? Damn, Hyun-woo won’t be able to survive against Garam’s group no matter how high his level. Furthermore, in such a situation I can only quietly watch.’

“Now, let’s go!”

Then Takosu, Garam and Rokon proceeded as planned. Isyuram

had no choice but to go with them.

‘This is impossible. I’ll feel sorry if Hyun-woo gets injured but I have no choice but to stick with them.’

The group took out their weapons as they crossed the deck. Then they tried to stab his back as Hyun-woo stepped foot on Seutandal. It was the backstab attack of four high levelled users! Ark quickly flew back and lost 40% of his health.

“Hahaha! Take that you bastard!” “Then let’s see you take this……. Eh?”

Garam had approached Ark and was raising his fist when he suddenly stopped. Takosu and Rokon also looked around with confusion. 100 people had gathered by the dock. This wasn’t the regular group made of passengers. Armed with armour and sword, the people with blue skin were the Baran clan of the Eastern Nation. They were the inhabitants of Seutandal. The Baran clan of the Eastern Nation were holding a sign saying ‘Welcome Commander!’ and shaking it.

In fact, Ark hadn’t paid any attention to Garam. Although normally he would be wary of Garam, Seutandal was Ark’s home ground these days. If Ark was attacked then the residents as well as the guards would notice. And even if they weren’t there, Ark was confident that he could deal with Garam alone. The reason that Ark had hesitated and remained on the ship until the end was because of the Baran clan. Ark had called JusticeMan before leaving for Seutandal. He conveyed the necessary information to Beseutyu beforehand. After hearing the news, the Baran clan wanted to come out and greet him. In order to avoid the attention of the other users, Ark had waited until all the passengers scattered. But then Ark suddenly collapsed while they were cheering. The Baran clan paused in their trumpeting and their pupils’ shone.

“What the, what’s with those guys? Are they crazy?”

“How dare they swing their swords at Seutandal’s saviour!”

“They must want to die.”

“We don’t need to see anything else. Attack them!”

The soldiers flocked in front of the collapsed Ark.

“Huk, what, what the?”

Damn, what on earth is going on?”

“What is that guy’s identity? Ahuk! Ugh!”

Garam, Takosu and Rokon were surrounded by soldiers and died in a blink of an eye. The 100 eyes then turned towards Isyuram. Isyuram flinched and hurriedly raised his hand before shouting.

“W-wait. I’m not an enemy!”

“Don’t talk nonsense, we saw you attack with the others!”

“Kill him, he is their accomplice.”

“I-it’s true! If you don’t believe me then ask him!”

The soldiers approached Ark after hearing Isyuram’s words. Ark just sneaked a glance at Isyuram and tapped his stomach before laughing pleasantly.

“Flatfish.”

“W-what? Huk, I..... Don’t tell me you’re still hung up about that?”

“Grudges over food can be frightening.”

“Wait, I’m the one who asked that fisherman.....”

Isyuram quickly tried to explain but the soldiers didn’t listen. Although Ark and the soldiers had a high degree of intimacy, NPCs wouldn’t randomly attack users. If it was a normal user, they wouldn’t attack even if Ark commanded them to. However, Isyuram had attacked Ark so his name was grey. That alone was justification for the soldiers to attack Isyuram. As the target had been Ark, there was no need for the soldiers to discuss the situation.

“Attack because of the flatfish!”

“I don’t know what the commander is taking about but there’s clearly a grudge!”

“He is clearly the enemy!”

The angry soldiers gathered around Isyuram. The captain of the number 1 SWAT team? Representative of the national taekwondo team? None of that mattered. Isyuram couldn’t do anything to prevent being killed by the 100 soldiers.

‘Oh my god, I’ve been stepped on by followers of my disciple.....’

However, Isyuram was lucky that he died. Although his death was delayed, Garam still trusted Isyuram after he died. If Isyuram had survived then he would’ve been suspected by the others after they resurrected. Anyway, Isyuram’s infiltration mission was still continuing!

Seutandal's Hero

[TL: For people who read the previous chapter when I first uploaded it, I've edited it a little bit so that Haman fortress is actually close to the harbour. Not far away. Ark also finally used a male pronoun for Radun in this chapter so from now on I will use male pronouns for Radun instead of gender neutral.]

"Bah, trying to trick me?"

Ark muttered as he snorted. Ark hadn't believed Isyuram in the slightest. If Isyuram really wanted to stop the fight between Ark and Garam then he should've done it in Reuben. However, Isyuram just watched the fight and jumped in when Garam was having difficulty. It was obvious that he was trying to protect Garam.

'Yet he dares say they're not colleagues?'

So Ark had doubted Isyuram when he approached for the first time. He was clearly trying some scheme since it was obvious they weren't as strong as Ark. Wasn't that why he quietly leaked information as they approached Seutandal?

'They clearly plotted to keep me on the boat. I don't know why they want me on the boat but there is clearly a hidden scheme. I don't know what types of methods exist in New World so I should always be careful.'

Their goal was to prevent Ark from leaving the boat. Then obviously he had to leave the boat to prevent their scheme. Ark was confident against that group so he just ignored Isyuram's warning. And after he was surprised, Ark immediately checked Isyuram's name with Eyes of the Cat. Grey..... Isyuram had also stabbed Ark in the back. Thus Ark was convinced that his idea was correct.

'As expected, he is accomplices with Garam!'

Ark was also angry that Isyuram ate the flatfish sashimi by himself. Eventually distrust and doubts caused a tragic incident. Anyway, he had no time for these trivial matters. There were many people like Garam in New World who wanted to pick fights for no reason. In any case, Ark erased the incident at the harbour from his memory.

‘There’s no need to pay attention to such things in the game. Anyway, this place really has changed.’

Ark exclaimed as he looked around the harbour and Haman Fortress. Seutandal had rapidly changed in just four days. When Ark left for Giran, there were only 10 wooden buildings around the harbour while the foundation around the castle was still being constructed. But Haman was the heart of Seutandal. Thanks to the ongoing flow of users, construction of hotels and inns were in full swing. Of course, there were still areas that needed attention but it was only a matter of time. After the construction was completed and the system updated, Haman would be transformed into a great city. A large bulletin board at the entrance of the fortress caught his eye.

-Welcome to Haman Fortress!

This is a small guide for first time visitors.

The inhabitants of Seutandal, the Baran clan suffered under the threat of the wicked Nakujuk for a long time. Not too long ago the Nakujuk invaded and slaughtered thousands of Baran, causing a tragic incident. Fortunately, a great leader led the Baran clan and constructed Haman fortress to oppose the Nakujuk.

Hooray our great leader!

“Huhuhu, great leader..... My face feels a little hot.”

The great leader written on the board was Ark. Ark had learned many things from watching Alan. Alan turned into a celebrity in Schudenberg after his appearance on TV. But Ark decided that it wasn’t a good thing. In this world, there were many people who would feel envious of someone who did well. Becoming a celebrity

was no different from becoming an enemy. If Alan wasn't so famous then he wouldn't have been ruined so much. Ark had no intention of going down Alan's route. Therefore he thoroughly hid his name and appearance. That was also why the welcoming committee hadn't placed Ark's name on the sign.

'It will become more troublesome if I'm a celebrity.'

Ark praised his foresight as he passed by the people reading the bulletin.

-Sadly, the threat of the Nakujuk still hasn't disappeared. Therefore Isabel, the representative of Seutandal is asking for the help of courageous adventurers. Adventurers who fightt for justice against the Nakujuk will receive a token whenever they kill one. When they provide proof of the 'Nakujuk's red hair,' compensation will be provided.

* Compensation for hunting 10 Nakujuk (Copper medal: without this medal, you won't be able to trade at Haman Fortress.)*

Compensation for hunting 50 Nakujuk (Silver medal: 10% discount on all shop trades)

* Compensation for hunting 100 Nakujuk (Gold medal: 20% discount on all shop trades)

* Compensation for hunting a Nakujuk chieftain (Gold ticket: you will acquire a magic item through a lottery)

"Anyway, it's now truly begun?"

Ark was also the person who came up with this. Although the war was won, the Nakujuk could still send troops through letter movement as they still occupied the valley village. With the Baran clan's power growing, the Nakujuk were engaged in a last desperate struggle. It wasn't enough for him to be worried, but he couldn't just leave it alone. If their numbers grew then they could threaten Haman fortress. Thus the only method Ark could think of to reduce the Nakujuk's numbers was to use the players. Seutandal's current situation meant that they couldn't afford a lot of rewards. Although

the Eastern Nation had a lot of funds, a lot of it is focused on construction. So they didn't have the ability to give a decent compensation all participants. However, they couldn't delay the development of Seutandal.

'Apart from warriors, merchants also came here.'

Therefore Ark designed the medal system. When players first come to Seutandal, they couldn't use the stores run by the Baran clan. They had to at least receive a copper medal to use the stores. And the discount would increase with the silver and gold medals. Thanks to that, users who came to Seutandal had no choice but to defeat the Nakujuk. The average level of users who came to Seutandal was level 200. On the other hand, the Nakujuk was between level 250~280. Therefore there were many notices on the bulletin boards of users looking for parties.

"I'm recruiting people to hunt the Nakujuk!"

"Are there any magicians here?"

But the profession that suffered the most was the merchants. For merchants seeking to trade in Seutandal, being prohibited from using the stores was like being struck by lightning on a clear day. Moreover, they had to receive a discount in order to truly receive a profit from the stores. In other words, merchants needed at least a gold medal but the Nakujuk was a fair distance away from the fortress and not many parties wanted to take merchants.

"Buying Nakujuk's Red Hair, 20 silver for one!"

"Buying a set of 100 Nakujuk's Red Hair for 190 gold!"

The merchants crouched near the bulletin board and bought the tokens. Thanks to that, there were quite a few warriors who stayed around Haman fortress for the part time job of hunting tokens. But if looked at closely, it wasn't that different from deceiving people with petty tricks.

'Huhuhu, the Nakujuk are the Haman's war enemy so the discount would automatically be applied as the NPC's sign of appreciation for people who killed a lot of them.'

The medal system was only to give the appearance of compensation. It was a petty trick to avoid having to spend money on users! That was Ark's speciality. However, Ark's medal system was hiding an even more extravagant scheme.....!

'Once everyone possesses a medal it will become insignificant, but at the moment not that many users have them. The Nakujuk aren't easy to hunt for level 200 users and the token won't drop that often.'

So there were many users who couldn't use the stores. However, the users needed consumables to hunt the Nakujuk. Of course, the merchants who came from the continent sold consumables but there was a constant shortage of supplies for warriors.

'This is a chance to sell the consumables obtained from Magaro's laboratory!'

Thanks to the Seutandal stores being sealed off, Ark managed to obtain a sell his goods for a large price. Abuse of power! How wicked..... Ark was indeed good at being wicked.

'Well, it can't be helped even if the actions are dirty. There are 20 days left until I need to pay the balance for the house. I have to organize everything and make some money. And volunteer troops are necessary for Haman fortress anyway. I'm not going to allow such annoying things to prick my conscience.'

Ark finished firming his mental state. Anyway, the bulletin board also posted new developments and events.

-This week's events

*Find the hidden Eastern Nation clan: Find the Eastern Nation clan members hiding using 'Stealth' in Haman fortress.

This is a challenge for the foreigners visiting Seutandal. The Eastern Nation members are hiding somewhere between points A-F in Haman fortress. After finding and collecting some documents from the clan members, you will receive a fixed prize. Foreigners with skills such as 'Sensing', 'Tracking' and 'Sixth Sense' are encouraged to participate.

-Facilities Guide

*One day farm experience: Experience harvesting various Seutandal plants or visiting the cattle. It can be a great opportunity to pick up leather extraction or butchering from the kind farm owner (Currently in business).

* Beseutyu's information centre: It is possible to hear the history and information about Seutandal from the wise man Beseutyu, whose family has kept records for a long time. It can be a hint for finding new adventures in Seutandal (Currently in business).

* Monster Safari: Learn the tendencies and weak points of various monsters as you travel around Seutandal. An ideal chance to learn what you might face! (Currently under construction. Opening soon)

* Seutandal Sightseeing: Have you arrived in Seutandal only to find a gloomy black map? You can sightsee around Seutandal using the skyrays, making it a convenient and safe method of travelling and uncovering your map (Business is closed for a while due to various circumstances).

Not only Lancel village, but Seutandal also seemed to become more and more like an amusement park.

‘Well, it’s good that there are lots of ways to enjoy themselves.’

Ark laughed and entered Haman fortress. When Ark appeared in the shopping district, the various Baran clan members recognized him and greeted him. He was grateful but it was a little stressful as the users’ attention would focus on him. On the other hand, he was satisfied by the thought that Seutandal had completely become his home town. Anyway, Ark hadn’t returned to Seutandal to view the development. The most important thing was finding the last Three Marvels and reclaiming his summons.

‘The last piece of the Three Marvels is almost in my grasp.....’

The problem is finding where Razak and Dedric lived. Before returning to Haman fortress, Ark had tried contacting Yuzuria. The world tree should know about the distribution of each species in

Seutandal. But Yuzuria shook her head.

-Of course my roots used to stretch across all of Seutandal. The world tree can obtain a lot of information through those roots. However, you didn't allow a lot of room for my roots to stretch when you planted me in here.

Anyway, the world tree wasn't useful in matters like these. He was more likely to find information from Beseutyu who has recorded the history of Seutandal. That's why Ark contacted JusticeMan before departing.

'Is it here?'

Ark looked at the wooden building situated to one side of Haman fortress. This was the information centre that Beseutyu had created after Seutandal rose.

"Welcome. This is Beseutyu's Information Centre..... Eh? Ark hyung!"

Bona's eyes widened when he saw who came in through the door. After Seutandal had risen, some of the Baran who had been living in Lancel village returned. Bona also returned as well to help Beseutyu. Therefore, his <Find the Settlers> quest unfortunately stopped at 98%.

"Wah, when did you arrive?"

"Just now. Where's your Grandpa?"

"Grandpa went to another elder's house to collect the materials you required. He hadn't been able to recover the data from the valley village yet. You came faster than expected."

"You're looking after the business alone?"

"Hehe, I also know quite a lot. I'll show it to Ark hyung for free."

Bona pushed out his chest and spoke firmly.

"Ooh, really? Then please guide me further. What new information is there these days?"

Ark playfully asked an embarrassed Bona who scratched his head.

“H-hyung still knows more than me. You know everything..... Ah, that’s right! Hyung, did you know about this?”

“What?”

“Something important happened not that long ago.”

Bona looked around and lowered his voice.

“I heard it from Lariette noona.....”

“Ah, Lariette-nim is here as well? I thought that Lariette-nim was accompanying the rehabilitation group as they surveyed the area. What’s going on?”

The soldiers who fought the Nakujuk had changed their name to the ‘Autonomous’ soldiers. And the Autonomous group was led by JusticeMan, the rehabilitation group and Lariette. Their dream of an autonomous police force that couldn’t be achieved in Lancel was finally fulfilled in Seutandal. But Bona was showing a discontented expression as he talked.

“You should let me tell you.”

“Okay, okay. Continue.”

“There was an incident where a group of tourist who visited the Eastern ruins in Seutandal was exterminated. The guides and tourists didn’t have enough strength and died.”

“What?”

“It’s not just that. Several days after that incident, a magician and a warrior attacked out sightseeing office.”

“They came inside Haman fortress?”

“Yes, isn’t that absurd? There were 20 staff working there and six people lost their lives. Soldiers were immediately dispatched but they’re still not caught. They’ve probably already escaped to the continent.”

Bona added that it was the reason JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and Lariette hadn't come to greet him. The commanders of the autonomous force were the only ones strong enough so they went out to chase directly. The Nakujuk and Baran didn't have any NPCs that could use magic. If a magician managed to get into the city, how many NPCs would be massacred?

"But how would they have escaped to the continent? The autonomous members are defending the harbour. Shouldn't the criminals be unable to use the ferry?"

"That's....."

"Recently there are rumours of smugglers."

At that moment Beseutyu had entered and answered. Then Bona shouted with a sulky face.

"Grandpa, Ark-hyung is my customer!"

"Hehehe, sorry. How have you been doing Ark? I'm sorry it wasn't possible for me to go and greet you. I was looking for the materials you requested. I thought about sending Bona but then the store would've been empty."

"No it's fine. I never asked for it. And I'm glad that the residents are grateful but it is a little hard. There is no need for it next time."

"Well, you are hiding your own achievements..... As expected, you have the qualities of a true warrior."

Beseutyu once again firmly misunderstood.

"By the way, what did you say about smugglers?"

Ark asked with curiosity while Beseutyu sighed as he sat down in a chair.

"Yes, that's what I said. Registered criminals aren't allowed ride the ferry would have to sneak into Seutandal. But there's even more. A while ago there was an incident when a boat was attacked by a group of pirates entirely consisting of those criminals. So there is a place in Seutandal where criminals are gathering. The authorities

have been investigating the coast but still haven't found anything. I also believe that they have contact with the Nakujuk."

The situation turned out to be surprisingly serious after listening. But when he thought about it, it was entirely possible. Although Haman fortress treated the Nakujuk as monsters, they were also residents of Seutandal. There was the precedent of the Hermes guild interacting with them. Obviously chaotic players would be eager to come to Seutandal. There were users in the game who owned merchant boats and at least one of them would be eager to bring chaotic players to Seutandal for money. Since there were high levels of maritime trade, a lot of chaotic users also take up piracy.

'The Hermes Alliance might even be protesting using these actions.'

Hermes had already made an alliance with the Nakujuk. If there were outlaws living in Nakujuk territory then Hermes were certainly among them. The Hermes guild definitely hadn't given up on Seutandal yet. The three kingdoms openly formed goodwill with the Baran clan, yet schemes could still be arranged secretly.

'This is why JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and Lariette-nim are searching for the culprits. Seutandal still has a long way to go before it becomes stable.'

The path to true peace was distant and steep.

"Although that information is true, there's still no need to worry that much."

Beseutyu coughed and changed the subject after seeing Ark's serious expression.

"Here is what you were looking for."

"Did you find it?"

"Not exactly, but I can guess the area."

Beseutyu opened the map and pointed towards one spot.

"You said that your summons are a vampire and undead? In my opinion the vampire lives here. He is located in the northwest of

Seutandal. This is a place that no one has ever been to. But an elder had an ancient document and I noticed a strange passage.”

“Strange passage?”

“Yes, a long time ago ... I think it was before the Dark Century. One traveller explored the northwest territory of Seutandal and discovered a land enveloped in darkness. And a race that relied on drinking human blood lived there. They are hostile to outsiders and will capture them for their blood. The traveller would be drained of their blood until they died of old age.”

“The traveller died? Then how was it recorded?”

“They placed the message in a bottle and sent it into the sea before dying. An ancient record keeper found the document. The location on that document points to this area.”

Blood-sucking species. The vampire. Ark checked the map again and tilted his head to one side.

“Wait? Isn’t this.....?”

Ark noticed something strange and opened his own map.

‘There’s no doubt. This is the area pointed out by Yggdrasil and Yuzuria that contains the fragment of the Three Marvels! What the? Then the last beast clan is the vampire? But vampires are able to change into people. Maybe they live together with the beast clan keeping the final piece? Or did the beast clan bury the fragment somewhere in the territory of the vampire?’

Ark was confused but it wasn’t bad news.

‘This means I can find Dedric and the fragment of the Three Marvels at the same time.

“Do you know how to get there?”

Although he had been living in Seutandal for a while, he still hadn’t explored a lot of it. He had only explored the east and south around Haman fortress and the area around Ageiron in the north. That wasn’t even 1/5th of the entire area of Seutandal. Therefore most of

his map was still black. Since Seutandal was surrounded by mountain ranges, it wasn't possible to wander around blindly. That was why the Seutandal sightseeing business received a lot of profit.

"Um..... Actually, that's the problem."

Beseutyu took out an old map. It was a map of Seutandal, but the lines summarizing the land seemed like it was graffiti drawn by a 13 year old. Of course, the terrain was still recognizable on such a map.

"Now, look here. This is the northern mountain ranges, and this is the western mountain ranges. Thanks to these mountain ranges, Seutandal is clearly able to be divided into north, south, east and west. Thanks to the high mountain ranges the air flow, weather and ecosystem in each region is different. But the place you want to get to is surrounded by the mountain ranges."

Beseutyu shook his head.

"This area is also filled with steep cliffs and there are many storms thanks to the different air currents striking against each other. Thus it also won't be possible to use the skyrays to fly over a land route. Even the Nakujuk can't use the Drakens to approach this area."

"Then there is no way to get there?"

".....It would've been impossible in the past."

"You're saying it is possible now?"

Beseutyu worried for a moment about Ark's question before replying.

"You know that Seutandal had been caught in the dimensional storm until now. Because of the storm, it wasn't even possible to approach this area from the outside. In fact, until now we thought of that place as the end of the world. But then Seutandal rose. It is now an island."

"As expected, it's the sea."

Ark instantly knew the answer. Yes, the place where Ark had to go

touched the coast. If he couldn't cross over the mountains then he could enter by the sea.

"Honestly, I would like to stop you. Like I said, there is no information about this place. Only that the dreadful vampires who suck human blood live there."

"I have no choice but to go."

He had no choice, even if the destination was a dragon's lair.

"Is that so....."

"Then do you have any information about the territory of the undead?"

"Yes, that place is quite well known. Didn't I previously tell you that the undead had a significant effect on Seutandal? Because of the dimensional gap, the undead were freely able to travel in and out of the underground. In fact, the underground had been gradually widening because of the dimensional storms. But the rate of erosion had decreased ever since Seutandal rose."

Beseutyu explained while pointing to another spot on the map. It was located on the north end of the East Moon Mountains.

"Ah, the conversation got side-tracked for a moment. Anyway, this is the place where the undead will appear. 'City of the Dead.' It is the territory of the undead. This was originally underground but it returned to normal after Seutandal rose. But it is the territory of the undead so there is still danger."

"Thank you. You've really helped me a lot."

Ark began to rise from his seat when Beseutyu began speaking again.

"Wait a minute. I have something to give to you."

"Huh? A gift?"

"In fact, I was going to give it when all the autonomous members were gathered..... But you dislike the idea of an uproar so I'll give it

to you quietly. They're also busy investigating the sightseeing office attack case. I'll speak as the clan's representative."

Beseutyu took out a small box from his pocket and spoke in a serious voice.

"The Baran clan has really learned a lot after meeting you. We would've had everything taken away from us if it wasn't for you. So the elders started consulting each other after Seutandal rose. It was about how we should repay you. As expected, this was the only option."

"That.....?"

"Didn't I say this before? Our clan's saviour was Rarukan. Thus we made Rarukan's ring in order to return the favour. Just like Rarukan, you are also our saviour. Therefore we made Ark's ring to return the favour. Although we don't have the ancient knowledge used to create Rarukan's ring anymore, the elders melted down all the magic ore to create this."

The box was opened and a ring with five coloured jewels appeared.

-Ark's Ring (Unique, impossible to be traded after being acquired)

Item type: Ring

User restriction: Level 200 and higher

A ring specially designed by the inhabitants of the Netherworld, the Baran clan for their saviour Ark-nim.

This ring was created from smelted magic ore that had been passed down to the elders from a long time ago. Unfortunately the ancient knowledge of the Baran clan has disappeared so the full power of the magic ores couldn't be properly used. However, the magic of the five jewels has the power to amplify the body's physical abilities. The inside of the ring is carved with the words 'Homage to Ark, saviour of our clan.'

<Option: Strength +5, Agility +5, Stamina +5, Wisdom +5, Intelligence +5>

<Special Option: You can use the skill 'Sudden Increase in Power.' When this skill is used, your strength, agility, stamina, wisdom and intelligence will increase by 40 for 30 minutes. But after the effects have passed, you will fall into a 'weakened' state for 5 minutes. Cool down time: 24 hours>

'Heok, a unique item!'

Ark's eyes widened. It was a ring which raised all his stats except for luck! The additional ability made it one of the best items. Although it couldn't be traded or sold in shops once acquired, having an item with his name carved on it in a game was quite nice.

'Ohh, I didn't receive any compensation from the Baran clan for defeating the Nakujuk after Seutandal rose so my heart had been quite uncomfortable.....'

Now he had been compensated by the Baran after a period of time had passed. Although he also received the compensation from the mermaids and the Meow like that.

"I see that Ark-hyung likes the ring."

Bona smiled and spoke after Ark failed to hide his joy. He remembered how Ark had previously dropped Rarukan's ring which he had been so excited to obtain. However this was not the only reward.

"The representative Isabel would also like to meet you."

'Oh, there's still something else?'

Ark eagerly looked for Isabel. Then Isabel spoke after Ark found her.

"Welcome, Ark-nim. I arrived in Seutandal as soon as Deliverer-nim contacted me, but regretfully Ark-nim had already left."

Isabel had become the representative of Seutandal because of Ark but he had already left for Giran by the time she arrived.

"I'm sorry but the current Eastern Nation is investing all its funds into

development so I can't give you a reward. But you will always be appreciated and remembered as the clan's saviour. In addition, we will help Ark-nim whenever you require it. This is not the promise of the representative of Seutandal, but as the head of the Eastern Nation."

Isabel's words caused an information window to appear.

-You have received the title 'Seutandal's Hero' from the representative Isabel.

You have overcome many difficulties and completed all the main quests related to Seutandal. You have fulfilled the Baran clan's long cherished goal of escaping from the threat of the Nakujuk and forming the new Eastern Nation. Seutandal has also returned to middle earth after hundreds of years. It is difficult to believe one person has accomplished such great achievements! It takes a true hero that criminals can't even imagine to achieve such great feats.

Your heroic deeds will be recorded in the history of Seutandal for a long time.

-Seutandal's Hero is one of the 'Hidden Hero' titles

You don't dwell on fame. You would rather find a way to be useful to others than achieve further fame. The 'pursuit of truth' is one of the traits of 'hidden heroes.' This trait will give you an opportunity to learn special skills in exchange for 'Lore' fame.

* As a title bonus, all stats increase by 2.

* Degree of intimacy with all members of the Eastern Nation will rise to the maximum amount.

*Fame increases by 50.

* Thanks to the effect of 'Pursuit of Truth,' hidden NPCs who 'inherit and convey lore' will teach you secret techniques in exchange for fame. The fame consumed will depend on the type of technique.

'What the, it's not an item?'

Ark looked at the information window with a slightly disappointed expression. He resolved the desire of the Eastern Nation which stretched over hundreds of years and only received a title..... But he already received the trade agreement contract and the Eastern Nation was struggling economically so he should be satisfied with this much.

‘By the way, what is the ‘Pursuit of Truth?’

He hadn’t received that many bonuses from the title this time. Instead, the title had granted him the special quality ‘Pursuit of Truth.’

‘If I encounter hidden NPCs then I can exchange fame for secret techniques? How is that different from skills? Fame is no use for a Dark Walker but how will I find hidden NPCs? Well, I’ll probably meet such a person someday anyway. I can learn about the special trait after meeting the NPC.’

Ark talked with Isabel a little more after that. According to Isabel, Shambala had once again resumed his quest to collect the scattered Dark Brothers all over the continent. Now that there was the Eastern Nation, gathering them would become much easier.

‘If I’m too slow then won’t Shambala change to his second profession first?’

Ark felt a little burdened after hearing Isabel’s words. He was about to finish the conversation when Ark remembered something.

“Ah, wouldn’t there be a suitable place here?”

“A suitable place?”

“For this guy to take a break.”

Ark pointed towards Radun. Radun was a summon. Unlike Dedric and Razak, Radun was always wrapped around his waist but Radun needed a place in Seutandal to revive in just in case he died. Therefore three Summoning Ports were necessary. Since Dedric and Razak had already died, Ark needed to go visit them directly but he needed to find a suitable place for the location of the Summoning

Port. It would be a problem if something happened to Radun after being recalled so he needed a safe place. And wasn't the Eastern Nation the safest place in Seutandal? Isabel smiled at Ark's explanation and nodded.

"Then how about my room?"

"Isabel's room?"

"Yes, only I can use it so other people won't notice. Besides, it's good if I can sometimes meet such a cute pet. How about it? You don't want to?"

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun eagerly nodded as Isabel stroked his head. Normally pretty girls hated snakes. Therefore Isabel earned Ark's approval. The safest place in Seutandal was in Isabel's room in the Eastern Nation as it was always protected by hundreds of people. But was that all? Shambala was Isabel's bodyguard so he would therefore become Radun's. Well, it was better for Shambala not to know that.....

Ark entered Isabel's room and left the Summoning Port in a suitable place. Once it was connected using magic, the jewel at the top started shining and a message window appeared.

-Please select the target to be registered.

"Radun."

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

-Ark's summon 'Radun' has been registered to the Summoning Port. If the registered pet's summons is cancelled, it will be recalled to this location. It is similar to when the summoned pet dies and the pet can't be summoned for 24 hours. When dying in this state, the penalty isn't applied to the summons. But if the Summoning Port is destroyed and the pet dies, it will lose 10% of its stats.

'Except for choosing the location of my pet's recall, it isn't that

different from before. However, this cost 700 gold.'

Who knew that such a large amount of money would be wasted on his summons?

'Now I have to look for my other summons directly.'

Anyway, now Ark's summon Radun had become Isabel's pet.

'Shall I put the rest in order before departing?'

Ark exited to the town and went to the shopping area. The route to the shopping centre? He passed by 10 shops. But Seutandal was still suffering from a shortage of materials so half of them weren't open. In addition, medals were needed for the store so the shopping area was mainly empty. By the way, there was one area which had a lot of people coming and going.

"Selling best quality potions and scrolls that are difficult to get from the continent. There's no need to hesitate. It's inexpensive, inexpensive! Please hurry. They're running out quickly!"

The person who opened a street stall in the corner and shouting was Buksil.

"Hey Buksil."

"Yes, welcome. Huh? Ark-nim!"

Buksil ran over with a joyful look.

"When did you come back?"

"Just now. How much have you sold?"

"Huhuhu, I thought you would ask. The business is doing amazing. All the special potions have been sold and now the recovery potions and scrolls are left. The current sales is 3,320 gold."

"That's a lot more than I thought?"

"Don't you know? It's thanks to my abilities. I went around Seutandal to check how much the volume of each produce and raised the price little by little. Supply and demand, that is the basics of a sales pitch.

After selling about 70% of the products I would then raise the price.”

‘Ohhh, he’s quite good?’

Ark looked at Buksil with new eyes. In fact, Ark had calculated that he would receive approximately 2,500 gold for the items obtained in Magaro’s laboratory. Thanks to the uniqueness of Seutandal’s medal system which restricted store transactions, he had made up to 3,000 gold. But thanks to Buksil’s marketing strategy, he had exceeded that by 10%.

“That means I can get the sales execution fee of 332 gold right?”

Buksil clasped both hands together as his eyes sparkled. Of course, 10% was definitely 332 gold. However.....

“No, 132 gold.”

“Huh? Huh? W-w-what did you say?”

“Video copyright fee.”

Buksil winced at Ark’s cold tone.

“Don’t you know I called the broadcasting station and learned everything?”

“You received 2 million won for the rights to the video?”

Buksil started sweating as the words continued. Yes, Ark had called the broadcasting station as soon as he got home after Ho Myung-hwan had told him about it. Of course, it wasn’t that easy to receive the information from the station. So Ark contacted the station through Ho Myung-hwan and learned the price. It was 2 million won. Therefore 2 million won was removed from the 332 gold. Buksil quivered on his feet and spoke carefully.

“B-but I’m the one who shot the video..... Deducting the 2 million won is.....”

“What?”

A cry of distress escaped from Buksil as Ark approached him.

“I’m not shameless enough to seize the 2 million won. No, to be honest I have no interest in the copyright. If you consulted me then I wouldn’t have asked for it.”

That was impossible. If he consulted Ark then Ark would’ve negotiated with the broadcasting station to receive even more. Then he would use that as an excuse to take some of the money. But there was no reason to reveal the truth to Buksil now that Ark had caught him.

“How could you? You didn’t even speak a single word to me. Did you think I wouldn’t learn about it later? I really believed you. I thought you were a friend. But you betrayed your friend for 2 million won. Do you understand my feelings?”

Ark’s impassioned speech caused Buksil to become embarrassed.

“I’m really sorry. Please forgive me.” Ark-nim thought of me like that.....”

“Shut up, I can’t just forgive you! Do you know how big the wound in my heart is? This is why I distrust humans! 2 million won? Honestly, I feel like you should just take the 332 gold and never see me again.”

“Hik, n-no. It’s because I did a lot of home shopping and I needed money. Please forgive me! Huk huk huk, I absolutely won’t do it again. I won’t do it without Ark’s permission in the future. Please believe me!”

“The future?”

Ark abruptly changed and murmured quietly.

“Then will you film my videos from now one?”

“Huk huk huk, I’ll do anything. Whatever you want. Video..... Eh? Huh? Video?”

Buksil finally realised something strange. But Ark pretended ignorance and continued talking.

“Okay, then I’ll forgive you this time.”

“W-wait a minute. Filming videos?”

“Due to various circumstances, I need to film videos from now on. You’re willing to do that work from now on? Thank you very much. I’ll hire you. I look forward to you being my exclusive cameraman.”

“I said wait a minute. What the hell are you talking about?”

“Ah ah, don’t worry. I’m not that inconsiderate so I’ll give you a monthly salary of 50 gold. How about it? Isn’t it good?”

In fact, this was Ark’s purpose. The method of the entrance examination had changed so he needed to take videos continuously from now on. However, it was too difficult for Ark to hold the camera and fight at the same time. That’s why he approached Buksil. Buksil understood that Ark wanted to keep his identity secret and took care of it. He also functioned as a bag space so it was killing two birds with one stone! He was actually worried the most about bag space. He had become used to Buksil accompanying him so the smaller bags felt awful.

‘He received 2 million won for the video rights. If I can get free videos and a merchant’s bag space, 500000 won a month is no big deal.’

The problem was Buksil. A merchant was an occupation which can earn quite a lot of money. He had been accompanying Ark until now because of his goal, but now that reason was gone. As expected, Buksil’s rocking body made his refusal clear.

“B-but I have my own plans.....”

“Really? Then it’s not possible.”

“You’re giving up?”

“Well, I can’t force someone if they dislike it.”

Buksil sighed with relief at Ark’s answer. At that moment, Ark murmured like he was thinking out loud.

“However, there was that thing I heard about. The game character’s publicity rights.....”

“Huh? Publicity rights?”

“I’ll give an example. What would happen if someone sold the rights to a video without asking the protagonist and he complained? Could it be broadcast anymore? The broadcasting station might even make the person who sold the video pay a penalty fee.”

“Huk, w-what it that.....?”

“Apparently the penalty sum is 10 times what the broadcasting station paid for the rights..... 10 times 2 million won, isn’t that 20 million won? Wah! It’s no joke. Do you have that type of money? Oh, where did you say you used the money again? Huh? Why are you shaking? It was just an example. Eh? Are you crying? Why are you crying? I was just mentioning it. Do you really think I would go that far? Speaking of the videos.....”

“I’ll do it, I’ll do it! No, please let me do it!”

“Eh? Really? Ya, as expected from Buksil. Okay, I won’t be able to stop you since you’re so willing. Let’s give you an unscheduled deposit. We’ll do a contract of 50 gold for 6 months. Now, all 50 gold to 132 gold and it is 182 gold in total!”

Ark kindly extended the 182 gold. Ark deducted 200 gold from 332 gold because of the broadcasting fee and added 50 gold, making it 182 gold..... That was Ark’s calculation method.

‘I can’t escape. It’s not six months. I can’t escape this man for my entire life.’

That’s what Buksil was feeling after taking the 182 gold from Ark.

“Now, shall we leave on another adventure?”

Ark headed towards the coast with Buksil reluctantly trailing behind him. He needed to go to the ‘Land of the Vampires’ and the ‘City of the Dead.’ He selected the first destination as the land of the vampires where the final fragment of the Three Marvels could be found. The problem was that he could only enter through the sea route. However, there weren’t any commercial boats or ferries to that location.

‘Do I have to pay for a chartered merchant boat?’

But it wasn't that easy to charter a merchant boat. Even a small vessel that only 2 people could ride required 200-300 gold. There wasn't that much time left to obtain the rent money so he couldn't spend that much on chartering.

‘Unbelievable. However, it's not possible to bite the Mermaid's Scale and walk under the ocean..... Huh?’

It had been such a long time since he obtained it that Ark had forgotten about the item.

‘Oh my god, why didn't I think about it until now?’

“Radun, Flute of the Merpeople!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun spat out a small flute.

If he was by the ocean, it was possible to call the dolphins using ‘Flute of the Merpeople.’ After he received it, he never went to the ocean so he had forgotten about it. If he remembered then he wouldn't have needed to pay the money for the ferry going between the continent and Seutandal.

‘Fortunately I made a profit from the fish on the boat..... Anyway, I have to put the special items separately so I don't forget about it again.’

Ark moved to a deserted beach and blew the flute. The quiet sea rippled and a herd of dolphins appeared. Ark got on the back of the dolphins and shouted in a powerful voice.

“Now, let's go! The goal is the land of the vampires!”

Vampire Castle

“Ugh, my waist is so sore.”

Ark moaned as he got off the dolphin. Using the dolphins was good because they don't cost any money. But it was different from riding a comfortable sailing boat, with the spine being constantly bent over. In addition, he had to ride them for quite a distance. Yuzuria said that the fragment of the Three Marvels was 700 km away from her in a straight line. However, Ark had to travel around the coast so it was more like 1,000 km. Of course, the distance was different from reality but it still took him 5 hours to get to his destination.

“Phew, I'm glad we arrived before my waist broke.”

Ark looked around with tense eyes. He had left in the evening and it took 5 hours so it was now midday. But the land around him was enveloped in a thick darkness. An information window had appeared when he arrived near the coast.

-You have entered the 'Dark Earth' area.

<Explorer's Knowledge: Hidden area discovery bonus (Skill Points: 20>

-You have been affected by a mysterious magic 'Dark Blood' created by an unknown source!

<All players within 'Dark Blood's' sphere of influence will have stats and range of vision reduced by 30%. However, this penalty doesn't apply to players with a dark attribute. On the other hand, players with a 'light' attribute will have their skills blocked by Dark Blood and continuously receive damage from the darkness>

The area was veiled in a lifelike black fog. Not even the moonlight could shine through the thick darkness. It was truly the land of the vampires.

‘By the way, it was under his nose the whole time.....’

Who would’ve thought that the final piece of the Three Marvels was hidden in the area that Dedric lived in?

‘It’s worked out well. If I find Dedric then it shouldn’t be that difficult to find the final piece. First I have to find Dedric and receive information about the terrain.’

But he couldn’t be reassured about finding Dedric. If this was the land of the vampires then there would be other vampire apart from Dedric. There was no guarantee that those other vampires would be friendly to Ark. In normal fantasy worlds, vampires possessed powerful magic and great intelligence. Fortunately, he had the dark attribute so ‘Dark Blood’ hadn’t affected him but he couldn’t be careless.

“Oh Ark-nim, isn’t this atmosphere unusual? My stats have decreased. What on earth is this area?”

Buksil asked Ark in an uneasy voice after landing.

“Oh, didn’t I tell you? This is the land of the vampires.”

“Huh? V-vampires? I-I’ve suddenly remembered that I’m really busy so I have to go.....”

“Do you want to die?”

“Huk huk, it’s really scary. I’ve always been scared of the vampire Dracula.”

Well, Buksil’s fear was understandable but he wouldn’t be the one at risk. No matter how scary they were, a vampire was still a monster.

He would just hunt it like normal if it appeared.

“Stop talking nonsense and follow me.”

Ark used Eyes of the Cat and entered the forest next to the shore. The map cleared up and confirmed that the forest located in the east was enormous. And the bushes in the forest were really dense.

‘Apart from the black mist, what else is special about the land of the

vampires?’

But Ark started feeling really uncomfortable after entering the forest.

‘What the? This feeling?’

Ark once again checked the area with tense expression. However, he couldn’t see anything different apart from trees and grass. It was quiet. No, it was too quiet. Yes, that was the source of his uncomfortable feeling. The forest was dense but he couldn’t feel any signs of life from it. No matter where he went he couldn’t see any signs of monsters, small animals or even birds. It was so silent that even the sound of Buksil swallowing his saliva could be clearly audible.

‘Weird, something is weird.’

“Hieeek, hieeek! Ark-nim, Ark-nim, over there, something is over there……!”

“What? Where?”

Ark tensed and turned around after pulling his sword out. However, there was nothing at the place Buksil indicated.

“There is nothing!”

“B-b-but something clearly touched the back of my neck…….”

“Calm down! You surprised me for no reason.”

Ark once again started looking around the forest. Thanks to Buksil’s commotion, Ark also started to feel more anxious. It really felt like something was following them through the forest. It was the same feeling that occurred when walking home alone at night……

Occasionally Buksil would shriek and collapse onto the ground. He later learned that Buksil was weak to ghosts and demons. Buksil seemed to consider vampires as another form of demon.

‘Although Buksil is overreacting, there might be something here.’

Therefore Ark used Radun’s Stalking to check if there were any traces. However he couldn’t find anything.

‘I don’t know so I should just use Stalking continuously.’

Anyway, if he removed the uneasy feeling then travelling through the forest was okay. There weren’t any monsters or animals around but the thick forest had abundant fruits and herbs. Ark had disposed of all the japtem in his bag so he started gathering any ingredients he ran across in the forest. How much time had passed?

Ssak ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun who had been using Stalking flicked his tongue and pointed towards one spot. Some footprints were going between the bushes.

-You have searched for information about the target tracks. <Classification: Warrior profession, Alignment: Normal NPC, Travelling time: 38 minutes ago>
--

“A normal NPC? What the? There are also normal residents here?”

Ark looked somewhat bewildered. This was the land of the vampires. Yet there were normal NPCs within this area? Didn’t that mean that the NPCs lived harmoniously with the vampires?

‘If there are NPCs then it’s not that bad. If there are NPCs then there must be a village. I can find information about the vampires from there.’

“Radun, track the footprints.”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark ordered Radun and followed the footprints through the forest. They ran through the thick forest for approximately 30 minutes. The small village appeared in front of him.

“What the? This is the village?”

There were 100 residents living in the village. Ark and Buksil sighed with relief and looked around the village. But the atmosphere here was also somewhat strange. Both the men and women were burly and oversized. Their faces were also as hard as rocks that it was

almost frightening.

‘Aren’t they all wearing leather clothes? There are no beasts around so why are they wearing leather clothes? And what’s with their expressions? They look like soulless people.’

Anyway, meeting the NPCs was difficult. For example, Ark had entered the village and spoken to a villager near the entrance.

“Excuse me.” “Huk, you.....!”

The villager looked like he had seen a ghost and ran into the village. It was also the same afterwards. No matter how hard he tried to ask for information, the people would run away with a fearful expression.

“Why are they all like that? Do they think I will eat them like a wild boar?”

“Ah Ark-nim! This village is strange for some reason.”

Buksil spoke with a trembling voice.

“It really is strange. The women are all like the Hulk..... Ah, I just remembered.”

“What?”

“These people have clearly been bitten by vampires. It’s just like in a movie. A person bitten by a vampire will turn into a strange monster. That’s right, clearly that’s the reason. There’s no other reason for people to live close to vampires. Oh, I see that they’ve all hidden their necks. Maybe hiding a bite mark? They also have anaemia..... Perhaps they bite according to the right blood type? I have Rh blood type..... Surely there won’t be any vampires with Rh blood type?”

.....Ah, he really was playing around. Ark didn’t know why he was so afraid. But when taking into account that it was the land of the vampires, such talk couldn’t be discounted.

‘After thinking about it, I’m also feeling a little bit jittery?’

“You’re the ones who came from the out of town.”

Then he suddenly heard someone’s voice from behind him. Ark and

Buksil turned around with an aggressive stance but the voice just laughed.

“Hahaha, I seem to have surprised you. I’m sorry.”

“Who are you.....?”

“I’m Albert. I live in this town.”

The person who introduced himself as Albert was a 20 year old man. His face also looked tough so it was a serious problem in the genes of the residents. Albert smiled and still looked scary.

“Please don’t be offended by the attitude of the villagers. They’re just scared since this is the first time they’ve seen outsiders. You look different from us.”

“Then you are?”

“Well, it depends on the people you talk to.”

Albert shrugged and replied. Ark still wasn’t satisfied but it was fortunately that he found someone willing to talk.

“By the way, I heard that vampires live here.....”

“That’s correct. Is it a problem?”

Ark became even more lost at Albert’s words.

‘Eh? What the, what’s with this reaction? Isn’t it a vampire? Don’t vampires suck a person’s blood? But how can he look so casual talking about vampires? What on earth is going on? Perhaps?’

“Then are you possibly a vampire?”

“Heok!”

Buksil freaked out and retreated at Ark’s words. But Albert just laughed and shook his head.

“That’s impossible. Vampires are the aristocrats. It’s impossible for them to live in a village like this. If you’ve asked such a question then I guess there are no vampires outside.”

“Then you live alongside the vampires?”

“Of course.”

Albert nodded and replied.

“Well, this is your first time here so I’ll explain it to you. The fact that vampires are our saviours. All the residents of this place are protected by the lord.”

“Lord?”

“The Vampire Lord.”

Albert turned his eyes towards the forest and continued talking.

“You probably don’t know this, but a big incident occurred in this region a long time ago. The sky and earth were abruptly divided and fire covered the world.”

It was probably when Seutandal was separated from middle earth and engulfed in the dimension storm.

“At that time, many people died without knowing why. Then a Vampire Lord led his clan here. And he used powerful magic to set wards around this area. We’re alive thanks to those wards. In addition, the Lord drove out all the monsters that inhabited this area. Thanks to that, the forest became abundant and we don’t have to worry about our lives. Well, we’ve lived without fear for a long time so they’ve become a bit cowardly.”

Albert smiled and pointed to the village. When Ark turned to look, the villagers who had been peeking through their windows instantly hid. Anyway, Albert’s explanation was startling. According to him, the vampire that appeared here wasn’t the one that he knew about. It wasn’t a vampire who indiscriminately sucked blood but one who lived in harmony with common NPCs. And thanks to the powerful enchantments placed by the Vampire Lord, the residents were unaware that Seutandal had risen.

“Oh! That happened outside? But it has nothing to do with us. This is a paradise with no threat from monsters and abundant resources.

We are satisfied with our lives here.”

The surrounding forest was definitely rich in fruits. And according to Albert, there are many wild beasts deep in the forest.

‘Ha..... There really are many surprising things about the area. I never thought there would be people living near a vampire.’

Anyway, it wasn’t bad news for Ark. If a gentle vampire was living here then wouldn’t he have no problems finding Dedric and the Three Marvels?

“By the way, why have foreigners like you come here? You’ve clearly misunderstood the vampires so what reason did you have for coming here?”

It was like Albert had scratched an itchy place.

“I actually came to find something.”

“I might be able to help.”

“I’m looking for..... No, I’m actually looking for two people. One is a vampire called Dedric. He is an aristocrat.”

“Ah, Dedric. I know him. He is a vampire living nearby.”

“Really?”

“Yes, I can guide you to his residence.”

“Please guide me.”

“I’ll do that. And the other person?”

“They are a beast clan. Have you ever seen any beast clans in the area?”

Albert started frowning at Ark’s question. After a moment of thinking he shook his head.

“I’m sorry. I have no memory of seeing any beast clans. Excuse me, but can I ask why you’re searching for a beast clan?”

“That’s a little..... I’m sorry.”

The Three Marvels was also a treasure to NPCs. How could he excessively give out information about it? Ark refused and Albert just waved his hand casually.

“No, it’s okay. I just have a curious nature..... Anyway, I’ll guide you to Dedric. Oh, before that.....Perhaps you’ve heard rumours and came to kill a vampire.....”

“Absolutely not. Dedric will be very joyful after meeting me again.”

“Hahaha, it was just a joke. If you came to kill vampires then you would’ve never gotten through the wards. Now, follow me. When your business ends, please come talk to me about the outside world.”

Albert laughed with a pleasant voice and started walking. Indeed, a vampire had the dark attribute so a priest with the ‘light’ attribute was needed to fight it directly. However, the Dark Blood ward sealed off all light skills and would constantly damage them. In other words, the vampire’s natural enemy couldn’t enter here.

‘How powerful is the Vampire Lord to erect such wards?’

But Albert who lived here had never seen the Vampire Lord. Vampires who lived here had their own hierarchy. The Vampire Lord lived in a castle in the centre of the area and never leaves the castle, with only high ranking vampires allowed to visit. Of course, Dedric lived around the outskirts of the area.

“Ark-nim, isn’t there something strange?”

Buksil whispered in his ear while they crossed the forest. Ark sent him an irritated glance.

“What?”

“You know. A vampire and humans living peacefully..... Obviously that person is being controlled by a vampire.”

“I told you to calm down. Look at that guy’s throat. Do you see a bite mark?”

Ark pointed towards Albert’s neck as he spoke. Of course Ark had

considered it. But there were no marks on his neck after checking. Ark also wasn't afraid of vampires like Buksil was. Wasn't Ark's summon also a vampire? After thinking about Dedric, he highly doubted that the vampires in New World were that scary. The vampires sucked blood of course but who knew if they even had a skill to control people? And even if such a skill existed, he doubted that the vampire could use it excessively.

'I'll just kill it if it turns out badly.'

"This is Dedric's castle."

After walking for 30 minutes, Albert indicated a towering castle in the woods and spoke.

"T-that is Dedric's castle?"

Ark and Buksil's mouths dropped. The castle was located on an enormous cliff. It looked like an old castle that would appear on the tourist brochures of France and the UK. It was dark and looked gloomy but that was natural for a vampire's castle. Anyway, Ark instantly became angry as he saw the castle.

'What, what the. That brat Dedric..... He was that rich?'

But after thinking about it, it was natural. After all, Dedric was an aristocrat. Moreover, he inherited all of Dunphil's property after evolving. Despite his behaviour, Dedric was still an aristocrat.

'Son of a bitch. So it's like that. My pet possessed such an extravagant castle?'

"What's wrong?"

Albert asked after seeing Ark's expression.

"Ah, it's nothing."

"Then please follow carefully. The place we're climbing is steep."

There were stone spiral steps carved into the cliff that the castle was located on. After climbing up the stone steps, soldiers guarding the gate could be seen. It was natural to have guards with a castle

this size. But that just offended Ark even more.

‘What is this? He even has guards? Ya, Dedric really has grown.’

“Please wait a minute.”

Albert talked to the guards for a while before returning.

“The guards checked with the Lord after I said your names. They told me you can go in. The guards will guide you. So I’ll be leaving…….”

“Follow me.”

The guards approached Ark’s group after Albert left. Ark and Buksil felt their eyes widen as they entered the castle. It was extraordinary from the outside but it looked even more amazing inside. It really looked like a medieval nobleman’s castle, with the walls decorated with various works of art and dozens of soldiers and servants wandering around. Some of the servants were even dressed like typical maids. Of course, the women’s faces looked like the ones in the village so it was a bit disturbing……. Anyway, a dark feeling began to rise up inside of him.

‘Damn, his Master is going through all this suffering while he gets to live in luxury every time he dies? Indeed, no wonder why he wanted to go home so much. He’ll see soon. After registering him to the port, I’ll make him constantly work!’

Ark walked up the stairs. The staircase went up to the 10th floor. Ark soon arrived in front of a door with images of bats clumsily carved into it.

“Come on in.” The thick doors opened and the room Dedric lived in finally appeared. Although he knew that his summon lived here, the luxurious room made Ark hesitate for a bit. On the opposite side, a shadow sitting in a large chair with his back to Ark could be seen.

“Lord, we have brought them here.”

‘Lord? Then Dedric is sitting down there? That guy? He heard my name and didn’t even bother to turn around? His Master has arrived

yet his attitude is still like that? Isn't this like a stray dog entering the house and taking advantage? He must've become bold after being away from me for a few days. Okay, I'll see how smug he'll feel after I punish him!'

"Hey, you! You....."

Ark shouted before wincing and shutting his mouth. The chair had slowly turned around and revealed the Lord of the castle. It was a youth with neat hair. He stared at Ark and curled his lips. Sharp fangs were slowly revealed..... Anyway, he knew it was a vampire so Ark wasn't that startled. The problem was that it wasn't Dedric.

"I gladly welcome you to my castle Foreigner."

"Eh? Who.....?"

"I am the Earl of the vampire clan, Karakul. You can call me Earl."

Karakul's fangs were proudly revealed as he laughed.

"Earl Karakul? T-then Dedric?"

"Dedric? I remember hearing that name somewhere but I can't recall where."

"Eh? But I thought this was Dedric's residence.....?"

Karakul suddenly burst out laughing.

"Hahaha, the intelligence of humans who are lower animals still hasn't changed over hundreds of years. They're still stupid. You're so easily tricked after becoming a little anxious."

"What?"

"You still don't understand? You weren't led to my castle by mistake. Huhuhu, it was lucky. I'm really lucky that I was surveying the area and spotted you. I've been watching since you stepped foot into my territory. With my eyes."

It was at that time. Something floated up from behind Buksil. To his surprise, it was an eyeball! When the eyeball appeared from his neck, Buksil screamed and flopped down onto the ground.

Meanwhile, the eyeball flew towards Karakul. Karakul grasped the eyeball and shoved it into his left eye before laughing.

“What a noisy pig. Well, he’ll be quiet soon.”

‘What, what the? Eyeball? Then the uncomfortable feeling in the forest.....?’

Ark was finally able to determine the source of his uncomfortable feeling in the forest. The eyeball flew in the air so it was impossible for Radun to detect it with Stalking. Then it was hidden at the back of Buksil’s neck by his hair. So of course he never knew about it.

‘Then the vampire has been watching me since I arrived on the coast and lured me here? Why?’

Karakul instantly laughed when Ark retreated a few steps.

“Heh, this slow human has finally grasped the situation.”

“What on earth are you after? Why would you.....?”

“Ah, you really are very stupid. The first human I met after hundreds of years is such a fool. I hope I don’t become stupid after sucking his blood.”

“Suck my blood?” You’re so slow! Can’t you tell by the atmosphere? Is this a joke? Why else would I lure someone annoying like you here?”

Karakul sent Ark an irritated glance. But Ark still couldn’t understand the situation. Of course he knew. It was natural that a vampire sucked blood. However, what about the people he met in the village? And Albert? The castle’s guards and employees?

“Vampires living with humans.....”

“You idiot, isn’t it impossible for humans to live with vampires?”

Karakul suddenly waved his cloak and a black storm appeared. Then, someone grabbed Ark’s wrist from behind. He flinched and looked back at the guards. No, it was something that looked like a guard. The guard’s body abruptly started splitting.

“Oooh!”

The mouth was torn from left and right and a snout appeared. Sharp fangs emerged from the mouth and there was the smell of a beast. At the same time, the skin tore apart and changed into an eerie red monster.

‘Huk, this, this is?’

Ark reflexively attacked the guard with his sword. Then the guard who turned into a monster did a flip backwards and avoided his attack. In the dark, its eyes burned red! Ark quickly used Eyes of the Cat and confirmed that they were called Bloody. Soon the other guards also tore off their skin like leather and transformed.

‘Oh my god, are the guards and employees of the castle also Bloody?’

Finally he realised how he had walked into the vampire’s fangs. Karakul said there were no humans here. In other words, Ark was a delicious meal that had appeared after hundreds of years. Karakul had been afraid that Ark might flee which watching him and sent Albert to lure him in. He was even stupid enough to listen to the vampire’s speech.

‘I never thought that I would be outsmarted by a monster.’

Yes, that’s why he believed Albert’s words. Vampires were also monsters. He never thought that monsters in the game would use cheap tricks. However, there was something Ark hadn’t considered. Dedric was somebody who sometimes helped him with his cheap tricks.

‘It would be okay if there was only the Bloody…….’

Ark looked at the Bloody who were approaching in the darkness. The appearance of monsters the colour of blood in the dark was just like a horror movie. But if the visual effects were removed, it wasn’t a situation that would make Ark afraid. The average level of the Bloody was 350. On the other hand, Ark’s level was 314. Dark Blood applied a penalty to other players but it was a bonus to Ark. With the 40% bonus applied, Ark was level 439! Even

with a lot of Bloody around, it was somewhat possible to run away from them. However, Ark felt despair after checking Karakul's level.

'Oh my god, level 500.....!'

"Huhuhu, shall I appreciate the power of a foreigner who I finally met after a long time?"

Karakul smirked and laughed.

"Arghhh, I knew it, I knew it! I told you it would be like this!"

"Shut up, would you like to become the first blood donation? Dark blade!"

Ark grabbed Buksil's collar and randomly fired off a Dark Blade.

'If Karakul helps then I'm screwed. Fortunately that guy seems to consider the battle as entertainment. I have to push those guys back and somehow escape!'

Then the Bloody avoided his Dark Blade and swiped a claw at Ark. Ark felt a dull shock in his side and quickly retreated. Then the remaining two monsters ran up to him. Ark had been thinking about waiting for a chance to escape but there were no such opportunities once the fight started.

'What, what the? These guys..... Are they really level 300?'

The Bloody were more powerful than he imagined. The attacks from the claws and fangs steadily decreased his health while they were really agile. There were only three of them but Ark couldn't 100% guarantee that he could win! His stats had increased thanks to Dark Blood. But the ward was created by vampires so it would also apply to vampires and the Bloody.

'I calculate incorrectly. After all the bonuses are applied, it's like me level is still 314!'

"Dark Protection, Sudden Increase in Power!"

Ark activated the special skills of his rings. His defense and magic resistance increased by 20%! With his stats increased to the

maximum, Ark blindly rampaged using Dark Blade and Dark Dance.

“Fresh, very fresh!”

Karakul laughed and clapped at the sight. After firing all those skills, he was barely able to defeat one Bloody. While focusing on one, the other two had managed to get behind him. He received quite a lot of damage from the backstab attacks but it was within Ark’s calculations. The entrance was now wide open thanks to them being behind him.

“Now! Buksil, run!”

Ark grabbed Buksil’s collar who screamed and started running. However, at the moment something appeared in front of the door. Surprisingly, Karakul had managed to get all the way there.

“Huhuhu, after hundreds of years the humans had developed a bit of slyness.”

Karakul laughed and muttered.

“I’m glad you’re not the brainless guy I thought you were. Your skills are also not bad. The blood of a strong fellow will taste even nicer. I’ll finally be able to soothe my hunger for human blood after a long time. Ah ah ah, I can’t stand the thirst anymore. Unfortunately, this is the end of your tricks.”

Karakul instantly disappeared. Ark winced and turned his body before he suddenly felt a tremendous shock.

-You have been attacked by Karakul. 500 damage!
--

‘Hik, what is this.....?’

He had become dizzy from the blow. Even with his various defense buffs, he still received 500 damage! That meant the hit would’ve normally dealt 800 damage. As expected, a level 500 monster wasn’t ordinary.

‘Maybe it’s because Karakul’s stats also rose thanks to Dark Blood. Of course a ward created by a vampire would profit vampires the most.’

In a 1-on-1 fight, there was no way Ark could face him. With the Bloody there as well, the odds weren’t in his favour.

‘Damn, I can’t become a vampire’s meal!’

“Dark Blade! Dark Strike! Riposte!”

Ark fired the skills towards Karakul who just laughed.

“Nice move. But your destiny was decided the moment you stepped foot in my territory.”

The two Bloody ran up and flanked Ark on the right and left and Karakul’s command. Ark rapidly turned and used Riposte on them. Then he took one step back and felt a stinging sensation on his neck.

Ark panicked and saw Karakul rubbing at his mouth.

“It’s been hundreds of years since I’ve tasted human blood..... It’s as good as expected.”

At the same time, a red warning message appeared in front of Ark.

-Karakul has used Blood-sucking.

The effects of Blood-sucking will vary depending on the vampire. Karakul’s Blood-sucking has a ‘Restraint’ property. When ‘Restraint’ is encountered, your attack and defense will decrease by 10%. In addition, three random skills will be sealed for 10 minutes.

‘Hik, w-what is this?’

Ark’s face turned pale at the information window. In such a tough situation, his attack and defense was reduced and his skills Dark Dance and Dark Blade were sealed as well? Wasn’t this the sound of Ark dying?

“Hahaha, I’m going to squeeze every last drop of blood from you!”

While Ark was wobbling, Karakul bared his fangs and ran up again.

‘It’s the end if he bites me again!’

“Radun, sword. Blade Storm!”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark received a sword from Radun and made it explode.

“Ugh, this bastard..... Where did he go.....? Catch him!”

At that moment, Ark had used ‘Sprint’ to run through the door and down the stairs. Then he heard a voice screaming from behind him. It was Buksil who he had forgotten about.

“Hiiiiik, A-A-A-Ark-nim!”

When he flinched and looked back, he saw Karakul inserted his fangs into Buksil’s neck.

“Ah ah ah ah! Ah ah ah ah! Grandmother who passed away.....”

Buksil’s plump body instantly became drained like a mummy and he collapsed.

“Huhuhu, that’s one fellow handled..... Bloody, catch the remaining fellow!”

“Ooh oh oh oh!”

The Bloody started tearing off their skin at Karakul’s command. While all the guards and employees were turning into the Bloody, Ark ran down the stairs. There were 50 of them! Ark had truly been invited into the devil’s castle.

‘Oh my God!’

Ark moaned desperately. Then a large window in the middle of the stairs suddenly caught his eye.

‘Okay, I have to rely on a plan of desperation now!’

Ark used ‘Sprint’ to run towards the window. The Bloody closest to

him swung its claw. At that moment, Ark used advanced Intimidation to make it freeze and stepped on its body before jumping. It was like a scene in a Hong Kong movie as he threw his body through the window. As soon as he tried to jump through the window.....!

Tong-!

Ark was hit by an opposing power and was thrown back.

“I won’t let you commit suicide!”

Karakul had used his cloak to block off Ark’s escape path then ran towards him. Ark raised his body and swung his sword. However, a Bloody threw its body and was stabbed by the sword instead. Meanwhile, Karakul had approached Ark and bit his neck. His health was already low so he fell into a critical condition! His health rapidly lowered as more blood was sucked out. At the mPoment, he felt his eyesight becoming dark. Just like Buksil, Ark turned into a mummy and collapsed.

‘Damn..... Dying in a place like this..... Do I have to ride the dolphins here again?’

But the situation was far more serious than Ark thought.

-‘Chain of Blood’ has been activated by the vampire’s Blood-sucking.

The user’s soul has been captured by Karakul’s Blood-sucking. Users whose soul has been captured by the vampire will have their resurrection place forcibly changed. In addition, all your abilities are sealed. The ‘Chain of Blood’ will last until Karakul dies or you escape from his sphere of influence.

* Your resurrection point has been forcibly changed by ‘Chain of Blood.’

* All equipment has been switched off by ‘Chain of Blood.’

* All stats reduced by 80% by ‘Chain of Blood.’

* All special qualities and skills have been switched off by ‘Chain of Blood.’

* The use of a bag has been forbidden by 'Chain of Blood.'

'W-what is this?'

This time the blood drained from Ark's face in reality as he lost consciousness in the game.

Forced Slave Pens

How much time had passed? Ark suddenly raised his head and scanned the area.

“What, what the? Where is this? What happened?”

It was a dark space filled with a strange smell. Why was he in a place like this? Ark looked around with a puzzled expression before he touched something. His gaze lowered until he saw the collapsed form of Buksil.

“Hey, Buksil! Are you okay? Wake up!”

“Umm.....” A-Ark-nim?”

Buksil opened his eyes after Ark shook him. Then he stared at Ark foolishly before suddenly flinching.

“Heok, v-vampire! A vampire was drinking my blood..... Huh? Where is this place?”

“I just woke up and I don’t know either.”

Grrrrr.

Then he heard a horrifying sound behind him. He jumped with surprise and turned around to see deep red pupils in the darkness. It wasn’t just one. In the front, from the side, dozens of pairs of eyes with a menacing light approached them.

“Hik, hik, I didn’t see anything. Nothing was seen. I will faint. Please let me faint.”

Buksil shouted as the unidentified monsters surrounded them and grabbed Buksil’s hair. But the situation wouldn’t improve even if he fainted.

‘Damn, I don’t know what is going on but for the moment..... Huh?’

Ark quickly pulled out his sword. No, it was more like he tried to take it out. But his sword wasn't around his waist. It wasn't only his sword. All his armour and accessories were gone, with only rags left.

'What on earth is going on? Why is my equipment gone?'

A red message window appeared when he tried to open his bag.

[-The use of a bag has been prohibited by 'Chain of Blood.']

'Chain of Blood? Ah, that message I saw a while ago!'

Ark recalled what happened before he lost consciousness. That's right. Karakul had sucked his blood and Ark fell victim to the curse 'Chain of Blood' after dying. After checking his status information window, Ark confirmed that he couldn't escape from the castle with Chain of Blood still active. In addition, his stats had been restricted by 80% and his skills, bags and equipment were all prohibited. A moan naturally emerged from Ark's mouth as he remembered.

"Oh my god! This absurd skill....."

Then there was that sound again and the red eyes came closer. With his equipment, skills and stats reduced, Ark tensed up and retreated. If he was attacked by a monster in this state then he would be torn apart.

"What on earth are these guys?" "Kikira, Kura! Stop..... Everyone is in the same situation....."

It happened when Ark and Buksil were surrounded by the red eyes. He suddenly heard a voice from behind him. The intimidating red eyes winced and withdrew. Then something hopped between his eyes.

"I understand..... It's the first time that humans came here..... There was no intention to hurt you..... No reason to harm you..... Nor any motivation..... They just gathered because it was unusual....."

Ark's eyes gradually started to adjust to the darkness. His vision gradually brightened so Ark surveyed the area. Ark had awakened in

an underground stone room. And dozens of monsters swarmed in this place. Monsters that looked like earthworms, monsters that looked like bulls etc. It was like a museum of monsters with all different types gathered. The only common thing in common was that all their complexions were pale. It was a monster the size of a flea called a Flip that had spoken. If he went by appearance, it looked like the weakest but all the monsters seemed to listen to it. Fortunately, the atmosphere didn't seem hostile. No, he couldn't see the flea's impression but it seemed to be friendly.

"Where is this place? And you are?"

"This..... It is Earl Karakul's dungeon....."

The Flip spoke slowly.

"And..... We are the monsters seized by Karakul..... Just like you guys..... Well, it's quite puzzling in many ways..... You'll get used to it....."

"You were seized? Is that why monsters aren't seen in Karakul's territory?"

"That's right. But Earl Karakul is different..... The vampire has been capturing monsters for a long time in order to increase his magic..... He uses it to make his subordinates..... You might have seen them..... Monsters the colour of blood..... The vampire changed them using his magic and called them Bloody....."

According to flip, the Bloody were originally monsters who had been changed by the vampire's magic. So Albert thought that the Vampire Lord killed all the monsters but he was actually using them. The Flip had a strange expression on its face as it continued.

"The monsters confined here..... Is because they failed to become Bloody..... Because not all monsters can change into Bloody..... Well, I don't know whether it is fortunate or unfortunate."

"Why wouldn't it be fortunate?"

"If only it was that good..... We have two types of work here....."

“Two types?”

Ark asked with a dubious expression. Then there was a metallic clinking sound and a couple of Bloody entered.

“Hey, it is time to work!”

When the Bloody swung its whip and shouted, the monsters flinched and exited. The Flip murmured in a low voice as they exited.

“Just go outside for the time being..... I’ll tell you beforehand..... Now that you’ve come here..... It is better not to think about resisting..... You can’t escape this place even if you die.....”

“You’re moving too slowly, quickly!”

“Hik, I’m going! I’m going! Please don’t hit me!”

Tears flowed down Buksil’s face as he was hit by the whip. When they went outside, a large underground area appeared.

“Start quickly, all those that don’t fill their quota will be punished!”

The Bloody shouted as it indicated a pile of shovels and pickaxes.

‘What do I have to do with these?’

“This brat, are you going to just stand there?”

When Ark hesitated, the Bloody instantly swung its whip at him. Ark had a sudden realization. He thought that Buksil had exaggerated when he screamed after being struck by the whip. This was a game so any type of pain would only be felt as static electricity. But the pain he felt now couldn’t even be compared to that shock.

‘Ugh! W-what is this pain? No, that bastard.....!’

When Ark glared at it, the Bloody cursed and swung its whip recklessly. The pain felt like his flesh was actually being struck!

“Please wait.....”

At the time, the Flip came running and begged while on the ground.

“This, this guy is new..... I’ll teach him so just this once.....”

“Is it Flip?”

The Bloody looked between Ark and the Flip before turning away.

“Okay, I’ll let it go just this once. Make sure you teach him properly.”

“Thank you..... Hey, you.....! You should also say thank you.....”

The Flip cringed and pushed Ark’s head down into a bow. At that moment, Ark felt tears gather. He was level 314 yet he had to cringe before a monster? What the hell was this situation? However, there was no other way at the moment. In fact, he felt like tackling the Bloody but his body wouldn’t move. It was reasonable because his stats had been reduced by 80%. In addition, he couldn’t fight without his equipment or skills.

“Hey..... This human seems obedient..... Take him and make him work.....”

“Heok! No, Ark-nim..... Hiik!”

Buksil panicked and shook his head, but an earthworm like monster just wound around Buksil and dragged him to a place with other monsters gathered. Meanwhile Ark accompanied the Flip to a workshop. Then it indicated Ark’s ankle and spoke.

“You really have a sharp temper..... It is better to kill that temper..... It’s not possible for you to escape anymore..... I know it is difficult but..... With those shackles, you won’t be able to endure it if the Bloody whips you.....”

“Shackles?”

Ark looked dubiously at his ankles. Although he hadn’t been paying attention to it, his ankles had shackles tied around it. There were no chains connecting them so he had disregarded it. But Ark’s face distorted when he examined the information window closely.

-Shackles of Pain

Shackles made by a vampire to hold his slaves.

These shackles have been created by the vampire’s magic to

increase all pain dealt to the body by 10 times. The shackles will automatically loosen if the vampire dies or you escape from its sphere of influence.

‘Oh my god! There really are various measures.’

He had been caught by Chain of Blood and now he even had these shackles on him. Ark instantly felt very gloomy. What would he do next?

‘What do I need to do? I need to escape from Karakul in order to release the Chain of Blood. I’m in no state to deal with Karakul and his Bloody at the moment. No, there is no guarantee I can deal with them even with all the monsters here. Besides, this place is underground. There is only one small passage to go aboveground.....’

No matter how hard he thought, there was no clue to solve the situation. Ark shook his head forcefully.

‘I can’t give up yet. Yes, this is still a game. If they trap users in this place then there should be a way to escape. There must be a way to clear the doorway. Even if my pride is injured, I have to pretend to follow their orders so I can collect information.’

Acting rebellious wouldn’t help him. Wouldn’t collecting information be easier if he wasn’t struck all the time?

“I understand. I’ll be careful from now on. Please teach me a lot.”

“Uhh..... You’ve finally understood me.....”

“So what do we have to do here?”

“For the moment..... Just dig in this area with the shovel.....”

Ark obeyed Flip and started digging at the ground with a shovel. After 30 minutes had passed, he had dug up a lot of pebbles and sweat was trickling down his back.

‘Huk huk huk! Why the hell are we shovelling? Aren’t only pebbles coming out? Why are they making us do this? Were the monsters

captured just to dig at the ground? Is that right?’

He was Seutandal’s hero but now he had been captured by a vampire and forced to shovel at the ground. Ark vented his anger by swinging his shovel even more powerfully. All of a sudden the Flip picked up a small pebble from among the earth and sand.

“This..... It’s what we are looking for.....”

The stone that Flip picked up emitted a pale light when he examined it.

Moon Rock (Hearthstone)

A hearthstone that has absorbed the magic of the moon for a long time.

It isn’t uncommon in New World to find mysterious stones that can absorb the magic around it. The nature of the stone will change depending on where it is buried. A stone buried in a volcano will take on fire properties. Stones buried on a snowy mountain will take on the property of ice. Stones that take on attributes are called hearthstones.

The Moon rock is also one of the hearthstones. The Moon rock which has absorbed the property of the moon has the ability to strengthen a character’s magic attribute. It is also effective in regaining mana when used as a magic ingredient. In addition, it will give mysterious powers to items with sockets.

<Directly used: Mana +10 when used directly, the Moon rock will disappear after being used>

<Used in socket (Armour only): Mana recovery +2%>

‘What is this? Hearthstone?’

Ark’s eyes widened as he looked at the stone. He had received a socket item a while ago. He never imagined that something could be inserted into the socket this way.

‘I can put this stone in the Promised Sword.’

But Ark made a disappointed expression after looking at the Moon rock closely. The effect when added to a socket was mana recovery +2%. The Promised Sword had four sockets so the effect would be 8% at most. Of course, it was better than nothing but couldn't he find better hearthstones if he made an effort to look? Well, his bag was banned so he couldn't collect it anyway.

'Surely not all the Hearthstones would be trivial like this?'

The Flip saw Ark looking at the hearthstone and continued talking.

"Earl Karakul..... This is his purpose for us after we failed to become Bloody..... It is in order to mine these stones..... I don't understand too well..... The castle basement..... These Moon rocks have a different power compared to ordinary pebbles..... Karakul knows a method to increase his magic using these Moon rocks....."

"Is that how vampires can become stronger?"

"Hmm..... You really don't know anything..... Well, I have been bored without anyone to talk to here..... I'll explain it..... But don't stop moving your hands because the Bloody will see it....."

The Flip continued digging and murmured like he was complaining.

"Earl Karakul..... No, all the vampires that live here..... They're always waiting for the chance to attack each other's territory. So they have to raise their magic..... In order to lead more Bloody....."

"Huh? Doesn't the Vampire Lord rule here?"

"That is correct..... The Vampire Lord does control this area....."

"Yet he's just watching members of the clan fight each other?"

"That..... The vampire's scary point is....."

Flip had become quite bored without someone to converse with. It couldn't stop talking once it opened its mouth. In fact, the vampire was a species with enormous strength in magic but they had a lot of weaknesses. If they saw a cross or smelt garlic then they would become confused. In addition, the skin is sensitive so it would be

burned if sunlight hit it. That wasn't all. In the real world that would be it but this was a game. Although it was impossible here, a priest with light magic could easily take care of vampires.

"The Vampire Lord is someone who has lived over 1000 years..... He is the highest ranked aristocrat..... Those weaknesses are all eventually conquered..... By growth spurts in vampires..... He will only use his powers if the vampires are in danger of extinction....."

That's the reason he erected wards to protect the vampire clan. Thanks to the Lord, the vampires increased their numbers after the disappearance of their natural enemies. That's the reason why the Lord overlooked all the fighting. Although the Dark Earth was wide, it wasn't infinite. Since the vampires were near invincible inside the Dark Earth, population control was a problem. Moreover, the life expectancy of the vampires was hundreds of years so they wouldn't die of old age.

"When the Dark Earth was first created..... All the vampires lived in the Lord's castle..... But thanks to the numbers increasing excessively, now only the highest ranked aristocrats are allowed to live there..... Everyone else was expelled..... Even vampires would eventually age and die..... But the Lord is different..... He is immortal..... And the Immortal's castle is a place where magic dominates..... It is a place where other vampires could also become immortal if they were selected....."

That's why all the vampires driven out were eager to return. In order to return to the castle, they had to defeat other aristocrat vampires and take away their territory to increase their status. The vampires who increased their power to the highest rank would be allowed entry to the Lord's castle. Then that vampire's territory would be distributed to new vampires and the war would begin again.

'What the? Then the Lord created a war of fratricide as a solution to the population problem?'

It was absurd, but a fitting solution for a vampire to come up with.

"Fighting between vampires..... It's more complicated than you think....."

“What do you mean?”

Fighting between vampires was entirely different from a human's war. The vampires who fought in the Dark Earth had several absolute rules they had to follow. It wasn't that easy for vampires expelled from the castle to capture territory. In order to control the territory, the vampires had to imbue their own power into the soil. In other words, owning the soil would make that land theirs. That's why the ones that led the Bloody were more likely to win.

“It is because the Bloody can fight in the Dark Earth..... There are also no restrictions on the Bloody..... In order to attack other castles or prevent being attacked, a vampire needed to increase the number of Bloody..... But no matter how many Bloody they lead..... It's no use if the vampire itself is weak.”

“Why? Can't overwhelming amounts of Bloody kill the ones on the other side and then the vampire?”

“I told you..... The vampires are under the protection of the Lord..... He doesn't care if vampires kill each other..... It is only when other species kills a vampire..... They would incur the wrath of the Lord..... The Lord was an existence who once terrified the world..... It was to the extent that even the Dark Lord couldn't recklessly anger him..... Even a dragon would die if it incurred the wrath of the Lord.....”

‘What the? Then even if I manage to escape this place and gain power, I can't kill Karakul?’

Thanks to the Dark Earth, there was no guarantee that he could defeat Karakul in a 1-on-1 fight. But how strong would the Lord be compared to a high ranking aristocrat? He would truly die if he ever encountered such a monster.

‘The problem at the moment isn't defeating Karakul.....’

“The vampires just use the Bloody to create a route..... It is the only method to enter enemy territory to ask for a duel..... Vampires can't refuse when they receive a duelling challenge from another vampire..... That's why the Bloody are no use to a weak

vampire..... Only strong vampires like Karakul would mobilize the Bloody.....”

Among the expelled vampires, Karakul was quite strong. He had crushed many of the surrounding areas and gained considerable intelligence and status. Of course, other vampires would obtain those things if they defeated Karakul but there was none with the power in this area. That’s because Karakul used all his power to concentrate on defense.

“Life as a vampire truly isn’t easy.’

It was a species that had trouble living with family or other people.

“Earl Karakul has extremely strong magic..... It is thanks to these hearthstones..... These hearthstones only appear here.”

‘Is it really such a great item? This stone?’

Ark once again looked at the description of the Moon rock. It was a stone that had gained the property of the moon and increased magic, but it was just a normal stone to Ark. Although there was a mana recovery effect, it was only 10 mana at most. His skills used between 50 and 500 mana. He wouldn’t even be able to sell it for a few silver in the stores. It was better to buy recovery potions even if they were more expensive. The socket item was also the same. He wouldn’t even be able to sell it for a few silver in the stores.

‘Well, I don’t know if the information is useful but it is lucky that I encountered an NPC willing to give information. At least the information is more reliable than Albert.’

Ark needed to learn all the necessary information.

“By the way, have you ever seen a beast clan in the Dark Earth?”

“Beast clan..... I haven’t seen anything like that..... But I’ve seen humans.....”

Ark became puzzled at Flip’s answer.

“Humans?”

“You might have seen them..... There are humans living near the coast..... I don’t know why Karakul is leaving them alone.....”

“But.....”

Karakul said that no humans existed in Dark Earth. Therefore Ark thought that the villagers were also camouflaged Bloody. But they were people? Neither Karakul nor Flip had a reason to lie to him. If that’s the case, who was wrong? Ark made a confused face. Then the Flip turned its head and spoke.

“By the way..... I have to explain why I’ve been kind to you since I’ve first seen you.....”

“Huh?”

“I wanted to tell you..... Because I’m truly thankful.....”

“Thankful? What do you mean?”

“That is the end of today’s work. Everybody gather here!”

At that time, a group of Bloody entered the underground square. The monsters started trembling at the sight of the red eyes.

“Heh, you lowly things. Don’t worry, they’ve already been selected. That plump fellow and the conceited one! Follow me, the Earl has summoned you.”

The monsters sighed with relief as the Bloody pointed towards Ark and Buksil. While Ark was unsure of the situation, the Bloody pulled Ark and Buksil somewhere. Buksil shrieked and collapsed like a pig that was being led to a slaughterhouse. Unlike Buksil, he had no reason to resist just to earn the whip so Ark just followed silently. Then Ark started to suspect the situation when they arrived in Karakul’s room.

“Huhuhu, you’ve come. I was waiting.”

Karakul smacked his lips together with a joyful expression while a napkin was hanging around his neck.

‘Oh my god! This bastard.....!’

“I’ll eat thankfully!”

Karakul ran up to Buksil and immediately attacked with his fangs.

Suck suck suck, suck suck suck suck.

Buksil’s already haggard face shrank even further as his blood was sucked out. Buksil became a mummy in an instant and Karakul rushed towards Ark. The dirty feeling of having all his blood sucked out! His body became colder and he felt dizzy. The appearance of his dead grandmother suddenly flickering in front of him. After he almost died, Karakul retreated and wiped his mouth.

“Mmmm, mmmm. Although it is regretful, overeating isn’t good. But fresh human blood is so delicious. Once I’ve tasted it, I can’t go back to tasting other blood. I’ll just have these guys as my meals for a while. That’s it, take them away.”

‘Damn, I’ll kill you. Absolutely, no matter what it takes, I’ll kill you!’

However, Ark and Buksil didn’t even have the energy to lift a finger after being turned into mummies. The Bloody had to drag them like a piece of cloth.

‘This is the second task Flip was talking about.’

Ark now understood the situation. Karakul hadn’t captured the monsters simply for a labour force. They were also food for him. Flip was kind to Ark for that reason. Probably the monsters had been chosen at random so far. Now that the fresh blood of a human was added to the menu, he would never consider feeding on monsters. Thus Flip was grateful for Ark and Buksil taking on Karakul’s meal duty.

‘Oh my god, being forced to work and now I’m used as a lunchbox.....’

He was feeling the same as when he tried to suicide by jumping out the window. But his resurrection point had changed because of Chain of Blood. Committing suicide wouldn’t do anything but cut his stats. The only consolation was that he didn’t lose any stats when Karakul sucked his blood. When they arrived at the underground

dungeon, all the other monsters were already sleeping.

‘Hah, is there really no way to escape?’

Ark sighed before he suddenly heard Flip’s voice in the darkness.

“It’s better to give up early..... I’ve lived here for 20 years..... I’m still alive thanks to the magic of the vampires..... I’ve also never seen any monsters succeed in escaping..... Don’t make it more difficult for yourself..... The next day will be the same so you should sleep early.....”

Then the Flip lay down and started snoring. The voice of Buksil continuously sobbing could be heard beside him.

“Huk huk huk, it’s over. The game is now over. Huk huk huk, now what? This is all because of Ark-nim. Why didn’t you just let me return when I wanted to?”

‘Damn, is there really no way?’

Ark had no energy to retort so he just sighed and leaned against the wall. It was at that time. Something moved around his waist and pushed out from his rags.

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

“R-Radun.....!”

Ark exclaimed before blocking his mouth. He checked that all the monsters were still sleeping before whispering.

“Radun, how are you here?”

Radun thought about Ark’s question but licking his tongue and twisting his body to make gestures. Ark started at him before quickly opening the character information window.

“Character information window!”

Chain of Blood has sealed all special traits.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
-----------------------	-----	-------------	-------

Alignment		Good +450	
Fame	11,425	Level	314
Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the World Tree, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero	
Health	5,005	Mana	4,995
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	604 (-80%)
Agility	764 (-80%)	Stamina	954 (-80%)
Wisdom	120 (-80%)	Intelligence	973 (-80%)
Luck	114 (-80%)	Flexibility	127(-80%)
Art of Communication	66 (-80%)	Affection	57 (-80%)
Resilience	415 (-80%)		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138 (-80%)	
* Equipment item effects			
Chain of Blood has cancelled all equipment.			
* Character Special Traits			
Chain of Blood has sealed all special traits			
* Available skills			
Chain of Blood has sealed all skills.			
* Skill points: 30			

There were no changes in Ark's basic stats except for the 80% restriction. In other words Ark thought that he had died but he only lost consciousness thanks to Chain of Blood. Therefore Radun wasn't forcibly recalled. Since then, the clever Radun had hidden himself before sneaking out after the monsters fell asleep.

“Well done Radun!”

Radun was like a ray of light after Ark thought that everything was lost. Chain of Blood restricted his equipment, skills and use of his bags. But Radun had already been summoned. The restrictions applied to Ark didn't work on Radun.

“Radun, please pull out the items one by one from your stomach. There might be something helpful.”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak, ssak ssak!

Radun opened his mouth wide and pulled out the items one by one. He had placed quest items and treasures inside Radun. If he placed it in his main bags then there was a chance that it could drop.

‘Oh, this is it! If I use this then I can solve this situation.’

The item Ark grasped was the Sacred Branch.

‘I can communicate with Yggdrasil or Yuzuria when I use the Sacred Branch. Ark was going to call Yuzuria to ask for help from JusticeMan or Isabel.

Of course, the Flip mentioned that the Lord would be furious if Karakul was killed by other species but he would worry about it then. Since he couldn't escape from here, he had no time to worry about the game scenario that would ensue. But when he placed the Sacred Branch on his forehead, all he heard was static before a message window appeared.

-Your current location has no reception.

<The communication features of the Sacred Branch is blocked by Dark Blood>

Ark was lost for words. What was with the old-fashioned cell phone message? As expected, Yuzuria and Yggdrasil were no help in important situations. The next item Ark picked up was the Promised Sword he received from the Magic Institute.

‘I had no intention of using this for the moment so I had placed it in

Radun. It might become useful.'

Then Ark's dreadful fate started. Ark's daily routine was labouring in the morning before Karakul sucked his blood in the evening. He was also tired and in bad shape after returning to the dungeon. However, Ark waited until the monsters were asleep before using the sword to scratch away at the wall. It was like Papillion who escaped from jail using a spoon! But he had to give up after a couple of days. The rock wall of the jail was stronger than he thought. In addition, his stats were cut by 80% so it was hard for him to effectively use the sword. Ark also didn't have to patience to wait dozens of years to escape like Papillion. Ark started to become more anxious as his last possibility faded away.

'Unbelievable. What is an alternative method? Surely there must be a way to escape.....'

Bump!

Ark had been sighing while shovelling. Then his shovel suddenly hit a blunt object.

-Unidentified Monster Bone

The bones of a pitiful monster who died a long time ago from the labour.
--

"How dreadful."

In the distant future, it might be Ark's bones that were found. Ark sighed and started to throw the bone away when he suddenly stopped.

'Wait? Bones? Maybe.....?'

Ark considered something for a while before his eyes suddenly gleamed.

'Yes, that's it. Obviously a lot of other bones will be buried. I might be able to escape if I collect them. No, I can escape! Ohhhh, now there's a possibility!'

Ark avoided the eyes of the Bloody and quickly slipped the bone to Radun. Then he approached Buksil and whispered quietly.

“Buksil, please dig a bit deeper from now on. If you discover any bones then you should bring it to me without the Bloody knowing. Hopefully it will help us escape.”

“Huh? H-how?”

“I’ll explain later. Please just collect the bones.”

Since then, Ark and Buksil started frantically shovelling. The monster bones were buried quite deeply. Thanks to that, Ark and Buksil had to dig two or three times deeper than the other monsters. Then it had almost been one week, or two days in reality.

-You have learnt a new skill.

Excavation (Beginner, passive): You’re handling of a pickaxe and shovel has become more proficient. Thanks to Excavation, it has become easier to dig up the ground and the probability of finding items has increased.

In some cases, amazing treasures can be found buried in New World. If you ever feel suspicious of an area then you should dig it up.

<Shovel and pickaxe speed +20%, Item excavation probability +10%>

“Ohu, what is this?”

Despite his skills being blocked, he could still learn new skills. The skill made excavating the monster bones even easier. The items he found started pouring out from the ground. Of course, most of it was pieces of metal, wood or other miscellaneous items. But because he shovelled the whole day, sometimes he would find jewels like emeralds or amethyst.

‘The jewels are cracked so they’ll only be worth a few silver but it is still something. I also have to collect as much Moon rocks as

possible.'

The quota of Moon rocks assigned to each prisoner a day was 10. When he first started digging, he was barely able to reach that amount. Now thanks to his Excavation skill, he could dig up 20 in one day. After Ark filled his quota, he would pack everything else into Radun. It was a gloomy situation but he still had to make money. He could feel this way because hope was visible.

'Okay, I have to keep this momentum going!'

Ark became even more motivated and started digging even harder.

"Huh! That guy, he's not playing around."

"How can he have such energy when the Earl sucks his blood every evening?"

"Hey, newbie. You should take a break. We'll be in trouble if you collapse."

It was to the extent that the Bloody were worried about him. Ark just wiped his sweat and smiled brightly.

"Please don't worry, my body is very durable. I will work hard for the Earl!"

"By the way, the human really isn't talented. He works so hard but can barely fill his quota."

The Bloody clicked their tongues and muttered. They never imagined that Ark was using Radun to stash the items. After his many blisters turned into hard calluses, his Excavation skill finally rose to intermediate. His hands holding the shovel became even faster like a motor. The odds of finding bones, trash and Moon rocks also rose to 20%. Thanks to that, Ark once again became more motivated and dug into the ground as hard as possible. Then there was a ringing sound and a message window appeared.

-Your skilled workmanship has dug up a rare product.
--

<Excavation skill proficiency +10>

-Vampire Stone (Rare Hearthstone)

For hundreds of years, this hearthstone has absorbed the magic of a vampire. The hearthstones that have managed to absorb the magic of a vampire can be counted on one hand.

Of course, the hearthstone can be used as a deluxe magic ingredient or it can give the attributes of a vampire when inserted in a socket.

<Used in socket (Weapon only): You can absorb 5% of the enemy's damage and have it converted to health>

‘Ohhh, w-what is this?’

Ark's eyes widened by one centimetre as he confirmed the item information. In other words, it was a rare hearthstone that had absorbed Karakul's magic for hundreds of years. As expected, the performance of a rare hearthstone couldn't be compared to a normal Moon rock. It was an effect which absorbed 5% of the enemy's damage! In other words, if he received 100 damage then he could recover 5 health. It might not seem that great, but monsters level 300 could deal between 6,000~8,000 damage with one attack. Based on the percentage, he could recover 300~400 health. It was as effective as drinking an intermediate recovery potion.

‘Gulp, if I manage to find four of these hearthstones and socket them.....’

20% life absorption! It would make it possible to hunt monsters of a similar level infinitely! Although he frantically dug around, another Vampire Stone never appeared. It was actually a miracle that he managed to find a rare hearthstone when his excavation skill was only intermediate level. He had been digging 20 hours a day for a week. Although he never rested during that time, the probability of finding it was still really low. It was almost impossible that a few rare hearthstones would appear in the same place. Anyway, he finally managed to collect enough bones after a week.

“Radun, I want you to sneak around secretly and find any type of

string. Something like wire would be best.”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun nodded and headed towards a mouse hole in a corner of the jail. He soon returned carrying a strand of something resembling thread.

‘Now’s the troublesome part.’

Ark confirmed that the monsters were sleeping and pulled out all the bones. He stayed all up night making the escape tool that he took one week to prepare.

“.....As expected, I never get tired of it no matter how much I eat. That’s it, I’ll stop here.”

Karakul murmured after finishing his meal. Once again Ark and Buksil had collapsed. It was evening and they had been called to become Karakul’s dinner again.

‘Ugh, I still haven’t got used to the feeling.’

Although it was only 1 day for NPCs, one day was 8 hours in reality. Since it was 8 days in reality including today, his blood had been sucked twenty four times. He hoped that he would become familiar with it, but he would get goose bumps every time the fans entered his neck. And since they were chosen on a daily basis, Ark and Buksil soon became as skinny as sticks.

“Hmmm, they’ve become increasingly smaller. Should I let them grow for a few days?”

The two of them looked so pitiful that even Karakul was talking like that.

‘Damn bastard, today will be the last time. I’ll escape no matter what!’

Ark and Buksil were dragged out to the hallway by the Bloody. As soon as they left the room, Ark wobbled and pushed off the hands.

“Ah, I can walk by myself. Is that okay?”

Buksil also smiled weakly and nodded his head.

“Yes, yes, hahaha! I’ve already adapted to it.”

“Heh, then go ahead.”

The Bloody hesitated before grinning and replying. They judged that the two of them couldn’t run away. They couldn’t even walk properly so how could they escape from the Bloody? The Bloody surrounded them as they walked down the hallway. Just as they walked past a large window, Ark grabbed Buksil and jumped onto the railing. The Bloody turned around and flinched.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“This fool, is he trying to jump off and commit suicide?”

“They’ve been caught by the Earl’s magic so suicide is useless.”

“Suicide? No, we’re escaping.”

“What?”

“Now Radun, hang glider!”

Ark shouted powerfully. Radun poked his mouth out and spat out an item. Just like a genie appearing from a magic lamp, it was a black object over 10 metres long. Yes, this was what Ark had prepared to escape! A hang glider. Ark had collected the durable bones over previous week and tied them together to produce a hang glider. Ark had the idea after seeing an item inside Radun.

Grimwing’s Wing (Special)

The wings of a bat made huge through mutation.

The purpose is unclear, but it is obviously a rare item.

If might become useful later on.....

It was Grimwing’s Wing that he obtained in the Argus Mountains. So

far the purpose of the item had been unclear. The wing was folded, but once stretched out it was an incredible size. The length from left to right reached 10 metres! Ark had looked at the shape and remembered a hang glider. One of the reasons Ark couldn't escape was the location of the castle. Karakul's castle was located on cliffs dozens of metres high. On the other hand, his special quality 'Slime's Time' had been sealed so he couldn't use it to invalidate the fall damage. If he jumped through the window then he would 100% die.

'But it is possible to fly in the air.....!'

He might be able to escape from the castle and Karakul's sphere of influence. However, there was one problem with this plan. It was whether the hang glider could handle two people. However, Ark and Buksil had their blood sucked twenty four times by Karakul. Their status had changed to mummies after having their blood sucked just now.

"Buksil, maintain the centre well!"

"Yes, I'll do whatever it takes to escape from this place!"

"Okay, let's go!"

Ark and Buksil ran and jumped off the railing. When the hang glider suddenly fell, it wobbled for a while but they managed to figure out the balance.

"Eh, t-those guys.....!"

"Run, we can't lose them!"

The Bloody cried out in large voices as they finally grasped the situation. But Ark had jumped off the 10th storey and Karakul's territory was too large for the Bloody to chase him.

"Ark-nim, we did it!"

Buksil became tearful at the thought of escaping from the demonic Karakul. But they suddenly heard a rough voice from behind them.

"You impertinent bastards, you think you can get away from me?"

“Hik, A-Ark-nim!”

Buksil turned around and his face turned pale. Karakul had heard the news and chased after them through the window. Karakul was a vampire so he could turn himself into a bat.

“That abnormal bastard.....!”

There was a tight knot in Ark’s stomach. Although it could fly through the sky, the hang glider wasn’t powerful. On the other hand, Karakul could directly chase them with his wings so of course he was faster than the hang glider. Karakul caught up with Ark after 5 minutes and attacked the hang glider with his sharp claws.

“Hik, hik! It tore the wings!”

“Damn, I know! Don’t shake your body!”

“Hehehe, what silly people!”

The wings became tattered every time Karakul flew over them. Therefore the hang glider’s speed gradually slowed down. Buksil was unable to balance himself and the hang glider started shaking.

‘At this rate, we’ll fall before we escape the sphere of influence. Everything is finished if I die. The Bloody now know about Radun so there will be no second chances.’

Ark bit his lip before speaking.

“Buksil, I’ll definitely come and rescue you.”

“Huh? What are you.....?”

“I’m sorry. Isn’t it better if I live and rescue you?”

“Hik! Ark-nim, w-wait a moment!”

“Buksil, I won’t forget your courageous sacrifice.”

Ark turned around and aimed a powerful kick at Buksil.

“Haaayaahh! Pig missile launch!”

“Aaaaaaak, A-Ark-nim!”

“Huk, what, what the?” Cough!”

Buksil was thrown at the exact moment Karakul came to attack and they collided. Karakul who encountered the pig missile fell from the sky like a plane without wings and crashed. Buksil’s scream and Karakul’s cold, furious voice could be heard.

“Ark-nim, yooooooooou…….”

“Y-you……. Are you even humannnnnn……?”

“I have no reason to listen to words from you!”

Ark shamelessly answered as he flew across the sky. The sweet taste of freedom after experiencing hell for 8 days……. It really was sweet.

The Boy Dedric

-You've escaped from Karakul's sphere of influence.
Chain of Blood has been lifted.
Shackles of Pain has been released.

'That's it! Success!'

It had been 10 minutes since he had escaped after shooting the pig missile at Karakul. After he crossed a small river and the forest changed, the message window appeared and the shackles fell off.

'I've escaped Karakul's territory. The Bloody are too far to reach me and a vampire can't leave its territory so I don't have to worry about Karakul chasing me.

Ark found a suitable place and landed.

"This might be useful again, Magic Restoration!"

He used advanced Magic Restoration to fix the hang glider. Ark felt touched as he looked at it. It was the first time he had used a skill in 8 days. But he didn't have time to enjoy himself. He might've escaped Karakul's territory but he was in the territory of another vampire. He couldn't guarantee what would happen.

'I better use Stealth to look for a suitable hiding place and do maintenance on myself.'

Ark gave the hang glider to Radun and used Stealth. Then a red warning message floated in front of Ark.

[-Hostile forces are watching so you can't use Stealth!]

'Huk, what, what the? I haven't even worn my equipment properly.....!'

It wasn't possible to change equipment when in a battle state. Fortunately, swords and shields were the exception so he took out his sword. But he was lacking in defense. Yet he couldn't run away carelessly. He might attract even more enemies.

'Damn, it better not be another vampire's Bloody. I'll commit suicide if a vampire captures me again.'

In the worst case scenario, Ark would commit suicide so he observed the surroundings. However, it kept on being quiet so he felt uneasy.

"Huhuhu, it's a meal."

A voice was audible in the gloomy forest.

"I've never seen this guy around here before."

"He's a little dirty but he should be a fine meal after we wash him."

'Oh my god, there are three of them.....!'

Ark swallowed his saliva. There were few monsters in the Dark Earth, with the vampires being the majority. In other words, he was either meeting the subordinates of a Vampire Lord or monsters with equal power. Either way, Ark couldn't fight against them with no defense.

'Dammit! I'm such an unlucky guy..... I just managed to escape from one vampire castle. Should I kill myself before it is too late?'

Ark was seriously contemplating suicide. Then something like an arrow flew from the forest. Ark had been lost in thought and reflexively swung his sword. If it was the Bloody, such a clumsy counter attack would be easily evaded. Although he was tense, his sword dealt a direct hit.

"Ugh!"

Something hit the ground as it was struck by his sword.

"Ack, he hit our colleague!"

"Shit, he is strong. A-3 plan, pincer movement to the left and right!"

Ark stared with astonishment at his opponents. The one that had fallen to the ground was a bat struggling to flap its wings. All of them were incredibly weak bats.

‘What the, who are these guys? And did they just say plan A-3?’

“Uhh, this bastard...! A strong enemy!”

“He’s clearly an expert in sword mastery considering how quickly he took care of us.”

“You, although you look like a human..... Ugh, w-what are you? Uhh! Help me!”

Ark pressed his foot against the stomach of a bat and watch in surprise as it struggled and flapped its wings. Then he removed his leg and held the bat by the head.

“W-what are you doing?”

“Do you want to die?”

“I was careless just now but I’ll fight you properly.....”

“Fight properly?”

Ark lowered his face to the bat and growled, making it retreat a little bit. Then it muttered in a terrified and tearful voice.

“You..... You..... You’ll regret this.”

“Regret? I won’t regret it.”

“You really are going to regret it. Our Lord is close by.....!”

“R-really..... Our Lord is unbelievably strong!”

“Earl Karakul in the next town can’t even touch our Lord!”

The playfulness disappeared from Ark’s face at the bat’s words. The bats were so weak that he had become careless. If this area was right next to Karakul then wouldn’t the Lord be as powerful as him? And the bats were subordinates of that vampire!

‘I forgot, it’s not just the bats I have to deal with!’

Ark hurriedly withdrew. Thanks to the bats, he had been unable to use Stealth and he hadn't even had a chance to wear his equipment so he couldn't face a vampire. The momentum immediately went to the bats as Ark retreated.

"Huhuhu, you've finally grasped the situation."

"But it's too late. We've already mentally contacted our Lord to tell him that there is an intruder. He'll arrive soon."

"You're finished when our Lord arrives!"

It was at that time. A nearby bush shook and a voice rang out.

"Roaaaar, how dare somebody invade my territory!"

"Lord, over here!"

The bats flapped their wings and shouted.

'Dammit!'

The voice had been heard from the forest right in front of him. If the vampire could turn himself into a bat like Karakul then it was too late to run away.

'It can't be helped. The only method in this state is suicide.'

Ark ground his teeth together and lifted his sword. Then the voice rang through the forest again.

"I'll count to three. If you want to live then run away before then!"

'Eh? What is this?'

Ark's determined face suddenly changed. He got three seconds to run away? Did that sound like a vampire? That wasn't the only strange part. The opponent shaking the forest had appeared just then. But he wasn't showing himself.

'What on earth is this? Wait..... Which reminds me, this voice.....? It is familiar..... The bats also shouted plan A-3 earlier..... Perhaps.....?'

The voice in the forest hesitated before shouting.

“Two and a quarter..... Uhh, you should run away quickly. I don’t often spare people. Two again.....you still haven’t escaped? There are really no more chances. Two and a half.....”

‘Indeed, I’ve seen through this.’

Ark slung his sword over his shoulders and walked into the forest. After walking through the bushes, he saw the quivering form of a boy shouting through a megaphone.

“Huhuhu, this is really your last chance, two and three quarters.....”

“.....Sheesh.”

The boy retreated with surprise at Ark’s voice. Then he stared dumbly at Ark’s face.

“Lord, Lord, this guy! It’s him!”

The bats couldn’t grasp the strange atmosphere between Ark and the boy. The boy acted like he didn’t hear anything and turned around with a pleasant smile. Then he walked away stiffly like a wound up toy doll.

“Eh? Lord?”

“Where are you going? What about this guy?”

“.....Stop moving!”

Ark smiled and spoke, making the boy instantly stiffen. The boy paused awkwardly before turning around and speaking.

“Ah, that is..... Um..... It’s been a while?”

The vampire boy speaking was Dedric. The bats looked confused at Dedric’s reaction.

“Eh? Lord, do you know this human?”

“Ah, well..... This is the person who summons me.....”

“Heok! T-this person is the Ark you were talking about?”

They freaked out and looked at the arc.

‘Huhuhu those cheeky bats, they now understand the situation!’

Ark folded his arms and stared at the bats. He never imagined that he would encounter Dedric this way. After meeting Dedric, he was now certain about the pecking order. Ark was Dedric’s Master while the bats were his subordinates. In other words, he was the Master of the bat’s Master. He expected that the bats would shed tears and beg for forgiveness after hearing about Ark’s reputation from Dedric.

“This is the human that summons our Lord.”

‘Heh, they’ve finally realised? Now beg me for forgiveness. But I have no intention of forgiving you.’

Ark was seriously contemplating how to cook the bats.

“This guy is the unscrupulous and cheapskate human?”

“I heard that he was really wicked. But didn’t our Lord use his charisma to educate the human? Our Lord is too wonderful.”

“The human became strong after learning from our Lord.”

Ark’s expression became vacant after hearing the bats’ words. Dedric belatedly noticed the situation as Ark muttered.

“Oh, this is the first time I heard those words? Is that what Dedric told you?”

“Ah, no I…….”

Ark stepped towards Dedric who retreated with a fearful look. As expected, the ignorant were courageous. One of the bats had punched Ark’s head and shouted.

“What, this brat! How dare a subordinate call him Dedric?”

“Subordinate? I’m Dedric’s subordinate?”

“He really is an ungrateful bastard. Didn’t his status rise because of Our Lord?”

“Our Lord is gentle so he might forgive you, but we won’t permit it. If you call our Lord by that name excessively.....”

The last thread of Ark’s patience broke inside him.

“Excessively?”

Ark laughed with an odd expression and approached.

“What did you say? When did I call his name excessively? Huh?”

“What, what the! This brat, what’s with that look?”

The bats flinched and sent a begging look towards Dedric.

“Lord.....”

“Oh oh! Yes, our Lord, what did you call him? How can a human like you call the name Dedric excessively?”

Ark continued laughing and approached, making Dedric turn pale and terrified. Then Ark raised his fist underneath Dedric’s nose, causing Dedric to squeal and secretly speaking in Ark’s ear.

‘M-master! P-please let it go just this once! Afterwards Master can hit me as much as you want until your anger is released. But please endure it in front of those guys. It’s a request. I won’t say unnecessary drivel even when diving down a dragon’s mouth. Huk huk, I swear! I’ll do whatever you want in the future.’

Ark instantly stopped his movements. Ark had grasped the situation thanks to Dedric’s desperate voice. Although he was mistreated by Ark, Dedric was still a vampire aristocrat. It had its own standards and behaviour. It must be really important to have Dedric begging so earnestly.

‘Which reminds me, doesn’t this guy have a surprisingly strong ego? If it is cracked here then he might become even worse. It is better than having to keep on disciplining him..... Dedric’s help is also necessary so wouldn’t it be better to have him owe me a favour now? This will be a convenient method to control Dedric in the future.’

Ark sighed loudly and took one step back.

“Okay. I’ll be careful from now on. Dedric-nim.”

Dedric sighed with relief after Ark’s words. Fortunately for them, the bats were able to live even after they kicked Ark again.

“What the, this brat! Why did you cause such a strange atmosphere?”

“We’re the seniors. You should use honorifics with us in the future!”

“S-stop. You morons!”

Dedric ran over and stopped the bats after seeing Ark’s expression. In fact, his face didn’t seem that angry.

“S-sorry. These guys are still immature…….”

“No it’s fine. It can’t be helped. I am Dedric-nim’s subordinate. We talk about the details later. There is plenty of time.”

Ark grinned and replied while an angry vein bulged on his forehead. Anyway, the situation was somehow resolved and Ark headed towards Dedric’s castle (?). It wasn’t a long way as Dedric’s castle was only 10 metres away. No, in fact Dedric’s castle was only 10 metres. Dedric’s castle looked like a beggar’s hut built underneath a bridge, with wood planks being tied together with gaps for wind. However, straw mats divided the hut into two areas, with one room used by the bat siblings with the other one was split into Dedric’s office, bedroom, living room and kitchen.

“Our Lord has integrity.”

“Yes, he’s too scrupulous to snatch the territory of other vampires.”

The bats said proudly. Thanks to that, Ark’s plan of disciplining Dedric disappeared. Ark had been thinking about what to do while walking towards Dedric’s house. It felt like the time when a teacher visited him and saw that he was so poor his socks had holes in them. How could he stay angry?

Anyway, Dedric’s followers were still young bats. They fell asleep as soon as they arrived at the castle. Dedric moved to the adjoining

room and immediately changed his attitude, prostrating himself on the floor in front of Ark.

“Oh oh oh, M- Master. Thank you. You can hit me as much as you want later. I’ll work really hard and will complete your objective even if I have to die.”

Ark looked at Dedric and sighed before asking.

“Didn’t you inherit Dunphil’s assets?”

“That.....”

Dedric started to sob and confessed his hidden circumstances. Among all the vampires, Dunphil wasn’t exactly the coolest one. He had no talent in making Bloody and he also had no idea how to increase his magic. Luckily for Dunphil, no other vampires coveted his territory so he somehow managed to survive.

“But then Earl Karakul increased his power and defeated the surrounding vampires. He had lived on the other side, but now Karakul’s territory was right next to him after all the territory was taken. Therefore the cowardly Dunphil fled to this piece of land and offered Karakul the rest of his territory.”

This was the reason Dunphil was able to survive the strong vampires. But then he had his property taken away by Dedric not long afterwards.

‘Dunphil was such a weak vampire that he even lost to Dedric so of course I wouldn’t know how strong Karakul is. By the way, didn’t Dunphil act ridiculously arrogant when he first appeared? Is pretending a natural characteristic of the vampires?’

“Ah? Were the bats subordinates of Dunphil?”

“No, they are my cousins who lived in a cave west of here.”

Dedric blushed and scratched his head.

“The best way for bats to succeed is to become the subordinate of a Vampire Lord.”

It was extremely difficult for bats to become subordinates of a vampire in Dark Earth. The battle capacity was a lot lower than the Bloody so they were mainly used as messengers by the vampires.

“It’s to the extent that my parents hosted a feast after I became Dunphil’s subordinate.”

Dedric became nostalgic as he recalled his memories. But soon after Dedric became a subordinate, he was bullied by the other bats and expelled by Dunphil. Dedric’s parents were so shocked that they died from the impact while Dedric was driven out by his clan for dishonouring them and forced to live in the cave. That was the reason why Dedric burnt with hatred for Dunphil.

“Afterwards I wandered for a long time.”

Dedric looked 10 years old but he muttered in a delinquent type tone. Anyway, Dedric wandered until he accidentally became Ark’s summon. He was then able to slay Dunphil and suddenly became a vampire aristocrat. He was still a Lord even if his territory was like a beggar’s. Not too long ago, he wandered around and discovered that his uncle had died and his cousins were orphans..... It was an impressive tale of a bat’s hardships.

“Lord-nim..... I’ll defend the territory.....”

While they were talking, one of the bats kicked the blanket and talked in his sleep. Dedric covered him up again and came back with a strange expression.

“These guys think that I’m the best. I want to succeed for them.....”

‘I finally know why Dedric cares about his status so much. Until now I just thought of him as a summon with no manners, but he unexpectedly has some depth. It is better than some people.’

He remembered his uncle who had suddenly appeared after Ark hadn’t seen him for a long time. His uncle had always showed up to beg for money from his father before leaving. But his uncle never showed his face when Ark’s father died and his mother was hospitalized. In New World, only the basic character was programmed and their actual behaviour was determined on its own using artificial

intelligence. Thus all Dedric's actions were chosen by him. In that case, wasn't an NPC like Dedric more human than his uncle?

'These bats were the reason why Dedric was eager to go home?'

Ark rethought the situation after hearing Dedric's circumstances.

"Okay, I'll protect your honour while we are here.

"Really?"

"Now you have to work even more eagerly when I summon you."

"Thank you, Master. Master is also a human!"

"What?"

"Ah, nothing!"

Dedric quickly closed his mouth and shook his head. Before those actions would seem hateful, but now they weren't for some reason.

"But Master, how will you summon me now that Seutandal has risen?"

"Don't worry, I've found a method."

Ark explained the Summoning Port to Dedric who nodded.

"Then are we leaving immediately?"

"No, I still have some things to finish."

"What is it?"

"I have to rescue Buksil but..... That's a secondary problem. The most important thing is finding information about the Three Marvels."

Of course he had to help Buksil. He also had to return the favour to Karakul. Although actually killing Karakul was a problem, his pride was too strong to allow him to just leave. He had to at least destroy all of Karakul's Bloody. However, he had no confidence in his abilities.

'But it might be possible if I get my hands on the final fragment and

change to my second profession.'

"Is a fragment of the Three Marvels here?"

Dedric's eyes widened.

"But I've never heard of any Beast clans here."

"I can guess a place. Let me summon you and we'll go together."

Ark laughed as he got up from his seat. He registered Dedric to the Summoning Port and summoned him. Apart from the high ranking vampires in the Immortal's castle, vampires couldn't leave their estates. Dedric was the same. However, Dedric was a vampire and a summon. He could go anywhere in the world with Ark.

"They are the beast clan?"

"Yes, if my guess is correct....."

Ark nodded and looked at the village. This village was the first place Ark visited in Dark Earth. While Ark had been trapped in the castle, he had gained various information about Dark Earth from the Flip. After several clues were combined, he was convinced that the beast clan lived here.

"How are these people the Beast clan? No matter how hard I look, they are humans. This is the territory of the powerful vampire Karakul I spoke about. I heard that he possesses the ability to disguise his subordinates as humans."

"I'm aware of that. I've already met Karakul."

"Eh? You've met Karakul? Why didn't you say anything?"

"Yes, there's still a debt I have to repay. I also have to take back the baggage."

"W-wait! What are you saying? Surely Master isn't....."

Dedric panicked and shook his head as soon as Karakul was brought up.

“I don’t want to know what you’re talking about. Karakul rules this region. If I oppose him just a little bit than my territory will disappear. Frankly, it’s dangerous enough just having my territory close to Karakul. If they are Karakul’s subordinates.....”

“That’s why I’m going to confirm it now.”

“Hik, w-wait a minute!”

Dedric pulled Ark’s collar with surprise. However Ark just dragged Dedric into the village. Once again the resident sitting near the entrance of the village became frightened like he saw a ghost and ran off. Ark used Sprint to block the villager’s path and laughed.

“I just want to talk for a moment.”

“W-why are you doing this? I don’t know anything. I don’t want to care!”

“I haven’t said anything yet. You don’t know what? Why don’t you want to care?”

“T-that.....”

“As expected, the residents here aren’t Karakul’s subordinates.”

Ark was now convinced he was right by the villager’s reaction. If these people were Bloody transformed into humans then they would’ve aggressively lured him like Albert. However, the villagers had reacted like Ark was trouble from the first time they saw him.

‘Even if my idea is wrong, the village is near the coast. It is possible for me to run away.’

Therefore Ark had targeted the time when villagers would be scarce and entered.

‘But this is the important part.’

“I just have one thing I would like to ask.”

“W-what is it?”

“Have you ever seen anything like this?”

Ark took out the two fragments of the Three Marvels from his bag. The villager's eyes popped out like a missile.

"T-that..... Where did you get that? Perhaps you are.....?"

"The Truthseeker."

The villager turned pale and stumbled at Ark's answer. Then he suddenly looked around and spoke quickly.

"This place is dangerous. Come this way."

The villager pulled Ark into a nearby house. An old man inside the house flinched and stood up as Ark entered. But the villager quickly approached and whispered in his ear, causing the old man's eyes to widen and scan Ark. He hesitated and looked outside through the window gap before sighing with relief and sitting down.

"Fortunately it's not here today."

"What do you mean?"

"The eye. Earl Karakul's eye. When you entered the village the first time, you smelt like you were a colleague of Karakul. So we thought you were a person that Karakul sent. We only knew about the misunderstanding after Albert appeared..... I never imagined that you would still be alive."

"Hah, so that was what happened?"

Ark now understood the reaction of the villagers. The old man looked apologetically at Ark before he spoke in a begging tone.

".....Can you show the fragments of the Three Marvels again?"

Ark nodded and pulled it out again. The old man's eyes brimmed with tears as he stared at the Three Marvels before muttering.

"Ohhhh! It's real. This is unmistakably the Three Marvels. I can clearly see that this is the 'Star' and 'Dark' pieces."

"Yes, this is clearly the Three Marvels. And you are the beast clan who possesses the final piece."

The old man sighed and his shoulders slumped.

“.....How did you know?”

The reason Ark was convinced they were the beast clan was easy. Karakul said that there were no humans living in Dark Earth. However, Flip said that it had seen humans. Their claims conflicted with each other so which one was telling the truth? Ark struggled with it before eventually reaching the conclusion that both were true. In other words, there was only one explanation. The vampire was an existence that was closer to humans than to monsters. Just in their outward appearances, a vampire was closer to humans than orcs. When looking at the Meow, mermaids or raccoon clan, it was impossible to consider them ‘human.’ In the view of vampires, beasts were non-human. On the other hand, monsters would 100% see the beast clan as human. They were a species that monsters consider human yet vampires didn’t consider human. It could only be a beast clan. The old man nodded with a bittersweet look at Ark’s description.

“Yes, we are the beast clan like you guessed.”

“But why do you look like humans?”

That was the only part Ark was worried about. Although the villagers looked tough, they looked nothing like a beast. He thought it was similar to Karakul’s ability to transform his subordinates. There was no other reason for the villagers to be alive while in Karakul’s territory. Thus Ark had secured a route of escape.

“Perhaps the beast clan are the subordinates of Karakul?”

“That..... No. Subordinates? Absolutely not! Although our bodies might be seized by Karakul, we have never sold our souls.”

While Ark was conversing with Ark, the villager who had been watching the outside through the window shouted angrily.

“Then this is your natural form?”

“No we are the wolf clan who have inherited the blood of Fenrir, the first wolf.”

“Wolf clan?”

“Yes among all the wolf clans, we are the Wolrang family who has inherited the lineage of a noble warrior.”

The old man breathed in deeply before speaking.

“I am the elder of the Wolrang clan. The Wolrang were trapped in Dark Earth 100 years ago.” The elder started his lecture on the history of the Wolrang family.

Although the Meow also had a warrior lineage, they were closer to thieves. On the other hand, the Wolf clan was a pure warrior lineage so the only profession available was warrior. And the Wolrang were the strongest among the Wolf clan.

“During the Dark Century hundreds of years ago, the Wolrang fought at the front lines with Hero Maban against the dark forces. It was truly an honourable battle. A large number of our kin died but there was no regret. That time was probably the golden age of the Wolrang family. I would’ve rather been born then.....”

The elder muttered with sad eyes as he seemed to look in the past. And it happened near the end of the Dark Century. The 7 heroes fought against the Dark Lord while the Wolrang were given another mission. It was to head to Seutandal with allies in order to stop the aerial attack of the Rwigenberg. The Wolrang accepted this dangerous mission and waged a bloody battle against the Rwigenberg. Thanks to warriors’ sacrifices, Seutandal was relatively unharmed despite the Rwigenberg’s invasion. Then the 7 heroes defeated the Dark Lord and he unleashed his ultimate destruction magic, trapping Seutandal in the dimensional storm. Therefore the Wolrang family became trapped on Seutandal. The place where they battled the Rwigenberg was the area where the mountains converged that Beseutyu pointed out. It was on the soaring cliffs where there was only the storm present.

“The lives of our isolated ancestors then became very miserable. The earth in that area had died. They had to risk their lives for a blade of grass or a sip of water.”

The Wolrang who had fought fiercely on the front lines fell victim to hunger and cold. The Wolrang who had survived numerous battles started dying one by one.

“Huk, I know how that feels. Dying yet never getting any sympathy in return.”

Dedric muttered with tearful eyes as he sat on Ark’s shoulders. However, the elder of the Wolrang was different from the bat with no manners.

“No, we hadn’t expected anything in return for fighting the darkness. We just wanted to fight and die honourably like a warrior. I think that was the most painful thing for our ancestors. There was no honour. It was only an empty death.”

Anyway, the Wolrang wandered the mountains for 100 years.

“Our ancestors eventually found the land filled with darkness. This place was already dominated by vampires but our ancestors had no choice. No, I think they were hoping to fight against the vampires in order to die. But that didn’t happen. The place they arrived at was Dunphil’s territory who proposed peace.”

‘Eh? Dunphil? Ah, that’s right. Didn’t this area originally belong to Dunphil?’

It was all connected? After the Wolrang family appeared, Dunphil was so cowardly that he proposed peace straight away. However things changed a few years ago. Dunphil handed his territory to Karakul and ran away. Karakul wasn’t weak like Dunphil.

“Karakul tried to make us his subordinates. But even if the Wolrang had lost our former glory, we would rather die than become subordinates of a vampire.”

Therefore Karakul and the Wolrang waged a war against each other. After battling fiercely for a decade and many sacrifices, the Wolrang had finally managed to kill most of the Bloody and reached Karakul’s castle.

“We were one step away from deciding Karakul’s fate. Then.....”

The elder bit his lip and muttered.

“One of the eve of the decisive battle, someone in the clan betrayed us. Albert..... He stole our clan’s treasure and offered it to Karakul. He stepped on all the honour that our ancestors had built up!”

“W-wait a minute. The clan’s treasure? Don’t tell me.....?”

Ark asked with surprise and the elder instantly nodded.

“Yes, it is the fragment of the Three Marvels that you are looking for.”

Ark became confused by the elder’s answer. He thought that the beast clan would give him the Three Marvels after he found them. So he had considered a way to rescue Buksil after gaining that power. But now the Three Marvels was in Karakul’s possession? Didn’t that mean he had to defeat Karakul before he could obtain the Three Marvels?

‘Hasn’t this problem just become more complicated?’

“Hero Maban left the treasure to us before he went to fight the Dark Lord. He believed in us. To have Hero Maban’s legacy taken away by a mere vampire..... It was our greatest shame. Truthseeker, you’re welcome to laugh at us. Although our ancestors have given us sharp fangs and claws, our minds have dulled..... We deserve it for losing the clan’s treasure.”

The elder spoke in a self-mocking voice. The Wolrang’s courage also disappeared after losing their treasure. They lost their power to fight and were trapped here, with Karakul often coming to suck their blood. Although their features had changed, their blood they inherited from warriors who fought against the Dark Lord still strengthened Karakul. Every day was humiliating for the Wolrang clan.

At that time, Ark noticed something strange.

“Then your appearance changed after losing the Three Marvels?”

Ark had thought the reason the Wolrang changed was because Karakul cursed them. If they lost their strength after losing the Three

Marvels then how could they fight alongside Hero Maban? However, the answer was surprisingly simple.

“The source of our power is the moon. Therefore we are even more powerful in the evening under the moonlight. We are weaker during the day as the moon isn’t visible but it still exists. Thus the Wolrang clan could maintain its form. But thanks to the strength of the darkness here, the Wolrang had difficulty maintaining our features.”

The Wolrang were similar to werewolves. However, there were a few differences as they could maintain the appearance of a wolf during the day and night. But the Wolrang weren’t able to maintain the wolf features because the power of the moon was blocked..... So the Wolrang used the power of the Three Marvels.

“Our clan holds the ‘Moon Piece.’ The treasure contains the power of the moon. So we were able to receive the protection of the moon here. But we lost that power after Karakul received the moon piece.”

‘The Moon Piece!’

Ark’s spirit felt refreshed.

‘My last question has been answered!’

He had been wondering why Karakul trapped the Wolrang here and not in his castle. Even if the Wolrang had the shape of humans, they could still be trapped in the dungeon to be used as labour. The reason the Wolrang weren’t trapped in the underground jail was because there was a possibility of them regaining their power. Yes, it was the dungeon where Ark had been forced to labour. Karakul had obviously hidden the Moon Piece somewhere in that dungeon. The reason why the Moon Rocks were created was because they absorbed power from the Moon Piece.

‘All my questions are answered!’

It was the feeling of a complicated knot finally being undone. Karakul was the key to all his problems. He had no choice but to defeat Karakul to find the final fragment. Although he could use ‘Stealth’ to enter the dungeon, he didn’t know where the Moon Piece was hidden. What would happen if his stealth turned off while he was in

the dungeon?

‘There is no way I can defeat the Bloody and Karakul all by myself. But.....’

“As you know, I need the Moon Piece. But it is impossible for me by myself. I need the help of the Wolrang who were the guardians of the Three Marvels.”

“Of course we’d be interested in helping. It doesn’t matter even if the entire clan is wiped out.”

The elder then sighed and shook his head.

“But we have no power. We’ve lost our fangs and claws, and we also lost our courage.”

“It will be different if you have the power of the moon. Radun!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun flicked his tongue and spat out a stone. It was a Moon rock he sneaked out of the dungeon!

The elder cried out with distress and grasped the Moon rock after he saw it.

“Hik, t-this is..... No way!”

Susususu.

Silvery fur started sprouting from the hand holding the Moon Rock. After that was the long nails and sharp fangs inside a snout. The elder growled in a pleased voice after transforming into a silver wolf.

“Ohhhhh, this power..... My combative spirit is burning in my heart..... This is it, the Wolrang family.....”

“I have enough Moon rocks to distribute to all the villagers. Now, would you like to help me?”

“Of course. No, please let us help! Recovering the Moon Piece will allow us to repay the humiliation. In addition, you are the Truthseeker. You are the descendant of the great Hero Maban so

we would like nothing more than to fight beside you. Please lead us against Karakul and the clan's traitor Albert."

At the same time, there were two dings and a quest window popped up.

Wolrang's Revenge

You have found the descendants of the Wolrang in the Dark Earth. However, the vampire Karakul has taken away their treasure and subjected the Wolrang to humiliation every day. Help the Wolrang family get revenge on Karakul and the clan's traitor Albert.

<Difficulty: B+>

"I understand. But I need time to prepare. Please wait 2~3 days. This can't be discovered by Karakul or Albert. So you'll have to secretly prepare the other villagers. Ah, and of course you shouldn't shapeshift."

The wolf instantly turned back into an old man after Ark took the Moon rock away. Then Dedric suddenly exclaimed.

"Wait, you're really thinking about fighting Karakul?"

"Haven't you been listening?"

"No, absolutely not! Master doesn't know how strong Karakul is. And even if Master manages to kill Karakul....."

"I already know that."

If he killed a vampire then he would incite the wrath of the strongest vampire. Ark and the Wolrang would all be wiped out in an instant. Even if he won the fight against Karakul, there was a 100% chance that he would die after the battle. However, Ark grabbed Dedric's shoulder firmly and grinned.

"There's no need to worry. The one who will defeat Karakul is you."

"Ah, it was like that. I also..... Eh? W-w-w-what?"

"Didn't you hear me? The Wolrang will make it possible for you to

fight against Karakul. You will have the best role of defeating the leader. After all, it doesn't matter if vampires kill each other."

"Don't talk nonsense! There is no way I could win against Karakul!"

Dedric panicked and turned pale while shaking like crazy.

"Didn't you say you would willingly plunge into a dragon's mouth if I ordered you to?"

"B-but...."

"You are also a vampire. Don't you want to show something nice to your cousins?"

"But I won't be able to win!"

"Don't worry, I'll make sure that you win."

Ark replied with a wicked grin.

Showdown, Vampire vs. Vampire?

“Are you ready?”

“Yes we are.”

The elder of the Wolrang clan nodded at Ark’s question. In the dark forest before Karakul’s castle, 100 silver werewolves had gathered. They had necklaces with a Moon rock emitting a pale light around their neck which Ark had provided.

“The time limit in this area is 30 minutes.”

“We know.”

Although the Moon rock had the power to change them, the power of the Moon Piece was like a battery that was being drained by the Wolrang. Therefore there was a time limit on it. Ark had tested this before leaving. As a result, he determined that the Wolrang could only maintain their form for 30 minutes.

‘30 minutes isn’t that much time. But wiping out all the enemies isn’t our purpose. I just need to reach Karakul within 30 minutes.’

“It won’t be an easy battle.”

“We’ve prepared ourselves. And we are ready to die. But.....”

The elder wiped the snot flowing from his nose and quickly asked.

“.....Is ‘that’ really going to work?”

“Yes, trust me.”

Ark smiled and explained the plan.

“Apart from the elder and ten elite people selected, the remaining troops will disperse to important areas of the castle. However, you

don't need to be too unreasonable. Like I told you, defeating all the enemies isn't our goal. If it seems dangerous then you can leave."

"But if the strategy fails then won't it be too dangerous for you will the escape route blocked?"

"I won't consider retreating even if the strategy fails."

"Yes, you really are a descendant of Hero Maban."

Fighting spirit was ignited in the eyes of the Wolrang after Ark's answer. If the Commander showed a resolution not to give up even in the face of death, naturally the morale of the soldiers would also increase.

"There's no time left so let's go."

"Understood. Wolrang warriors, prepare to enter the battlefield! Grind you fangs. Sharpen your claws!"

"Ohhhhhh!"

The Wolrang raised their voices in unison.

"Radun, let's go!"

Ssak ssak ssak! Pa pa pa pa!

Radun raised a cloud of dust as he ran towards the castle at Ark's command. The 100 Wolrang followed with their silver mane fluttering behind them. The guards cried out in confusion as the Wolrang approached up the steep slope.

"Huk, t-those guys are.....?"

"Are they the Bloody from another territory that is invading?"

"No, they are the Wolrang from the village near the coast. But shouldn't their abilities be sealed? How did they transform themselves?"

"Hurry up! Tell the Earl! Everybody else stop them!"

A guard cast off his human skin and changed into a Bloody before

shouting orders.

“It’s too late, Dark Blade!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Radun accelerated forward and crashed into the Bloody. At the same time, Ark jumped over the Bloody into the castle grounds and turned around to use Dark Blade. In an attack of this scale, a slowed reaction from a surprise attack could make a difference. The backstab dealt tremendous damage and the Bloody fell down. Ark kicked the Bloody’s face as it tried to get up before using XX Interceptor. The Bloody shrieked and cowered from the pain that it was feeling for the first time.

“Ugh, h-he……!”

Kuaah, kuaaang!

A Bloody brandished a spear and ran up to Ark. But the Wolrang surged forward several metres and attacked the Bloody. The Meow’s style of attack was to avoid the enemy’s attack with their quick movements then counterattacking in a vital spot. However, the Wolrang’s style was much simpler. They pushed forward with their strength and strong bodies before biting off the Bloody’s flesh with their fangs. The Bloody tried to counterattack with spears but the steel was no match against the Wolrang’s defense. Their strength and health was also one of the best among their profession. The Bloody were torn like rags under the attack of the Wolrang family.

Awooooo!

A howl emerged from the mouths of the Wolrang. In the past, the Wolrang had defeated the Bloody and drove Karakul into a corner.

“There is no time for howling!”

Ark ignored the Wolrang family who were caught in the atmosphere and continued his plan.

“It’s an invasion!”

When they entered the castle, the guards and employees

immediately transformed into Bloody. It was enough to cause fear but Ark just ignored the scene. He had to reach Karakul on the 10th floor before the time limit of 30 minutes was over. There was no time to look at unnecessary things.

“1st unit, take care of the 1st floor!”

Ten of the Wolrang family spread out at Ark’s command. The Wolrang dashed over 10 metres and splattered flesh and blood everywhere. They’ve had their power and honour taken away for a long time so they attacked vengefully. But the advancing Ark and Wolrang family didn’t even turn their heads.

“That’s it, 2nd unit take care the 2nd floor!”

Once again, ten of the Wolrang split off and jumped around the area. Ark commanded 10 Wolrang to split off on each floor and just ran up the stairs without stopping. The number of Bloody doubled when he reached the 5th floor. It was to the extent that the unit made up of ten attackers couldn’t keep up. Although they were steadily going up, they lost 10 Wolrang on each floor so the Wolrang’s power gradually weakened. While going up the stairs and breaking through the Bloody, the Wolrang at the rear became a burden. Those who separated from their unit were torn to pieces. But there no time to worry about them. If they stopped for just a moment then they would be surrounded by Bloody.

Kuaaaang!

Nevertheless, weren’t they still the Wolrang family? Even when surrounded by the enemy, there was no Wolrang who asked for help. Instead they persisted in attacked the Bloody even with their dying breaths. Thanks to that, Ark managed to penetrate the steadily increasing Bloody and reached the 10th floor. But after passing the 9th floor, there was only 10 Wolrang left. On the other hand, close to 50 Bloody swarmed in the hallway.

“Those guys, they’ve reached here!”

“Block them! Make sure they don’t enter Earl Karakul’s room!”

“Ya, you beep-beep bastards!”

Ark used his advanced Intimidation skill. The gathered Bloody winced and stiffened.

“The goal is right before our eyes. Everyone have courage!”

He also used advanced Nursing to restore the energy of the tired Wolrang.

“Ohhhh, now’s the time! Show them the latent power of the Wolrang family!”

“Don’t fear death and just break through the enemy!”

“If we can’t move then just die with the Bloody! That is an honourable death!”

Ark and the Wolrang swung their swords and penetrated the Bloody. Blades came flying from everywhere! The Wolrang leading the charge became bloody in an instant. Then the Wolrang spread his arms and grabbed four or five Bloody before jumping through a window.

“We aren’t the vampire’s food! For the Wolrangggggg!”

“Truthseeker watch carefully, this is the Wolrang ahhhhhhh!”

The situation became messy as other Wolrang followed suit to jump out the window. It was really a scene that couldn’t be seen without tears. Thanks to the suicide bombing of the Wolrang, the number of Bloody had instantly been reduced in half.

“Riposte!”

Meanwhile Ark took out the surrounding Bloody. He then just Sprint and dived like an arrow through the door. Ark rolled his body before standing up and looking around the room.

Palapalapala.

In a dark room lit by several candles, Karakul was just playing a pipe organ without any concern. Thanks to Ark and the Wolrang opening the door, even the Bloody looked at the scene with bemusement.

‘He truly is a vampire.....’

A curse naturally emerged.

“Karakul!”

Karakul stopped playing after Ark shouted angrily. He slowly got up and turned around before laughing while showing his fangs.

“Huhuhu, the guy making all the commotion is the food who escaped a while ago. Why have you returned without any fear? Aren’t these the dogs I trapped? Bah, and these pitiful creatures dare to show themselves after I spared their lives? As expected for wild dogs. If it wasn’t for Albert then I would’ve killed you all.....”

Karakul looked around with relaxed eyes and walked forward.

“Do you think you will be able to kill me?”

“Let’s see? I won’t know until I try.”

“How impertinent, kill them all.”

As if it was too troublesome for Karakul, he refused and turned around. The Bloody who had been startled for a while once again raised their weapons.

“Karakul, are you running away?”

“What?”

Karakul frowned and turned around.

“Summon Demon, Dedric!”

“Ohh, Dark Dash!”

Dedric closed his eyes tightly and rushed towards Karakul. There was a sound like firewood cracking as Karakul stepped backwards.

“Ugh, what, what the, this guy?”

“E-E-Earl Karakul. A-according to the laws of the vampires, I challenge you to a duel!”

“What? Who are you?”

“I’m the one who inherited from Dunphil, Dedric!”

Dedric cried out. The die was cast.

“Stop!”

Karakul’s voice rang through the room. All the Bloody that were attacking the Wolrang in the castle stopped moving. Karakul lowered his hand and stared at Dedric. Anger turned his eyes a deep red.

“Dunphil..... The one who was scared of me and ran away..... His descendant would only be a low level vampire at most..... You dare..... Challenge me to a duel?”

“Ah, no. That.....”

Dedric trembled as he closed his eyes before shouting.

“Y-y-yes!”

“Do you know what it means? The consciousness of the Lord supervises all vampire duels in Dark Earth. Even if you are recalled when defeated, you will still die afterwards. It means eternal annihilation.”

“I know, dammit! I know that!”

“Hahaha! You know? Yet you still dared challenge me?” Karakul suddenly shouted.

“So you think you can win against me!”

At the same time, all the windows in the room shook and broke. A large storm rolled around the room as Karakul approached Dedric.

“Okay, I have no interest in your small land but I’ll kill you.”

It was at that time. A bloody red circle around 10 metres in diameter was abruptly drawn around Karakul and Dedric. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-A vampire duel had begun.
The magic of the Vampire Lord who rules that Dark Earth has

activated. When the vampire duel has begun, no battles are permitted within 100 metres.

In addition, no other vampires are allowed to enter. All physical and magic attacks from outside will be blocked by the magic circle. When the duel ends, all of the loser's possessions are automatically given to the winner. When defeated, your territory and castle will be taken away and your soul destroyed.

'That's it, my plan has succeeded!'

Ark clenched his fist as he read the information window. If Dedric who had a territory challenged Karakul then he couldn't refuse. That was why Ark broke through enemy lines to reach here. When receiving a duel application in Dark Earth, a vampire couldn't refuse. And once the duel started, none of the vampire's subordinates could fight. Although Ark and the Wolrang were slightly different, they could still be considered as Dedric's subordinates. So there was no reason to fight a pointless battle.

"Summoning your pet to challenge me. You might use cheap tricks but I'll make you regret it. I'll kill him and then make you suffer."

"We'll see. Will it really be as easy as you expect?"

Ark picked his nose and murmured.

"You can only say that now."

Karakul muttered in a low voice. He instantaneously disappeared and showed up behind Dedric.

"Hik, what, what the?"

Dedric freaked out and flew into the sky. But Karakul changed his arms into wings, caught up and kicked Dedric. Dedric quickly lost 30% of his health.

"Kukukuku, I thought there was something when you applied for a duel..... This is indeed a joke. Somebody with these capabilities has become an aristocrat. Human, you believed this guy could attack me?"

Dedric wasn't even visible in Karakul's eyes as he spoke to Ark. It was natural since Dedric wasn't a match for Karakul. Currently Dedric's capabilities was around level 220~230. After Ark had frantically fed him dishes for two days to prepare for the duel, his level only rose to this degree. However, Karakul was level 500. It was more than two times the difference. But the difference was even wider than that. The Dark Earth was a place created for vampires. Of course, the added bonuses for vampires were terrific. Ark hadn't fully realized that part when making his plan. Compared to Karakul, Dedric wasn't a pureblood vampire. Although he had evolved from a bat into a vampire, his quality was still weak so the stat bonus received was low. Therefore 30% of his health disappeared at once. Three or four shots will destroy him. With other monsters, Dedric could evade the attacks by flying but that was difficult with vampires. If he fought directly than Dedric would be smashed in 1 minute.

'It is embarrassing to call Dedric a vampire. But he isn't subjected to the same weaknesses as his vampire opponent. It is his strength!'

"Dedric, use your escaping skills and hold on!"

"Wahhhhh, save me!"

Even without Ark's words, Dedric was already running away. Dedric who had gone through Ark's hellish training was an expert at evasion. Thanks to that, Karakul was unable to catch him.

"Kukukuku! This is your strategy? Running away? But this is a duel. It's not possible to run away after the duel begins."

"It is also impossible for you to run away."

"What the? Run away? Me?"

Karakul asked with an astounded expression.

"Now's the time. Wolrang, get ready to support my preparations! Take out the support tools!"

While the duel was ongoing, the Wolrang surrounded the duel circle and simultaneously took something out. Karakul who had been

watching suddenly shrieked and cowered.

“Heok, what, what the, that? This creepy feeling is.....!”

“Heh, you were born in Dark Earth so you wouldn’t know what this is. But your vampire instincts will still remember the shape. It is a cross.”

“C-cross?”

Karakul muttered in a confused voice. Yes, this was one of the support tools Ark had gathered by riding the dolphin back to Haman Fortress. Tazza used his ‘Cloning’ skill while Lariette had blessed it! Karakul was born in Dark Earth so he had never seen a cross, but he instinctively feared it and kept a wary eye on the Wolrang.

“Eh? What’s with that guy? What is he acting like this?”

Dedric tilted his head to one side after seeing Karakul tremble and retreat. Since he had evolved from a bat, Dedric’s vampire alignment was still low so he wasn’t affected by the crosses. However, Karakul had fallen into a state of panic and closed his eyes tightly.

“Ugh, you cowardly brat, this is a vampire’s sacred duel.....”

“Cowardly? What? Aren’t we just supporting?”

Ark shook the cross and laughed.

“Now, shall we start cheering actively? Play, play, Dedric!”

“Play, play, Dedric! Win, win, Dedric!”

Ark and the Wolrang opened their mouths and cheered. Then the room began to fill with a strange odour. The smell finally reached Karakul’s nose making him shriek.

“Eeeeeek, w-what the? What is this awful smell? My nose..... No, even my brain is paralyzed.....!”

This was the second support tool used by Ark! He attacked using garlic. Garlic was like rat poison to vampires. Therefore Ark had selected an elite group of Wolrang and fed them garlic soup. That’s the reason why the elder had a runny nose before leaving. Of course

there was a terrible garlic smell every time they talked so it was like a bio-chemical weapon. It was a double attack of crosses and garlic smell! Every time they cheered, Karakul received mental damage and staggered. He wasn't even paying attention to the duel anymore as he closed his eyes and blocked his nose while rolling on the floor screaming.

"Hehehe, I don't know what's happening but this is a chance!"

A strong person is weak while a weak person is strong..... Dedric truly acted like a human! Dedric rushed towards Karakul.

"Huk, s-stop!"

"What..... Ack!"

When Dedric ran up, Karakul immediately lifted his head and swung his nails. Although his five senses were paralyzed by the cross and garlic attack, it still wasn't difficult for Karakul to counter attack against Dedric. Dedric received a critical hit and 50% of his health disappeared. His remaining life instantly went down to 20%. Dedric flapped his wings like a hummingbird and escaped in a hurry.

"You idiot! I told you that you won't win if you go near him!"

"B-but how will I win if I don't attack?"

Dedric shouted angrily.

"Didn't I tell you? All you have to do is run away. Let's prepare for the 3rd stage!"

"Ohhhhhh!"

The Wolrang heard Ark's order and took out mirrors.

"Radun, [Vision] scroll!"

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark tore the scroll that Radun spat out and shouted.

"Activate scroll, Saint's Brilliance!"

It was at that time. An intense flash of light emerged from the scroll. It was Lariette's skill Saint's Brilliance. Another name was 'Light Emission.' Although Saint's Brilliance had no effect on normal monsters, it did lethal damage to the undead or those with dark attributes. It was even more effective against the vampires where sunlight was like rat poison to them. It would be best if Lariette performed the magic directly. However, the place was Dark Earth. Thanks to Dark Blood, all skills of a 'light' nature were blocked and the user would continuously receive damage. So Ark decided to use the [Vision] scroll that the Eastern Nation sold. Over the last two days, Ark bought many [Vision] scrolls and had Lariette fill it with her magic. But there was one problem. The vampire duel blocked all physical and magical interference. Saint's Brilliance was regarded as a magical attack so of course it would be blocked by the wards. However, Ark was a genius at using cheap and unexpected tricks.

"3rd stage illumination support!"

Glitter, glitter, glitter, glitter-!

He reflected Saint's Brilliance off the mirrors that the Wolrang were holding and concentrated it on Karakul. Yes, he couldn't use magic attacks but it was just reflected light once it bounced off the mirrors. Therefore the circle wouldn't see it as magic and block it. In addition, 'Holy Light' was sufficient against vampires without anything else added to it.

"Aaaaack, h-hot! It is hot! Hot!"

The rays of light spun like a spider web inside the duelling circle. When Karakul was hit by the light, black smoke emerged from his body.

"What! What is this? It burns when it hits my flesh!"

Karakul couldn't open his eyes so he didn't know why his body was burning.

"Huhuhu, what is it? This is called the Holy Light."

"W-what? Holy light? H-how..... Kuaaaak!"

Karakul changed into a bat and wildly flew around the duel circle. However, the Wolrang changed the angle of the mirror and pursued him. Thanks to the duel circle, Karakul couldn't avoid it no matter how great his evasive skills. It was like Karakul was trapped in a 10 metre cylinder of light and his health quickly decreased. Karakul tried to turn into the size of a mouse but the Wolrang just aimed the mirror at the ground.

"Hahahah! Isn't this exciting?"

Dedric, do you understand? You just have to run away no matter what. Never get close to him!"

Ark shouted as he continued to activate the scrolls.

"U-understood!"

"This cowardly bastard"

"Cowardly? What? What did I do? Did I shoot an arrow or use magic?"

Ark smirked and retorted impudently.

"Ugh, this is a sacred duel..... Kuak, hot..... Using a trick like this.....! B-Bloody, kill those bastards!"

Karakul stomped his feet and frantically shouted. However, all battles were banned in this area until the duel was over. All the Bloody could do was stop the light with their bodies. However, the Wolrang just used their extraordinary jumping power and continued to reflect the light.

"Uhh! But this light..... Your summon will also be hit by the reflected light..... He will never avoid all of it..... His health is also low..... Even just a small graze....."

Karakul moved closer to Dedric while he was talking and the light hit him. Dedric cowered and screamed.

"Aaaack, this.....! This light is.... This light is..... Ayu, sparkly. Aye Master, it is too dazzling."

“W-what? How did this guy?”

Karakul flinched and Ark replied with a smirk.

“Huhuhu, I’m sorry but Dedric is a fake vampire.”

“Huk, a fake? D-don’t tell me.....?”

“I’m not joking. You still don’t understand? You misunderstood and Dedric isn’t actually Dunphil’s descendant. He was originally a bat.”

Of course Dedric weakened when hit by the light. But all it did was make him feel slightly ill and decreased his stats by 20%. It wasn’t the type of damage that Karakul received as a pureblood vampire. When Karakul was hit by the light, his stats were reduced by 50% and he received 30 damage every second. Thanks to Karakul being burned by the light, his health had lost 80% of his health.

“Ugh! At this rate..... I can’t lose to a bat..... Vampire Tempest!”

Like the majority of high level monsters, Karakul was hiding a trump card. Karakul spun his body like a spin top and a violent storm appeared inside the circle. His cloak also split into many blades and approached one by one.

“Oh, t-that guy..... Concentrate the light!”

Ark cried in a desperate voice as the Wolrang obeyed. However, the Bloody desperately blocked half the attack. If Dedric was hit by the storm of blades then their chance of defeating Karakul would disappear. Dedric’s current health was 20% after his rash actions. Karakul’s special move would kill him instantly.

“M-Master, please help!”

Dedric pressed against the boundary of the wards and looked at Ark with worry. Then Ark’s thoughts started to turn over in his head.

“Line up all the crosses in front of the mirror. It is a plan of desperation. Saint’s Brilliance!”

Ark tore open five [Vision] scrolls at once and shouted. At that moment, a brilliant light flooded the room. The only place the light

didn't strike was the circle boundary. However, the light that reflected off the mirrors penetrated the duel circle. No, it wasn't just light. The light was shaped like a huge cross!

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

A huge explosion occurred in Karakul's body. At the same time, Karakul's Vampire Tempest skill was released. A clear cross pattern was burnt on the body with black smoke emerging from it. Was that all? Karakul received continuous damage from the light and rolled around on the ground.

"Now Dedric! Use your vampire skill Hammering!"

"Oh, take this!"

Dedric crashed into Karakul's head like a big hammer. It was the trump card skill that took him 10 tries to suck from Bul-kkun, Hammering! It was a skill that took too much time in an actual battle but it dealt 400% damage. When hit by Hammering, there was a strange sound. The remaining 3% of his health disappeared and Karakul collapsed.

"U-unbelievable..... I was killed by a bat....."

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

When Karakul collapsed, message windows continuously appeared in front of Ark. He had gained 7 levels! Since his summon had killed the enemy, he still received the experience. So the amount of experience Dedric gained was also applied to Ark.

"Wahhhhhh! Karakul is defeated!"

The Wolrang cheered when Karakul died. The level 220~230 Dedric had defeated a level 500 vampire. Well, all Dedric did was deal the final blow..... But wasn't the results important?

"Eh..... R-really..... I really won?"

Dedric made a perplexed expression before gripping his fist and shouting.

“Did you see? I really won? M-Master, I am the champion!”

Wasn't this like a parody?

‘Well, it doesn't really matter. Soon I can find the last Three Marvels and change to my second profession!’

How long had he waited for this moment? While the enchantment in the centre of the room slowly faded, an intense blast of wind entered through the window. Ark reflexively closed his eyes to stop the dust from entering.

“Huk, what, what the? What on earth.....?”

A strange existence floated in the space where the duel circle was. He wore a robe with complicated designs on it with the hood covering its face.....a dark aura appeared around the cloak while the huge black wings fluttered. The blood vanished from the Wolrang's face when he appeared.

“T-the vampire referee.....”

“Vampire referee?”

“He is under the direct control of the Lord and supervises all the duels between vampires.”

As expected from a high ranking vampire aristocrat, the referee exuded a tremendous aura. He was level 900! However Ark had heard that they weren't involved in anything outside the castle. Except when a vampire was killed by other species.....

‘Don't tell me he thinks the duel wasn't fair?’

Ark looked at the referee with a tense expression. However, the referee wasn't interested in Ark and spoke to Dedric.

“Dedric.....”

“Huh? Yes!”

The normally mannerless Dedric had prostrated himself on the ground.

“You have defeated the vampire Karakul through a vampire duel.”

The referee looked at Ark and the Wolrang and a small smile appeared on his face.

“You seemed to have used a shortcut..... I judge that there were no actions which violated the Lord’s rules. According to the Great Vampire Lord’s laws, all of Earl Karakul’s assets will henceforth be yours. Dedric, I bestow the glory of victory on you in the name of the Lord.”

When the referee raised his hand, blue flames engulfed Karakul and something black appeared. The black heart flew towards Dedric who absorbed it.

At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-Your summon Dedric has defeated the higher ranking vampire Karakul.

Thanks to the absorption of Karakul’s heart and blood, Dedric can now evolve. Please choose one familiar to be the main. The Familiar created by the fusion evolution will have the main Familiar’s stats with the auxiliary Familiar’s stats after consideration.

‘Evolution? Ohhh, what kind of luck is this?’

Ark’s mouth dropped absent-mindedly as he stared at the information window. Of course, he knew that Dedric would inherit all of Karakul’s possessions if he defeated him. However, Ark never imagined that it would make him evolve.

“Huh?”

Then the referee shook his head and looked at Ark.

“You..... Are the Master who summons Dedric?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Was there a problem? Ark quickly closed his mouth and answered. The referee murmured like he was thinking out loud.

“Until now there had been only one person who made a vampire his summon, Hero Maban..... Oh, is it like that? His descendant has appeared?”

It wasn't a voice filled with hostility. No, somehow it was filled with longing.....

“You know Hero Maban?”

Ark asked but the referee did not answer. He just started outside with vague eyes before suddenly asking a question.

“As the descendant of Hero Maban, you can choose the evolution. You already know this but even among the vampire clan, Karakul was someone born with rare power and talent. He is already dead but if you choose him during evolution then you'll receive a powerful summon that Dedric can't even be compared to. What personality will you choose to evolve?”

Dedric looked at Ark with a slightly worried expression. Thanks to his previous behaviour, Dedric was worried about the evolution. But Ark wasn't worried.

Stats? Future skills? Of course it was important.

However, Ark's thoughts about his summons weren't as simple as that. He was even more certain after spending several days without his summons. If Dedric's personality disappeared then it would be better not to evolve him.

“Dedric.”

Ark answered without any hesitation and the corner of the referee's lips turned up. It was an expression where he was unsure if the referee was smiling or frowning. When there was silence for a while, Ark once again opened his mouth. Then abruptly the body of the referee turned into hundreds of bats and flew out the window.

“My duty here is over. Choose as you will!”

Ark sighed and relaxed. It was fortunate that the referee hadn't seen any problems with the duel. Then he proceeded with the evolution and Dedric was wrapped in a red light. Just like when he turned from a bat into a vampire, the dark energy was the only visible change.

-The evolution has been successfully carried out.

Dedric has been promoted after absorbing Karakul's strength. The great Lord who rules the vampire clan has given him the name 'Racard.' Racard has acquired the necessary knowledge to become a higher ranking vampire. In addition, he had gained the rights to all assets and territory left by Karakul.

-Racard

A vampire who has defeated the vampire Karakul through a duel and gained the title of Earl.

His magic has become more powerful after absorbing Karakul's blood. In addition, the fragments of Karakul's knowledge will manifest his vampire powers quicker. However, the blood of a vampire has increased his weakness to light.

While in the sunlight, he will be unable to change into a vampire during the daytime and have all stats reduced by 50%. In addition, his resistance to the dark has increased by 50% while his resistance to the light decreases by 50%.

Race: Demonic

Alignment: Dark

Ranking: Middle class

Health: 1,520 (+150)

Loyalty: 78 (+20)

Strength 113 (+20)

Agility 95 (+20)

Stamina 279 (+20)

Wisdom 58 (+50),

Intelligence 166 (+50)

Luck 36 (+10)

* Attack power of Lancel's sword has increased by 9, durability increased by 80.

* The skill slots of Blood-sucking has increased to 2.

* The effect of 'Skill Block' has been added to Blood-sucking.

-You have learnt the 'Blood Lane' skill.

-Skill block <Blood-sucking secondary effect> (Beginner, Racial special skill): Karakul's special skill.

When using the Blood-sucking skill, there is a 10% chance to block one of the enemy's skills. However, the blocked skill is randomly decided. An increase in skill proficiency will increase the probability and duration of the blocked skill.

-Blood Lane (Beginner, Species characteristics): The blood of a vampire is a dark existence with a strong curse embedded in it.

Blood Lane is a technique which scatters the vampire's blood and applies a curse to a fixed area. When affected by the blood, there is a 50% chance of delusions, confusion, frenzy and despair which decreases the combat power. However, the vampire will also have its abilities reduced by 50% until he recovers the blood lost. Blood Lane can only be used in the evening.

<There is a 50% probability that all enemies within 10 metres will be affected by the various situations mentioned for 10 minutes>

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The place where there was a huge magic circle shook with a roaring sound. At the same time, half of the demons within collapsed. A

knight wearing black armour and holding a blood stained bayonet raised his head. Then he pulled out a jewel the size of a fist from his bag. A sinister aura that was difficult to describe surrounded it. The knight looked around and soaked the jewel in a pool of blood. Then a black message window appeared.

-You have succeeded in absorbing the essence of 666 lesser demons in the 'Devil's Jewel.

'The Devil's Jewel has also absorbed the special abilities of the demons.

"It's over."

The knight murmured quietly. It was at that time. Suddenly the space behind him distorted and an old man appeared.

"Congratulations, you've finally become strong enough to completely conquer the lesser demons."

"It took a lot more time than I thought."

"Of course. The lesser demon is a much stronger opponent than the demons you've fought so far. Naturally it would be difficult to defeat them the first few times. But now you've acquired the abilities of the lesser demons so you are finally a proper Ruin Knight."

Ruin Knight! That's right. The knight in the black armour was Alan. Alan had obtained the 'Hatred' stat after being defeated by Ark and changed professions to a Ruin Knight. Afterwards, Maseutyu had brought him to high level hunting grounds to learn the Ruin Knight related skills. A Ruin Knight had to collect the essences of demons! One of the abilities of a Ruin Knight was to absorb the ability of the corresponding monster using the Devil's Jewel. So far, Alan had absorbed 20 different skills. All the high levelled demons he absorbed from had unique and powerful skills.

'A Ruin Knight is a stronger profession than I thought. According to the skills absorbed and my level, my damage completely exceeds that of a Holy Knight.'

Of course, raising a Ruin Knight wasn't as easy as it sounded. He had spent the last few months just hunting monsters that had passed through the wards.

"How long am I going to be doing this?"

"You don't want to become strong?"

"I do but....."

"Huhuhu, don't worry. The training is over."

Maseutyu laughed. Then the space warped again and someone entered the wards. Surprisingly, the person who appeared was a user with red hair wearing a white mask. Maseutyu instantly spoke in an enthusiastic voice when the person appeared.

"This person is the implementer of the true history, the master of true darkness."

"You are the Ruin Knight?"

"Who are you?"

"Like you heard, I am the one implementing the true history. My task is to rectify the wrong history. Your strength will support me. It is possible right now. Once I tell you about something interesting then you'll be more involved. No, there is no doubt about it."

'Something I'll be interested in? Is he talking about the company's entrance examination?'

Of course, the reason Alan started the game was to join Global Exos. However that was a few months ago. Now his only purpose in playing the game was to get vengeance on Ark. He wouldn't have endured the last few months if it wasn't for the thoughts of vengeance.

"But I....."

"Your first task involves Seutandal which has re-joined middle earth. Almost all the preparations are finished. How about it? Will the Ruin Knight appear in that world?"

Alan flinched and looked at the Red Man. Alan had also seen the video of Ark posted on the official site.

'If Ark can I do then I can as well. Although I would like to find Ark straight away, that would be too boring. Okay, let's challenge Ark. I'll use the system to send him an official challenge. Just wait Ark!'

"Good, then follow me."

An eerie grey light crept into his helmet.

Pet Dog

[**TL Notes:** I made a small edit to the previous chapter. The skill slots for Racard's blood-sucking skill increased to 2, not by two.

Also for those who don't know what 'chaebol' is when it is mentioned in this chapter. It is like a family lead huge corporations commonly found in South Korea. If you want more information then you can look it up in google.]

Shortly after Karakul met his end.

According to the rules of a vampire's duel, Racard inherited all of Karakul's possessions. It meant the Karakul's territory, castle and the Bloody subordinates all belonged to Racard. The Bloody swiftly changed their attitude after the duel finished.

"Oh, the shining charisma, it is wonderful!"

"As expected, the people who make their own fortunes are different."

"It will be a great honour to serve such a fine Lord."

"I thought it would be like from the beginning."

"I'll offer my whole body to our Lord."

The Bloody prostrated themselves on the ground and shook their tail. They didn't seem like subordinates who had served Karakul for 100 years. Well, the Bloody and Karakul's relationship wasn't one of loyalty but was more like a forced blood contract.

"Earl..... Earl Racard...."

Racard looked like it still hadn't sunk in. But after a moment, his face brightened as the Bloody continued praising him.

“Earl, yes I am now an Earl. Hahaha, this castle is also mine! Everything is mine! Hahaha. Eh? What’s that nasty stuff? Why is it in my room?”

Racard looked around the room and frowned as he saw a black lump. Then one of the Bloody twisted its hand and replied.

“Yes, that is Karakul who was the previous Lord.”

Karakul had been a powerful vampire who controlled portions of the Dark Earth. However, the triple combo of the cross, garlic smell and illumination had turned him into unrecognizable ashes. Racard farted at the Bloody’s answer and muttered.

“Bah, what are you guys doing? This is my room. Quickly remove the mess. Clean up the room.”

“Yes, I understand. I’ll remove this messy thing.”

The competent Bloody was also a professional maid so the room was quickly cleaned up. The broken household goods were removed while the various blood spots were neatly polished. Then the strong vampire Karakul was separated into non-flammable trash and dragged out. It was a world where losing was truly disastrous.

“Huhuhu, I’m an Earl.....should I talk like an Earl?”

Racard sat down in the chair used by Karakul and laughed. Then he spoke to Ark and the Wolrang.

“Ah, did you see? Did you see? I’m now an Earl. But there’s no need for you to be tense. I’m not an authoritarian vampire. In addition, I’m thankful to the Wolrang who helped me. So you can live comfortably. Hahaha!”

However Ark didn’t feel like laughing.

‘Damn, this is bad.’

Ark sighed with a mixed expression. Of course, Racard’s evolution was an inspiring event for Ark. 170 total stats were added when Racard evolved. It was like he gained 17 levels at once. However, the important thing for summons wasn’t the level but the ranking.

Recently he learned that the ranking that appeared in a summons's information window wasn't simply a classification.

The combat ability of monsters wasn't just determined by their level or stats. A user's skill was affected by the ranking of the skill. This was also applied to the monster rating system. A monster's skills, agility and ability to cope with different situations would depend on the ranking. That's why a level 80 user could fight against a level 100 monster without difficulty. However, it wouldn't be that easy for the user if they were dealing with a level 100 intermediate monster. If the monster was in the advanced ranking then its power would increase by approximately 20 levels and a party might be required to hunt it. It was one of the reasons why Ark used Racard's satellite surveillance mode in battles. Most of the monsters Ark was currently dealing with were intermediate ranked. Because Razak also involved, he now had two intermediate ranked summons.

But he wasn't entirely happy about Racard evolving to an intermediate rank. If Ark attacked an intermediate ranked monster, the damage wouldn't be applied or not all of it will be applied. On the other hand, there was a possibility of receiving additional damage if he was in a critical condition. The rankings of the monsters would also increase in the higher level regions. It would be impossible to exert his full power no matter how much he raised his stats through food. In the end, the evolution of his pets was necessary if he wanted to use them in higher level regions. It was the reason Ark chose evolution even though he could raise their stats through food.

'Anyway, Racard has an intermediate ranking now. There will be no penalties applied if we face an intermediate monster.'

It meant that he could use Racard more aggressively in fights.

'There is also an additional skill slot in Blood-sucking.'

Until now, there had only been one skill slot for Blood-sucking so it was very inconvenient. If he wanted to preserve the skill saved in the slot then he couldn't use Blood-sucking. Now that there were two slots, he could divide it into one slot to use and one to save. It also had a 10% probability of blocking a random skill. Ark had experienced the effect of blocking skills through Karakul so he was

aware of its power. Although it blocked a random skill so luck was needed, it could be used to properly neutralize the enemy.

‘Blood Lane is also a wide area curse magic!’

The evolution was undoubtedly successful.

‘Okay. Karakul is defeated and my pet evolved into Racard.....everything is good. But.....’

Ark released a sigh and looked at Racard absent-mindedly. No, he looked at Racard who was now wearing a red tuxedo. The reason Ark was dissatisfied was because of the tuxedo.

Blood Red Tuxedo (Rare)

Armour type: Special Costume

Durability: 23/60

Defense: 30

Weight: 15

User restriction: Vampires only

A vampire’s tuxedo dyed in his favourite colour, blood red. It appears to be clothes that Karakul who possessed great power preferred and is a luxury clothing using the finest fabrics. There aren’t many vampires who wears such luxury tuxedos in Dark Earth. The dignity of the vampire will increase just by wearing this.

<Option: Stamina +5, Wisdom +10>

<Special options: Dignity of a vampire increases by 30%. A vampire’s dignity has an influence on the effect and success rate of vampire exclusive skills. The effect of and success rate of Blood-sucking and Blood Lane will increase by 15%>

‘The rare item I got was exclusively for vampires.....’

The vampire wasn’t a race that users can select. In addition, Ark was the only user who can summon vampires. In other words, the

vampire-only items were created exclusively for Racard. Of course, Ark was also intending to gather equipment for his summons.

‘But why did a boss monster drop a rare item for my pets?’

He would be able to receive hundreds of gold from rare items if it wasn’t a vampire exclusive item. Now he had to equip all of them on Racard! Ark felt anger well up as he saw Racard wearing the tuxedo.

‘First I had to spend 700 gold on a summoning port and now I have to give a rare item to my pet? Am I a chaebol? What the hell? Why was there suddenly so many maintenance costs on my pets? On the other hand, Racard has become a Lord.’

In this situation, it was impossible for Ark not to consider profit. Ark bit his lips before a brilliant idea popped into his head.

‘Wait, this castle? Aha, I see.’

Ark’s eyes shone brightly as he looked around the room. Karakul was quite a well off vampire in Dark Earth. Like most vampires, he had a lot of items that appealed to his vanity. There were quite a few unnecessary paintings and statues. And the current owner of those decorations was Racard! Ark thought of an idea and smiled wickedly at Racard. In the meantime, Racard had lost his sassiness and became more arrogant.

“Haha, that’s right. I’m already an Earl! Dedric used to only live in a small hideout and now I am an Earl! Ohhhh, look at me now!”

Dedric who had abruptly risen in the hierarchy seemed to think he had become the founder of a new religion. It was so absurd that he couldn’t help but laugh.

“Ohhhh, hooray Earl Racard!”

“We swear allegiance to the new Lord!”

“We’ve never mentioned it but we never liked Earl Karakul.”

Dedric became even more arrogant after hearing the Bloody’s reactions.

“Huhuhu, lower your heads even more!”

“Hey Racard.”

Then Ark approached.

“What? What bastard dared call my name so informally.....Hik, M-Master!”

“Oh, aren’t you arrogant? Have you become so big that I can’t say your name anymore?”

“No, that’s not it.....”

Despite being an Earl, Racard was still Ark’s summon. The suffering that Racard received after evolving into Dedric and becoming cocky had been carved into his bones. Racard thought that Ark was going to beat him up again and stuttered while shrinking back.

“I didn’t know it was Master. Really.”

‘Yes, the mental training I gave before is still working.’

Ark liked Racard’s expression.

‘I was looking for signs that he had become cocky again after evolving but now’s not the time for that.’

“Well, okay. You went through some trouble this time so I won’t find faults in such a trivial thing.”

Racard gave a relieved sigh at Ark’s words. Then Ark muttered something.

“Anyway, I feel good that you’ve been promoted. By the way, who was it thanks to?”

“Eh? T-that.... Thank you very much.”

“Is that so? You’re grateful?”

Ark smiled and put his arms over Racard’s shoulders.

“Then I’ll just say something comfortably.”

“Huh? What are you saying? What?”

“I’ll sum up the situation. You’re thankful to me.... You have hundreds of subordinates and this nice castle because of me. But what about all the trouble I went through? I got nothing. Don’t you think it is too terrible? It is troublesome getting nothing after going through all of that.”

“Eek? B-but.....”

“It’s okay, it’s okay. You don’t have to give me any money.”

Ark looked around the area and spoke in a coy voice.

“Just a few souvenirs from your castle will do.....”

“S-souvenirs?”

“A few of the paintings hanging here and some sculptures. Anyway, you have no interest in such things. You’ll just leave it to rot so I’ll take it as a commemoration. How about it? Is that okay? Your castle will be clean and I’ll receive some nice souvenirs. Anyway, you should do something for me or else you’ll start to feel troubled. Isn’t that right?”

In other words, it was a subtle threat. That’s right. This was Ark’s ulterior motive. The pictures and sculptures inside the castle were just decorations. However, decorations like these could be traded as goods to merchants. In other words, decorations could also be sold as goods despite having no additional effects. Ark’s ulterior motive was to pack the decorations away and sell them. Racard finally noticed Ark’s motive and jumped with surprise.

“B-but Master....”

“What? Don’t tell me it’s really valuable?”

“No, rather than it being valuable.... It’s still.....”

“Bah, okay. If you behave like this then I have no choice but to act dirty too.”

The smile had disappeared from Ark’s face.

“Okay. Let’s do some calculations. Do you know the expenses?”

“The expenses?”

“Let me explain it to you. Do you know how much money I spent on you? How much food have you eaten from me? But there’s even more? Do you know how much money went into the summoning port? How much money was needed for the support tools to defeat Karakul? Whose pocket do you think it came out of?”

“T-that.....”

“Until now I’ve never even said a word about it. But you’re behaving so dirty just for a few decorations? Then clearly I have to receive the necessary expenses from you. Should I calculate how long you should be beaten up? Do you want me to become a person who collects your debt? I’ll use whatever it takes to receive it.”

The blood drained from Racard’s face as Ark continued speaking. Racard was well aware of how petty and vicious Ark could be in regards to money. Ark would think of it as being robbed of the decorations. It would be impossible to withstand him. Racard was a vampire so he also wanted the decorations, but his many experiences eventually made him lift the white flag.

“Okay, I understand. Take it, just take it.”

“Huhuhu, I thought you would follow me advice.”

Thus the ownership of the castle’s decor was transferred to Ark. First NPCs and users, now Ark was at the level of robbing his summons.

‘Considering everything I spent on this battle, I won’t earn that much even after selling all the decorations. A few hundred gold at most? But it still won’t compensate for everything that I spent. If I lack money in the future then I’ll have to control Racard even more.’

Ark finally finished threatening his summon. The Wolrang elder watched him blankly before speaking in an impatient voice.

“Ark, is now the time to be doing this?”

“Ah, that’s right.”

Ark finally remembered his purpose. The real reason he defeated Karakul wasn’t Racard’s evolution. His purpose was to reclaim the Wolrang’s fragment of the Three Marvels, the Moon Piece.

“Obviously the Moon Piece is hidden somewhere in this castle.”

“I already know where the Moon Piece is.”

The Moon rock had managed to absorb the moon’s power despite no moonlight being able to penetrate the Dark Earth. So the Moon Piece must be hidden in the underground workplace. At that time, the magic of the Moon rock ran out and the Wolrang changed back to people. Despite the Wolrang changing back to humans, Racard was now the Lord so there were no problems with the Bloody. Ark, Racard and the Wolrang walked through the castle and arrived at the underground slave pens.

‘Now, where is the Moon Piece hidden?’

Ark surveyed the labour area with expectant eyes. The underground area was very wide. Karakul was also never hide the treasure in a place it could easily be found. It wasn’t easy to find the Moon rocks when his skills had been sealed by Chain of Blood but now he could use Magic Detection. The Three Marvels was an object filled with a lot of magic. It wouldn’t be a problem to find it even if it was buried in the ground. The ground was also filled with Moon rocks so he could utilize the Wolrang to find the Three Marvels.

‘I can kill two birds with one stone and collect the Moon Piece and Moon rock at the same time.’

The Moon rocks weren’t worth that much money but 1 copper was still money! Money was strewn all over the ground so Ark couldn’t just leave it alone. Just as Ark was about to use Magic Detection.

“Huk, t-that guy is.....?”

Suddenly the elder’s nose twitched before he turned around and saw something. The Bloody had a guard post where they monitored the slaves. Yet one guy was shovelling like crazy at the guard’s post.

The Wolrang confirmed his face and raised their voice.

“He is Albert!”

Ark turned around at the Wolrang’s voice. It was the young man who was the traitor of the Wolrang family, Albert. Albert focused his attention on Ark and the Wolrang before muttering.

“Sheesh, they’re already here.....!”

“The clan’s traitor, you were hiding in a place like this?”

“Catch him. We can never forgive him!”

The Wolrang yelled with excited voices and started running. But Albert didn’t run away. 10 Wolrang were heading towards him. Although he was about to be caught by them, why did he have no intention of escaping and just continued shovelling?

‘What is it? That Albert..... Shouldn’t he know that Karakul died? Then why didn’t he run away immediately? And why is he shovelling.....?’

Ark belatedly realized the reason after looking at Albert.

‘Wait, that guy is.....!’

“We got you!”

“Pay the price for disgracing the clan’s honour!”

Meanwhile the Wolrang had ran several hundred metres and tackled Albert. It was at that time. A dim light appeared in the centre of the pile of Wolrang before the 10 Wolrang were thrown back in different directions. Then a shadow shot out like an arrow and instantly moved dozens of metres. The identity of the shadow that had hit the Wolrang was Albert. But he wasn’t the previous Albert. Just like the Wolrang, his form was that of a huge wolf with his silvery mane fluttering behind him. The Wolrang clan looked at the stone Albert was holding in his hand before screaming.

“Moon rock? No, that’s.... The Moon Piece!”

As expected, it was hidden in that place? In fact, Ark had already

guessed the location of the Moon Piece before arriving there. It had to be buried in a safe place where the slaves wouldn't find it. There was only one such place. Wasn't it the place monitored by the Bloody? That was the reason why Albert hadn't ran away and instead started digging in the underground workplace. Anyway, he couldn't run far away while in the form of a human. If so, Albert would rather take a risk and find the Moon Piece which would make him more powerful.

"T-that guy!"

"The clan's treasure is in the hands of the traitor.....!"

"Kyakyakya, foolish bastards. You thought I would just take it lying down?"

Albert bared his sharp fangs. The Wolrang looked fearful but Ark just scratched his head.

"What? Is this guy stupid?"

Of course, Albert was a lot stronger when transformed into a silver wolf then when he was a human. And transforming with the Moon Piece was a lot different than transforming with the less powerful Moon rock. Thanks to the influence of the Moon Piece, the Wolrang were able to fight evenly with Karakul despite the effects of Dark Blood. But the Wolrang clan also transformed into wolves when the Moon Piece appeared. In addition, there was only one exit from the underground workplace. No matter how strong Albert was, how would he manage to defeat the other Wolrang who also transformed into wolves to escape?

It would be the same even if the Wolrang wasn't there. All the Bloody inside the castle was already Racard's subordinates. Ark was also blocking the exit. The likelihood of Albert escaping safely was only 0.0001%. In other words, Albert had caused his own loss.

"Well, you should be grateful for surviving this long. This wolf bastard has no manners. Having difficulty because of you..... I'll make you into finely minced pork."

Ark took one step forward with the intention of breaking Albert's

bones. Then Albert opened his mouth and muttered.

“Stop! If anyone takes one more step then I’ll swallow the Moon Piece.”

“Ah, this is completely tiring. Is that what you call a threat? Do you have that much confidence in your digestion ability? Would you like to try it? I’ll split you in half before you can digest the Moon Piece.”

“W-wait a minute.”

The elder suddenly interrupted Ark.

“Albert..... No, it will be a serious problem if any of the Wolrang swallows the Moon Piece.”

“Eh? He really can digest the Moon Piece in seconds?”

“The Wolrang receives their power from the moon so if a Wolrang swallows the Moon Piece then he will overflow with magic and transform into a difficult monster. He will turn into the god Fenrir. We can’t afford to have Albert transform into Fenrir.....”

The elder broke into a cold sweat as he spoke and shook his head.

“But that is not the only problem.”

“It’s not?”

“If the Moon Piece runs out of power then it will turn into an ordinary stone. Of course, it is the clan’s treasure so it will recover if it receives moonlight but it might take 10 or 20 years to recover. That Albert, I never thought he would use this method.”

The elder muttered. Now Ark’s face became serious. In fact, he didn’t feel it was that serious if Albert transformed into Fenrir. He might be a god but he was still a monster. There were hundreds of Wolrang and Bloody present. No matter how great the monster, it couldn’t deal with all those troops alone. However, it would be a huge problem if the Three Marvels lost its power.

‘It’ll take 10~20 years to regain its power? Then even if I obtain the Moon Piece, I can’t receive my bonus abilities or find a clue to

change to my second stage profession?’

“Kyakyakya, now do you understand the situation?”

“You bastard!”

Ark stepped towards Albert who moved the Moon Piece to his mouth.

“Didn’t I tell you? I’ll swallow it if you take even one step.”

“If you swallow the Moon Piece then you’ll become an irrational monster.”

“Bah, I have no other choice now that Karakul has been defeated. This is my plan of desperation. If I turn into Fenrir then I’ll pull you all to hell. Of course, the Moon Piece will also become an ordinary stone as a result.”

“T-that bastard....!”

“Elder-nim, don’t listen to him.”

“We have to tear that kind of fellow to pieces.”

The Wolrang shouted with agitated voices. At that moment, Ark sighed and took out a thin piece of paper.

“....What do you want?”

“Kyakyakya, I knew you would agree. As expected from humans. It is different from the foolish wolves who would risk their limbs for honour. I understand your intentions.”

Albert laughed and stated his requirements.

“I know that Seutandal has rose to middle earth. In that case, there is no reason to stay in a place like this. First of all, I’ll request some security. I don’t want anyone to follow me when I leave Dark Earth for middle earth. And money. I’ll need money if I’m expected to live as a human on middle earth. 5000 gold. Prepare 5,000 Gold right now.”

Albert talked like a terrorist holding hostages captive. In fact, Albert

actually had a hostage in the form of the Moon Piece.

“Wait, what about the Moon Piece?”

“Make one of the children of the Wolrang accompany me. Once I’ve safely migrated to middle earth with money, I’ll give the Moon Piece to the child. Because there is no need for the Moon Piece once I leave Dark Earth.”

“How do I know you’ll keep your promise?”

“Whether you believe me or not is fine. But do you have any other choice?”

Albert opened his mouth and threateningly moved the Moon Piece in and out. Why did he have to be threatened by a wolf who sold himself as a salve to Karakul? It felt like his blood pressure was rising to 300 every time Albert threatened to swallow the Moon Piece. But he didn’t know what would happen to his second class change.

‘However, I can’t just accept that guy’s request.’

5000 gold. He had to give 5000 gold to that bastard? Currently Ark didn’t have that kind of money. Even if he did, he had no intention of giving it to the wolf. If he accepted the terms then what reason would Albert have to keep his promise? No, he was 100% certain that Albert wouldn’t keep his promise.

‘This brat, does he think I’m stupid?’

If Ark was thinking from Albert’s point of view, there was absolutely no way he would give back the Moon Piece. Albert had said that the Moon Piece would be unnecessary when he crossed into middle earth. But they were unexpected words. Of course the Moon Piece wasn’t necessary to transform. However, it was the only weapon he had to protect himself from Ark and the Wolrang chasing him. Who would give such a weapon away so easily?

‘I can’t just let him swallow it..... Okay. I’m also going to use a desperate plan.’

Ark sighed with a gloomy expression while communicating with Racard.

‘Racard. I’ll attract his attention so hide yourself and approach from behind. That guy will only pay attention to me and the Wolrang. You won’t be noticed if you turn into a bat and sneak up from behind. Seize the Moon Piece when he is caught off guard.’

Racard had a worried expression after Ark finished talking. Although he managed to defeat Karakul and became an Earl, he had no confidence against Albert who had turned into a wolf.

‘There’s no need to worry. This is the Dark Earth. If the situation deteriorates, he won’t dare kill you in case he enrages the Lord.’

Racard’s expression became relieved. After a brief moment, he smiled and spoke.

‘I understand. As long as you decide not to take all my decorations.’

‘What?’

Ark frowned as he heard Racard’s voice in his ear. However, Racard pretended to know nothing as he looked into the distance and whistled. He was trying to profit from his Master’s crisis? A pet trying to rob its owner.....

Anyway, Ark wanted to use Dark Blade on Racard but couldn’t in this situation. If Albert swallowed the Moon Piece then the decorations would be the least of his problems.

‘Okay. But you definitely need to get it.’

‘Okay.’

Racard enthusiastically answered, turned into a bat and approached Albert from behind. Meanwhile, Ark used various excuses to attract his attention and waste time.

“It can’t be helped. I accept your requirements. But I don’t have 5000 gold right now.”

“If you don’t have the money then there will be no negotiations.”

“W-wait a minute! I can save up the money. But I need some time. Five days. 5000 gold isn’t a small amount of money. I’ll have to exit Dark Earth and gather that much money.”

“.....You want me to wait five days for you?”

“Is it impossible? Then how about 50 gold? I can give you that amount right now.”

“W-what? This guy..... You’re the Truthseeker yet you’re trying to bargain for the Moon Piece? In addition, only 50 gold? That’s 1/100 of what I asked!”

“Then what should I do? I have no money right now.”

“This guy.....”

Albert muttered before his nose suddenly twitched and he flinched. Then he suddenly turned around while a choked scream could be heard in the darkness.

“Hik!”

It was Racard who had been creeping closer. Albert frowned and stared at Ark.

“This fool, you really are stupid!”

‘Damn, I forgot that he is a wolf.’

He hadn’t taken into account a wolf’s sense of smell. Ark waved his hands and quickly gave excuses.

“No, I didn’t know what that guy was planning to do!”

“What nonsense, these negotiations are now failed!”

“Sheesh, stop him. Racard. Do whatever it takes to get the Moon Piece!”

“U-understood!”

Racard shot forward like an arrow at Ark’s words. Ark also used Sprint to dash towards Albert. However, Racard was still 50 metres

away from Albert. Ark was several hundred metres away. There was no way that Ark or Racard could stop Albert from swallowing the stone in time.

‘Damn..... Is this really the end of the Moon Piece?’

Ark moaned desperately as he saw the Moon Piece about to enter Albert’s mouth. Daeng kang! It was at that time. There was a sudden sound and Albert stumbled. At the same time, the Moon Piece fell from his hands. Ark couldn’t fathom what had happened....but there was no time to worry about it. The shaky Albert was reaching towards the Moon Piece with his hands.

“Dark blade!”

Just before it landed in his hands, Ark used Dark Blade on the Moon Piece.

“Racard, now!”

“I know. I’ll catch it!”

Racard snatched the Moon Piece from the sky. After Racard snatched the Moon Piece, the Wolrang just gaped as they couldn’t understand the situation. Then dozens of the Wolrang ran up and caught Albert who was trying to escape.

“Ugh, this, unbelievable!”

In just a few seconds, the Moon Piece’s kidnapping incident was solved.

-A mysterious stone fragment filled with ancient power.

It is a mysterious stone with a dark aura on its surface. 50 points in Knowledge of Ancient Relics is required to confirm this.

Before checking this item, a -50% penalty to all stats will be applied to the owner.

Ark finally obtained the Moon Piece after Racard passed it to him. And Albert was pinned to the floor by the Wolrang.

“Phew, fortunately it didn’t turn out badly. But who attacked Albert?”

“I..... It was me.....”

Then something popped up from Albert’s back.

“Eh? You are.....?”

Ark’s eyes widened as he muttered. The person holding the shovel and approached was the slave monster Flip. Ark had forgotten but there were dozens of slaves caught in the underground jail. The Shackles of Pain was released so they knew that Karakul was dead. But they couldn’t grasp how the situation had changed so they hid in the dungeon before overhearing Ark’s conversation with Albert.

“I explain the general situation. Although the shackles were unlocked..... We were still slaves.... That did not change. And the person who will decide our treatment..... Your summon, no..... It’ll be you. So I thought I should help you.”

“But how did you approach without Albert noticing you?”

“Huhuhu, I.... Towards guys with a lot of fur..... I will never be caught.....”

Ark immediately understood the meaning of Flip’s words. Once again, Flip was a flea type monster. Albert and the Wolrang were wolves. Of course he would be insensitive to the smell of fleas in his fur.

“Thank you very much.”

“No, thank you....”

Flip muttered before looking slightly fearful as Racard approached. It had lived for decades as a slave to Karakul but now Ark’s summon Racard was the new Lord. The slaves hesitantly exited the jails before there was a sudden shout of anger.

“You bastardddddd!”

Ark, the Wolrang and Flip turned their heads at the same time. One monster was running at a face pace towards Ark. It had sunken

eyes and a blackened and gloomy face, with the entire body wrapped in rags! It was a dreadful monster that looked like it had starved for hundreds of years.

‘What’s with this guy? Was there such a monster among the slaves?’

The Wolrang and Bloody thought the situation was finished and had become careless. The thing ran up to Ark and swung a pickaxe. No, it tried to swing it. Ark automatically withdrew his sword.

Duk, kwatang, degul degul.

The monster had stepped on one of its ragged hems and fell down. Ark forgot about counter attacking and stared at the monster blankly.

‘What the hell? Did this guy suddenly appear just to do a body gag?’

“Ugh, ugh....”

The monster who had fallen to the ground suddenly moved its shoulders and sobbed.

“Eh? Crying? Hey, Flip. Who is he?”

“That.....”

Flip scratched its head and was about to talk. However, the monster had winced at Ark’s words. Then it raised its head and tried to swing the pickaxe again.

“What? What did you say? What type of man are you?”

Pakak! Ark kicked the monster’s jaw when it sprang at him, making it collapse again. But that only lasted for a brief moment. The monster raised its body like a zombie and shrieked before running up to him.

“Huk, you hit me? You dared hit me? Okay, then I’ll kill you!”

“What is with this guy? Huh? Wait, this voice is.....?”

Ark felt something strange and looked at the monster with Eyes of the Cat. Ark screamed after seeing the information window floating on top of the monster’s head.

“Eek? B-Buksil?”

To his surprise, the identity of the monster was Buksil. Buksil’s face contorted at Ark’s scream.

“Ugh, you really didn’t recognize me?”

“No, what on earth is with that shabby form?”

“..... How dare you ask that question!”

Buksil ground his teeth together and yelled.

“Why am I like this! Digging all day and sleep deprivation! In addition, during the evenings I had to provide the blood of two people by himself. Because you deserted me and left!”

Karakul had been deeply offended when Ark escaped. But Ark had already left his sphere of influence so he turned all his fury towards Buksil. The crime of attempting to escape with Ark, of hitting him with the pig missile etc. made Buksil’s prison life extremely different and more difficult than before. Although Ark had kind of expected it when he left Buksil behind.

‘But I never thought he would change like this.....’

It had only been 3 days since Ark escaped. However, it looked like those 3 day were a lot more difficult than the 8 previous days. Once again, the decisive moment for such a hellish experience was when Ark used Buksil as a pig missile. But there was no reason to talk about it now. He felt a bit sorry when thinking about it, but it had already happened. And hadn’t he managed to save Buksil and defeat Karakul because he was successful in escaping?

“Ah, um.... That is..... Anyway, I’m sorry.”

“What, what, what? You think everything will be cleared up with an apology?”

“This brat, why are you questioning it so closely? Anyway, it’s already been settled so why don’t we forget it?”

Ark grinned awkwardly towards Buksil. Then something

unimaginable happened. All of a sudden, one of Buksil's eyeballs popped out? Buksil hurriedly fumbled with along the ground and picked up the eyeball before putting it back in.

"Hik, my eyes..... My eyes....."

"Eh? What the? What happened to your eyes?"

"Do you need to ask? This is your fault!"

"What are you talking about? How can you blame me for your eyes popping out?"

"I don't know, I don't know. Everything is your fault!"

"Corrosion.....that's what it is called....."

Flip scratched its head and interrupted.

Here was a summary of the absurd situation. After Ark had escaped, Karakul drank portions for two people from Buksil. But even if Buksil had the nutrition of a pig, it was impossible for him to recover enough blood every day. Therefore all the blood in Buksil's body became depleted in a matter of days. However, Karakul was still angry and sucked the last drop of blood from Buksil. And at this point, something happened to Buksil that even Karakul didn't expect. Buksil's body which had been completely depleted of blood acted like a vacuum and sucked in some of Karakul's blood. If Karakul had strong magic like the highest ranking nobles who lived in the Immortal castle, Buksil would be turned into a vampire. However, Karakul's blood only had enough magic to turn him into a monster.

"But a foreigner..... Cannot change into a Bloody. Karakul knew that sometimes the blood would flow backwards..... So he hadn't paid that much attention....."

Karakul never expected that the unexpected skill he used on Buksil would react with the blood transfusion. Karakul's skill was normally used on vampire babies. In the old days, the skill Karakul used to watch things using his eyeballs was normally used to watch the children. However, he had used this skill on Buksil so it turned him into a strange creature.

‘Anyway, that guy is really unlucky. But he still received a plausible skill. Couldn’t he use that remove eyeballs skill to get himself out of trouble?’

Ark laughed with an amazed expression. Then Buksil who had been rubbing his eyes angrily grabbed Ark.

“Laugh? Were you laughing just now?”

“So what?”

Ark raised his chin and spoke in an impudent voice.

“It couldn’t be helped at that time. No? Even if it meant I would be captured again? If I hadn’t done it then wouldn’t you and I still be digging in the dungeon? But Karakul was defeating thanks to me escaping. You got to be freed as well. So why are you complaining? On the contrary, shouldn’t you thank me?”

“T-talking like that.....”

Buksil licked his lips and stuttered. Well, Ark felt sorry when looking at that shabby form. But it was just like he said. Even though he was sorry, Buksil didn’t seem to be accepting it. If that’s the case..... Ark leaned down and grabbed Buksil’s collar.

“Are you still mad? Shouldn’t you be thankful that I came to help you? Are you still a person? Huh?”

Ah, the villain had resorted to threats. Buksil’s face turned red. He opened his mouth and was going to speak. Then Ark smiled and spoke in a low voice.

“Well, I do understand your feelings. I’m not that heartless. But is it really smart to attack me?”

“What the? I won’t be affected by your threats anymore. I’ve already gone to the depths of hell!”

“Then would you like to enter the bottom of hell again?”

“What?”

Buksil flinched and looked at Ark. Ark smiled and spoke in a quiet

tone.

“Think about it. Weren’t you caught by Karakul and trapped in the underground dungeon? However, Karakul has died and my pet is the new Lord. In other words, it is possible to lock someone up in the underground jail again. Do you understand?”

“.....!”

Buksil started sweating as his hands gripped the pickaxe tightly.

“Eh? Why are you shaking? Relax. That was just a scenario I mentioned.”

Ark wiped Buksil’s sweat and continued in a soft voice.

“Well, is the problem settled? The problem was that I left you while escaping but wouldn’t you prefer to thank me for rescuing you?”

There was the hidden threat of being locked in the jail again! Buksil’s face was dyed with fear. Buksil knew. Ark was a person who wouldn’t blink while doing such dreadful actions. Although Buksil accepted it, he still dragged his feet. Finally, he had no choice but to tearfully succumb to Ark’s threat. However, Buksil wasn’t able to leave it like that.

“.....I understand. Instead there is one condition.”

“Condition?”

“I need a subordinate.”

“Eh? What?”

“I actually wanted to tell you before. Do you know how much work is needed? Foraging ingredients, filming the video and even running Ark-nim’s errands. Even your summons are ignoring me these days. I used to have my brothers but now..... A subordinate is needed to improve my motivation and work load.”

‘Damn, is this my fault?’

Ark scratched his head with an astounded expression. In fact, previously he would’ve just ignored it. However, it was now

necessary for Buksil to accompany Ark. And Buksil was a user not a NPC. There was a limit to how much he could be pulled along using intimidation. He also felt sorry about abandoning him before so Ark wanted to help. But a subordinate..... In other words, he wanted one of Ark's summons as a subordinate? Of course, it wasn't that difficult. But Racard had picked on Buksil so far and he would not listen obediently to anyone besides Ark. The same was also true for Radun and Razak.

'Racard had just become an Earl so it'll be troublesome if I tell him to serve Buksil. Besides, isn't the point of a subordinate to relieve Buksil's stress? No matter how much I tell them to treat Buksil like a hyung, neither Racard or Razak would listen obediently to Buksil. But it's not possible to completely reject it.....'

If Buksil refused to film the videos then Ark would have a serious problem. He was obedient now under the threat of being trapped in the dungeon again but he didn't know how Buksil would react after they left Dark Earth.

'The best way is to buy a pet.....'

In New World, pets other than summons existed. However, a pet like a squirrel cost several hundred gold. In addition, Buksil didn't want a simple pet but a subordinate he could control.

'Wait, a subordinate?'

Then Ark suddenly had a brilliant idea.

"Okay. You wanted a subordinate to relieve your work load?"

Ark smiled and went to where the Wolrang were gathered.

"Let's show him the price of betrayal and rip him apart!"

"Yes, we can never forgive his humiliation!"

The Wolrang were gathered around Albert and talking violently. Ark stealthily intruded between the Wolrang and spoke to the elder.

"Elder-nim. Could you possibly entrust this guy to me?"

“Entrust him to you? Surely you don’t intend to help him?”

“It’s because of Albert that I was caught as a slave for Karakul. My mind also wants to kill him immediately. However, Albert is still a descendant of the Wolrang who fought with Hero Maban against the dark forces. Killing Albert will now wash away the disgrace he dealt against your honour. In addition, killing him is too generous a punishment for a traitor.”

“Umm, I guess so.....”

The elder sighed and nodded.

“In that case, how about I take Albert with me? The Wolrang was a clan that followed Hero Maban. If I take Albert then there will be no stain to the Wolrang’s honour. While following me around as punishment, Albert might even think about the honour of the Wolrang clan again.”

That’s right. Although he was making up plausible reasons, the real reason Ark wanted Albert was as a subordinate for Buksil. But the elder had a dissatisfied expression.

“I understand your intention. If he accompanies the descendant of Hero Maban then he might be rehabilitated. But that child’s sin is so immense. Will serving you be a suitable punishment? Moreover, he might not listen to you.....”

“You don’t have to worry about that and I’ll prove it to you.”

Ark approached Albert who was gasping on the floor.

“Hey, Albert! Did you hear me words? What do you think about it?”

“Ugh! I will never serve you. Although I am like this, I am still a Wolrang. I would rather die.....”

“I knew you would say that. Radun, Shackles of Pain.”

Ark received the Shackles of Pain from Radun. It was the shackles used on Ark when he had previously been captured. After escaping Karakul’s territory, it had fallen of but Ark had packed it just in case it was needed. Ark whistled and locked Albert into the shackles.

“You know how this words right?”

“T-this is.... You bastard.... Doing this kind of thing.....”

“That’s the wrong answer.”

“W-wait. Kkaekkaeng!”

Then Ark started stepping on Albert. Karakul was died but the Shackles of Pain was an item. The effect applied to the item would be unchanged. And the effects of Shackles of Pain amplified the pain by 10 times! Ark had trained in taekwondo for a long time and he knew how to inflict pain. Ark utilized that knowledge to only hit a vital spot. Under the Shackles of Pain, that suffering was amplified by 10 times. The Wolrang became startled at Albert’s loud scream.

“You, you bastard! Kuaak! How are you a human....? You must be disguised as one.....”

“I don’t want to hear that from a wolf.”

“S-stop! H-help me. Ah, no..... I would rather die.....”

“You don’t like it?”

“Aaaaah! Kkaekkaeng!”

Ark laughed and continued stepping on Albert. Such cruel violence! The slave monsters, Wolrang and even the Bloody turned pale with fear. How much time had passed? Every time Ark would use his hands or feet, Albert would roll on the ground until he eventually grabbed Ark’s hem.

“I’ll do it! Whatever it takes. No, please let me do it. Just please don’t hit me!” Ark then smiled and went to the elder.

“Hmm, you heard his words. What does Elder-nim think?”

“.....Maybe accompanying you will be a more serious punishment than dying.”

The elder swallowed his saliva and nodded. The other Wolrang also agreed. It was to the extent that they looked at Albert with pity.

“Buksil? What do you think about this guy as a subordinate?”

“Huh? Huh? Yes!”

When Ark suddenly spoke to him, Buksil nodded his head with surprise. Then the elder who had been watching sighed.

“Albert, do you really believe that you will reflect on your bad deeds with him as your Master?”

“Yes....”

“Good. Although you are a traitor, you are still a part of the Wolrang clan. I don’t need to explain that the Wolrang’s purpose is to serve. You have to be really prepared and swear obedience according to the custom of the Wolrang.”

Albert flinched at the elder’s words but listened with his head raised. Then he stared at Ark before approaching Buksil. After hesitating for a moment, he fell down next to the group and exposed his stomach. That’s right. Revealing the stomach was a sign of obedience in animals.

“Now, please stroke his stomach. An oath of obedience will be formed.”

Buksil rubbed the stomach with trembling hands and Albert instantly panted with his tongue hanging out. The elder and the Wolrang wore serious expressions like they were conducting a sacred rite. Thus, Albert became Buksil’s pet dog. Since the problem regarding Albert was settled, Ark went to Racard.

“Racard, our talk earlier..... You said that you wanted to keep the decorations if you snatched the Moon Piece from Albert.....”

“Did I say that? Hahaha. I don’t remember that? Even if I did say that, it’s not like I got the Moon Piece back for you.”

“As expected, you also thought like that? So I can take the decorations as promised?”

“Of course. Take it. I have no interest in such things in the first place.”

Racard laughed awkwardly with a frozen face. The effects of violence wasn't only applied to Buksil. Racard had become cocky after evolving into an Earl but seeing Albert being beaten up reminded him of his own experiences. Thus he didn't have to use violence on Buksil or Racard.

"Then it is a happy ending."

Ark laughed and murmured brightly. No one else laughed along with him.

Change Professsion Quest

[Important Translator's Note:

So I've finally received confirmation in this chapter that Jewel was a male all along. Therefore I will keep his name as Jewel but will be referring to him as male starting from this chapter. Previous chapters will be edited to reflect this. Sorry for the misunderstanding.

Another change I've made is <King> set to <Animal King> set.]

"Hey, Baekgu."

"B-Baekgu? Who is that?"

Albert who was lying on the ground looked up and asked. Ark replied with a shrewd expression.

"That is your name from now on."

"B-but I am called Albert....."

"Ohh, you don't like the name I gave you?"

Albert flinched and retreated as Ark's face tightened. He was still trying to keep his rebellious spirit? It didn't seem like it at the moment.....with his ears and tail drooping while the body was trembling. Albert entreated in a quivering voice.

"Yes, I understand." Call me Baekgu or whatever you want. I'll come whenever you call....."

'Hmm, seems like my discipline was effective.'

Ark nodded with a pleased face. In fact, there was a reason he had beaten up Albert so intensely. In order to raise a pet dog, the relationship between Master and servant had to be made clear from the beginning. If he went easy on a wild animal in the beginning then

it would become more difficult to tame later on. Albert was a member of the wolf species. Ark had no guarantee that he wouldn't become rebellious later on. That was also the reason why he changed Albert's name into one commonly used for dogs. Now Albert would remember today's pain every time he was called Baekgu.

"Okay Baekgu. I don't need to say it again, but from today onwards you will be Buksil's pet dog. Do you understand? You're rank in the group is at the very bottom. Naturally Buksil and my summons are your superiors. Understood?"

"Buksil....."

Albert, no Baekgu growled Buksil's name in a low voice. Although he had submitted to Ark, Baekgu was still a member of the wolf species. It would be fine if he was serving Ark who was the descendant of Hero Maban, but being the subordinate of a pig injured his pride.

"What's with that look? Do you have a complaint?"

"Ah, no it's fine!"

However, he immediately became a pet dog again as soon as Ark frowned. Ark stroked Baekgu's head a little bit before looking at Buksil.

"Okay, okay. That's a good dog. Hey Buksil. Do you have a problem with your subordinate? You'll take care of Baekgu from now on."

"Huh? M-me?"

"Of course. You're the one who wanted some help."

Although Baekgu was a servant, it would still cost money to feed him. The reason Ark wanted Buksil to raise Baekgu was so that all the expenses would go to Buksil. Buksil felt like crying after having the food expenses of Baekgu shoved on him, but he didn't dare complain after seeing Ark's previous violence.

'Damn, as expected I couldn't oppose Ark-nim.'

In the end Buksil was just left with regrets. In order to change the atmosphere, Ark clapped his hands.

“Now, let’s start working earnestly!”

“Huh? Working? What do you have left to do?”

“Well, there is one more important thing.”

Ark nodded with a serious face.

‘Huhuhu, now comes the happy epilogue after the happy ending.’

Yes, the really important information in fairy tales wasn’t the body. The part that always wowed the readers was what came after the happy ending. Did the nice and hardworking protagonist become rich?

‘However, the world isn’t as insignificant as portrayed in the stories. In reality, the hero would die after suffering miserably.’

It wasn’t possible to end a story with this as it would crush a child’s hopes and dreams. In the end, the only thing that gave hopes and dreams to children was a capitalist ideology! That was what Ark believed. Therefore he sought as much compensation as possible without any hesitation.

“Baekgu, have you lived in this castle for a long time? Show me every corner of this castle.”

Of course, his intention wasn’t to look around a vampire’s castle. It was in order to recoup so of the expenses he wasted on making Racard evolve.

“This is a guest room.”

“Wait a minute. Ohh, there are quite a few decorations here?”

Ark made Baekgu go around and place a red tag on many items. Then Buksil would pack anything with the red tag into his bags. In fact, Ark had a good eye after working part time in an antique store. It helped him grasp which items were worth money. If Ark was alone then he would carefully choose the items worth the most money. But

now there was Buksil. Buksil had emptied all his bags before leaving Seutandal. Furthermore, as an NPC Baekgu also had a small backpack.

‘I don’t need to worry about bag space.’

So Ark attached the red tags to items that were even worth 1 copper. Therefore Ark even took the forks, plates and knives.

‘This is a lot more than I thought it would be.’

Ark was especially impressed with the warehouse. In Dark Earth, it was difficult to find items other than decor. He only knew this later, but the Bloody didn’t use weapons or armours. The Bloody was a monster that used their claws or thick leather as equipment. Therefore a Bloody would also drop claws or leather when they died. However, there was a considerable number of Moon rocks and general items in the warehouse.

“Karakul used to collect some of these items from the coast.”

That was the Bloody’s explanation.

‘Huhuhu, Karakul is making me happy even after he died.’

Naturally Ark packed all the items stored in the warehouse.

‘Sheesh, there are no magic items. But I should get 600~700 gold if I dispose of all these items. That barely covers the cost of one summoning port but the income was better than I expected.’

“Ohhhh, my castle.....my castle.....”

Racard whimpered with tears in his eyes. Who would come to the house of their summons and then deprive it of all the household furniture? The Wolrang watched Racard with pity and muttered.

“This is the descendant of Hero Maban that Elder-nim has been waiting for?”

“Isn’t he different from what we heard?”

“Well.....I haven’t met Hero Maban either.....”

The elder scratched his head with an embarrassed expression. Ark heard their voices but he wasn't embarrassed at all. He didn't know what illusions the Wolrang possessed about Hero Maban but didn't a legendary hero also need to eat? In order to kill the devil, travel expenses were necessary. And this was a game which reflected reality. When a hero enters a house and breaks the jars to look for treasure, why wouldn't a NPC become angry? There was only one reason why they would tolerate it!

"Huhuhu, it's okay because I am a hero."

Yes, heroes with the occupation of a legendary hero would get a free pass. In addition, Ark had a urgent reason that matched a hero.

'Even the descendant of a hero has to save for the rental cost!'

Of course, he had money from selling the items from Magaro's Laboratory and his booming stores so he wasn't worried about the rental cost. But his assets would reset back to '0' once the house was paid off.

'I have to continue saving even 1 copper.'

Wasn't Ark the descendant of one of the most legendary heroes in the game? Yet he still couldn't forget about the quest compensation. Therefore Ark finished going through the vampire castle and found the Wolrang elder.

"Elder-nim, soon you'll be away from the rule of the vampires and can recover your lost glory."

"Ah, it is all thanks to you. On behalf of the clan, thank you."

"Yes, the Wolrang family can now regain their former glory."

Ark smiled while muttering the same thing.

'Why is he repeating it?'

Then the elder coughed like he remembered something and spoke.

"Cough, I remember that I still need to give you a reward. But as you know, we've lived under Karakul's rule for 100 years so we don't

have that much. So will this item be okay?”

The elder reached into his backpack and pulled out shoes made from silver leather.

Wolf's Feet (Rare)

Armour type: Leather Shoes

Defense: 60

Durability: 60/60

Weight: 15

User restriction: Level 200

These boots belong to the legendary wolf warriors who fought with Hero Maban hundreds of years ago. When these boots are used, it is possible to dash just like a wolf.

<Option: Immunity to fear, Movement speed +40%, Attack speed +10%>

<Special Option: The 'Jump' skill is available. You can jump up to 10 metres when using this skill. Cool down time: 5 minutes. Mana consumption: 50>

-The quest <Wolrang's Revenge' has been completed.

‘Ohh, it's a rare item!’

Ark's mouth opened absentmindedly. As expected when the quest difficulty was B+, he received a rare item.

‘Although why is it footwear of all things?’

It wasn't that he didn't like it. Currently Ark was wearing the 'Wind Spirit's Boots.' When considering the level restriction, Wolf's Feet had better defense and options. However, the additional effects weren't that much larger than what he was currently wearing. Besides, the Wind Spirit's Boots had the Slide skill attached so he could utilize it better.

‘The Wolf’s Feet has the skill Jump? I can jump up to 10 metres? It isn’t something that I can utilize in battle. The cool down time is also 5 minutes. Well, it’s not possible for me to use the Wind Spirit’s Boots forever but I don’t know if I should change it yet. I’ll decide once I try it out in battle.’

Therefore Ark switched footwear for the moment. Suddenly there was a dinging sound and the information window appeared.

-The set items’ effect has been applied.

You have equipped a new item in the set. It is a special set of items that craftsmen created for an ancient hero. Naturally, the effects will become more powerful when the number of equipped set items increases. If you obtain all the items in a set then the effects will be beyond compare.

* Currently equipped set items:<Animal King>

『Raccoon’s Pith』 『Cat Paws』 『Guardian Armour of the Merpeople』 『Wolf’s Feet』 『??』

You have equipped four items in the <Animal King> set and an additional effect will be applied.

<Wild Ability: Strength +10 (+10), Agility +10 (+10), Stamina +10 (+10), Defense +10 (+10)>

‘Set item! If this happens then there is no choice.’

Although ‘Cat Paws’ was a rare item and Raccoon’s Pith had the transformation ability, its defense was a lot lower compared to armour around level 200~300. There was also the effect which ignored the underwater penalty but he hadn’t been near water for a while. So there was a lot of times when he wanted to buy new leather armour from the auction site. The reason he hadn’t changed the armour was because they were set items. He thought the set item bonus was too valuable to change.

‘However, as my level increased then the defense from changing armour was higher than the set bonus so I was quite worried.....’

He never thought he would find a set item in a place like this. Thanks to that his strength, agility, stamina and defense had increased from 10 to 20 so there was no need to worry about changing armours for the moment.

‘Yes, this is the additional effect with only four items.....’

If he completed the set then he would probably receive a huge effect. However, finding the set item was more difficult than he thought. Every day thousands of people connected to the information site looking for information about set items. Although they found one or two directly, the remaining items were bought at auction. Therefore Ark had half given up.

‘Wait, haven’t I received all the set items from the beast species?’

In addition, the name of the set was Animal King! Then wouldn’t the remaining set item be related to a beast clan?

‘Hassan from the Meow said that there were quite a few beast species apart from the mermaids and racoons. I’ll have to ask Yggdrasil if he knows the location of any other beast clans. Anyway, now I’ve found four items. There is a high likelihood that I’ll complete it!’

“Thank you. I will use it well.”

“I’m glad that you like it.”

The elder had been worried that Ark wouldn’t like the item. However, those feelings disappeared at the sight of the child like Ark. Ark fidgeted with the boots before he suddenly asked.

“What will the Wolrang do now?”

“I haven’t thought about it yet.”

“Will you leave the Dark Earth?”

“Of course. After a long time.....no, for some of the clan this is the first time they’ve transformed into their original form. This is the true form of the Wolrang. The Moon Piece also belongs to the descendant of Hero Maban. If we remain in Dark Earth then we’ll be

forced into that miserable human form again.

The elder shook his head violently at the thought of living like they had previously.

“Luckily, the Dark Earth is no longer an isolated place so we can go to the outside world. Of course it won’t be that easy. There are many among the Wolrang who have not experience the outside world.”

“Then shall I introduce you to a suitable village?”

Ark asked with eager eyes.

“A suitable village?”

“Yes, there is a village that I know very well on the continent. It is originally a human village but now the raccoons and Meow live there as well. If the Wolrang don’t know the continent then it will be a good place to live.”

Of course, the village Ark was talking about was Lancel. Not long ago, the Baran evacuated from Seutandal had sought refuge in Lancel and the <Find the Settlers> quest had been completed. Unfortunately, some of the immigrants left and the achievement was stopped at 98%. If the Wolrang moved there than his quest would finally be completed. However, the elder shook his head after thinking for a moment.

“No, it is a good suggestion but I’ll have to decline.”

“Huh? How come?”

Ark became confused as he thought they would accept.

“The Wolrang is a beast clan descended from wolves. After being trapped here by Karakul for 100 years, we realized the type of life we desire. To dash freely in an unknown world is in our instincts. We want to run around the continent that our ancestors protected and revitalize those wild instincts.”

“That would be a problem!”

“Huh? What do you mean? Are you in trouble?”

“Ah, no, I mean....”

Ark scratched his head with an irritated expression before sighing.

‘Damn, what is this? If I can make the Wolrang migrate then wouldn’t be long quest end? No, I have to do whatever it takes to make them move. A quest is a quest, but I received a huge benefit when I made the Meow and raccoons move to the village.’

If the number of beast species in Lancel village rose then Ark’s influence would also increase. But was that all? Once they moved to the village, he could use them or the Meow as troops. Wasn’t the Wolrang’s combat power a lot stronger than the Meow?

‘I need to convince them somehow..... But the Wolrang are wolves. Furthermore, they don’t desire anything except....wait.....honour?’

Ark thought for a while and came up with a plausible excuse. Ark summarized his idea in a firm voice.

“There is a reason for the Wolrang to go to the village. Although I haven’t said anything because I didn’t want to worry the Wolrang, the continent is not as peaceful as it used to be.”

“It’s not peaceful?”

“Yes, this is information I learned while followed Hero Maban’s footprints. Several hundred years ago, the Dark Lord was defeated thanks to the 7 heroes. Unfortunately, he hadn’t completely disappeared. The Dark Lord is still hiding somewhere and there are several wicked villains trying to resurrect the Dark Lord through evil schemes.”

“W-what? The Dark Lord?”

“That’s correct. It is the reason why I’ve been frantically looking for Hero Maban’s legacy. As a descendant of Hero Maban, my fate is to stop those trying to resurrect the Dark Lord. But it is impossible with the power of one person. This is still a secret.....I’ve gathered several beast clans in Lancel village in case of a crisis. Won’t the

warrior beast clan help the descendant of Hero Maban?"

"Ohhh, you really are Hero Maban's descendant!"

The elder spoke in a voice filled with admiration at Ark's words.

"Honestly, I thought you weren't really reliable after seeing your actions after Karakul died but you truly are Hero Maban's descendant. Yes, so you did have a deep meaning. If you weren't resolute then it would be impossible to defeat evil. A true hero wouldn't worry about what other people think."

"Yes. I'll put up with the reputation of a stingy person in order to make preparations to save the world.....ugh!"

Ark wiped at his tears with an angry expression. Although Buksil and Racard looked like they were going to throw up, the elder started patting Ark's shoulder with sympathy.

"It's okay, it's okay. You don't have to say anything. The road of a hero is very lonely."

"You understand?"

"I know, I know. We fought in the frontlines against the darkness yet we ended up being captured by a vampire. Why wouldn't we recognize your noble intentions?"

"Thank you. Then moving to the village....."

"Well, the Wolrang can't really refuse if that is your intention. But after living peacefully in a village, will we truly be able to help like our ancestors? Honestly, our strength right now might be more of a hindrance than a help."

"T-that.....!"

'Why are you thinking about so many things?'

Angry welled up inside Ark at the elder's response.

'But the elder isn't wrong.....it would be better for the Wolrang to become stronger. But my settlers quest.....wait.....settlers..... Don't I just have to increase the number of residents registered to

Lancel village? Then perhaps.....?’

Ark thought for a moment before immediately talking.

“Elder-nim is correct. But won’t it be a problem if I can’t contact the Wolrang after they find their wild instincts? So how about we do this?”

“What is it?”

“I’ll take the Wolrang back to Lancel village for the moment. After you become a resident of Lancel village, you can travel the continent. If you do this, wouldn’t it be easier for me to find you if there is a situation?”

It was like a false address registration!

“That’s right. There is such that method. Indeed, we were born in the Dark Earth so we haven’t seen any other beast clans. We also know nothing about the continent. Okay, we’ll do as you say. We’ll become residents of Lancel village when we head to the continent.”

In the end, Ark received the elder’s permission. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-‘Find New Settlers’ quest has been updated.

You have received the promise of the Wolrang clan who live in the Dark Earth to become residents of Lancel village. The quest will be completed when the Wolrang arrives in Lancel village.

<New Settlers Found: 98% (+15%) complete>

-It is possible to receive the compensation promised from Lancel village when the achievement exceeds 100%.

‘I did it! Now it is like the quest has already finished!’

“Then we will go back. We need to be prepared to leave for the continent.”

The elder led the Wolrang and returned to the village near the coast. Meanwhile Racard started to organize the place. The first

thing Racard did was gather all the Bloody scattered in the castle and was inaugurated as the Lord. Although there were only 300~400 Bloody in the castle, others were dispatched to prevent the intrusion of other vampires so he actually had 800 Bloody.

‘With this many Bloody, there should be no need to worry about other vampire’s invading.

In fact, that was the main thing Ark was worried about. Racard had defeated Karakul who monopolized this area of the Dark Earth. In reality, Racard didn’t have the ability to defeat other vampires.

If that fact was revealed then the other vampires wouldn’t leave Racard alone. After Ark left, if other vampires asked for a duel then Racard would be beaten to death. The only lucky thing was the rule set by the Lord. Before applying for a duel, the other vampire had to defeat all the Bloody and make his way up to the castle. However, Karakul had 800 Bloody! That was a lot more than the surrounding vampires had. In addition, Racard also had dozens of slave monsters. In fact, the most unexpected thing was the reaction of the slave monsters.

“We.....will continue to work at the underground area.....if possible....”

When the inauguration ended, Flip spoke as the representative of the slaves.

Ark had learnt this while he was a slave, but the slaves had been there for at least 10 years while some of them had been trapped for 20~3- years. After more than 10 years in prison, they were more afraid of the outside world than the jail. This applied to all the monsters. Anyway, this place was Dark Earth. If they went outside then it was likely that another vampire would capture them in order to suck their blood. Of course, Racard was a vampire so he also had a thirst for blood. But as Ark’s pet, most of his meals were taken outside. Therefore they thought that Racard was better than other vampires. Now that the Moon Piece was gone, no more Moon rocks would appear. But small miscellaneous items and jewel still appeared in the ground so there was no reason to stop the monsters.

‘Huhuhu, I might come back to the Dark Earth later. Then I’ll take all of the items that the monsters had gathered.’

“Okay, it’s fine if you truly want to work in this environment.”

“We will work harder from now on!”

“Ah.....Master, always doing as you please.....”

Racard complained while rolling his eyeballs but he settled down after one stare.

Now there was only one minor thing left to do.

Ark moved the registration place of the summoning port while Racard sent for the three baby bat siblings who had been waiting at the old place.

“Wow, wow! This is now our Lord’s place?”

“Huhuhu, Karakul was nothing compared to our Lord.”

“But Karakul seemed to have a surprisingly frugal nature. The castle is so big and wonderful but it has no decor.”

“Yes, he was like that.....”

Racard scowled at Ark before replying. However, it was impossible for the baby bats to understand the circumstances behind Racard’s voice.

“Hmm hmm, our Lord doesn’t have to worry anymore.”

“Yes, we’ll defend the castle even if our Lord is summoned outside.”

“Newbie, watch over our Lord well. You should serve him better in the future!”

“Lord, please take care!”

However, Ark was already ignoring the nonsense from the baby bats. Ark had finally taken out the Moon Piece.

‘Okay, shall I begin now that everything is settled?’

How long did it take him to find the Three Marvels? It had been 1 year since he received the Star Fragment in the underwater city! He had finally found the last piece of the Three Marvels. Extravagant bonuses and skills are always given whenever he found a new fragment. However, the Moon Piece was different. He would receive extra abilities but it was also an item closely related to the Dark Walker's second class change.

'No, it is obvious. The Three Marvels is an item for the 2nd class change!'

That was the reason why Ark had waited before pulling out the Moon Piece. He didn't want to treat something so important as a chore. Ark took a deep breath and grabbed the Moon Piece firmly. There was a small vibration and the information window appeared.

-Your Knowledge of Ancient Relics has confirmed 'The fragment of stone filled with an ancient power.'

-Fragment of stone filled with ancient power (Moon Piece)

A stone filled with mysterious and frightening powers. This was made using darkness but it has taken on the attribute of light. Using Knowledge of Ancient Relics, you have confirmed that it is one of the Three Marvels that Hero Maban used in the Dark Century. Hero Maban has left his power inside the Three Marvels for his descendant. Only the Truthseeker can obtain the knowledge that Hero Maban left behind.

*The owner of the Moon Piece can use Hero Maban's techniques.

<Experience +30,000, Knowledge of Ancient Relics +15, Intelligence +10, Fame increased by 20>

-New Profession-specific skill.

Gift of Darkness III (Passive): A Dark Walker's abilities will increase significantly in the dark. Stats will be increased by 50%. The duration of 'Stealth' will increase to 30 minutes. However, this skill cannot be raised.

-New Profession-specific skill.

Moonlight Shadow (Beginner, Active): By releasing the power of Hero Maban and the moon, you can create 3 shadows with 30% of your maximum health and defense.

Your alter ego will be unable to move, but it will release a hostile energy to lure the surrounding monsters. When surrounded by monsters, this skill can be used to escape the crisis. However, this Dark Walker skill requires the power of the moon so it is needed to charge in the moonlight first.

<Mana consumption: 500>

“Oh, Gift of Darkness III!”

Ark was in such a good mood he felt like screaming. As expected, the Moon Piece gave a tremendous bonus. The one Ark hoped for the most was Gift of Darkness III.’ So far it had increased every time he found a fragment so he had been hoping for an upgrade this time. As expected, the Three Marvels didn’t disappoint him. Now his dark attribute bonus was 50% to all stats! If he was a level 300 Dark Walker then he would gain 150 levels if he fought in the darkness! It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that Ark clung to the Three Marvels because of the Gift of Darkness. But that wasn’t all. The Star Piece gave him Blade Storm, he learnt Dark Dance from the Dark Piece and now it was possible to learn Moonlight Shadow from the Moon Piece.

‘The skill isn’t that bad.’

Ark nodded with a satisfied expression after reading the information window. Moonlight Shadow was a skill which created a dummy. Ark had no area of effect attacks so he had only been able to fight a lot of monsters because of his pets. However, it became quite difficult when the numbers exceeded 10. If he faced them one on one then it was easy to take care of 20~30 monsters but it was harder when he was surrounded.

“Then wouldn’t I be able to escape when the monsters’ attention is

attracted to the dummy? Well, it only has 30% of my health so it would be smashed in an instant after being surrounded by enemies. But it should become useful when combined with Dark Dance.”

He was quite satisfied with the abilities received from the Moon Piece. There was just one problem.

“What the? Is that it?”

Ark muttered while staring blankly at the Moon Piece. Three Marvels.....the characters literally spelt our Three Marvellous Treasures. Therefore wasn't it impossible for there to be four or five fragments? Then why hadn't information about the profession change appeared yet?

“What is going on? Don't tell me that the Three Marvels is unrelated to a class change and this is the end?”

And, of course, the idea that the Three Marvels was related to the second class change was only Ark's guess. In fact none of the Meow, mermaids or raccoons had spoken one word about a class change. They only said that Hero Maban's power was hidden in the Three Marvels.

“No. No way.....it is impossible. No, this must be it. Radun, spit out the other pieces of the Three Marvels!”

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun spat out the other two pieces at Ark's command. It happened when Ark held all three pieces of the Three Marvels in his hand. An intense light emerged from the Three Marvels and the pieces combined into one. Thus the Three Marvels which had changed into one disc returned to Ark's hand again.

‘This disc must be the original form of the Three Marvels.’

Then a dim light shot upwards from the centre of the disc. The light turned into a strange shape.

‘What the? This shape? Where have I seen it before before.....?’

Ark went through his memories before he remembered. It was the

‘Magic Eye.’ Although it seemed strange at first, after adjusting his eyes the light actually looked like a 3D image where a strange figure was floating. Then the original disc contained information about Hero Maban’s legacy like he expected? Ark had an idea and changed his focus. Like he thought, three dimensional forms started appearing. However, the colours were so tangled up like in a colour blindness test that it was impossible to figure out what the shapes were.

‘Damn, what is this? How about I supposed to look at these forms.....ah!’

“Eyes of the Cat!”

Ark instantly used Eyes of the Cat. Yes, Hero Maban was a Meow. If he created something only the Truthseeker could skill then the key would lie with the Meow. It was the Meow technique related to the eyes!

The environment changed to green while the various colours mixed together to form vivid letters.

I am Hero Maban of the Meow clan.

A long time ago, I fought with my colleagues against the dark existence trying to destroy the world. And we defeated him.....is what I want to say but it is not the truth.

The dark existence was a lot stronger than we thought so all that we could do was use all our power to seal it. Although it is frightening, we guessed that the dark existence would be resurrected one day.

That’s why I scattered the pieces of the Three Marvels all over the world.

For the person who found this.....you will have to face the fearful darkness and confront the harsh edge.....but I will give you the power to face the darkness. Although I’m leaving this message, I realize that it is difficult to face the dark existence with your current strength.

Darkness is needed to confront the dark.

Rather than the darkness of anger and insanity, this is the true power of darkness..... But there isn’t that much time for me to explain your destiny. That’s why I entrusted my powers to a friend who will live for eternity.

You'll understand why you have to go there when you meet him.

If you are ready to accept that destiny.....

You will find power when you understand the meaning of true darkness.

After the message ended, the colours mixed together and a new message formed.

Heaven and earth, life and death, find the place where they are reversed and follow the hero's star path.

Look for the forgotten battlefield and let the scattered pieces of the moon from the top of the best seat lead you to the resting place.

The person who has forgotten the time in the true darkness will welcome you.

Then the writing changed again and a three dimensional map appeared. The recognizable terrain.....it was a 3D image of Seutandal. One part of the map indicated the place where the first clue would be found. Surprisingly Ark knew the place that was indicated. It was the territory of the undead where the City of the Dead was located.

'The last Three Marvels was in vampire territory and now I need to go to the land of the undead? Is this a coincidence? Or is it based on probabilities?'

No matter how realistic it was, New World is still a game. So the events that happened were arranged artificially. From his experience, unexpected incidents that took place in other games didn't appear in New World. In order for an incident to spread, a certain event must have happened.

'The reason Hero Maban's legacy is hidden in the undead territory.....what is it?'

Ark remained confused. Then there was a dinging sound and the quest information window appeared.

-Profession Change Quest: Great Legacy
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You have obtained all the pieces of the Three Marvels left behind by Hero Maban. As the Truthseeker, you have chased after the footprints of Hero Maban and finally gathered all of the Three Marvels. That journey wasn't just to obtain the Three Marvels. The true meaning of the journey was to understand and befriend the mermaids, the raccoon clan and the wolf clan. Now you are finally ready to inherit Hero Maban's true legacy. Solve the clues left behind in the Three Marvels to find Hero Maban's legacy.

<Difficulty: ???

Quest Restriction: Dark Walker, Star Fragment, Dark Piece, Moon Piece>

'Quest to change profession!'

Finally, he received the quest to change to the Dark Walker's second stage profession. Ark thought that he would change professions after finding the Three Marvels. He hadn't expected to receive a class change quest. He had already read all the notes regarding the quests that the people who had changed to their second profession posted. In fact, changing to the 2nd stage profession was a lot harder in New World compared to other online games because a prerequisite was required to trigger the quest. However, Ark had finally met the prerequisite and received the quest. The compensation for changing to his second profession would be huge!

'It doesn't matter if I change it today or tomorrow as long as it is resolved. Besides, I don't understand the reason why it is in the undead territory.'

"Let's go! Racard, Radun, Buksil and Baekgu."

Ark set off at a lively pace. His next goal was Razak and his second stage profession!

"Damn, nothing is going my way."

Recently Jewel had become quite dissatisfied with his life. Jewel's

daily life had become really stressful after the failure of the Seutandal mission. If Jewel had managed to occupy Seutandal then the Hermes Guild would have enormous potential. And that huge mission had been appointed to a high ranking officer, Jewel. However, the results were different from the expected jackpot. Before the reinforcements that they spend 30 million on arrived, Jewel's army had already been smashed to pieces. Who wouldn't be mad after wasting 30 million won? But that wasn't the only reason for Jewel's anger. It had been over a month since Seutandal rose. But the Hermes guild was unable to enter Seutandal openly. Of course, the Hermes guild wasn't officially banned from Seutandal. However, Haman fortress was the centre of Seutandal and it was currently in the control of the autonomous group led by JusticeMan and the Dark Brothers. They knew about the Hermes guild so it was difficult to step foot on Seutandal. Therefore the Hermes members had a lot of complaints. And their dissatisfaction was focused on Jewel who was in charge of the Seutandal mission. Therefore, Jewel status as the top 2 of the Hermes guild fell to the very bottom.

'It's all because of that bastard Ark!'

Jewel ground his teeth together and kicked a stone. Ark.....ah, why did someone so annoying exist in the world? It wasn't necessary to explain the reason why. In the old days, Jewel had failed to win the Evil Silrion, the siege on Silvana failed and the conquest of Seutandal also failed because of Ark.

'That's not all. I broke up with my girlfriend a month ago, I lost my wallet a month ago and my mother started lecturing me yesterday. Everything is because of that bastard!'

Jewel paranoia had reached the stage where he might be recommended to undergo psychiatric treatment.

'Anyway, I will never forgive him.'

Unfortunately, Jewel had no room for revenge at the moment. Although Nagaran had been quiet for a while because of the 5 coalitions, the clouds of war had started circling again. Thus

Raiden had convened an emergency meeting of the alliances to deal with the situation. There was no room for Jewel to roam around looking for revenge.

‘In addition, I hate to admit it.....’

He wasn’t a match for Ark anymore. In order to catch Ark, he needed a minimum of 10 people and a maximum of 15 people to do it. However, it was impossible for Jewel to take that many people away in this war situation. However.....

‘While I’m stuck here, isn’t that Ark bastard carelessly running around?’

The thought was enough to make him bristle.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

Jewel had been thinking furiously when something suddenly happened. A roaring sound echoed through the whole castle.

“What, what the? What is that?”

“Jewel-nim, it is serious!”

A guild member ran in and shouted at Jewel.

“There are people attacking the gate!”

“The gate? Somebody has invaded without declaring war?”

“No, there is only two people attacking.”

“Two? Only two people? Two people are attacking the gate? Then this sound is caused by only two people? Jeez, what are the guard NPCs doing?”

“I only heard the NPCs so I don’t know either.”

“.....What, what the, this is?”

Jewel opened his mouth after running towards the gate. There really was only 2 people attacking the gate. It was a barbarian wearing leather armour and an elf magician wearing silver armour. However,

their behaviour exceeded Jewel's common sense. Even time the barbarian swung his weapon, the gate's endurance would fall like it had been hit by a catapult. Of course, there were also guard NPCs near the gate. Although they didn't participate in the sieges, the guard NPCs were given along with the servants. And the guards' mission was to prevent trespassers. However, the guards couldn't get near the barbarian.

"Ah, it's really annoying."

The elf magician sitting behind the barbarian waved her hand while yawning. Every time she did that, the guards would be thrown back dozens of metres.

"Redian, don't kill them. It will become annoying if we kill NPCs in Nagaran."

"Why is this stone head giving me advice? I know already."

"Well, you're always so fickle."

'Oh my god, these people are.....!'

Jewel watched the two people conversing with wide eyes.

'Why are those people here? No, now is not the time to be doing this.'

"W-wait a minute! Bread hyung-nim, Redian noona, please stop!"

"Huh? What the, that is?"

The barbarian stopped swinging his sword as Jewel came running. Yes, the barbarian warrior and elf magician was Bread and Redian. They were hiding after killing dozens of tourists in Seutandal.

"How does he know us?"

Bread scratched his head while Redian poked out her tongue and replied.

"Have you already forgotten? This is Jewel who followed us around for a while in the old days."

“Ah ah, that’s right. That guy was here?”

“Well, originally he was quite close to Raiden.”

“Heh, his habit of following other people around hasn’t changed.”

While Bread and Redian were flirting, Jewel gasped and said.

“Hyung-nim, noona, long time no see. But what are you doing here? No, why are you attacking the gate? Are you in a bad mood or something?”

“No, well, it’s not really a bad mood.....”

Bread scratched his head while Redian bluntly replied.

“The guards said we had to go through all these formalities to get permission to enter from the Hermes guild. We became annoyed so Bread decided to just knock.”

“K-knock? That was a knock?”

Jewel looked at the gate with a bemused look. Although the gates could endure the catapults for hours, it’s durability had already been decreased by 10%.

‘Dammit, repairing the gate is expensive.....’

Anger welled up inside Jewel but he didn’t dare show it to the two in front of him. But Redian and Bread had no interest anyway.

“You came out anyway. Where is Raiden? There is something we wanted to discuss with him.”

“He is the castle’s Lord. What did you need.....”

“Do you want us to explain it again to each of you?”

“Ah, no. Then follow me.”

Jewel flinched and guided them through the castle. Finally they entered the office where Raiden spoke in an annoyed tone.

“What the hell Jewel? Why was it so noisy.....?”

“Yo Raiden. It’s been a while.”

Raiden raised his head with surprise at Bread’s voice.

“Bread? Redian? How are you? Have you made up your minds already?”

“Our minds? What are you talking about?”

“Ah I remember. He’s talking about how he asked us to join the guild.”

“What, he did?”

Bread replied in a confused tone before Redian spoke.

“I told you that we have no interest.

“I would give you guys the best treatment.”

“Shut up! Don’t say the same things several times. We’re not interested.”

Bread banged his bayonet into the ground and shouted.

“We wanted to talk to you about something. Didn’t you mention a guy to us?”

“A guy I mentioned?”

“You know, the fellow you wanted us to handle. That fellow who could turn himself into a black wolf. Do you know what that guy is now?”

“Black wolf.....you mean Ark?”

Raiden stuttered after searching through his memory. After Jewel suffered from Ark’s attacks in Seutandal, Raiden judged that he had become too difficult for Jewel and Duke to handle. Therefore he had asked some people he was acquaintanced with to kill Ark. The people who he first contacted was Bread and Redian. However, both of them had been busy with Asyubell’s quest so they rejected it. Redian nodded at Raiden’s words.

“His name is Ark? That reminds me, I’ve heard that name mentioned a lot by the NPCs in Haman fortress.”

“But why do you want to find Ark?”

“It’ll take a while to explain.

Bread and Redian sighed before talking. After struggling with Asyubell’s quest for a few months, they had failed thanks to some tourists so they swore revenge. But no matter how hard they tried to collect information, nobody would tell them his name. That’s because Ark had firmly told the NPCs in Seutandal not to leak any information about him. It was only after they destroyed the sightseeing office in Haman fortress that they realized their target had already left Seutandal. Therefore they chased their target to the continent. However, the continent was huge compared to Seutandal so finding one user was like finding a needle in the desert.

“While wandering around, we saw the video about Seutandal on the TV.”

It was the video that Buksil had sold to the broadcasting station. The user who made Seutandal rise was a black wolf! They remembered Raiden’s commission after watching the video. Raiden smiled and nodded after their explanation.

“.....So that’s what happened.”

“Now it’s your turn. Do you know where he is?”

“I do not know the details. But I do know his approximate location. You said that you chased him to the continent? But he has already returned to Seutandal a fortnight ago.”

“What, what the? Are you sure about that information?”

“Yes, an informant in Haman Fortress confirmed his face.”

“Informant? You still play the game using such boring methods.”

“That is my style.”

Raiden grinned and replied. In fact, Raiden hadn’t completely

abandoned Seutandal. Although the situation in Nagaran meant he had to withdraw for a while, he still maintained the alliance with the Nakujuk and was waiting for a chance. Even though the Baran clan was occupying Haman fortress, that situation could change at any time. Therefore Raiden had sneaked an information into Haman fortress and used the Nakujuk to disrupt their trade.

‘It is not too late yet. Even though the Baran is currently occupying Seutandal, the Nakujuk are still powerful. If I hinder their trade and increase the lawlessness around the harbour, there is a chance to reverse the situation. The problem is Ark. He might interfere again.’

Raiden was worried about Ark’s presence. Of course, Raiden didn’t think that Ark could challenge the entire Hermes Alliance. But Ark had a strange way of complicating the situation.

‘Anyway, I have to hide the information about Ark from the Hermes Alliance. But now that these two also have a grudge against Ark.....it is a chance.’

Raiden organized his thoughts and spoke again.

“Did you want to join forces?”

“What?”

“Presently Ark is somewhere in Seutandal. As you know, we also have a grudge against Ark. If you want then I will help you sneak into Seutandal. Don’t worry, no other conditions are required. All I want is for you to kill Ark. That’s all.”

“.....It is hard to know what you are thinking.”

“How about it? Will you accept?”

“Yes, although I don’t trust your intentions there is no need to waste your resources.”

“Okay, then I’ll message my lawless contacts.”

“Ah, okay, then we’ll be going.”

Bread and Redian headed back towards Seutandal. Jewel followed

them to the gate and smiled at their backs.

“Huhuhu, now that Ark is ruined.”

“But even Jewel-nim and Duke-nim couldn’t deal with Ark. Would those two be able to handle him? Are the two of them that strong?”

A guild member watching from nearby asked with concern and Jewel laughed.

“Do you know about pioneers?”

“Yes, aren’t they users like Jewel-nim who participated in the beta test? Thanks to the previous knowledge, they managed to raise their characters more quickly.”

“Yes, I’m a pioneer. But those two are on a different level. They are the last pioneers.”

“Last pioneers?”

“Huhuhu, it is a legend among pioneers.”

Jewel was like an old magician talking to his students about the past.

“A few months before the beta test ended, there was a public announcement and every user gathered on an island in Bristania. There was no time to gather information about levels or skills in PVP. After a few days of preparing their skills and equipment, a battle royale began.”

“Battle Royale?”

“Yes, an infinite killing competition!”

Jewel said and laughed.

“Even the NPCs that the users saw were killed.”

The battle royale started one day before the beta test ended. Users who died couldn’t be resurrected for 24 hours so it was the end.

“It was a really intense contest. Over 1000 people were gathered on

the island and started killing each other. No matter how hard me and Duke fought, we only managed to endure for 2 hours. Raiden hyung-nim lasted 7 hours. And the people who survived until the end of the beta test was only two people. They were Bread and Redian.”

“That’s why they are called the last pioneers……?”

“That’s right. That most surprising thing was that Redian and Bread weren’t teamed up at the time. The two people remaining simply couldn’t defeat each other. It lasted until the test finished. Well, now they seem quite friendly with each other.”

“Then it is possible to put an end to Ark.”

“An end? No, this is just the beginning.”

Jewel gave an evil grin and muttered. In fact, users could be killed several times in the game. That’s why Ark had built up a strong support base of users.

“I will tear down his support base.’

Jewel had realised that Ark had two support bases. One was the Baran clan in the Eastern Nation of Seutandal. The second was Lancel village in the Argus Mountains. During the decisive battle in Seutandal, the residents of Lancel village had appeared through the dimensional gate. After investigating the village, he saw that Ark had a store there.

‘The Hermes Alliance will eventually take back Seutandal. All that will remain is his support base in Lancel village and that will be settled once Nagaran quiets down.’

Jewel had been worried that Ark might interfere. However, Ark would be no problem if he had already been battered by Redian and Bread.

“Then I will deal the final blow to Ark! Hahaha, I can’t wait to see his expression when he encounters Bread and Redian and then when he loses his support base! I’ll make him regret messing with me, hahaha!”

Jewel laughed crazily as he looked at the sky. He was like the evil magicians who appeared in old stories.

Mother

“How is it? Do you like it?”

Hyun-woo looked at his mother's expression and laughed. Her expression indicated that his mother still couldn't understand the situation. She stared blankly at the house for a while before speaking in a hesitant voice.

“You really rented this house?”

“How many times have I said it? It is just like I said.”

“But the money required to rent this place.....”

“Mother, a son should have this much capabilities.”

“But the rental deposit for a house near the hospital.....you didn't have to go through all that trouble. I never dared imagine a house like this.....”

“Mother doesn't have to worry about unnecessary things like that. This much is nothing.”

Hyun-woo spoke with a proud expression and stared at the house. The rented house was a 3 storey house with a small garden.

‘I was worried at first but I somehow managed to make it!’

Over the past two months, Hyun-woo had almost gone insane with worry. The deposit fee for the rented house was 80 million won. Excluding the contract signing deposit, that was 60 million won. Thus Hyun-woo had spent the last two months running after money.

‘What will I do if I don't have the money after two months? What is something unexpected happens?’

The thought of having no money to pay the deposit filled Hyun-woo with extreme anxiety. In addition, 60 million won wasn't the type of money that Hyun-woo who only graduated from high school would

have. After paying the hospital bills and the cost of living, he had a few million won at most. He had lived without making a deposit account in his bankbook. So naturally money was main thing on Hyun-woo's mind. He was unsure if he could gather the rest of the rental deposit money in the two months so he had been quite restless. In the end he worried for nothing. After converting his gold to money, Hyun-woo's assets was a lot more than expected. And he was able to have that type of gold because of 'Ark.'

Aside from Ark, Hyun-woo also had the rehabilitation members, Roco, Sid, the three baby pig brothers and Lariette to help. After all, Ark had Sid and the three pig brothers in his group so that was 4 merchants. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that Hyun-woo was in charge of asset management after investing in various projects. It was thanks to those investments that he could settle the rent balance. Hyun-woo now summarized the order that the money was deposited in his bankbook.

First from Buksil. Buksil had sold the items obtained in Magaro's laboratory for 10% more than he expected so Hyun-woo received 3,200 gold. Then there was Sid who sold the 16,000 ores Ark received in Seutandal. In fact, Hyun-woo had intended to sell the raccoons living in Lancel village the ore. But no matter how much the raccoons like the ore, it was impossible to sell all of the 16,000 ores. And according to the law of supply and demand, the price would go down the more available the item was. That was when Sid heard the news and appeared like the wind. Sid used the information of the Continental Commerce Firm to check the ore price in Schudenberg Kingdom, then he used Sapjil and Ulmeok to increase the price. Thanks to that, Ark was able to dispose of all the ore and the profits was 30% more than he expected. So he earned 2,400 gold from that. During the several months Roco managed the store, she earned around 1000 gold! Just those three alone was 6,600 gold. That amount had exceeded his target goal.

'Huhuhu, I also can't forget about Alan's help.'

Hyun-woo smiled and remembered the 9,000,000 won that had been deposited in his bankbook a few days ago. It was the price Hyun-woo received for selling the Steel Shield of Hatred and Despair he

received from Wigurima in Ageiron. Hyun-woo had been disappointed after confirming the performance of the item. Although it was a level 300 boss, all Wigurima dropped was a rare shield which wouldn't sell for that much. The most he would gain for it was 3 million won. But he received an instant purchase request the moment he sold it on the auction site. Surprisingly the person who requested it was Charming Man, Alan's ID. Hyun-woo checked that it was the same ID who bought the gloves and his hypothesis was confirmed.

'There's no doubt. Alan also previously bought the Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred which had a skill related to the Hatred stat. The Steel Shield of Hatred and Despair is also the same. The only reason he would buy such items is because of the hatred stat. Alan is collecting set items.'

If this was true than the situation was different. People would normally look at the market price of the item before deciding how much they would spend on it. But Alan was rich. If he wasn't after set items then he wouldn't give up no matter the price. Thus Hyun-woo raised the price to triple the amount and managed to sell it for 9 million won.

'Alan might be a surprisingly good guy.'

Thus Alan's intimacy with Hyun-woo increased quickly without him even knowing. Of course, Alan would never wish for that to happen.....

Anyway, thanks to Alan Ark had 15 million won left in his account after paying off the rent deposit. But it wasn't all good. Hyun-woo's wallet thickening meant that Ark's wallet had thinned. Thus he was once again saving 1 copper every day. Although he was attempting to save every copper he could, he wasn't worried about starving to death.

'And accomplishing that goal is not for me along.'

Hyun-woo looked proudly at his mother. Hyun-woo's goal over the last two months had been to live together with his mother and that was his mother's goal as well. Physical therapy and rehabilitation

was essential. So she put in a lot of effort and moved her body whenever possible.

‘What is that? Of course someone sick would try to get better.’

.....There might be people who thought like that. However, those who have stayed for a long time in the hospital or who had family there knew that it wasn't an easy task. Hyun-woo had watched his mother struggle for 6 years so he knew all too well. At first all patients admitted to the hospital would try to get better. But after one month passed and then one year, most people would have misgivings. There would be a feeling of helplessness from living so many years with medical treatment and it was easy to give up. It was natural. Therefore they accepted that they couldn't be completely cured.

“The patient will have to cross the most difficult mountain to receive a complete cure.”

That was something a doctor had said one year after his mother had been hospitalized. It was natural. Sometimes it was difficult for the sick person to endure the pain that came with the treatment. That's why doctors would say that ‘the patient's will is the most important.’ It was one of their favourite phrases when treating people. But his mother endured it. ‘I can get better’.....no, she never lost her commitment and she improved so much that the doctors were surprised and discharged her from the ICU.

“I wanted to tell you this. Patient Park So-mi really is like a honour roll student. Her figures have all improved so much compared to two months ago. The hospital treats people with the idea that the patients' motivation is the most important but I never thought it would be so effective..... She must really want to live with Hyun-woo ssi. Although she should still be careful, a complete recovery in the future doesn't seem that distant.”

The doctor in charge explained how eagerly his mother had been receiving treatment.

‘My troubles are nothing compared to my mother's suffering.’

After 6 years apart, Hyun-woo and his mother were really eager to live together. Fortunately that dream could now be achieved. Yes, now his mother was healthy enough to be an outpatient and she was rewarded with a lovely house with a garden. But his mother looked at Hyun-woo with worried eyes and said.

“Hyun-woo, your mother can’t live here if you’ve obtained it through bad acts.”

Why were all mothers the same in this situation? Hyun-woo pouted and whined like a child.

“Why doesn’t Mother believe in her son? I’ve received a lot of education from mother so I know what bad acts are. Look at these clear eyes. They are innocent. They’re gentle like the eyes of a newborn baby.”

“..... They might be gentle and innocent but they are still impudent.”

“It is genetic. Anyway, I have done nothing that I am ashamed of. In addition, you don’t have to be concerned because Hwa-rang ajusshi looked after me while you were in hospital.”

“Oh, it’s been a couple of days since I’ve seen Detective Gwon. What has he been doing?”

His mother suddenly spoke in a concerned tone. Then a smirk appeared on Hyun-woo’s face.

“Aha, the reason you’ve been looking around restlessly is because of Hwa-rang ajusshi. Huhuhu, he’s the first thing you looked for when I started talking. Is that how it is? When did your relationship progress so much?”

“W-what are you saying.....?”

“What’s wrong? I am turning 24 this year.”

“24 years old.....that’s right..... You were 18.....now you’re already 24 years old.....6 years.....”

His mother’s face instantly darkened at Hyun-woo’s words.

‘Ah, I made a mistake.’

Hyun-woo belatedly realized. In fact, his mother always became melancholy whenever Hyun-woo’s age was mentioned. She seemed to be thinking about how long she had been a heavy baggage for her son. Hyun-woo started talking in order to change the atmosphere.

“Hwa-rang ajusshi and the hyungs are waiting at the house.”

“At the house?”

“Yes, this is the first time I’m seeing the house after all my things were moved. I’ve been busy the last few days. So Hwa-rang ajusshi and the hyungs entered the house first to organize the baggage.”

In fact, Hyun-woo had paid off the deposit just before the battle with Karakul began. So while the game unit and internet had been installed at the new house, he had been playing at the game arcades. He was seeing the new house for the first time with his mother so he felt anticipation and excitement.

“Come on, let’s enter!”

Hyun-woo pushed her wheelchair energetically and finally entered their new home. There was the noisy sound of firecrackers as they walked through the front door.

“Surprise!”

“Noonim (formal way of saying older sister for males), congratulations on your discharge!”

Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members were all gathered near the front door. Hyun-woo realized how comfortable his new residence was after seeing them gathered in one spot. The rehabilitation members were so huge that there was no space to move or breath in his old place. But the living room in their new place was so large that it felt like the rehabilitation members could play soccer in it.

“Hehehe, noonim, you have come.”

The rehabilitation members flocked around them.

“Thank you. You didn’t need to come…….”

“Why are you talking like that?”

“We are men.”

“Hyun-woo is our younger brother. So noonim is like a mother to us.”

“Oh, that reminds me? Should we call you mother?”

Then Gwon Hwa-rang’s face hardened.

“Hey you! Don’t say something so disgusting! Park-nim is different from you guys who have the DNA of animals. And who would want to have a child your age?”

“Sheesh, why are you mentioning our age? Anyway, I was just joking.”

“DNA? Why is hyung-nim mentioning DNA in this situation?”

“We’ve endured it until now, but hyung-nim is like a wolf drooling over noonim who is little Red Riding Hood.”

“It’s true. Noonim, it’s not too late. He is like the wolf who disguised as the grandmother. You should escape before he eats you. We’ll risk our lives to help you escape!”

“What, what the, these guys?”

“Hohohoho. Thank you. But Detective Gwon seems more like a bear than a wolf to me.”

His mother burst out laughing as she stared at the quarrelling Gwon Hwa-rang and rehabilitation members. Gwon Hwa-rang who had been grabbing Jjak-tung’s collar awkwardly laughed and blushed.

“Hahaha, yes I am a bear. I’m not a wolf.”

“Sheesh, suddenly a bear is really good. Tsk tsk, this old bachelor……get out of the way.”

Jjak-tung and Tazza kicked Gwon Hwa-rang and pushed him into a corner. Then they lowered their heads and smiled.

“Now, let’s forget about the animal who doesn’t know whether he is a wolf or a bear. Anyway, we are Hyun-woo’s older brothers so we’ve prepared a small gift to congratulate noonim on your discharge.”

When his words finished, a bouquet and cake suddenly appeared in their two hands. Then clapped her hands like a young girl and asked with startled eyes.

“Omo, it is amazing. Are you two magicians?”

“Heh, there is nothing we can’t do.”

They were an ex-conman and gambler so such tricks were easy for them. Anyway, then came the really amazing part.

“Shut up. All you could come up with was a bouquet and cake?”

“That’s right, now it’s our turn!”

Bul-kkun and the other rehabilitation members lined up in front of his mother. Then the ‘love of the rehabilitation members’ game began.

“We’ve prepared a gift for noonim.”

“Now, please look over here. The living room window is protected by the elegant windows. I know a merchant who specifically makes high end curtains. The 100% feel of silk when touching! It also has antibacterial and fungal control and is good for your health.”

Yapsab explained the curtains with a rapt expression. Then Bu Dong-san stuck out his tongue and interrupted.

“Bah, you foolish fellow!” How will be curtain be useful for her health? This fellow doesn’t understand houses. Noonim, please look down at the floor. Do you see the flooring? Hahaha, that’s right. This is called jade flooring. Indeed, isn’t this the best material for the floor?”

Then it was Hae Gyeol-sa’s turn.

“Heh, short, too short. These fellows are thinking in such a short sighted manner. Are they only seeing the bottom? Who cares about

the flooring? Look a little higher. The most important thing is lighting. Don't you see the TV? Doesn't the mood of the interior depend on the lighting? Noonim, I've prepared for you a lighting system with 3 wavelengths and matching wallpaper."

"Hahaha, what silly people!"

At that time, audible laughter was heard which shook the living room. He turned around and saw that Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae were laughing.

"Curtains? Flooring? Lighting? Wallpaper? This is why you guys are only capable of cheap tricks. Isn't health the most important thing? If you eat well then you will become healthier. That's why I prepared this! A high end kitchen and refrigerator set!"

"And I've prepared a profession exercise set for your rehabilitation!"

"I'll like to see any of you beat this. Our eye level is different from you. Hahaha!"

Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae indicated towards the flashy kitchen and exercise equipment. Then the remaining rehabilitation members sank to the ground and murmured with sad faces.

"Ugh, how regrettable."

"The most important thing is definitely food and exercise."

"I only thought to buy kitchenware....."

Gwon Hwa-rang finally noticed a change and quickly interrupted.

"Park-nim, I've prepared something as well. I've prepared a first class bed! It has a threefold spring structure and is very good for your back. Furthermore, it is so robust that you can use it for 10 years."

However, all he got in return was the teasing of the rehabilitation members.

"As expected from an old bachelor. Disguising something blatant as a present....."

“In addition, 10 years? Isn't he intending to secretly prepare items for marriage? How sneaky.....”

“Ohhh, please return to your zoo. You unscrupulous old man!”

“W-what are these brats talking about? I just.....”

Gwon Hwa-rang face quickly turned red. Then Hyun-woo looked around the house with surprised eyes and asked the Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members.

“Ajusshi, hyung-nims, this is the reason why you asked me for the key?”

“Well, it's like we said. We wanted to prepare it beforehand.....”

“Did you think you were alone?”

Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members studied Hyun-woo's face before talking. Hyun-woo was the type who didn't like receiving one-sided help. Therefore Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members had prepared the gifts for Hyun-woo secretly. In fact, Hyun-woo had expected it to some extent. When considering their close relationship, he had expected one or two gifts. But Hyun-woo thought it would just be a few pots or pans. He never imagined that he would receive such large gifts. However, Hyun-woo's reaction was different from what the rehabilitation members expected and he was just deeply moved. Hyun-woo wasn't moved by the value of the gifts. It was because he could feel the thought and regard put into each gift. It was also for the sake of his mother.....

Yes, Hyun-woo didn't like receiving things one-sidedly. But if it was for his mother.....

“Thank you. Ajusshi, hyung-nims, thank you very much.”

Hyun-woo was moved to tears and bowed. When was it? When was the last time he felt this much gratitude towards someone? And the last time he sincerely thanked someone?

“Eh? What the? What's with this guy?”

“So....isn't this much expected?”

The rehabilitation members blushed and scratched their heads at the unexpected response. Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members looked at Hyun-woo awkwardly while his mother wore a soft smile. There was a subtle silence. Suddenly the front door slammed open and Jung Hye-sun came in whining.

“Huk huk, I’ve arrived. Huh? What’s wrong with everyone?”

Jung Hye-sun asked after belatedly noticing the awkward atmosphere. Hyun-woo just tilted his head to one side.

“Eh? Hye-sun, you have today off?”

“Ah, what are you saying? The day your mother is discharged from hospital is a national holiday.”

“National holiday? Today is a holiday? Isn’t it a weekday?”

Hyun-woo asked but Jung Hye-sun just ignored him and approached his mother.

“Mother, I’ve arrived.”

“Thank you for coming.”

“What do you mean? Of course I’m going to come. Today is the happiest day for me apart from Independence Day. Furthermore, I can’t leave Mother alone with these oversized brothers.”

“Hohoho, it is good that you’re so bright. How are you?”

Jung Hye-sun had visited the hospital several times so she had become quite close to his mother. Yes, but the original person concerned how no idea Jung Hye-sun considered her a mother in law. The strategy to win him over had already begun a long time ago. Hyun-woo looked at the exchange with confusion and asked.

“But what is that huge backpack? Did you have some business?”

“Oh, this? I can’t just let this day pass without celebrating. So I made a few things.”

“Who’s going to eat all of that?”

“Hyun-woo doesn’t know about the eating habits of the others. This much might not be enough.”

Jung Hye-sun just shrugged. The rehabilitation members nodded with serious faces.

“Huhuhu, as expected from our little cutie. She knows us too well.”

“Now let’s eat and drink.”

“Hey, Landlord! What are you looking at? Order snacks and drinks!”

Then Jung Hye-sun who had been taking out the food raised her eyebrows and said.

“What? I said there would be no drinking.”

“Eh? W-what are you talking about?”

“How can we eat all that food without any alcohol?”

“Yes, you know. Alcohol is like a digestive for us!”

“Ohhhh, it’s a tyranny!”

They were acting like they wanted to run onto the streets and give a candlelight protest.

“Noisy!”

However, they immediately quieted and lowered their tails like a dog when Jung Hye-sun shouted. Their year of experience with Jung Hye-sun meant they knew when not to push the line. In the past, the rehabilitation members had experienced all sorts of hardships like being threatened with knives in alleys. They never lost their courage.....but now their lips protruded and they whined like children.

“We can’t eat our meals without some alcohol.”

Ah, were they truly gangsters in the past? Anyway, their protest worked. His mother looked at Jung Hye-sun with a charming smile.

“Isn’t a little bit of alcohol okay?”

“But Mother, they turn into animals when they get drunk.”

“That’s okay. All men get a little noisy when they’re drunk. A woman only needs to worry when a man is too quiet. Hyun-woo, you go and buy it.”

“Ohhh, as expected of noonim!”

“I’ll swear allegiance to you!”

The rehabilitation members voluntarily swore their support after her decision. So at his neat new house.....just by looking at the prepared food, a party of an extravagant scale had begun. The rehabilitation members ravenously ate their food and drank alcohol while teasing Gwon Hwa-rang about his mother, forcing him to drink. But Hyun-woo was actually confused about Jung Hye-sun.

“We’ve just moved downstairs. Nice to meet you.”

While the food was being unpacked, Jung Hye-sun greeted the 2nd and 3rd floor residents and even the next door neighbours. After she returned, she attached herself to his mother’s side and chattered tirelessly. Hyun-woo had no experience with dating or a sense of strategy, so he couldn’t understand that Hye-sun was trying to get close to his mother. Although it was difficult to form a conclusion yet, the strategy was getting good results.

‘Why is she so friendly?’

Jung Hye-sun seemed different to Hyun-woo for some reason. Around that time, an enormous hindrance to Jung Hye-sun’s plan appeared.

Ding dong, ding dong.

While they were all getting suitably drunk, the sound of the doorbell was heard.

“Eh? Who is it? There should be no more people.....eh?”

Hyun-woo’s mouth dropped with surprise when he opened the front door. A person he never imagined in this place had visited.

“Hello? Hasn’t it been a long time since I’ve seen you in real life?”

“Mi-su ssi?”

Amazingly, the person who arrived was Lariette or Kang Mi-su.

They met often in New World but it had been 1 year since they’ve seen each other in reality.

“Why is Mi-su ssi here?”

“Mi-su ssi? Ah, Lariette-nim? We invited her.”

Bul-kkun heard Hyun-woo’s question and replied.

“Hyung-nim invited her?”

“Yes, Lariette-nim has spent quite a lot of time with us. This is the long awaited chance to say hello properly so we invited her. By the way.....you truly are a beauty.”

Bul-kkun looked at Kang Mi-su’s face while chewing on a piece of squid. Hyun-woo also agreed on that point. Just like Ark’s face resembled Hyun-woo, Lariette also resembled Kang Mi-su. Because Lariette and Hyun-woo had spent a lot of time together, he had been slightly desensitized to her face. However after meeting her again in reality, his heart started thumping like it was their first meeting. No matter how realistic the virtual reality character, it couldn’t outperform the original.

‘She seems to have become prettier than before.’

“Come in. Everybody has been waiting for Lariette-nim.”

“Thank you.”

Kang Mi-su smiled and entered the living room. When Kang Mi-su entered the living room.....Hyun-woo and Bul-kkun weren’t the only people affected by her. The moment she entered, the once boisterous atmosphere became quiet. The rehabilitation members had spent a lot of time with Lariette but this was the first time they’ve actually seen Kang Mi-su. Ddeok-dae, Hae Gyeol-sa, Jjak-tung, Tazza and Yapsab all opened their mouths absentmindedly and stared at Kang Mi-su. Kang Mi-su hesitated before handing a

bouquet of flowers and a toilet paper set to Hyun-woo's mother.

"I heard from Oppa. Congratulations on your discharge. This is a small house warming gift."

"Thank you. But how do you know Hyun-woo?"

"Just.....I've received a lot of help from him in various ways."

Kang Mi-su attempted to read Hyun-woo's face before answering. Anyway, all the interest focuses on one topic after she appeared. Hyun-woo had previously mentioned that she had a rich boyfriend. Therefore the rehabilitation members hadn't made any moves on her but who wouldn't be tempted when a pretty girl was seated with them? They were also tipsy thanks to all the alcohol.

"Now all the leaders of the autonomous group in Seutandal have been gathered. I'm Bul-kkun. I'll get you a glass."

"Get out of the way! Hehehe, I am Yapsab. You're an elf even in reality."

"Have you ever heard that you resemble a celebrity?"

The rehabilitation members enthusiastically welcomed Kang Mi-su and blatantly competed for a seat next to her. However, they forgot about one person until they needed her.....

"Hey, Hye-sun. This dish is empty. Get us a little more."

"And this one as well!"

Jung Hye-sun immediately started to feel displeased.

'Bah, what the? Why was this woman invited?'

Jung Hye-sun lips tightened and she glared at Kang Mi-su. She had learnt Lariette's name from the recordings. When Hyun-woo had dropped by Lancel village to obtain the Sacred Soil, Lariette was also with him.

Then she heard Jana the Meow shaman talk about the other woman with Ark. Thus Jung Hye-sun questioned the rehabilitation members about Kang Mi-su. The rehabilitation members said that Hyun-woo

mentioned Lariette had a boyfriend so she stopped paying attention.

‘But.....’

This time she saw her directly. Her woman’s instinct warned her that Kang Mi-su was a shrewd fox! No, it wasn’t just a simple feeling. After Kang Mi-su appeared, Hyun-woo’s attitude began to feel uncomfortable somehow. He made an uneasy face every time the rehabilitation members rushed to her. Jung Hye-sun was definitely disturbed by Hyun-woo’s restless movements. Therefore Jung Hye-sun turned her misgivings into hostility towards Kang Mi-su.

‘Deception is overflowing from that woman..... I heard she has a boyfriend but I can’t be careless. Hyun-woo oppa is clearly wonderful. I don’t know what but that fox might have an ulterior motive.’

This was clearly a misunderstanding. No, was it really a misunderstanding? Anyway, Jung Hye-sun felt an impending sense of crisis and approached Hyun-woo with a pleasant smile.

“Oppa, what are you doing? Lariette-nim should help me get the glasses for everyone. By the way, Unni’s (female term for older female) true personality is different from how you look.”

“Huh? Me?”

“Yes. I’ve only seen you a few times in the game but Unni seems really sly. I guess the trend in games these days is to reel in a man with a smile. Isn’t it easy to receive the help of a knight when you’re so pretty? Ah, I’m envious.”

Kang Mi-su’s face seemed slightly frozen by the end of her words.

“Hye-sun, those words are.....”

“Oppa, can’t you see that I’m trying to talk to Unni?”

Jung Hye-sun immediately glared at Bul-kkun who was sitting on the sidelines. Then Kang Mi-su smiled pleasantly at Jung Hye-sun and replied.

“Thanks for the compliment. But Hye-sun ssi also seems like an sly person. Although everybody is casually sitting with each other, you’ve stuck yourself to Hyun-woo’s side. Usually women who act like that are difficult to deal with. Honestly, I don’t know whether they’re sly or insensitive.”

“W-what?”

“Omo, did I make you feel bad?”

Kang Mi-su covered her mouth with her hand and deliberately acted like she was sorry for Jung Hye-sun. In fact, Jung Hye-sun had received the impression that Kang Mi-su was the beloved daughter of a rich family. She thought that stabbing her once would take care of it. Her impression was that Kang Mi-su had a careful personality. However, her personality wasn’t as nice as Jung Hye-sun thought. She worked at the reception desk of Global Exos where she had to deal with various guests who were spiteful or nasty. A sweet character wouldn’t be able to endure working there. In the game, she was also a leader of the autonomous group in Seutandal but she tended to be in the background compared to the rehabilitation members. She wasn’t the type that would not retaliate after being blatantly attacked. Anyway, Jung Hye-sun’s mouth dropped from the unexpected counterattack. However, she just laughed after a brief moment. Anger was building up inside her.

“Hohoho, I’m finally able to see your true personality. But I’ve known Hyun-woo oppa for a very long time. I’m in charge of Hyun-woo oppa’s store in Lancel village. Isn’t that enough intimacy?”

“Well, I’ve also known Hyun-woo ssi for 1 year. And we also travelled together in Seutandal. At that time, Hyun-woo ssi taught me how to cook and fight. If it’s that much then shouldn’t I be able to visit his house and celebrate?”

“T-that....he taught you to fight? Cook?”

Jung Hye-sun turned around and stared at Hyun-woo. Hyun-woo just looked back with a puzzled expression. He couldn’t understand why the two females were acting like this. But the only thing more unbearable than the two females was the rehabilitation members.

While Jung Hye-sun and Kang Mi-su were engaged in a psychological war over Hyun-woo, the rehabilitation members just continued eating while glaring at Hyun-woo.

“Bah, shouldn’t an older female match better with an older man?”

Meanwhile, the atmosphere was becoming more serious as the two female’s psychological warfare started deteriorating into personal attacks. Then a vein started popping on Kang Mi-su’s forehead when she heard that.

“Older woman? Omo, I didn’t know. Hye-sun ssi is younger than me? I thought you were older than me judging by your skin. Hye-sun ssi should go to a skin care place to take care of it. Should I introduce you to a good place I know?”

“What? Did you really say that?”

“What did I do?”

Kang Mi-su tilted her head to one side while pretending to be confused. Then Jung Hye-sun clenched her teeth and extended a wine glass to Hyun-woo.

“Oppa, drink this glass of wine!”

“Huh? What? Why?”

“Hyun-woo ssi, wouldn’t you prefer to drink from my glass instead?”

“Eh? But.....”

Hyun-woo became upset as he was attacked by wine glasses from both sides. Hyun-woo wasn’t so foolish that he couldn’t grasp the general atmosphere. The two women extending a wine glass at the same time was blatantly asking him ‘which one of us do you prefer?’ But Jung Hye-sun was a younger sister who took good care of his mother. Meanwhile Kang Mi-su was a woman who made his chest tremble. No, what type of man would be able to choose in this situation? How could he handle this?

‘Why are they fighting? And why am I involved?’

Hyun-woo looked at the rehabilitation members with eyes begging for help. However, the rehabilitation members just looked at him with cold eyes. In this situation, not even the rehabilitation members or their grandfathers would be able to make this dreadful situation cool down.

“It can’t be helped.”

Just as Hyun-woo was in a desperate situation, his mother pushed her wheelchair over and poked Jung Hye-sun and Kang Mi-su on their forehead. When the two of them looked puzzled, his mother smile gently and said.

“A woman shouldn’t make things so difficult for men.”

To his surprise, his mother was an amazing magician! That was all she said. The two women’s spirits, which was about to go crazy, calmed down. He didn’t know what type of magic was used. But Jung Hye-sun and Kang Mi-su scratched their heads before blushing and withdrawing.

“I’m sorry. We unconsciously.....”

“It’s nothing. You reminded me of my childish past.”

His mother smiled and stroked both of their heads. Just like that, the two quarrelling cats sheathed their claws. Jung Hye-sun and Kang Mi-su had no resistance against his mother. It was a powerful magic. His mother truly was amazing. However, Hyun-woo’s crisis wasn’t over.

“D-damn, so envious!”

“Even having such a wonderful mother.....so jealous, I can’t allow it!”

The rehabilitation members rushed towards Hyun-woo and forcibly made him drink. Hyun-woo sensed the critical situation and once again looked at his mother to request help. However his mother, Jung Hye-sun and Kang Mi-su were talking with each other and were in their own female world. Hyun-woo eventually received the critical hit from the chain of alcohol and beer. How much time had passed

from when the tragic incident caused by jealousy and misunderstandings started? Hyun-woo suddenly felt a soft hand on his head. He had collapsed from the combined attack of the rehabilitation members. When he looked around the room, he couldn't see Jung Hye-sun or Kang Mi-su. In the living room, there were the corpses of the rehabilitation members strewn all over the place.

‘Hah, I ended up drinking so much. Huh? Then.....’

Hyun-woo sighed and listened. After feeling the soft touch and the familiar smell, Hyun-woo realized that he was on his mother's knee. Then the voice of Gwon Hwa-rang was audible from the side.

“Pass him to me. I'll take him.”

“No, leave him here a little bit longer.”

His mother replied as she continued stroking his hair.

“.....But this house, did Detective Gwon help obtain it? Hyun-woo won't talk about it.....”

“No. I honestly wanted to help but Hyun-woo refused. Although he is concerned about his mother, he doesn't like receiving help. Hyun-woo gathered all the funds for the rental deposit by himself. Isn't it really admirable? It is uncommon for an adult of his age.”

“Please don't say that.”

“Huh?”

“Hyun-woo doesn't have a lot in common with adults his age? Yes, that's right. But it's not like that. The Hyun-woo I knew originally wasn't an adult. 6 years ago he was a spoiled child who didn't understand the world. I wanted the period where he could be a child to last longer. Did you know? I woke up in the ICU and heard your speech to Hyun-woo.”

“.....!”

“I knew at that time. The spoiled Hyun-woo was gone and he was going to be an adult.....because of me he has to become an

adult.....I knew. My heart was pained. Even now my heart is still hurting. Hyun-woo shouldn't have to be an adult. He should've matured at his own rate instead of being forced into it."

Suddenly, something fell on Hyun-woo's head. It was his mother's tears. His mother silently shed tears while firmly holding Hyun-woo's hand.

"How much.....all his troubles in the meantime..... How much....."

His mother's voice gradually became quieter. He felt a sharp pain in his chest. The hot feeling seemed to be welling up from his heart. However, Hyun-woo closed his eyes tightly and held back the tears. He swore, that day.....when his mother opened her eyes for the first time in the ICU. He would not cry in front of his mother again. He would only show a smiling expression.

Land of the Dead

Pa pa pa pa, pa pa pa pa!

Radun shook his bum as he ran across the field. The weather was good and no troublesome monsters could be seen. However, Ark's expression while riding Radun wasn't that bright.

"Ugh.....I still feel sick."

Ark frowned and shook his head. The effects of the nightmarish alcohol bombs caused by the jealousy of the rehabilitation members was still affecting him. In fact, Ark wasn't the type to become drunk easily. It was the first time the morning after had been a little difficult but it seemed tolerable after going for a light jog and sweating it off. Therefore Ark enthusiastically tried to start a new adventure.

'Damn those dolphins!'

The dolphins he summoned at the Dark Earth was the problem. He had already experienced it when heading to Dark Earth but riding the dolphins was the worst. Aside from that, it took an incredible amount of skill to stay on every time the waves surged. Every time that happened, Ark's stomach which he barely soothed would jump upwards. Although he didn't get seasick, he had to endure the motion sickness from the dolphins. There was also the throbbing pain in his lower back.

'No matter how free it is, I'll be worried if I have to ride the dolphins regularly.'

So Ark showed his superhuman patience and endured for 4 hours. Of course, there was the possibility of a land route after he left Dark Earth. However, the land route was surrounded by mountains so it would take him many times longer to get back to Seutandal. He would rather suffer from motion sickness.

'Anyway, I'm also affected by the alcohol. If I go on a drinking spree

with expensive alcohol then of course it won't be good for my body. Plus.....'

His face became hot as he thought of the psychological warfare between Roco and Lariette. Ark wasn't stupid. At the time he had been puzzled, but he understood the situation after the alcohol wore off. It was caused by Roco's misunderstanding.

'That Roco, what were you thinking.....?'

Ark mistakenly thought that Alan was Lariette's boyfriend. Although it would be difficult to understand when looking through Ark's eyes, no men would look at it objectively. No, these days Ark unexpectedly thought of Alan as a decent guy. He never asked directly but Ark was under the impression that Alan was Lariette's boyfriend. Naturally Lariette would have a handsome boyfriend with lots of money. Why would she be interested in Ark? Roco hadn't known the situation and unreservedly exposed her jealousy. But Ark was really puzzled by the situation that unfolded from her jealousy. Just thinking about that incident caused his face to become hot.

'I should avoid Roco and Lariette-nim for the moment.'

He didn't have the courage to face them.

"Uhh, I don't like it."

Then Racard's voice was heard from Ark's shoulder.

"Huh? What?"

"I don't like seeing that pig's face. That stupid pig!"

Racard stared at Buksil and murmured with dissatisfaction. Buksil turned his head and smirked at Racard. The reason Buksil was making that expression was because of his pet dog, Baekgu.

'It is an really surprising combination.'

In fact, Buksil had initially disliked it when Baekgu was made into his pet dog. Having a dog two times bigger than him? Even if he was tamed by violence, that was only relevant to Ark. He might've sworn

an oath of obedience to Buksil but it wasn't enforceable. Buksil wasn't assured by Ark's words. No, it was a wolf and a pig. He was lucky if the wolf didn't eat him. However, Ark had a very strong reason for making Buksil Baekgu's owner.

'Now they I've fulfilled his current wish for a subordinate, he won't ask for another one in the future. I can also reduce the money spent by 50% after giving Baekgu to Buksil.

Although they were travelling together again, Ark and Buksil's relationship was different than before. Even though Ark had previously been unpleasant to Buksil, this time it was necessary that he hire Buksil. It could be said that Buksil had been promoted from a slave to a free person. As the exclusive cameraman, Buksil had made a request.

"I won't do any labour."

"What does that mean? I'm giving you a monthly salary."

"Yes, obviously I would film the video if I receive a monthly salary. But I refuse to do any other type of labour. You'll have to pay me the same amount if you want other types of labour."

Buksil's request was natural in a capitalistic society. Of course, Ark was angry about paying for a position he normally got for free but he had no choice. He could threaten him but he had no way of knowing if it would keep working. At the end of their negotiations, Ark and Buksil managed to agree on a reasonably price for Buksil's work in gathering ingredients. Ark agreed to pay him 1~5 silvers within the normal asking price of the store for the ingredients after 30 days. That was an expense of approximately 1 gold per day in Ark's budget. Of course he had to pay for the labour, but thinking about buying the ingredients that he previously got for free made him upset. But the ingredients that Buksil gathered were necessary. Ark had to feed Buksil, Racard and Radun who needed an enormous amount of food after transforming. Thanks to that, it was easy to start lacking ingredients. When that happened, Ark's travel speed would decrease by half.

'Isn't there a method in which I can save money?'

Then Ark subsequently made Baekgu Buksil's pet dog.

"If you're my employee then why do I have to feed your pet for free?"

That was the reason why Ark put Buksil in charge of the expenses for Baekgu's meals. The situation had completely reversed. Ark charged 50 silver per day for Baekgu's regular three meals. In other words, Buksil ended up only receiving 50 silver for gathering the ingredients. The meal expenses matched the price of Ark buying the ingredients.

"I was tricked again. Damn, this is a lump not a pet dog!"

It was natural that Buksil thought like that. But after travelling with Ark, Buksil's thoughts changed by 180 degrees. In fact, Buksil had been most worried about whether Baekgu would listen to him. Unlike his worries, Baekgu obediently followed Buksil's commands. He thought that Buksil was better than Ark who would randomly hit him. In addition, Baekgu was quite useful. As a Wolrang he had some degree of fighting ability so he could be used as Buksil's bodyguard during fights. In addition, his keen sense of smell helped find ingredients. So even with Baekgu's meal expenses settled, they found so many ingredients that they could receive 1 gold for it. But it was the riding function that was Buksil's favourite. Just like Radun, Baekgu could be used as a mount.

Pa pa pa pat, pa pa pa pat!

Now Buksil could ride Baekgu instead of Radun. Ark hadn't expected it but having Baekgu as another mount was good. Thanks to Radun not having to carry Buksil, their travel speed became 30% faster.

'The result of entrusting Baekgu to Buksil is quite good.....'

'That's strange? Buksil is a nice fellow? Why does anger well up whenever I see his face?'

Racard tilted his head like he couldn't understand. He agreed. In fact, Ark also didn't like it. He couldn't understand why but it felt like Ark would be disadvantaged when Buksil was happy.

“What are you doing right now?”

Ark asked with uncomfortable eyes. Then Buksil laughed and raised the memory crystal.

“Huhuhu, do you want to see?”

“The memory crystal? Is there something unusual about it?”

“Nothing like that. Just take a look at it.”

Buksil activated the memory crystal and played the footage that was stored. The scene showed when they were riding the dolphins.

“What is this?”

“Just wait and see. Oh, it starts now.”

Ark turned his head at Buksil’s words but there was no special change. What was he meant to see? Ark made an uncertain expression until he noticed something strange. It wasn’t necessary to say again, but Buksil took the video using the magic projector. Of course, most of the footage was taken from behind Ark. But this video was different. There were also situations where the scene was filmed from in front, behind or on his left and right.

“How is it? Doesn’t it feel completely different?”

“What on earth is going on? You were behind me when riding the dolphins.”

“I applied the Vampire’s Eye.”

“Vampire’s Eye?”

“It is the skill I learnt after Karakul sucked my blood.”

Of course Ark also knew that. It was a skill which could use the eyeball to scout the area.

“I don’t understand what it has to do with filming the video?”

“I thought it was a skill that might be useful so I’ve been testing its various uses. Then I accidently found a new use for it.”

“New use?”

“This is it.”

When Buksil smiled and tapped the back of his head, one eyeball popped out. No matter how many times he saw it, it really was an uncomfortable scene. However, Buksil was already accustomed to it so it wasn't strange for him anymore. Then he took out a memory crystal the size of a finger and inserted it into the back of the eyeball.

“Ugh, that was slightly painful. Anyway, now the eyeball will act like a magic projector and anything it sees will be preserved in the memory crystal. Huhuhu, isn't it awesome?”

It was amazing. The idea of embedding the memory crystals on the eyeball was really great. Thanks to the Vampire's Eye, the video filming ability was really amazing. Buksil popped out his remaining eyeball and embedded it with a crystal. Then the two eyeballs with crystals in them circled around Ark. When the eyeballs were collected and the video played, the scene which showed looked like it had been filmed from a helicopter.

“So I can also edit the scenes taken earlier. Not only that. I can use the eyeballs to film battle situations taking place somewhere else at the same time to give a sense of urgency.”

“But how can you see when your eyes are removed?”

“The magic projector.”

Buksil laughed and took out the magic projector. Then he extracted the plug and inserted it into the back of his head.

“This allows me to see all the scenes shot.”

With the magic projector attached to him, Buksil laughed as he spoke. The eyeballs floating on either side of him also seemed to laugh. However, Ark didn't feel like laughing. Not a cyborg.....little by little he was becoming a strange monster.

“It is wonderful.”

“Isn’t it? Isn’t it? Having my blood sucked turned out to be a benefit.”

Baekgu snorted at Buksil’s exclamation.

“Huhuhu, this will revolutionize game videos. The broadcasting stations will drool over this.”

That was the reason for Buksil’s excessive excitement. Buksil had already earned a good amount of money from selling the rights to a game video. Although it was eventually discovered by Ark and they made a contract for him to receive 50% of the video income from now on.

“Now the possibility of an exclusive contract with the broadcasting station isn’t a dream. Ark-nim, please show me some good situations.”

Buksil did a thumbs up and laughed. Buksil had been forcibly compelled to become Ark’s exclusive cameraman and he had been seriously worried about his future in Dark Earth. He had contemplated if he should continue travelling with Ark in New World. But after thinking about it, he realised that it wasn’t so bad to stay with Ark. Anyway, he had raised his level quite a lot by conducting the sales for the items Ark sold. And he now received money for the ingredients he gathered and a pet that he normally would’ve never received.

‘Plus.....’

In fact, Buksil had a simple dream. It was to become the cameraman of a broadcasting station..... That was why Buksil had been carrying around an expensive magic projector which he used to shoot videos of Ark. And he was one step closer to his dream after seeing his video appear on the TV.

‘The broadcasting station is interested in videos of Ark. If I become his exclusive cameraman then my videos can appear on TV again.’

In addition, he would receive 50% of all fees. It was an opportunity to earn money and accomplish his dreams! Although it was sometimes an unfair and regretful experience, Buksil was also a little thankful to Ark. Thanks to that idea, Buksil changed his mind and

started to earnestly fulfil his obligations. But no matter how happy the pig was, the scene with the missing eyeballs still seemed like something from a horror movie.

‘The person appears satisfied by himself.....’

Ark scratched his head and clicked his tongue. If the videos sold well then Ark also received something, so it was good. But why? Seeing extracted eyeballs with crystals embedded and a magic projector attached to the head of a pig like a cyborg made his eyes water. Racard looked at it with upset eyes and muttered.

“Master.....I can’t stand looking at that guy.”

“Yes.....”

-You have entered the Land of the Dead.

<Explorer’s Knowledge: Hidden area discovery bonus (Skill Points: 10)>

You have entered a special area and the environmental effect is applied.

<Natural resilience -50%, Fatigue increases 20% faster. If fatigue reaches 70%, you will be afflicted with ‘loss of motivation to live’ and your attack, defense and movement speed will be decreased by 50%. This will be cancelled when fatigue is relieved>

“This is the undead territory?”

Ark confirmed the information window as he looked at the expanse of swamp stretched out in front of him. If it was the Land of the Dead then it should be infested with undead. There was still a considerable distance to travel before he reached the City of the Dead. Perhaps the undead only infested the city and not the areas surrounding it.

“Well, I don’t have to worry about the special area environmental effect.”

In New World, special environmental effects were applied depending on the region. The first time he experienced it was the 'cold wave' effect when he entered the snowy mountains of Seutandal. Then there was the 'heat wave' effect that was previously applied in the lava cave. However, it wasn't simply a penalty. Although Dark Blood would apply enormous penalties to general users, it was actually a bonus to Ark. If he explained it more deeply, the impact of environmental effects could be divided into two types.

First, it was based on attributes or skills. For example if someone with a ice attribute or a user who learnt ice magic was in the snowy mountains, their attack power or magic would become stronger. On the other hand, that skill or magic wouldn't be able to exert its full power in an area with a 'heat wave.'

And the second type was based on species. In a dense forest, general characters might have a bonus of 'natural resilience increased by 20%' but the forest elves would receive an effect like having their magic increased by 30%. On the other hand, dwarves would receive bonuses in underground areas such as dungeons. In the past, the rehabilitation members had spent several months in the underground labyrinth and received penalties such as 'depression.' If a dwarf like Buksil had spent that time in the underground labyrinth, they would receive a bonus instead. Thus the combat power of a user would change depending on the area they were in. That was the reason why Ark chose a human when he first started. Generally, humans weren't significantly affected by environmental changes. Humans might receive a bonus depending on the area but there was no significant penalty applied. They weren't particularly resistant or vulnerable to certain states. So it was possible for stable play. Of course, there were also areas where the environmental effect had nothing to do with species such as the Land of the Dead.

"This standard is nothing to worry about but....."

Natural resilience affected the rate at which his health recovers without the use of potions or magic. The 50% reduction was impractical but nothing to worry about since he could use food at the end of each battle for recovery. The same thing applied for fatigue. He actually had a separate worry.

“Baekgu, you stepped on some poo.”

“Eh? Uh, where? Ugh!”

Baekgu let out a cry of distress and retreated at Ark’s words. Then his foot entered the swamp and his health quickly decreased.

‘As I guessed.’

Ark grinned and nodded. In fact, Ark had been to a similar area before. It was a black swamp surrounded by dead trees with a nasty smell coming from it. In an area like this, the thing he had to pay the most attention to wasn’t monsters but the swamp. If he fell into the swamp then he would instantly be affected by deadly poison.

“Ah, I’m sorry. I thought it was poo but it was actually just mud.”

“Ah, Ark-nim! Heok, B-Baekgu.....! What are you doing? Detoxify him quickly!”

“Don’t you know? A herbal antidote costs 70 silver.”

Ark held the antidote and laughed.

“Damn, give it to me!”

Buksil snatched the potion and poured it over Baekgu. Thankfully, Baekgu was cured of the poison and he stared tearfully at Ark.

“Huk huk, I’m alive. Phew, Master-nim.

“Yes yes. I know, I know.”

“As expected, I only have one Master.”

The friendship between the wolf and the pig was deepening every day thanks to Ark. Anyway, Ark was able to determine that the swamp was poisonous from that small incident. However, the entire area wasn’t covered by swamp. There were fields between the swamp that three or four people could navigate through.

“But the path through the swamp is too complicated. If there are no monsters then I should ride on Radun.’

It was natural since Radun had a high immunity for poison. Buksil could also ride Baekgu so it wasn't a problem. Although he had no tolerance against poison, he could jump dozens of metres. Therefore the length of the swamp wouldn't be a problem. No, it was actually faster than riding Radun. How long had passed since entering the swamp? Then Baekgu who was ahead of him stopped moving and twitched his nose.

"Baekgu, what is it?"

"No, I smell rotting corpses all of a sudden."

"Rotting corpses?"

Ark looked around the area warily. This was the Land of the Dead. If there was the smell of rotting corpses then wouldn't there be undead monsters nearby? Indeed, they were already deep into the swamp. It would be around this time that any monsters would appear. However, Racard who had been scouting returned and shook his head.

"I went and looked but I can't see anything."

'Hmm, then the monster is not visible. Once Baekgu reacted to it.....'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

Ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

All of a sudden Radun screamed and fell into the swamp. Ark instinctively jumped off Radun and landed on the ground. He was able to grasp the situation after turning around. A rotten arm sticking out of the swamp had pulled Radun's leg.

'The monsters were hiding in the swamp?'

"Radun, release transformation! Dark Blade!"

Ark swung his sword and cut off the arm that was holding onto Radun. Meanwhile, Radun returned to his snake form and slipped around Ark's waist. However, Radun was barely able to sigh with relief before Racard screamed.

“M-master, the swamp.....!”

Ark’s face stiffened as he turned his head.
Bugul bugul, bugul, bugul.

It wasn’t just one area. All around the swamp, bubbles started appearing and some dark forms started rising one after the other. The stench of rotten flesh travelled over the distance as the shapes revealed the exposed bones, with maggots and leeches attached to their remaining skin. It was like the disgusting sight of food left to rot for three years! However, Ark wasn’t horrified by the monsters.

“Oh my god, this is.....!”

The number of monsters that rose from the swamp was 100! Using Eyes of the Cat, he confirmed that the name of the monsters was Mould Zombie and they were level 300.

“Damn, how am I supposed to fight 100 of them in such an inconvenient terrain?”

But the situation wouldn’t improve if he complained. He had to fight if monsters appeared. No, it was impossible not to fight.

Kuaaaa!

It was the amazing sight of Mould Zombies heading towards him. Ark quickly attacked using Dark Blade. But once the battle started, he realized the Mould Zombies weren’t as strong as he thought. They were level 300 so why did their health decrease by 10% every time he attacked them?

“What the? These guys are weak compared to their level?”

Ark thought about it and realized the reason why.

“That’s right, my dark attribute bonus is now 50%!”

Thanks to the Moon Piece, his Gift of Darkness had upgraded! The effect increased all his stats by 50%. After completing the <Wolrang’s Revenge> quest, Ark’s current level was 325. With the 50% bonus applied, his current level was 487. Of course the level

300 Mould Zombies wouldn't be a match.

"Okay, then the zombies' large numbers won't be a problem!"

He was now overflowing with confidence after realizing the situation. In addition, zombies were weak compared to other monsters. It was difficult for thoughts to process in their brain. So unlike other monsters, zombies just used their superior numbers for straightforward attacks. In addition, the movement their movement was slow so he wouldn't be hit even if he was careless.

"Hahaha, these guys are so slow, catch them!"

Racard was puzzled at first but quickly grasped the situation and become lively. Slow moving monsters were the easiest for Racard to deal with since he could fly in the sky. The reason users avoided zombies was because of their terrible appearance. However, Ark had seen movies about a murderer eating minced raw flesh so his nerves was stronger than that. The zombies weren't a problem.

"Okay, let's sweep them all up. Dark blade!"

Ark blindly used the skill and rampaged among the zombies. However, there was something Ark had failed to notice. There was a reason the zombies in the swamp were called Mould Zombies..... Ark only realized the meaning when one was defeated. When the Mould Zombie died, its stomach started swelling up before suddenly exploding. The maggots and leeches attached to the rotten flesh of the Mould Zombie flew towards Ark.

"Sheesh, I feel dirty.....Spirit of the Cat!"

Ark shouted and the form of a huge cat appeared above his head. The maggots and leeches collapsed after hearing the piercing scream. It wasn't just the ones on Ark. It was an advanced skill so all the leeches attached to the zombies that were in range collapsed. But it wasn't the leeches who only sucked 1~2 health that Ark had to pay attention to. He wasn't aware of it thanks to the maggots and leeches. When the Mould Zombie had exploded, a grey powder had scattered in every direction.



-The 'White Mould' of the Mould Zombies has encroached into the interior of your body.

<You will be affected by the abnormal state of the mould for 10 minutes>

"Huk, what is this?"

A baffling message had surfaced in front of Ark. Why was it suddenly a situation where he couldn't touch the Mould Zombies?

"What on earth is going on?' Skill Penetration!"

Ark used 'Skill Penetration' with a puzzled expression. It was an extra effect that he received when Eyes of the Cat advanced to the Master level.

-Eyes of the Cat (High Grade, Active): You have observed numerous enemies using the eye technique.

Thanks to the accumulated experience, you can know more information about your opponent. In addition, you can use your sharp intuition to figure out the opponent's skills. Thanks to the bonus of reaching the Master rank, you can see details of the opponent's skills.

<For 10 minutes + Night Vision, + Life Detection, + Weak Point Discovery, + Double Critical Chance. Mana consumption: 100>

Skill Penetration: You can confirm the details of the skill the opponent used. If you use it continuously then you can also determine the timing of the skills. Once activated, it will consume 5 mana every 10 seconds until cancelled or mana runs out.

In the past, he had no problems without this effect. In low level areas, the skills of a monster or chaotic player was obvious so he had no need to check the information window. However, high-level monsters would often use strange or unique skills. In that case, Skill Penetration was an extremely useful skill as it allowed him to figure out the information quickly. Once he used Skill Penetration, it

instantly showed him information about the mould.

-Mould Zombie racial skill: Mould spore scattering.

There are various parasitic moulds present in the interior of the Mould Zombie. When the host is injured, the parasitic mould will escape from the interior and propagate outside. Of course, the mould would also escape to the outside when the Mould Zombie dies. The mould spores have several different colours and can have different deadly poisons. If something living breathes in the spores then it would be a dangerous situation.

【 White Mould 】 The Mould with the weakest toxins. It will increase symptoms of 'hallucinations' for 10 minutes.

【 Green mould 】 A mould you should pay attention to. It will increase 'numbness' for 10 minutes.

【Purple Mould 】 A lethal mould. It will give the symptoms of a 'zombie.' The moment it is inhaled, the flesh will rot and you will die.

* It is impossible to treat using the common remedy treatments

'What is this? Mould spores? Damn, the mould zombies have parasitic fungi? They raise the mould inside their bodies? Then just breathing it in would cause an abnormal state? How can I avoid it? Isn't it like I have a 100% chance of dying if I inhale the mould? Wait? Didn't I breathe in the grey mould before? Isn't grey mould hallucinations? But nothing seems to have changed.....?'

"Master, what are you doing? Back, back!"

Then Racard shouted from behind him. Ark instinctively halted his sword movement.

"Eh? Lariette-nim, how.....?"

Surprisingly, it was Lariette smiling behind him.

"What are you saying Master? Are you blind? Steady yourself!"

"What?"

Kuaaaa!

Ark asked with a befuddled look. Then Lariette winked, ran up to Ark and bit his throat. It was a critical hit and his health drained away. Ark gasped with surprise and pushed Lariette away.

“T-this is.....heok! JusticeMan ajusshi, rehabilitation hyung-nims, Shambala.....!”

It wasn't just them. All the users and NPCs become acquainted with while playing the game appeared. After seeing their forms, Ark realized that he had been caught in an abnormal state.

“This is the hallucinations?”

Ark looked around with a stunned expression.

It was an absurd technique. Of course, the hallucinations weren't a big problem for Ark now that he noticed. It might've been a serious problem if Ark was in a party, but he was fighting alone. Therefore the only presences that approached him were those trying to kill him. But among the three mould types, there was one that would rot his flesh and cause death. If he inhaled it then it was a 100% fatal poison. Then Lariette's body which he injured a while ago swelled up and exploded. Ark rushed to cover his mouth but it was too late.

-The 'Green Mould' of the Mould Zombies has encroached into the interior of your body.<You will be affected by the abnormal state of the mould for 10 minutes>
--

It wasn't necessary to search for more information about this state. His body trembled and wouldn't move properly.

‘Damn, I made a mistake. If I get affected every time I kill one then how will I keep 100 of them? I should retreat for now.’

“Buksil, Baekgu, retreat! Escape outside the swamp!”

“Hik, understood. Baekgu, let's go!”

Buksil instinctively perceived that the situation was serious and hurriedly exclaimed. Baekgu could jump several metres with one breath and escape to the swamp outside. However, they were already surrounded by 100 Mould Zombies so it wasn't easy to

escape. Just as Baekgu was jumping, one of the Mould Zombie jumped and grabbed his leg. This caused Buksil to fall off.

“Ack, M-master!”

“Aaaaak, Baekgu, Ark-nim, help me!”

Buksil fell into the swamp and turned pale as he was immediately poisoned. The panicked Buksil was like a gift for the Mould Zombies who converged on him. But Buksil was already halfway to being a corpse after being trapped at the vampire’s estate. Buksil frantically jumped out of the swamp and ran around randomly. Baekgu followed after Buksil and muttered.

“M-master, please hold still for a bit.....!”

“Ack, I don’t know, I don’t know! Just help me!”

‘Dammit, Buksil will revive if he dies but Baekgu won’t.....’

Although Baekgu was a pet dog, he wasn’t a summon. He was a regular NPC who would stay dead if he died. But there was no way for Ark to help. He was still under the effects of ‘Hallucinations’ so he couldn’t even tell Buksil apart from the Mould Zombies. It would be different if he hadn’t caught the ‘hallucinations.’ Honestly, Ark wasn’t even sure if he could shake off the 100 Mould Zombies to escape.

“Huck, red mould!”

One of the Mould Zombies Ark attacked died and scattered red spores. He was screwed if he inhaled it! Ark quickly tried to withdraw from it. He was so surprised by the red mould that he stepped into the swamp and the Mould Zombies swarmed. Ark hurriedly left the swamp and drank the antidote but his health had already dropped from 70% to 40%.

‘There’s no choice. I’ll have to leave Buksil with Baekgu and try to survive myself!’

“Riposte!”

Ark pushed back the Mould Zombies with Riposte and ran. Since they scattered the mould spores every time they died, it was best to

use Riposte to push the zombies back. But it wasn't easy while Ark was still affected by 'Numbness.' He felt terrible every time he moved his body. It felt heavy every time he used his skills. Ark couldn't even move 100 metres before he was surrounded by the Mould Zombies again.

'Damn, it can't be helped. I have to reduce the number of zombies somehow!'

"Racard, return to my side and use Blood Lane!"

"Ah, yes. Blood Lane!"

At that moment, Racard's eyes turned red and blood gushed out from his mouth. It flowed up and covered a range of 10 metres like a rain shower. It was the descent of the cursed blood which caused a large number of abnormal states!

"That's it, now I've got you guys.....eh?"

Ark was delighted but then his eyes suddenly widened. Why was an 'immune' message flashing over all the Mould Zombies when he confirmed it with Eyes of the Cat? Ark swore after confirming the information.

'Ah damn.....I was too careless!'

Blood Lane was a skill which caused abnormal states associated with the mind. But the opponents were zombies. They were also filled with mould. It was impossible for a mental attack to affect them. The use of 'Blood Lane' put Ark into an even more serious situation.

"Oooooo, I'm dizzy. B-b....I need blood."

The penalty of using Blood Lane was that his movements and abilities would fall by 50% until Racard recovered the blood. Therefore Racard couldn't fly and collapsed on the ground. Then a mould zombie grabbed Racard. Then Racard drooled while looking at the hand and bit it.

"Oh, b-blood....!"

However, Racard only rejoiced for a moment before falling to the ground with nausea.

“Eh? Eww, disgusting! That damn blood has passed its expiration date!”

Naturally the blood of an undead wouldn't be fresh.

“What are you doing in this situation? Just eat you useless bat!”

“What did you say? Master was the one who told me to use Blood Lane...ouch!”

Racard had been stepped on by a zombie. Despite his evolution, the Mould Zombies were still 50 levels higher than Racard. In addition, his stats had fallen by 50% and he couldn't fly so he was no match for the zombies. The Mould Zombies firmly stepped on Racard and he quickly fell into a critical condition.

“Why aren't you different even after evolving? Riposte!”

Ark pushed the zombies back with Riposte and picked up Racard. The situation was still serious even after rescuing Racard.

‘Damn, what now? There is still a long distance before I can escape outside the swamp and I can't even move 100 metres.....using Sprint in the swamp is also difficult..... However, I can't fight earnestly against the Mould Zombies.....’

It would be dangerous if he was affected by the White Mould or Green Mould again. And the Red Mould guaranteed a 100% chance of death. Then he suddenly heard Buksil's voice out of nowhere.

“Ark-nim, this way!”

He turned around and saw that Buksil and Baekgu were jumping around and shouting in a cemetery. In fact, tombstones had sometimes appeared in the swamp. Most of those tombstones were on the plains, not the swamp. The place where Buksil had fled to was a place with tombstones gathered. But the atmosphere of the tombstone that Buksil was standing next to was slightly odd. It was three or four times larger than the other tombstones and a pale light

was surrounding it. The most surprising part was the Mould Zombies who chased after Buksil and Baekgu couldn't enter the area and were just circling it.

“What’s going on?”

“I’m not sure either. I accidentally ran to this place and then the zombies couldn’t enter.”

‘A safe zone inside the swamp?’

He didn't know the reason but it was fortunate that Buksil had found the place. He only had 200 health left. In this situation, it was impossible to avoid the Mould Zombies in order to escape the swamp. On the other hand, the tombstones were only 100 metres away.

‘The problem is how to get there.....’

It wasn't that easy to reach the tombstone. The swamp filled with poison was between Ark and the tombstone. Although there were stepping stones in the middle that he could use to move through the swamp, the dozens of Mould Zombies made a wall blocking him.

‘I only have 200 health left so if I fall into the swamp and become poisoned then it'll be dangerous. In addition, I have to avoid the attacks of the Mould Zombies. But there is no room to go back.’

Ark pushed the zombies surrounding him back with Riposte and clenched his teeth tightly.

“Okay, this is an risky venture. Moon light shadow!”

A ring of blue light scanned Ark's body up and down after he used the skill. Then the ring of light warped like pasta dough and changed into a person. Ark's body had been scanned and a replica produced. Then the Mould Zombies suddenly flocked to the copy of Ark.

“Oh, is has quite a nice effect?”

Ark instantly made two more dummies and ran to the stepping stones. Most of the zombies had gathered around the dummies so

only a few were blocking him. Ark pushed them back using Riposte and jumped across the stepping stones. Then one of the dummies which was being attacked couldn't endure anymore and disappeared in a flash of light.

Grrrrrrr? Grrrrrrr!

The Mould Zombies shrieked as they realized they had been deceived and rushed towards Ark.

'Damn, it was faster than I expected!'

Ark quickly jumped along the stepping stones.

"Ark-nim, hurry, hurry!"

"I know. Calm down and stop shouting wildly! That's it, I'm almost there.....huk!"

Ark only had a few stepping stones left. However, 10 Mould Zombies suddenly jumped into the swamp in front of him. That wasn't all. The Mould Zombies pursuing him from behind was rapidly closing the distance.

"Dammit, there's no point dying here. If this happens then I must rely on a plan of desperation!"

Ark threw his body and shouted.

"Jump!"

It was the 'Jump' skill attached to his item Wolf's Feet! Ark had only intended to use Jump to leap over the zombies. But was it because he made a mistake with the weight distribution the moment he jumped? When he used the skill, his thigh muscles momentarily swelled and he shot forward like a cannon. At the same time the 10 zombies quickly surged forward. Ark reflexively swung his sword.

Pepepepeng!

Something unthinkable occurred. The addition of his enormous speed increased his attack power tremendously and a few of the zombies were sent flying. Thus Ark managed to cross the swamp and arrived

at the tombstone.

“Whoa! B-brilliant!”

Buksil’s mouth dropped as he exclaimed excitedly. However, Ark was even more surprised than Buksil.

‘What, what the? This is no joke. I thought it could only be used to jump, but it could be used in such a method? No, now’s not the time.’

Ark turned his body and confirmed the Mould Zombies had followed.

‘They really can’t come here. The distance of that light is approximately a 10 metre radius? But why is this tombstone different?’

After verifying his safety, Ark examined the tombstone. Although it was bigger in size, he couldn’t see anything different between this tombstone and the others. But Ark could guess the reason after reading the writing on the tombstone.

-The saint ‘Betelgeuse’ lies here.

“A saint? Then the zombies can’t approach because of the power of the saint who lies here?”

But why was there a saint’s tombstone at all? He had those types of doubts but now wasn’t the time to think about it.

‘Although the crisis is resolved for the moment, the situation still isn’t good.’

They could rest and recover for the moment thanks to the tombstone’s power. However, Ark and Buksil were still surrounded by 100 Mould Zombies. Although previously they had been slightly scattered, now the Mould Zombies had completely surrounded the tombstone where Ark and Buksil were resting.

‘I have to look for a way to escape while my health recovers.....’

He couldn’t stay here forever. Ark’s destination was the City of the Dead which was just beyond the swamp.

‘I’ll have to experience this situation many more times while crossing

the swamp.....’

If his opponent was an ordinary zombie then he could somehow deal with the unfavourable terrain. However, he had to find some method to take care of the spore attacks from the Mould Zombies.

‘If I’m affected by hallucinations again then I can just close my eyes and use ‘Mind’s Eye.’ Although the ‘Numbness’ is troublesome, I can somehow handle it if I stay near the tombstone.’

The problem was the red mould. Before he escaped just then, one of the zombies he knocked down had scattered a red mould. It was fortunate that the zombie had been blown away thanks to Riposte, but it would be impossible to avoid being poisoned if it happened right in front of him. And the result was a 100% chance of death.

‘Although it is okay while I’m near the tombstone, I need some countermeasures if I want to move ahead through the swamp. But it can’t be recovered using a general remedy.....’

Ark sighed before he had a sudden flash of an idea.

‘Wait? Do I have to use a general remedy? What did the information window say again?’

It couldn’t be recovered using general remedies. In other words, he could treat it using special remedies. And what was a special remedy? Ark considered with a smile before getting up.

“Hah, why didn’t I think of that before?”

Along the Path of Stars

[**TL Notes:** In the last chapter, there was an information window which was about the colours of the moulds. The last colour was purple in the raw but that was the only time it was mentioned so I thought it was a mistake by the author and changed it to red. However, purple is mentioned in the chapter but it is a little confusing because it seems to be the same as the red mould. So I've changed information in the previous chapter to purple and just kinda thought of red and purple moulds as the same thing]

“Bang, bang!”

Awooo, Awoooo! Buksil and Baekgu jumped around while yelling.

“Noisy, please do it quietly. Dark Blade!”

“But we’re bored because there is nothing to do.”

“Bored? You dare say such a thing in front of me? Riposte!”

Ark rotated his sword and pushed back 10 Mould Zombies.

“Ark-nim, the Mould Zombie on that side is about to explode!”

Buksil exclaimed while filming the battle with the eyeball. When he turned around, the Mould Zombie who had lost all its health was swelling up like a balloon. The Mould Zombie was about to use its worse attack, Spore Scattering. Ark had been having a hard time against the Mould Zombies because of this attack. In fact, the slow moving zombies weren’t a big threat to Ark. However, he became defenceless while avoiding the spore attacks. The location was also in a poisonous swamp. The places where he could run away were limited. If he tried to avoid the mould attacked then he would be attacked by the other Mould Zombies.

‘However, having my health decreased is better than being poisoned

by the mould.'

If he was affected by the mould's abnormal states then the situation would become even worse. Furthermore, the zombie that was swelling up had a red aura around it. The red mould was the most dangerous one. Once inhaled, the poison would give him the symptoms of a 'zombie' and there was a 100% chance that he would die. However, now Ark just smiled.

'Before I would do everything to avoid it, even if I had to plunge into the swamp.'

Pepepeng!

The Mould Zombie finally exploded and red powder was scattered everywhere. Then the message window that appeared in front of him wasn't red which indicated a crisis, but was instead blue.

-The 'Red Mould' of the Mould Zombies has encroached into the interior of your body.

However, the toxin has died thanks to the powerful immune components before it could spread.

"Hahaha! Look at this you damn zombies! This is the power of medicine!"

Ark gave an elated laugh and looked at the Mould Zombies. Yes, this was what Ark had spent the last couple of days and nights studying! Although he had managed to protect himself thanks to the saint's tombstone, Ark had been in a gloomy mood. He hadn't figured out a way to deal with the spore attack. Fortunately, the saint's tombstone was a safety zone so he would somehow be able to handle the Mould Zombies. However, Ark's purpose wasn't hunting. It was to reach the City of the Dead through the swamp.

'I can't be driven into such a situation again in a place with no safe zones.'

No, it was still dangerous even with the safe zone. If it was other moulds then he could avoid it using the saint's tombstone. But it was

the end if he was poisoned by the red mould.

‘It doesn’t depend on level or ability. If my stamina and mental strength is high, my resistance to the other states would increase. But that doesn’t matter if I’m affected by the red mould. Even if I manage to get away from here, if the mould is found elsewhere then there is no way I can pass. But the mould can’t be cured using general treatment pills the way a common illness or poison can.....’

Ark was contemplating this when he recalled a similar situation. An illness which general remedies and even Holy magic couldn’t cure! Yes, he remembered the Galgin clan who received mass food poisoning in the Forest of Life and had been on the verge of death. And hadn’t Ark been the one to settle the problem?

‘Can I possibly solve it like that incident?’

Even poisonous pills were legal depending on the way it was used. Thus couldn’t even dog poo be used as medicine? Oh, was that a bit different? Anyway, Ark had learned the method to cure the Galgin’s food poisoning. Thanks to his <Food Worshipper>, he was able to determine the hidden effects of ingredients. So Ark then began his earnest study of moulds.

‘There are many experimental ingredients around.’

Ark started to hunt the Mould Zombies close to the tombstones. At this point, Ark still didn’t know what kind of mould would appear after the zombie exploded. Whether it was grey, white or red, Ark took measures to ensure his safety. After reducing the zombie’s health to 90%, Ark would withdraw and finish them off with arrows. Of course, The Mould Zombies couldn’t approach the tombstone so the safest way would be to just shoot arrows at them. However, Ark was still a beginner in archery. It would take forever to kill a level 300 monster. In addition, the arrows were for emergencies so he didn’t carry a lot around with him. But he got what he needed.

-Brown Mould Spores Pocket (Poisonous Herb)

The only place where the mould is able to propagate. Usually in dead animals or the undead, the parasites would develop within the
--

thin pockets. If the pocket receives an impact when the undead dies then it would break and the spores would scatter. Mould spores are extremely dangerous to living things, but the mould would die very quickly without pockets like these.

* Advanced Ingredient Identification Additional Information: A processing method can extract ingredients with immunity against the moulds.

‘As expected!’

Ark’s eyes lit up at the sight of the information window. Thanks to his advanced ingredient identification, he knew there was a possibility of creating a treatment against the moulds. So Ark spent one day finding the Mould Spore Pockets. In the past, he had used various methods of extracting ingredients to create the treatment for the Galgin. However, medicine wasn’t that superficial.

“Let’s try drying it.....ugh!”

The spore pocket was similar to a directionless germ weapon. If he touched it or dropped it onto the ground a little bit too hard then it would explode! So Ark had to kill countless numbers of Mould Zombies over and over. Ark used trial and error and gradually figured out the method of dealing with the spore pockets.

‘Hmm, the spore pockets won’t explode when soaked in water. They are dangerous ingredients so I should soak everything and keep it in water for the moment.’

Ark experimented on the spore pockets using various methods and recorded everything meticulously. But his mould research ran into a wall on his 2nd day. He had tried steaming, boiling, drying, soaking and other methods but he still couldn’t extract the required material. Ark felt the same feeling of frustration as scientists who failed in their research.

“Surely they has to be a way to create a medicine against moulds?”

It happened when Ark was engulfed with disappointment and despair. A lot of amazing discoveries in science or medicine were

found by coincidence. Nitro-glycerine was accidentally stabilized when the boat shook and a researcher created dynamite by accidentally mixing together a few chemicals. The miracle that occurred was also a similar coincidence.

“Yawn, can you really make a remedy? The methods you’re trying.....eh?”

Buksil had been yawning because he stayed up all night as the assistance but he suddenly became startled. While in a half asleep state, he had mixed different experimental ingredients together.

“What are you doing? Don’t you know we only have a few left?”

“I’m sorry. I.....”

“Eh? Wait, bring that over here.”

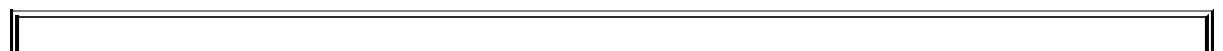
Ark checked the bottle that Buksil was holding in his hands and felt a sudden flash. The mixed liquid that Buksil prepared had dissolved the white and purple mould. But when the two liquids mixed together, the purple lightened and became indigo. Well, it was obvious when considering the normal colour associations. The problem was that the toxic element also changed colour.

‘There is also the method of mixing the moulds to change their nature!’

The accident had showed Ark other areas of study. Thus Ark concentrated on mixing the liquidized moulds.

‘Oh my god, it is so easy to separate them.....’

He spent so long searching for answers and it was right in front of his eyes. In fact, the answer was there when he saw the information window for the first time. He could make a final colour using purple, green and white. Mixing purple and white was indigo, green and white was teal and mixing teal with indigo made blue.....and the colours of immune messages was blue. Yes, the correct answer was blue. When Ark mixed the teal and indigo liquid together, an information window instantly appeared.



-You have made the blue mould disinfectant.

By combining the ingredients and extracting it, you have successfully created something to kill the mould. When this disinfectant is sprayed, you can stop the propagation of mould. If you take the medicine then the mould can't occupy your body for a certain period of time. However, the toxin isn't neutralized so if you take a large dose in a short period of time it can be fatal.

<Immunity to moulds +100% for 1 hour, the medicine can't be taken more than three times a day>

A new information window also appeared after he made the mould disinfectant.

-You have learnt the Food Worshipper's skill 'Knowledge of Poison.'

Knowledge of Poison (Beginner, Passive): In ancient times, the most effective method of curing poison was to use other poison. In addition, the snake's venom is also used as an antidote when bitten by a snake. You have studied the moulds and produced a disinfectant using this knowledge.

<The probability of obtaining a venom pouch from a monster has increased. By refining the poison within the pouch, it is possible to produce an antidote or immunity medicine. The success rate depends on the skill level, and there is a 30% chance of being poisoned if the refining of poison fails>

'A new Food Worshipper skill!'

Ark's mouth dropped at the sight of the information window. In fact, being poisoned was one of the most troublesome things for users like Ark who wandered around without settling down. In New World, there wasn't just one type of poison. The antidotes sold in stores could easily get rid of beginner's venom. But when the poison reaches intermediate or advanced level, users would have to try hundreds of different antidotes depending on the monster or area. That's why most users investigated what poison antidote was needed before they went to a new area. If there were a lot of poisonous monsters

in the area then sometimes the users would abandon the new area. Antidotes were relatively cheap, but if they drank it like water then the cost would pile on. The only profession that could solve the problem without wasting a lot of money were thieves. Since they also had poison skills, they obtained an antidote manufacturing skill at the beginning. Although thieves were sometimes unpopular, they were one of the first targets when composing a party. And now Ark could create antidotes thanks to his 'Knowledge of Poisons' skill.

'But it isn't that easy to make antidotes using Knowledge of Poisons.'

The medicines only made him immune to the poison for a certain period of time. He also had to obtain the poison pouches from the monsters so mass production wasn't easy. But wasn't there a chance of turning it into a lucrative business?

After he succeeded in creating the mould disinfectant, the situation went through a 180 degree change. The combat strength of the Mould Zombies was very low compared to their level. There was no reason to be afraid of them without the moulds. No, he was actually rather thankful.

"Ark-nim, another four have appeared behind you!"

When he turned around, he saw that some more Mould Zombies had crawled out from the swamp. He only discovered this later, but a fixed number of Mould Zombies would appear after a certain amount of time passed. If he couldn't deal with them in the time limit then the number of Mould Zombies would increase. They were constantly respawning zombies. Even though it was just like a fearful scene in a zombie movie, Ark only saw the zombies as experience.

"Hmm, they are easy to deal with but it will become more difficult if the numbers keep on increasing. Buksil, how many zombies are there now?"

"50 zombies have appeared this time."

Buksil examined the zombies with his floating eyeballs and replied.

"The number has increased quite a bit. Shall I reduce it?"

Ark avoided the Mould Zombies and shouted.

“Racard, lure them all to one place.”

“This way~ this way~ you stupid stiff zombies!”

Racard gathered the Mould Zombies together like a dog herding sheep. Once all the zombies were in one place, Ark held his sword tightly.

“Demonic Opening, Elemental sword fire attribute!”

Gwisal’s sword vibrated intensely and flames appeared around it. Ark lifted his sword, leaned his body at an angle and shouted.

“Okay, Jump! Dark blade!”

Ark’s inner thigh muscles seemed to expand a few times before he was propelled forwards. Ark literally tore through the zombies as he used Dark Blade. Ark had developed a new method of dealing with the zombies.

In fact, it would’ve been better to use Flash when they were all gathered but this place was a swamp. It wasn’t the type of terrain that he could carelessly flash around 20 metres. Even if he had an antidote for the poison, the skill would be cancelled if he fell into the swamp. So he came up with combining the skills Jump and Dark Blade. Although it was difficult when he first used Jump, through trial and error he had discovered the correct method. Jump was a skill that would move Ark 10 metres. It was his posture that determined which way the skill would send him. If he lowered his body then he would jump vertically.

Ark expanded on his previous attack of jumping upwards and swinging down. Thanks to the tremendous speed and height, his power increased enormously. And the probability of Drastic Measures also increased by a lot. Once he didn’t have to worry about the moulds, Ark swept through the Mould Zombies and experience came pouring out.

“Huhuhu, how is it? This is the ‘Adol’ technique!”

Thanks to the absurd attack which increased the chance of Drastic Measures, the amount of experience and items he was able to obtain would increase even more! Unfortunately, Jump was a skill attached

to an item so he couldn't register it as a chain skill with Drastic Measures. However, the effect was so wonderful that Ark called it 'Adol.' Apart from Flash, it was the birth of his second ranged attack skill. Ark was different from before and wiped out almost all the Mould Zombies. But Ark's attacks had a time limit.

[-There is 59 seconds left for the effect of the Mould Disinfectant.]

'Sheesh, only this much?'

"Racard, I'll have to clean up the situation. Gather them again."

"Okay. Hey, why are you so stupid? Come over here!"

Racard lured all the Mould Zombies who followed with a stupid expression. Ark used his remaining mana to continuously use 'Adol' and sliced the remaining Mould Zombies to pieces. All the dead bodies exploded and scattered moulds of various colours everywhere, but it seemed more like a congratulatory fireworks of spores. If he killed all the Mould Zombies then more wouldn't respawn for a while.

[-Your level has risen.]

After killing almost 100 zombies during the 1 hour, he had risen 1 level. Ark returned to the tombstone and confirmed the outcome of his battles.

"Character information window!"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +450		
Fame	11,725 (+ 500)	Level	334
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of the World Tree, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero		

Health	5,255 (+150)	Mana	5,295
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	652 (+28)
Agility	829 (+55)	Stamina	1,002 (+20)
Wisdom	118 (+10)	Intelligence	1,031
Luck	112 (+60)	Flexibility	136
Art of Communication	66	Affection	62 (+10)
Resilience	421		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		153	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20, Defense +40			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available			
Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.			
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available			
Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%			

Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense

"The hunting ground is not that bad....."

Ark looked at the information window and sighed. After developing the disinfectant, he had spent 10 days hunting at the saint's tombstone. He was level 325 when he entered the swamp and he had gained 9 levels by the 10th day.

"If I could use the disinfectant continuously....."

That was why Ark felt regret. The poison disinfectant could only be used 3 times a day. Since the disinfectant only lasted one hour, that was 3 hours in total. There were 8 hours in a day so he would be defenceless for the remaining 5 hours. It was actually amazing that he managed to gain 9 levels in 10 days. Once he started hunting, he managed to eliminate all of the Mould Zombies. But without the disinfectant he would've managed to gain 20, no 30 levels.

“Isn’t it impossible to grind more levels as long as there is mould here?”

When considering the amount of experience earned per hour, it was a viable hunting ground. However, that value fell when he took into account the fact that he had to take the disinfectant. In addition, the items that the zombies dropped were also bad. In other words, the experience and items wasn’t worth the level. Yet there was a reason Ark had stayed there for 10 days.

“Buksil, you collect the items with Radun while Baekgu will collect the corpses of the zombies.”

“Yes.”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

While hunting against a time limit, Ark had no room to pay attention to items. So he left the gathering of items to Buksil and Radun. Buksil would collect the items on the plains while Radun looked for the ones in the swamp. Ark lifted one of the Mould Zombie’s corpses from Baekgu’s back and took out his dismantling knife. Baekgu’s body trembled and he hurriedly avoided the place. The ensuing scene was the reason his back became chilled. Ark used his knife to peel off the flesh from the zombie’s corpse.

-You have succeeded in gathering ‘Skin of the Dead’ using Leather Extraction.

-You have succeeded in gathering ‘Heart of the Dead’ using Butchery.
--

This was the reason why Ark stayed at the saint’s tombstone. It was in order to extract the items from the undead! They were necessary ingredients he needed to complete his Necromancer’s Immortality Pill recipe. But the areas where the undead appeared in Seutandal and the continent were limited. Then he had completely forgotten about it during the Nakujuk’s invasion.

‘This is one of the best places to obtain the necessary ingredients for the Necromancer’s Immortality Pill.’

That was Ark's first thought when he saw the zombies. Of course, it wasn't that easy to collect the ingredients even with a lot of zombies. His Leather Extraction and Butchery skill was still low so he could only get one item for every three or four he killed. Ark had to collect 2000 of the skin and heart, so gathering 4,000 items in total meant he had to kill approximately 12,000 zombies.

'It sounds like a joke after calculating the numbers. But I can't give up the chance to make a grade A recipe. I have to complete it even if it takes a lot of time. I can't miss this chance since I don't know where else I can encounter a large number of undead.'

Thus Ark spent 10 days in the gloomy swamp thanks to this resolution. But now it had reached the limit.

"Ark-nim, it has already been 10 days. Are long are we going to be stuck here?"

Buksil said with a sigh. Racard and Baekgu also made pained faces and complained.

"All I can see is swamp and zombies."

"This bad smell.....my nose is so numb and my head hurts."

"Same with me Master. This damp humidity is really difficult to handle."

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak?

Radun looked like he couldn't understand the words coming from Buksil's mouth. But Ark also felt the same. Normally he roamed around everywhere or was in a dungeon. But Ark had spent the last 10 days hunting at the saint's tombstone. Although it ensured a safe haven, his breath clogged up every time he logged into the game to see the same scenery.

'I've gathered 1,200 skins and 1,300 hearts.....I've finally collected more than half. But this is the entrance of the swamp. Won't I have to continue hunting zombies while passing through the swamp? In addition, I can always stop and come back. It's not necessary to stay here much longer. I've also stocked up on many antidotes and disinfectants so I should leave soon.'

Ark checked his bag with a nod before standing up.

“Okay, the re-application time of the disinfectant has also ended so let’s leave.”

“Huh? We’re leaving now?”

Buksil happily got up. Ark’s party finally left the saint’s tombstone they spent 10 days resting at and continued into the swamp.

“Let’s keep an even pace. I’ll go to the front.”

Buksil hummed at the thought of leaving the swamp after 10 days. Naturally the Mould Zombies sometimes appeared and interrupted the party. However, Ark had already mastered the battle techniques against them and they just submerged into the swamp again. He discovered that the moulds wouldn’t spread if the Mould Zombies sunk into the swamp after dying. In fact, that was the reason Ark finally left the saint’s tombstone. The duration of the disinfectant was 1 hour. If he ate it continuously than 3 hours was the limit. Then he would be defenceless for the remaining 5 hours! But considering the sheer size of the swamp, it would take more than 3 hours to find the City of the Dead. So after various experiments, he had figured out a way to kill the Mould Zombies without making them spread their spores. However, he wasn’t 100% confident when applying this method. So he had to move forward before the number of zombies in the swamp increased and overwhelmed him. But when had things ever progressed as planned? Sometimes there were circumstances when the mould ended up spreading and he was forced to use the disinfectant.

‘Damn, I thought it wouldn’t be a problem but it’s harder than I thought. I’ve already used two disinfectants. There’s still 3 hours left until morning so I’ll be defenceless for 2 hours if I eat one more.’

It was only possible to use one more disinfectant in the 3 hours! Ark started to feel uneasy. They’ve been wandering in the swamp for 5 hours and he still hadn’t found the City of the Dead. In a situation like this, Buksil also started to feel some misgivings.

“Ark-nim, what will we do if we can’t find the City of the Dead before

you have to use the disinfectant again?”

“It can’t be helped. We’ll just have to exit the game and return when the time is over if that happens.”

That was the last method Ark thought of. In a situation where he couldn’t use the disinfectants, he couldn’t take the risk. However, this plan had a fatal problem.

“T-then what about Baekgu?”

He could cancel Racard’s summons but Baekgu would be left in the swamp by himself.

“.....If we die then the results will still be the same. I just have to find a way before that happens.”

Ark sighed and replied. Then Baekgu looked at Buksil and spoke in a tearful voice.

“M-Master! I hate moulds and I don’t want to be left alone.”

“Don’t worry. If he can’t find a way then I won’t leave you alone! Ohhhhh, search Eyeballs! Baekgu, you use your sense of smell to search as well!”

Buksil shouted with a desperate expression and used his eyeballs. Ark looked at Buksil and Baekgu and had a thought.

‘It’s strange, didn’t the swamp seem smaller when I looked at it on the map? If I moved in a straight line from the tombstones then we should’ve already exited the swamp and reached the City of the Dead.’

“Ah, Ark-nim! There’s another glowing tombstone in front of me!”

Buksil exclaimed after scouting the area with his eyeballs. When he moved in the area Buksil indicated, a saint’s tombstone soon appeared.

“Another saint’s tombstone? Then there is one saint’s tombstone at every fixed distance? Anyway, it’s lucky. We can rest here until morning and then move on.”

“I’m glad Baekgu.”

“Yes, Master. Huk, it really is fortunate.”

Baekgu replied in a tearful tone and ran to the saint’s tombstone. However, Baekgu tilted his head to the side with a puzzled expression when he arrived.

“Eh? This is.....?”

“Eh? What’s this? Fire and stripped down japtem? Who was camping here? Has someone else come here?”

Buksil muttered while exploring. However, Baekgu shook his head.

“No, our smell is the one left behind.”

“What? Hik, come to think of it.....?”

Buksil touched the tombstone with surprise. A graffiti that said ‘Buksil was here’ was recorded on the tombstone. Although it was shameful writing on a tombstone..... That concept wasn’t a problem for Buksil.

Anyway, the situation became clearer thanks to Buksil’s scribble.

“Get out of the way!”

Ark arrived after Buksil and checked the tombstone.

-The saint ‘Betelgeuse’ lies here.

‘Betelgeuse.....it’s definitely the previous tombstone. What on earth is going on?’

Ark opened the map with a puzzled expression. Ark’s group had headed straight to the east after leaving the tombstone. He had checked the map while walking yet they had ended up in a circle. After checking the map again, the unconfirmed area was still obscured. Then somehow they had got their directions mixed up and was walking backwards?

“Ark-nim, what is going on?”

“Well.....damn, I want to ask that too.....”

Ark worried about it for a while before standing up again.

“Racard, fly as high as possible and pay attention. If something changes then tell me immediately.”

This time Ark ran across the swamp in the opposite direction. After running for 4 hours, the tombstone once again appeared in front of them.

“Again! Betelgeuse’s tombstone. Racard!”

“I don’t know, there were no changes. The direction also didn’t seem to change.”

Ark’s face became even more serious at Racard’s answer. He moved in two different directions yet ended up at the same spot. This couldn’t be a coincidence.

‘We’re stuck in the swamp. Oh my god, I only became aware of it after ten days.....’

The swamp located in the Land of the Dead was one giant labyrinth. Now the Mould Zombies wasn’t the problem. He was stuck in a labyrinth without any markers or clues. The only way to escape this place was to die and resurrect in another location.

‘Wait? Markers or clues?’

Ark considered something and looked at the tombstone. It was the only glowing tombstone in a dark swamp. And he always ended up back here despite the direction he moved in. Then wasn’t the tombstone itself a clue for escaping? No, it definitely was. In fact, Ark had been doubtful from the moment he saw the tombstone. He wandered why there were tombstones in a swamp. But if somebody made this tombstone as a marker to escape the swamp?

‘There’s no doubt about it. This tombstone is the only thing without an explanation. Obviously this tombstone is a reference point. The problem is what the reference point means.....’

Ark went over the tombstone carefully. However, he couldn’t find anything no matter how hard he looked. Ark had thought it was

strange so he checked the tombstone when he first found it. But he never found a secret passage or item.

‘Damn, does that mean I can’t reach the City of the Dead if I don’t solve the tombstone’s secret? The key to entering the City of the Dead is the tombstone..... But what type of hint is it? This ridiculous trap appearing out of nowhere..... Huh? Wait.....hint?’

Something flashed through Ark’s head.

-Heaven and earth, life and death, find the place where they are reversed and follow the hero’s star path.

It was one of the phrases he heard when he received his class change quest. And the place to complete the quest was the City of the Dead. Then wouldn’t this phrase be a clue to reach the city? A big problem could be solved if he thought carefully. The place where life and death is reversed was clearly about people changing to the undead.

‘Yes, then I have to follow the hero’s star path to escape from this place.....’

The hero’s star path? Did that mean follow the constellation? But he couldn’t even see the sky while in the gloomy swamp. Thanks to that, his dark attribute bonus was applied even in the daytime.

“Heaven and earth is reversed.....hero’s star.....what does that mean? Wait? D-don’t tell me.....?”

Ark had a flash of inspiration after thinking for a while.

“Buksil, do you know anything about constellations?”

“Huh? Ah, no.....”

“Sheesh, do some studying!”

Ark declared coldly and exited the game unit. Then he sat down in front of his computer and accessed the internet.

‘There’s no doubt about it. Saint Betelgeuse, I heard about it when I was a child. If I remember correctly.....’

Ark searched the internet for the name Betelgeuse. He confirmed that his guess was correct when he saw the information.

-Betelgeuse (α Orionis) a red variable star that can be easily seen.

Yes, Betelgeuse was the name of a star in the Orion constellation. All of Ark's questions were answered with that information.

'That's it. The saint's tombstone contains the name of an Orion star. Then the meaning of the rest of the phrase is automatically solved.

The hero mentioned in the class change profession quest was Orion, son of Poseidon and the one who drove the monster away from Chios Island. If he swapped the sky and earth around, then the tombstone would act like a star on the ground and the mystery would be solved. Now the only thing left was following the hero's star path. However, that was also solved after reading the rest of the information on Betelgeuse. The first tombstone that Ark had found in the swamp was Betelgeuse's. Then that was the starting point. And Betelgeuse was the brightest star in the Orion constellation. If so, then the next saint's tombstone Ark had to find was.....

'The other bright β Orionis star, Rigel.'

Ark immediately searched for information on Rigel. Rigel was located in Orion's left foot. If he applied Orion's constellation to the swamp using Betelgeuse as a marker, he would have to head in the direction of Rigel.

"That's it, I found it! Hero Maban's puzzle has been solved!"

At first, he had been quite puzzled but now he felt a sense of accomplishment. This was the reason why people enjoyed brain puzzle games.

"Hyun-woo, have you finished for today?"

While Ark was skipping around his room, his mother's voice could be heard outside the door. His mother was living with him so he couldn't lie to her anymore about making money from the game. Well, luckily his mother seemed to have received a hint from Gwon Hwa-rang so she didn't protest. She was just worried when he played the game

for an excessively long time. Ark opened the door quickly and grinned at his mother.

“Not yet. I need to go back to do something important. But it will take quite a bit of time.”

“Please don’t go overboard.”

“Yes, don’t worry. I’ll still exercise every morning.”

Ark replied before entering the game unit again.

“Huhuhu, Hero Maban, you can’t catch me with this degree of riddle. I’ll solve the rest of your puzzle and seize your legacy!”

Ark’s eyes brightened as he entered New World. The person who entered the unit wasn’t Hyun-woo but Ark.

City of the Dead

“A village!”

Two days passed before Ark managed to leave the swamp. After using the disinfectant at the appropriate time and sweeping through the zombies, Ark finally arrived at his destination. It was safe to say that Ark had come to the right conclusion. By applying the Orion constellation to the swamp, he moved from Betelgeuse to Rigel to Bellatrix and so on.....the names on the tombstone appeared in the order of brightness. It took an average of 2 hours to travel between tombstones so the threat of the Mould Zombies wasn't a problem. Then Ark finally landed on the last area which corresponded with Orion's sword. When looking at Orion, there is a nebula which includes hundreds of irregular star. This dark area was where his final destination, the City of the Dead was located.

‘Unfortunately I couldn't gather all of the necessary ingredients from the swamp.....’

But the immortality pill wasn't urgent at the moment. He wanted to find Razak and complete his profession change quest. He could return to the swamp after completing the quest and slowly gather what he needed from the Mould Zombies. Anyway, an information window appeared after he saw the village.

-City of the Dead

You have located a suspicious place where darkness and death spreads over the land. The place you have found in the swamp are ruins where ancient secrets have been kept for hundreds of years. There is an astonishing number of undead resting here. They are different from the frozen undead that are frequently seen in Seutandal. Why the undead are living together is still unknown.

<Explorer's Knowledge: Hidden city discovery bonus (Skill Points: 20)>

20 skills points were given after his difficulty finding it! Just like the information window described, the City of the Dead was actually ruins. There was the wreckage of ancient castle walls scattered everywhere.

The residents? Monsters? At any rate, the majority of the NPCs were dead but some of them were skeletons or zombies. To be precise, zombies and skeletons are different from the dead. They literally had the impression of 'someone who just died.'

'How will I enter?'

Ark hid in a suitable place while looking through the city using Buksil's Vampire's Eyes. The information window regarding the residents wasn't red so they weren't hostile. But it wasn't blue which indicated a favourable relationship. It was grey which meant the NPCs could take both sides.

'They are grey so they won't be excessively aggressive.....'

He had learnt from his troubled experience in Dark Earth. What guarantee did he have that he wouldn't experience hostility in this village? Of course, there was the method of using 'Stealth.' However, Ark's purpose wasn't simply sneaking around. He needed to find Razak, renew the resurrection point and look for Hero Maban's hidden legacy. It wasn't possible to do that while limited by 'Stealth.'

'I need a method which won't be suspected by the residents. Ah, that's right.'

Ark deliberated for a short moment before asking Buksil.

"Buksil, have you learnt the sewing skill?"

"What does Ark-nim think of me?"

"Huh? What does that mean?"

"Sewing is a basic skill for merchants. A merchant's first step is cutting fabric and selling it as clothes to make a profit."

“Stop talking about trivial things and just tell me if you can do it.”

“My level is advanced, advanced!”

Buksil arrogantly stuck his stomach out.

“Okay, then please make me some clothes out of this.”

“Ark-nim, you had fabrics? Hik, w-what it this?”

Buksil panicked and withdrew. Ark had taken some leather out of his bag. However, this wasn't ordinary leather obtained from animals. It was the leather of the Mould Zombies. Yes, the greatest difference between Ark and the residents was their appearance. Ark's group had a good complexion compared to the tattered and rotten bodies of the residents. Then the method was simple. Wouldn't he become similar if he wore clothes made out of the leather of the Mould Zombies? However, Buksil just shook his head.

“You want me to make clothes out of this?”

“You can't do it?”

“No, I can but.....”

“Shut up and just do it.”

Buksil started tearing up at Ark's growl and started stitching the leather together. Although Buksil wanted to die, the skin of the dead was still leather. Anyway, he used his sewing skill to make some clothes.

“These trivial clothes were made with advanced sewing skills. It is humiliating.”

-The Dead's Leather Clothes

Armour type: General Leather

Defense: —

Durability: 10/10)

Weight: 2

User restriction: —

It was a costume which made the wearer look like a zombie. A rotten smell drifted from the ragged clothes. It would be easy for him to be mistaken as an undead wearing these clothes. No, before that anyone who wore these clothes would be considered insane. It certainly wasn't clothes that sane people would wear. Since the leather was skinned from a corpse, the leather drooped in several places. In addition, there were poisonous moulds stuck on several places. The thought of wearing such terrible leather clothes was enough to cause goose bumps.

'This looks a little intense even for me.'

However, he had wasted 30 'Skin of the Dead' making the clothes. Ark swallowed down his nausea and wore the clothes over his armour. Soon a plausible undead was created.

'Ugh, why does this uncomfortable feeling seem to pierce through to my skin? Although I feel dirty, this will definitely fool the undead.'

"Okay, create three more identical clothes."

"Hik, do I have to wear one of those three?"

"Huh? Why else would I waste valuable leather on creating three more sets of clothes? You are the cameraman."

"C-can't I just stay here? The village isn't far so using my eyeballs to take the video won't be a problem, even with the zombies around. Then Baekgu can also stay here."

Buksil said with a stutter.

He had a good point. In the old days, Karakul was able to use his eyeballs for surveillance so it wouldn't be a problem if Buksil was separated from him. So there was no reason for Buksil to come along.

If the situation worsened and they had to run away, he would have to laboriously collect the Skin of the Dead again in order to make another set of clothes to enter. If he didn't have to create it for Buksil and Baekgu then Ark would save 60 leathers.

“Okay, if there are any problems then you can contact me with the eyeball.”

When Vampire’s Eye rose to an intermediate level, it gained a communication function. Well, it already wasn’t normal with the video shooting method attached to it. Gaining an additional communication ability wasn’t that big a surprise. Therefore it was convenient even if Buksil was far away. Ark nodded and Racard quickly interrupted.

“M-Master, do I have to go too?”

“Do you want to fight?”

.....They were expected words. So Ark who was wearing the leather clothes and Racard headed towards the city.

‘Won’t I see as soon as I enter? Whether they are tricked or not..... I’ll have to look carefully at the atmosphere.’

Ark quickened his pace as he approached the entrance of the village. Although it was difficult to tell the entrance thanks to the ruins, there were dead soldiers standing guard like in most villages. If the guards showed a hostile reaction then he would quickly flee. Was he lucky? Although they lingered a bit, the guards didn’t show any hostile reactions. No, it was like they had no interest from the beginning. The guards just opened their mouths and stared into the sky absentmindedly.

‘What the, what is this? Then these disgusting clothes weren’t necessary?’

He wore those clothes for that exact purpose, but now he felt annoyed after he was ignored. But he still wasn’t careless. There was no evidence that the guards were affected by the clothes but there was also no evidence that the guards weren’t affected by the clothes. There was no guarantee how they would react if he took off the clothes.

‘Well the first checkpoint has been passed.’

Ark sighed with relief after entering the village. Just like the guards, the residents didn’t pay any attention to Ark and Racard. However, Ark felt a different

type of tension. It was natural since there was no feelings of life in the city. Although there were many dead people wandering among the debris, it was so quiet that he would be able to hear a needle drop. They seemed more like dolls made of paper or wood. Once again he realized that it was truly the City of the Dead. The dead just continued whatever they were doing in silence. Some of them were clearing the wreckage in order to write something on the ground while others were repeatedly piling up logs. Some souls continuously bumped their head against a wall and muttered something. It was like a documentary of psychiatric patients.

“..... What the, these guys? They’re strangely terrifying.”

Racard grasped the hem of Ark’s clothes like a young child and muttered. They were even causing fear in a vampire.

‘How will I find Razak and Hero Maban’s legacy?’

Ark explored the city while looking through the rubble at each corner. During his walk, he found many skeletons with a neutral alignment but no Razak. After 2 hours, Ark arrived at a shattered building in the centre of the village.

‘I can’t get a sense of where to look. My pet won’t move from his summoning location without a good reason. Razak is definitely somewhere in this place..... Then should I look for Hero Maban’s legacy first?’

Look for the forgotten battlefield and let the scattered pieces of the moon from the top of the best seat lead you to the resting place.

That was the second clue that he received. There was no reason to think about it. The forgotten battlefield was obviously these ruins. And obviously the best seat was the highest building in the ruins, so didn’t he have to climb it in order to look for the moon markings?

‘Is the tallest building the tower?’

Ark had occasionally seen a tower while wandering around the place. There was no doubt that the tower was the highest place in the village. Since it was in a broken state, it wasn’t an easy task to

climb the tower. The stairs had large gaps in them so he was force to just climbing gear to scale the wall. After an hour, Ark finally reached the top of the tower.

“Now, shall I look for the scattered pieces of the moon?”

After climbing the tower, he could see the city by looking down. But no matter how hard he looked, he couldn't see anything related to the moon.

“What the? Shouldn't I find it here?”

Ark started to feel annoyance as he looked around. He had finally reached the City of the Dead after much suffering. He couldn't find any signs of Razak and a seemingly easy clue regarding his profession change quest had once again turned into a maze. Razak and his class change quest was definitely here but he wasn't able to find any clues after hours of searching.

“Do I have to keep roaming around the village until I find something?”

Ark climbed down the tower and sighed. After walking towards a emptier part of the city, he suddenly saw the dead lining up on a street.

‘Eh? What's this? Those dead people?’

Ark became curious and headed towards them. The dead were gathered in front of a pile of trash.

-Fossilized bone

The unearthed bones of an ancient monster. The intended use is unknown.

-Old and Rusty Shield

Armour type: Steel Shield

Defense: 30

Durability: 7/10

Weight: 30

User Restriction: Level 150 Warriors

It is impossible to guess what this shield is made out of. The overall shape and embossed patterns on the surface seem to indicate that it was a high quality item. However, even an excellent blacksmith can't get rid of the products of time. It has been neglected for so long that the iron has oxidized. No warriors would entrust their lives to this shield.

'They're similar to the items that the zombies in the swamp dropped.'

He had collected 70 such items from the Mould Zombies. But he honestly didn't know if they would be bought at any stores. If he calculated it by the scrap iron then he would be lucky to receive 1 silver per kilogram.

There was no space in his bag so he just kept the ones worth 1 silver. But why were the dead lining up for such items? Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

"Going to buy.....are you going to buy.....?"

The dead stall owner spoke in a testy voice.

'Eek? What the? This was a business? No, the dead are able to talk?'

Ark was unable to understand the sudden situation. After Ark was quiet for a while, the dead person immediately spoke in an irritated voice.

"You're buying.....if you don't buy.....then can you leave?"

"Oh, no, that.....you can talk?"

"What the, just now.....are you making fun of me?"

"Of course not."

Ark hurriedly shook his head. The city was so quiet he never imagined the dead could talk. He also had preconceived ideas from

the dead people he saw in Seutandal. If the dead could talk then the situation was different. Wouldn't it be easier to find clues regarding Razak and his quest? Therefore it was necessary for the dead to have a good impression of him.

"If you're not going to buy.....then get lost."

The dead store owner said as he raised his hand. Ark thought for a moment before speaking.

"Everything that you're selling looks incredible. My mind didn't know what it wanted so I unknowingly just stared at it."

"Huhu.....you have a good eye."

"If the items are such good quality that wouldn't they be expensive?"
But I don't have enough right now....."

"Boo.....for a poor person.....I have no business."

The attitude of the dead person changed 180 degrees when Ark said he had no money. So a poor person was even ignored by the dead? Apart from that, the dead was lined up to buy miscellaneous items? What good was this stuff to the dead? No, hadn't he seen in movies that the dead was buried with riches because they would use it in the afterlife? Probably the most engaged people in this city were the dead who engaged in trade. Ark muttered to himself before he suddenly heard Buksil's voice coming from the eyeball.

"What are you saying? I'll run a business even after I die. That is the nature of merchants. Ohhhh, we're really seeing the ultimate merchant! How wonderful. I respect.....ouch!"

"What the, noisy.....an eyeball?"

The dead merchant coldly stared at the eyeball after it spoke. The atmosphere became hard to figure out.

Ark kicked the eyeball and started talking again.

"Please don't pay attention to it. Anyway, I heard that someone I know is in this city. Have you ever heard the name Razak?"

“Razak..... I’ve never heard that name before.”

“So have you seen anything that resembles fragments of the moon? Do you live in this area?”

“My memory.....I don’t have any regarding that.”

The dead person shook his head at Ark’s questions. Ark was unable to find a clue again and sighed before turning around. Then he suddenly heard a thud, thud, thus sound coming from his foot. The dead merchant frowned and spat out curses.

“Damn it! Again..... That bastard.....if he doesn’t stop then I’ll kill him!”

Everybody was already dead but the merchant had a really serious expression. Ark stopped and turned back around.

“What’s wrong?”

“This noise.....I keep on hearing this noise.....I’m going crazy because of it!”

“Who is making this noise?”

“I don’t know..... It seems to be the one stuck in the underground prison.....he was silent until a few months ago.....then all of a sudden he started making these noises..... Thanks to that, I’m about to go crazy!”

The dead merchant yanked at the hair on his head and looked at Ark.

“Ah, that’s right..... You.....didn’t you say you liked my goods? How about this..... The person making the noise.....can you make him stop? If you do.....my collection containing the best items....I’ll give you one..... I’m really going crazy because of this noise..... Because of that noise.....guests won’t come here!”

“Huh?”

Ark asked with a befuddled look. There was a ringing sound and the information window appeared.

-The Noise coming from Underground.

For the last few months, a merchant operating in the City of the Dead has been hearing a noise and it is causing him enormous stress. If you remove the source of the noise then the merchant has promised to give you one of his goods.

<Difficulty: ???>

‘What the, I can get a quest from the dead as well?’

Ark read the information window with an absurd expression. Honestly, he didn’t care about the miscellaneous items he would get as a reward.

‘Still, the quest doesn’t seem that hard to settle? If I complete the quest then I might be able to get more information. If he gives me the best item from his collection then I might even receive an item for my summons.’

Anyway, Ark had nothing to do except searching the city so he accepted the quest.

“I understand.”

“Ohhh, thank you..... This is a key I previously found..... It is probably used to open the door to the prison..... Quickly go and hit that guy.”

The dead merchant said as he handed Ark a rusty key. Ark received the key and went underground to the basement. Although some of the place had collapsed, he was able to pass through. He followed the underground passage down for a short time before some prison bars appeared. The sound was clearly audible as the key opened the prison doors. The sound rang through the whole dungeon. Ark became a little tense at the noise.

‘The fellow making this noise for several months....is he an undead?’

Ark pulled out his sword and entered the prison. How far did he proceed? Ark was just walking past a jail cell when he felt something

suddenly come to the bars. There was a crunching sound as something grabbed the iron windows and shaking it.

“Huk, what, what the? How surprising! That is the cause of the noise!”

Ark withdrew and raised his sword. All of a sudden, Radun became astounded and crawled up Ark’s arm to listen to the noise.

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

“What the? Radun, what is it?”

Ssak ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak?

Clack clack clack! Clack clack clack clack clack!

There was a familiar sound coming from the cell Radun was examining.

“Eh? This sound....?”

Ark winced and focused his attention on the prison. Surprisingly, the skeleton shaking the iron window.....was Razak!

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak’s face was thrilled as he saw them. But that impression immediately disappeared because of the insincere interpreter.

“I believed that Master would come.”

Racard picked his nose and murmured.

‘If he was here then it would be impossible to find him by searching the village.’

Ark met Razak and listened to the summary of his situation. The identity of the noise annoying the dead merchant for the last few months was Razak. Thanks to the special familiar’s contract, the summon couldn’t leave the place they were bound to. The place Razak was summoned from was the underground dungeon. After Ark used Pledge of Death, Razak had been forcefully recalled. From then on, Razak had waited in this dark and lonely place for Ark’s to come. However, after a few months.....that’s right, it had already been a month since he parted from Razak. And one month in reality corresponded to

three months in New World. Razak felt increasingly uneasy as time passed. Was he abandoned? No, would Ark even be able to find him? Razak was unable to sit there quietly after feeling so uneasy. Although he knew it was impossible, Razak used his whole body to try to escape. That noise reached the merchant who started feeling hysterical.

‘This guy…….’

Unlike Ark, his summons felt 100% of the physical pain. But despite that, did he keep on running his body into the wall to return to Ark? In addition, it was also because Ark died and Razak shared his health that Razak was forcibly recalled. But it took one month for them to finally reunite. He felt sorry towards Razak when he thought about it. Then Racard snorted and muttered.

“Heung, are you normal? Why would you crash into the wall? And Master shouldn’t praise him. He’s living in a place like this. I always knew he had a dark side.”

“So you were in this cell when the contract initiated? But why a prison cell?”

“Well, let’s see. He died in prison. No doubt he was an incredibly bad person.”

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak glared at Racard and protested. After a moment, Razak started looking gloomy and sighed. According to Racard’s interpretation, even Razak didn’t know why he was an undead in this place. He lost all memories of his past once resurrected as an undead. He had a few fragments of memories but they were vague like a dream.

“As expected, you are a bad guy. Didn’t you die in prison? You’re probably not even a former knight.”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

“Are you completely sure about your memory of being a knight? Don’t make me laugh. Why should I believe it?”

Clack clack clack, ttadadak?

“Noisy, are you just remembering the positive things about yourself? You should address me with honorifics in the future. Huhuhu, the quality of my body is different from yours who lived in a prison. It doesn't matter if I believe your words about being a knight. Now I am an Earl. Earl Racard. Hahaha, come and show respect. I am.....ouch! What the? You just hit my head, my head.”

“Then don't act like that. Do you want me to hit you?”

“Damn, you only hate me.”

“That's because only you behave hatefully. Is that any way to treat a colleague you haven't seen for several months?”

“I don't care.”

“If you say one more word then you'll earn the whip.”

“Ouch! Okay, don't hit my head again.”

Ark hit Racard's head before approaching Razak.

“Anyway, it is lucky that I've found you. “Now we have to register you.”

He used the keys received from the dead merchant to open the door but Razak couldn't leave. Ark had to install the Summoning Port and registration in the prison cell.

‘So one thing has finished.’

Now the only thing left was to look for clues regarding his profession change quest. But he had one thing to do before that. Although it is a simple one, a quest was still a quest. He neatly resolved it so shouldn't he receive compensation? Ark left the dungeon and went back to the dead merchant. Then he experienced something truly absurd.

“That.....What are you saying..... I requested something?”

The dead merchant asked with a puzzled look.

“Eh? No, you asked for my help a short while ago. The noise from underground was driving you crazy. Weren’t you going to give me something from your collection if I stopped the noise?”

“That.....I don’t know anything about that..... You’re interfering with my business.....get lost.”

“What, what the? What about my reward?”

“Ah, you’re really loud..... The noise you’re making..... How many times do I have to say it.....? I have no such memories..... So I shouldn’t have to pay you and become a beggar.....”

“You don’t like it? Are you done speaking?”

Ark grabbed the dead merchant’s collar. Ark was kind to NPCs. It was the same even if the NPC was an undead. However, the reason Ark was friendly to NPCs was because it was profitable. If the quest NPC was trying to get out of giving him compensation then he had no problems stabbing them. The merchant became puzzled by Ark’s bloody attitude.

“What the! What are you doing.....? Ah, understood..... I understand..... okay..... Although the noise is unpleasant, this is still a business.....take this. Don’t bother me anymore or else I won’t stay calm.”

The dead merchant looked through his pockets and threw a small coin.

-Dead Coin

A copper coin made hundreds of years ago. But these coins weren’t used as money. In other words, they’re commemorative coins made in honour of the dead. It appears to have no value as money in modern times.

-The quest <Noise coming from the Underground> has been completed.

The quest instantly completed with the dead merchant threw him the coin. He completed a quest yet he received no experience and not

even one copper coin?

“This, is he treating me like a beggar?”

“Ark-nim! Behind you, behind!”

Buksil suddenly burst out as his eyeballs had been scanning the area. When he turned around, he saw that some guards were approaching.

“Son of a bitch!”

Ark ground his teeth together and pushed the dead merchant away. Of course he didn't forget to collect the Dead Coin which fell to the floor. It was still a reward no matter how trivial it was. Who wouldn't become angry?

“Let's leave, that damn bastard!”

Although he avoided the shop because of the guards, his anger wasn't easily soothed. A NPC trying to get out of giving a quest reward? What kind of nonsense was that? Then Racard who had been talking to Razak sighed and approached.

Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack? Clack clack clack clack.

Ark felt like he had been slapped on the head at Racard's ensuing interpretation.

“Master, Razak said that the dead merchant wasn't trying to trick you.”

“Wasn't trying to trick me?” Didn't you see it? He definitely asked me for help.”

“That.....the merchant really didn't remember the deal.”

“He couldn't remember something that happened only 10 minutes before?”

Razak sighed at Ark's words and explained. When someone died, they would go to heaven. Well, he actually didn't know what the heavens was like in New World. However, those with a strong lingering regret when dying would be unable to go to heaven and

become an undead. And the dead living in this city had significant regrets. That's why the merchant continued to sell japtem and the guards defended the city for hundreds of years. In Razak's case, his regret was 'losing the target of his loyalty.' That's why Skull swore his allegiance to Ark the first time he was summoned. If Ark hadn't summoned Razak then he would probably still be stuck in the underground prison with his regrets.

"The dead currently exist here but they've repeating their lives for hundreds of years."

Yes, that was the problem. The dead were an existence of the past. Ark might share the same space but he was a living human being of another time. So while the dead remembered the other existences from the same time as them, they couldn't remember Ark who was from a different time. It was the boundaries between the living and the dead! The only exception to this was Ark and Razak due to their bond. Ark felt empty after hearing the explanation.

"What the? Then accepting the quests means nothing?"

It was fortunate that he even received the coin from it. Anyway, he had no intention of staying here long.

"Sheesh, I found Razak so I should quickly complete my profession quest."

Ark complained and stood up. However, the dead merchant's quest actually gave surprising benefits to Ark. The first one was that he found Razak in the underground dungeon. The second benefit was that he figured out a way to complete his profession change quest.

'I was wrong. The best seat didn't mean the highest place.'

Ark had thought that the City of the Dead was merely ruins. However, he heard from the dead merchant that an ancient king used to rule here. The dungeon and castle were located in the city centre. Yes, the best seat wasn't the tower but the symbolic King's throne. Ark stood up and immediately went to the castle. Unlike the underground dungeon, the upper levels had a lot of guards gathered. These soldiers were there to prevent the intrusion

of outsiders. Ark was able to understand these soldiers after listening to Razak. The guards outside were to prevent outsiders entering the city. Meanwhile, the soldiers lingered in order to protect the closest thing to their king.

Ark used 'Stealth' to break into the upper levels. When he reached the top floor, the hall where the King's throne was located appeared. On the throne, the King was sitting blankly with a crown on his head.

'Even the King has lingered here? What is the place he is staring at? Does that place have anything to do with the King's lingering spirit? What is the King's regret that is keeping him on earth? Eh, that is?'

Ark followed the King's gaze with curiosity and his eyes widened. The place the King was staring at was the front balcony. From that angle, he could see the top of the tower and a panoramic view of the city with a lot of debris.

'If that building wasn't broken.....?'

The moon. While debris was scattered all over the place, a building shaped like a crescent moon was visible. Perhaps the building would form a full moon if it was intact. And the shape could only be seen if looked from above this building.

'This is why the clue said to look for the scattered moon at the best seat!'

Ark opened his mouth, checked the location of the building and sneaked out. When he checked his mouth and visited the place, the building seemed to be a temple. It wasn't that big but a strange object occupied the middle of the temple. It was a huge sarcophagus with a dead warrior holding a sword carved into it.

"Sarcophagus..... This is slightly unexpected? Didn't the clue say to find the resting place after following the scattered pieces of the moon? If so, then I have to search this place for another clue.....but the only thing here is the sarcophagus."

"Hehehe. Ark-nim, look at this."

Ark had been scratching his head with confusion. Then he turned

around as he heard Buksil's voice. There were three holes present on the warrior carved into the sarcophagus, one on the two eyes and one on the mouth. Buksil's two eyeballs were hovering over the warrior's eyes and turning around. The sight of the eyeballs on the warrior's solemn face was quite funny.

"Please stop that. I'm trying to search."

Ark muttered before he realized something strange.

'Wait? That is a sarcophagus. If this temple was built to house the sarcophagus then why would there be holes in the eyes and mouth? Perhaps.....?'

A scene he had previously seen in a movie about the Middle Ages appeared in his head. He couldn't remember exactly, but the movie was about the ancient Greeks or Romans. In the movie, three coins would be placed on the eyes and mouth of a warrior who died in battle before he was placed into the sarcophagus. During those times, the people believed that the dead needed to pay 3 coins to cross the river and enter the other world.

"Ohhh, that's why a person should study these things. "Hey Buksil, come out of there!"

"Ugh, you don't have to grip so hard! Those are my eyeballs!"

Ark pulled the eyeballs from the sarcophagus and tried to insert a coin. But the hole was too small for his coin to be inserted.

"Eh? What the? These coins don't work? Then.....?"

Ark retrieved the small coin he received from the dead merchant earlier. Didn't it make perfect sense? Ark once again viewed the information window regarding the Dead Coin.

'The Dead Coin was a commemorative coin for the dead!

The problem was that he needed 3 Dead Coins to unravel the sarcophagus' mystery. However, that problem was easily solved by Ark.

"Huhuhu, this is a chance to get revenge on the merchant!"

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

“Aaaaah! Again.....it is starting again.....that stupid noise.....!”

The dead merchant yanked at his hair furiously as the floor started ringing with the noise. Then Ark approached and asked quickly.

“Shall I settle the problem?”

“Huh? You.....who are you?”

As expected, the dead merchant hadn't remembered his earlier argument with Ark.

“You don't need to know that. Do you want me to solve this problem?”

“Oh, really.....! Then I'll ask you..... Get rid of that noise.....I'll give you an item from my best collection..... Oh, you'll need this key to get there..... Huh? I clearly left that key here.....”

“The key is not needed.”

Ark accepted the quest and quickly headed to the dungeon. Yes, Ark was planning to trick the dead merchant who had short term amnesia. The merchant couldn't remember anything related to Ark. In other words, he couldn't remember that Ark had solved the noise problem. So he made Razak go back to the dungeon to make noise while he went and accepted the quest from the merchant. Of course, the merchant also forgot that he had given the quest in the first place. Therefore wouldn't it be better if he grabbed the merchant's collar and threatened him from the beginning? Thus Ark continuously threatened the dead merchant. However, he wouldn't receive the quest if he used the 'Intimidation' skill. Ark started to understand that the merchant's reactions was a part of the system. Although he originally thought he wouldn't receive a quest reward, this quest reward was designed to be received when Ark treated the merchant in a horrible manner. If the merchant refused then he would just have Razak make noise again. If he wasn't threatened using Intimidation then he would throw something.

“This.....you really seem like a beggar.....how pitiful.....take this

and get lost.”

This time the dead merchant threw a bone. He had repeated the quest many times as the merchant threw random items. Skin of the Dead, a broken jug, a lost shield.....they were all items that had been thrown. After Ark repeated it 10 times, he finally collected 3 Dead Coins.

‘Phew, the repetitive quest in order to receive goods has finished. Now I’ve collected all three. I can insert the coins like a vending machine and find a clue.....’

Ku ku ku ku ku!

After inserting the three coins into the warrior, there was a mechanical sound and the sarcophagus started vibrating. Then it moved sideways as a dark space appeared. Suddenly a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-The Underground Crypt.

You’ve found the underground crypt hidden in the City of the Dead. The residents here feared death and worshipped it since ancient times. Everybody was equal despite good or bad, wrong or right, or status. So this temple was created in the heart of the city as a refuge. Once again, this is a resting place for the dead. If a person with greedy desires steps foot in here then they’ll have to pay the price.

<Explorer’s Knowledge: Hidden dungeon bonus (Skill Points: 10)>

Seek the scattered pieces of the moon and find the resting place.

That was when his second clue for his profession change quest was solved.

Rhapsody Melody

“That is everything.”

“Thank you.”

Roco handed a cup of water to the sweating Sid and laughed. Sid drank as he looked at the front of the store and muttered.

“By the way, 1 gold is typical for Ark-nim.”

“It is surprisingly popular.”

While Ark was elsewhere, they were in charge of the store’s operations. And the store did a monthly exhibition. This time it was a 1 gold sale. All the merchandise spread on the low bench was 1 gold.

“Items with low durability that can’t be used for long.....”

Sid turned pale and shook his head. The items Ark was selling for 1 gold was fairly amazing. Although a lot of the items’ original prices were under 1 gold, they were magic items that could be used for 50 levels. The reason he could sell it for 1 gold was because of the durability. The repair skill that people initially learnt sometimes failed. When that happened, the maximum durability of the items would fall. In addition, people also learnt techniques to strengthen the rating of the item which would also decrease durability if failed. Those were the items that Ark aimed at. If they constantly failed with repairing or upgrading, the durability would fall to 1~5.

Ark had Sid go and buy those items which were being sold as scrap metal in Nagaran. Sid frankly couldn’t see a way to sell those items. However, there was one thing Sid hadn’t considered. Of course, it wasn’t possible to use such equipment in battles. But no matter how much durability was left, they still had the appearance of a perfect magic item. They could be worn as costumes. Users were willing to spend 1 gold on deluxe costumes that they could wear.

“Baby, do you want me to buy you this wonderful magic armour? I’ll be proud to buy it for my girlfriend.”

“But aren’t you lacking money at the moment?”

“Huhuhu, Ark’s store is only selling it for 1 gold.”

“Ah, you can buy the magic armour for 1 gold at Ark’s store!”

“Everybody, Ark’s store is selling items for 1 gold!”

Jana was also advertising at the entrance of the village. Therefore, the store was booming and its contribution to the village quickly increased every day. While Ark was wandering around the City of the Dead, his assets were steadily recovering.

‘Ark-nim always sees everything he starts through to the end. I’ve become very successful as a merchant.’

While Sid was thinking this, Roco counted the box and tilted her head as she asked.

“The amount of resources this time is slightly less than the previous trade.”

“That’s because the situation in Nagaran is quite a mess these days. Every guild is buying weapons and consumables in bulk so the prices have jumped. If I purchase goods at this time and sell it in Seutandal then we’ll only receive a loss.”

“The atmosphere in Nagaran isn’t good?”

“The explanation is a little long.....”

“It’s okay. I need to know in case I have to go to Nagaran.”

“As Roco-nim knows, Nagaran has been quiet because the 5 coalitions that occupy it, including the Hermes Guild, are very powerful. If one of them moves then the other Lords would all act to stop them.”

“Hrmmm, then what is happening now?”

Roco asked with a curious look. Although several exhibitions were

held in the store, Ark's plan was to organize a trade route between his businesses on the continent and Seutandal. And he left that work to Sid.

Sid ran the Continental Commerce Firm in Nagaran. It was a battlefield where a lot of users always gathered. The characteristic of high level users was that they lost all their starting naivety. Most users when they started the game would treasure even 1 copper. If they could receive a few more silvers then they wouldn't hesitate to carry their heavy bags to the next village. But at the late level, users tended to ignore silver and focused on gold. If their bags were heavy with japtem only worth a few silvers, they wouldn't care about market price and would just sell it at the nearest store. To Ark it wasn't any different from throwing money on the side of a road. This tendency was particularly strong in Nagaran. So Sid received the special mission to buy such items cheaply and then he would hand it to Ark's store when the quantity was sufficient. Those goods would then flow onto Seutandal and so on.

It was the trade route linking Nagaran, Lancel and Seutandal! The triangular route envisioned by Ark was being put into motion. However, the triangular trade route still wasn't firmly established. That's why they planned the exhibitions just in case. Anyway, now the situation in Nagaran couldn't be separated from Ark's store anymore. So it was natural that Roco as the store manager would pay attention to Nagaran.

"It started to crumble when the Hermes Alliance hired mercenaries to conquer Seutandal and failed. The former balance was broken. So I don't know what will happen in the future as all the coalitions have made moves to expand their military armaments."

"But is the Hermes Alliance very large? The Alliance lost 3000 gold so wouldn't that affect them?"

"That's a little complicated."

Sid explained.

"In fact, that is equivalent to the profit the Hermes guild receives from Silvana. 3,000 gold is a lot of money but it isn't that much to the Alliance. But the problem is Jewel and Duke."

It was determined that the failure to conquer Seutandal was Jewel and Duke's fault. If Jewel hadn't been so greedy and asked for help immediately then the situation would be different. Therefore the guilds belonging to the alliance requested the two of them to withdraw from the guild. However, Raiden was a pioneer and just ignored the Alliance's request. But Hermes was an alliance, not a guild anymore. Currently 8 guilds belonged to the Hermes Alliance. When the alliance's leader ignored their request to kick out Jewel and Duke, their dissatisfaction accumulated. In the end, some guilds withdrew from the Alliance and even joined up with other coalitions. Since the scale had grown so large, management had become difficult.

"A lot of the regular customers at the Continental Commerce firm are members of the Hermes Alliance. That's how I learnt this information. Although the information was hidden, a person with knowledge will know all of it."

Sid gave a creepy laugh.

"Anyway, the 5 coalitions in Nagaran are secretly preparing for war. Although I don't know when it will start, the sieges between established Lords is different from before. If the conditions are met, the war can begin without the Lord's permission."

That's why the prices of equipment and consumables in Nagaran were inflating. However, Sid just spoke like he didn't care.

"Well, whatever. The prices of various precious metals have gone down instead. That's because each coalition are selling their precious metals in order to buy war supplies. So most of the resources this time are precious metals. You can sell it to users who have learnt the engraving or enchantment skill or you can sell it in Seutandal for a profit."

"You must've gone through a lot."

"Gone through a lot....."

Sid scratched his head as he recalled the past before saying.

"In fact, I thought it was slightly unfair when I first received the job at

the Continental Commerce Firm. But it was actually quite okay after I've experienced it. I can use the public funds from the Continental Commerce Firm to buy the [Safe Travel] scroll and I'm also safe from chaotic users."

On the surface, the Hermes Alliance was the one who received the tax from the Continental Commerce Firm. Therefore the Hermes Alliance was obligated to protect the firm. Since Sid was trading under the flag of the Hermes Alliance, chaotic users wouldn't dare recklessly attack him. But in fact, more than half of Sid's travels were under Ark's directions. The Hermes Alliance was only helping Ark's businesses. If Raiden was aware of this then he might just end up fainting. Anyway, thanks to that Sid was able to focus on business for the last few months.

"Huhuhu, fortunately I've reached level 300."

"Level 300?"

Sid was the foreign division manager of the Continental Commerce Firm which was growing larger every year. He gained 2~3 levels with every difficult, successful deal so it was natural. Sid then indicated a horse and cart with a satisfied look.

"And I bought a carriage a short time ago."

"Isn't this a carriage given to the Continental Commerce Firm?"

"I used all my money to buy it. The most expected thing for a merchant is a carriage. If I use the carriage then the maintenance costs would be paid for by the Continental Commerce Firm. I'll save the pennies for my own store in the future."

Sid only held a handful of acorns but he had strong aspirations.

"Then I'll give this to you and go. I have a lot of places to visit before returning. Ah!"

Sid suddenly remembered something and rummaged through a bag in his carriage. The item that appeared from the bag was an old harp.

“I accidentally received this harp during a trade a short time ago. Roco-nim, aren't you a Minstrel? It didn't know if you would need it so I just brought it. How is it? I don't know that much about music instruments.”

Antique Harp

It appears to have been neglected for a long time and using it in this state will just cause it to be broken. But a person with its discerning eyes will be able to see its true value. It has an elegant streamlined body and the optimal placement for a beautiful tune.

It must be the musical instrument which a great commander has poured his heart and soul into it. If the harp is used by ignorant people then it would be a waste of this masterpiece.

Just like described, the harp was very old. But Roco's heart was captured with one glance at the harp. When she changed to a minstrel, the harp was given as a quest reward so she had handled it for a short while. Compared to other musical instruments, it was quite heavy and expensive so she had changed to a different instrument. But there was a type of quaint charm to it, just like its name. She was particularly impressed with the image of a woman carved onto the handle part.

“This appeals to me!”

“I knew it.”

Sid grinned and nodded.

“I bought it for 5 gold and was planning to sell it for 6 gold. But I'll give it to Roco-nim for 5 gold.”

“Eh? That's so expensive. You want 5 gold for a worn-out and broken harp? I'll give you 2 gold for it.”

“I won't go below 3 gold.”

“Why are you doing this?” You said you bought it for 5 gold but weren't you somewhat cheated? Don't you think it is worth more of a

discount?”

No free gifts existed in Ark's group. They followed the example of their leader Ark in which 'they would even pick up a stone and sell it!' That was the motto of the group! However, Roco and Sid saw each other every week so a heart-warming bargaining scene occurred.

“Phew, I understand. I'll give you a discount. Roco-nim is now formidable. 2 Gold 40 silver. I won't reduce it anymore.”

“Okay.”

The harp's price was knocked down to 2 gold and 40 silver.

“Sapjil, Ulmeok, put these goods into the warehouse and figure out the price for it.”

“Yes Store Manager!”

Roco directed the store assistants and went up to the 2nd floor.

‘Hmmm, there is no important work to do these days so it has been quite boring.’

In recent times, Roco had quite a lot of free time. She had only been busy when Ark was trying to reach his rental house deposit. However there was no need for that anymore and her education of Sapjil and Ulmeok was finished, causing them to tremble with fear and shudder at the sight of her. Although she was busy when there was a problem, she didn't have a lot of duties as the store manager. Roco was grateful for the free time at all. No, to be honest it caused her quite a lot of stress.

‘I thought I would see Oppa more if I looked after the store but I see him even less than before. While I'm stuck here, that fox Lariette will look better.....ayu, I'm so irritated.’

Fortunately she checked with the rehabilitation members and it didn't seem like Lariette could meet Ark as well. But that wasn't the only cause of Roco's stress. When they met for the first time, Sid had bad credit but he was already level 300. In addition, Sapjil and Ulmeok's level also rose thanks to them being sale assistants. It was

possible because they were merchants. However, Roco was a Minstrel. She received no experience no matter how much the business profited. Of course, Roco also played during that time. Sometimes she would go hunting with the former thieves or the Meow around the village. But there wasn't the same effect as when she was with the rehabilitation group so she still hadn't reached level 200.

"I'd like to play in Seutandal with the rehabilitation oppas too....."

But she couldn't leave Ark's store to Sapjil and Ulmeok.

"Yes, I'll just have to be patient and protect Oppa's business."

She used this thought to build her determination. Eventually Roco started a new hobby in order to appease her boredom. One of Roco's interests in reality that she could do in the game was handling multiple instruments. The store gathered quite a few japtem. Roco collected the musical instruments and set them aside in a special collection. Violin, viola, trumpet.....the 2nd floor was filled with Roco's musical instruments. Thanks to her boredom, she played them as soon as possible and her skilfulness became quite high.

'I don't have a harp yet so it will go quite well. It isn't possible to use as an equipment but won't a nice sound appear if I repair it? It is also beautiful so it can be used as a decoration. For the moment I'll have to spend time repairing it.'

Roco had a happy expression on her face as she picked up the dust cloth. Roco's specialty in reality and the game was housework. Thanks to her cleaning up the store, her various household skills have risen to advanced level. When Roco rubbed it with the dust cloth, the harp slowly regained its original brilliance and shine. Roco felt a sense of fulfilment every time more of the harp's features were revealed.

'My eyes weren't mistaken. It looks so beautiful with the original colour. Now what kind of tone will the harp make? Okay, next are the strings. I must quickly repair it in order to play the harp.'

Roco rode to the music store in Jackson and bought some strings. Once all the repairs were completed, Roco looked at the harp with an expectant face.

Ddi ddu ru rung ddi rung ddang-!

“Eh? What is that?”

Why did the harp sound like a brick was being ground up? Roco realized that she had forgotten one of the most important tasks in repairing an instrument. The most important task of string instruments was to adjust and tune each individual string.

“But I’ve never tuned a harp before.....”

In fact, Roco had never done any tuning in New World. Most stores sold musical instruments with the tune already adjusted. Of course, Roco had done tuning before. But Roco mainly handled tuning acoustic guitars in reality. On the other hand, the harp had 47 strings to tune. Roco ended up visiting the instrument store in Jackson once again. However, the NPC looked at the harp and shook his head.

“I’m sorry but I don’t know anything about the harp. Furthermore, the life of that harp seems to be finished. Even if it is adjusted, it will be difficult to get the right tone from it. How about you look in the store and find a new harp? A famous artisan has made it so the tone is very beautiful. And the functionality is also amazing. Come, look over here. Do you see the sharp metal in the corner? A monster can be damaged with this.....”

The shop owner recommended her a steel harp with extra attack power.

“I’ll come again!”

Since then, Roco had looked through various textbooks to tune the harp. Fortunately Roco was very interested in music, so she had good sound detection even if it wasn’t perfect pitch. After a rewarding 10 days, she finally finished adjusting the harp.

“That’s it! Now I can hear the tone of the harp properly.”

Roco played the strings with a tense expression.

Ddiririring, ddiririring!

The 47 strings produced a soft, clear sound.

“This is it! This is the sound of a harp! Hohoho, this sounds better than my previous harp thanks to all the effort I put into repairing it. Shall I learn how to properly play a harp now? Where is it, that song I played before.....?”

Roco went to her box of sheet music.

Ddiririring ~ ddiririring ~ ddiriririririri ~.

Suddenly there was a poltergeist phenomenon.....why did the strings of the harp sitting on the table start to play by itself? That wasn't the only amazing part. The image of the woman carved into the handle opened her mouth and started to sing along. Roco hesitated as she looked at the harp. The room was filled with the sound of the harp and the singing..... Somehow the harp seemed like it was playing a beautiful, broken melody. It was an unfamiliar melody that she heard for the first time, but Roco quickly became a prisoner to that melody.

‘Ah, it is the first time I’ve heard such a beautiful melody. It makes me feel a heartrending pain in my chest, like I’m sitting alone in a beautiful, mysterious forest. That’s right, this is real healing music. My frustrated mind seems to be cleansed.’

Roco sat in front of the harp and became lost in its sound. Then there was a loud ringing sound and a quest information window appeared.

-Temptation of the Mysterious Music

You've accidentally obtained an old harp. Although the harp was impossible to use, you who loves music repaired the harp and gave it a new life. The harp then played a mysterious song like it was trying to repay your efforts. The contents of the song are about the tragic life of a genius musician. When the song ended, the woman carved on the harp seems to be vaguely staring somewhere.

It is the Melody Hill where the genius musician used to spend all his time. The harp seems eager to show its new owner to its previous owner who met a tragic end.

<Difficulty: B Quest Restriction: Minstrel>

“Eh? A quest? Then this harp is the starting item for a quest?”

Roco read the information window with shocked eyes.

“If it is the Melody Hill than it isn’t far away.”

Roco checked the map and accepted the quest without really thinking about it. She was curious about the quest that appeared after she repaired the harp and heard the incomplete melody. If she arrived at the destination with the harp then she might be able to hear the rest of the song. In addition, she could take the Unicorn so it wouldn’t take more than 1 hour to get there.

“Okay, Unicorn!”

Hihihihing! Hihihihing!

The unicorn snorted and quickly arrived at Melody Hill. It was a hill overlooking the village of Harukon. When she explored the hill while riding the unicorn, she saw a simple tombstone surrounded by flowers. When Roco approached the tombstone, the harp shook and instantly showed a reaction. But that was all it did.

“What the? Do I have to play it directly?”

The harp’s strings moved like that was the answer. Roco thought she would hear the rest of the song so she was quite disappointed. But she came all the way here so shouldn’t she complete the quest?

“What kind of song do I need to play?”

Actually there was no need to worry. Roco only knew how to play one song on the harp. It was the harp sheet music she received when she changed into a minstrel. Just like a magician learned magic through magic scrolls, a minstrel learned how to play the instrument from sheet music related to it. The magic depended on

the skilfulness with that instrument and the percentage of completion when playing the song. Unlike a magician, a minstrel could create their own songs once the degree of skilfulness has risen enough. However, Roco's harp playing skill was still inferior. She was apprehensive but the tune played to some degree when she concentrated. Roco played the harp seriously when something happened.

-Ugh, stop, stop! I won't accept such abominable playing!

The sculpture image on the harp seemed to raise its voice angrily. Roco became startled and stopped her performance while looking at the harp.

-It is not the harp. It's me. Hey, what the? Raise your head. Over here.

When she raised her head with confusion, a long haired, middle aged person floated from the tombstone.

"W-who are you?"

-Me? I am Melody. The master of the harp. No, the former owner?

"Huh? But I thought you were dead?"

-I'll explain it to you. Damn, I can't say it directly or through the harp. Hah, I've lived all of my life for music and now I can't even talk about the purpose of the harp..... It's so regrettable, just imagining the way I died is so vexing. I want to cry. I'm going to cry. I'm so sad.

Roco gaped at Melody as he blew his nose. It was a look which asked why it was regrettable. Frankly, Roco had no interest in the complaints of the ghost. There was a saying that said there were no light graves. And the person was already dead so what was the point of hearing their complaints? But she had to ask or else the quest might not progress.

"What is the matter?"

-It's so sad and regrettable that I don't want to explain but I will.

Melody shamelessly confessed his circumstances. He was born in a family which produced many famous musicians through the generations. But he had no great talent unlike his brothers. He suffered from harsh mistreatment throughout his life until he decided to climb up a mountain. While he remained on this mountain, he practiced playing an instrument until he obtained skills that would even amaze his brothers.

-So with the harp in my pocket, I climbed the mountain and spent 15 years here training. I made an effort to reach the state where no one could imitate my skills. Huhuhu, maybe I really was a genius. And finally the day came. The first step into the world after transforming into a genius musician!

“So did you surprise your brothers?”

Melody flinched and sighed before murmuring.

—A cliff.

“Huh? A cliff? What?”

-Damn, it was a cliff. The first step I took into the world was off a cliff!

Roco's eyes flickered before she finally understood his words. Melody had spent 15 years training to produce a heavenly sound. While heading down the mountain, he fell off a cliff and died. She didn't know whether to laugh or cry at his story.

-It is so regrettable that I can't close my eyes even after I died. But if someone gives a satisfactory performance on my harp then I might be able to relax and close my eyes.

Melody murmured in a melancholy voice until he suddenly raised his voice.

-Ugh, but the person who appeared after a few decades holding my harp is this woman. I can't possibly accept this. Are you really a minstrel? How did you make the harp produce a sound like an ogre? Are you a magician not a minstrel?

“What, what the? All I did was visit and play!”

-Play? You call that playing? It's just noise! I woke up quickly thanks to that noise. Huh? I would've rather slept than be woken up by you!

"Why should I care about a stupid ghost who dived off a cliff and died?"

Roco exploded and started packing her bags.

-What? What did you say? What, diving? My pride can't accept a person who makes such noises with my harp. That harp is a heirloom of my family. If you don't know how to play it then give the harp back!

"I don't want to. It was quite expensive repairing this. I have no intention of listening to your word."

Roco stood up with a sulky face. Then Melody looked confused and hurriedly exclaimed.

-W-wait a minute. Didn't you hear me? I can't fall asleep again without the harp. Only the expert performance of the harp will make my go to sleep. Why don't you sit down?

"Whether you fall asleep has nothing to do with me. Because I am a minstrel who can't play the harp that well. Anyway, the owner of this harp is me. It might seem unfair but I won't let you take it from me. Do you understand?"

-Okay. Then I'll do this.

Melody was distressed for a while before he made a suggestion.

-To be honest, I'm not in the mood for this but there's nothing else I can do Starting from today, I will teach you how to play the harp. If a genius musician teaches you then your body will get the hang of it in no time. Huhuhu, how about it? This seems like a strange fate. You won't receive many opportunities to be taught by a great musician like me. It is a reward for repairing my harp.

"Bah, I have no interest in a teacher who will harass me because I am a woman. Let's go Unicorn."

Roco snorted and disappeared like the wind on the unicorn. The Melody shouted with a desperate voice.

-What the? You're still a novice so you're incredibly lucky to have a chance to be tutored by me. Hey, wait! Just hear me out. I wanted to say.....please have a look! Okay, okay. I won't call you 'Woman' anymore. So please come back! Come back! Come back! Gone? Are you really gone? Sob, what will I do now.....?

".....Roco."

Roco muttered while walking out of the woods. Melody wiped his tears while he stuttered.

-Eh? Eh eh? Ah, didn't you leave?

"I couldn't do it. You woke up because of me. If you say my name properly then I'll agree to be your student. I also want to hear the harp played well. If I'm your student then won't I be able to learn the song the harp played?"

-Of course. I composed that song. Oh, you are actually a good woman. Thank you, I'll teach you anything you want. So please put me to sleep quickly. That is my only wish. Isn't it simple?

"I understand. I'm going to try."

Thus Roco became a student of a ghost and started to engage in fully fledged music studies.

Dazzling lights which stung the eyes and a noisy roaring sound which resounded through the ears. It seemed so different from the ordinary everyday life that it seemed like an alien space. In the night, it was a space where the colourful lights lured in humans off the streets. Those who stepped into these places would return back to their primal natures. However, the only people who could enter this place were the ones selected.

It wasn't based on data but was restricted by the age or clothes of the person. The people who failed the horrible screening test would sob and wail about discrimination! The name of this modern day

pandemonium.....was the place which was just called 'Club.'

"Hahaha! Hey, three bottles of alcohol and some appetizers! Quickly!"

A loud voice was audible from the room overlooking the main stage. Then the young woman flanking him sent him flirtatious looks.

"Oppa is so cool. I like it."

"But isn't that much slightly unreasonable?"

"What? Is this a joke? Do you know who I am? A few bottles of liquor won't make any dent in my bank account. Order anything you like. Today I will pay for everything. No, I'm in a good mood so I'm ringing this golden bell after a long time."

The one smirking with a red face was Lee Myung-ban, also known as Andel who once sought to step on Ark in New World. But that was just inside a game in the end. In reality, Andel was the son of an upper class family. Andel waved his hand that was holding jewel encrusted watches and the women made a fuss.

"Come, this golden bell will only ring once."

"It's great that Oppa is ringing the golden bell."

"Heh, I won't play with any losers. Okay, you guys have made today merry so I'll ring the golden bell. Huhuhu, do you want to play the King game?"

"Omo, shall we do that?"

"Oppa, aren't you being too blatant?"

"Hahaha, every man is a wolf. Don't you know that yet?"

Andel smirked and stroke a girl's face. Then the door to the room opened and a testy voice was heard.

"You're quite fortunate."

"What the? Who dared come in.....?"

Andel checked the face of the young man and flinched.

“Ah, Alan? “You, how are you here.....?”

“I know what type of places you go to.”

The person who appeared was Alan who Andel had known for 10 years. When Alan sat down, the girls’ eyes quickly focused on him. Alan was dressed plainly. It was just jeans and a white t-shirt. But it seemed more luxurious than the shirts embellished with decorations that Andel was wearing. In other words..... Andel suddenly seemed like a commoner after Alan who gave off a noble impression appeared. Their levels were completely different.

“Wah, this Oppa is cool.”

“That’s right, he’s my ideal type.”

Andel became dissatisfied with the women’s reactions to Alan. Andel and Alan had known each other for 10 years but these days their relationship was estranged. That’s because of Ark. It was because Andel was tricked by Ark that Alan had Silvana taken away from him. Of course, Andel knew how much Alan had poured into Silvana. So he had decided to avoid Alan until he became less upset but his thoughts changed after a while.

‘It’s only a game. Why should I have to ignore a friend of 10 years?’

“Alan, why did you come to see me?”

Of course, the voice coming out of his mouth wasn’t sentimental. Alan looked at Andel before suddenly saying.

“You’re not connecting to New World these days?”

“What the? Are you still holding onto that thing? I don’t care anymore. I only took the test to enter Global Exos because I thought I should pretend to do some work. But I don’t want anything to do with that test anymore. Don’t you feel the same way?”

“So your interest in New World really disappeared?”

When Alan asked sharply, Andel held his tongue. At first Andel had played the game more aggressively than Alan. Like he said, Andel

wasn't very interested in joining Global Exos. He stayed up all night to play the game was because it was fun. And the reason he hadn't connected to the game..... Then Alan took out an MP Movie Player. Andel's face wrinkled as he watched the video. The video shown on the MP Player was something that had previously aired on TV. The protagonist of the video was a black wolf who Andel recognized with one glance.

"Ah, that Ark bastard.....!"

Yes, it was indeed him. The reason Andel wasn't connecting to the game. Every time he connected to the game, he remembered the humiliation he suffered from Ark and couldn't stand it. His organization was shattered by Ark and collapsed. Then Alan became angry at him so he abandoned the game. Alan immediately started to talk again.

"Are you really okay with this?"

"What?"

"That Ark. He destroyed everything we built. Now he had this success. Are you really going to act like this? You're able to forgive him? Was your personality that good-natured? I couldn't do it. My chest burns at the thought of leaving that guy alone."

"Damn, I'm also angry. But that's it."

"I heard about it. Didn't you suffer because of that person?"

"Yes, do you know how broken I was because of that?"

"Yet you're just going to leave it as it is."

"I know, I know. I also prefer to step on him. Honestly, I've already seen that movie. Do you know how long I was furious? But he is not the same Ark. His level and power has increased a lot. It will be difficult to take care of him."

"No, you have to remember that it is a game. I have a way."

Alan replied in a firm tone.

“I’m also not interested in the test. But I can never ignore that guy. I’ll go after him no matter what. Whether it is reality or the game.”

Alan’s words were true. In all the time Alan had lived, he had never been so disregarded by another person. No, it wasn’t exactly true to say he was disregarded. Once again, Alan was rich. In addition he was smart. If someone disregarded him, Alan never hesitated to use all his weapons to step on them and he never failed. The only blot on his undefeated record was Ark. When seen objectively, his failure to defeat Ark was the one shame of Alan’s whole life. It was like a hole in his ego. It was a small hole, but his ego was so strong that even a small hole would annoy him. The only way to fill up that hole was to utterly destroy Ark in New World.

Yes, that was where his intense hatred of Ark stemmed from. Andel clenched his fist firmly and nodded at Alan’s words.

“The same goes for me. I’ll do whatever it takes! I’ve never been so insulted by another person. But it’s not as easy as it sounds. At least in the game.”

“Yes, I have to admit that. He isn’t as simple as I thought he was. That’s why it’s even more insufferable. Now New World isn’t just a game that I am playing for fun. I’ll risk everything to erase him from New World. So I require your help.”

“What? My help?”

“Yes, I’ve only been thinking about revenge against Ark so I’ve been raising my power. I’m confident now after increasing my strength. But like you said, he’s not the same opponent as before. Yes, it’s not time yet. I have to wait a little bit more before I appear in front of him. So you should do some preparations.”

“Why is my help necessary.....?”

“You have to gather people. That kind of force is needed if we want to defeat Ark and his group. We don’t need people like the ones in ‘Dawn Blade.’ Chaotic players are good. We need players who will obey our orders. But.....I can’t explain why but I can’t do that task. So I was hoping to leave it to you.”

“I’m still only level 200. Will they listen to me?”

Andel asked with a grumpy expression.

“We have a weapon against them.”

“Weapon? A weapon.....”

Alan pulled something out and showed it to Andel. It was a passbook. The women who looked at the passbook screamed.

“Kyaaa! How many 0’s is that?”

“I obtained this for the club a few months ago. What it New World? Shall we create a new club?”

Andel stared at Alan with a dumb expression.

“.....This amount isn’t easy even for you.....can I really use it?”

“I don’t care as long as we step on that guy. No, honestly I think this much is lacking for the scale of the organization that I desire. But if I receive the help of a friend then it is possible. How about it? Will you help me?”

Andel hesitated with a complicated expression. But after a moment, he grabbed Alan’s hand and nodded.

“Okay, you and I will step on that bastard. If you have this much determination then I’ll also try my best. Money isn’t easy to raise but you’ve managed to prepare this much. It is like an investment. If we abandon our principles then we can step on him and occupy New World. Is that why you prepared the money?”

“As expected, you’ve understood my real intentions.”

“Heh, I did spend 3 years at a private school with you.”

“Then you’ve decided?”

“Yes, I’ll believe in you and use the weapon you’ve prepared to gather amazing people.”

“Okay, I’ll trust you and leave it to you. But you should keep one

thing in mind. Like we said earlier, he isn't an easy opponent to deal with. You must not move until I've finished preparing everything."

"How many times have I faced him? I know that guy better than anyone. Rest assured that I'll never make the same mistake. Huhuhu, I can't wait a couple of months or even 1 year if it means I get my revenge."

"It's only once. It will only take one instance for everything to be ruined."

"Okay, I understand. I'll endure it. It's just a game. I'll wait until things are prepared."

Andel drained the remaining alcohol and stood up.

"Now is the time. Okay, let's go New World!"

"Oppa, the golden bell?"

"Noisy, I don't have that money anymore! You buy your own things!"

Andel screamed and exited the room. So after a closed room meeting with Alan, Andel once again returned to the stage of New World. Andel's strongest weapon was money.

Underground Cryp

“Ark-nim, right, right!”

The eyeballs floating in the sky screamed. Ark reflexively turned and saw the huge axe heading towards him.

“Heok, Jump!”

Ark used Wolf’s Feet to quickly move his body 10 metres. The axe blade lost its target and slammed several metres into the wall. If it hit his defense then he would’ve been split in half. But he could barely breathe a sigh of relief before he heard a terrible sound.

Cheolkodong, cheolkodong. Syusyusyusyusyu!

It was the mechanical sound of something operating! Hundreds of holes opened in the nearby wall and a shower of arrows shot out.

“Dark Dance!”

Ark continuously rotated his body and danced to avoid the arrows. No matter how much he used Dark Dance, he couldn’t avoid the damage of hundreds of flying arrows. Tutututung. Around 10 arrows stuck in his shoulders, chest and legs and he lost a lot of health. But his health being decreased wasn’t the problem.

-You’ve been hit by a blunt arrow 40 damage!

<The special ‘push’ effect of the arrow is applied>

The arrow Ark was hit with had a ‘blunt’ attribute. Thanks to his resilience stat, he only received 40 damage per shot. However, he had no resistance against ‘push’ so he was pushed back in rapid succession. Razak screamed as Ark was pushed back.

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

The place Ark was heading to was a pitfall filled with sharp blades. If

Ark fell in then he would end up like a porcupine. The arrow trap and the other traps were all carefully calculated.

“Racard, Dark Dash!”

“I’m going. Ohhhhhhh!”

Racard’s body flew across the space and forcefully slammed into Ark. When hit by Dark Dash, Ark was instantly thrown several metres. Ark used Mind’s Eye but saw that he wasn’t out of the range of pitfalls yet. Then Razak plunged into the arrow trap. He blocked the arrows with his shield and jumped towards Ark. Ark was startled to see Razak and soon noticed his intentions.

“Well done, Razak. Sword transformation!”

Razak changed into the Saw Blade after Ark shouted and was caught. Ark changed him into the whip and wrapped it around a nearby pillar. Then Ark pulled himself towards the pillar using the whip. Fortunately he managed to avoid the trap but there weren’t any safe places. As soon as his feet touched the ground, Ark heard a mechanical sound and walls on either side started moving forwards.

‘There’s no place to avoid the trap on the left or the right. If that’s the case.....!’

After quickly judging the situation, Ark acted like a ninja and jumped between both walls to propel him to the top. Fortunately he managed to get away but he was still being threatened by traps.

‘Damn, where is it? Where on earth is it? I don’t have much health left now.....’

Ark moved his body and carefully looked around. Then he saw something glistening in the darkness. After avoiding the blades and concentrating his eyes, he saw a glass bead that was lodged inside a hole in the wall. Ark frowned as he confirmed it.

‘It is too far away. How am I going to get it when it is hidden in such a difficult place? The distance is too far. And it is so deeply lodged in the wall that my hand won’t reach it. What should I do? If I hesitate

then the traps will just get worse.....'

Ark contemplated for a moment before raising his head and shouting.

"Buksil, come here!"

"Huh? W-why?"

"Just come, this time it is an eyeball missile!"

When the eyeball approached him, Ark turned and did an overhead kick.

"Eeeeeek!"

The eyeball screamed as it flew forward. The goal was the hole in the wall. When Buksil impacted with it, the glass bead shook and fell. At the same time, the numerous blades, rocks and arrows flying towards Ark stopped. The message window he was waiting for then appeared.

[-You have operated the switch and turned off all the traps!]

Ark sighed and sat down.

"Phew, I thought I would really die this time."

His whole body was drenched with sweat after running around without stopping for 10 minutes. Ark wiped off the sweat and murmured in an irate voice.

"Damn, what kind of dungeon is this?"

Yesterday Ark had entered the underground crypt. It wasn't necessary to explain again but Ark had prepared thoroughly before entering the dungeon. He checked his equipment and ingredients and entered expecting fierce battles. However, the underground crypt was different from what he imagined. It was a secret dungeon located in the City of the Dead. Ark was expecting sleeping corpses to jump up and attack him. But the corpses in this place hadn't budged no matter where he moved to. Instead, Ark was attacked with a large numbers of traps just like an Indiana Jones movie. He

couldn't breathe without activating pitfalls and traps.....! Ark wandered the border between life and death many times.

'In the beginning it was arrows and poison needles.....'

The further he went into the crypt, the more difficult the traps became. If he had been hit by the flying axe then he would've lost 50% of his health. But that was its charm. If he had been stuck between a wall when it appeared then it would've been instantaneous death! In other words, defense or attack was no help in this dungeon. It was thanks to his improvisation combined with his movements that he was still alive.

'I never could've come this far if I hadn't discovered the method to turn the traps off.'

Fortunately there was a way to disable the traps. Whenever a trap was triggered, there was always a glass bead in the area which functioned as the switch. Removing the glass bead would stop the operation of the traps. However, avoiding the relentless traps and finding the hidden bead wasn't that easy. It was thanks to Buksil's eyeballs that he managed to find the glass beads. Because Vampire's Eye wasn't affected by darkness, it could move freely through small holes to find the bead. Well, this time he had another use for it.....

"Ark-nim!"

The eyeball had become red after striking the glass bead and it flew angrily towards him. Ark pretended ignorance and said.

"Ah Buksil. Good work. I'm alive thanks to you."

"Now you're saying this? What were you thinking? This is my eyes, my eyes!"

"Then you should've found the glass bead more quickly. You found it too late so the traps became worse. Therefore it was inevitable. And isn't it wonderful? Eyeball missile. Don't you think it is an upgrade from the pig missile? Are you going to weaponize every part of your body? Buksil, the living weapon! How wonderful."

“Eh? That is a little cool.....ah, no, what was it?”

The eyeball paused and murmured. The two eyes rubbed against each other and dust fell down. It was a really pitiful scene.

“Anyway, the traps have been turned off so shall we check the loot?”

Ark murmured and got up. The crypt didn't have any monsters. However, there was a chance to collect items that could be called loot after the traps were switched off.

‘Let's see, is there anything slightly useful this time?’

Ark approached the wall with an expectant look. Just like a medieval movie, a wall in the crypt was made like the honeycomb in a bee hive. And a corpse that looked like a mummy was enshrined in the wall. Ark collected the items present on the body.

Old Sword

Weapon type: One-handed sword

Attack: 7~10

Durability: 17/200

Weight: 45

User restriction: Level 250

The sword buried with ancient warriors in the underground crypt. In the past it possessed tremendous power but that feature has already been lost. The iron has oxidized and it cannot be melted down in a furnace.

‘Damn, another bad item?’

Ark sighed after he saw the information window. The crypt had a lot of weapons and defensive items buried. However, the performance of those items were so bad that it was no different from a pile of trash. Would he only be able to get the price of the scrap metal? Although it was an item that could still be used, he would only be able to get a few coppers for it. No, Ark couldn't ignore a dropped

item even if he would get no money for it. Racard looked at its appearance with an uncomfortable expression.

“Master, no matter how you look at it.....”

“Don’t tell me, I know.”

He knew what Racard was trying to say. He entered the underground crypt and suffered through the traps just for a few scrape items. Wasn’t this just grave robbing? His face turned red at the thought of Buksil filming it. However, Ark wasn’t going to give up any items. The world famous archaeologist Indiana Jones was also famous for being a grave robber. Well.....he had a wide viewpoint.

‘Yes, what is so bad about recycling items that the dead won’t use anyway? It is a time where there is a shortage of raw materials. Recycling will contribute to humans.’

That was how Ark mentally armed himself.

‘But the income compared to the amount of effort is really enough to cause tears. I can’t gain any levels because there are no monsters and all I can obtain is just a pile of junk? If it wasn’t for my class change quest then I would never bother with this dungeon.....’

However, he wouldn’t let his heart make hasty decisions. It was an extremely difficult dungeon! If he made just one mistake then the traps scattered everywhere would kill him. In addition, this dungeon was the type where the traps would reset if he died and had to enter the dungeon again. If he had to break through the traps again from the beginning then he would go mad.

‘Anyway, I believe this is the last area based on what I recall from the map.

Ark collected all the items and opened his map. The topographic map of the complicated underground crypt was already almost cleared. When he looked using his cartography skills, the map completion rate was 95%. There was only 5% left to be completed. And Ark already knew where the remaining 5% was hidden. In fact, Ark initially had no intention of exploring the crypt to 100%. He had planned to use the shortest route to his destination. After going the

wrong way a few times, Ark's completion rate was 60% when he reached the destination. It was a huge door with a sentence written on it! It was obviously the final destination of the dungeon just by looking at it. But there was a problem he hadn't expected.....the door was locked.

"How on earth am I going to open this?"

Ark was filled with anxiety. Suddenly the eyeball floating all over the place discovered something on the top of the opposite wall.

"Ark-nim, there is something recorded here."

If you would like to meet the owner of this place then insert the tokens of courage and wisdom.

'Tokens of courage and wisdom?'

Ark looked carefully at the iron door. Although thick dust was piled up, he carefully examined the formation carved into the wall. There were small holes forming a circle. Ark determined the size of the holes and immediately knew the meaning of the sentence.

'That's right. The token of courage and wisdom. Damn, does this mean I have to completely go around the dungeon?'

The tokens of courage and wisdom didn't involve monsters. That's right, it was to pass through all the traps in the dungeon. Only passing through the traps could he get the glass bead. The key to opening the iron door was the beads. Furthermore, there were thirty holes carved. In other words, he needed at least 30 beads. Ark only gathered the required number of beads after exploring 95% of the crypt. Well, thanks to that he became enough of an expert to rival Indiana Jones.....

"Now the final destination is close. Let's go!"

Ark finished his maintenance and headed towards the iron door. Then he laid the glass beads in one by one.

Ku ku ku ku ku.....!

The iron door started vibrating as soon as he finished putting the

beads in and the door slid to the side to reveal a hidden passage. It was a straight passage that headed downwards.

“Finally, I’ve reached the final stage of the profession quest.”

Ark jumped in with an expectant expression. How far did he go? He went all the way down until he suddenly heard a voice muttering.

“Damn it! That brat.....how much longer.....will it hold out?”

‘Eh? That voice?’

Ark flinched and stopped moving before he used Eyes of the Cat. There was a wide space at the end of the passage and a dark shadow was wandering there. It looked like one of the dead but it was covered head and toe with what seemed to be black paint. It was to the extent that he couldn’t see through the black with Eyes of the Cat.

“There’s only the shell left..... I’ll kill it this time.....! When that is done.....I’ll become a complete existence.....”

The black person muttered as he walked around before he suddenly flinched and turned his head. He became surprised as he saw Ark and confronted him.

“Yes, who are you?”

The person looked at Ark with uneasy eyes until he suddenly shouted like he remembered something.

“I see..... You covet that as well..... Foolish bastards..... Your vain greed.....I won’t allow it!”

Sharp fangs suddenly sprang from his mouth and blade like claws from the hand. A red warning message flashed as the person attacked.

-The boss monster ‘Karma’ who has a corrupted soul has appeared.
--

‘Boss monster? This crypt also has a boss monster?’

There were no monsters present so he hadn't expected a boss. Ark was unprepared and hurriedly pulled out his sword to attack Karma. It was a crude attack so he hadn't expected it to work. But Karma fell down from the hit and also lost 3% of his health.

'What the? This guy?'

Ark looked at Karma struggling on the ground with astonishment. Shouldn't the boss monster be incredibly strong?

'That's right, there were no monsters here so I had no idea of the level of difficulty in this dungeon. The difficulty of the traps is quite high but that has nothing to do with the level of dungeon. This isn't this dungeon more reasonable than I expected?'

He confirmed that it was the right answer after checking Karma with Eyes of the Cat. Indeed, Ark was high level. He had reached level 339 after killing the zombies in the swamp. If he added the 50% dark attribute bonus then he was level 508. On the other hand, Karma was only level 450. Even though he was a boss monster, Ark had already overwhelmed it in stats. It wasn't necessary for him to fight really seriously against it. Of course, bosses in New World possessed special skills so victory or defeat wasn't just determined by level.

'But what's this? This uncomfortable feeling?'

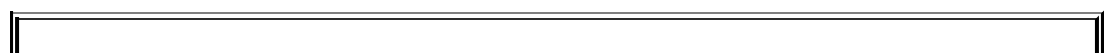
Instead of feeling comfortable at the thought of an easy fight, he felt uneasy instead. If the boss was that weak then wouldn't the loot be bad as well? But Ark clamped down on the uncomfortable feeling. Anyway, he hadn't entered hoping for loot. Ark's purpose was his profession change quest!

'I'll finish this quickly and complete my quest!'

"Dark blade!"

Ark ran up to Karma and stabbed him with his sword. Then Karma screamed and waved his hand.

"Hik, Time Acceleration!"



-The durability of Gwisal's sword had fallen has quickly fallen. <Durability -10>
--

-The durability of Gwisal's sword had fallen has quickly fallen. <Durability -10>
--

-The durability of Gwisal's sword had fallen has quickly fallen. <Durability -10>
--

A suspicious gas had emerged from Karma's hand. At that moment, a message window appeared saying that Gwisal's durability had fallen?

'Hik, w-what it this?'

Ark panicked and withdrew. Before coming here, he had carefully looked at Gwisal's information window and the durability had dropped from 200 to 80. Ark avoided Karma's ensuing attacks and used Magic Restoration continuously to repair Gwisal's sword.

"What on earth is happening? I didn't even touch the black person? What is this thing?"

Ark used Skill Penetration. It was urgent to examine what Karma had done.

-Karma's special skill: Time Tuner

Thanks to his spirit body which is close to nature, Karma uses techniques which deal with time. This technique allows several decades to pass in seconds or revert to the past.

However, this technique does not work on existences that have life.

【Time Acceleration】 Speed up the passage of time within a certain space. When time is accelerated at maximum speed, all objects within the area (sword, armour etc.) will have their durability fall.
--

【Time Rewind】 The passage of time within a certain area is reverted to the past When affected, all objects will return to its
--

previous state. However, this skill only works up to the time when the object is created (when applied to equipment, the item will return to its ore state).

‘What the? Time Tuner?’

Techniques which controlled the flow of time? Although it didn’t apply to Ark since he was alive, Time Rewind wasn’t something that he could take lightly. Ark turned pale with fear after reading the information window. Although it wasn’t necessary to explain, real physical laws applied to equipment in New World. If he didn’t use his sword over a certain amount of time then the durability would decline. Of course, it only decreased by 1 every month and repairing it would always return it to the original state. But if he left the equipment alone after a few years then the durability would fall and the item would break. Karma’s skill acted like that. When his sword entered the space, it was like time accelerated by a hundred times. In the end, it appeared like Ark had neglected his sword for a few years. The durability was decreased at a tremendous rate. If his response was a little bit late then his sword would’ve been destroyed. It wasn’t only his sword. Wouldn’t the effect also apply to his armour if it hit his body?

‘I have to fight against someone like this?’

He would’ve preferred to lose 1,000 health. If he died then he would just lost a few stats when resurrected. However, his items were unrecoverable if the durability reached 0. In addition, 70% of his equipment was rare or higher so it would cost 1 billion won buying new equipment. If that happened that Ark would become sick and collapse.

‘Close range fighting is dangerous. My pets are wearing equipment so it is also risky for them.’

“Razak and Racard, quickly retreat!”

Ark panicked and used Sprint to retreat.

“Huhuhu, where did your confidence go.....you cowardly bastard!”

When Ark retreated, Karma instantly used taunts to provoke him. However, Ark wasn't the type to risk losing millions of won just because of a few taunts.

'He's provoking me so Time Tuner isn't a long distance magic.'

While being chased by Karma, Ark started analyzing him. The radius of Karma's skill was probably a few metres around him. If he didn't approach then he wouldn't have to worry about his equipment breaking. And Karma used skills like a magician so his defense and health were extremely low.

'If I keep my distance while dealing strong damage then I might be able to fix this.'

"Radun, give me a sword! Blade Storm!"

Ark took out a sword and made it explode. It split into countless fragments and attacked Karma. But something astonishing happened in the next moment.

"Time Rewind!"

After Karma used his magic, the fragments combined back into a sword and weakly fell to the ground. Thanks to time rewinding, the sword had returned to its previous state before it exploded. It was an absurd defense. This also happened when he tried to shoot an arrow. When Karma rewound time, the arrow lost its acceleration and fell to the ground. Karma then rushed towards him.

"Hahaha! You greedy bastard.....I'll strip you naked..... Time Acceleration!"

Damn, what is there? There's no way to fight!'

Ark was like someone with his tail trapped. He was confident in a frontal confrontation. But if he fought within close range then time acceleration would be applied to his equipment. Even if he continuously used Magic Restoration, at least one or two of his equipment would be destroyed before he could repair them.

'That absolutely can't happen! The equipment I worked so hard to

obtain.....!'

He couldn't tolerate it, even if it meant he had to die.

'Is there a way to block his skill?'

Ark worried for a while before a thought flashed through his head. Karma's skills were Time Acceleration and Time Rewind. In other words, they were magic with completely opposite properties! What would happen if Time Rewind was applied to an area which already had Time Acceleration? Wouldn't it be neutralized?

'Yes, that's it! That's the only way.'

"Racard, take it off!"

"Eh?"

Racard's eyes widened at Ark's words.

"M-master, since when is that your hobby.....I'm a handsome boy but....in this situation....."

"What nonsense are you saying? You're wearing rare equipment. You should take it off so it isn't destroyed."

"Ah, is that so? But why? Heok, don't tell me you're making me fight against another tough person?"

"Don't worry, I don't expect that from you."

Ark snorted and murmured. Although Racard could fight Karma once he took off his equipment, he wouldn't be able to defeat the boss on his own. No matter how weak, he was still a boss. Karma wasn't so weak that Ark could defeat him without his equipment. So Ark wanted Racard to use Blood-sucking. It was in order to absorb a skill that would neutralize Karma's.

"Got it? I'll attract his attention while you suck out his skills. The skill I desire is Time Acceleration. Fill your two slots with Time Acceleration."

There was a reason Ark wanted Time Acceleration. Karma didn't know that Racard could absorb skills. If he knew that fact then he

wouldn't let Racard suck his blood easily. Then this was the only chance to use blood-sucking. So he had to defeat Karma with only two skills.

'The skill that can deal the largest damage is Blade Storm. In addition, the attack damage is determined by the quality of the sword. My counterattack made him lose 3% health last time so two hits with Blade Storm should be enough.'

Then he would be in a critical condition. With less than 10% health, Ark could rush forward and attack while continuously using Magic Restoration. A magic sword was the best bet for this.

'That guy stopped my attack with Time Rewind just now. Time Acceleration means that a lot of time can pass within a few seconds. I have to kill him before durability reached 0.'

That's why Ark ordered the acquisition of Time Acceleration which is the opposite of Time Rewind.

"Okay, I don't know if I could acquire it but I'll try."

Racard sneaked out of the combat zone and took off his tuxedo before approaching Karma. Meanwhile Ark shot arrows wildly and attracted Karma's eyes.

"Take this you damn monster!"

"These attacks....are useless! Ah, ouch!"

Karma flinched and looked down at his foot. Racard had quickly bit the ankle and sucked the blood before running away.

"Damn, the taste is dirty. This isn't blood.....it tastes like rotten soup....."

-Racard has used Blood-sucking on Karma.

A new skill has been saved in the empty slot.

* Currently absorbed skill: <Time Acceleration> You can accelerate time within a certain space.

‘Okay, that’s one!’

Even though he complained, Racard managed to collect one skill.

“Jeez.....this mosquito like guy....!”

Karma rushed up to Racard angrily. However, Racard avoided the attack like he really was a mosquito. When Ark shot an arrow, Karma instantly turned back to him. Karma still didn’t know that Racard was absorbing his skills. Racard wasn’t dealing any damage to his health so he hadn’t considered it necessary to pay attention to Racard.

‘Now Racard! Time Acceleration!’

“Okay!”

Racard sucked on Karma’s neck like a mosquito at Ark’s command. After a few repetitions, Racard was once again able to absorb a skill. However Ark sighed after checking Racard’s information window. It wasn’t Time Acceleration that was absorbed but Time Rewind.

‘Damn, you’ll have to cancel it and suck again!’

“U-understood. Eh? B-but Master.....this is slightly strange.”

Racard who was running away from Karma suddenly frowned. In a short while, Racard suddenly screamed and rolled around on the ground.

“Aaaaak! M-Master. I-it hurts! It feels like I’m being eaten!”

“R-Racard, wake up! Razak, protect Racard!”

Ttadak, clack clack clack clack!

Razak who had retreated at Ark’s command ran towards Racard. But after his scream was heard, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-Your summon Racard has manifested a new vampire ability.

Racard has awoken one of the abilities obtained when he became
--

an Earl after defeating Karakul. With two skills of the same nature saved in the slot, Racard has learned 'Skill synthesis.' 'Skill synthesis' has the ability to combine the two skills to make another one. When the two skills with different properties are synthesized, it will evolve one step higher.

-Skill Synthesis: Two saved skills are combined into one.

* Skill currently synthesized in the body:

<Absolute Time> Absolute Time is able to invalidate all time magic in the surroundings for 10 minutes.

'Skill synthesis?'

Ark's mouth dropped as he read the information window. Wasn't it like eating meat and spice separately, but then mixing it for delicious food? Combining Time Acceleration and Time Rewind created Absolute Time! The two effects mixed and created a skill that destroyed time magic. If he had sucked Time Acceleration twice then he never would've awakened the vampire's abilities! If Absolute Time was able to destroy time magic then Karma wouldn't be a problem anymore.

"Good! This is it!"

"Ugh, I didn't know it would feel that bad. Please use it quickly. Ouch!"

Racard muttered as he still hadn't adapted to the nausea from awakening his ability.

"Yes, very soon....."

Ark immediately prepared a counterattack. Now it was possible to finish Karma off whenever he wanted. Before he had only thought about escaping but now he had a brilliant idea.

'Wait? That fellow stops all flying attacks with Time Rewind. And Time Rewind returned the moment to hundreds of years ago. 'Then perhaps.....?'

“Radun, the Old Sword!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

As soon as Radun gave him the sword, Ark threw it towards Karma.

“Bah.....Time Rewind!”

Karma judged that it was an attack and turned back time. Of course, the sword lost its energy and fell to the ground. But the sword which fell to the ground was different from before. The Old Sword he picked up in the crypt was literally an old sword. What would happen if it was hit with Time Rewind?

‘As expected!’

Ark quickly reclaimed the Old Sword and looked at the information window.

Ancient Sword

Weapon type: One-handed sword

Attack: 20~22

Durability: 200/200

Weight: 45

User Restriction: Level 250

The sword buried with ancient warriors in the underground crypt. The basic equipment of the infantry, it is a lightweight and reliably crafted sword. It is a sword within any decorations, making it easy to handle with a decent attack. This type of sword improves basic agility.

<Option: Agility +5>

Ark was in such a good mood he felt like screaming. Yes, hundreds of years ago the sword was in its perfect state. But it had been buried in the ground for hundreds of years and couldn't be used anymore. He had returned it when it was created for the first

time. Ark intended to change all of the items he found in the crypt.

‘I found 30 items. I can change all of them into useful items!’

Ark hid his real intentions and muttered.

“Ugh, there is also a failure?”

“Hahaha! You fool.....Every attempt will be the same!”

“But there’s still a lot of weapons. You can’t stop everything. Take this!”

“You fool, didn’t I say that was useless? Time Rewind! Time Rewind!”

Karma was a guy whose primary nature was protecting himself. Then couldn’t Ark use that to change all the junk items to something new? Ark’s only worry was that Karma would notice and start to use Time Acceleration. It would be fine with normal equipment but if Time Acceleration was used on old items then they would turn to dust. However, Karma was tricked by Ark’s act and kept on using Time Rewind.

‘Hahaha, I’m sweeping in the money!’

Ark frantically threw the junk items.

“Take this, take this and this.....eh? This is?”

“Huk huk huk, already.....ran out of.....huk huk huk, of items.”

Karma muttered as he gasped and Ark clicked his tongue.

“Yes, everything is gone. Unfortunately.”

“Huhuhu! Huk huk huk, now it’s your turn..... Huk huk huk, the items you’re wearing.....huk huk huk, I’ll turn it to dust..... Huk huk huk, Time Acceleration!”

Karma made an elated expression and rushed forward. Then Ark laughed and muttered.

“Racard.”

“Ohhhhh, I’ve been waiting for this. Eeeeeek! Absolute Time!”

Racard seemed like he was vomiting up the skill. There was a roaring sound and all the time magic used by Karma was destroyed.

“Huk, what, what the.....why.....?”

Karma burst out with confusion. He hit Ark’s armour with a disbelieving expression but there was no change in the armour. Karma realized that something was wrong and stuttered as he looked at Ark.

“W-wait a minute..... There is something wrong..... I’m just a little tired.....”

“Ah, is that so?”

Ark smiled pleasantly at Karma and nodded. Next Ark continuously used Dark Blade. Karma was no problem now that he didn’t have his time magic. With Razak and Racard attacking as well, Karma fell into a critical condition within 2 minutes.

“Huk.....I can’t die....not like this!”

Karma stumbled and shouted when he had 5% health left. Instantly a weird black air current started forming around Karma’s body. Most of the bosses had a special skill they used when in critical condition. Karma’s final knockdown skill seemed to be something other than time magic. Ark had the thought too late and rushed forward with ‘Jump.’

“It’s too late, Dark Blade!”

Kwaaaaaaa, kwaaaaaa!

Then Karma’s body split in half and the black smoke went in all different directions.

‘Damn, did he finish the skill?’

Ark maintained a defensive stance. But the unexpected message windows appeared in front of him.



-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

‘What the? Wasn’t Karma’s final skill completed? I didn’t feel an attack.....’

Anyway, Karma died and his level rose. He felt dissatisfied but Karma died so he didn’t pay it any attention. He gained 5 levels after defeating Karma. In addition, he managed to transform 30 junk items into fine items.

“Huhuhu, he was a strange person to the end but it turned out okay.”

Ark carefully looked at the items that dropped onto the ground after Karma collapsed.

Short note regarding Racard’s synthesis skill. Nature= Time magic.
Property= Accelerate or Rewind.

Rise, Rise 2nd Profession!

Note: I'm going to change the chain skill 'Dark Strike' to 'Dark Torrent.' I had trouble translating this skill but there were two possible interpretations and I went with Dark Strike. However, that's not possible anymore because there is another skill called Dark Strike so I'm going to change it to Dark Torrent. However, I have no editor anymore so the changes will be slowly made.

-Phantom Sandglass (Special)

The fallen soul Karma was able to use time magic because of this artifact. Although the origin of the hourglass is unknown, the sands running through it has the power to move time.

When you use the Phantom Hourglass, the time magic will allow you to rewind time or forward it to the future.

However, that effect does not apply to living things.

<The number of uses: 5>

'What is this?'

Ark stared at the hourglass. It was a boss monster. Of course he had hoped for equipment but all he got was a consumable. The Phantom Hourglass. It was an artifact with the power to control time. Although he was initially in an unbearable situation because of it, he discovered a lot of loopholes in its power after fighting Karma. In addition, Ark's opponents were monsters. What use was there in ruining the armour or weapon of a monster? It was possible to use it to recycle junk items.

'But there are only 5 uses.'

What kind of compensation was repairing 5 junk items for defeating a boss monster? Ark sighed with a depressed expression.

‘The boss was a little shabby.....’

The compensation was also shabby.

‘Well, the artifact still has a unique ability so it might be useful. If I meet a strong boss then I can destroy its armour or weapon. Yes, there is no need to be disappointed. I didn’t enter looking for loot.’

Ark collected the Phantom Hourglass and then looked around. He had wandered around the entire crypt and even defeated the boss. The only thing left to do was look for clues about his profession change quest. While he was standing in front of the boss, Buksil’s eye approached and said.

“Ark-nim, it continues over on that side.”

His eyes confirmed that there was a small passage behind where he saw Karma for the first time. There was no reason to think about it. Ark entered the passage. He walked for approximately 50 metres. But why was a skeleton suddenly blocking the passage? There was still an enemy remaining after defeating the boss? Ark instantly prepared for battle after discovering the skeleton. But no matter how long he waited, the skeleton didn’t make any weird movements.

“This is just a statue?”

The eyeball muttered as it flew around. Just like the eyeball said, the skeleton was just a statue. The statue had numerous bruises on its surface and was standing in a defensive stance with its shield raised in front of it. It stopped people coming in from the outside.....no, the skeleton actually blocked the passage. Although the passage behind it was seen, it wasn’t possible to get past the statue.

‘What the, this is? What should I do?’

Despite pushing or pulling, the statue would not budge. Although it didn’t look like metal, a metallic sound rang out when he tried to hit it with the sword.

‘Why is the statue in this place? Perhaps this is a clue for my profession quest?’

There was no reason for a statue to be placed here. Ark meticulously looked over the statue. However, the only things visible on the surface of the statue were the bruises.

'Is this statue really a clue towards my profession quest? Or is it just a statue that was trapped inside? I can't enter because of the statue....ah, that's right.'

"Buksil, go inside and confirm what is there."

The statue blocked the narrow passage so well that even Racard who had changed into a bat couldn't pass. However, there was enough space for one eyeball to get through. The eyeball became brave after Ark's command and entered the gap. No, it tried to enter. Suddenly red flames rapidly emerged from the eyes of the statue and attacked Ark and the eyeball.

"Huk, what, what the? This guy.....was alive?"

Ark was totally caught off guard and tumbled to the ground as he received a critical hit. At the same time, something similar to iron powder fell from the surface of the statue. After it had all fallen off, the perfect form of the skeleton was revealed. Although its body only consisted of bone, the skeleton emitted a strong force that was completely different from other undead. The skeleton glared at Ark with red eyes and approached.

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak instantly stood in front of Ark and held up his shield. Kakakakak, sparks flew as iron met iron. But after a short moment, the skeleton pushed forward with his shield and created a shockwave that sent Razak flying.

"Razak! Damn, Racard quickly move him away!"

"U-understood. This way you stupid bones!"

Racard shouted towards the skeleton. The skeleton flinched and stopped running up to Razak. It looked at Razak and Racard dumbly then ran up to Ark and said (?).

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack? Clack clack clack clack!

“Eh? What the? Master, wait a minute!”

Racard shouted with a surprised expression.

“What the? He’s trying to kill us.”

“This guy is asking if Master is the Truthseeker. If you are then he isn’t our enemy. He is the summon of Hero Maban.”

“W-what? Hero Maban’s summon?”

Ark stopped attacking and asked with confusion.

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

“He thinks we were rude for not recognizing a senior.”

Clack clack clack clack! Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack, ttadadak!

“Hehehe, rude? We are honourable pets fighting for our Master. There is no need for us to apologize.”

Racard looked between the two skeletons with no interest and interpreted. Well, Racard was the only one who understood the foreign language so it was good that he was there while the two skeletons were talking. Anyway, Ark looked at the skeleton and remembered the hints for his profession change quest. The person who has forgotten the time in the true darkness will welcome you. The true darkness meant the underground crypt. Hero Maban’s had slept for hundreds of years before Ark appeared in front of him so he had forgotten time.

‘All the hints for my quest have been solved. All that’s left is to change professions. Then wouldn’t the skeleton hold the key for my profession quest?’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him. Razak and the skeleton who had been talking suddenly tilted their head to one side and asked.

Clack clack clack? Clack clack clack clack?

“He asked if you’ve met someone else before meeting him?”

“Meet? Is he talking about Karma?”

“That’s right, Karma. He asked how did you do it?”

“I defeated him..... Uh, what? I didn’t defeat him?”

Ark asked in a concerned face as the skeleton shook his head. After thinking for a while, the skeleton shook it off and continued talking.

“He asked if you have the qualifications to prove that you are the descendant of Hero Maban.”

“This thing?”

Ark pulled out the Three Marvels that had been combined into one disc. The skeleton stared at the disc as he seemed lost in his memories. The atmosphere became heavy as Racard continued interpreting.

“It is a long story. But he will explain the reason why Hero Maban called you here.”

The skeleton guided Ark into the passage he had blocked. How long did he follow the skeleton? After 50 metres, a small space the size of a living room appeared. In the corner there was a pile of old ingredients covered in dust and a small spring flowed into a well on one side. The traces showed that someone who wasn’t an undead lived there. In the centre of the room there was someone sitting down cross-legged. The dead person just sat down in that position like he was a mummy. Who had lived and died in this place? In addition, why had he died in a lotus position like a monk? While Ark looked doubtful, the skeleton slowly approached and kneeled before the dead person before speaking. Whatever he said caused Racard to burst out screaming.

“Heeek! M-Master!”

“What the? What is it?” What did he say?”

“.....This mummy is.....Hero Maban!”

“What? H-Hero Maban? This mummy?”

Ark looked at the mummy with a stunned expression. It was a name he had been hearing since he started the game, Hero Maban. One of the 7 heroes and the founder of Ark’s profession, Dark Walker. But none of the beast clans or even his lover Adelaine knew where he had died. He had turned into a mummy in the underground crypt.....!

“Why on earth? It is impossible for Hero Maban to have died locked in here.....”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack.

“Of course this is Hero Maban.”

Racard interpreted and the skeleton instantly sighed and sat down. Ark also sat down on the spot.

-Clack clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack. (I am Anguradon. The undead who protected Hero Maban.)

Racard sat down on Anguradon’s shoulder and simultaneously translated his words. Anguradon struggled with his explanation before talking again.

-Clack clack, clack clack clack? (Have you looked around the city above the underground crypt?)

“Yes....I had to find the clues for my profession change quest.”

-Ttadadak, clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack. (Then it will be easy to explain. That is the reason why the dying Hero Maban called the Truthseeker here.)

“Because of the city?”

Ark asked and Anguradon instantly looked upset. Anguradon’s subsequent explanation was startling. The original name for the City of the Dead was Oberium. Before the Dark Century occurred, it was a city in Seutandal ruled by a brave warrior. It was also the

people of Oberium, who exchanged with the continent while the Nakujuk and Baran were still barbarians in the grassland. It was the reason why there were no records of them in the Baran clan's history. When the Dark Century was at its peak, the kingdom with the strongest forces was Oberium. Compared to the continent, Oberium was invaded but such dark power that it had already become a ruin.

"But why is it like this now?"

-Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack. (It is because of the terrifying power of the Dark Lord who terrorized the world. It will be easier to watch it then listening to me explain.)

Then Anguradon took out a memory crystal present in the room. When Ark received the memory crystal, a panorama like picture appeared.

'This is.....?'

The landscape that appeared was somewhat familiar. Yes, it was looking down on Oberium the city of the dead. The landscape that appeared was from before Oberium had become a ruin. Just like Selebrid the capital city of Schudenberg, Oberium was a huge and gorgeous city. And thousands of Oberium's soldiers wearing shiny armour in a square. The time period was near the end of the Dark Century. The assembled soldiers had gathered to help the 7 heroes fight against the Dark Lord. They geared up and confirmed their determination. Shortly before they headed to the continent, a dark shadow suddenly crept over their heads. Fear spread over their faces as the warriors raised their heads. Confusion also spread over Ark's face.

'T-that, the Rwigenberg!'

Yes, the huge skyray had appeared above the soldier's heads! It was the aerial fortress Rwigenberg that the red man had seized and disappeared with previously. The warriors mobilized their magic and arrows and waged a war against the Rwigenberg. Then the Rwigenberg's mouth opened and a black air current flowed out. The warriors enveloped by the black air current screamed and rolled on the ground. And.....the bodies of the warriors started changing

slowly.

‘The dead? Doesn’t that look like the dead? Then the dead wandering around Seutandal.....!’

Yes, the identities of the dead wandering Seutandal were the previous residents of Oberium. Here the video was lost as the memory crystal was broken. Unlike the current crystals, the ancient spells on the memory crystal shattered it once it was played once. Anguradon started talking again after the crystal broke.

-Ttadadadadak, clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack. (The magic you saw was the ultimate curse magic that the Dark Lord created near the end of the Dark Century. The Dark Lord aimed the results of his magical experiments towards Oberium which was the most threatening forces at the time. If he had completed the ultimate destructive magic then the world would’ve ceased to exist.)

Ark was reminded of words from the Wolrang elder. When the Dark Century was ending, the Dark Lord had sent his most powerful weapon the Rwigenberg to Seutandal. Ark had wandered ‘why?’ when he heard those words but now he knew the answer to those questions. It made no sense to send the most powerful weapon to attack the Baran clan when the Dark Lord was being threatened by the 7 heroes. But he understood after seeing the contents of the crystal. The Dark Lord had sent the Rwigenberg to stop Oberium from sending reinforcements. Oberium who had ruled Seutandal was completely destroyed and the residents turned into the dead. These dead people were different from the normal undead.

-Clack clack clack clack.....clack clack clack. (Although Oberium’s sacrifice was painful, the 7 heroes were able to defeat the Dark Lord thanks to the absence of the Rwigenberg. But that didn’t mean the end of the Dark Century. The 7 heroes.....no, Hero Maban knew that.)

Anguradon looked at Hero Maban with melancholy eyes then continued.

-Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack clack. (While

everyone was drunk on the joy of victory, Hero Maban was worried about the future. One day the Dark Lord would be resurrected. And if the Dark Lord is resurrected then the world will be threatened by the ultimate curse magic again.)

The magic that the Dark Lord had completed during the end of the Dark Century had only been used once against Seutandal. The continent had never directly experience the fear so they were unfamiliar with the magic. But Hero Maban knew that the Dark Lord would rise again and threaten the world with his magic. While the other heroes joyfully celebrated on the continent, Hero Maban looked for the door to this dimension by himself and found it. He used the knowledge he gained from fighting against the forces of darkness to study the curse magic. He also did it for Oberium who met a tragic fate right at the end..... But Hero Maban couldn't solve the secret of the magic.

-Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack clack. (Hero Maban had no choice but to use his final method.)

Anguradon clenched his fists and looked at Hero Maban. A skeleton.....only bones remained so Anguradon couldn't cry.

-Clack clack clack, clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack clack. (It was to accept the curse magic into his body in order to find a technique to resist the magic.)

Ark finally knew the answer to all his questions after hearing Anguradon's words. Yes, he finally realized how Hero Maban had died. He used his own life to figure out the secret to the magic. That was also the reason why he led Ark who was the Truthseeker here. He sacrificed his own life in order to convey the secret of the curse magic to the next generation. That was probably the reason why he hadn't visited the mermaid queen Adelaine like he promised. Just as Ark was thinking this. Adelaine's necklace that was on his chest started trembling. Ark grabbed the necklace and looked at Hero Maban's remains.

'What's this? Why does it want me to go there?'

It was hundreds of years later yet the necklace was still filled with devotion for him. Why did he purposely cut himself off from the other heroes and his sweetheart? It was impossible for somebody sane to act like that.

Ark honestly couldn't understand his behaviour. No, he didn't want to understand. But he still managed to elicit true devotion from other people. Anguradon also displayed tremendous loyalty to Hero Maban by staying by his side and defending him for hundreds of years.

"Huk huk huk, he is a hero. This guy is a real hero. I'm fiercely impressed. But the descendant of that hero....."

Tears dripped from the eyeball before he looked at Ark. Hero Maban probably hadn't imagined that his descendant would be like this. However, Anguradon didn't know Ark's character and just spoke in an excited voice.

-Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack clack! (I had been waiting for you. I verified the evidence of Hero Maban's selection with my own eyes. Just like Hero Maban predicted, the Truthseeker has come and he can receive the secret of the curse magic.)

Anguradon stood up and approached Hero Maban. Then he stared at him with sad eyes before reaching towards the jaw and crushing it. Then the mummy remains turned into dust and two precious stones fell out. One was a shining gem that burned while the other black gem emitted a special aura. Anguradon extended the first shining stone to Ark.

-Clack clack clack, clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack. (With this it is possible to receive some of the dark magic that Hero Maban left behind. He left some of his experience and power along with the knowledge of the curse he studied. Truthseeker, receive his legacy. Insert it into the Three Marvels and receive his power.)

'Finally my second profession!'

Ark swallowed his saliva and received the gem. Although he had heard everything about the Dark Lord's resurrection, Ark cared more about his second stage profession. When Ark's trembling hands

inserted the precious gem, a tremendous light was emitted from the Three Marvels disc and an information window appeared.

-Hero Maban's soul stone has been combined with the Three Marvels.

As the Truthseeker, you had chased after the footprints of Hero Maban and collected the Three Marvels.

That journey wasn't just to obtain the Three Marvels. Hundreds of years ago, Hero Maban realized the true power of the darkness, stars and moon.....while travelling by himself, he looked at the shining stars and moon in the darkness and realized the meaning of the true night.

He hadn't realized it but it was already embedded deeply in his heart. Hero Maban truly loved the darkness and left his knowledge in the 'Soul Stone,' allowing a Dark Walker to change professions to a Dark Soul.

Would you like to change your profession?

Was that even an impossible choice?

"Change! Change! Change!"

The light that was emitted by the disc was absorbed by Ark's body.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +450		
Fame	11,725 (+ 500)	Level	344
Profession	Dark Soul		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of the World Tree, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero		
Health	5,405 (+150) <+1000>	Mana	5,445 <+1000>

Spiritual Power	200 <+200>	Strength	672 (+28) <+40>
Agility	832 (+55) <+50>	Stamina	1,032 (+20) <+40>
Wisdom	Wisdom 118 (+10) <+40>	Intelligence	1061 <+50>
Luck	112 (+60) <+40>	Flexibility	146
Art of Communication	66	Affection	67 (+10)
Resilience	428		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		153	
Added Profession Effect			
* Your profession restrictions have been released and your profession-specific skills have been upgraded to a higher level.			
* You've acquired the special skill 'Area Declaration': Glory of the Night acquired.			
* Your profession restrictions have loosened and you have successfully learnt the highest rank skill 'Divine Skill.'			
* Your profession-specific skills have been upgraded to a higher level.			
* The proficiency and rating of your previous skills have been upgraded.			
【Dark Strike 】: Upgraded version of Dark Blade. It has inherited the effects of Dark Blade by default. However, whenever you use Dark Strike then the power of darkness will be accumulated in the sword. It is possible to accumulate the power from 2-5 times before inflicting a critical hit on the enemy. <Number of accumulations x 50% of attack is added. Mana consumption: 200>			
【Blade Tempest】: Upgraded version of Blade Storm.			

It has inherited the effects of Blade Storm by default. However, when a magic sword is used for Blade Tempest then the effect will be even greater and there will be a helpful effect for allies.

<The explosion will depend on the special effects of the sword.
Mana consumption: 800>

【Dark Scale】: Upgraded version of Dark Dance.

Skill will be automatically used when degree of completion is 70%. Darkness will be assimilated in the body and will display an armour like effect. The dark armour will decrease your evasion by 20% but will increase your defense by 30%, and there is an increased 10% of reflecting the enemy's attack. In addition, any dark magic will be invalidated if the damage is less than 100.

<Dark Scale will increase your defense. Mana consumption: 500>

【Moonlight Illusion】: Upgraded version of Moonlight Shadow.

The maximum health of the moonlight shadow clones will increase from 30% to 40%. In addition, you can move the clones using simple commands. The number of clones and commands will depend on the skill rating. (Current number of clones is 3 and the number of instructions is 3)

* Attack everything: Take every action to fight the enemy until their health disappears.

* Take suitable action: A suitable defense and offense will be taken until their health disappears.

* Be careful of your lives: run away until their health disappears.

-You have learnt the high ranking skill 'Glory of the Night.'

Glory of the Night <Area Declaration> (Beginner, Active):

Glory of the Night is a special area declaration skill which fences off a certain area that will give you special powers within that area. When inside an area declared by Glory of the Night, a Dark Soul can summon a stone imbued with the power of darkness. When present in a 100 metre radius, the power of darkness will increase your attack and defense by 50% and magic resistance by 20%. In

In addition, you will only be able to use the high ranking skill 'Divine Skill' with the area declared. However, the Dark Soul will only be able to use the area declaration at night or until the dark stone is destroyed.

<Duration lasts for 10 minutes.

Mana consumption: 2,000

Spiritual Power consumption: 400>

Finally my second profession!

Ark looked at the information window with an impressed face. While he was still reading the information, Anguradon handed him the black precious gem and spoke.

-Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack. (Hero Maban who had sacrificed his life made preparations to pass on his knowledge. Come on, take this. Please accomplish Hero Maban's last wish.)

"That.....is mine!"

Then a dark shadow abruptly flew from the passage towards the gem. Ark was completely caught off guard while his summons looked on with confusion. But it seemed like Anguradon had already expected as he turned his body and hit the dark spirit with his shield.

"Kuaaak....how.....?"

-Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack clack. (Did you think I'd never know your interior motive? If you had been destroyed then I would've died as well. My living existence is proof that you were alive.)

"So it was like that....?"

-Clack clack clack, ttadadadak, ttadak. (Yes, I just pretended that I didn't know anything. It was in order to convey Hero Maban's knowledge to the Truthseeker. But everything is over and I have no business anymore. I had been waiting for this day. There is no use

trying to escape. You and I are one body. My duty is over so I have no lingering wish to remain in this world.)

Anguradon swung his sword at the black spirit which fell to the ground. Then the black aura flared and it escaped at an absurd speed outside.

“Kuaaaak! No. Like this.....I can’t die..... If it’s like this.....I won’t die alone..... The seal has loosened.....I’ll drive this place to eternal ruin!”

-Clack! Clack clack clack clack! (Damn, did I miss?)

“What’s going on? Who is he?”

-Clack clack clack clack. (He is Karma.)

“Karma? But I already killed him.....”

-Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack, clack clack. (No, he did not die. He just pretended to die. The fact that I’m alive is the evidence. Because that fellow and I were born from one body.)

Anguradon suddenly revealed a new secret. Karma was Anguradon’s alter ego. After Hero Maban absorbed the curse magic, Anguradon had been watching over him for hundreds of years. Although Anguradon was an undead, he was still affected by the influence of the curse magic. Anguradon gradually started to covet the gem inserted into Hero Maban’s body. In order to escape the effect of the magic, Anguradon was forced to reassemble his body using the bones from the crypt. But the bones that Anguradon removed became another living existence. It was just a body with a dreadful desire for the precious gem. Karma. Yes, Karma was just like his name. In a previous life, he had fallen into sin and his body became corrupted. Karma was literally the desire that Anguradon had shed! Anyway, Anguradon turned himself into a statue at the entrance of the passage in order to block Karma. Karma’s main body had been destroyed so the only thing keeping him here after hundreds of years was Anguradon.

-Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack! Ttadak! (We have to

hurry. He'll go on a desperate rampage after he failed to obtain the gem. That fellow has accumulated his magic for hundreds of years. If he goes outside in this situation then there is no telling what he will do. Ugh!)

Anguradon said in a desperate voice before he suddenly moaned and sat on the ground. His legs had weakened before it changed into powder and scattered.

"What happened?"

*-Clack clack clack.....clack clack clack.....clack clack clack clack!
(He....the guy is disappeared. He also knows it. So he is creating explosions in the city. You have to stop him!)*

Anguradon handed him the gem and said.

-Clack clack, clack clack clack! (Although it is vexing, I'm stuck here. I am near Hero Maban. Before it is too late.....stop that fellow from going to the outside!)

Ark still didn't fully understand what was going on but he didn't question it closely. Ark received the precious gem. Then the gem melted into a liquid and wound around his body. It changed into a tattoo with a geometrical design that wrapped around both arms until his shoulders.

The power of the precious gem has been absorbed into your body. Hero Maban truly loved this world and researched ways to oppose the darkness that threatened it until his very last breath. Unfortunately, that power is still unfinished.

Furthermore, his successor to the Dark Soul profession is too immature to understand the necessary spiritual enlightenment. Fortunately, Hero Maban had foreseen this. His successor's indication of his enlightenment is in the form of a tattoo. When you have obtained sufficient knowledge and experience in the soul stone, the tattoo will expand. When all the powers are opened then you will gain the full ability to fight against the darkness.

<p>-You have awakened the ability 'Eternal Soul.'</p>

When you receive enlightenment related to the Dark Soul, the powers of the 'soul' will be absorbed into the tattoo. The 'soul' tattoo consists of 10 stages. If you absorb all of the 'soul' magic then you will acquire the knowledge that Hero Maban exchanged his life for. The biggest goal of a Dark Soul is to absorb all this 'soul.'

'Eternal soul? Then Eternal Soul is another power of a Dark Soul?'

Ark's head became complicated as he read the information window. Ark had finally changed to his secondary profession after many twists and turns. But half of Hero Maban's true strength lay in Eternal Soul. He had to find special enlightenment of clues and loosen 10 seals. Why did he feel like this was just the start? In fact, he hadn't paid much attention to the curse magic that the Dark Lord used but that changed now that he had the tattoos.

'Anyway, that means I can become stronger?'

Ark understood as much as he could and decided to move on. There was no time to think about the skills and abilities he got from his secondary profession. There was no guarantee what Karma would do outside.

-Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack! (Hurry. You have to stop him before my body totally collapses!)

"Okay, let's go!"

Ark used Sprint and ran outside. Just as he was about to be followed by Razak.

-Clack clack.....clack clack. (The Truthseeker's summon.....wait a minute)

Razak stopped and turned around. Anguradon looked at him before taking one bone from his ribs.

-Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack! Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack. (This is the token of friendship I received from Hero Maban when we made the contract for the first time. I've kept

it all my life. Although I've changed my body after it became corrupted, this part has stayed the same for hundreds of years. Hero Maban gave his knowledge to your Master so I wanted to give this to you.)

Anguradon passed him the rib bone and sighed.

-Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack, ttadadak. (I can see the anguish in your eyes. In the past you lost the person who you've sworn allegiance to and now you have a new Master. I know. I've also had the same doubt after I evolved as an undead.)

Razak shook slightly at Anguradon's words. In fact, Razak had been anguished for a long time. The only memory Razak had was of 'loyalty.' But when he was revived as an undead, the place he woke up was a dungeon. He had no doubts while he was a skull, but his intelligence increased after he evolved and he became confused about his identity. Anguradon who had lived for hundreds of years had seen through Razak's anguish.

-Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack clack! (But you don't have to hesitate even if you don't know the past. You're not living in the past anymore. You exist in the presence and have received a new name with a new master. Your faith is the only truth. Go, serve your master!)

Anguradon finished talking and lay on the ground. Every time he moved a bone had disappeared and it was already difficult for him to hold on. But Anguradon wasn't even paying attention to his broken body and kept moving. He was heading towards the place where Hero Maban's remains was scattered. Anguradon had lost both arms and legs before he reached his Master's corpse and muttered in a hoarse voice.

-Ttadadadak, ttadadadak, clack clack clack clack.....(Ohhhh, Master.....now.....now I can go to your side. I've waited for hundreds of years. I will hear the words 'you did well' from you....this moment.....this moment.....)

Anguradon's eyes became cloudy as he slowly disappeared. His

body turned into powder which piled on top of Hero Maban's remains. Razak silently looked at them and kneeled down. Then he disassembled a rib bone and inserted the one received from Anguradon.

-Razak has used his 'Bone Collector' skill to reassemble the ribs.

<Loyalty +200>

-Your summon Razak has collected a special bone and learnt a new skill.

Steel Loyalty (Special racial skill, Active): The skeleton Anguradon's ultimate defense skill. When skill is used, the bones will change to steel and defense will increase by degree of loyalty (Current Loyalty: 894).

However, this skill can only be used when you are within 10 metres of your summon and it only used to protect the summon.

<Cool down time: 8 hours.

Mana consumption: 300>

Kwaaaaaaa, kwaaaaaaa!

"What, what the? What is Karma doing?"

Ark looked around with a bemused expression after exiting the crypt. It was the City of the Dead. No, Oberium was embroiled in a storm. The enormous storm emitted a black aura. But there were no tremors in the earth. The storm only affected the dead present in Oberium.

"Kuaaaaak!"

One of the dead screamed with pain and rolled across the ground as he was wrapped in a black aura. After a short time, the body of the dead swelled like balloon. A white gas also rose from the body of the dead. It looked like the person was becoming a transparent gas. Yes, it was the soul of the residents of Oberium that had been stuck in the flesh of the dead for hundreds of years. The soul appeared

grey when it emerged from the body and soon became a part of the storm.

‘Are the souls being swallowed by the darkness to strengthen it?’

“Aaaaaak, help me!”

The other dead were terrified and ran all over the place. They couldn’t grasp the situation but instinctively sensed the danger.

‘What am I going to do?’

He couldn’t just do nothing. Karma was definitely the one who caused this curse. Although the identity of the sphere wasn’t confirmed yet, Ark instinctively knew. The huge black sphere in the centre of Oberium became increasingly bigger as it swallowed more souls. Ark couldn’t imagine the damage that would occur once it reached its limit. It was his hunch. But he couldn’t think of what he should do.

‘Do I have to attack that black sphere?’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him. Ttadadadak! He abruptly heard a sound from behind him. It was Razak who had finally exited the crypt after being delayed by Anguradon. But as soon as Razak came outside to Oberium, he screamed and rolled on the ground. Ark realized that the situation was more serious than he thought.

“T-this!”

He had carelessly forgotten about it. Razak was an undead living in Oberium. If the dead was affected then wouldn’t Razak be affected as well? And in the end the dead were swallowed by the black air current. What if Razak faced the same situation.....?

“Damn, it can’t be.

Curses emerged from Ark’s mouth.

Eternal Soul

Dukong, dukong, dukong!

The heavy sound echoed and vibrated through the air. It belonged to the black sphere hovered in front of the buildings in Oberium square. The black sphere contracted and expanded just like a heart. The dark energy surrounding the sphere seemed to become more intense. The energy the sphere emitted wasn't just simple darkness. It was deeper than darkness! It was like the darkness was infused with wickedness and flames of madness! The inside twitched and unpleasant sounds could be heard from it.

"What is that?"

Ark stared at it with puzzled eyes.

Chwaaaaaak!

A windstorm suddenly emerged from the black sphere and the dark aura went in every direction. The dark aura flew around the ruins like a snake looking for food and closed around one of the dead.

"Aaaaah, help me!"

"I don't like this, ah, no!"

Screams rang out all over the place. Did the dead still have memories of the cursed magic that happened hundreds of years ago? The dead who lingered had shown no interest in anything now turned pale with fear at the dark aura. They rolled on the ground to escape but their resistance was meaningless.

"Kuaaak!"

The dead who screamed were eventually captured. The translucent grey gas emerged and scattered everywhere. It was the souls of the dead. The souls were drawn into the black sphere like they were pulled by magnets. The black sphere opened like a huge, hungry

animal and devoured the souls.

“Souls.....it’s eating them?”

A groaned flowed from Ark’s mouth. It was unthinkable to even consider. Overwhelming fear! The dead were in a complete state of panic at the horrifying scene. They screamed and ran all over the place, but the dead had no chance of escaping the dark aura. It was the end once they were caught. The dark aura sucked out the souls and then the souls were swallowed by the black sphere. Whenever that happened, the black sphere fluctuated and the dark aura became even stronger. The same situation hundreds of years ago was being reproduced again in Oberium!

“Damn, what on earth? What am I going to do?”

Ark couldn’t grasp how to handle the sudden situation. At that time, something rose from the mouth that swallowed the soul. It was shaped like a huge human face!

“Karma!”

Ark screamed after seeing the face. To his surprise it was the face of Karma who he defeated in the crypt. Yes, Karma had formed after Hero Maban’s summons became corrupted by the curse magic and shed his form. In other words, Karma was using the magic which drove Oberium to extinction! It was the reason why the atmosphere was unusual.....

“I’ve grasped the situation.”

Ark murmured in a gloomy voice.

“Is this the boss’ second transformation?”

That’s right. In RPG games, the heroes would go through obstacles to defeat the final boss only to have it go through a final, stronger transformation. However, the boss monster was only level 450 and didn’t have time magic anymore yet he went through a secondary transformation?

“Like this.....I can’t die....not like this!”

Ark looked at it with irritated eyes. While Karma chewed on the souls of the dead, he fixed his gaze on Ark.

-You are.....!

Chwaaaaaak!

Ark drew his sword.

“This is the end, Dark Blade!”

Ark reflexively swung his sword. But the sword just pierced through the darkness and it wound around Ark.

“Eh? What, what the? The attack didn’t hit?”

Ark looked somewhat perplexed. Then the dark spirit passed through Ark, just like it previously did the sword.

“What the hell?”

He used Skill Penetration a little too late.

* Karma’s special skill: Soul Eater

When this magic is used, Karma will be able to seize the souls of the dead to satiate himself. When Karma absorbs the souls, he is able to absorb the chaos energy. If the chaos energy accumulates then Karma will be able to use this energy for a special skill. However, Soul Eater can only be used to seize the souls of the dead and undead.

Ark, Racard and Buksil’s eye was wrapped in the dark aura but they weren’t dead so they weren’t affected. In Karma’s current state, Ark’s sword was unable to damage him. But Karma was also unable to damage Ark.

‘I got scared for no reason.’

However, it was still too easy to breathe a sigh of relief.

‘There is something unusual.’

Although he couldn't be attacked by Karma, he was still uncomfortable by something. In particular, the chaos energy present in the information window weighed in his mind. Ark had taken away the gem that Karma had targeted for hundreds of years. Wasn't there a reason he was trying to obtain the chaos energy from the dead souls? If the chaos energy became full then there was no guarantee what would happen.

"We should withdraw first to check out the situation."

"Huh? But there's still the dead people."

"It can't be helped. My attacks don't connect."

Ark looked at Buksil's eyeball and scratched his head with irritation. Of course Ark wanted to help the dead. They had been cursed and suffered forever while being forgotten by the world. Although they were NPCs in the game, he couldn't help feeling pity for them after hearing Anguradon's words. But the sphere was collecting energy for a questionable attack. The dangerous smell was more important than his compassion. In addition, would the dead even obey if Ark gave an evacuation order?

'Although my mood is a little bad, I don't have a choice.'

However Ark couldn't flee. Ttadak, ttadadadak!

Before he even moved a step, he heard Razak's voice from behind him. Based on the information about Soul Absorption, Ark and Racard weren't affected by it. But there was something he hadn't considered. Razak was an undead who was also tied to Oberium. Yes, Razak had been wrapped in the dark aura as soon as he exited the crypt.

-Razak has been caught by Soul Absorption.

Once caught by soul absorption, the dead's life force is consumed continuously. The health which disappeared was absorbed by Karma. Once the soul is trapped in Karma's body then it can't be freed.

“God dammit!”

Ark cursed as he realized the situation too late. Originally, the undead had no concept of ‘death.’ The term ‘undead’ meant an existence that had already died. There were even undead users who could rejoice in killing but were unable to precisely express it. After getting out of combat, the undead was unable to enter that state again for a certain period of time. That meant..... If a user killed a monster then it would regenerate after a period of time. That is the reason why monsters continued breeding. However, the undead were created so they had no concept of reviving after a period of time. That’s why the undead regenerated quicker than other monsters. This is because the undead’s soul never leaves their body. But Soul Absorption went against that rule. The dead who had their souls caught wouldn’t be able to resurrect anymore. And that also applied to Razak. If Razak’s soul was shut in Karma’s body then Ark wouldn’t be able to summon him anymore.

‘Danger, it’s really dangerous!’

A red warning light flashed in Ark’s head.

“There’s no way! How can I leave now? Dark blade!”

However, Karma didn’t have a body at the moment and was just the pure embodiment of magic. Just like before, the physical attacks didn’t connect. Ark’s attack could do no damage to the dark aura. Meanwhile Razak rolled on the ground as he received damage from the dark aura wrapped around him.

Ttadak, ttadadadak!

“Ugh, unbelievable.....!”

Ark’s face darkened. Just like the other dead, Razak couldn’t resist Soul Absorption.

‘It will stop if I cancel the summoning but.....’

When the summoning was cancelled, Razak would be recalled to the underground jail in Oberium. The dark aura was spread all over so he would still be caught while stranded. Then Ark wouldn’t be able to

do anything.....no, he had to find a method but Razak's health had decreased at an incredible pace and was already down to 30%. And 29%, 28%, 27%.....it fell all the way to 22%.

"N-no!"

Then Ark jumped as Razak abruptly screamed and slammed his shield on the ground. Then Ark lost 300 mana and an information window appeared.

-Your summon Razak has drained your mana to use Steel Loyalty. <His body has become like steel and defense has increased by 894>

"Isn't this the skill Anguradon used in the crypt?"

Ark looked at Razak with amazement as Razak changed into a steel sculpture. Just like when Radun learnt Stalking in the past, Ark wasn't present when he learnt it and never saw the information window. Anyway, Razak stopped having his health drained after using Steel Loyalty. Since his body changed into steel and defense increased, Soul Absorption didn't have an effect anymore.

"The crisis has been stalled for the moment."

However, he still couldn't breathe a sigh of relief. Just like Anguradon, Razak couldn't move after turning to steel. And the dark aura was still attached to Razak's body. He only had 22% health left. As soon as Steel Loyalty ran out, his health would be drained and his soul absorbed completely.

'In the end I have no choice but to defeat that guy if I want to rescue Razak. There must be a way to kill him. No, there should be. If I can't handle him than Razak would be eaten. But all physical attacks are invalidated..... Huh? Wait? Physical attacks were 100% invalidated? Then isn't it the same as when I use Slime's Time? Then perhaps if I.....?'

When he used Slime's Time, the attacks he wanted to avoid the most was magic. Then Ark came up with an idea.

“Okay, then shall I try this? Elemental sword, Fire attribute!”

Pepepepeng!

-Karma has received fire damage. 50 damage!
--

“It works!”

As soon as the fire wrapped sword was brought down, the dark aura was cut like tofu. Karma negated physical attacks by 100%. In other words, the only damage came from the magical property that was on the sword. Elemental sword gave his sword an addition effect which corresponded to 10% of his basic attack. In other words, Ark could only exert 10% of his power. Therefore his damage was at most 30~50.

‘But small damage is still damage!’

Since Karma couldn’t attack Ark, he would eventually manage to defeat Karma. However, there was a big problem.....

-Karma has recovered 100 health using Soul Absorption.
-Karma has recovered 100 health using Soul Absorption.

Karma restored 100 health every time he swallowed a soul. With all the dead spread out in Oberium, his health was recovered faster than Ark could damage him. There were enough dead for several days so wouldn’t Elemental Sword be ineffective?

‘But there is no way I can wait until the dead disappears.’

Of course Karma wouldn’t be able to recover his health anymore after he swallowed all the dead. But who knew what would happen once Karma swallowed the dead and the chaos energy was charged? He didn’t know but Ark was absolutely sure that it wouldn’t improve the situation.

‘There’s only one option. Yes, I have to separate the dark aura from Razak’s body and run away as fast as possible.’

Of course, the dark aura was stuck to Razak's body so he would damage Razak as well. However, Razak was in a defensive state after using Steel Loyalty. He would hold survive until the dark aura was separated. So Ark changed his direction and attacked the dark aura that was stuck to Razak. Elemental Sword struck the dark aura and melted it. Although Razak received some damage, his defense had increased to 894 so he didn't even receive 10% damage. Ark gave an order to Racard after clearing the dark aura.

"Racard, distract Karma and turn his eyes in another direction!"

"Okay! This way, you idiot!"

Racard immediately attracted Karma's eyes to the other side of the street using Taunt.

"That's it, now's the time. Release steel loyalty! Run!"

Razak ran as soon as the skill was released. No, he was going to run. Ark judged that Karma had completely changed into the black sphere. If Racard drew his attention then they could stealthily escape. But that was Ark's mistake. As soon as Razak turned off Steel Loyalty, the pupils that were pursuing Racard turned and stared at the two escaping. Then the dark aura hanging around flocked towards Razak and covered him.

-Kukukuku.....you stupid guy.....you thought I would forget?

'Huk, what the? That guy was waiting for me to cancel the skill?'

-I won't miss even one person.....I will absorb everything within Oberium.....every existence here will be destroyed.....you'll never be able to sneak out.....if I cannot have the gem then we'll fall into darkness together!

The face once again emerged from the black sphere and made a noise. But the sounds did not enter Ark's ears. Ttadak, ttadadadak! Razak was wrapped in darkness and his health fell to 10%. He was going to become Karma's snack just like the other souls.

'.....That guy still has some rationality remaining!'

It was the mistake of a lifetime! There was no ways to prevent Razak's soul from being absorbed. He was vulnerable to magic attacks. If he was a magician then his damage would be able to exceed Karma's recovery rate. However, the damage from his magic sword couldn't exceed the recovery rate.

'If only Lariette-nim was here.....'

Ark murmured as he bit his lip. Karma's attribute was 'demonic.' The Innocence Knight's 'Holy' attribute was its natural enemy. Just like when she assisted him against Tamura, Lariette's magic would be effective against Karma. However, Karma wasn't going to wait politely while Ark left to fetch Lariette.

'If Razak is eaten, I might be able to fetch Lariette and liberate him before he is completely digested. But it would be an issue if that fellow swallows Razak's soul. Even if I hid, I don't know what the chaos energy will do. What is an alternative method? Huh? Wait? Tamura?'

Then an epiphany came to Ark's head.

'That's right, didn't Tamura also use the dead as a recovery source? I managed to block his recovery.....'

This was just like when he fought Tamura after Lariette changed to an Innocence Knight. When cornered. Tamura absorbed the dark fragments and transformed himself. Then he fed on the dead to restore his health. Monsters with the demonic attribute seemed to have the ability to recover through souls. However, it was Ark that stopped Tamura's recovery not the Innocence Knight.

'The method I used to block his recovery.....!'

It felt like a lightning bolt had struck his skull. Ark raised his head and exclaimed.

"Please recover. Remember the memory of when you were honourable soldiers of Oberium which ruled Seutandal. You have been dropped into a hopeless pit thanks to the magic.

You are the only people who can save yourselves!"

Pepepepeng!

A strange sound suddenly resonated from Karma who had swallowed the souls.

-Kuaaaaah.....what....what the....this....this is?

Black blood suddenly flowed from Karma's body. Although Karma's health after he changed to a black sphere was low, Ark was absolutely certain that the damage he received wasn't low. The movement which Karma used to pick up and swallow the dead became dull. Ark's eye lit up at the sight.

'It's just like with Tamura. He can't recover health when the Nursing effect is applied to the dead. I've finally found it. It is this fellow's weakness! Now I can defeat him alone!'

That's right. This was the method he used to stop Tamura's recovery. When he used Nursing, there was an additional effect of 'Blessing.' 'Blessing' has a holy attribute. Since Karma absorbed the dead blessed with the holy effect, he received damage instead of recovery. Every time Karma absorbed a soul which had received Nursing, he shook as he suffered a blow. Finally Karma stopped Soul Absorption and glared at Ark.

-Ohhh....you, you.....! After snatching my gem.....now you dare do such a thing.....never.....I'll never forgive you!

"You won't forgive me? What did you say?"

Until now there had been confusion on Ark's face. He had been thinking about escaping but the situation had changed. Once Soul Absorption was released, Razak was also freed. Furthermore, Karma couldn't attack Ark directly so he was now insignificant!

"Why are you behaving so impertinently? It's my turn now!"

-You intend to attack me.....

"Attack you? Why would I do something as tiring as that? Your stomach is full of weapons."

-What?

Karma flinched a little bit. Ark smiled and used Nursing again.

“Now, see what your willpower has accomplished! When your will opposes, the enormous evil won’t be able to control your soul! Your soul only belongs to you. Now it is your turn! Brave residents of Oberium, wake up and fight against the darkness!”

Pepepeng!

At the same time, there was a tremendous sound from inside Karma. Yes, Karma couldn’t swallow any more souls but he already had some trapped inside him. The souls of the dead hadn’t disappeared yet. It was only trapped. And Ark used Nursing on the souls of the dead that were confined. In other words, all the souls within Karma had changed into a bomb. Thanks to the blessing effect of Nursing, it will like Karma had swallowed a handful of grenades as there were the sound of explosions and holes appeared in his body. Just like a pierced balloon, the sphere deflated as the souls of the dead exited through the hole. It wasn’t possible to keep trapping the exploding souls. It was the weaponization of Nursing! At that moment, an intense light appeared around Ark’s body.

-The Miracle Nursing was successful.

Your sincerity in regards to the dead had surpassed the limits of space and species. In the past, the residents of the glorious Oberium was cursed with a spell and became the miserable undead. Thanks to the physical form, their souls had become sick and despairing! The most feared sickness in the world was despair Those who would die honourable have forgotten as the despair degraded and corrupted their souls. In the end, they became the dead with no sense of commitment. Yes, the most fearful point of the curse that the Dark Lord created was the ability to take away hope and give despair. But you have given those despairing souls courage to overcome the despair.

You have not abandoned the souls that everyone else has forgotten. You have extended a helping hand to them even when there was no hope left. Having a heart which doesn’t give up is a true qualification of a caretaker. Thanks to this achievement, you

have become a true paragon of a caretaker and have reached a higher level.

* Due to the success of miracle nursing, all stats increase by 1.

* The Affection stat increased by 10.

*Fame increased by 50.

*Alignment to good increased by 50.

* The 'Purification' effect is applied to all the souls of the dead.

-Thanks to the success of Miracle Nursing, you've received the title of Oberium's Caretaker.

Your fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many patients.

* As a title bonus, all stats increase by 2.

*Fame increases by 50.

'Miracle Nursing! Stat bonuses!'

It was an excellent choice to see it through to the end. When Miracle Nursing was used, all the souls were vomited out. With all the souls vomited out, Karma was worthless now. The black sphere was unable to maintain its form and crumpled.

'Although I can't deal any more damage with Nursing now that the souls are gone, there are also no ways to attack me. I can just relax and use Elemental Sword until it's over.'

"Come, shall I finish this? Elemental sword, Fire attribute!"

Ark smiled cruelly and used his magic sword.

-Kukuku.....you stupid fellow!

Then hundreds of tentacles suddenly extended from Karma and wrapped around Razak and the souls. However, Ark just snorted and laughed.

“Bah, do you want to commit suicide?”

The ‘Purification’ effect of Miracle Nursing also applied to Razak. Even if Karma swallowed the soul, it would just deal damage and he would have to vomit it out again. Swallowing the soul was like committing suicide. However, Karma didn’t swallow the souls again. After Karma captured the soul, he suddenly grew to an extravagant size.

“Huk, how come? Haven’t all the souls been vomited?”

Karma had a vague smile at Ark’s confusion.

-Huhuhu...you fool.....still don't know.....these souls are all affected by my magic.....despite them exiting, I had time to absorb the souls.....but the magic fell off the souls once they were purified.....where do you think all that magic went?

“Don’t tell me.....?”

-That's right.....because of you, all the magic separated from the souls was absorbed by me.....it was exactly what I wanted.....I'll show you what my grudge for hundreds of years can do!

Ark’s face stiffened at the messages that appeared continuously.

-Karma’s chaos energy has been 100% charged and the ‘Chain Disappearance’ skill used.

When ‘Chain Disappearance’ is used, all the undead connected with Karma will disappear together. After the soul disappears, it will cause a chain explosion that will deal x100 damage to all living things.

<Time until Chain Disappearance is used: 3 minutes>

‘Chain Disappearance.....!’

Ark then recalled the words that Karma shouted in the crypt. Karma had fallen into despair after Ark took away his precious gem. And this was the ruin that Karma wanted! Karma had gathered the chaos

energy in order to completely ruin Oberium. His use of Miracle Nursing had actually helped Karma instead. He needed the chaos energy to be charged before he could use the curse magic. Karma had taken advantage of the energy from Miracle Nursing to charge the chaos energy. The price of his mistake was ruin.....!

“A-Ark-nim!”

The floating eyeball shouted in a desperate voice. In fact, Buksil had been watching the battle from the opposite side of the river. But Chain Disappearance was a skill which dealt x100 damage by the number of souls to all living things within Oberium. There were hundreds of souls within Oberium. It was a nuclear bomb which would deal thousands of damage with one blow. Ark and even Buksil who was on the outskirts would be blown apart.

“Damn, do we have to leave?”

Ark ran forward and swung his sword.

Sakak-!

Karma’s body was struck and a black piece struck off. But although there was a black piece on the ground, the main body just grew back again. It was the same with his tentacles. No matter how many times the tentacles around Razak were cut down, they just grew back again.

“We’re screwed. Should I have run away sooner?”

But it was already too late. Now that the skill was used, Ark and Buksil wouldn’t be able to escape from Oberium within 3 minutes.

“Racard, what are you staring blankly at? Stop him!”

“But none of my attacks hit.”

“Damn, who told you to stop cutting the tentacles? Continue cutting them until they can’t combine anymore!”

“U-understood.”

Racard picked up a stone and brought it down on the black chunks.

However, the stone just passed through the blackness like Ark's sword. Karma looked at Ark and Racard and shouted.

-Hahaha, it's impossible.....now the only thing left is death.....everything will die!

In the end the stone was just thrown away. Racard who was looking around suddenly noticed something strange in a corner and flew to Ark.

"Eh? Master, look at that!"

"Can't you see I'm a bit busy? Hyaaaaa!"

"It's not that. Look over there?"

"Damn, what is it? Eh? What the, that is?"

Ark frowned as he turned around but his expression soon changed to match Racard's. Ark frantically swung his sword and sliced off chunks of blackness. But the black lumps soon re-joined with the main body once cut off. However, there were some chunks which couldn't re-join. The place where Ark was hacking at Karma was in the centre of Oberium where the dead merchant engaged in business. When the black chunks that Ark cut off fell onto the merchant's stall, the black chunks were absorbed by the japtem.

'What on earth is going on? The black lumps are pure magic so why are they absorbed by the items?'

Ark stared at it with amazement for a while before he remembered something.

'Wait.....the black lumps were originally a part of Karma. Karma had reassembled his body from the bones that Anguradon discarded in the underground crypt which had absorbed the magic for a long time. Ah, I see!'

He realized that he had forgotten a simple fact. It was Anguradon's body in the underground crypt, but the discarded bones were just japtem. Karma had used the magic collected in the japtem to create himself. Karma sucked the surrounding magic from the underground

crypt in order to become strong enough to threaten Anguradon. Anyway, the answer was simple when considering Karma's background. The amount of magic that could be absorbed depended on certain conditions.

'When it falls off Karma's body, it is just lumps of magic. Then just like the magic poured into the bones in the crypt the first time, wouldn't the magic be poured into the japterm? If all the magic was concentrated in one place then another monster similar to Karma might develop. But if I distribute the cut pieces.....ok, it is worth a try!'

He had to try something instead of doing nothing.

"Racard, satellite mode. Display all the japterm present in the area!"

"Ohhh, understood!"

Racard flew upwards at Ark's command. At the same time, a small mini map appeared on the top right of Ark and marked the location of all the japterm.

"Okay, Riposte!"

Ark used Riposte in the direction all the japterm was gathered. Karma's body flew like pudding in every direction. Some of the lumps fell on the ground and re-joined the body but other magic lumps fell on the japterm and disappeared after being absorbed. The japterm which absorbed the magic turned black. After the magic was absorbed, the nature of the item was changed. Anyway, it was still japterm. No matter how much the japterm changed, there was no reason to pay attention to it.

"It has an effect. The main body is shrinking!"

-Ugh.....t-this bastard.....what are you.....stop it!

"You idiot, do you think I would stop? Riposte!"

Every time the skill was used, Karma's body scattered all over the square. Every time the surrounding japterm turned black and the body became smaller. When the size became smaller, the tentacles

broke one by one. The black chunk slowly decreased from 10 metres, 5 metres, 3 metres.....when it reached 10 centimetres, all the tentacles broke. Eventually even the main body was split into two and absorbed by the japter. Karma who had changed to the size of a finger cursed.

-Yes.....you....dare.....I.....can't forgive you.....

-The Chain Disappearance skill has been completed!

When the time limit ended, Karma's body split. And.....bang! Karma exploded like a small pea. Chain Disappearance was a soul destruction skill which caused souls to self-destruct together. However, Karma's body had changed to the size of a pea and there were no souls attached so the explosion was small. In the end his final move meant nothing.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.

Ark shouted with joy at the sight of the message window. He had rescued Razak and the dead and even gained 2 levels. The experience he got from the boss wasn't that bad. He even succeeded in Miracle Nursing and raised his stats. That wasn't the end of the bonus he received from killing Karma. Even though Ark wasn't expecting a lot of loot, he still searched through the remnants of Karma. Finally he noticed a shiny black stone near where Karma exploded. As soon as he grabbed it, the stone melted down and was sucked into his palm. At the same time, both sides of his wrists started aching.

"Ouch, what the?"

Ark flinched and looked down at his wrist. The area which throbbed was where his tattoo was engraved. It was the trademark of 'Eternal Soul.' That part tingled like it was hit by a hammer and a light surrounded it. At that moment, the tattoo cracked and started expanding. Then an information window appeared in front of him.

-A seal of 'Eternal Soul' has been released and you've acquired a new profession-specific skill.

[Demonic Response]: Eternal Soul Stage 1 (Beginner, Passive)

'Demonic Response' is a necessary stage to learn if they want to reach the enlightenment needed for Eternal Soul. When fighting against a monster with the demonic attribute, you will deal additional 5% damage and resistance to the magi attribute will increase by 10%. In addition, you will be able to detect hidden demonic energy within the bodies of monsters.

<Attacks against demonic attribute +5%, resistance to attributes +10%>

[Demonic seal]: Eternal Soul Stage 2 (Beginner, Active)

When the health of a monster with the demonic attribute falls to 3%, the soul of the monster can be released to be sealed. In addition, you will be able to seal the demonic attribute within certain items. The items sealed used Demonic Seal are either destroyed or given a random property. When the proficiency increases, the power will become stronger and the possibility of destruction will decrease.

<You can extract magic and seal it in an item. The effect is random. Spiritual Power consumption: 50>

"Eh? Eternal soul?"

Ark looked at the information window with confusion. In fact, he had been wondering how to acquire the special qualities of Eternal Soul. Then this is the enlightenment associated with a Dark Soul? The original information window was vague about how to acquire the special enlightenment. But now he had a sense of it..... After a seal was released, he was able to understand most of the theory behind it. Eternal Soul was a skill created by Hero Maban to battle the forces of darkness. The key to releasing that skill was related to those dark forces. In other words, he had to study various demonic

attribute to obtain a clue to reach the next stage.

“Now I have Demonic Response and Demonic Seal.....”

Thanks to Demonic Response, he could detect monsters with the demonic attribute. While travelling, Ark had encountered monsters with the demonic attribute several times. Tamura who he met in the Abyss of Despair and the Ancient Evil Goat in Silvana’s dungeon was also of the demonic attribute. Judging from his experience, monsters with the demonic attribute was a lot stronger compared to the other attributes. When dealing with such a monster, additional damage would definitely be helpful. And he received 2 skills just from unsealing one seal. What would happen if he sealed the demonic attribute into an item? He understood the general principles after seeing Karma being absorbed by the japtem. But the nature of an item couldn’t be changed so easily. If he sealed the demonic attribute into an item then there was a possibility that it would be destroyed.

‘What would the demonic attribute do to an item? There is also the possibility that it will be destroyed.....then liberating the souls of a monster is a good thing. Eternal Soul. Then the stage 1 and 2 skills I received are tremendously useful. Can I get it easily?’

Ark clicked his tongue with a regrettable expression.

-Ohhh, I.....I.....

The dead souls scattered around and stood up. Ark thoughtlessly flinched and stepped backwards. The souls of the dead which Karma spat out were different from before. Although their form was still a vague grey, it became clearer after Karma disappeared.....but above all their eyes changed. Until now, their eyes had looked absent-minded like they had been taking drugs. Now the eyes were sparkling and looked around everywhere.

-T-this is.....?

-It’s like I had a nightmare.....

-Ah, yes I remember.

-Yes, we were defeated. The Dark Lord.....

-How long has it been since then?

The souls muttered as they seemed like they were waking up after many years of sleep. After Karma swallowed their souls and they were purified using Miracle Nursing, the souls had regained their past memory. Their expressions were confused as they wrestled with their memories after waking up.

-That huge lump of demonic magic.....we were one step away from falling into an eternal darkness. But we heard someone shouting and listened. Our minds was closed with despair and someone opened it.....!

The gazes of the souls fixed on Ark. Then he heard a voice from behind him.

-His Majesty the king has come. Everybody salute!

-Y-your Majesty!

The souls split to the left and right with surprise and gave deep bows. Ark was unsure of how to react. In the meantime, a procession walked between the dead people. It was the King and guards he saw in the throne room while searching for the pieces of the moon. Thanks to the Miracle Nursing, the previous vacant eyeball had cleared up.

‘It’s like I’m looking at ghosts when their eyes are cleared..... But is something wrong?’

Ark was filled with anxiety. The ghost king quickly approached Ark and grabbed his hand.

-You. It was you!

“Huh? What are you.....?”

-Ohhh, there is no doubt. The voice who led us out of the darkness was you!

Find the Forbidden Ingredients

-You are Oberium's saviour!

-Praise the hero!

The soldier ghosts lined up in front of the barracks and raised their swords. Then the crowds of resident ghosts gave shouts of joy.

-Ark-nim, hooray!

-Hooray for Hero Maban's descendant!

He only discovered it later, but the skin of the dead was nothing but a container for the soul. When Karma swallowed their souls, the residents of Oberium were released from their restraints. Thanks to the purification, the skin of the dead was shed. Ark looked into the eyes of the ghosts. The eyes of the ghosts who escaped from the curse looked like a cartoon character. The sparkling eyes of the ghosts really didn't fit the situation. Anyway, all of this was thanks to Ark defeating Karma. The King remembered Ark's voice from when he used Miracle Nursing. After everything was put in order and Buksil and Baekgu came from the outskirts of town, they naturally got the hero treatment. Buksil looked at the sea of cheering ghosts and muttered.

"Hehehe, do you see? You're a hero."

"Don't you have any shame?"

"Huh? What is it?"

"Didn't you come running to receive the heroic treatment?"

"Why are you talking like that? Why shouldn't I have done that?"

Buksil was dissatisfied with Ark's cold words and complained.

"Ark-nim managed to pass safely through the crypt because I

supported you with my eyeball. In addition, who was the one videotaping while I accompanied you?"

Baekgu naturally nodded along.

"Yes, you really would've been in trouble without my Master's eyeball."

Ugh, he didn't have anything to retort to that. He definitely knew that he would fail without the eyeball.

"Ugh, as expected you're the only one who understands. Baekgu."

Buksil and Baekgu tearfully hugged each other. They really like to sit down and play. While Buksil and Baekgu were angry at him, Ark had no energy to waste on such trivial things.

'I have to finish organizing things here. Now all that's left is.....'

Ark looked at the King with eyes that shone even more than the ghosts. It wasn't his intention but Ark had finished Karma and lifted Oberium's residents from the curse they suffered for hundreds of years. Wasn't that a heroic deed? So he should receive compensation according to his heroic deeds. The ghost king seemed aware of Ark's attention and approached.

-You did something really important.

"You're overpraising me."

Ark deliberately answered. Although he was their hero, there was no need to show off too much. At such a time, modest was more suitable. It was natural that his image would rise favourable with the NPCs. The ghost king then continued with the words he expected.

"No, no. It is not too much praise. You're actions are deserving of that praise."

"You don't have to go that far....."

-You still don't understand what you have done for us. You can't even imagine. You can't imagine how painful our existence was for hundreds of years. We spent that whole time in endless despair.

The King looked down from the balcony with a painful expression. He had sat on the throne for hundreds of years and looked over the ruins of Oberium. When Oberium was cursed by the Rwigenberg, the King sat on his throne and cried tears of blood as he watched the end of his kingdom. The rage, despair and guilt boiling in his heart caused the King to be caught by the dark aura and he became that dishonourable existence. He stayed on the throne and saw the same image for hundreds of years, causing him countless pain. It was the really dreadful part of the curse magic. The King's haunted voice as he gave the explanation made even Ark solemn.

-Although the curse has been released, that pain is still fresh in my heart. No, my sense of guilt has deepened even more after remembering everything.

"Then what I did....."

Ark's insecure expression made the King laugh and shake his head.

-You don't have to make that expression. A King whose kingdom falls to ruin must naturally accept the pain. If I can't withstand the pain then my citizens won't be able to stomach it either. Now the curse has been released. The dark aura which bound us is gone. Although I want to give you some compensation for saving Oberium from the darkness, I don't have anything to give.....

Ark had sincerely felt anger at the darkness which invaded Oberium. In the end he managed to defeat the darkness but he couldn't even receive a single cent? When he heard the story about the dark curse, he had felt sincere anger. But no matter how angry he was, he couldn't return the treasure they lost. Then the King murmured something like he was thinking aloud.

-If there was treasure left then I would be able to compensate you properly.

'What the? Now you say that? Is that right?'

Ark frowned and stared at the King. It was obvious that the King couldn't afford to give even one penny. Ark had been full of expectation and suddenly deflated.

‘Damn, saying such useless words....well, it’s not possible. Anyway, I didn’t do it with the intention of saving them.....I should just be satisfied with this good feeling.’

Ark sighed and scratched his head. Anyway, he wasn’t going to receive any compensation for this situation. Although he would usually feel angry, looking at the ghosts he couldn’t feel that emotion.

-Ah, that’s right. There is that method!

Ark had half way given up but his eyes once again widened at the King’s words.

‘Oh, what the hell? This reaction? Should I expect something? There must be something even though the place is ruined!’

Ark looked at the King with eyes sparkling with expectation. But he was surprised at the King’s next words.

-In fact, Oberium had the custom of burying the dead warrior’s equipment with them in the crypt. The location of the crypt was a secret and unaffected by the darkness so it should be untouched. It’s been hundreds of years but it might still be worth a look. The ancestors will understand the handling of grave goods if it is for this purpose, so I’ll release the seal on the crypt right now.....

“W-wait a minute!”

Ark shouted like a person running from fire. The riches contained in the crypt? Hadn’t Ark already robbed all of them? The crypt currently bore Ark’s mark all over it. Just like Buksil had drawn on the grave stone in the swamp, Ark had also tried the same thing in the crypt. And the only person who has recently visited Oberium was Ark. If the King found such traces in the crypt then it would be tiring. If it was discovered, Ark’s reputation as a hero would fall! In the worst scenario, there was the possibility that the Oberium ghosts would turn into enemies.

‘Besides, the grave goods became new after being affected by Karma’s time magic. If they were taken away.....no, it can’t be!’

When Ark suddenly exclaimed, the King instantly tilted his head to

one side.

-What's wrong?

"T-that is....."

Ark stuttered for a while.

"You've seemed to have misunderstood something."

-I misunderstood? What is it?

"It's true that I saved Oberium. But I was only acting upon Hero Maban's will and never wished for a reward. Of course, I couldn't possible decline if I was offered compensation. But I'm not a shameless person who would take away someone's burial goods. Please listen to my words."

"Yes, Ark-nim is absolutely not that type of person. Receiving the burial goods of people who have already passed away? People who would steal things like that are trash. Don't you agree Ark-nim?"

Buksil laughed and shot a sharp glance at Ark. Although his blood pressure rose, Ark awkwardly laughed and nodded.

"T-that's right. I never hoped for a reward for my assistance."

Racard, Buksil and Baekgu all made expressions like they wanted to vomit at Ark's shameless words. This place was Razak's hometown so he just sighed from the corner. But the King couldn't understand and just nodded with admiration.

-You really are Hero Maban's descendant! Yes, Hero Maban was just like you.

The King murmured with an expression like he was recalling some memories.

-Although my memories are fragmented after I died, I still have some remaining. Before my kingdom ceased to exist, I took great pride in its military. It was good enough that people of the next generation would remember our honourable fight against the darkness. After this city became ruins, no one dared to visit here

where the cursed magic overflowed. Unlike my expectations, we have been forgotten by history.

“.....”

-But only one person. There was one person who remembered us. Hero Maban..... He didn't forget about us. He dedicated his life finding a method to save us. All his attempts ended in failure and he disappeared somewhere.....

Ark's face changed at the King's words. Hero Maban had sacrificed his life to save the abandoned souls!

'Money was power' was Ark's motto but he felt a deep emotion that was new after listening to the King. It was pride that he inherited Hero Maban's profession.

“I can't tell you in detail but Hero Maban was here until he died.”

The King nodded at Ark's words.

-Yes, it is something like that. It isn't necessary for you to say that, we already know that Hero Maban tried everything to save us. If the dark forces weren't opposed here then we wouldn't even go down in history. Our souls would've been corrupted from the regret and fallen into a rage. The reason our curse was released and we recovered our memories is because of Hero Maban. He will remain a real hero in our memories. Therefore we can't feel regret that we fought against the darkness.

“And this is the descendant of the respected Hero Maban.”

Buksil whispered as he looked at Ark with pitying eyes. After hearing such words, Ark also became a little embarrassed. Anyway, the King turned his head and looked at the soldiers lined up. The soldiers nodded with a look of pride. Then the King caught Ark's hand and said.

-Yes, I finally remembered. I'll give you a reward fitting for Hero Maban's descendant.

“Huh? A reward? The problem is.....”

When Ark made a confused expression, the King shook his head.

-No, it's not a material compensation. Hero Maban gave everything to save us and you didn't hesitate to help us either. One day, you will fight against the darkness. We would like to achieve the honour that we couldn't accomplish in the past.

Suddenly the King's hand that was holding onto Ark heated up. At the same time, there was a ringing sound and the information window appeared.

-Thanks to 'Pursuit of Truth,' you have acquired a new lore skill.

<Lore skill learned: Secret art, Ghost Knight Corps>

* 6,000 fame is needed to acquire this skill.

'A lore skill!'

Ark's eyes popped out the information window. Pursuit of Truth was the addition effect of the title 'Seutandal's Hero' that he received from Isabel last time. There were people who passed on secret techniques all over New World. He had forgotten about it after the title was received but he never imagined he would receive it in a place like this.

-Originally the royal family of Oberium made a contract with our ancestors to summon them. That is why the Dark Lord feared us. However, we're now ghosts so the contract doesn't work anymore as it is only between the living and the dead. Now that we are ghosts, we can help you using this method. Of course, you might lose some fame for making contracts with ghosts but please accept our sincerity.

If he learnt the skill then it would cause problems to his fame. He had to pay using his fame to learn the skill.

'But that skill consumes 6,000 fame.'

Ark currently had 11,825 fame. It was more than half of the fame he had gathered so far. He was a little hesitant but when would this

opportunity come again? Furthermore, fame had no special meaning for Ark. If it was for learning new skills then there was no reason to refuse.

'I can't completely grasp the skill just from the King's explanation but it is easy to gather 6,000 fame. It is very likely that it is a strong skill.'

"I don't really care about the eyes and ears of the world so it is an honour to accept. You said you didn't accomplish any glory in the past but that isn't true. Thanks to the sacrifice of honourable warriors, everybody is now living in peace. No matter what the world thinks, I consider you a true hero. How can I decline everybody's enthusiasm?"

It was beneficial. Ark's actions were sufficient to light a fire in the ghosts' chest.

-Oh, thanks to you we've gained a new life!

-We'll commit our lives to Ark-nim!

The crowd of ghost soldiers kneeled down and shouted. When the King released their hands, the back of Ark's hand had a shiny seal carved. It was a shield with swords crossed through it in a X shape. It was the crest engraved on the chest of the ghost soldiers. The crest shone for a short time before it disappeared and the information window appeared.

-You have learnt a new lore skill.

Secret arts, Ghost Knight Corps (Special, Beginner, Active): A contract with the dead within Oberium- with this summoning contract, 30 ghost knights can be summoned. The ghost soldiers will attack random enemies for 5 seconds before disappearing. The ghost knights will deal physical damage and will be resurrected if they die. When the proficiency increases, the damage of the ghost soldiers will increase even more. However, summoning the ghost knights will consume spiritual power.

<30 Oberium ghost knights will be summoned for 5 seconds. Cool

down time: 24 hours, Spiritual Power consumption: 300>

Summoning Ghost Knights! It was a skill where the ghost knights would be able to attack enemies for 5 seconds! It was a sort of wide area summoning skill.

‘Summoning the knights costs 300 Spiritual Power but my pets don’t consume Spiritual Power anymore so it doesn’t matter. It is better that it consumes Spiritual Power instead of mana.’

In addition, the attack was different from other wide area skills. For example, Flash was a wide area skill which dealt a base damage of 100 to enemies. However, it might not deal 100 damage because the skill would miss. In the end, it was better to use Dark Blade to finish an enemy. However, ‘Ghost Knight Corps’ is a skill which summoned the ghost knights. A troop of 30 knights would either attack one by one or concentrate the attacks on one target. In other words, it was different from other wide area skills because it could be used in a 1 on 1 situation or 1 against many..... No, it was even more powerful in a 1 on 1 situation.

“Thank you!”

Ark exclaimed as he grasped the King’s hand. He hadn’t received any compensation but his uncomfortable feeling had gone away. No, this skill was a reward beyond his expectations.

-We are pleased that you’re happy with our feeble help. The King nodded his head with a pleased look. So Ark finished the arrangements with the King to his satisfaction. Just as Ark was saying farewell, some ghosts approached with an awkward face.

-Your Majesty, a problem has occurred.

-A problem?

-Yes, in fact.....

The soldiers gathered in the area and pointed. It was towards the dead merchants who had changed into ghosts. However, they all had fearful looks in their eyes. Then they gathered around Ark and the

King and clamoured away.

-Your Majesty, it is those items.

-Those items?

-When we were cursed, these are items that we managed to scrape together. But after Ark-nim fought with Karma and sealed his magic in there, the items are emitting an eerie aura and can't go near it.

The merchants floated in front of Ark with a haunted expression. After sealing the demonic magic within the japtem, he had completely forgotten about it. It was probably because the ghosts could feel it that they instinctively feared the items.

'Don't tell me they want me to pay for it?'

That was what Ark worried about. Then the King snapped angrily at the merchants.

-What about it? Are you asking him to take responsibility for it?

The merchants flinched and quickly shook their head.

"Ah, no. Did we say such a thing?"

-But the fearful items are everywhere that we're scared to walk around.

-Yes, please get rid of that horrible stuff.

-Hmm, the sealed items are definitely very dangerous for us who are souls. It won't be hard to destroy but that might release the magic.....if that happens then the curse magic might be resurrected as well. But we're souls tied to Oberium.....

The King heard the circumstances and murmured in a concerned voice. Ark then spoke with sparkling eyes.

"I'll take care of it."

-You?

"Yes, I'm not influenced by the sealed magic. If you give me the

items then I'll leave it in a safe place."

-Ohhh that's right, you're the one who sealed the items so it won't be a problem for you. How about it?

-Please. I beg you to take those horrible things away.

'Huhuhu, the japtem fell naturally into my hands.'

Ark inwardly laughed at the merchant's answer. The sealed items were fatal towards the ghosts. But to Ark.....no, it wasn't dangerous even for ordinary users and NPCs. Of course, it did absorb the demonic magic so who knew how it had changed? Would he be able to sell it as scrap iron anywhere? Well, if the stores wouldn't buy it then he'll just throw it away.

'Anyway, I've learnt the summon Knight Corps skill so I should raise my intimacy with them.'

Ark took the japtem and increased his favourably impression. However, his mouth widened when he picked up an item. He never expected that such a treasure would be found among a pile of junk.

-Cursed Old Sword

Weapon type: One-handed sword

Damage: 7~10 (+ 50)

Durability: 8

Weight: 45

User Restriction: Level 250

The sword used by ancient warriors of Oberium. However, the sword has absorbed the demonic magic and changed its nature. The enchanted magic within the sword has enough energy to destroy an opponent. At the same time, the sword's durability has weakened because of the magic. In addition, the user will be affected by the curse and will receive constant damage until it is released.

* Cannot be repaired, reinforced or enchanted.

* Due to the effects of the curse, the user will receive 50 damage every 10 seconds.

-Cursed Old Shield (Magic)

Armour type: Steel Shield

Defense: 30 (+250)

Durability: 7

Weight: 30

User Restriction: Level 150 Warrior

The shield is so old that it is difficult to expect anything from it. However, the shield has absorbed the demonic magic and changed its nature. When the unstable magic within the shield is attacked, the magic will be released and damage the attacker. At the same time, the shield's durability has weakened because of the magic. In addition, the user will be affected by the curse and will receive constant damage until it is destroyed.

* Cannot be repaired, reinforced, enchanted or cannot be unequipped.

* Due to the effects of the curse, the user will receive 50 damage every 10 seconds.

'Heok, damage +50? Then wouldn't that be 57~60 damage?'

Ark's eyes popped out like he was Buksil. Ark currently used a rare two-handed sword. Gwisal's damage was 40~50. But the damage of an ordinary one-handed sword was even higher than that. Of course, it wasn't all good. The curse decreased the durability down to 8. In addition, repairing it was impossible. But was that all? It couldn't be unequipped and the user would receive 50 damage every 10 seconds. That was 300 health in 1 minute. In 10 minutes it was 3000! If a user only had 3000 health then they would die after 10 minutes. It was literally a cursed sword!

‘But it also depends on how you use it.’

It only had 8 durability so swinging it a few times would destroy it. In other words, it would break before his health would run out. Of course, the damage received in the meantime wasn't small but it would deal tremendous damage to the enemy. Then he could change the sword freely during a fight. If he was fighting multiple enemies then he could use the sword for damage until it broke.

‘No, it doesn't need to be that complicated.’

Ark could use Blade Storm to explode it. The more powerful the sword, the stronger the damage of Blade Storm would be. However, swords with a lot of damage were expensive so he couldn't normally do that. But it was different if the sword wasn't able to be sold anywhere else. In addition, the damage was suitable for a rare sword. The curse sword also had a demonic attribute. If he used such a sword with Blade Tempest then the damage would be unimaginable. The cursed sword was worth 30 swords! It was similar to Ark loading 30 missiles at the same time. And the sword would break through the defense!

‘This is a great item to throw away.’

It was unlikely that he would be able to buy a curse item like this at the store. The item couldn't be repaired and it damaged the user when equipped so it would be impossible to sell to general users. But now a japtem worth a few silvers was more useful than many items.

‘It's a jackpot!’

Ark was in a condition where his eyeballs rolled back. Then something popped into Ark's head after packing the cursed item away.

‘Wait? Doesn't the nature of the items change when magic is sealed in it?’

And Ark had the skill to seal demonic magic in items. The Eternal Soul stage 2 skill ‘Demonic Sealing!’

‘Can't I reproduce these items after I encounter a monster with the

demonic attribute?’

If he could make cursed weapons out of japtem then the effectiveness of Blade Storm would increase by 200%! He could produce missiles using japtem and monsters with the demonic attribute. Well, monsters with the demonic attribute aren’t that common..... While Ark was mulling over Demonic Sealing’s new uses, he was also packing the japtem. He found every piece of japtem in Oberium and approached the King.

“I’ve collected all the cursed items.”

-Thank you. Now the curse is gone from Oberium.

“Then I’ll take this and go. Please stay healthy.”

-Healthy.....that isn’t something a ghost often hears.

“Ah, is that so?”

Ark scratched his head with an awkward expression and the King smiled.

-Anyway, thank you again. Good luck on your journey.

So Ark received the ghosts’ farewell and prepared to leave Oberium. Suddenly Razak pulled at Ark’s sleeve, causing him to stumble.

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack.....

“What the? What is it?”

“This guy says that he wants to ask the King something.”

“He wants to ask something?”

Ark looked doubtfully at Razak after Racard’s interpretation. Razak hesitated before murmuring something again. Razak wanted to ask something about his past. Once again, Razak didn’t remember anything except for the fact that he was a knight. Although Oberium was purified after Karma was destroyed, Razak hadn’t recovered his memories like the other ghosts. So he wanted to understand why he was resurrected as an undead in the underground jail. Although

Anguradon had told him not to dwell on the past, he started to feel greedy after the other ghosts in Oberium recovered their memory. After Razak said that, Ark also became curious.

“That reminds me.....perhaps you know something?”

However, the ghost King shook his head.

-I don't know. Because many people were jailed at that time.

Razak sighed at the King's answer. Then the King thought for a while and talked again.

-But there is one thing I know. Since ancient times, Oberium has always left a special marker on the body of someone who committed a violent crime. The mark isn't able to be erased even if the person dies and only bone is left. There are no such markings on your body so you're not a violent criminal. It is most likely that you are a nobleman or knight who violated a martial law and was imprisoned.

“No, it's still not sure. What if the bones are changed?”

Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack!

Racard looked at Razak with suspicious eyes and muttered. Then Razak ran towards Racard and swung his sword. The King watched the two of them and spoke apologetically.

-I'm sorry I wasn't more help.

Ark laughed and nodded.

“Please don't worry about it. No matter Razak's past, he is my summon now.”

At that moment, Razak stopped running after Racard. Then he looked at Ark with wide and sparkling eyes. Then Buksil stroked Baekgu's head and imitated Ark.

“Baekgu, despite your past you are my dog now.”

“Yes, Master. Baekgu is happy.”

“Sheesh, it’s not funny.”

Racard kicked a stone and curled his lip.

“Dark blade!”

The sharp, sparkling sword split the space. The blood of the Mould Zombie splattered and it stumbled and withdrew. At the same time, a black flame like energy emerged from the sword and seemed to expand further.

“Not yet!”

Ark flew about the area and fired Dark Blade continuously. Every time it swung, the black aura gradually became larger until there was a spark. When the spark happened, the sword started ringing in his hand.

“Okay, now. Dark Strike!”

Ark threw his body and forcibly swung his sword.

Kuaaaa! Kwakwang!

The black aura concentrated on the sword exploded and smashed into the Mould Zombie. The black aura was wrapped in an intense spark! The Mould Zombie lost 30% of its health with one blow and the zombie scattered in all directions. If the damage was higher than the monster’s remaining health then it was an ‘Over critical’ attack.

“This is it, this is it. This exhilarating taste!”

Ark looked at the dispersed body of the Mould Zombie and laughed. The technique he used was the once he received when he switched profession, ‘Dark Strike’. ‘Whenever he used Dark Strike, the dark aura would charge until it dealt an unbeatable strike! Currently Dark Blade was an advanced skill so he could only charge it 4 times. 50% damage was added every time so four charges was +200%! In addition, Dark Strike had a higher chance of a critical hit than Dark Blade. When hit directly, a level 300 Mould Zombie lost 30% health. But more than anything, Ark really liked the

feel of the blow in his hand.

'This addictive feeling is no joke.'

The sword would vibrate whenever the dark aura was charged! The feeling when the dark aura exploded was exhilarating! It was also exciting whenever he dealt an 'Over Critical' hit on the monster. Although Ark normally used Gwisal's sword, it was interesting fighting with Dark Strike. That wasn't all. He gained four profession-specific skills after changing to his 2nd profession. It was Dark Strike, Dark Tempest, Dark Scale and Moonlight Illusion! Because he received four profession-specific skills at once, Ark felt like it was fun to test all of them.

“Master, behind you!”

At that time, he heard Racard's voice from the other side.

Kuaaaaa!

When he turned around, he saw 5 Mould Zombies running towards him. At the moment, Razak stood in front of Ark and raised his shield. Ttadadadang. Three Mould Zombies went flying when struck by the shield.

“Well done, Razak.”

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak began to laugh (?) He nodded his head. Thanks to his two summons Racard and Razak, Ark was able to unleash 100% of his battle capabilities. Racard analysed the area and dispersed the enemies properly. Meanwhile Razak stayed behind Ark and prevented any surprise attacks. This was Ark's original battle method. He hadn't understood until there was a vacant place. Ark was always with them so he had forgotten how big a role his pets played. But after he was parted with them for one month after Seutandal was raised, he realized how big of an existence they were. For the first time since he changed to Dark Walker, Ark felt true affection for his pets. That change in feelings was instantly applied to the system.



-Razak is delighted with your wholehearted praise.

<Affection +2>

‘Huhuhu, the stats can increase like that as well.’

Previously he had no interest in affection but now he knew that it could raise the skill proficiency. In a way, that stat was more important than strength or stamina. Racard pouted and complained after hearing Razak being praised.

“Me? Me? Didn’t I inform you quickly?”

“You also did well. As expected from the number 2!”

“Hehehe, isn’t that right? Right? As expected from Master.”

Racard continued rattling on. It was another good point of having two summons. If he called two at the same time then there was a burning sense of competition. That tendency had become even worse after their evolution. Therefore their combat capabilities improved even more when there were two of them.

“Bring it on, Razak’s cousin. I am the number 2!”

Racard unleashed Taunt on 30 Mould Zombies while Razak jumped all over the place and swung his shield. It wasn’t necessary to say that their presence made the battle a lot easier.

‘I’ve caught around 140 so far?’

Ark calculated it in his head while fighting. The disinfectant was necessary when fighting the Mould Zombies. Before arriving at Oberium, the disinfectant lasted for one hour and his best record was 100 zombies. Now that Razak was here to help, he killed an average of 160. That was a 60% improvement! After switching professions, he received bonus stats and new skills and he had his summons to help as well. This made the battles a lot easier.

‘My combat capabilities are at 100% thanks to Dark Soul and my summons. Should I return to the campsite and put things in order?’

“Racard, drive the zombies this way!”

“Okay!”

Racard flew around and taunted the zombies. After moving around, he managed to line up 30 Mould Zombies. Ark knew exactly what technique to use.

“Well done, you’ve gathered them properly. Jump!”

When Ark activated ‘Wolf’s Feet,’ the muscles in his thighs grew. Ark leaned his upper body forward and shot off like a bullet. The power of ‘Dark Blade’ was condensed in Ark’s sword which flew forward. It was the technique ‘Adol’ which combined Jump and Dark Blade. Ark’s sword penetrated through the Mould Zombies.

Chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa!

The sharp sword ripped through flesh and bone. The 30 Mould Zombies bounced away in different directions.

“Flash!”

Ark then continued with ‘Flash.’

Previously he hadn’t used Flash because he couldn’t control where his body would go in the swamp when he moved like a flash of light. After cooking an ‘Immunity to Poison’ dish, the toxic swamp wasn’t a problem. After repeating Adol and Flash a few times, more than half of the Mould Zombie’s health disappeared.

“Okay, Racard and Razak! Now it is a slugfest. Concentrate on one location!”

“Hehehe, I’ve waited for this!”

Clack clack clack clack, ttadadadak!

Razak and Racard gathered around Ark. Despite steadily eating food, Razak and Racard had only reached an average level of 280. They’ve learnt combat skills from Ark but their level was less than the Mould Zombies. However, it was different when Ark used a battle formation that had him in the middle. When it was ‘ $1+1+1=3$,’

the battle could change by 5 or 10 degrees! Ark and his summons removed the Mould Zombies one by one.

Kuaaaaak! Pepepepeng!

Finally the last Mould Zombie was shattered with Dark Strike and the long battle ended. When he first started the battle, he had 60% experience and now it increased to 100%.

[-Your level has risen.]

“Yes, I levelled up!”

Ark cheered and checked his character information window.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +500		
Fame	5825 (+500)	Level	349
Profession	Dark Soul		
Title	Cat Knight, Oberium's Caretaker, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero		
Health	6555 (+225)	Mana	6495(+25)
Spiritual Power	400	Strength	725 (+38)
Agility	885 (+110)	Stamina	1,105 (+35)
Wisdom	161 (+15)	Intelligence	1,123 (+5)
Luck	15 (+60)	Flexibility	158
Art of Communication	66	Affection	89 (+10)
Resilience	436		

Special stat:
Knowledge of Ancient
Relics

153

* Equipment item effects

Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.

Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%

Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10

*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20, Defense +40

Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3

Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available

Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

- * Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.
- * You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.
- * Shock absorption is increased by 20%.
- * Poison resistance has increased by 50%.
- * Skill points: 70

‘Hrmm, it is as wonderful as I expected.’

Ark laughed as he looked at the information window. After changing to Dark Soul, his various stats had ascended. But after a short time, Ark sighed and shook his head.

‘The problem is levelling up. It took a full day to gain half a level?’

Ark smacked his lips and looked at the information window with regret. After fighting Karma and leaving Oberium, Ark had risen from level 346 to 349. It was 3 levels. But it had already been one week since he had left Oberium. Even though Razak increased efficiency by 60%, he was constrained by the duration of the disinfectant and his levelling speed fell by half of its previous rate. The reason was due to his level.

In New World, users received 10% bonus experience per 5 levels when fighting monsters higher levelled than them. Of course, the opposite also applied and there was a penalty of 10% every 5 levels when the user is higher than the monsters. When there was a difference of 50 levels, they would receive no experience or items. It was a system to prevent high levelled users from staying in lower levelled areas. Currently Ark was level 349. It varied slightly but the Mould Zombies had an average level of 300. Ark would only get 10% experience at most from now on.

‘Now it is only 10%. If my level increases again then I would get experience or items.’

When considering the situation, he couldn’t allow himself to level up. It was the first time he was worried about being too high levelled.

“I have to find the necessary ingredients before that happens.....”

Ark muttered as he pulled out his dismantling knife. Yes, the reason Ark was using the disinfectant and fighting the Mould Zombies for one week was to obtain the ‘Skin of the Dead’ and ‘Heart of the Dead.’ It was better to obtain the ingredients in a place overflowing with zombies. Of course, there were a few areas on the continent where the undead was present. However, the level of the zombies Ark saw was even lower than the Mould Zombies. He wouldn’t experience a penalty to his experience and not collect any ingredients or items. He had heard rumours of places where the undead was stronger than the Mould Zombies but the distance was too far and they were too high levelled. Facing just one or two would be too much for him.

‘No matter how strong the undead, they can only give one ingredient of each type. With higher levelled monsters, my extractions skills are only intermediate so it would likely fail and take several months to finish collecting them.

So Ark decided to hunt the Mould Zombies. However, it had been one week since he had changed professions and he only gained 3 levels so he was feeling a bit frustrated.

‘But there is no other way. I have to collect all the ingredients before I reach level 350.....’

Ark sighed and moved the dismantling knife. But after dismantling 160 zombies, he only gained 30 ingredients. Thanks to his level difference, the probability of items dropping had decreased.

‘Phew, I still need to collect 300 more.....so I have to fight like this 10 more times? Furthermore, I can’t stop my level from increasing.’

Ark confirmed the items in his bag and sighed. Then Razak and Racard who had been waiting in the campsite muttered.

“Master, when are we eating? I’m hungry enough to die.

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack.

“Hungry? Ah, that reminds me....”

Ark checked the gauge floating on the top right and nodded. Thanks to the duration of the disinfectant, he was unable to take a break after the battle started. After using it twice and fighting for 2 hours, his satiety had fallen to 40%. Ark received a penalty when it dropped below 50%, but he was fighting a weak enemy so he felt he didn't need to worry about it.

'Why isn't that guy coming?'

"Ya, Buksil!"

Ark shouted at the eyeball floating above the campsite. Then the eyeball fell to the floor and rose again before replying.

"Ouch, yes? Huh? You called me?"

"What, were you sleeping when I was fighting?"

"Ah, no. I'm working really hard to gather the ingredients."

When Ark looked doubtful, the eyeball shouted angrily. The place Ark was hunting the zombies was on the outskirts of the swamp. There was a reason he intentionally fought the Mould Zombie there. There was a time limit for hunting so he had no reason to go deep into the swamp. And another reason was procuring food. Of course, it was possible to find ingredients in the swamp. However, the swamp ingredients weren't that good or numerous. Including his summons, there were 5 people in Ark's group. It was difficult to feed five people just relying on the ingredients in the swamp. Now that Ark had Baekgu to easily find the ingredients, he left the supply of ingredients to Buksil. So Buksil would gather the ingredients while Ark was fighting. While Ark set up a campsite and hunted, Buksil looked for ingredients within the range of the safe area. In fact, previously he never imagined that Buksil would be able to gather ingredients in a place where 300 monsters were rampant. But now Baekgu who was a Wolrang warrior could play the role of a bodyguard.

'Well, the efficiency hasn't increased that much.'

Ark glared at the eyeball. Buksil seemed to always head to a place out of Ark's line of sight.

“I’m telling the truth! I’ve been working hard gathering food. Think about it Ark-nim. There are three image windows floating in front of me. One eyeball is filming Ark-nim while the other one is filming me gathering ingredients. So can’t Ark-nim look at the video to confirm it?”

The eyeball clamoured tearfully. Well, he had no objections now that Buksil mentioned that.

‘However, I have to buy the ingredients that Buksil gathers so if he works too eagerly then I’ll be in trouble. It’s better for him to only gather the necessary amount.’

“I understand. Where on earth are you now? I’ve run out of supplies.”

“Eh? Already? I just dropped off 30 ingredients to you.”

“Everyone has already eaten it. Every time we finish a battle then we end up using 160 ingredients. So far I’ve been supplementing the missing ingredients with my own. But now my remaining ingredients have already fallen.”

“Hrmm, what do I do?”

The eyeball muttered as it moved left and right.

“I didn’t know that Ark-nim was lacking ingredients so I went to a place far away this time. It’ll probably take an hour if I return it right now.”

“Really? Did you obtain anything after going so far?”

“I did! And you’ll understand why. There are a lot of ingredients around here.”

“Ahhhhh, I’m hungry! Hungry! I can’t wait 1 hour! I’m hungry!”

“Shut up, are you a child?”

“Ya, I am a child. Does Master think that I’m an adult?”

The bat fell to the ground and transformed into a boy vampire before speaking. Well, he didn’t have anything to say to that.

“I understand. Just sit tight and wait. Buksil, I’ll settle it this time so hurry up and return.”

Ark grunted and started exploring the area. Ark had to feed his pets using his share of ingredients.

‘Sheesh, I’ve graduated from ingredient foraging thanks to Buksil....’

But as expected, it wasn’t easy to gather ingredients in the swampland inhabited by the undead. The ingredients that appeared regularly were blighted fruit or suspicious mushrooms. Of course there were also plants that grew which counteracted poison. He could use the ‘Knowledge of Poisons’ he got from Food Worshipper to remove the toxins, but it would take too long and it wouldn’t increase his satiety that much. It also had a completely horrible taste. It was the reason Buksil had to go to a distant place to gather ingredients. Apart from that, it was surprisingly difficult to satisfy his pets’ taste.

‘It can’t be helped. I can’t wait for Buksil while I’m so hungry.’

So Ark was forced to pick the trivial ingredients. He was picking the blighted fruit when his eyes saw something. An overweight mushroom could be seen.

‘What the, that mushroom? There were mushrooms like that in the swamp?’

Although he hadn’t checked the information yet, the appearance looked quite good. It looked like a Matsutake mushroom the size of a fist that noblemen enjoyed.

‘Oho. This really might be a Matsutake mushroom.’

Ark ran to the swampland and gathered the mushroom. Then he checked the information window using Ingredient Identification with a strange expression.

-Monkfish Mushroom

A valuable mushroom that only grows in a special area.
--

* Advanced Additional Information: The Monkfish Mushroom has
--

unique ingredients which makes it difficult to digest. It's to the extent that more calories than what is present in the mushroom is required to digest the food. So a person will become hungrier the more they eat. In ancient times, the nobility deliberate ate the Monkfish mushroom in order to eat more food.

"Eating this will make you hungrier?"

It was a truly ridiculous ingredient.

'Isn't celery considered the best diet food because eating it requires more calories than it gives?'

Ark truly had an abundant common sense. But there was no reason to diet in New World. It was pointless to decrease the satiety. He might've understood if it tasted good but it didn't.

"Despite its appearance, it isn't a plausible mushroom."

Ark was about to throw away the mushroom with a regretful expression when he suddenly flinched.

'Wait? The more you eat the hungrier you become?'

There was an intense spark in Ark's brain cells.

'This might actually be a huge ingredient.'

Ark instantly took out a pot and threw the Monkfish mushroom in. He put in drinking water and suitable spices and completed a dish.

-The Survival Cooking dish 'Monkfish Mushroom Soup' has been completed!

The Monkfish mushroom has been used to make a soup. However, the Monkfish mushroom cannot be satisfactorily completed with your current cooking level. Furthermore, the special effect of the Monkfish mushroom is to cause more hunger. Eating the soup might make you starve.....

<Satiety -40%>

“As expected. It is an extravagant ingredient!”

Ark exclaimed as he confirmed the effect of the dish. It was a strange mushroom which increased hunger. It was like a poison for a starving person. However, it would show an extravagant effect if he used it properly. It didn't matter when hunting the low level Mould Zombies but it would be extremely important for survival in the late level areas. He was able to increase his stats by eating several key foods. However, Survival Cooking had one weakness. When satiety reached 100%, it wasn't possible for him to eat anymore. Survival Cooking dishes had some of the best effects but it also increased satiety by a lot. He could only eat 5~6 dishes before eating the limit. But what if he could decrease satiety? If it was like that then he might be able to reach the limit of 10 dishes. Of course, satiety would increase more depending on the effect. For example, the 'Great Buffalo Steak' increased his strength +25 but it also increased satiety by 80%. It was good if he was starving but bad if he wanted to raise stats.

“But it is possible to freely eat 10 dishes if I can decrease satiety.”

He could eat 10 Great Buffalo Steaks! The added stat would exceed 100. Ark considered the mushroom even more valuable than japtem.

‘I shouldn't worry about hunting the zombies anymore. This is an opportunity. Earlier the status window said that Monkfish mushrooms only grew in special areas. In other words, the Monkfish mushrooms grew somewhere in this environment. If he was lucky then he might find a mushroom garden. Where is it?’

So far, it had been a fortnight since he had entered the swamp and Oberium. However, he had never seen the Monkfish mushrooms in the meantime. So Ark carefully looked around the swamp for the Monkfish mushrooms.

“The swamp on this side is cloudy.”

The swamp flowed downstream and upstream. The fact that the Monkfish mushroom flowed downstream meant that there were some upstream. Ark hurriedly gathered the ingredients and returned to the camp. He created simple dishes to fill the stomach of his pets.

“Okay, follow me!”

“Eh? I haven’t even digested my food yet so where do you want to go?”

Racard extended his thick stomach and frowned.

“Noisy! Buksil, you follow too.”

“Where on earth are you going?”

Ark replied with a wicked grin.

“To look for the forbidden ingredients.”

It was a food ingredient which caused hunger. It was an affair involving ingredients. In other words, it was the finest special ingredient which made it possible to show his full power.

Hell Training

-Suspicious Cave

A dark and suspicious cave in the swamps. The moss and mildew coats its outside, causing a bad smell and eerie noises also can be heard from the cave.

Countless voices of the dead can be heard in the swamp. There is the root of the corruption and evil souls. If possible, it is recommended that you pretend not to see the cave and pass on by.

<Explorer's Knowledge: Hidden area discovery bonus (Skill Points: 10)>

"There is a dungeon here."

Ark gazed at the cave opening with a bemused look. Underneath the rotten wood and moss, there was a dark opening. The cave had surprisingly appeared when he followed the flow of the swamp.

'Anyway, it is certain that the Monkfish mushrooms came from here.'

A viscous liquid flowed from the cave. The Monkfish mushrooms probably grew in the cave because of the viscous liquid. In other words, the Monkfish mushrooms were growing in large quantities somewhere in the cave.

"It's been a while since I've entered a dungeon."

Ark looked at the cave and laughed. Then the eyeball sat inside Ark's collar and muttered.

"Ark-nim, isn't the atmosphere unusual?"

"You idiot, that makes it better."

There was no user who would pay attention to the various warnings present in the information window. A dungeon was the staple of RPG

games. Monsters hunted in dungeons gave better experience and items. In addition, the higher reward meant higher compensation. Who would avoid that just because of a creepy atmosphere? Of course, Ark wasn't going to carelessly run in.

'Now what kind of monsters will I see in this dungeon?' Ark used Eyes of the Cat at the entrance to look inside the cave.

His pupils turned green and he could see the inside of the cave. Just like the entrance, the interior was filled with rotted wood and moss. And he could occasionally see rotten dead bodies.

"Mould Zombies, level 400 Mould Zombies!"

Ark shouted with joy after confirming the monsters that lived in the dungeon. He had just been having trouble with the level of the Mould Zombies within the swamp. But now he found zombies that were 100 levels higher! All of a sudden he had encountered monsters 100 levels higher so he didn't have a problem anymore. After calculating the dark attribute bonus, Ark was level 523. So he was in fact 123 levels higher. But his actual level was 349 and he was fighting a level 400 monster, so he would receive 100% experience and a bonus 10% for every 5 levels that the monster was higher than him.

'Even if I level up, I won't have to worry about items and materials not dropping.

Ark was fortunate about that.

'There are 20 Mould Zombies at the entrance. They won't be a problem even if they're level 400.'

Ark had a lot of experience fighting Mould Zombies and he was already tired of it. So there was no need to think of a plan using 'Stealth.' The zombies were empty headed so it was impossible for them to lay traps and they would just run forward haphazardly.

"I don't need to see anything else. There aren't that many so I'll finish it quickly!"

"Hehehe, come on Mould Zombies."

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Ark, Razak and Racard held their weapons and entered the cave. But a message window he never imagined appeared as soon as he entered.

-You have entered an area with a special property!

<In New World, there are occasionally areas with unique properties. This is influenced by the environment such as a snowfield. Once inside this cave, mana is steadily drained. Within the sphere of influence, 50 mana is lost every second>

‘What, what the? My mana is drained?’

Ark’s mouth dropped at the information window. 50 mana every second! Then he would lose 3000 mana in 1 minute? Currently Ark had 6,495 mana. Even if he did nothing, his mana would be depleted in 2 minutes.

‘Damn, what will I do without my mana?’

Special effects when entering a cave wasn’t uncommon. However, this effect was considered one of the worst. If his mana was drained so quickly then didn’t it mean he wouldn’t be able to use skills?

“Master, what do we do?”

Racard hesitated while flying towards the zombies and asked.

“Don’t worry about it. I just won’t use skills.”

Certainly not being able to use mana was a considerable penalty. However Ark didn’t take it too seriously. If he was a magician then being unable to use mana was definitely deadly. However, Dark Soul was closer to a warrior than a magician. He also had his passive skills which didn’t require mana so he wasn’t too worried.

“Bah, if it’s going to be drained anyway then I might as well use it all. Flash!”

Ark ran at full speed and used Flash. His sword sliced through the 20 Mould Zombies and decreased their health. Next Razak and Racard also attacked, decreasing the health until two or three zombies collapsed.

“Okay, let’s do it like that. Flash!”

Ark steadily used Flash with excitement until the fourth time he tried to use it.

-You are unable to use the skill because you don’t have enough mana.
--

“Sheesh, my mana is already depleted? It can’t be helped.”Flash consumed 500 mana with every use and he also lost 50 mana every second, so his 6,000 mana had already reached the bottom.

Although his mana had run out completely, he wasn’t willing to stop. So far, he had killed thousands of zombies in the swamp. Even without his skills, there was no reason to worry about 20 zombies. No, if he could hit it then he would easily defeat them. But Ark miscalculated. Kuaaah! Because he randomly fired Flash, Ark had stopped right in the middle of a horde of zombies. Ark had defeated two or three zombies but there were 20 of them. In other words, he had to block approximately 40 attacks. No matter how quickly Ark swung his sword, he couldn’t block that many arms. Tutututung, he felt a serious pain in his shoulder and lost some health.

“Damn, it is hard to avoid these guys in the cave. Racard, attract as many of them as possible!”

“I understand. Hey, you messy corpses. Your opponent is me!”

Racard yelled and quickly flew the opposite way. However, only one Mould Zombie chased after Racard.

‘Whoops!’

Ark started to realize the situation was more serious than he thought. Yes, until now Racard had been able to lure 10~20 zombies thanks to the Taunt skill. Although Taunt only consumed 30 mana, it was still a skill. When his pet used an active skill, it drained Ark’s

mana. Thanks to Ark lacking mana, Racard's Taunt skill was also disabled.

'Oh my god, then I need to deal with those guys one by one?'

All the strategies he thought of were blocked so he instantly became gloomy. This was a narrow cave so he had no room to avoid the attacks of 20 Mould Zombies. It was fortunate that Razak's Shield Stroke was a passive skill but he still wouldn't be able to handle 20 zombies. If he blocked the front then he would be attacked from behind, if he blocked the right then he would be attacked from the left. Since he was under consecutive attacks, it was different to catch the timing to counterattack. It was one of the difficult parts when fighting 1 against 20. The laws of physics still applied to New World. That also applied to this battle. When Ark was hit by the opponent's attack, his body turned rigid for a bit. It only lasted for 1 second but Ark was unable to swing his sword during that time. In addition, his posture was also unsteady so he was unable to draw out 100% of his power. So he was unable to counterattack properly while surrounded. Unlike reality, New World had a variety of skills for this situation. Magicians had the 'Warp' skill while thieves had 'Crossing' skill. Ark's main evasion skill was Dark Dance. But he didn't have any mana.....

Pepeng, pepeng, pepeng, pepeng!

A red light flashed in front of Ark. It was the first time he was being hit so one-sidedly.

"D-Dark Dance! Flash!"

In a situation where Ark couldn't hit back, his health quickly decreased. He even forgot the fact that his skills were sealed. He became even more irritated at the severe beating he received from the Mould Zombies. After being hit, a yellow message window floated in front of him.

-You have received a serious blow and have become 'Dizzy.'
<Your range of vision has been reduced by 80% for 30 seconds. The probability of receiving a critical hit has greatly increased>

He became 'Dizzy' after being hit a certain number of times in a row! It was the first time he had been in that state since he started. When things were going well, one thing became twisted then it stayed twisted. After becoming 'Dizzy,' Ark's vision blurred in front of him. With his blurred eyesight, he was unable to distinguish between the Mould Zombies' attacks. Ark couldn't even grasp the directions and just wandered around while receiving critical hits.

"M-Master, to the right!"

Ttadak, ttadadadak!

Racard and Razak ran towards him as Ark's health nosedived. But that was just their feeling. His summons were only able to fight against high level monsters because of Ark. Now Ark was being beaten and his summons were no match against the level 400 Mould Zombies.

"Hik, it can't be!"

Racard screamed as he was hit by a Mould Zombie. Razak was also surrounded by the zombies while he used his shield to block all attacks.

"Ah, no. I can't handle this situation! I have to somehow escape!"

"Riposte, Riposte, Riposte!"

Ark was almost in a critical condition so he swung his sword wildly. Although Riposte was a chain skill, he could still manually counterattack. Even when he concentrated, the skills sometimes failed. While in his 'Dizzy' state, it was impossible to succeed in his skills.

'Something....there must be another way.....'

Ark's lips became dry as his health continued decreasing. Then something popped into Ark's head.

"That's right, I have that. Ghost Knight Corps!"

Yes, the desperate plan he came up with was summoning the ghost

knights of Oberium! It was an active skill but it consumed Spiritual Power instead of mana. The space abruptly started shaking after Ark used the skill. He looked at the gaping space and saw heavily armed ghosts from Oberium.

-The Oberium Knights have come when you called!

The knights looked around and shouted as they saw the Mould Zombies.

-Over there, defeat the threatening enemies!

-For the glory of Oberium!

Ohhhhhh!

The 30 ghost soldiers rushed like a storm at the Mould Zombies. Just like a huge wave had swept over a sand castle on the beach, the ghosts wielding shields, swords and maces poured over the zombies. Unfortunately, it was still a beginner skill despite the visual effects so the zombies weren't hurt that much. The ghost soldiers were also impervious to any attacks. The Mould Zombies were pushed by the pressure of the ghost soldiers and collapsed like dominos. The ghost soldiers gained even more momentum as they rushed the Mould Zombies. However.....

-Wahhhhh, those evil zombies! Eh?

Bbyorong, bbyorong.

The chief knight shouted with anger after hearing an alarm ring.

-Drat, our bodies are tied to Oberium so we can't help anymore.

Then the bodies of the ghost soldiers disappeared like they were a lie. The 5 second duration time of Ghost Knight Corps had ended. Although it had consumed 300 of his Spiritual Power, Ark managed to escape the siege of the Mould Zombies thanks to the ghost soldiers. It was his last chance to escape from the cave!

'Let's escape the cave for the moment!'

Ark did his best to turn around and threw his body. However, he felt

a devastating impact to his face and saw stars.

“Ouch, my head!”

Ark was still ‘Dizzy’ so his pupils were unclear. He couldn’t see where he was going and ran into a wall. It was one of his most embarrassing moments ever, escaping the Mould Zombies only to run into a wall.

“Racard, what are you doing? Didn’t I tell you to take care of the directions?”

“Sheesh, why are you so nervous? You didn’t give me any time to talk.”

“Shut up, quickly inform me of the directions!”

“Okay, follow me!”

Racard complained after pulling Ark’s hair. It was like Ark was blind so he had to follow Racard’s directions. Racard pulled Ark’s hair and dragged him while Razak blocked the zombies with his shield and followed.

“Are we there yet?”

“Not yet.”

Ark panted while he listened to Racard’s answer.

‘I’ve walked approximately 100 metres but when did I enter that deeply?’

Ark thought it was slightly strange but he had no way to check. After a while, his eyesight gradually brightened. Ark’s face hardened at the same time. When he surveyed the area, he had already left the cave. The cave was near Saint Betelgeuse and the Mould Zombies had retreated back to the cave after he exited. Yet Racard was still pulling his hair and was turning round and round on the same spot.

“.....Are we there yet?”

“There is still a long way to go. Heok, it’s dangerous. Quickly!”

When Ark asked in a low voice, Racard just pulled his hair harder.

“The only dangerous thing is your head!”

Ark grabbed Racard and shouted. Then Racard panicked and stuttered.

“Eh? M-Master can see now?”

“Do you want to die?”

“Please don’t look at it like that. I was just kidding.”

“A joke? Then you want to play?”

Ark replied with a wicked grin. He wanted to relieve a little stress.

“See, I told you there was something unusual.”

The eyeball murmured as he studied Ark’s face. Then Ark stealthily turned his head and pointed to one side.

“Your idea of a joke is hitting me?”

“..... You’ve returned safely.”

The eyeball carefully looked at it and answered. Ark indicated to the corner where Racard was sitting with swollen eyes. Since the situation had deteriorated so suddenly, his pets had considered mutiny. Anyway, Ark managed to relieve his stress with Racard but he was still miserable.

‘Even if my skills can’t be used.....’

Who would’ve thought that he would be so one-sidedly beaten up? His confidence which had swelled after changing professions and hunting 160 zombies in a hour suddenly burst. However, being mauled by zombies wasn’t the only reason for Ark’s miserable mood.

‘I didn’t think it was possible. I’ve become dull.’

During the battle, Ark realized he had some serious problems. In fact, this wasn’t the first time Ark had fought many enemies in a narrow space. In the past, he also experienced the same thing when

sweeping up the thieves. In addition, the enemies had similar levels after applying the dark attribute bonus unlike now. But it hadn't been one-sided that time.

'The reason is clear. I've been unconsciously relying on my skills too much.'

Yes, Ark immediately realized the problem. In the beginning, Ark had placed more emphasis on his combat ability than his skills and stats. Just like a fighter observed the enemy's combat pattern during a tournament, he had meticulously looked for methods to defeat them. He didn't have any worthy skills so he hadn't used his skills carelessly. However, Ark currently had various attack, defense, evasion and wide area skills. Thanks to his steady effort, he managed to gain over 6,000 mana. His health was also on par with his mana so could fire skills blindly. Ark's fighting technique had evolved from a battle of perception to one which used skills blindly. It was because hunting was more fun and quicker when he used skills. He couldn't even remember the last time he had used kicks.

'This is the reason that I've been beaten up!'

Ark had certainly become strong after changing to his 2nd profession and learning various skills. However, because of that his pure combat abilities had regressed. Once his skills were disabled, he was unable to fight properly.

"Oh my god..... I'm no different from the trivial warriors I've beaten.'

In the old days, Ark had thought Andel was pathetic for only relying on his defense and skills. Unlike online games in the 2000's, a character in a virtual reality game was more than their level or skills. Understanding a battle was as important in battles as utilizing skills. He was able to display his might in a 1-on-1 match with Shambala and JusticeMan because of that. Ark knew better than anyone about overlooking something important. It was a failure for which he had no excuse.

'I thought I was training properly but I wasn't.'

The first reason was that Ark had been fighting weaker enemies

after receiving the 50% dark attribute bonus. The second reason was that he relied on skills rather than ability in emergency situations. Overconfidence was also the reason why he blindly entered the cave. In the beginning he wouldn't have behaved so ignorantly.

'If I fight against Shambala then isn't there a 100% chance that he would beat me?'

Although it was a dismal thought, Ark tried to maintain a positive mindset.

'Yes, I don't need to think so badly. It is lucky. I've realized my mistake before it is too late to go back. Even though skill application is important, maintaining my combat ability is also essential. I've clearly realized it this time. Okay!'

"Now, we've rested enough so let's get started!"

"What? We're entering again?"

Ark stood up and Racard frowned at his words.

"Of course. Have I ever abandoned a dungeon just because of tough enemies?"

"No but....."

"Don't worry. I have no intention of entering so ignorantly this time."

After recovering his mana, Ark's group once again returned to the cave. Ark sent a command to Racard.

"Racard, pull a few of them to the entrance."

"Aha, you intend to take care of them little by little?"

"Such a thing.....why does your expression seem a little bothered?"

"I'm going."

Racard quickly flew into the cave after Ark glared at him. He unleashed his bitterness from Ark's abuse on the Mould Zombies and lured three of them. Monsters gathered in one place were

usually had a 'link' between them. 'Link' was an established system where certain monsters moved together. However, the Mould Zombies were undead and weren't caught by 'Link.' It was something Ark was glad about.

Kuaaaa!

"Master, they're coming!"

Racard flew out of the cave entrance with three zombies following him.

"Okay, I'll start now. For the moment, I won't use my pets or skills!"

"Racard, Razak, you don't have to move. Don't help me even if it becomes dangerous!"

"Eh? But why? Well, it's not that hard."

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Ark received the promise from his pets and ran up to the Mould Zombies. When Ark ran in front of them, the Mould Zombies changed their target. Wind blew as the sharp nails sliced down! Ark crossed his legs and used a taekwondo move to block the sharp nails. Then the other two zombies swung their arms as well. Although one of them was blocked by his sword, the other nail grazed his shoulder.

'Ugh, my reaction time has become slow as well. In the old days I would've had no trouble avoiding that attack. I only used 'Dark Dance' for a while and have become sluggish. I have to concentrate or I'll be hit again.'

At the same time that Ark suffered damage, he turned his body and avoided the next attack. In this situation, it would be easier to connect 'Parry' and 'Counter-attack' for the chain skill Riposte. Then he would follow it by continuous Dark Blades until the dark aura built up and he used Dark Strike.....A picture was painted in Ark's head at the moment. He had become accustomed to battling using skills.

'But if I do that then it won't be training!'

Ark flinched and repressed the desire to use his skills. If he excluded all his skills and only used 'Sword-Hand Combat' then it would be training.

'Riposte is a skill so I can't use it not matter how much I want to!'

Ark leaned his upper body forward to avoid the nails. Then he stretched his leg and kicked the Mould Zombie. The Mould Zombie lost its centre of gravity and stumbled. Then Ark threw his body upward and kicked the Mould Zombie's jaw.

Kuaaaaak!

The Mould Zombie rolled over several metres just like a movie.

"How about that? This is Korea's taekwondo!"

Ark muttered with pride. Of course, most people were heavy so they wouldn't fly several metres from a kick. But even if the laws of physics exist, this was still a game. His attacks depended on his stats and he had 725 strength. The stats also applied to the Mould Zombies but it was like they were kicked by a bull. Such calculations were essential for combat in New World. Although Ark didn't go to the gym anymore, he never missed his dawn exercise. If it was simply taekwondo skills then he was confident. But that was in reality. In New World, his battle style was adapted to fit the game i.e. New World taekwondo style!

"I have to concentrate and maintain my posture."

Ark put more focus on his training than on defeating the Mould Zombies. He avoided the zombie's attack and did a spin kick. The spin kick was followed by his sword attacking the stomach! When he was surrounded, he stepped back and started kicking. A variety of taekwondo techniques emerged. At first he was a little worried, but eventually his body warmed up and he could deal with the three Mould Zombies. Even though he didn't use other skills, he did use the basic Sword-Hand combat because it was effective. The Mould Zombies were medium-sized monsters so there was a 5% chance that advanced Sword-Hand Combat would cause an abnormal state! If he continuously used kicks then there was a high chance of

causing that state.

“Take this!”

Kukuong, kuaaah!

The last Mould Zombie was caught was a wrestling back drop and the battle ended. Ark hadn't used any skills to handle three Mould Zombies and Buksil muttered after watching spellbound.

“A-awesome. That's fantastic. You're not just a dirty person!”

“What? Dirty person?”

“Ah, no, rough.....no, hot.....yes, you have the hottest personality.”

“That's not true. This little thing is not cool at all.”

Racard rubbed his swollen eyes and complained. Buksil only recently knew Ark so he had never seen Ark use taekwondo or wrestling techniques. However, Racard had seen those techniques since the beginning so he wasn't impressed. Ark had no intention of finishing it like this.

“Racard, this time lure 5 of them.”

“Eh? “Isn't that more unreasonable?”

“Shut up, just bring them as soon as possible.”

Ark trained with the Mould Zombies while slowly increasing the numbers. After doing this for a day, Ark was able to deal with ten Mould Zombies without using any skills. Of course, it wasn't like his combat abilities suddenly grew after one day. He was just reviving his previous battle style using taekwondo. It didn't take that long since he hadn't been neglecting his exercise. If Ark hadn't been using his skills so much and concentrated on his actual fighting ability then he could've dealt with 20 Mould Zombies.

‘That feeling seems to have returned.’

Ark gave a satisfied smile as he looked at them.

“Now it's time for you guys.”

“Eh? What?”

“You guys will also be training. Racard, you used to be able to lure monsters without using the Taunt skill. But what happened to that? Razak is no different. Raza didn’t make any big mistakes you didn’t do very well either. This is evidence that you have become undisciplined! Now we’re going to return to my original methods. I’ve going to revive the old training methods for a while.”

“I don’t want to experience the past again. Isn’t our current strategies enough?”

“Do you want you other eye to become swollen as well?”

“Damn, I knew it would be like this. I knew it!”

Racard murmured with a desperate voice. Then Ark looked at Buksil and Baekgu in the corner and said.

“You two as well!”

“Huh? Why do we have to train as well?”

“Until now it didn’t matter, but if you go to higher level regions then Baekgu as he is now won’t be enough as your bodyguard. Baekgu needs some training to level up and become stronger. And Buksil as well. Didn’t you have some trouble with filming the video? You have to learn what to do if your eyeball is attacked. Take it out!”

Eh eh? Eh eh eh? Wait a minute. Hik!”

Ark took out Buksil’s eyeball and turned it round and round. Ark threw it and kicked it.

“What do you feel?”

“W-what are you doing.....ouch!”

Buksil staggered and sat down as he felt nausea. But Ark just declared sharply.

“Bah, how can you take videos in this state? If you’re going to shoot a video while scouting the area and foraging ingredients then you need to handle this much.”

“That, that is.....!”

“I won’t allow anyone to decline!”

Ark raised his fist and threatened them. Ssak ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak?

Radun also looked at Ark with surprise eyes. ‘Dad, what should I do?’ He seemed to ask.

“Not you, you’ve been doing well. Aigoo, you cutie.”

“Ooh, this is discrimination!”

“Shut up, training is starting!”

So Ark and his group began three days of hellish training.....

“Racard C-plan, lure three of the zombies without using Taunt!”

“Yes! Ya, you beep-beep-guys! Bring it on, come on, come on!”

Razak glared at them and unleashed a barrage of curses. Although the zombies didn’t really understand, they instinctively felt anger at the curses and followed him. Ark looked at Razak and Baekgu and nodded.

“Razak, block two of the Mould Zombies with your shield. Baekgu, you will approach and attack the zombies while Razak is stopping them with his shield. Go!”

Clack clack clack!

“Yes, Captain!”

Razak and Baekgu moved to their positions at Ark’s command. Although they had failed several times at the beginning, now the execution of the strategy reached 80% after the training. This was the outcome of the hellish training for three days. Now Ark didn’t have to follow their movements every time anymore. His summons now listened to him again after the discipline. And Baekgu who participated in the hell training had gained 4 levels. He was not the only one who changed. While Razak and Baekgu finished the two blocked Mould Zombies, Ark lured the

remaining one towards Buksil's eyeball.

"Buksil, bring me a memory crystal!"

"Yes!"

Buksil quickly pulled out the memory crystals from the eyeballs. Then he played the dramatic footage from the crystal. Buksil hadn't been resting in the meantime and had been tirelessly working to make the image of the battle seem filled with urgency. After the training to withstand violence, he had managed to take the scene of Razak's fight from dozens of angles.

"Okay, it's a pass."

"T-thank you!"

Buksil sighed with relief and replied. Ark gathered Buksil and his summon again before speaking.

"Now the training is finished. First, I think it's admirable that you 'volunteered' for the training. What the? What happened to your expressions? Well, are you dissatisfied?"

"Of course not!"

"Anyway, now it's time to show the results of your training against the zombies in the cave! Razak, Racard, from now on we'll be capturing the dungeon. And Buksil and Baekgu will collect the food necessary for it. If you pinch me dungeons success going forward will need more military capacity. You've succeeded in the training so there is no need to worry while collecting ingredients. While collecting the ingredients, you'll also take the videos and Baekgu will take care of any zombies that escape. Can you do it?"

"Yes, we can do it!"

All of his bruised companions shouted simultaneously. He didn't know how long it would last but they were currently showing the results of the discipline. Anyway, Baekgu and Buksil left to gather ingredients while Ark took Razak and Racard to begin the dungeon exploration. Animosity filled his summons eyes as they looked at the cave.

The Phantom Hourglass

Kuaaaa!

The nails of the Mould Zombies aimed at his neck. The deeply rotted nails gave off a bad stench! Ark reflexively dodged the Mould Zombie's attack. He avoided the nail, turned his body and kicked. The Mould Zombies ran into the wall and stumbled. After combining Sword Mastery with kicks, his movement skills had increased by leaps and bounds. The Mould Zombie that was hit stiffened and became 'Stunned.' Even if skills that contained mana were blocked, he had used 'Eyes of the Cat' beforehand to find the weakness of the Mould Zombies to cause the 'Stunned' state.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwak!

He swung his sword like a rapid fire gun and pierced through the Mould Zombies. Black blood dripped from the holes in the zombie as it stumbled.

"Master, the next fellows are coming!"

Then he heard Racard's voice from behind him. He turned his head and saw 5 Mould Zombies running.

"Razak!"

When Ark raised his voice, Razak who had been taking care of other zombies came running. He raised his shield and pushed two Mould Zombies. Meanwhile, Ark ran up to the remaining three and used sidekicks. The Mould Zombies who had been kicked flew back several metres and slammed into the wall. However, the zombies just opened their mouths after landing and ran after him again.

'The saliva!'

The Mould Zombies in the dungeon weren't that high level. The difference with the swamp zombies was that the cave ones had

poisonous saliva. The Mould Zombies spat their saliva and Ark rotated on the axis of his left foot, and did a 360 degree spin kick. The jaws of the zombies snapped shut as the saliva gushed out from the side. That wasn't all. The neck of the Mould Zombies rotated after being kicked. The zombies couldn't grasp the direction because their heads were on backwards and wandered around crashing into walls.

'It's a lot easier now that my body is moving comfortably.'

Ark laughed as he looked at the Mould Zombies wandering around with their heads backwards. It was incomparable to Ark's movement a few days ago. The conversion of sword and kicks increased his reaction rate..... He could feel the difference in his body after his physical ability rose. But the outcome of the training wasn't simply his performance. Over the past few days, Ark had sealed his skills and only trained in his physical abilities. It was all because he wanted to defeat the dungeon. However, his training ended up different from his original intent and brought an unexpected result.

'I never even considered it. The issues of only relying on skill-based battles.'

Skill based combat was straightforward and convenient. It was unnecessary to explain. If he used his skills then he could dispose of the Mould Zombies in less than a minute. However, using generals would only take 3 minutes or 2 if he dealt a lot of critical hits. The battles were longer so of course he lost more health and it took a lot more time to restore it. That's why Ark had mainly been using skill based combat. However, he had forgotten one thing while focusing on the speed of using skills.

Ark's primary attack skill was Sword-Hand combat. Since he mainly used skills, his Sword-Hand combat was unable to increase in proficiency. And Ark's Sword-Hand combat was advanced. If he didn't reach any special enlightenment in the related skill then it was impossible to increase beyond advanced. But that changed after he started to use Sword-Hand combat in battle again. Although he initially faced 3~4, he was eventually able to face 6~7 opponents. If he faced more than 10, his life was really in the balance. But even if

he was in a critical condition, Ark never used any skills. Even if he died, he wouldn't use skills. If he was in a crisis then he would quickly escape. This was the training he decided on. Practicing martial arts was a hundred times better than skills. These weren't techniques that could be easily learnt. In the midst of a crisis, he used martial arts techniques.

Japan's legendary swordsman, Miyamoto Musashi was the originator of modern kendo that was based on a three stage level. Modern kendo had 9 stages of qualification but they wouldn't be a match against Musashi. The reason was clear. Modern students practiced in a safe environment and was no match against someone who polished their skills risking their lives. The explanation was slightly redundant, once Ark made a decision he decided to carry it through. If he wasn't positive about it then nothing would be done! That was Ark's philosophy. Even if Ark was facing a huge mountain, he stuck to his resolution of only using his sword and kicks. After fighting at the Evil Silrion, his Sword-Hand combat had been stuck at 500 but it finally broke through.

-The proficiency of Sword-Hand combat has risen after a lot of experience.

Sword-Hand Combat (Master, Passive 503/1000): You have become a Master in Sword-Hand combat.

You have completely understood the special qualities of the sword and you are able to draw out its performance by 100%. You have received additional damage when using a sword or knuckle, and your evasion and critical hit has risen considerably. In addition, there is a 20% chance of fully understanding the attributes of the sword.

<Overall combat ability increases by 50%. The effect of Sword-Hand combat means that wearing a shield will become a baggage. When using kicks, the probability of causing a random state to a small monster is 10%, a medium sized monster 8% and a large monster 5%. When a difficult technique succeeds, the probability of causing an abnormal state will also increase>

* Master additional effect (Deferred Strike: There is a 20% to deal double damage with one strike. The second damage will only have 50% of your base damage.

‘Sword-Hand combat has reached the Master stage!’

Ark’s mouth opened as he confirmed the information. Overall combat ability increased by 50%! It wasn’t simply that his damage had increased. It meant that all his combat capabilities including defense, attack speed and reaction rate had increased! Ever since then, Ark felt like it was easier to move his body. In addition, his probability of causing abnormal states had increased. But he was able to feel the effects of Sword-Hand combat increasing thanks to Deferred Strike.

Understanding the characteristics of the sword gave him a chance of dealing double damage! It didn’t seem that wonderful when reading the information window. It dealt two attacks but the second one only did 50% of his base damage. It was better to use Dark Blade. However, using it was completely different from the explanation. It had a 20% probability. That was one in five strikes. But that was only simple probability. Just because there was a 1/6 chance of landing a 6 on a die didn’t mean the six would appear. The six could come out but it also might not come out. There was also a 30% or 40% chance of throwing a 6. The odds might contribute more than 30%, 40%. That also applied to Deferred Strike.

“Now!”

Ark ran up to the zombies who had their necks twisted and swung his sword. There was two ringing sounds as the zombies were struck twice and their health drained out. Although there was only a 20% chance, the odds of Deferred Strike occurring increased by leaps and bounds in this situation. If his first attack was a critical hit which dealt 150% damage then the second strike would deal 75% damage. That was 225% damage with one strike.

“If their necks are twisted then it is easy to deal a critical hit!”Ark rapidly stabbed the Mould Zombies and they tore apart like sandpaper. The zombies were successively cut by the critical hits and Deferred Strike!

The Mould Zombies became like a rag and collapsed. Meanwhile, Razak and Racard who had survived the hell training disposed of one of the zombies and approached the other one.

“Now, hit it hard with the shield!”

Clack clack clack clack!

Racard and Razak worked together to attack the zombie. This was also the outcome of his hell training. Ark's pets also didn't use skills and now they were able to battle against level 400 zombies. Their abilities were equivalent to level 280 but it was possible to defeat the zombies if it was 2 against 1. In this situation Ark's pets could hold their own so he was quite satisfied.

‘If they can handle it then it is better not to interfere.’

Ark relaxed and watched the battle between his pets and the zombie.

“Hahaha, we won, we won!”

Racard cheered as they finally defeated the Mould Zombie after 4 minutes.

“You still have a long way to go. You have to be able to defeat one in 2 minutes.”

“Sheesh, would it hurt for you to give a compliment?”

“I'll give you a compliment when you finish it in 2 minutes.”

Ark smiled at Racard who grunted. Anyway, it was different from his initial worries and he steadily ventured into the cave. There were many Mould Zombies so his progress wasn't fast, but Ark's purpose wasn't to clear the dungeon. Yes, his first goal was to collect the necessary ingredients for his Necromancer's essence.

‘I have almost all the materials.’

In addition, the Mould Zombies in the cave was level 400. He received 200% experience every time a zombie was defeated so his level increased quickly. After a few days, he gained 8 levels and

reached 357. It was four times the speed of his hunting in the swamp. However, the regeneration of the Mould Zombies in the cave was slower than the swamp so it was slightly regretful.

‘But clearing the dungeon would become even more difficult if the regeneration speed of the Mould Zombies was fast.’

Even though he could deal with 10 Mould Zombies without using skills, he still had to use the disinfectant. Because of the duration of the disinfectant, he had to repeatedly invade the cave and then retreat. If the regeneration speed of the zombies was quick then it would take three or four times his current speed.

“This will soon come to an end.”

Ark muttered after scanning the map. He used his cartographer skill to reveal that the map was 95% cleared. He could use the disinfectant one more time so if he was quick then he could clear the dungeon.

“Okay, let’s go.”

Ark had recovered his health using food and stood up. After taking care of the Mould Zombies in the area, he once again entered the cave. The effects of the disinfectant would end in 20 minutes. Ark followed the single passage until he reached a dead end.

“Eh? What the?”

Ark stared with bewildered eyes at the dead end. He came all the way here only to encounter a dead end? Well, he originally came here to search for the Monkfish mushrooms. However, he still hadn’t found any of the mushrooms. Even though he searched the wall, he couldn’t find a hidden device. Instead, he discovered a pool of deep black water in a corner.

‘Wait, if the Monkfish mushroom grows in this cave then wouldn’t the water make it flow into the swamp?’

And there was black water on the floor throughout the cave. The place that water was coming from was the pool.

‘That stagnant water should connect to where the water is being supplied from. The puddle might be connected to other places.’

“You guys follow me.”

Ark plunged into the pool of water without hesitation. Nothing was visible in front of him once he entered the black water. Ark used his hand to check the around the pool. After a short time, he felt where the current of water was flowing. It meant the current of water was coming from somewhere!

‘Over here!’

Ark pulled out a stone and the current of water reversed. Ark took a deep breath before diving back down and following the waterway that had been formed.

‘I have to reach the top. The place where the tunnel emerges will be clear!’

“Puah!”

He swam upwards and breached the surface of the water. Ark took a deep breath and looked around. The place where Ark came up was a side wall in a pool where a underground waterfall was flowing into. The water from the pool seemed to be flowing into the swamp via the cave.

“There’s no doubt. The Monkfish mushrooms is somewhere here.”

Ark exited the water and checked the underground space. He had no mana to use Eyes of the Cat so he couldn’t see the environment clearly. However, his eyes gradually adapted to the cave and he was able to grasp the approximate shape.

‘Is this place like a mine?’

All the walls of the underground was formed from a type of black room. After rubbing his hand against it, a black soot that seemed like coal streaked his hand. While crossing the cave, he often saw a coal like rock. The water that ran through the cave seemed to be black because of the coal dust that had fallen. Then Racard who

was flying ahead shouted.

“Master, mushroom, mushroom!”

“Ah, is it the Monkfish mushrooms?”

Ark shouted with joy and rushed in Racard’s direction. Was that the mushrooms near the lump of coal? It was the Monkfish mushrooms that Ark was looking for! The Monkfish mushrooms were present in the gaps between the coal.

“Hahaha, it is a jackpot!”

Ark raised his arm and instantly picked the mushroom. He didn’t rest and picked the mushrooms but they showed no signs of decreasing. The Monkfish mushrooms had a tremendous effect when used properly. Even if he called Buksil and Baekgu then it wasn’t possible to collect all the mushrooms.

“If it’s like this then it can be used.”

As long as there was enough mushrooms then he would have a constant supply of it. This meant he could catch high level monsters faster. Ark scraped the mushroom one by one as he dreamed of a pleasant hunt. The mushrooms gradually piled in his bag.

-This fellow dared to dirty my refuge!

A deafening roar shook the space and a red warning message appeared.

[-The boss monster Immortal Lich ‘Karad’ has appeared.]

‘Eek? Boss monster?’

Ark flinched and turned his head. Something wrapped in a black aura walked into the dark space. Karad wasn’t a skeleton or a zombie, but he looked like an undead monster when some bones exposed. He was covered with a hooded cloak and was holding a long stick. The outfit was just like a magician. In traditional fantasy, a lich was a magician who became corrupted in their search for immortality. Before Karad was an undead, he had been a magician.

‘Boss monster..... Thank you.’

A satisfied smile spread on Ark’s face as he hurriedly got up and took an attack posture. ‘Boss monster=big rewards’ was the formula in Ark’s head.

‘I found a large supply of mushrooms and now there’s even a boss monster!’

He was grateful to the dungeon. Of course, he didn’t like all of the situation. Due to the special effect of the cave, Ark couldn’t use mana. As well as his attack skills, he didn’t have enough mana to use Eyes of the Cat to determine Karad’s level and weaknesses.

‘But the opponent looks like a magician.’

He had fought Jewel in the Evil Silrion and Seutandal until he was bored. Therefore Ark was well aware of a magician’s weakness. A magician had low defense and slow reaction rates. Instead, the attack power of their magic was incredibly strong but it took time to complete the spell which was also a weakness. If the magician wasn’t given any time to complete the spell then they were a weak opponent.

In his current state, he might be a match for a magician.

‘Of course, he can still use Warp.....’

Luckily the underground area wasn’t wide. Even if Karad used Warp, there were only a few places he could go. Ark had confidence that he could kick the boss before he completed any strong spells.

‘I also have my summons as well.’

If he arranged his pets in the directions Karad could warp to then he could interrupt the spell casting.

‘I have magic resistance so I can ignore low ranking magic and move forward for close combat.’

Ark completed a rough strategy plan.

-Death for intruders.....!

Karad stretched his hand and cast a spell and black magic arrows flowed out like a rain shower.

‘That’s a huge number. I can’t avoid everything. If that’s the case.....!’

Ark hid his face and neck with both arms and went running forward. If he took that posture then the damage wouldn’t decrease. However, if he covered the head and neck then he decreased the chances of a critical hit. Ark’s health quickly went down as he was hit by the magic arrows. However, the damage wasn’t that much compared to how many times he was hit. His magic resistance had increased thanks to the Mongoose immortality pills.

“Racard, Razak, spread out to both corners!”

Ark approached Karad and shouted. Ark arrived and prepared just in case Karad used Warp. As expected, Karad instantly chanted the spell for Warp as Ark ran up. Warp was a teleporting skill but it was impossible to designate the location. He appeared in the right hand corner and prepared to use the magic arrow skill again. But Razak was there with his shield and used it to stop the spell.

“Good job, now take your time and attack with your shield!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak subsequently used his shield to prevent Karad from using Warp. Nevertheless, it was impossible for Razak to take care of a boss by himself.

-You impertinent skeleton!

Karad swung his cane and Razak flew back a few metres. Karad then started chanting a spell. However, Ark had already rushed towards Karad before the spell was completed.

Pepepepeng! Snap!

His sword penetrated the body. He continued with a flashy spin kick. Karad stumbled as he was hit on the temple and retreated. Ark didn’t miss the opportunity and kicked out in rapid succession. A

magician had to chant in order to use magic so 'Stun' was more useful than other abnormal states. As he expected, Karad was unsteady and couldn't remember the chants.

-Ugh, y-you.....!

Karad used the gap in his attacks to once again disappear with Warp.

"Everybody be alert!"

Razak and Racard glanced around carefully at Ark's command. After a while, Karad's form was once again seen. But this time, he was lucky and moved to a back corner. Ark and his summons were waiting in the opposite direction.

"Sheesh, Racard stop him!"

"U-understood!"

Racard flew towards Karad. However, this time Karad was slightly faster.

-Take this you dirty intruders. Dark Arrows!

"Aaaaack!"

Black magic arrows flew from the hands of Karad. Racard screamed as he was hit by the magic arrow and fell. Meanwhile, Ark once again ran through the arrows but was too late to prevent Karad from using Warp again. If Ark couldn't stop Warp then he wouldn't be able to deal with Karad. It was even worse since he couldn't use skills. However, Ark wasn't alone.

-Hahaha, I'll let you regret attacking me from hell!

Magic.....

Daeng kang!

-Ouch!

Karad stumbled as a shield hit him on the side of the head. This time Razak had appeared in front of Karad.....The battle was Karad

was like a lottery. If he appeared near Ark or his summons then Ark would dominate. Conversely, if Karad appeared somewhere else then he would dominate. No matter how quickly Ark ran, Karad would be able to use magic then escape with Warp. That continued for 20 minutes.

“Huk huk huk, Radun used Stalking to determine his tracks.....”

Ark muttered while being short of breath. If the magician escaped using Warp then Radun can figure out the location using Stalking! It was the skill which caused Jewel despair. But as expected, Ark couldn't use Stalking. He didn't have enough money. Eventually someone had to collapse. Ark and his summons were exhausted after running and flying around for 20 minutes. In addition, he received damage running after Karad and only had 30% health remaining. In addition, their magic resistance was low so Racard and Razak were in a critical condition.

‘But Karad's health is also low.’

Ark looked for Karad again as he disappeared using Warp. He willingly submitted to being hit by a few shots of magic when approaching Karad for the chance to land a few kicks and cause an abnormal status. Even if he was a boss monster, Karad was a magician so Ark dealt a lot of damage to him. Karad had broken bones here and there that were hanging out of his flesh. Although he couldn't see the monster's status using Eyes of the Cat, he was able to approximately guess the remaining health. Ark guessed that Karad had 20% health at the most.

‘If this continues then I can win!’

Ark was convinced of that. Then Karad once again appeared on the opposite side. The distance was approximately 50 meters!

‘Damn, guess I need to get hit again.’

Ark used his arms to protect his vital areas and ran towards Karad. It took approximately 4 seconds for Karad to chant the spell for Dark Arrows. When calculating the speed Ark could run 30 metres, the spell would definitely be completed. But this time the

spell wasn't completed by the time he arrived. Ark lowered his arm with a doubtful look.

-.....The power of resurrection!

Karad finished chanting a long spell and opened his eyes wide before shouting. Then the broken bones were reformed and the tattered pieces of skin stuck together again. Karad's body was being recovered at an absurd rate.

"What, what the.....?"

Ark stopped with surprise as Karad smiled coldly and muttered.

-Kukukukuku, what's with that expression? Did you think you could kill me? I am an immortal Lich. It is impossible for you to knock down this body! Take this, Dark Arrows!

The magic arrows repeatedly hit Ark's body. After being hit by dozens of magic arrows, Ark lost his balance and fell to the ground. He received a critical hit and he lost 8% health, but that wasn't the problem. They had fought for 20 minutes and had finally managed to get Karad in a critical condition. In exchange for that, Ark had lost 70% of his health and his pets were in a critical condition. The outcome of that was Karad's broken bones and torn flesh. But now all that was recovered? What happened to the torn flesh and broken bones? When he checked Karad's state, he saw that the recovery magic was being gradually applied and wasn't an immediate effect. However, the recovery speed was fast and could be compared to that of a normal priest. It was likely that 50% had already been recovered. If he continued using Warp and recovery magic then how long would Ark last?

'Damn, being unable to determine the enemy's situation is bad. Is there a countermeasure to that magic? I need to either not give him time for the recovery magic or my attack power needs to exceed his recovery rate.'

That was impossible if Ark wasn't able to use any skills. In addition, he only had 20% health left and with no mana he had no chance of winning. If Karad could recovery then there was no way to

survive. Ark shook his head forcefully.

‘No, I can’t die like this!’

Ark clenched his teeth tightly and swung his sword.

-Huhuhu, don’t you know that’s useless?

However, Karad instantly used Warp. Ark vainly hit the wall. His blade scratched against the wall like a flint and a spark flew up. His sword had hit a lump of coal so it was a natural result. But after that something unthinkable occurred. The spark touched Ark’s sleeve and burst into flames.

“Heok, what, what the?”

Ark hurriedly withdrew and the flames faded away. Ark carefully looked at the arm where the flames occurred and understood the situation. While attacking Karad, he had got the coal dust on his arm. When the spark struck the powder, combustion happened and a fire occurred.

“Damn, that was surprising.”

Ark cried out with irritation and turned his body. Had he breathed in too much coal dust while fighting Karad? Then an idea came to his head when thinking about the spark causing flames.

‘Wait? Coal dust? Maybe..... No, it is possible if it’s in this space!’

“Razak, Racard, the coal!”

Ark suddenly raised his head and shouted. Racard who had been searching for Karad’s location muttered with a strange expression.

“Eh? What are you talking about? Has all the coal dust affected your head?”

“That’s right!”

“Then your head really is full of coal dust?”

“You fool, that’s not it. Fill this place with coal dust!”

“What? Master. Are you sane? Won’t we choke on coal dust if this place is filled with it? Did you really go crazy? It doesn’t matter to Razak who doesn’t breath, but I have the soft vampire lungs! I don’t want to die because of this!”

“Shut up and just do as I say! Razak too!”

Ark shouted while frantically hitting the wall with his sword. After hitting it with his sword, Ark kicked the coal dust piled on the floor and scattered it into the air. Razak also hit the wall with his shield and sprinkled the coal dust.

“I’m going to die soon anyway so it doesn’t matter how it happens.”

Racard sighed and flapped his wings, causing a wind that scattered the dust.

-What, what the?

Karad looked at the exposed coal dust with confusion. He tried to see through the darkness and the coal dust but it wasn’t that easy to find Ark.

-You cheeky bastard, you think you can get away from me like this?

Karad yelled and blindly shot his magic arrows.

“Cough, cough, not at all. Cough, it’s just starting now!”

Ark’s form became visible within the coal dust. Although his mouth and nose was covered with his mantle, coal dust entered his lungs every time he breathed. In addition, it felt like there was gravel within his eyes every time he blinked. However, there was a vague smile of satisfaction on Ark’s face.

“Racard, Razak, jump into the pool!”

Ark shouted while running towards the pool, dragging his sword against the ground behind him.

Kararararang!

When the sword blade encountered the ground, sparks flew up. The

sparks flew upwards and spread at an incredible pace.

“Now!”

Ark ran and plunged into the pool underneath the waterfall.

Flash! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a sudden bright glare and at the same time there was a loud roaring sound. Then a massive hot storm swept through the underground area. Kwa kwa kwa kwang, the rocks couldn't tolerate the heat and started falling. It was to the extent that the vibration even shook the water in the pool.

“Puah, it's a success!”

After a while, Ark emerged from the water and shouted.

“Puah, what, what? What was that just now?”

Racard looked around with wide eyes. In just a few seconds, the underground area had become a mess. The coal dust which filled the space just then wasn't visible anymore. The rocks on the ceiling couldn't endure the blast and fell to the ground, scattering in all directions and there were still some flames burning. The view was like the results of a bombing!

“M-Master, what type of magic did you use?”

“It's not magic. Just science. No, isn't it just basic physics and mineralogy? That's it.”

Ark replied with a wicked grin. That's right. Some people might have already noticed, but Ark had come up with a method to explode the coal dust! He would explain the dust explosion in advance. The very small particles floating through the air was in the range of the sparks and exploded. It was a typical example of a coal dust explosion. If never happened in these days, but explosions at coal mines in the 70's wasn't that rare. He had remembered learning about coal explosions during school. As expected, people learned from seeing things.

‘But I didn't think it would work like this.’

“I didn’t know it would be that extreme! Huhuhu, then that fellow’s bones would be.....heok!”

Racard was laughing when he turned around and screamed. Ark’s face turned to follow Racard’s gaze and hardened.

-Ooooooh.....t-that bastard.....you arrogant human.....!

Karad stood in the centre of a small fire and swayed. The body had become tattered after the explosion but it was still holding on.

“U-unbelievable..... He survived that explosion?”

Ark muttered with incredulous eyes. But Ark had overlooked one thing. Karad was a magician monster so he had incredibly high flame resistance. Then Ark’s ears heard Karad’s voice chanting a spell.

“This is the recovery magic he used before! Ah, no!”

Ark jumped out of the pool with an aghast face. If that guy used his recovery magic then his recovery rate would be faster than Ark could damage Karad. Eventually the situation would be like the coal explosion never happened. No, it would be worse. Karad wasn’t stupid so he wouldn’t fall for the same trick again.

“Summon Ghost Knight Corps!”

The space warped and the ghost knight corps appeared. But before the ghost knights could charge, Karad laughed and muttered.

-It’s too late. The power of resurrection!

At the same time, Karad’s body started recovering at a quick speed.

-Kill the evil!

The ghost knights rushed towards Karad at Ark’s order. The 30 knights attacked with their swords and spears. Karad’s body was torn every time he was attacked. However, the power of recovery was already restoring the flesh and bones. Although there were 30 knights, it was a low level skill so the attack damage was also low. Of course, 30 people were attacking so the damage was larger than the recovery rate. But they couldn’t defeat Karad within 5 seconds.

-Sheesh, if only there was a bit more time.....

The ghost knights stared at Karad and disappeared. That was what Ark wanted to say.

-Huhuhuhu. Is that all? Do you have anything remaining?

Karad laughed after the ghost knights disappeared and looked at Ark. In fact, Karad wasn't in as good a situation as he pretended. After being pushed by the ghost knights, Karad was broken like tofu. After the attack from the ghost knight corps, Karad only had 1-2% health left. But the power of resurrection was still being applied. While Ark was staring blankly, Karad's health was still being recovered at an incredible speed.

'Incorrect. It's over. My general attack can't keep up with his recovery speed!'

Ark sat down with a thud and sighed desperately. Suddenly a black form flickered on Karad's chest. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-Karad's health has fallen below 3% and you can extract the demonic aura.

'What? Demonic? Then that guy has a demonic monster?'

Ark suddenly raised his head. After his health had fallen below 3% thanks to the ghost knights attacks, the Demonic Seal skill was activated. If Demonic Seal succeeded, then the remaining health of the monster would be ignored and it would die. However, the power of resurrection meant that Demonic Seal wasn't automatically activated when it fell below 3%. Then Ark stood up and shouted.

"Demonic Seal!"

Chwajijijijik!

Instantly a bright light emerged from Ark's hand and penetrated the chest. Then the black aura which had been flickering on his chest flickered and emerged. The light was dragging it out. Then Karma started to harden into a jellified state.

-Kuaaaaaak, you..... What did you do.....!

<p>-You have succeeded in extracting the demonic aura. Please select the target to be sealed into.</p>
--

“That’s it, Radun. Ancient Sword!”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun spat out the Ancient Sword from the underground crypt. Next the light moved to the Ancient Sword and it was absorbed into the sword.

<p>-Demonic Seal was successful. Thanks to the Demonic Seal, the attribute of the item has changed.</p>

-Kuaaaaaak!

At that moment, Karad screamed and was torn apart. After a short while, the rotten flesh changed and a vague form rose from Karad’s body. It was Karad’s soul which had been trapped in the body after he changed into a Lich. He seemed to suffer from a pained head for a while before it slowly raised. With white hair and beard, he seemed like one of the Oberium ghosts.

“Were you a magician of Oberium?”

-That’s right.

The ghost magician who had been confined to Karad’s body sighed and answered. Just like the ghosts of Oberium, Ark’s intimacy with Karad was at 100% after freeing him. So Ark could receive answers to his many questions from the ghost magician. As Ark expected, this was originally a coal mine. But one day, something strange spread from this coal mine. The miners working in this place lost all their willpower and the incident spread. The Lord of this region sent people to investigate the incident- before falling under the curse, this area belonged to the Lord of Oberium- and a magician was dispatched for the investigation.

-After descending down here, I released it was the legendary Mana Hall.

“Mana Hall?”

-Yes, the Mana Hall is a place which can manipulate the source of mana and there are two types of Mana Halls. One Mana Hall releases infinite mana while the other Mana Hall absorbs the surrounding mana. The Mana Hall which exists deep in this place is the 2nd type. In some rare cases, the power of the Mana Hall is emitted to the outside but this Mana Hall has dwelled under the earth for a long time.

The magician instantly told the Lord of the investigation results. At that time, the forces of Oberium was preparing for war against the forces of darkness. After the Lord heard this news, he ordered the magician to find a way to utilize the power of the Mana Hall. If they could control how mana is sucked out then it could be used against the forces of darkness. The magician who received the order instantly closed the mine and began to study it.

“Did you find a way?”

Ark asked with curious eyes but the magician shook his head.

-With my knowledge, it wasn't possible to find a way to handle the great forces of nature. Even when the miners dug the soil, it lost its power the moment it exited outside.

There seemed to be some restrictions on this power.

-But then I found something unexpected. I discovered a stone that could absorb the magic even though it looked the same as other stones. After investigating the stone that could absorb the magic of the earth, I discovered that it was a Hearthstone.

‘Hearthstone!’

Ark's eyes flashed. He had obtained a socket item from the Magic Institute. Ark had found a Hearthstone in the territory of the vampire Lord but he couldn't find anymore. He was seeking more

Hearthstones so it was natural for Ark's eyes to light up at the information. But before Ark could dig for more information, the magician sighed and shook his head.

-But.....

The moment the magician touched the Hearthstone, the curse magic was activated in Oberium. The strength of the curse magic was enormous. The abundant earth was changed into a swamp with a rotten smell. All the living beings caught in the curse became the dead wandering the earth. Ark suddenly had an idea while listening and asked.

"Then all the undead within the swamp were also residents of Oberium?"

Then shouldn't Demonic Seal have been triggered when he killed the Mould Zombies if they were Oberium residents? But the magician quickly answered Ark's question.

-That's different. The undead in this region emerged afterwards from the impact of the curse.

Anyway, the magician in this place encountered the curse magic but he didn't become a dead person like the other residents. Was it stopped because the Mana Hall absorbed some of the mana? Or maybe it was because he was in the mine? The curse magic which affected the magician was incomplete. However, the form which resulted was more horrifying than the full curse. He was neither dead nor alive.....the magician had to endure the pain of his decaying body while still living.

-Even suicide didn't stop the Dark Lord's curse magic. Thanks to my rotting body, I started searching for ways to defeat the curse magic. Finally I came up with a way to use the power of the Mana Hall within the Hearthstone.

The Hearthstone found in the Mana Hall! The Mana Hall managed to somewhat stop the curse because it absorbed some of the mana, so couldn't the power of the Hearthstone be used to absorb some the curse encroaching on his body? But unlike his expectations, the

magic of the Hearthstone was unable to be controlled after it collided with the curse magic and in the end the magician was turned into a Lich. Therefore Karad became immune to the power of the Mana Hall because he absorbed the same type of magic from the Hearthstone.

-Now I can finally be liberated from my pain.

The magician said and then pointed somewhere. Suddenly a cloudy light slowly engulfed the magician's body. The magician spoke it a voice filled with deep emotion as his body gradually faded.

-My time has already passed. Thank you God for this.

The magician said before he completely disappeared. Unlike the residents of Oberium, the reason, the magician's demonic magic wasn't that strong. It was weak because the curse magic had collided with the Hearthstone. So unlike the residents of Oberium, the magician entered heaven not long after the demonic magic was extracted. Since the magician's demonic aura was weakened, the japtem which it was sealed into didn't change as much as the items in Oberium. But there was still a reward for releasing the magician separately. After the magician disappeared, he received a lot of experience.

-You have received 30% additional experience for using Demonic Seal.
--

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.....

Whenever Demonic Seal was successfully used, he would receive an extra 30% experience. Thanks to that, Ark gained 7 levels in one breath.

'Is this okay?'

Ark laughed as he went to the corpse of Karad.

Mantle with Strange Power (Rare)

Armour type: Mantle

Durability: 25/60

Defense: 25

Weight: 20

User restriction: Level 250 and more

A high-class mantle used by high ranking magicians of Oberium. This cloak is made from the fur of the legendary Rakurisa and has the effect of boosting the wearer's mental power and vitality.

However, this cloak has also absorbed the strange power of the Lich and has an added special effect of recovering vitality. Karad was unable to receive the Hearthstone's endless ability to absorb mana, it was able to obtain its immortal ability from this cloak.

<Option: Health +200, Mana +200>

<Special Option (Power of Resurrection) When 2000 mana is consumed, 1000 of the wearer's health will be restored>

In New World, there were rare stones which could absorb the magic around it and these were the Hearthstones. The nature of the stone would change depending on where it is buried. This stone had absorbed the Mana Hall's ability to drain mana. When it encountered the power of the curse magic, the reaction was explosive and the Hearthstone lost its strength and became a common stone.

"Ohh, a rare mantle!"

Ark's eyes shone. But when he read the information window, the item wasn't that great. Although it gave 200 extra mana and health, the special option was a little too low. Consuming 2000 mana just to restore 1000 health? It was possible for Karad who had infinite mana but how could he use it?

"The Hearthstone is also regretful."

Ark looked regretfully at the 'Hearthstone which lost its power.' The

Hearthstone had the same ability to absorb mana as the Mana Hall. Thanks to the Hearthstone, Karad had gained the ability of infinite mana. While the effect was shown in the monster, there was no guarantee that a user would get the same effect. While Karad had used the 'Mantle with Strange Power' for his enormous recovery ability, the effect on the item dropped lower. But even if the performance hadn't dropped, the ability to absorb mana was extremely rare. While New World had mana recovery potions, those potions were ten times more expensive than health recovery potions. On the other hand, the amount required for his skills would increase when the skill levelled up so he would always lack mana. Any user would drool at the idea of a Hearthstone which absorbed mana.

"If my mana was able to replenish quickly then I can show the true power of this cloak....."

It was regretful.

"A magician who absorbed the power of the Mana Hall could create a Hearthstone. Even if the special effects of the Mana Hall stops at the mine, the power still remains. In other words, if the Hearthstone is buried again then wouldn't it absorb the power of the Mana Hall?"

But when he worked as the vampire's slave, he discovered that it took hundreds of years for the Hearthstone to absorb the magic around it. Even if it was buried again, it would only become a Hearthstone after hundreds of years. No one would bury a stone and expect to survive the hundreds of years it took to become a hearthstone.

"Well, it can't be helped."

Ark turned away from the body with dissatisfaction. Then something came to Ark's head all of a sudden and he murmured.

"Wait? Is a few hundred years truly necessary?"

Time..... Ark had an item related to time. After defeating Karma, Ark had received the mysterious artifact Phantom Hourglass which allowed him to control time. It could be used to turn scrap iron into

original items, but the number of uses was limited so it was too valuable to use in that manner.

‘Can’t I bury the Hearthstone and then use Time Acceleration on it?’

Wouldn’t that create a Hearthstone? In any case, Ark dug a hole and buried the Hearthstone. Then he raised the Phantom Hourglass over it and a message window appeared.

-You have used the Phantom Hourglass.

<You can turn it back 100 years or accelerate time forward 500 years at most>

“Time Acceleration!”

Then the sand at the top started to fall at a tremendous speed. Once the sand finished falling down on the other side, another message window appeared.

-The special effects of the dungeon has disappeared.

<Although 50 mana is still absorbed every second, the penalty has disappeared>

‘The special effect is gone!’

The terrain had returned to normal so that meant the Hearthstone was properly absorbing the magic. Ark pulled out the Hearthstone with a face filled with expectation.

Mana Steal Stone (Unique Hearthstone)

This Hearthstone has absorbed the magic of the Mana Hall for hundreds of years. Although the power which maintains the balance of mana stretches over thousands of metres, it does not affect the outside. But in some rare cases, it influences the earth and the property of the earth will change. This Hearthstone has absorbed the power of the Mana Hall and gained similar properties. Of course, the Hearthstone can be used as a high level magic ingredient or it can be inserted into a socket item.

<When used as a socket (Weapon Exclusive): When an enemy attacks, there is a 10% chance of absorbing 1~5% of the enemy's mana.

The Hearthstone gave him a 10% chance of absorbing mana when used in a socket item!

..... He had hit the jackpot.

The Knowing Eyeball

Kung kung, kung kung.

“Master, I’ve found one here!”

Baekgu’s nose which was pressed to the ground twitched like a dog and he shouted.

“I understand, wait a minute.”

Buksil ran over and looked through the bush, instantly finding a vegetable that looked like a carrot. But when he grabbed the stem and tried to pull it out, the root broke.

-Ingredient Foraging has failed.

<The ingredient has been damaged and it has lost its value as a cooking material>

“Damn, this one as well!”

Buksil became angry and threw the broken carrot away. Then he wiped away the sap which had dripped onto his body.

“This is making me angry. Baekgu, let’s rest for a bit.”

“But we haven’t filled the quota for today yet.”

“Eh, I don’t know, it’s too hot. Even if I find the ingredients, I can’t successfully harvest them.”

“But if you don’t fill the quota.....”

Baekgu started trembling with fear as he imagined what would happen. Buksil also winced and muttered.

“I’ll just rest for 5 minutes.”

“.....Yes.”

Baekgu approached the shade of a tree and kneeled down. Buksil sat down near him, took out the ingredients from his bag and sighed as he counted them. In fact, foraging the ingredients was surprisingly tough work. Didn't he have to go to the field directly to collect the ingredients? It was a mistake to think there would be a large amount of herbs and fruits lying around. Most of them were hidden in bushes and were difficult to spot. In the swamp, the number of ingredients was half of the number normally found in other places. But the hardest part after finding it was actually gathering the ingredients.

'The problem of finding the ingredients is solved thanks to Baekgu's sense of smell.'

That wasn't the only problem. In reality, it was still possible to eat the food even if it was a little damaged while digging it out. But there was no such system in New World. If he damaged it even a little bit when gathering then the ingredient couldn't be used anymore. In addition, it was summer so it was very hot. For Buksil, foraging ingredients was no different from hard labour.

'Even though I'm selling the ingredients, I still feel like I'm being exploited.....'

Until now, he had managed to gather approximately 30 ingredients in one day which Ark was satisfied with. Then after setting a campsite and concentrating on hunting, 50 ingredients started being consumed a day and the satisfaction decreased. Buksil's ingredients quota also increased and he received more work. But that changed after Ark found the Suspicious Cave. The amount of dishes eaten could increase thanks to the Monkfish mushrooms so Ark requested 100 ingredients a day.

'100 ingredients a day? No matter how much the ingredients are sold for, that is still exploitation! It means I have to work and not rest all day long.'

He could get an average of 3-5 gold for 100 ingredients. It wasn't a bad income for one day's worth of gathering ingredients. But he honestly didn't care about money after working hours in the sun.

'But.....'

The biggest problem for Buksil was that he had no other options. It became even worse after going through the hell training a few days ago. After being with Ark for a while, he knew his personality. It was only good if he wasn't caught. That was the survival strategy he developed after travelling with Ark.

'Phew, now how will I collect the remaining ingredients? If I don't gather enough then I'll be hit..... Damn, I'm like Cinderella.'

He was abused by his stepmother (Ark) and his new older sister (the summons) and thinking about the heavy labour he was currently facing caused tears in his eyes. Then what would Baekgu be?

'I now know why people like raising pets.'

Buksil looked at Baekgu with fond eyes and Baekgu shook his tail.

'I can't imagine a New World without Baekgu anymore. Yes, I have to work hard so that Ark won't bother Baekgu. And I can earn money to provide Baekgu with food. Ayu, this is my fate.'

After providing Baekgu with food, Ark had roughly 70 silver left as profit from selling the ingredients. In order to provide Baekgu with meat, he had to make over 1 gold a day. So he had to make money. Anyway, thinking that it was for Baekgu not Ark became a source of comfort for him. Therefore Buksil stood up and said.

"More monsters appear when it is dark and it'll become more difficult so we should find them now."

"Yes, Master."

"Shall we head towards that forest this time? Let's see.....Eh? Huh? Eh eh?"

"What's wrong?"

"No, that..... Damn, it was caught."

"Caught?"

"It was caught. It appears to be caught somewhere. Please don't move."

“Is it the one attached to Ark-nim?”

“No, that’s the right eyeball. The one that is caught is the left eyeball.”

Buksil murmured with an irritated voice. While Buksil was picking ingredients, he also had to film the video. Buksil always left his right eyeball with Ark. So he never had both eyes because the other one was needed for scouting. Currently Baekgu was level 310. He was stronger than the monsters around here. So even as a merchant, Buksil could gather ingredients away from Ark. But he wasn’t confident against monsters without Ark. Razak and Racard were summons so they were resurrected after they died, but Baekgu was an NPC. If he died then that was it. So it was always necessary to check if there were any monsters with his eyeball before moving. However, it wasn’t that easy.

While his two eyeballs were set free, the magic projector was attached to his head and he always had to confirm three images at the same time while moving. So he didn’t have to be in the same area to film the video. Anyway, an ordinary person like Buksil was controlling it. A person couldn’t look at three screens at the same time. If he was careless even for a bit then his eyeball would sometimes hit something. He became better after going through hell training with Ark but even he had a limit.

“Damn, I’ll have to take back that eyeball.”

Buksil complained as he run to the forest. It was a dense forest where the bushes were overgrown. It wasn’t a problem to look for the eyeball. When the eyeball was set free, there was always a separate window showing the direction of the eyeball.

“Ah, there it is. My eyeball!”

After following the arrow, he poked through the bush and was able to find the eyeball that was stuck. Buksil pulled out the eyeball from the bush and rubbed it with his sleeve. It was when he tried to send it away again. Suddenly he heard a sound from the side.

“.....Are you certain?”

“.....I made the necessary preparations.....”

“.....I’m worried..... It’s been two days.....”

‘Are those voices?’

He had been here for 10 days but it was the first time he heard voices. This was an undeveloped land so there weren’t many users. He couldn’t relax because it might be a monster who talked like a person. No, he still had to be careful regardless of whether it was a monster or user.

‘If I meet a chaotic user here then it will be chaos.’

Buksil winced and his expression became tense. He hadn’t seen it until now but there was a gap in the bush where he could hear the voices. The bush seemed like it was hiding a cave. Buksil confirmed it and became worried. It was best to avoid monsters and users. But he had to collect ingredients around here for a while so there was no guarantee he wouldn’t run into them.

‘Don’t they have a partner as well? If I hide here then they can’t find me.’

Buksil pushed his eyeball carefully through the bush. He controlled the eyeball and steered it into a wide open space.

‘Aren’t they users?’

Around 15 users were gathered in the empty space. Buksil moved his eye and sneaked along the wall, managing to listen to their conversation. Then one man surveyed the area and muttered.

“It’s good that you managed to find a place like this.”

“It is better to be careful.”It is better than working in the light.”

“That is correct.”

Then a smile spread on the face of a man with a X shaped cross on his cheek called Sunfish. Then a handsome user who had been watching from the side clicked his tongue and muttered.

“Why would you choose that face when you started the game?”

“Is that how it is? It makes me look tough. Who would want a pretty face like yours? Is the Namdaemun Gate handsome? Ha, even a dog passing by would laugh at you.”

“What did you say?”

Namdaemun glared angrily at the scarred Sunfish. Then a knight crossed his arms and said.

“Shut up, please calm yourselves down.”

“I’m sorry, Jepeteu hyung-nim.”

With one single sentence from the knight, the two men withdrew with their tails between their legs. The man called Jepeteu looked down at the hobbit sitting behind the scarred man. The group in the cave was divided into two sides, and Jepeteu and the hobbit seemed to be the respective leaders.

“That is like the price of a luxury vehicle.

What happened to all the money you earned? If your merchant ships continues hitting Seutandal than that amount can be easily recovered. In addition, the law hasn’t really conflicted with the pirates yet. I just want to move my organization here.”

“The guys under me also talked like that. If a bandit group comes here than the living expenses for my subordinates will decrease.”

“Just enforce some discipline on them.”

‘Dangerous!’

Buksil became tense as he watched through the eyeball. He couldn’t completely understand everything the men said. But he understood clearly that they were chaotic users. Although he couldn’t confirm it with the 『Penetration』scroll, it was obvious from their conversation that they were chaotic. And chaotic users were the most dangerous thing to an isolated merchant!

‘This is serious. Chaotic users are wandering around this place.....

It was clear that those guys weren’t low level. He should return to

the campsite where he left the ingredients. It was lucky that he discovered them first. Luckily they hadn't seen Buksil so he could still escape. Buksil observed their movements with the eyeball and withdrew slowly. It was when he was carefully retreating. His heel seemed to catch on something and there was a loud sound.

"Master, it's dangerous! Ugh!"

Baekgu grabbed Buksil then moaned and collapsed. He looked back with surprise and saw that a shining blue arrow was embedded in Baekgu's thigh.

"Tr-trap? Baekgu!"

"What was that sound?"

"Outside. Someone tripped one of the traps outside!"

The voices of the group in the cave were clearly heard.

'This is serious!'

Cold sweat dripped down Buksil's back. A merchant had been discovered by 15 users. If even one chaotic user was mixed among the users then Buksil's fate was decided. If they were pirates then the [Robbery] and [Plunder] scrolls were a basic part of their equipment. And there were 15 people. He would instantaneously become a beggar the moment he was caught.

"Baekgu, run!"

Buksil got on Baekgu's back and shouted. However, Baekgu had an arrow in his thigh and couldn't run properly. The group inside the cave exited with their swords drawn.

'No, this can't happen!'

In this desperate situation, Buksil suddenly came up with an idea.

'That's right, there is a way to bind their feet!'

"Stupid bastards, we're the Seutandal's autonomous group. You're all surrounded!"

A loud voice was suddenly heard behind the group. The group who had ran up to Buksil flinched and started to protect their bodies. But there was nothing behind the group. Yes, the voice that was shouting just before was his eyeball! Buksil had hidden it behind the group and then used the communication feature while Baekgu quickly ran through the forest.

“What, what the?”

“There’s nothing here?”

“That bastard! He used some strange technique!”

The group belatedly realized that they had been tricked and ran after Buksil. One of the archers used ‘Eagle Eye’ on Buksil and shouted.

“T-that is..... A magic projector! A magic projector is attached to his head!”

A look of confusion spread on Jepeteu and Garrett’s face.

“What? Then he was recording everything about our meeting?”

“When did he start recording? Surely not from the beginning?”

“Damn, I don’t know. Anyway, just take away the magic projector!”

“Horse, grab the horses!”

Garrett ran into the cave and pulled out their horses. Garrett got on the horse and glared at Jepeteu.

“I thought this place was safe? What are you going to do about this problem?”

“.....Don’t worry about it.” I’ll do whatever it takes to retrieve it. Hey, tell the situation to the other kids and intercept him. The rest of you chase after him with me. Archers will take the lead.”

“I understand. Track!”

The archers used tracking and chased after Buksil. The fifteen people raised a cloud of dust as they chased him.

‘Damn.....’

A frustrated sigh flowed from Isyuram’s mouth. He had a few trivial problems coming here.....he died because of Ark.....but Isyuram had managed to infiltrate the organization of wanted criminals. Up until then, Isyuram thought his task had succeeded. However, it had been a month and Isyuram still hadn’t found anything. It was natural when thinking about it. They were wanted criminals in reality and in New World. If they were caught then they would spend between 1-10 years in jail. They also doubted their parents and siblings so it was natural not to trust Isyuram.

‘I’m just lucky to be allowed in this group.....’

If he hadn’t met Garam in prison then it wasn’t possible for him to be here. When he initially joined, the boss Jepeteu hadn’t liked it. Luckily Garam had an unexpectedly high position in the organization. Although he wasn’t the second in command, he was among the top 5 out of 70 people in the organization. Thanks to Garam’s active defense, he was able to join the group. However, Garam was also very careful.

“My phone number? That’s a bit.....”

“Why? Sometimes I might come in late so I’ll have to get in contact with you.”

“That is a bit difficult. Actually, I was in a small situation.”

“Situation?”

“I’ll gradually tell you.”

Garam always used that excuse whenever he tried to pry for information. Talks between Garam and the other organization members was also the same. If they ever talked about something important, than Isyuram was always locked out and they never called each other by their real names.

‘But I can’t question them too closely.....’

Thanks to their many years as criminals, they were used to distrusting people. If Isyuram acted even a little bit strange then he would be sniffed out and crushed. Well, it still turned out okay. If any information about Isyuram being a part of the police leaked then his method of finding information in New World would be gone forever.

‘I still haven’t found anything.’

When Isyuram first entered the virtual reality world, the Special Crimes Countermeasures chief said that the criminals were tired of an isolated life. But after Isyuram examined it, he realized it wasn’t the whole story. It might’ve begun like that but now it wasn’t.

‘There’s no doubt about it. These guys are taking advantage of the virtual space called New World to do business.’

His awareness of games had changed by 180 degrees after playing New World. And the most startling thing about New World was the cyber money.....it was gold recognition. When Isyuram first started the game, he didn’t think too much about using the 2,000 gold he had. There were people who just enjoyed the game. It was also worthless for those who didn’t understand the game. It wasn’t the wrong idea of course. For people who didn’t play New World, gold had no value. The thing that Isyuram didn’t know was the real market price of gold!

‘The game money has equal value to cash.’

1 gold was worth 10,000 won. When it was this degree than it already wasn’t a simple game. In addition, New World was a game that millions of people enjoyed. Gold was a necessity. In other words, gold in New World could be changed into cash at any time or vice versa. There were many stock investment professionals who would buy or sell gold with future profit in mind. The game money moved within 1 year totalled several thousand billion won! So money in New World could also affect the economy in reality.

‘This is the blind spot of the National Police Agency investigation!’

Several hundred billion won was moved in one year thanks to the online game. The scary point was that the enormous funds moved

were all anonymous. Thanks to the user personal information privacy policy that was implemented a few years ago, it was impossible to investigate the personal information. There was no way of knowing about any transactions that took place within the game. In order words, things like illegal money transactions and money laundering were all possible.

‘Illegal money laundering for gangsters or concealment of wealth or illegal gambling of politicians. There are a number of ways to take advantage of it.’

Just like the Swiss banks concealed personal information, it was able to conceal billions of money. But the National Police Agency (NPA) were still unaware of the gravity of this situation. Of course the cyber investigations team made an effort, but those measures still couldn’t completely account for the virtual reality world. If criminals used the various methods of laundering illegal money in the vast virtual reality world then the NPA would have no way of tracking all that money.

‘Damn, the criminals are ahead of them but the police don’t want to admit it..... Anyway, my guess is that Jepeteu and the criminals are making contact with other organizations. If I can figure out how they are contacting the other organizations then I might be able to figure out a way to catch them.....’

There was no way to hide 70 people meeting in secret. In addition, Isyuram was still a merchant despite his superhuman fighting skills and the criminals were warriors. There was no probability of success even if he only fought against 1 person.

“Hey, why does your face look so down? If you’re bored then do you want to play a game of poker?”

Isyuram sighed as he sat down beside Garam. Garam had a pile of gold in front of him. The poker game involved dozens of gold. When compared to the exchange rate of 1 gold=10,000 won, that was already illegal gambling.

‘I’m itchy to put on the silver handcuffs.’

“No, that’s okay.”

It happened when Isyuram was shaking his head. He heard the sound of a horse and someone came into the campsite panting.

“Hey, it’s a serious problem!”

“Huh? What?”

“This meeting where we were finalizing the deal was recorded by someone with a magic projector and then he fled!”

“Eh? Really?”

The members of the organization threw down the cards and stood up.

“Jepeteu hyung and Garret hyung are chasing after him so hurry!”

“Damn, this is troublesome. Let’s go!”

The members started flocking and making preparations to chase.

‘Magic projector? Is that an item that can store a video? Then this was an opportunity! It must be something important if those guys are making all the fuss, and if I’m lucky then I might be able to intercept the magic projector!’

Isyuram joined the rest of the criminals.

‘Damn, I didn’t think that far.’

Ark scratched his head with an irritated expression. The exploration of the Suspicious Cave was successful. He gained more experience than expected and also a rare mantle. But the biggest profit was the Hearthstone. Every time he attacked an enemy, there was a chance to absorb mana using the Mana Steal Stone. Although he had more than 6000 mana, the skills he received after changing professions ate a lot of mana. In such a situation, a Hearthstone that could recover mana was a windfall. There were mana potions but they were many times more expensive than the health recovery potions. Although the probability was low, with the Vampire Stone

and Mana Steal Stone then he could absorb health and mana at the same time. That alone was enough to make the 'Promised Sword' better than Gwisal's sword. Ark wanted to confirm the effectiveness of the Hearthstones right away. But he had figured out a method to create Hearthstones using the Phantom Hourglass. If he went to an area with the desired special effect then he could produce a Hearthstone. He wanted to try it when he had all four Hearthstones equipped.

'It's good, it's all good, but.....'

Ark looked at the Monkfish mushrooms that had become charcoal and sighed. In his desperate situation, Ark had used the coal dust explosion to finish off Karad. However, there was something Ark hadn't considered. There were a huge number of Monkfish mushrooms in the coal mine. But those mushrooms had been caught in the explosion and completely became charcoal. Although he hopefully dug a few out, the effect of the Monkfish mushrooms had disappeared like expected.

'In the end I've only managed to obtain 60 mushrooms. Damn, if I knew this would happen then I wouldn't have caused the explosion.'

But it was too late for regret. Still, wasn't he quite lucky? Although Ark's dream of obtained a jackpot with the mushrooms was stopped, he had finished the other preparations thanks to the Suspicious Cave. He had managed to gather all the 'Skin of the Dead' and 'Heart of the Dead' from the dungeon.

'Huhuhu, I can finally make the A class Immortality Pill!'

It was the reason that Ark had doubled Buksil's required quota of ingredients. Once he started making the Immortality Pill, he could not use the pot until it was completed. It took him 48 hours to create the B class 'Slime's Immortality Pill' so the A class pill would probably take longer. So he wanted to store as much food as possible before starting the creation period.

'Fortunately I already have enough food for two days. Once I make food out of the ingredients that Buksil collected this time then I can start the Immortality Pill.'

So Ark's face filled with expectation as he waited for Buksil.

"This bastard, why is he so late? Hey, what are you doing?"

Ark hit the eyeball attached to the back of his head and shouted. Then he heard a voice coming from the eye.

"Ugh, Ark-nim, please save me!"

"Bah, I knew you would commit a crime that would make me hit you. If you don't come back within 3 minutes then....."

"It's not that....chaotic, chaotic users! I am being pursued by them!"

"Chaotic? Where? Where are you?"

Ark stood up and shouted.

"I've almost reached the campsite but.....ugh! There are archers among them.....ouch! Anyway, I'm desperate. Please do something. I'm still fine but Baekgu.....Hik, Baekgu!"

"Master, over there!"

Then Racard pointed to one side and yelled. When he turned around, a huge cloud of dust was approaching at a rapid pace. Buksil was riding Baekgu in the lead while 15 users riding horses were chasing after him. When he checked using Eyes of the Cat, both Buksil and Baekgu had less than 20% health left.

'What's going on? Such a large number.....'

Ark made a confused face. Then Buksil rushed towards Ark at an absurd speed and shouted.

"S-save me!"

"What the, that guy?"

"Sheesh, he had colleagues?"

"Never mind, I only see one fellow. Kill them all!"

"Heroic Strike!"

No unnecessary questions were asked! The thieves rode forward on their horses and swung their swords.

“T-this.....you keep running and withdraw to the back!”

The group had already caught up so Ark had no choice. Even if he got on Radunma and ran away, it was difficult to escape from horses. The group also had archers so it was suicide to turn around and run when they were this close. In the end, Ark grasped the situation and drew his sword.

“There’s no possibility of this situation ending gently. Razak, Racard, get ready!”

Ark used Sprint to head towards Buksil’s direction along with his summons. The swords came from every direction. Ark raised his arm and shouted.

“Razak, transform!”

Ttdadadak, ttadadadak!

The bones started clanging and Razak transformed into the Saw blade. At the same time, Ark grabbed one of the warrior’s sword and pulled him to the ground. Then the Saw blade changed into a whip and pulled the horse, causing it to be stunned from the impact. The important thing in a fight was to attack one person while dodging the other attacks. Alternatively, he could attack and use any gaps to drink potions or use recovery magic.

“You’re the first one!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Ark blocked the sword which unleashing a barrage of kicks on the warrior.

“Oh, t-that guy.....stop him. Warriors turn around, archers intercept him!”

When Ark unexpectedly caused one of the warriors to fall into a critical condition, the thieves became tense. They took a battle position and attacked Ark. The warriors lifted their shields and

charged.

‘Sheesh, I only had a bit more before defeating him.....’

Ark rolled on the ground to avoid the warriors’ attacks. But before he could regain his posture, the arrows flew down like an evening shower. The arrow caused damage and an abnormal status. The arrows pierced through his chest, shoulders and thighs and glowed red.

-You have received a critical hit from the arrows! 250 damage. 240 damage. With the arrow lodged, your movement will be slowed for 30 seconds.

“Damn, Racard!”

“Ohhhh, Dark Dash!”

After Ark was hit by the arrows, Racard rushed to the archers. However, the archers were protected by magicians who used ‘Fireball’ and Racard retreated as his wing caught fire. Meanwhile, Ark pivoted on his foot to avoid more arrows and blocked the incoming attacks of the warriors. In addition, the warrior that Ark had driven into a critical condition was healed.

‘As expected, is it too difficult to fight against 15 people?’

Ark clenched his teeth as he lost a lot of health in a short time. They were between level 250-300. After hunting the Mould Zombies in the cave and collecting the materials, Ark reached level 366. When his dark attribute bonus was added, it came to level 549. That was more than 200 levels difference. However, there were 15 opponents. While he could defeat 20 monsters, the 15 users had a variety of skills. In addition, they were a band of thieves so PVP was their specialty. Their combat standard couldn’t be compared to that of monsters. Of course, he had defeated numerous users in Seutandal but even then it was 1 against 2~3. He also had a lot of supporters to reduce the enemy. However the only person fighting now was Ark. Buksil and Baekgu had their health depleted so they couldn’t help. No, Buksil and Baekgu would just be a hindrance even if they did fight.

‘No, Racard also can’t help.’

In the bandit group, there were archers and magicians. If it was monsters then Taunt could be used to scatter them but Taunt didn’t work on users. If Racard approached again then the long range attacks would hit him.

‘Damn, why did Buksil bring these guys.....?’

He had no business with that group. If he had 20~30 people with him then defeating those 15 was possible. But the 15 people had a combination of professions so it was unreasonable to expect Ark to beat them.

‘I have to try and take advantage of the terrain features.’

Ark dodged the arrows without any breaks and swung his sword when there was a chance. Ark knew that the swamp was around here. The poisonous swamp and rotting trees made it a densely packed place. Those guys wouldn’t be able to ride their horses there.

‘The problem is escaping their encirclement.’

The thieves had surrounded Ark and Buksil and took turns attacking them. Whenever Ark made a move to penetrate the siege, the thieves just moved back and maintained the encirclement. They were good at fighting in a group.

‘But there is a way!’

“Racard, Blood Lane!”

At that moment, Racard’s eyes turned red and a huge amount of blood gushed out of his mouth, hitting the archers and magicians. It flowed up and covered a range of 10 metres like a rain shower. The descent of the cursed blood caused a large number of abnormal states! But the thieves had surrounded a large area so half of them weren’t affected.

‘But that is enough!’

“Eh? W-what is this?”

“My body is moving on its own. Confusion!”

“Damn, it is curse magic. Curse Cure!”

The eight thieves that had been affected by the blood wandered around in a confused and dazed state. The priests swiftly chanted a spell and released the curse but the formation had already become disordered.

“Ooooooh, b.....blood....b.....”

“Go home and eat. Racard summon released! Buksil, Baekgu, run!”

Ark sent Racard who was vomiting blood back and ran forward. Although two warriors hurriedly tried to stop him, there was no possibility of stopping Ark with the battle formation collapsed.

“Adol!”

Ark combined ‘Jump’ and ‘Dark Blade,’ flying forward like an arrow and slamming into the warriors. The warriors received a devastating impact and fell to the ground. Meanwhile Buksil and Baekgu had broken through the encirclement and entered the swamp. Baekgu had only been with them for a month but had already adapted. He used ‘Jump’ to reach the swamp and lost the thieves.

“Damn, that guy got away!”

“Eh, what is this? It’s a swamp?”

The thieves became confused as they came across the swamp. They were different from Baekgu who could use Jump and couldn’t move properly for fear of falling into the swamp.

“Okay. Buksil, you escape through the swamp for the moment.”

“Huh? What about Ark-nim?”

“I have something left to do.”

Ark turned his body and grinned. While the thieves got off their horses and regrouped, Ark wandered around and attracted the Mould Zombies.

“.....I won't let it go!”

“That guy has been caught by the zombies!”

“Catch that guy! The pig was hiding behind him before!”

“Damn, if only there wasn't this swamp.....”

“Arrows. Turn him into a hedgehog with arrows!”

The thieves gathered and instantly shot a barrage of arrows. However, Ark was immersed in using Dark Dance and reducing the health of the Mould Zombies. When Ark concentrated on his footwork, a message window appeared.

-Dark Dance has reached 70% completion and Dark Scale is activated.

<The dark armour will decrease your evasion by 20% but will increase your defense by 30%, and there is an increased 10% of reflecting the enemy's attack. In addition, any dark magic will be invalidated if the damage is less than 100>

When the percentage of completion for Dark Dance became higher than 70%, Dark Scale was automatically triggered! It consumed 500 mana but the effect was worth it. The 200~300 damage fell down to 120~180. His defense had increased by 30% but the actual damage reduction was 40%. It was because an additional damage was applied when the enemy's damage was less than his defense. In addition, several arrows were reflected back to the archers. Thanks to that, the attack speed of the archers fell.

‘As expected, the 2nd profession skill is different.’

While Ark had decreased four Mould Zombies down to a critical condition, the thieves were running towards him after navigating the swamp.

“Oh, they've come just as I've finished the preparations. Riposte!”

Ark hit the Mould Zombies that had less than 2% health left with Riposte. Then the Mould Zombies flew towards the bandit group and

exploded, releasing a white powder. It was the 'Mould Spore Scattering' that the Mould Zombies used when they died. The warriors who were affected by the spores for the first time wore a stupid expression.

"W-where did he go?"

"Eh? When did you get here? Take this!"

The warriors looked around restlessly and started to hit each other. They were affected by the 'hallucinations' of the white spores and saw their colleagues as Ark.

"Is this another curse magic? Curse Cure!"

The priests chanted a spell but the magic couldn't break the spore's effect.

"What are you doing? Wake up, you stupid people!"

After hearing their colleague's voice, the warriors stopped attacking and stepped back. Nevertheless, they were under the effect of 'hallucinations' and couldn't distinguish between Ark and his colleagues. The warriors couldn't attack each other and started to confirm their colleague's voices. But that was just the beginning.

"Hmm, the white mould has the weakest effect? Aren't they lucky? But how long will their luck last? Now, let's continue. Riposte, Riposte, Riposte!"

Ark gathered the Mould Zombies and shouted before blowing them away. It was a Mould Zombie bomb! The Mould Zombies' bodies reached a critical point before exploding and scattering various spores. The white spores caused 'hallucinations' while the green mould caused 'numbness.' Then the worse mould spores appeared. It was the red spores which turned those affected into zombies! Three or four thieves were affected and their bodies started rapidly decaying.

"Damn, what the hell is this? Retreat, retreat!"

The thieves couldn't withstand the Mould Zombie bombs and

hurriedly withdrew. Then Ark's eyes brightened and he attacked someone who was trying to run away. It was the reason why Ark bothered to fight the thieves. If he used the Mould Zombies then he could wipe out the group. But there was a reason he wanted to confront those guys.

‘Chaotic!’

It was because there were users with red names among the group. It was a bandit group so it would be strange if none of them were chaotic. But although they were a bandit group, some of them weren't chaotic and only had a grey name. Only chaotic users could inflict the last blow safely. So it was common for chaotic users to be mixed in the group while the person in charge of PK would deal the last blow. If a bandit group had 100 people then only 10 of them would be chaotic. However, this group of thieves were a bit strange. The higher level a chaotic user was, the more severe the penalty. So it was common for the chaotic players to have the lowest level in the group. But in this bandit group, the leader Jepeteu was a chaotic user.

‘I'm very thankful.’

It wasn't necessary to say it again, but there was a 10% chance of equipment dropping when hunting chaotic players. In other words, chaotic users were like a walking loot for him. These were the highest levelled PKers he had come across. Even if the least valuable item dropped, he would still be able to get at least a magic or rare item! Ark caught one person with the Saw blade where the others became confused.

“Heok, J-Jepeteu hyung-nim!”

“Jepeteu, I'm sorry but you'll have to die.”

“What, what the? This bastard.....!”

Jepeteu's face turned red and he swung his sword. But away from his colleagues, Jepeteu was just level 300. He was moderately strong when fighting with his group but had no chance in a 1 on 1 fight. In addition, he was still affected by the ‘numbness’ caused by

the green mould. Ark continuously used his sword and kicks. Within 1 minute, Jepeteu had his face shoved into the swamp. There was a ringing sound and his helmet fell down.

‘Huhuhu, I got one item!’

Ark laughed and picked up the item. Then he heard cries from outside the swamp.

“Over there!”

‘Huk, what, what the? How many are there?’

Ark turned around and his face hardened. A huge number of users were raising a dusty cloud as they came from the other side. Yes, they were the subordinates of Jepeteu who Ark had defeated. There were dozens of them!

‘Are these the subordinates in his party? They have dozens of people so wouldn’t some of them be PKers? Anyway, it’ll be annoying if they come to the swamp. I can’t get any more items.’

“Radun, transform to Radunma!”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun transformed into the huge lizard and Ark jumped on. On flat ground, Radun could run at the same rate as a horse. But this place was different. The swamp was poisonous. It would be difficult to ride a horse properly. But Radun was a snake so he wasn’t affected by the swamp. Ark was willing to face the thieves in the swamp because he knew he could escape anytime.

“Let’s go Radun!”

Pa pa pa pa, pa pa pa pa!

Radun moved his short legs and ran across the swamp.

Marine Chase

“Phew, they are persistent bastards.”

Sand fell from his head as he shook it. The thieves who he met in the swamp were so persistent that it was scary. Usually chaotic users would only chase for a maximum of 1 hour but these guys stuck to him like leeches. The 70 people separated and searched so it wasn't easy to escape them.

‘In addition, their chasing abilities are just as good as JusticeMan and the rehabilitation brothers.’

He also didn't know how 70 of them managed to be gathered. It had been 1 year since New World opened and most people had formed groups by now. Many guilds were made from the beginning and a lot of users stayed with the people they met in the early days. These days, the recent trend in New World was to form groups or clubs instead of guilds. In the case of such groups or clubs, they didn't have the organizational skills of a guild.

‘If this was a survival game then there would clearly be a military club’

This gathering showed a strong organizational ability. The military club was those that would enjoy playing mock combat survival games in the mountains. In addition, their physical bodies were comparable with their level and combat abilities. With these characteristics, the thieves ran after Ark tightly.

“That's because it is Ark-nim.”

Buksil also dropped down onto the sand and whined.

“If you just ran away then they wouldn't have followed you. But you killed their leader and grabbed an item so now they want to pursue you no matter what.”

“Weren’t you the ones you brought them?”

Anyway, it was a bit annoying but there was an unexpected benefit.”

-Burikand’s Combat Helmet (Rare)

Armour type: Shell Helmet

Defense: 80

Durability: 90/90

Weight: 60

User restriction: Level 200

The combat helmet of Burikand, the leader of a mercenary group. In the past, Burikand was a mercenary who defeated a legendary monster and made a helmet from its shell. Thanks to its attribute, it tolerates magic. If it suffers damage then the durability will gradually recover over time.

Option: Magic Resistance +10%, Strength +20, Stamina +10.

Special Option: Even if durability is damaged, it will automatically recover.

This was the helmet that Jepeteu had dropped. In fact, Ark didn’t have huge expectations when he picked up the helmet. A chaotic player had a 100% chance of dropping an item when they died. So it was common sense that chaotic users would wear trivial equipment. But the reason that Ark had taken the risk to kill Jepeteu was because he expected the leader of the bandit group to wear a magic item.

‘Yet he dropped a rare item!’

Rare items were incredibly good but scarce items. It was enough compensation for risking his life. Thanks to Radun and Baekgu carrying them, they managed to arrive at Haman Fortress before the group caught him.

‘Huhuhu, now I can say goodbye to those guys.’

Of course, most of them were normal users except for Jepeteu. There were no restrictions on entering the city but they couldn't follow him to Haman Fortress. Although they couldn't attack inside the city, the 70 people could watch the entrance and wait for an opportunity.

'But I have no more business in Seutandal.'

That's right. Ark had finished all his business in Seutandal. He had found all his pets and also changed to his 2nd profession. He might as well leave Seutandal and return to the continent. Then the 70 thieves in the vicinity couldn't act.

"Come, let's cross to the continent before those guys bother us."

"Are we returning to Schudenberg Kingdom?"

"No, this time the destination is the magic kingdom of Bristania."

Ark laughed at Buksil's question and replied. Ark chose Bristania as his next destination because of the quest item he received. It was the Lord of Darkness Valderas' Insignia which gave him the <Find the Fire Draconian's Home> quest. He had completed 3~4 quests during that time and this was the only one remaining.

'The quest is restricted to level 120 so the reward might not be that great.....'

Yet he didn't like the idea of giving up a quest reward. A low level quest given from a quest starting item might give him a special item. Who knew what kind of compensation he would get or if it would lead him to a new quest?

"Anyway, I've explored almost all of Schudenberg and Seutandal now. Even without a quest, it would be good to explore a new area. Although I can accept quests from the same area, Bristania would give more difficult quests to users from different kingdoms."

Ark already felt anticipation at the thought of a new kingdom and quests. Then Buksil asked with a worried look.

"Don't tell me we're going to ride the dolphins?"

“Why?”

“Why? Seutandal is 4 hours away from Schudenberg but it will take 7 hours to reach Bristania. Riding a dolphin for that long would throw out my lower back! Ark-nim can ride the dolphins. And I will ride the ferry with Baekgu.”

“Who will take the dolphin? I’ll ride the regular ferry.”

“Huh? Why?”

Buksil’s eyes widened at Ark’s reply. The ferry to Bristania was more expensive than the Schudenberg one and cost 18 gold! However, Ark who feared wasting even one gold was expectedly riding the ferry. But Ark couldn’t help it this time. The sea route between Seutandal and Bristania was quite rough. The last time he visited the vampire estates, he received motion sickness. What would happen if he rode the dolphin on waves that were several metres high? In addition, Ark had never been to Bristania. Without geographic information about Bristania, it was likely that he would wander off to some ridiculous place.

‘Well, that isn’t the only reason.....’

“Anyway, we’re going on the ferry. There’s still some time before the ferry will arrive so I’m going to make some preparations. You have some time so go visit a few places.”

“Yes. Let’s go Baekgu.”

Buksil headed to the shopping district with Baekgu. Buksil’s bag was basically bursting with japtem. He hadn’t visited Haman Fortress since they headed for Oberium from the vampire territory. So it was packed with the decorations he took from Racard’s castle, the cursed items from Oberium, the various miscellaneous items he received from hunting the Mould Zombies and the various food ingredients. Except for the curse items and food ingredients, he needed to sell the other items in order to clear some bag space. While Buksil was conducting business, Ark headed to Haman Fortress. It had been one and a half month since he visited Haman. The fortress had changed unimaginably and was still changing. Ark

aimed for the trading post he completed shortly before leaving. But in contrast to the remarkable development of the fortress, the atmosphere was a little messy.

“The pirates have been attacking merchant ships so the atmosphere is a bit rough. A merchant fleet was attacked last time and there were a large number of casualties.”

Beseutyu spoke in a concerned voice. These days the pirates were the topic of conversation between most NPCs in Seutandal. When considering Seutandal's previous rate of development, it should've grown more. But because the cargo ships had been attacks, there was a shortage of construction materials so work had slowed.

“It's not easy to find the lawless port.”

“Are there a lot of users coming and going?”

In fact, Ark hadn't thought that the lawless port problem was that serious. If general users as well as the Hermes guild and Nakujuk were using it then information must be leaking somewhere. Wouldn't someone with a loose mouth write it on a notice board or something?

“I thought like that as well. But the guys managing the lawless port..... They're probably from Hermes but they are very strict about the users who can enter the illegal port. If they suspect the person can't maintain confidentiality then they wouldn't be allowed in. Well, only chaotic users are allowed in there so the chaotic players are being careful.”

“Those Hermes members are very determined.”

“Yes, so we decided to go after them ourselves.”

The problem had become so serious that Isabel had invest a huge amount of money to build a battleship. If Seutandal possessed a combat ship than the pirates won't be able to run wild. So the leaders of the autonomous group, JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and Lariette were busy training the Baran clan in sea battles. Beseutyu said that even now they were training offshore.

“By the way, if you go to the continent then when will you come back?”

“Well, I’m not sure yet. But it won’t take long.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

After exiting the information centre, Ark had wanted to visit the training camp but shook his head.

“JusticeMan ajusshi and the rehabilitation brothers are busy so they won’t have time to meet me. In addition, it is a little troublesome meeting Lariette-nim after what happened before. If they created a battleship just for the pirate problem then there is no reason for me to go.”

So Ark went searching for Isabel. If he offended her then he wouldn’t receive any more compensation. He also wanted to hear news about Shambala. Currently Shambala was on a mission to rally the residents of Eastern Nation. If Shambala completed the Eastern Nation rallying mission then Shambala would receive the Saint Assassin’s 2nd profession.

‘But why does it feel like his task is easier than mine? Plus.....’

Isabel’s face flushed every time she met Shambala which meant that Shambala’s work was painless.

‘It is a good thing but I don’t know if I should celebrate.’

Ark frankly still couldn’t understand how Shambala could feel a romantic love for a NPC. It didn’t matter how real the NPC seemed. Furthermore, New World wasn’t a girl entertainment simulation game..... Why would NPCs in the game flirt? He didn’t know what she wanted.

‘Well, it’s not my life to be concerned about.’

Ark didn’t have the energy to care about things unrelated to him. He even avoided Roco and Lariette since he didn’t know how to deal with the problem..... Anyway, he finished his business in Haman when the eyeball attached to him shouted.

“Ark-nim, hurry. The ship has arrived!”

When he hurriedly ran to the docks, the ferry to Bristania was making preparations to depart. It was ahead of schedule so Ark barely made it in time thanks to the eyeball.

“Wow, look at that!”

The gazes were focused on Ark’s group after they boarded the ship. Although some users recognized Ark, the users’ eyes were focused on Baekgu.

“Look at that glossy hair.”

“Isn’t the size also considerable?”

“Is his owner a merchant? Where did he get a pet like that?”

While users could select the Wolf Clan when creating their characters, Baekgu was a Wolrang and looked quite different. The silver fur made Baekgu look quite beautiful compared to other dogs. The owner of the dog attracted the envy of other users. Baekgu pricked his ears and listened to the words of the surrounding users as he ascended the boat behind Baekgu. Baekgu gathered strength into his neck and tilted it with a proud look.

‘If the Wolrang clan could see this then they would cry.’

The Wolrang who lived and died with honour would’ve been offended to be considered a pet, but Baekgu was already a pet dog.

‘Well, this turned out well.’

Anyway, the captain made a speech after Ark boarded the ship.

“Thank you for using this ferry. This is the regular ferry between Seutandal and Bristania. It might take a lot of time compared to travelling to other kingdoms, but just relax and we’ll make this as comfortable as your own home. We are now departing. All sailors to their locations!”

The sails opened and the ferry started moving.

“I’m finally leaving Seutandal. I’ll see you again Seutandal!”

Ark gazed at the gradually receding Seutandal with a look filled with deep emotion.

‘There’s no doubt about it. He got on the ship just then!’

There was a person spying on Ark from the corner of a building near the port. His hood was pushed back and revealed Sunfish who had the X scar on his cheek. Sunfish was a member of Jepeteu’s organization. After tracking Ark’s movements, they learned that his last destination had been Haman Fortress. So Jepeteu made Sunfish sneak into Haman beforehand in order to follow Ark.

‘They took the Bristania ferry. Huhuhu, did you think it was possible to escape from us just by taking the ferry? You stupid fool. We won’t let you escape from Seutandal.’

Sunfish pushed down his hood and took out the Feather of Whispering. At that same time, someone else at the port was also acting similarly to Sunfish.

‘I’ve found him! He’s on Seutandal as expected. But now that guy is screwed!’

A vague smile spread on the man’s mouth.

The ferry parted the water and flowed forward. It was already summer so the cool foam of the water felt refreshing. Once the ferry set sail, the users immediately took out their fishing rods.

‘It is regretful but.....’

Ark clicked his tongue as he looked at the people fishing. When he headed towards Seutandal from Schudenberg, he had made a profit cooking and selling dishes to the people fishing. He would’ve liked to engage in that business again. But Ark shook his head. When heading to Seutandal, it had been mainly warriors on the ferry. But there was a higher ratio of merchants when returning to the continent. The warriors headed towards Seutandal to hunt but the merchant’s purpose was trade. They bought things from the continent to Seutandal to sell and then would sell goods purchased

from Seutandal on the continent. So there was a ratio of 70% merchants when leaving. And a lot of merchants had learned to cook. While the effects and taste of Ark's survival cooking was superior, merchants were apprehensive to eat food they couldn't make. So it was unreasonable to expect them to pay him a fee to cook.

'Besides, I have no time to earn some petty cash.'

Ark laughed and entered the cabin. Then he pulled out the pot and arranged his ingredients. There were 200 bunches of 20 ingredients. It was the Skin of the Dead and the Heart of the Dead. That's right. This was why Ark bothered to use the ferry.

'It takes 7 hours to reach Bristania so it is impossible to play earnestly.

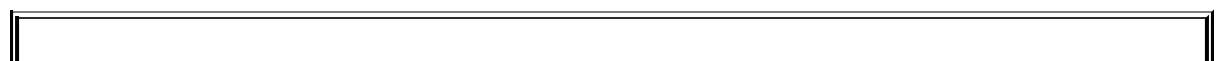
The sea route took a minimum of 7 hours. That was different from the previous 4 hours. Other users would leave their unit on while conducting other business. Thus most users would engage in other business while leaving the unit on. So he thought about making the Necromancer's Immortality Pill.

'The Immortality Pill takes a lot of time to create. It doesn't matter after reaching the maturation process, but the mixing and crystallization process requires watching. Anyway, I can't do anything on the ferry so I might as well start the process. By the time we reach Bristania, it will be in the maturation stage and I'll leave it in the vault at the Magic Institute.'

There was also a desire to finish it as quickly as possible because he had been waiting for so long.

'I can finally make the rank A immortality pill!'

Ark swallowed his saliva and put the ingredients into the pot. When the Necromancer's Essence was dropped in, it instantly melted and changed to a dark glue like liquid. Next the Skin and Heart of the Dead was added, the dark liquid turned to a black soot and a message window appeared.



-You have gathered all the necessary ingredients to create 'Necromancer's Immortality Pill.'

Now it is time to start the process of creating the immortality pill.

Immortality Pill Mixing = Crystallization= Maturation. Once it goes through these 3 stages then it is complete.

Estimated required time is 96 hours.

-You have entered the stage 1 mixing process.

The ingredients in the Necromancer's Immortality Pill have magical qualities that are contrary to each other. If there is a slightest mistake in mixing then all the efforts so far would be wasted. Special attention is required to ensure that all ingredients are mixed correctly until the process is finished.

<Once the brilliance of the liquid becomes a little muddy, you have to shake the pot and mix the ingredients together. The abilities of the immortality pill can vary by how well it is mixed.>

=Time remaining in Mixing process: 3 hours.

'96 hours.....!'

Ark's mouth dropped after reading the information window. Didn't that mean it would take 4 days?

'But I just have to finish the mixing and crystallization process and the rest is just waiting. It only took 8 hours to create the Slime's Immortality Pill. Although the A rank pill takes longer, if I start it now than I can finish the crystallization process by the time we arrived. As expected, it is good that I took the ferry.'

After looking at the information window, he realized he wouldn't waste any time. Compared to the time it took to collect the ingredients, 4 days wasn't a problem. When considering the bonus an A class immortality pill would give, who cared about a little boredom?

"Now let's get started."

Ark stretched his joints and grabbed the pot.

“I have to ensure the best degree of completion! Nothing can go wrong.”

Ark shook the pot at an absurd speed. Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang! Suddenly there was an audible roaring from far away and the hull tilted to one side.

“Ugh, what, what the? I almost ruined it!”

Ark looked at the pot with a stricken face. Not all the immortality pills were the same. The added bonus depended on the degree of completion in each process. That’s why he hunted 20,000 Mould Zombies and found enough ingredients to create two Necromancer’s Immortality pills. If it spilled over the side then the percentage of completion would fall!

“What is going on? Didn’t they promise to make this as peaceful as my house?”

Ark murmured with irritation. Dangtangtang. When the sound was heard, Buksil opened his door and shouted.

“Ark-nim, it is serious!”

“I know. They almost made my spill it!”

“No, that’s not it..... It’s the pirates, pirates!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

After running onto the deck, the roaring sound was instantly heard again. At the place where the roaring sound was heard was a ship with a black hull and skeleton flag rapidly approaching

“Emergency, emergency! A pirate ship is approaching closely!”

When the pirate ship appeared, the sailors ran around the deck making noises.

“Oh my god! Why are the pirates attacking a passenger ship?”

The captain muttered with a pale, stricken face. Typically the pirates only targeted merchants. There was no point engaging a passenger ship in sea battle when there wouldn't be much profit. There was the method of attacking the users directly but it wouldn't be easy and a variety of scrolls would have to be used. In addition, Seutandal couldn't produce that many supplies for trade yet so the merchants aboard the ferry often had empty bags.

On the other hand, the merchants' fleets had a lot of economic power and rich merchants. It was to the extent that they couldn't hold it in their bags and had to leave it in a warehouse. If they sank a merchant fleet then 20-50% of the warehouse items would float in the sea. So the pirates were more likely to attack the merchant fleets arriving at Seutandal.

'Damn, pirates? No way!'

Ark shook the pot and frowned. He really had no luck. He was saying it again but there was only a 1~2% chance of pirates attacking a ferry. So why was he among the 1~2%? In addition, if he died then he would lose all the ingredients he gathered with difficulty.

'My degree of completion can't fail because of pirates or I'll go crazy!'

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Once again projectiles flew from the pirate ship. However, it still wasn't enough to reach the ship and the bombs exploded in the water. "Port to maximum height! We're screwed once we're in the range of the ships!" The ferry rotated heavily at the captain's command.

However, this was a peaceful ship created for carrying passengers so the pirate ship was superior in speed and turning capability. The pirate ship moved in a slanted line and fired warning shots again, making the ferry shake.

'Hik, pot, my pot!'

Ark clenched the rail firmly and shook the pot. Then he suddenly heard a familiar voice.

“Kuahahaha. It’s better to stop the flimsy resistance!”

‘Eh? This voice is.....?’

Ark flinched as he saw the person yelling from the pirate ship. He surprisingly knew the face of the captain of the pirate ship. It was the boss of the bandit group that Ark had killed in the swamp, Jepeteu! Jepeteu had a subordinate magician use ‘Voice Amplification’ magic and shouted.

“If you surrender then I won’t sink your ship. We only want one person. If you cooperate and surrender then we’ll only look for that person!”

‘What, what the? They really chased me to here?’

Ark was surprised and hid himself behind the railing. Then Buksil glared angrily at Ark and declared sharply.

“Look, they chased us all the way here because you took their helmet!”

“The person we want is a dwarf merchant who looks like a pig!”

“Eek? Me? Me? H-how come?”

Buksil screamed and hid behind the railing as Jepeteu continued. Ark was also puzzled. Ark thought the bandit group was chasing them because he killed Jepeteu and snatched his rare helmet. But he hadn’t done anything and Jepeteu was looking for Buksil? Why?

“Did you do something to those guys?”

“I don’t know. I just kept running away!”

Buksil replied with a perplexed expression. However, this was not the time to be thinking about that. The passengers who were panicked by the warning shots became disturbed by Jepeteu’s words.

“What the? They’re chasing after someone?”

“Then they’ll leave us alone if they find the person they’re looking for?”

The passengers muttered with a hopeful expression.

‘Shit, if this continues then won’t the passengers drag us to them?’

Ark hid under the rail and continued shaking the pot while shouting.

“Don’t be fooled! That is the modus operandi of these guys!”

“What? Fooled?”

“Do you think they would shoot a ferry just to get one person? Once they board the ship, they’ll just rob everyone’s bags. Obviously they had a lot of [Robbery] scrolls.”

“I see. That’s right, that person is right!”

“That pirate is a weak bastard!”

By the end of Ark’s words, the passengers were glaring at Jepeteu. Then the captain grabbed a loudspeaker and shouted.

“Do you think I will surrender to pirates who are trash of the sea? Even if your words are true, this ship is owned by the King of Bristania. There is no way I will pass a passenger of the King’s to pirates! I will uphold the honour of Bristania and resist until the end!”

“Bah, I can’t communicate with them. It can’t be helped. Approach them!”

When Jepeteu laughed and raised his hands, the sails of the pirate ship instantly unrolled. Then the pirate ship accelerated and approached the ferry.

“Port side! Starboard!”

The captain shouted but it wasn’t easy to ferry to escape the quick hull of the pirate ship. After a short time, the pirate ship finally managed to line up beside the ferry. The strongest weapon of the pirates was the cannons. And cannons were mounted on the side of the pirate ship. That was why the pirate ship moved in a slanted line and approached from the side. That was the best attack range of a pirate ship! Once lined up side by side, the cannons could fire dozens of artillery. If an ordinary ferry was attacked by dozens of

cannons fired from close range then it would sink.

“S-stop them. Prevent them from bombarding us!”

The captain shouted frantically.

Then archers and magicians on-board the ferry attacked the pirate ship. But the range of the bombardment was from dozens of metres away. Most of the arrows and magic fell into the ocean, and the attacks that reached barely damaged the hull.

“Hahaha, you fools! Do you think attacks that shabby would damage this battlefield?”

“Damn, port side! Port side! We have to escape from their range!”

“Not a chance. You think that slow ship can escape us?”

No matter what direction the ferry moved to, the pirates quickly overtook them. Meanwhile, the dozens of cannons on the side of the pirate ship were loaded.

‘Damn, what do I do?’

Ark tightened his lips and felt like his insides were burning. If the artillery hit the ferry then it would suffer extravagant damage and sink. But the problem was not the damage. If Ark died now then his immortality pill creation would be cancelled. All the ingredients in the pot would be lost. But Ark couldn’t think of a method.

‘There is a method to escape. Fortunately it is just one pirate ship. Before the bombardment starts, I have to jump into the ocean with Jepeteu knowing.’

Even if the ferry didn’t sink, most users wouldn’t have a way to survive if they fell into the ocean. However, Ark had the ‘Flute of the Merpeople’ and could call the dolphins. If he called the dolphins before escaping into the ocean then he could escape Jepeteu. But he was also taking a risk. Right now Ark was concentrating his energies in shaking the pot!

‘Riding the dolphin and completing the immortality pill at the same time will be difficult.’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him. One of the soldiers on the mast shouted with a shocked voice.

“Captain-nim!”

“What?”

“P-pirate ship!”

“Are you joking? Why are you talking about a pirate ship that we’ve already seen?”

“No, that’s not it..... A different pirate ship has appeared from the left. And there are three of them..... It is a pirate fleet! They’re approaching at a rapid pace!”

“W-what?”

The captain ran to the left deck with huge eyes. Just like the sailor said, three pirate ships were approaching. While everyone was distracted by the pirates on the right, a pirate fleet had appeared on the other side. The three pirate ships were on a completely bigger scale than Jepeteu’s pirate ship.

“This is a ferry! A ferry! Why are four pirate ships attacking us?”

The captain muttered with a devastated look. Then a voice that was using ‘Amplification’ magic was heard from the pirate fleet.

“Hohoho, we’ve caught him!”

“Listen up, don’t bother with the weak fellows! We only want Ark who is riding that boat! We’ll only leave after we take him out!”

Ark focused his gaze as soon as his name was mentioned. The person yelling on the flagship of the pirate fleet was a woman wearing silver chain armour and a big burly man wearing leather armour. Even though he turned over every corner of his brain, Ark couldn’t remember those faces. Buksil looked at Ark and asked.

“This time they’re definitely looking for Ark-nim. What did you do?”

“Damn, I don’t know. I don’t know those faces!”

“People you don’t know are chasing after you and threatening you with a pirate fleet?”

“How should I know what those guys are thinking?”

Ark and Buksil were busy arguing. Then the woman wearing the magician’s clothes hit the man on the back of the head and said.

“You idiot, do you think he will come up obediently? Just sink them for the moment!”

“What? But.....”

“We’re positive he is present. Even if he sinks, he’ll just revive at Haman Fortress. Then we can just wait there.”

“Ah, that’s right. That means sense. Pirate fleet! Head to that boring ferry!”

The three pirate ships over took the left side of the ferry. Thanks to that, the ordinary ferry was sandwiched between pirate ships.

‘What is this? Doesn’t this mean I can’t escape on the dolphin?’

The pirate ships were lined up on the right and left side. Although Jepeteu’s reason was unknown, he definitely wouldn’t leave it alone if he saw Ark getting away on the dolphins. If Ark was too obvious when running away then the cannons of all four ships would point to him. Riding a dolphin while shaking his pot and avoiding cannons was impossible.

‘W-w-what can I do? I’m trapped like a prey about to be eaten.’

Just the thought of it was enough to make him sag.

‘I can’t die like this. But both sides are blocked.....’

No matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t think of a way to escape the pirates. Then he heard the captain’s completely panicked voice.

“Ugh, no. This is the end. Should I have accepted their request? Maybe they really are just aiming for the dwarf merchant and that Ark fellow.”

‘What? He can’t have that thought.....!’

“Captain, that’s not possible at all. Just like Captain said, doesn’t the King of Bristania have a responsibility to ensure the safety of all the passengers?”

While Ark was frowning, a sailor spoke with an unaccepting expression. The sailor was a person who with a righteous character. The captain sighed and nodded at the sailor’s words.

“Uh, you’re right. I was so scared that I forgot about my obligation. A true sea man is someone who handles himself in a moment of crisis. I have to follow that motto.”

“Yes, Captain. We’ll act like that as well.”

The captain and sailors had completely forgotten about their previous thoughts. Ark was saved thanks to that.

‘Lucky those guys stopped. That danger has disappeared.’

Ark was thinking when someone suddenly shouted.

“Hey, look at that. Another ship has appeared!”

“What? A pirate ship again?”

“No. That flag is Seutandal! It is Seutandal’s combat ship!”

‘Seutandal’s combat ship?’

Ark raised his head and looked over the railing. 2 combat ships were approaching at a fast speed from behind. The symbol of the Eastern Nation which was already representing Seutandal was drawn on the flag fluttering at the top mast.

“Hahaha, they’re pirates. We’ve finally caught up to them!”

A heroic voice was heard from Seutandal’s combat ship. These days, using ‘Amplification’ magic during naval battles seemed to be the trend.

‘Isn’t this voice JusticeMan ajusshi?’

That's right. The people on the combat ship weren't just JusticeMan. Standing next to him were the rehabilitation group and Lariette. A look of relief appeared on Ark's face. But it turned gloomy again after a few seconds.

'Seutandal's combat ship..... It was completed? However, it is too late. The pirate ships have already surrounded the ferry. It will be sunk before the combat ship can help. Is there some way to delay the time until the ship arrives?'

Ark pulled his hair and looked at the pirate ships on both sides. Jepeteu's pirate ship was 50 metres away and preparing for bombardment! There were as many as 30 cannon muzzles protruding from the doors! Just one round of firing would be enough to sink the ferry. But the even more menacing thing was the pirate fleet approaching on the other side. The three ships contained a total of 90 cannons aimed at the ferry! If the cannons were fired simultaneously then the ferry would disintegrate into powder. There would be no way for Ark to survive in the midst of the explosions.

'Then I have no choice but to suffer? No, wait? The pirate fleet only arrived a short while ago, but Jepeteu had already prepared his bombardment a while back so why hadn't he attacked yet?

Perhaps.....ah, that's it. There might be a way to survive.'

Ark suddenly remembered something and headed towards the bridge.

"It was an honour to sail with you."

"Huk, Captain!"

The captain and crew were embracing each other with teary eyes when Ark arrived. They were surrounded by four pirate ships so it was natural to give up hope. However, Ark had no intention of sinking into the sea with them.

"Captain, there is a way to penetrate the siege!"

"What?"

The Captain hurriedly wiped his tears and turned around. Ark told the Captain his thoughts. The Captain's face changed often while listening but he eventually nodded.

"Yes..... There is that method..... Maybe..... No, there is no other way. I understand. Gather all magicians from the sailors and passengers to one place! They'll be given orders depending on the reaction of the pirates."

"I understand."

While the Captain gathered the magicians and explained the plan, Ark climbed to the roof of the bridge. Still shaking the pot with one hand, Ark amplified his voice using 'Intimidation' and shouted.

"Hey you bastards!"

Beast Master

“Huhuhu, who knew my dream of being a pirate would come true?”

Jepeteu looked at the pirate ship with a satisfied look. Jepeteu had invested a huge amount of money into remodelling a combat ship into a pirate ship. He named the pirate ship ‘Pinocchio’ and it had 30 of the latest state of the art cannons attached. In addition, it contained comfortable cabins that could hold up to 200 Nakujuk that he hired at the lawless port! It had a special coating which increased defense against long range attacks and luxury sails which increased speed by 30%. The remodelling cost 8000 gold! It was an investment for the organization to advance in New World. It was laughable that a ferry would try to escape the state of the art combat ship. Jepeteu already had experience as a pirate so he controlled the pirate ship well and caught up with the ferry. It happened the moment he was about to sink the boat. An unidentified pirate ship appeared on the other side.

“What’s with them? Don’t they understand the ethics of business?”

Jepeteu looked at the eye catching pirate fleet with irritation.

“Hey, Sunfish. Send a signal.”

Sunfish received the order and climbed up the mast, waving a flag.

【This ship is already ours. Please leave. 】

They were commonly used signals between lawless pirates. Even the lawless pirates had their own rules. The purpose of the Hermes Alliance when creating the illegal port was to retake Seutandal. They were all lawless pirates so there was no point attacking each other. The number one rule was that pirates who attacked a target first had the priority. However, the pirate fleet on the other side had ignored that rule.

【Shut up, this ship is ours. Retreat or receive a beating. 】

‘T-those bastards! They know who I am yet they still dare.....!’

Jepeteu frowned at the answer he received. Jepeteu, who was he? Although he was in hiding because he was a wanted criminal, he was the middle boss of an organization with 300 members. He wanted to run over there immediately and beat them to death. But this was a game and there were three ships. While they didn’t have the latest up to date model like Pinocchio, The hull itself was bigger and they had three times as many cannons. If they attacked then there was a 100 in 100 chance of Jepeteu losing. That was the reason why Jepeteu hadn’t attacked even though his cannons were armed. In addition, the combat ship of Seutandal had just appeared. However, there was no probability of Jepeteu withdrawing.

‘There is no way I will leave the ferry to those guys. If the pirates take the ferry then retrieving the magic projector from the pig will be even more difficult. It is the same if the pig flees onto Seutandal’s combat ship.’

So Jepeteu just stood there and didn’t do a thing. Then a voice that had been amplified was heard.

“Hey you bastards!”

‘H-he is the one who killed me in the swamp.....!’

“Let’s see. That person over there, did you come chasing me because I killed you in the swamp? What? Did you chase me this entire distance just to whine? And you’re pulling such a shabby pirate ship around? You’re really playing shabbily. Are you a loser in real life? No, instead of a pirate or thief, aren’t you just a neighbourhood thug who extorts money?”

“What? A loser? A thug?”

Sparks flew from Jepeteu’s eyes as he glared. But then Ark turned his back and addressed the other side.

“And where did you guys come from? Why are you shouting will pulling three small boats? I’m sick of all the losers coming here. No matter what you do I won’t blink an eye. Go ahead and use your

trivial cannons.” You l-o-s-e-r.”

Jepeteu made a furious noise at Ark’s last words. On the opposite side, there was also the sound of someone losing control.

“That cheeky bastard dared insult the organization..... I don’t need to see anything else..... Shoot! Turn him into powder!”

“W-wait a minute!”

Then someone rushed over and hurriedly shouted. The person who came running towards Jepeteu was Isyuram.

“Are you with that guy and the pig?”

Isyuram had been listening to the speeches from the deck and jumped out with surprise. Isyuram had been with the members of the organization when they arrived at the swamp after Ark fled. He never imagined that the pig who recorded Jepeteu’s dealings and Ark were related. He only confirmed that the user who helped the pig and defeated Jepeteu was Ark after Ark appeared on the bridge.

‘I don’t know what happened but if Ark is with the pig then finding the memory crystal won’t work. But it’ll be difficult if Ark and the pig die here! I have to help them escape somehow!’

He hurriedly spoke to prevent Jepeteu from giving the command.

“Isn’t our purpose to snatch something from them? If they sink then they’ll just die. Maybe we should watch the situation a bit more.....”

“Heh, it does not matter. Didn’t you hear what those guys on the other side were saying just then? If those fellows die then they will resurrect at Haman Fortress. We can just wait at the resurrection place. As soon as those fellows arrive, we use the scrolls to strip them naked.

If we use the scrolls on the pig then we can snatch the magic projector.”

“But the pirates on the opposite side.....”

“We caught the ferry first. They went against the rules of the lawless

port. In addition, the Seutandal combat ship is heading towards that side. We have to smash the ferry before that ship arrives.”

“B-but.....”

“Shut up. Attack, attack!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Pinocchio’s cannons shot out 30 fire bombs at once. That wasn’t all. The pirates on the other side had also fallen for Ark’s provocation and aimed 90 shells. That was a total of 120 cannons being fired! It was only a matter of time before the ferry became destroyed.

“Continue to unleash it until that impertinent fellow is turned to powder!”

‘Damn, this is serious!’

Isyuram inwardly screamed and followed the shells with his eyes.

“Now!”

Then Ark’s voice was heard loud and clearly. At that moment, an amazing thing happened. 10 magicians were gathered on the deck and used magic. One side used fire magic while the opposite side used ice magic! The two types of magic flew into the sky and collided, causing an intense explosion. Fire and ice, when two attributes with opposite natures collided then a massive gust of wind occurred. The gust was so strong that the crew on the deck was pushed back. At the same time, the intense gust hit the mast and accelerated the ferry forward several metres like a turbo car.

“W-what is going on?”

Jepeteu stumbled with tears in his eyes. Who would have imagined that the sailboat would be able to accelerate quickly using the power of the wind? However, Jepeteu wasn’t looking at the ferry. In the empty space where the ferry previously was, black circular object were flying forward. Yes, it was the 90 shells shot by the pirates on the opposite side.

“E-evade! Evade them!”

Pepepeng, pepepeng, pepepeng!

Before Jepeteu could finish talking, Pinocchio had been directly hit by 90 shells.

“Hyung-nim, all the masts are broken!”

“The rudder isn’t working!”

“There are dozens of holes in the deck and water is leaking!”

“U-unbelievable..... My Pinocchio.....the boat that I poured 8000 gold into renovating.....!”

Jepeteu’s eyes widened as the reports from his men came pouring in. It was understandable if it was a ferry. But a battleship was incapable of falling that easily. It was common to be hit by shells in a general naval battle. That’s why Jepeteu’s ship and the pirate fleet thought it was okay to stay near each other. They also weren’t anxious because of the cannons. But with the ferry gone, Pinocchio and the pirate fleet were bombarding each other at close range. When receiving a bombardment of this degree from such close range, it was dangerous even for an expensive combat ship. In addition, there were three ships in the fleet so Pinocchio’s bombardment didn’t do as much damage. However, Pinocchio received the concentrated attack of three ships and shattered. Pinocchio fell into an unrecoverable state which was enough to make Jepeteu paralyzed.

“Ugh, they dared do this to my Pinocchio! Shoot, shoot! Show those other pirates!”

However, there were already only 10 cannons remaining on Pinocchio. The pirate fleet was also baffled by the unexpected situation. Meanwhile, Pinocchio was again bombarded as the 90 shells automatically fired. The Pinocchio which had 8000 gold invested in it sank into the sea along with Jepeteu.

“Aaaaaack, no, my Pinocchio!”

‘Well, at least Jepeteu didn’t get his hands on the memory crystal.....’

Isyuram looked at Ark as Jepeteu's cry rang out.

'Am I going to die because of that guy again? I am like a bowl of rice to Ark in New World.'

Isyuram's eyes stung. It wasn't just because seawater had entered his eyes.

"Awesome, a genius. You're a genius!"

The captain shouted towards Ark. It wasn't necessary to say but Ark was the one who devised the plan to move the ship using the collision of fire and ice magic. Ark couldn't use actual wind magic because when wind magic was used, it became as sharp as a knife. If the magic was used directly then the sails would be cut up. So the only method was to indirectly create wind from the collision of ice and fire magic.

"We can't be relieved yet. The black pirate ship had sunk but the pirate fleet received no special damage. We have to avoid that pirate fleet until Seutandal's combat ship arrives."

"T-that's right. Now what do we do?"

"Fortunately, most of the crew on the pirate fleet are Nakujuk. The Nakujuk don't have any magicians so they can't use that method to avoid the shells."

Ark said when a message suddenly appeared in front of him.

-JusticeMan has used the Feather of Whispering to request a whisper.
--

JusticeMan had confirmed that Ark was on the bridge and sent him a whisper. When Ark accepted the request, JusticeMan's voice was instantly heard.

-Ark, is this Ark?

-JusticeMan ajusshi!

-Why are you on that ship?

-It will take too long to explain the circumstances. Anyway, I've avoided the danger for the moment but the situation isn't good.

-I see. But your idea was accomplished very well.

-Well, this much is needed if I want to live.

Even in such circumstances, Ark didn't forget to shake the pot.

-But it will help the ferry hold on until we can reach it to rescue you. I'll lead the combat ship in the 3 o'clock direction so you move there too. You're slightly ahead of them so if you stay to the right then you should be able to join us without major damage.

Just like JusticeMan said, thanks to the acceleration the ferry was slightly ahead of the pirate fleet. JusticeMan's plan was to bypass the pirate fleet and join up with the combat ship which also had cannons. However, they were travelling at a 3-5 degree angle while the other ship had 30 cannons. While it was intimidating to the ferry, it wasn't impossible if they could accelerate using magic.

-Once you join us, we'll cover the ferry as it sails back to Seutandal. Then we will follow soon after.

-Huh? Why? The pirate fleet received a little bit of damage. I think two battleships should be able to face them..... And Seutandal can also call for support from the troops in nearby waters. Surely you can take care of those pirates?

-No, our purpose isn't to clean up the pirates.

-What is your purpose then?

-We want to use this chance to determine the location of the lawless port which they use as a home base.

JusticeMan explained the situation. While JusticeMan had been running around looking for the location of the lawless port, he had discovered a clue to the location. The lawless port couldn't be entered using a land route. In other words, it was a marine fortress

with a boat required to enter. Isabelle had committed huge funds to the battle fleet for this reason. But the pirates were aware of this and cleverly hid the location, which meant JusticeMan hadn't found it yet. While in the middle of ocean surveillance, they had captured the movement of the pirate fleet.

-Our fleet is on standby in the nearby vicinity. If they fight here and then leave, the pirate fleet will have to return to the lawless port for repairs. Then we'll follow using a high speed boat and can find the location of the lawless port. So you have to run away first.

-I understand what you're saying.

Ark disconnected the communication and instantly ordered the captain.

"To the right. Circle to the right to bypass the pirate fleet and join the combat ship."

"But if we circle to the right then we'll be within the range of the pirate fleet."

"That is the quickest method to join the combat ship. If we accelerate using magic then we won't receive a lot of damage. And once the distance is narrowed then we'll be supported by the combat ship."

"Support? Then you communicated with the combat ship just then?"

"Yes."

Ark nodded while the captain stared at him blankly.

"With your foresight just now, are you also the captain of a combat ship? Who are you?"

"Just a passenger."

Ark rocked the pot and replied. Anyway, the ferry circled in the direction that Ark indicated and entered the range of the pirate fleet.

"Not yet. The magicians have to conserve their mana. We need the magicians to raise the gust of wind to move the ship twice, so we

need to coincide the timing with the shells to minimize the damage.”

Ark paid attention to the movements of the pirate fleet and said. Then a huge explosion occurred on the pirate ship in the lead. It was an explosion of fire and ice magic! The pirate ship flew forward like an arrow towards the ferry.

‘What, what the? Isn’t that the magic we used? But that ship’s crew was almost all Nakujuk.....heok, don’t tell me that woman alone.....?’

Ark’s mouth dropped open as he confirmed the pirate ship rushing towards him. He saw that the female magician from a while ago had fire and ice magic rushing from both hands towards the sky where it exploded. She had accomplished by herself what it took ten magicians on the ferry to do. In addition, the gust that occurred was more powerful than the one created by 10 magicians.

“What the, who the hell is that woman? How.....no, why did they rush forward? Rushing in that way....heok! Perhaps.....accelerate, Captain accelerate the ship!”

Ark was astonished and suddenly shouted. But before the magicians could chant a spell, the pirate ship had already ran into the side of the ferry.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The ferry shook and the passengers and Ark on the deck slid to one side.

“Ack, pot, pot, pot!”

“I-I lived!”

Ark stared at the black liquid in the pot with a pale white face. When the whole boat shook, Ark rocked the pot and barely caught it using Dark Dance. All he cared about was the A rank Necromancer’s immortality pill!

‘But what is with these reckless guys?’

Ark stared with astonishment at the pirate ship stuck in the side of the ferry. The pirate ship had crashed into the side so it also wasn’t

okay. The players aboard were also disordered. Even if they lived, the pirate ship would require huge repairs. Yet the ship had collided without any hesitation. This wasn't the act of someone with their sanity intact.

'Who are the warrior and magician from earlier? Why would they do such a thing.....?'

"Hehehe, kill everybody!"

Then the pirates shrieked and boarded the ship. The ferry became a mess as the pirates boarded. The Nakujuk pirates who boarded were a bit stronger than before and were between level 250-300. Of course, the passengers aboard the ferry also reached that level. However, 70% of the passengers were merchants. While the warriors and magicians held on, the merchants couldn't resist and collapsed.

'Anyway, isn't this situation unusual?'

"Take this!"

Two pirates were rushing towards Ark. He quickly avoided their attacks and took out Lancel's sword. He had to shake the pot with one hand so he couldn't use the two handed Gwisal's sword. He was anxious as he had to fight while shaking the pot on a rocky boat. However, Ark maintained his balance using extraordinary movement and cut the Nakujuk. After the taekwondo training against the Mould Zombies, his overall sense of balance had improved beyond ordinary people.

'The Nakujuk aren't the biggest problem.....'

Ark used Riposte on the Nakujuk and looked at the distant sea.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Seutandal's combat ship was engaging the other two pirate ships. It was a complicated fleet battle where the bombardment never stopped! He could clearly see that JusticeMan was being slightly pushed back by the two pirate ships. However, this was within JusticeMan's calculation of the situation. While it looked like

JusticeMan's ship was receiving most of the attacks, he used his manoeuvrability to target the rear of the pirate ships. When the pirate fleet returned to the lawless port, they would be more easily tracked. Anyway, the intention of the attack was to aim for the weak point. But it was still a 2 against 2 naval battle so they couldn't afford to come help the ferry. As a result, even if they managed to disconnect the pirate ship from the ferry then the ferry wouldn't be able to escape it.

'I can't expect help from JusticeMan ajusshi.'

Unfortunately, there was no way to save the passengers of the ferry. But that result might even be better for Ark.

'The two pirate ships have been caught by the combat ship. And the other pirate ship has collided with the ferry. I can run away without a pirate ship stopping me!'

The reason Ark hadn't called the dolphins was because he couldn't escape without being fired on. But now all the pirate ships that would've stopped him were caught. He needed to escape while the pirates were distracted by the sailors and passengers. Ark quickly determined his course of action and shouted.

"Buksil, where are you?"

"O-over here!"

Buksil's voice was audible from above him. How did he get up there? Buksil was unexpectedly clinging onto the top mast. Anyway, he managed to escape by climbing up.

"You idiot, what are you doing there?"

"But the pirates....heok!"

"Heheh, die!"

Buksil screamed as two pirates climbed up. Then Baekgu jumped up the mast and bit the Nakujuk's neck, tearing the flesh and dropping them.

'I don't need to worry about Buksil while Baekgu is there.'

“Buksil, Baekgu, plunge into the sea when I give the signal!”

Ark said and quickly took out the Flute of the Merpeople. Just as he was trying to blow it, a tremendous energy surged in front of him. Ark felt a cold feeling and instinctively moved his body.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

A huge bayonet smashed into the deck, causing it to explode. The destructive power was like a bomb had gone off! The fragments of wood flew into the air and fell like a shower about the burly physique of the man standing there. It was the player who had said Ark's name. From afar, he had looked like a larger than normal person but it was a lot different seeing him up close. This man's muscular body was twice the size of ordinary people and the leather armour he wore made him seem like a beast.....he was like a brute.

“I finally met you Ark.”

The brute laughed and looked at Ark.

“You avoided my attack just then so don't you have moderately good reflexes?”

“Who are you?”

“Me? Oh, I haven't introduced myself. My name is Bread.”

Yes, the big, burly warrior was Bread. Together with the magician, he was a user who had a grudge against Ark. After visiting Silvana and receiving Raiden's full support, they had returned to Seutandal. With Raiden's support, he offered them some pirate ships from the lawless port and intelligence from his spies in Haman Fortress. One of the two men spying on Ark at the harbour was from Hermes' intelligence network. The news reached Bread and Redian who were waiting at the lawless port. The two of them rallied the pirate fleet and chased after the ferry.

“I am not interested in your name. Why the hell are you chasing after me?”

“You don't know me but I've been looking for you for a while.”

“Looking for me?”

“The explanation is a little complicated.....”

Bread scratched his head and laughed.

“Why don’t you just let me relieve my stress on your body and die?”

“Are you joking?”

“So you’re not going to die? Frankly, I like that it’s not boring. You’re the one who raised Seutandal? Just like Raiden said, your original look isn’t a black wolf.”

“Raiden? What? Are you from the Hermes guild?”

“No. Well, we did receive a bit of help from Hermes to look for you but they are unrelated to our reason to kill you. Anyway, do you have the same capabilities as the wolf who raised Seutandal? It’ll be boring if you die too easily.”

Bread smiled and asked with a strange expression.

“By the way, I’ve been interested for a while but why are you shaking that pot?”

“It’s not your concern. I can shake the pot or even catch the pot while dancing.”

“.....I don’t know why you’re doing it, but wouldn’t it be better to put it down? Or you’ll regret it.”

“Shall we see? If I will regret it. You might be the one leaving with regrets.”

Ark continued shaking the pot while smiling. Then Bread laughed and said.

“You’re full of self-confidence. Why don’t you show me your skills?”

Bread shot forward like a knife and swung his bayonet. Ark moved his body reflexively and the bayonet struck the ground. Just like before, the deck exploded. It was enormous damage!

‘This guy.....!’

He had a sense of how dangerous the attack was just by being in the proximity. Ark stayed away from Bread and checked his information using Eyes of the Cat. Bread’s profession was a Beast Master. It was a class he never heard of before. Well, he assumed that there were hundreds of professions in New World..... It was Bread’s level that made Ark amazed.

‘Huk, what, what the? Level 402?’

Although he was immersed in the game while lacking sleep, Ark was only level 366. But he was already over level 400? Was that guy even sleeping while playing the game? He hesitated after discovering Bread was over level 400 but it wasn’t enough to make him despair. In fact, Ark was more worried about the pirates boarding the ferry than Bread. If the pirates controlled the ferry then it would be difficult for him to escape.

‘I have to defeat him quickly and get out of here!’

“Radun, turn on the Dark Lamp!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun quickly vomited out some magic ingredients and lit the lamp. The lamp vibrated and the surrounding area turned dark. At the same time, the 50% dark attribute bonus was applied and Ark reached level 548. Even if that person was level 400, it was possible with Ark’s dark attribute bonus.

“Okay, if you want a fight so badly. Dark Blade!”

Ark ran to Bread and used Dark Blade. Bread hurriedly raised his bayonet and defended himself. However, Bread’s face was still relaxed as he laughed.

“Hmm, you’re level seems to be quite close to mine, no. Did you stats grow after using the lamp? It seems like you receive a dark attribute bonus? I did think that your battle scene was a bit different in the day and night when watching the video.”

Bread had abundant experience and figured out the Dark Lamp and his attribute fairly quickly.

“Although it is a bit disappointing, you seem moderately proficient. But the skills and items you use are fairly interesting. This is a game. Okay, if you appear like this then I’ll accept it without reservations. ‘Beast Spirit Possession!’ Strength of the Bear rise!”

‘Is it a bear like power? Is he a space sheriff?’

Ark laughed at the ridiculous gesture. Then the form of a huge bear appeared around Bread and he almost cried. As soon as the shape was absorbed in Bread’s body, he really was covered in brown fur like a bear.

‘Eh? What the? Transformation?’

Bread jumped forward with a huge momentum and swung his bayonet. Ark instinctively ducked at the last moment. The air parted from the bayonet’s tremendous momentum. And a mast was cut with one blow.

“T-this is.....!”

“Hey, it’s just starting. It will be difficult if you’re already surprised.”

Bread smiled and swung the bayonet again.

“Dark Dance!”

Ark used complicated footwork to avoid the bayonet. It cut the mast with one blow. A strength which transcended imagination. However, there was a limit to how much stat points received when levelling up. If he had that much power than his other stats would be low. A warrior who increased strength and stamina would have low agility, so Ark thought to use Dark Dance to draw him into a high speed battle. However, Bread already knew what Ark was thinking.

“Eh? This time it is a speed battle? It’s no good, ‘Beast Spirit Possession,’ power of the Cheetah rise!”

This time the form of a cheetah appeared around Bread. Just like when Ark used Jump, the cheetah was absorbed into Bread and his

thighs became two times thicker. Then he rushed forward at an absurd speed and brandished the bayonet.

Kwa kwang!

“Ugh!”

The violent impact pushed Ark back 10 metres. Dark Dance had reached 70% completion so his defense automatically increased by 30% thanks to Dark Scale, but he still lost 800 health. If Dark Scale wasn't triggered then it would've been 1000 health. However, Ark had no time to scream at the damage.

‘Damn, this is really dangerous. I almost ruined it!’ In this situation, it is okay to shake the pot for the mixing process but I will fail if it reaches the crystallization process.’

Ark sighed with relief as he caught the pot and shook it. After shaking it so many times, the slight muddy colour had gone away and it was becoming glossy.

‘But what is with this monster like guy? What on earth is that strange skill?’

Ark avoided the following attack with Sprint and used Skill Penetration.

-Bread's profession skill: Beast Spirit Possession

Beast Spirit Possession is the profession-specific skill of the special class Beast Master. When Spirit Possession is used, it is possible to contract the soul of animals to elevate certain stats. A Beast Master can contract a maximum of three souls at the same time.

* Current Beast Spirit Possessions:

【Bear】The bear's soul can amplify power by 50%.

【Cheetah】When choosing the soul of a cheetah, it is possible to increase agility and reaction rate by 50%.

‘Spirit Possession? What kind of cheat skill is this? In addition, it is

possible to contract up to three spirits? Then couldn't this guy become even stronger?'

In fact, Ark had no right to say that. In Bread's case, he could only increase three stats at the same time but the limit was only by 50%. But in Ark's case, his dark attribute bonus would increase all stats by 50%. Ark also had some cheat like qualities. However, Ark had never encountered a user who received similar stat bonuses as him. It was similar to Alan's overlapping three buffs and Shambala's dark attribute bonus.

'Wait? Does he also have a hidden profession?'

But now wasn't the time for such thoughts. Bread was far higher levelled than Ark and his skill was no joke. Even if he used all his power to fight, there was no guarantee of success. On the other hand, Ark had to shake the pot while fighting. In addition, he was using the level 50 Lancel's sword instead of his primary two-handed Gwisal's sword. But that wasn't all. All the pirates were running wild in the vicinity.

'If I don't defeat him immediately then it will be difficult. If I defeat this guy then the situation will be resolved. It is best to press him back and somehow escape.

But I have to increase my stats before I push him back.....is it time to use that?'

"Glory of the Night!"

Ark was forced into a corner and pulled out his trump card. It was the area declaration skill of his 2nd profession! Glory of the Night required 2000 mana. It was an enormous skill which even consumed 400 Spiritual Power. Once he used it, he had to give up summoning his pets. In return, his defense and damage increased by 50% while his magic resistance increased by 20% for 10 minutes. Although he hadn't realized it at the time, Shiva's Proclamation which the Red Man previously used was also an area declaration skill. He had thought it was a ridiculous skill at the time, but he learned that anyone could learn it after changing to a 2nd profession. And just like Shiva's Proclamation, Glory of the Night showed an enormous

effect. When Glory of the Night was used, the dark space widened. It was a summoning of the spirits of the night! At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-Glory of the Night has been used.

<When within a 100 metre radius, your attack and defense will increase by 50% and magic resistance by 20%>

The extra 50% was added to his dark attribute bonus and his damage ascended! A 100% bonus was added to his basic attack.

“Now, let’s see if you can keep laughing!”

Ark brandished his sword and ran towards Bread. Bread retreated with a slightly surprised expression and murmured.

“Eh? This guy has also changed to his 2nd profession?”

‘What? This guy too? Then.....?’

Ark flinched as Bread slammed his bayonet vertically into the ground and shouted.

“Land of the Beast!”

Then a coloured totem rose in front of Bread. A light continuously spread in front of the totem and turned the ground into a blue grass. It was an area declaration skill! But the more surprisingly thing occurred when the blue grass collided with the dark space. When contact was made, the totems sparked and broke at the same time.

-The Area Declaration skill has encountered another one and disappeared!

Ark exclaimed with astonishment and Bread just laughed.”What, what the?”

“How much time has passed since you’ve changed professions? This is how to stop the Area Declaration skill.”

“Area Declaration? As expected, you.....”

“What is it so startling? Did you think you were the only person with a 2nd profession?”

He thought he was the only one. Now he had invested 2000 mana and 400 spiritual power only to have the Area Declaration skill vainly disappear..... It was a really good skill which was why it had a weakness. In the end, was it impossible to use that skill when fighting against users with a 2nd profession?

‘Damn, then I can’t use Area Declaration against the Red Man.....’

He felt furious thinking about that. Well, it would have an effect when fighting monsters.

“Now I’ll demonstrate my power properly. Beast Spirit Possession, power of the Hawk rise!”

Bread really was a space sheriff. After being empowered with the spirit of the bear and cheetah, his agility, strength and reaction rate had increased. Now the spirit of the hawk increased his critical hit probability and he rushed at Ark. On the other hand, Ark’s area proclamation skill had failed and he couldn’t summon his pets.

“You’re still not putting down the pot? Are you trying to imply something?”

Ark was still shaking the pot even in this situation so Bread murmured in a nasty voice.

‘Damn, I would do it if I could but I can’t throw away the pot!’

“If you don’t exert your skills then I don’t have any more business with you!”

Ark barely avoided the critical hit and retreated. Then the eyeball attacked to the back of his head screamed.

“Ark-nim! Behind, behind, behind!”

Ark listened to the eyeball and hurriedly turned away. An immense fireball was heading towards him. It was flying from the female

magician wearing white chain mail called Redian.

‘That’s right, didn’t this guy also have a magician? Didn’t she just move the pirate ship by herself so how does she have enough mana? I’m screwed. Even if I somehow defeat Bread, there is no way I can escape that magician! No, I can’t even stop Bread’s attack while avoiding the fire magic!’

Ark groaned. However, Bread’s bayonet changed course and impacted with the fireball.

‘Eh? What’s with this guy?’

“What are you doing?”

Bread cut the fireball in half and shouted towards Redian. Then Redian frowned and shouted back.

“What am I doing? Isn’t that obvious? I was going to fry that guy.”

“Stop!”

“What?”

“You don’t understand? I am dealing with this guy. Although it is funny that he is shaking the pot, this guy’s skills are real.”

“Don’t make me laugh, I also have a grudge against that guy.”

Redian snorted and chanted a spell again. Then Bread looked serious and muttered in a low voice.

“I.....will really get angry.”

Redian flinched and looked at Bread. After a short time, the ball of magic deflated and Redian muttered.

“Sheesh, you stupid bear. Okay, but make sure you definitely deal with him. And then I’m next. You understand?”

“Yes, I understand. You’re as charming as always.”

Redian blushed and turned her head. Bread looked at her with a charmed expression before she turned around again.

“I’m sorry. Anyway, now no one will disrupt the fight. Don’t worry about the pirates either. She’ll stop any pirate that tries to interfere with a warrior’s battle. So why don’t you put down the pot and fight seriously.”

Ark stared blankly at Bread. He didn’t know what type of grudge they had but Bread was different from the people he encountered so far. He admitted to Ark’s skill and wanted to fight warrior against warrior to the death. He even declined his colleague’s help. For there to be such a person.....

‘An idiot, he is an idiot!’

Yes, Bread really was stupid. Then Ark could use this.

‘Hehehe, a warrior’s battle.’ I have no intention of talking foolishly like that guy. Don’t make me laugh. Didn’t he also crash into the ship to chase him? Who knows how the situation will change? In addition, don’t I also have to compete with that magician when Redian finishes? Then the pirates? In the end, nothing will change even if I win. Are you crazy? Why would I do such a thing? In addition, shaking the pot? Damn, I’m risking my life to shake this pot!’

However, Ark murmured with a deliberately impressed look.

“You’re a real warrior!”

“No, well, you don’t have to go that far.....”

Bread scratched his head with an awkward expression.

“No, I’ve never met a true warrior in New World. Okay, if you’re that resolute then I will oblige and fight you warrior to warrior. But I’ll apologize first. I’m ashamed to be fighting a warrior like you while holding the pot. I understand. Now I’ll face you with all my power.”

“Oh, really?”

“Definitely. But can you give me a few minutes? A man against man match. I need time to prepare and to pack the pot again, and this place is also in the middle of the ocean. So let’s turn our backs and walk ten steps like in a western movie before attacking.”

“Ah? R-really? Well, if that’s the case…….”

Bread nodded and turned his back to Ark with no hesitation. Then he took a deep breath and his shoulders moved up and down. Bread really was admirable. He had decided on a man against man fight. Then he coolly turned his back to the enemy……. This guy is sincere! That’s what he thought. However, Ark had a wicked smile on his face as he turned around.

‘An idiot, he really is stupid!’

In fact, Ark had blown the Flute of the Merpeople as soon as he turned around. After Bread walked a few steps, he turned back around and exploded a sword.

“Blade Tempest!”

It was the Blade Tempest which activated with a dark property! The fragments with a black aura around it swirled around Bread.

“Eh? What the? Cancel power of the Hawk. Beast Spirit Possession, defense of the turtle!”

Bread flinched and used Beast Spirit Possession, with his skin changing into the shell of a turtle. It was a Beast Spirit Possession which increased defense. Although the turtle skin was able to prevent some of Blade Tempest’s attack, it was limited. Some of the shrapnel managed to penetrate Bread and caused enormous damage. After the storm subsided, Bread jumped and shouted.

“Y-you! What are you doing?”

“Hahaha, did you think I would fight an ignorant bastard like you? Goodbye!”

Ark’s voice came from below the ship. Bread hurriedly ran to the railing and saw a large number of dolphins gathered. Ark was riding one of the dolphins and shouted to the deck.

“Now! All passengers jump down and ride any of the dolphins!”

“Eh? What’s with the dolphins?”

“The person who commanded the ferry a while ago. He called them!”

“Oh, it’s an opportunity, run!”

The users and sailors who had been cornered by the pirates jumped into the sea. When the sailors and passengers grabbed them, the dolphins caused a tremendous splash and scattered. Ark had urgently called a herd of dolphins for this reason.

‘This isn’t my style.....’

In fact, Ark had originally planned to get away by himself. However, the pirate fleet had appeared so now he reluctantly needed the passenger’s help. If so many people escaped then they wouldn’t be able to find one person. Just like the event quest in Jackson where JusticeMan led other users or using NPCs in the siege, Ark was willing to use players or NPCs to achieve his goal.

‘If one person escapes alone then it isn’t possible but there is a way if everyone escapes together. And it will also benefit me if everyone escapes too!’

“You cowardly bastard.....!”

“Bah, you should’ve listened to me you idiot! Hellfire!”

Redian cursed and aimed the magic towards the back of Ark who was escaping. The tremendously powerful magic tore through Ark’s back and he died straight away. But the next moment. Ark who was hit by magic scattered like smoke.

“No way.....illusion?”

“Over there! He fled to the other side!”

Bread discovered Ark who was escaping among the passengers.

“Cancel shield of the turtle. Beast Spirit Possession, power of the dolphin rise!”

Bread used the spirit of the dolphin and quickly caught up with Ark before attacking. However, this Ark also scattered like smoke and disappeared.

“What the? Another illusion? If that’s the case……?”

“There is! He’s escaping there!”

Redian shouted after discovering Ark who was gradually getting further away from the ship. Then she chanted a spell before cancelling it.

“Incorrect, he had already escaped my range.”

“This, unbelievable...! I’ve never seen such a cowardly person! He dared insult the principles of a duel....I can’t forgive him! I can never forgive him Redian. I’ll chase after him. Jump down!”

Redian held on to Bread and they chased after him at enormous speed.

‘Huhuhu, those stupid bastards.’

The original Ark looked up from the sea bottom and laughed. That’s right. The Arks who had disappeared like smoke was the Moonlight Illusion. While Redian and Bread attacked two and chased after the final one, Ark had hid on the ocean floor.

‘This is the benefit of sharing the escape with other users.’

Ark had called the dolphins for other users to help himself. It was in order to hide his illusions among the other users. If there were only 3 illusions of Ark floating in the huge ocean then they would see through it. So Ark called dozens of dolphins and mixed the illusions among the survivors. Bread and Redian’s reaction was delayed because of that. In the meantime, Ark had bitten the Mermaid Scale and waited on the ocean floor.

‘Huhuhu, it’s good that the liquid in the pot isn’t affected by water. By the water, I had completely forgotten about Buksil.’

Ark clicked his tongue and murmured. He had been so preoccupied that he had no time to worry about Buksil. Fortunately, Buksil and Baekgu were also riding the dolphins but Ark couldn’t track them. In order to deceive Bread, Ark had ordered the dolphins to scatter and head to Bristania. Therefore, Ark had no way of figuring out which

way the dolphins went. Although Ark tried to talk to the eyeball attached to him, the distance between the main body was too far for communication.

‘Well, I’ll just contact Buksil later and arrange a meeting place.’

Ark carefully looked at the outside situation from underwater. Just as planned, JusticeMan had pretended to retreat. The battle ended like that so the other ships towed the pirate ship attached to the ferry. Although Ark couldn’t confirm it, he expected that the rehabilitation group was following the pirates.

“The situation has been sorted. So, shall I go?”

Ark called the dolphins and rode across the sea. Even with all that, Ark’s left hand was still shaking the pot.

National Police Agency Quest

<p>-The auction is in progress. Wind Spirit's Boots: 6,200,000 won</p> <p>-The auction is in progress. Burikand's Combat Helmet: 6,700,000 won</p>
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Hyun-woo couldn't hide his disappointment after reading the messages on his computer. When he picked up Burikand's Combat Helmet, the price had gone beyond what he expected. Although Burikand's Combat Helmet was a level 200 rare equipment, the option wasn't that good. Although rare items have special skills attached to them, the defense wasn't that special. From a warrior's perspective, they would rather have magic items with addition defense. It was because it was a rare item that the item reached 6.7 million won after 4 days. Hyun-woo was disappointed by the Wind Spirit's Boots. In fact, Hyun-woo had hesitated over whether to change to Wolf's Feet. His mind had wanted to continue using the Wind Spirit's Boots. While Wolf's Feet had a little more defense and the 'Jump' skill wasn't bad, Ark thought that 'Slide' had more usefulness. The problem was that Wolf's Feet was a part of the <Animal King> set. If he gave up Wolf's Feet then not only would his defense decrease but the set item effect would decrease."Huh?"

"No matter how much I like it, I can't use that equipment. Unfortunately, he had no choice but to abandon the Wind Spirit's Boots. It isn't necessary to carry around shoes I can't use."

In the end, Hyun-woo decided to sell the Wind Spirit's Boots. But when the auction was in progress, the value fell below Ark's expectation. Although he changed equipment, his hesitance made him hold onto it for one month. But when he placed it on the auction site at the same time as Burikand's Combat Helmet, the auction price was less than the helmet by 500,000 won. In addition, only seven people had bid during three days.

“The number of bids doesn’t mean that there is less interest. If many people who were interested waited until the end of the auction then the price would rise less. At this rate, the highest bid will be 8 million won.”

A sigh flowed from Hyun-woo’s mouth. If an item was put on the auction site, the highest bid could be approximately guessed after 2 days. While selling the castle to Raiden, he had received the Wind Spirit’s Boots instead of 2000 gold. While calculating the price, he realised that it wouldn’t match Ark’s standards. He thought the value would reach at least 1500 gold. But only 8 million won? That was only half of his expected price? Of course, there was a reason for it.

“It’s because I saw Duke use the Wind Spirit’s Boots in the Evil Silrion that I wanted it. If I had just read the information and not seen Duke use it then I never would’ve accepted it instead of the 2000 gold.

That was the problem. The special option ‘Slide’ was what boosted the value of the Wind Spirit’s Boots! When Slide was used, someone could deal with a number of monsters at the same time. But the power of that item couldn’t be realized just by reading the explanation.

<Special option: You can use the skill ‘Slide.’

When using slide, the player can move to their desired location without moving their body. The body does not move which means attack speed, attack power and defense does not receive a penalty. However, the movement speed is the same and no more than 30 metres can be exceeded.

Mana consumption: 10>

“That’s the problem. If they knew how essential Slide was then the thieves and archers would swarm like ants. That such an item will be sold for 8 million won..... Ugh, my, my stomach.....”That was the explanation of the skill attached to the Wind Spirit’s Boots. Just by seeing this information, there weren’t many people who could imagine the way that Ark and Duke utilized it for battle. Therefore

people couldn't understand the value of the Wind Spirit's Boots.

Hyun-woo grabbed his stomach and broke into a cold sweat. Hyun-woo would risk his life for a thousand won. But the thought of receiving only 7~8 million won for the item caused a pain in his stomach. He felt it wasn't right. He really broke into a cold sweat at the thought.

"Ohhhh, I really can't stand it. For an item world 15 million won to be sold for 8 million won..... But I can't cancel the auction while it is still progressing..... Ouch. My stomach hurts. I really may die of bitterness....."

Hyun-woo looked at the Wind Spirit's Boots with tears in his eyes.

"Something..... Is there another way? Even if I can increase it to 10 million won....."

Hyun-woo clutched his stomach and thought desperately. Should he borrow the ID of the rehabilitation members and try to increase the market price? But that was a naive thought as it would only work if someone desperately wanted to buy the item. If the item wasn't popular then the ID of a rehabilitation member would probably win the bid. In the end, the important thing was to capture the attention of the people and let them know the value of the boots.

"But how....."

A thought suddenly sparked in Hyun-woo's head.

"Wait, why didn't I think of that before? Didn't I want the Wind Spirit's Boots because I saw Duke using it? Then I should show a scene of how I use it to other people."

Hyun-woo finally had an idea and frantically hit at the keyboard and moved the mouse.

"I've found it!"

Hyun-woo had located the video titled 'Netherworld Expedition of a Wicked Wolf' on the internet. Hyun-woo downloaded the video and used an easy program to edit it. After editing the video down to 5

minutes, he attached the file to the auction page of the Wind Spirit's Boots.

"Huhuhu, shall I have a look at it?"

Hyun-woo smiled and clicked on the attached file. Then the edited activities of Ark appeared on the screen. The video showed the scene where Ark who had changed into a black wolf was fighting against the Nakujuk.

"Die intruder!"

A few Nakujuk ran up to Ark and swung their swords. Then Ark abruptly slid like the ground had turned to ice and counterattacked. Although another Nakujuk clan ran up to him from the side, Ark once again slid on the ground and avoided the attacks. He was evading using 'Slide.' It wasn't only that. Ark moved using 'Slide' and also used flying kicks. When Slide was combined with spin kicks, the same techniques like that in a street fighter game could be used.

'Well, that looks good enough for now.'

It was the footage collected from the 'Netherworld Expedition of a Wicked Wolf' where Slide played an active role. Even though Hyun-woo was the protagonist of the video, he still found it fascinating to watch. So Hyun-woo edited 5 minutes of footage and added subtitles.

-The movement technique that the black wolf used in this video is the option skill attached to Wind Spirit's Boots. It is the idea chance to wear the same footwear as the protagonist! Don't miss this chance.

In fact, the popularity of that video had far surpassed Hyun-woo's imagination. Before it aired on the video, the video had gained the most hits in the shortest amount of time but he barely felt his celebrity status. Before long, the station was bombarded with enquiries about the black wolf. They even called him asking if he could attend as a guest. Since Hyun-woo didn't want his face to be known for several reasons, he declined but the black wolf quickly

became a celebrity in New World. Was there a reason for him not to use his fame?

“The utilization method is shown so I hope it improves a little more.....”

Hyun-woo switched off the computer and changed into training clothes. Although he couldn't go to the NPA gym anymore, Hyun-woo never missed his dawn exercise. When exercising, not only strength but also his concentration and improvisation would improve. Concentration and improvisation was quite useful in New World. Although it wasn't felt that much during normal situations, it increased his reaction rate in moments of crisis. For example, he was able to avoid Bread's attack a while ago because those senses had developed. After realizing that he had been neglecting his exercise, Ark trained for a while against the Mould Zombies. In the future, he couldn't neglect his body.

When the level increased, the character would become stronger. But just because the character was strong didn't mean the game would become easy. In his level increased then he had to hunt in increasingly dangerous places. From there unimaginable monsters with tremendous power existed! Rather, the game became more difficult as the level increased.

‘Also, if level increases then I will encounter stronger users. Just like the Red Man, Bread or Redian who I encountered a while ago. Although I couldn't show my capabilities properly thanks to shaking the pot and using a one handed sword.....I'm not confident I could win even when fighting properly. Especially if Redian ended up helping. Instead of levels or skills, I should increase my basic training.’

It was important in a regular battlefield! Even when an old warrior was living a daily life, they never forgot to train in their mind. That also applied to the game! In his daily life, Hyun-woo was always playing the game in his head.

‘Although my body is moving around in New World, my actual body is just sitting inside the game unit. I can't miss my daily exercise which will maintain my physical state. If my body becomes sick then that

will also affect the game.'

It wasn't just the physical parts. People who shut themselves up at home like Hyun-woo was bound to become lazy. A lazy gamer would just become a nuisance in the game. That's why Hyun-woo took every opportunity to jog and practice taekwondo so that he could loosen his body. After around 1 hour and a half, Hyun-woo finished training and turned on the computer after returning home. He couldn't resist wondering how the auction had progressed.

"Eh? Was I wrong?"

Hyun-woo stared at the screen with a confused expression for a while.

-This is really a jackpot!

-I never imagined that the 'Slide' skill could be used like that.

-When I saw the video last time, I was wondering how such movements could be made. But it was the option skill of the shoes. Amazing. Amazing. Amazing!

-It's worth it just to wear the shoes of the famous Black Wolf.

-I'm taking it. Anyone else should leave.

-Hah, why should we do that? Don't I have money as well?

-By the way, if that person put these shoes on sale doesn't that mean he found better ones? I'm so envious. If only I could get my hands on such shoes.....

Over the past four days, he only had 20 hits on his Wind Spirit's Boots. There were only 7 auction participants. Now after only 1 hour and a half, the auction enquiries had reached 1300 people. And the auction participants had increased to 84 people. There were also 400 comments attached to the auction. No matter how much he rolled the mouse wheel, it never seemed to end. Just like that, the auction site blew up.....

"Heok, 13 million won? It increase by 6.8 million won after 1 and a

half hours.

Hyun-woo's mouth dropped. The advertising strategy to showcase his equipment was a great success. Thanks to the fame of Black Wolf, there was an explosion of interest in the Wind Spirit's Boots.

"There is still 3 days left in the auction period. At this rate....."

He couldn't imagine how much the price would climb. Of course, no matter how greedy he was the amount of money that could be invested in one item was limited. Although interest had been amplified in the item, Hyun-woo guessed that he would receive no more than 15 million won for it. And Hyun-woo wasn't simply surprised that the price had gone up. Although some people were interested in the performance of the shoes, others were simple interested because the famous Black Wolf had worn them. Of course, Hyun-woo realized that the Black Wolf was famous. But he never expected that the price would go so high just because Black Wolf had worn them.

"Anyway, my idea is still effective."

Hyun-woo's eyes emitted a dazzling light as he looked at the selling price. The strategy to use the video to sell items was a success! Thanks to his brilliant sales strategy, it had become a big hit. If such advertisement was added to the items sold from now on then it would be possible to increase the highest bid. Thanks to this, Hyun-woo now came up with a new advertising strategy.

'If I sell an item then I can receive a fair price!'

Hyun-woo looked at the game unit with an excited expression. Just as he was about to enter, he heard his mother's voice from outside.

"Hyun-woo, someone is on the phone for you."

'Huh? Phone? Who is it this early?'

When Hyun-woo extended his hand, his mother handed him the telephone with a worried look.

"He said it was the police."

“Police?”

When he listened to the telephone, a clear voice could be heard.

“It’s me.”

“Huh? Who? Wait..... Eh? Is this Teacher-nim?”

“Are you okay?”

Lee Myung-ryong asked with a smirk. Hyun-woo rubbed at his aching joints and sore feet.

“Do I look okay?”

“Huhuhu, I told you. You shouldn’t neglect your normal training.”

“But I didn’t neglect it? I’ve been exercising until today.”

“Well it seems to me that you have been neglecting it. You need to devote yourself.”

“You say that after you beat me so thoroughly.”

Hyun-woo complained as he stared at Lee Myung-ryong. After Hyun-woo and Lee Myung-ryong finishes sparring at the gym, they had arrived at a nearby cafe. In reality, it was more being attacked than a spar. Although it had been so long since he had met Lee Myung-ryong, he had mercilessly beat up Hyun-woo. But even though he complained, the feeling wasn’t that bad. No, it actually felt refreshing. After sparring with Lee Myung-ryong, it felt like all his muscles had loosened. In addition, it was enjoyable to meet up with Lee Myung-ryong after such a long time. Anyway, Lee Myung-ryong made an apologetic gesture asked Hyun-woo.

“Has anything happened in the meantime?”

“Yes, I.....”

“I got your text. A new house. Sorry I couldn’t make it.”

It had been almost three months since Hyun-woo met up with Lee

Myung-ryong. Although he hadn't been to the gym since, they had met once outside. When he moved house, Lee Myung-ryong had sent a congratulatory message.

"It's okay. But has something happened? Have you finished being busy?"

"I've got some urgent business with you."

"With me?"

"Where do I start explaining....."

Lee Myung-ryong used ambiguous language and scratched his head. After a moment, Lee Myung-ryong began to talk with an embarrassed expression.

"In fact..... A few months ago, I also started playing New World."

"New world? Teacher-nim? Really?"

When Hyun-woo's eyes opened, Lee Myung-ryong coughed and muttered an excuse.

"Ah, it's not like that. I didn't start it for a hobby but because of an investigation."

"An investigation?"

Lee Myung-ryong sighed at Hyun-woo's question and explained the situation. Through various circumstances, he was assigned to the Special Crimes Countermeasures division and reluctantly started New World. Currently he had managed to infiltrate the criminal organization and was investigating. Of course, the reason why he didn't explain why he was assigned to the division was because it related to Hyun-woo. But he was lucky. Since a lot of time had passed since the incident, Hyun-woo had no doubts about why Lee Myung-ryong started playing New World.

"I never imagined that there are wanted criminals in the game."

"I also didn't think about it until after I received the mission."

"So why didn't you tell me that you were starting New World?"

“.....It is because I needed to look for the criminal organization and infiltrate it. It was vital that I maintained secrecy.”

This was true. The police agency was chasing criminals inside New World. If that information leaked out then the criminals would become wary and information collection would become difficult. But the real reason was that Lee Myung-ryong didn't want Hyun-woo to know the reason why he was demoted. In addition, the captain of the 1st SWAT team was embarrassed by his actions when he first entered New World.

“I understand.”

Hyun-woo nodded then looked doubtful.

“But then why are you telling me this now?”

“Like I said, I need something from you. Aren't you playing the game with a dwarf merchant that looks like a pig?”

“A pig like dwarf merchant? Are you talking about Buksil?”

“Buksil? Is his name Buksil?”

“Yes. The pig that is accompanying me is called Buksil.”

“Do you know his contact details?”

“Eh? That reminds me, I still don't know his contact details.”

Hyun-woo mumbled with a puzzled expression. Buksil had already been accompanying him for several months. But it was also possible to talk to him in New World so he never felt a need to exchange phone numbers.

“There is there a way to contact him?”

“Yes. I'm always travelling with him. Although there was a problem yesterday so we separated for a bit.”

While Ark had been trying to escape Bread and Redian, Buksil couldn't grasp the situation and the dolphins took him away to an unknown place. While Ark had commanded the dolphins to take them to Bristania, Ark was unsure of the exact location.

“Separated?”

“If I contact him through mail then we can instantly meet up again. But why do you want Buksil.....? Don't tell me Buksil is a wanted criminal?”

“No, that's not it.”

Lee Myung-ryong shook his head and explained.

“The story is a bit long to explain but not so long ago, I managed to infiltrate the criminal organization. But those guys are very distrustful so I haven't found that much information yet. Not so long ago, they were doing something suspicious in Seutandal and that scene was recorded by Buksil.”

“A suspicious scene was filmed?”

“There's no doubt but I still don't know what was filmed. Anyway, those guys are running around wildly so I feel like some important information was taken.”

“So those guys are after Buksil?”

Then a thought came to Hyun-woo's head.

“Wait? Those guys were after Buksil..... Perhaps the men following from Seutandal.....?”

“Yes, they are the wanted criminals. The police guarantee that they have committed terrible acts.”

Hyun-woo lost his energy at Lee Myung-ryong's answer. If they were from the criminal organization Lee Myung-ryong was investigating..... Somehow, he thought it was strange that Jepeteu was looking for Buksil instead of Ark. But he had such a background.... So the video Buksil took could be used as evidence for the police investigation? Then Lee Myung-ryong asked with a watchful look.

“Did you hear anything about it from Buksil?”

“No, Buksil didn't know why they were chasing him.”

“..... Well, it was taken with the magic projector so he might not know what was filmed. It is imperative that I check it as soon as possible. Anyway, you’re definitely going to meet with that guy?”

“Yes, I’ll send a text as soon as I might him. It shouldn’t take longer than a few days.”

In fact, Hyun-woo had a bigger reason to find Buksil. His items were within Buksil’s bags and he also needed to shoot the videos. Of course, there was a contract so Buksil couldn’t sell any of the items without Ark’s permission. After Hyun-woo answered confidently, Lee Myung-ryong’s face relaxed. However, he still couldn’t be relieved.

“It is good that you can get in contact with Buksil. But I still can’t rest assured.”

“Huh?”

“Even if Buksil didn’t film anything important, the criminals would do anything to get rid of it. Although the attack on the ferry failed, those fellows have already been smuggled into Bristania. Because you took the boat towards Bristania.”

“.....That’s right.”

“Then where are you right now?”

“There were various circumstances so I didn’t arrive at the Bristania harbour. I’m somewhere on the south east coast of Bristania but I haven’t found a village yet so I don’t know my exact location. Buksil doesn’t seem to be too far from where I am.....”

“That is good.”

Lee Myung-ryong nodded and said.

“Those guys thought that you would be near Bristania harbour. If you go to the harbour then they will find you. But if you’re away from the harbour then you don’t need to worry about those guys chasing you for a while. Meanwhile, please contact Buksil as soon as possible and receive the video from him. I’ll use some excuses to lure them to other areas. If we stay in contact then those guys should never be

able to find you.”

“I understand. Then.....”

Hyun-woo looked slightly concerned at the end of those words. It was work associated with wanted criminals. Although they couldn't kill anyone in the game, those guys had committed crimes in reality. However, Lee Myung-ryong was the captain of the number 1 SWAT team so it was natural to cooperate in the investigation. But if something went wrong.....

‘It doesn't matter if I'm along.’

However, now Hyun-woo was living with his mother. If there was a problem then Hyun-woo's mother might be affected by it. Hyun-woo's thoughts were then interrupted.

“Don't worry, as soon as I receive the video evidence I'll make sure to deflect their attention away from you and Buksil. Furthermore, they are wanted criminals so they can't run around freely. Still, if, if..... If those guys so much as even bruise you..... I will give up the police investigation and stop them.”

Lee Myung-ryong saw through Hyun-woo's anxiety with one glance. Working for the National Police Agency, he had seen many victims with the same fear of retaliation on their faces that Hyun-woo had.

“Yes.”

Hyun-woo nodded without asking any further questions. He didn't believe in the police's words. However, it was possible to believe Lee Myung-ryong. After seeing Hyun-woo smile, Lee Myung-ryong nodded and got up.

“Then I have to go now. Because I have to meet those guys at 9 o'clock and search around the harbour. Ah, what is your ID by the way?

I forgot to ask when we met on the boat.....”

“Huh? We've met before?”

‘.....Whoops!’

Lee Myung-ryong was surprised and closed his mouth. But it had already been leaked.

“I’ve only taken the boat two times so if we met on there..... That’s right, the guy I met on the ferry who was with the one who kicked me..... Ah, then you’re that merchant I met on the deck?”

“..... That’s me.”

Lee Myung-ryong grinned awkwardly and scratched his head. Then Hyun-woo scanned Lee Myung-ryong up and down and muttered.

“The spar today was somewhat different..... Perhaps?”

“Perhaps? W-what are you saying?”

“Is the spar today your form of revenge for that time?”

Hyun-woo realized it as soon as he heard Lee Myung-ryong was the merchant. At the time, the merchant had attacked Hyun-woo and died from his welcome company. In addition, most of the criminals on the pirate ship attacking the ferry died thanks to Hyun-woo. It was natural to get revenge through a spar. Lee Myung-ryong retorted impudently once his scheme was revealed.

“Revenge? Didn’t you kill me first?”

“That’s because Teacher-nim unnecessarily hid your identity. Moreover, I wasn’t the one who killed you. Wasn’t it the Baran clan who killed you?”

Lee Myung-ryong scratched his head and said roughly.

“Do you want to eat parfait?”

“I want to eat the special A set.”

“.....That’s mean. The monthly salary for the police is not that much.”

“I’m deeply hurt by Teacher-nim’s distrust in me.”

So the grudge between teacher and student was settled with one special set meal. They exited the cafe and it was like an information window appeared when Hyun-woo separated from Lee Myung-

ryong.

<p>-Secure the video showing the secret of the criminal organization. <Reward: 3 servings of the parfait special set></p>

Magic Kingdom Bristania

-The step 3 maturation process is in progress.

This is the final step in creating the Necromancer's Immortality Pill. The only thing left is to let it mature long enough to draw out 100% of the effects from each ingredient. Make sure to seal the pot up completely, avoid any direct sunlight and keep it in a cool, dry place.

<Handle with care! There is no guarantee of what will happen if you shake it or it receives an impact.>

=Maturation process, time remaining: 81 hours and 37 minutes.

"Phew, I'm glad there wasn't any problems."

Ark sighed with relief as he confirmed the information window.

'It's useless to be too greedy..... I really thought I was going to save time.'

His plan to take the ferry to save time on creating the immortality pill had backfired. Of course, if the ferry had arrived at the harbour as planned then there would be no problems. However, they received a surprise attack from the pirates along the way. But that wasn't all. Bread had appeared with an unknown grudge. He really felt like he received a huge misfortune whenever he wanted to create an immortality pill. Despite the numerous difficulties, Ark had firmly defended the pot. Throughout the pirate ships attacks, Bread's confrontation and riding the dolphins, he had firmly shaken the pot and passed through stage 1 safely. And he had to stage at a beach on Bristania until the 2nd stage crystallization process finished. After the 2nd stage was finished, the process of maturation immediately began. The time required for the maturation process was 81 hours. So Ark would have to bury the pot under the sand.

‘The maturation process is the most important and it needs 81 hours, so I need to bury this pot here for 81 hours. But I don’t know what will happen if it is detected by other users or monsters.’

“Master, I found it!”

At that time, Racard came flying from the forest near the beach. Ark had been watching the area and slightly shook the pot when he flinched. At the same time, a warning message flashed before his eyes.

<p>-Shaking the pot during the maturation process is dangerous!</p> <p><If the degree of completion falls then the final rating of the immortality pill will decrease></p>
--

“What, what the, you? You scared me so the degree of completion went down!”

Ark shouted angrily as sweat dripped down his face. He couldn’t know the rating of the finished product until the immortality pill was completed. Since he had to worry about the degree of completion falling throughout all those stressful situations, Ark’s nerves were tense. Then Racard acted like a child who had been scolded and said.

“M-me? You’re the one shouting for no reason.”

“Just be careful. You know how hard it was to gather the ingredients.”

“.....I understand.”

“Have you discovered a village?”

“.....Yes, if we travel for around an hour through the forest.”

“Well done. You take the lead. It will be a big problem if we encounter a monster now.”

Ark gently held the pot with his hand. During the maturation process, there was a worry that the degree of completion would fall if moved

too much. So it would be a serious problem if they encountered monsters while travelling to the village. Therefore Ark had Racard switch to satellite mode. Fortunately, the monsters around here weren't that high level so they didn't attack first. But even level 10 wolves were a threat to Ark now. Racard said 1 hour but he had to go back and forth to avoid the surrounding monsters which took them an extra 30 minutes.

'I was lucky that I encountered the pirates during the mixing process, f it was the maturation process.....'

Just thinking about it made him afraid. Anyway, a village appeared 1 and a half hours after travelling through the village. The place Racard found was closer to a city than a village.

'Is this a city in Bristania?'

It was only after discovering a city that Ark felt like he was in a different kingdom. Currently Ark had arrived in the kingdom of Bristania. It was located to the north of Schudenberg Kingdom. Although it was geographically located to the north of Schudenberg, Bristania had a lot of mountains unlike the plains in Schudenberg. In addition, most of it consisted of rough rocks. Well the scenery was nice but he wouldn't want to live there. Thanks to the barren land, Bristania had naturally developed magic science to live. That was the reason it was called the Magic Kingdom. Of course, most users who started here chose to become a magician instead of a warrior. The magic science made it easy to raise a magician. Anyway, that made the historical background of Bristania much more mystical than other kingdoms. The main buildings possessed a lot of magical aura and the appearance had a geometric design. Most of the town's shops also dealt with magic tools. Even the weapon stores sold magic spell books and scrolls. The guards at the entrance of the village was also a magician.

"That's it, now you can return to your castle."

Once Ark confirmed the village, he sent Racard back to his vampire territory. In a city with low intimacy, occasionally the residents would be hostile to his summons.

‘This is the first time I’m visiting a foreign country so I have to be careful.’

Ark entered the city holding the pot.

“Swalla swalla, swalla swalla!”

Suddenly he heard words that were impossible to understand.

‘What does that mean?’

Ark turned his head at the sound. The voice was coming from the entrance of the city, where a stone gargoyle was giving off a strange light. That place was normally the quartermaster in Schudenberg kingdom. In Bristania, the gargoyle probably played the logistical role. In any case, the voice was coming from users gathered around the gargoyle. It was one user. Ark stared at the user with a confused expression.

“Swalla swalla, swalla swalla, swalla swalla?”

“Swalla swalla, swalla swalla!”

It wasn’t just one user. All of them made strange sounds.

“What are they saying? Swalla swalla? Is that a popular saying?”

But he had no time to care about that right now. Ark approached one of the guards at the entrance and asked.

“Excuse me. What is this city’s name?”

“Swalla swalla? Swalla swalla?”

Then the guards were also speaking an alien language like the users?

‘What the? Isn’t it strange that a NPC is talking like this? What is going on?’

Ark didn’t know how to deal with it and hesitated. The guard tilted his head and seemed to understand something, then pointed inside the city. The place the guard was indicated was the Magic Institute at the city centre.

‘What the? He’s telling me to go there?’

When Ark gestured to the Magic Institute, the guard nodded. Ark scratched his head and headed to the Magic Institute tower. The city was closely filled with geometric shape. While Schudenberg kingdom felt like a medieval city, this truly felt like a fantasy world. The buildings were strange and there were various light and magic effects from the magicians living there. However, even the odd letters on the sign were distorted and he couldn’t read them. In addition, the NPCs wandering the city also talked in the strange language.

‘Is this a curse? Maybe I’m stuck in a curse. Or are the people stuck?’

Ark walked around the city with a confused look. Then Ark bumped into a boy who ran out from an alley. Ark had been walking timidly while holding the pot so he quickly retreated.

‘Huk, what, what the? Pot, my pot!’

Ark quickly checked his pot. Luckily, the physique of the boy was like a dwarf so the impact was too small.

‘Phew, that was lucky. Who is he?’

Ark felt like he lost 10 years of his life and glared at the boy. But Ark swallowed his curses as he saw the appearance of the boy.

“Swalla swalla, swalla swalla!”

The boy lowered his head and clamoured in a somewhat upset voice. He couldn’t understand but the boy seemed to be apologizing. The problem was the boy didn’t look normal. Unlike the dressed up people around him, the boy was wearing tattered clothes. And the clothes revealed that the body was undersized. The boy bowed his head and hurriedly picked up the items that had fallen to the ground. It was some cheap scrolls.

‘Is that smell coming from the boy?’

Ark blushed with an embarrassed expression after seeing the boy’s

appearance. The boy had made the mistake by running out suddenly. However, he felt guilty after determining that the boy had a difficult life.

“Are you okay?”

Ark became embarrassed and helped picked up the items before speaking. The boy looked up with a startled expression and held out a tattered book with shining eyes.

“Swalla swalla? “Swalla swalla! Swalla swalla!”

‘What the? What does that mean?’

Ark couldn’t understand the words and tilted his head to one side. After watching for a bit, Ark guessed what the boy was trying to say.

‘Is he asking me to buy this book?’

Ark looked at the book the boy was holding in his hand. It was a tattered book with an unknown use.

‘Well, I feel slightly sorry so maybe I should buy it?’

Ark seeing the hard life the boy was living, he asked for the price of the book. Then the boy smiled and showed both hands twice.

‘20? Then 20 silver? If it is that much.....’

Although normally Ark wouldn’t even waste 1 copper, he was willing to spend that much for a child. Hadn’t Ark also been an underprivileged boy?

‘It is clear the book is useless.....’

Ark smiled and drew out 20 silver. Then the boy made a disapproving expression and shook his head.

‘Then it was 20 copper not 20 silver? It is slightly strange that such a tattered book would be worth 20 silver.’

Ark thought he misunderstood the price and extended 20 copper. The boy sighed and was that a gold coin he pulled from his pocket?

‘What the? Gold? Huck, he’s saying it is 20 gold?’

Ark looked at the boy with astonishment. A tattered book for 20 gold? Wasn’t it shameful? No matter how much sympathy Ark felt for the boy, he couldn’t buy an unknown book for 20 gold.

‘No, does this boy knows that I feel sorry for him? That book for 20 gold? Is this a joke? Then he tried to look pitiful so that he can swindle me?’

“I don’t need this!”

Ark raised his voice angrily and shook his head. Then the boy’s shoulders dropped as his face lost its brightness. With a lowered head, he disappeared into the alley.

“Sheesh, what the? That was too unreasonable.”

Although he felt uncomfortable for some reason, Ark just shook his head.

“No, that guy must’ve prepared that appearance. He thought to use my kindness to sell that book for 20 gold. I should head to the Magic Institute.”

Ark pushed down his uncomfortable feeling and entered the Magic Institute tower. Then someone from the Magic Institute approached and smiled.

“Swalla swalla! Swalla swalla?”

As expected, it was impossible to understand.

“That.....you see.....”

When Ark stuttered, the magician instantly laughed and said.

“Ah, you must be an adventurer from the Schudenberg kingdom!”

“Eh? You can talk?”

“Of course. How ridiculous would it be if I couldn’t use a language spell?”

“But just before.....”

The magician seemed to know the approximate situation as he laughed and said.

“Hahaha, this must be your first time travelling abroad.”

“That’s right.....”

“Foreigners who travel abroad for the first time often become confused. Because there was no opportunity to hear a foreign language at home.”

“Foreign language?”

“Yes, the words I spoke just then is in the language of Bristania.”

Ark looked doubtful at the magician’s words. Of course this was the first time Ark had travelled to another kingdom. However, he often met NPCs and users from Bristania in Silvana and Schudenberg. At that time he had no problem communicating.

“But I met people from Bristania in Schudenberg and understood them.....”

“They obviously learned the Schudenberg language when travelling from Bristania to Schudenberg.”

The magician smiled and explained. Each of the three kingdoms in the continent had an original language. So before travelling to another kingdom, they needed to acquire the relevant foreign language first. Users and NPCs who came to Schudenberg kingdom had either learnt the language or had been forwarded to an interpreter. However, Ark had failed to learn the language so all he heard was unintelligible language. In fact, that system wasn’t only found in New World. For example, in old games such as WOW or Aion, different tribes were unable to understand each other. Only New World had the system to learn other languages. Incidentally, a lot of foreigners also connected to New World. The reason users didn’t feel inconvenience in communicating was because all languages were translated depending on what area they came from. In other words, it didn’t matter if they were Japanese or American

as all languages were filtered.

“And foreigners don’t know the letters. Since there is no inconvenience communicating in Schudenberg, they never felt the need to learn a foreign language. I don’t know how, but sometimes they may inadvertently learn a language. In particular, merchants are fluent in all three languages even if they hadn’t learned it.”

‘Oh, that reminds me, could it be.....’

Ark remembered seeing a ‘language’ tab on his character information window and he opened it.

-Language Information Window
*Country [Schudenberg]: 100% understanding.
*Species [Beast clan] 100% understanding [Elf] 100% understanding [Dwarf] 100% understanding [Hobbit] 100% understanding [Orc]: 100% understanding
*Other [Ancient language]: 100% understanding [Soul] 100% understanding [Demonic] 100% understanding
* The Country language is applied to all NPCs in the relevant area.
*Communication with all NPCs of the relevant element has 100% understanding applied. Also, mental communication has nothing to do with language.

<p>*The understanding of the relevant monster language is related to the country (special monster languages can be learned separately).</p> <p>* The language is automatically acquired when entering the relevant area.</p>
--

‘Ah, this information window displays the languages I can understand.’

Originally this system was automatically applied when encountering NPCs at the border checkpoint or through the harbour. However, it wasn’t possible to learn such knowledge because he took the dolphins.

“But I didn’t have any trouble in Seutandal.....”

“I heard that too. Seutandal uses the Schudenberg language. That’s because it is geographically closer to Schudenberg than other kingdoms.”

“So what should I do?”

“Don’t worry. We are selling dictionaries with the language of each country.”

The magician showed him a stack of books with a friendly smile. Ark’s mouth opened absent-mindedly as he was guided to the stacks. There were a huge amount of books sorted onto the stacks. It was hundreds of copies of the foreign language dictionaries. Dictionaries of the three kingdoms as well as ancient languages..... They even had dictionaries of the language of each monster race. The magician took out a book wrapped in a blue light.

“There are many types of Bristania language dictionaries but this is the best one. This is a dictionary the Magic Institute created using mental magic. Once this dictionary is used, the mental magic will act and it will be like you have learnt the Bristania language for dozens of years. Isn’t that wonderful?”

It was but the price was also amazing. He didn’t know what type of magic was used but one copy cost 120 gold. Of course, in reality it

cost 1,200,000 won to master a foreign language through a school. However, now he had to spend 120 gold to learn a foreign language that would have no use in Schudenberg? Ark inwardly complained and asked.

“Is there a dictionary that is a bit cheaper?”

“Cheaper?”

The magician who was like an eager salesman made a grumpy face. Then he looked through the book stacks and pulled out an old book.

“How about this dictionary? It is a beginner’s course so it will take some time to master the Bristania language. Well, if you study hard then communication won’t be a big problem.”

The magician said without any sincerity but Ark let out a huge sigh of relief. It was a common dictionary which cost 20 gold. He honestly thought that 20 gold was also a waste. But if he was going to be in Bristania then he had to learn the language. If he couldn’t communicate with NPCs then he couldn’t play the game properly.

“I’ll take this one.”

“That will be 20 gold.”

“Please give a discount.”

“Huh?”

The magician made an absurd face at Ark’s words. However, he jumped with surprise when Ark took out the Magic Institute member certificate.

“This is a Magic Institute member certification? In addition, your name is Ark? Then you are Ark-nim?”

“Huh? You know me?”

“Of course. There isn’t anyone in the Magic Institute who doesn’t know who Ark-nim is. Thanks to the research that Ark-nim brought back, the Magic Institute has launched a series of new products.”

“New products?”

“Eh? You don’t know? You haven’t heard the uproar these days?”

The magician murmured and pointed to a flyer stuck to the wall.

-The Magic Institute’s New Products Guide

<Weapon Reinforcing Agent>

Have you become dejected because your weapon has weakened? Are you unable to unleash your capabilities because you don’t have a good weapon? There is no need to worry anymore. After a long research, the Magic Institute has launched an ambitious magic while can make your weapon stronger using a special Weapon Reinforcing Agent.

* Please contact the staff if there are questions about price and performance.

<Letter Movement Service>

Is walking a far distance difficult? Although your body is sick, do you want to visit a distant friend? Do you want to go somewhere else but can’t deal with the monsters? There is no need to worry anymore. Using the commercialized Letter Movement, you can move between the magic towers.

*Still only limited to some metropolitan areas.

After completing the quests related to Magaro, Shannen had used Magaro’s research to develop these products. The areas the Magic Institute had concentrated on in Magaro’s research was the <Weapon Reinforcement Agent> and the <Letter Movement>. In addition, it was filled with new information. However, Ark shook his head after he asked for the price. The cheapest price to use the <Letter Movement> was 50 gold. Meanwhile, the <Weapon Reinforcement Agent> cost more than 100 gold depending on the type and efficiency of the weapon. Since merchants used the <Letter Movement> a lot, it still made a profit but most people preferred to leave reinforcement to an expert blacksmith.

“Aaaaaack!”

While Ark was thinking that, a light appeared on the highest level of the tower and a user appeared on the floor.

“Kuak, swalla swalla, swalla swalla, swalla swalla....eeeeek!”

The user cursed with a pale face and vomited. Although Ark couldn’t understand the words, he had used Letter Movement before and could understand the circumstances. Letter Movement really did cause an awful feeling. The user was probably in the same state that Ark had been in. Although Letter Movement had been commercialized, they still couldn’t guarantee a comfortable method of travel.

“Well, there is still some margin for improvement.....”

The magician scratched his head with an awkward face.

“Do you have any other business?”

“I’d like to use a personal warehouse and the transfer mailbox.”

“Anything else?”

“Ah, what is the name of this city?”

“Ciel. A city located in the southwest of Bristania.”

“Thank you very much.”

Thanks to his Magic Institute certification, he was able to rent a warehouse in the magic tower for free. Ark entered the personal warehouse and stored the pot carefully. That was the biggest reason Ark wanted to find a village. Since the degree of completion would fall if the pot shook a little bit, wasn’t it better not to carry it around?

“Phew, now I’m relieved.”

Ark wrote a letter to Buksil telling him to come to Ciel. Buksil was a merchant so of course he possessed a mobile mailbox. The mobile mailbox was different from the general mailbox and wasn’t restrained to one place. Once Buksil arrived at a village in Bristania, he would be able to check the letter at a Magic Institute. However, there were also the wanted criminals within this area. He didn’t want the

cowardly Buksil to become scared so Ark couldn't let him know about the wanted criminals.

"Now, all my work has finished."

Ark exited the Magic Institute after using the mailbox. When wandering outside, it still wasn't possible to understand the users and NPCs.

"Should I use this now?"

Ark took out the dictionary he purchased from the magician. Just as he was about to use it, he suddenly stopped.

'Eh? Wait? This dictionary.....?'

Ark looked at the dictionary and belatedly realized his mistake. It was the tattered book that the boy in the alley had been selling. After looking at the letters on the book, wasn't it the same dictionary?

'Then the boy was also selling this dictionary?'

In the end, the 20 gold wasn't an absurd price but was actually the market price. So the boy wasn't a swindler.....Ark got an idea and quickly ran back into the Magic Institute.

"Wait a minute. I'm sorry but can't I return the dictionary?"

"Huh? You are a full member of the Magic Institute.....wouldn't not knowing the language be difficult?"

"Please grant my request."

After getting the refund, Ark went running to the alley.

'There he is!'

After searching a few alleys, he managed to find the boy from a short time ago. The boy had set up a stall in an alley and was yelling in unknown words.

"Excuse me....."

The boy flinched when Ark approached and shrunk back. He seemed to think that Ark was visiting with some hostile intentions. Ark scratched his head and muttered with an embarrassed expression.

“No, it’s not.....I seemed to have misunderstood you a while ago and came to apologize. Instead of just speaking, I was wondering if I could buy your dictionary?”

“Swalla swalla? Swalla swalla?”

The boy tilted his head to one side. Once again, it was really frustrating not being able to communicate. After holding the 20 gold and pointing to the dictionary, the boy seemed to understand the situation and laughed. Although it was a little different, Ark also remembered a time when he had been wrongfully suspected. When he previously had a part time job at a store, Ark had been suspected of stealing several thousand won. Fortunately, it was revealed that the president had just calculated wrongly and the suspicions had been removed. But he was still hurt by that time.

He felt ashamed that he acted like the president and accused the boy of being a swindler. So he received a 15% refund for the dictionary thanks to the Magic Institute qualification and bought the dictionary from the boy. Luckily, the boy didn’t mind that he had been treated as a swindler in Ark’s head. Since Ark deliberating sought him out to buy the dictionary, the boy just laughed gratefully and bowed to Ark. He looked pretty cute.

‘Isn’t this guy surprisingly cute?’

Ark smiled and looked at the other things on the stall. Although he had no need for them right then, Ark bought a few useful scrolls. Even though Ark often extorted Sid and Buksil, he mainly did it to his opponents. After remembering his previous situation, Ark could afford to make a small gesture. Was this the first time he thought of another person’s circumstances? But thanks to the rental house being bought and the items on the auction site being sold at a higher than expected price, Ark had a surplus of money to be spent.

‘I have a margin with which to spend some money.’

Ark named a price which was about 10% more than the boy's offer. The scrolls weren't that expensive so he could afford a few of them. But the boy shook his head and named the fixed price. Ark was a bit embarrassed but he liked the boy's honest attitude.

"Swalla swalla, swalla swalla!"

"Well, please live well."

He stroked the boy's head who smiled before Ark left the alley. After he only bought the items because he felt bad about the misunderstanding, he felt quite good afterwards.

"Now that the uncomfortable feeling is gone, shall I learn the language?"

Ark used the dictionary and the information window appeared.

-A new language has been learnt using the Bristania language dictionary.

[Bristania] 30% understanding: you have gained knowledge about the Bristania language.

However, you will be unable to understand all the words until your understanding is 100%. The only way to learn a foreign language quickly is to engage in a lot of conversation. Conversing with users or NPCs from the corresponding country will increase understanding.

Thanks to the language being incorporated, he could understand some noises.

"It's cheap. Swalla swalla, cheap! Various cheap swalla swalla magic swalla swalla."

"New swalla swalla goods received swalla swalla at our store!"

However, it seemed like a tape had been mixed with an alien language.

"My intimacy is low and communication is also inconvenient."

But Ark could determine the main details of what the NPC was saying. As expected, it was a cheap item.

“Still, this is better than the other option.”

No matter the inconvenience, he would rather learn the language than waste 120 gold. In addition, at the beginning he couldn't communicate at all but now it was able to approximately understand the words.

“Now I have to wait for the completion of the immortality pill here and for Buksil to get in contact. In the meantime, he should talk to some NPCs and become used to the Bristania language. “What shall I do? The monsters around here are too low levelled.....”

Ark murmured as he walked around the town listening to NPCs.

“Listen closely, swalla swalla. You are a traveller with a lot of experience. Swalla swalla. My worries, swalla swalla. Will you accept?”

“Ah, I'm going crazy, swalla swalla, how can it be done, swalla swalla, can somebody help me?”

“Do you maybe, swalla swalla, need a job?”

They were NPCs who all gave quests. When Ark came into the city without learning the language, he was unable to trigger quests. Before coming into the city, he checked that the monsters were around level 150-200. So the city had a lot of level 100-150 users. It was comparable to the outskirts of Nagaran in Schudenberg kingdom. While the level 366 Ark was wandering around such a place, he heard a variety of quests. Since this was the first time he came to Bristania, the quests came flowing from all directions. However Ark rejected all the quests. Since he was level 366, if he did any quests below level 200 then he wouldn't receive any experience. Of course, sometimes quests were given in low level villages. But the quests they gave was mainly moving baggage. There was also the repetitive quests of hunting monsters. Therefore none of the NPCs running up to him gave plausible quests.

‘But I have to stay here for 3 days so I can't do nothing. I'll go

outside and gather ingredients while checking if there are any monsters that will give experience.'

Ark was just thinking about leaving the city. Then a shabby building near the shopping centre caught his eye. The reason Ark was interested in the building was because of the sign 'Martial Arts Training Centre.'

'Martial arts training? Then martial arts is taught there?'

This was the first time Ark had seen a martial arts dojo here so he turned around and walked there. In Schudenberg, there was a place where hired mercenaries could learn warrior skills. But it wasn't like this place which had a sign saying the training ground. In addition, this was the magic kingdom so it was a place more interested in magic than Sword Mastery.

"Welcome!"

A hobbit ran and greeted him when Ark entered.

"Is this a place where martial arts is taught?"

"That's right. Swalla swalla, everyone here, swalla swalla, can become a great warrior, swalla swalla. And not just warriors, swalla swalla, even magicians can train."

"Magicians? What kind of techniques are you teaching?"

"Huhuhu, swalla swalla, you'd be surprised when you see it. Swalla swalla."

The hobbit smiles with satisfaction. When he entered an auditorium, a statue of a big, burly hobbit could be seen.

"This is the founder of our dojo, Ramja. Swalla swalla, I'm his descendant, swalla swalla, we train in the methods of our founder, swalla swalla, in order to do that, swalla swalla, we have start of the art equipment."

The hobbit indicated to a wooden doll in the training area and said.

"This wooden doll, swalla swalla, uses magic, swalla swalla, moves

automatically, swalla swalla, when practicing against the wooden doll, swalla swalla, your combat ability will rise naturally!”

Ark still couldn't understand all of the language so it was difficult to understand the words. Although the language understanding was low, he was able to interpret the general principles of the training method against the wooden doll. When the wooden training doll was turned on, it would move and start a battle against the player. Players would score points if they avoided the doll's offensive and managed to attack it. The player was considered to have mastered the relevant training if they got over 300 points in the time limit. When mastering the training, a bonus of +1 points will be applied to stats and the player will be qualified for the next stage. The wooden doll had 10 stages of difficulty. However, if a mastered stage was challenged again then the bonus wouldn't be applied.

‘Stats can be increased for free?’

Ark felt refreshed as he grasped almost all of the training system. The wooden doll had a total of 10 stages of difficult! If he mastered all stages then wouldn't he get 10 extra stats? 10 extra stats was like gaining 1 level. Currently Ark was level 366. At this level, rising one level within 7~15 hours wasn't a small amount.

‘Then all warriors who start in Bristania receives this bonus? Okay, I can't miss this opportunity to gain stats. I have to break through the 10 stages quickly!’

“How do I use this?”

“Here, swalla swalla, put a coin in, swalla swalla.”

The hobbit pointed to a coin slot near the wooden doll. The training wasn't free!

“People who challenge the wooden doll, swalla swalla, invest 100 gold, swalla swalla.”

Ark then realized the training dojo wasn't as superficial as he thought. With a price of 10 silver for one stat, that was like the value of a gum. However, if the stage failed than 10 more silver was required. So if someone failed 10 times that would be 10 gold and

100 times was 100 gold wasted. With the degree of difficulty, it would be easy for people to lose 100 gold to the hobbit.

‘But.....’

Ark had survived so far using martial arts.

‘This is a good opportunity to examine my skills.’

Ark stood before the wooden doll and inserted the coin. Sseon sseon sseon, there was the light sound of music and the wooden doll started to move.

-You have mastered the 9th stage on the wooden doll. Stamina increases by 1.
--

-You have mastered the 10th stage on the wooden doll. Strength increases by 1.
--

-You have completely mastered sparring against the wooden doll!

<Training Dojo Mastery bonus: Strength +5, Agility +5, Stamina +5>
--

Pa pa pa pang~!

After the 10 stages were mastered, a cannon salute instantly appeared from the head of the wooden doll.

“Awesome, swalla swalla!”

When Ark perfectly conquered the wooden doll, the hobbit’s mouth dropped with amazement.

“In such a short time, swalla swalla, the people who cleared, swalla swalla, didn’t, swalla swalla, numerous warriors abandoned the ordeal halfway, swalla swalla, only a few have mastered it, swalla swalla!”

‘Certainly it was more difficulty than I thought.’

While Ark was resting, he stared at the wooden doll. The first 5 stages were so easy that it was slightly regrettable. Just by avoiding

the fist of the wooden doll which flew in a straight line and counterattacking, he was easily able to reach 300 points. But the situation completely changed once he reached stage 6. The wooden doll spouted 6 arms and they all attacked at the same time. Since Ark had rushed it, he failed stages 6-8 four times.

‘If I hadn’t practiced against the Mould Zombies then I wouldn’t have been able to master the 10 stages. I learned taekwondo so it would be a lot more difficult for general users.’

A person who wasted 100 gold would understand when to stop. Anyway, he challenged again after failing four times and Ark managed to broke through the 10th stage. He had invested 1 gold and 40 silver, and gained 4 stamina, 3 agility and 3 stamina. In addition, the mastery bonus gave him a +5 to strength, agility and stamina!

‘It only took 30 minutes.’

It was just like picking up stats freely.

‘I really can’t ignore low level towns. This is Bristania, not Schudenberg. Who knows what else will be different here? I have to carefully check through every village I visit from now on.’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

“In the end, swalla swalla, you will be the last, swalla swalla, graduate.”

“What do you mean?”

Ark asked and the hobbit pointed to the training area with a sneer.

“As you can see. Swalla swalla, in the past we used to get a lot of visitors. Swalla swalla, but now the number of people training, swalla swalla, the customers are few, swalla swalla, and have no guts! As expected, a dojo shouldn’t be built in the magic kingdom, swalla swalla, I’m almost bankrupt, swalla swalla.”

The hobbit sighed as he looked at the statue.

“Well, it isn’t possible anymore, swalla swalla, I haven’t found a

talented enough successor to the founder's secret technique, swalla swalla, it's really regrettable, swalla swalla, ah that's right, swalla swalla, perhaps you, swalla swalla, would you like to try?"

The hobbit suddenly pointed towards a shape of a palm underneath the hobbit statue. Ark placed his hand on the palm without any thoughts. All of a sudden, there was a mechanical sound and the statue started revolving. The hobbit shouted with an amazed voice.

"Unbelievable, swalla swalla, really, swalla swalla, the seal is melting, swalla swalla!"

"The seal?"

Ark asked the hobbit who was making excited noises.

"In fact, the founder of this dojo, swalla swalla, legend, swalla swalla, master of kung fu martial arts, swalla swalla! If only at that time, swalla swalla! The devil, swalla swalla! That person, swalla swalla, and him, swalla swalla, sealed the secret technique, swalla swalla only a person with the appropriate qualification and power will be able to learn the sealed secret technique, swalla swalla!"

He was unfamiliar with the language so Ark couldn't completely understand the excited noises. However, he was able to understand the most important words among the broken speech. Ark cut and pasted the words together to understand the contents. The person whom the statue was based off and who built this dojo was the legendary master of kung fu techniques. It was to the extent that he could even defeat the devil! And he had placed his techniques on a scroll and sealed it here. Only a person with the appropriate qualifications and skills to learn the secret technique could unseal it. Then why could Ark unseal it? The answer was simple. When Ark touched the scroll, an information window instantly appeared.

-Thanks to 'Pursuit of Truth,' you have acquired a new lore skill.

<Lore skill learned: Entrusted Volumes>

* 7000 fame is necessary to learn this skill.

‘A hidden secret technique!’

Ark’s eyes widened. Yes, the found of this dojo was a ‘person who conveyed hidden lore.’

“Ohhh, my eyes, swalla swalla. Go ahead and grab the scroll, swalla swalla!”

Just as Ark tried to grab the scroll, sparks occurred and his hand bounced off.

[-You don’t have the necessary fame to learn this skill!]

‘Huck, it needs 7000 fame?’

Ark stifled a scream as he saw the information window. He had used 6000 fame to learn the Ghost Knight Corps skill in Oberium. But now he needed 7000? If 7000 fame was needed then how wonderful would the skill be?

‘If he is the legendary master of kung fu then it must be an amazing skill!’

After seeing that he needed 7000 fame for it, Ark desired the skill even more. He could also guess the skill from the name Entrusted Volumes.

‘In RPG games, sometimes a surprisingly large treasure like a heirloom can be found in a beginner’s village. This might be a jackpot!’

However, Ark currently only had 5840 fame. After learning the Ghost Knights Corps skill, he needed a further 1160 fame to learn the skill.

“Ah, swalla swalla, that’s right the founder, swalla swalla, the person who can learn this secret technique, swalla swalla, people who seek the truth, swalla swalla, also needs a suitable amount of fame, swalla swalla.”

The hobbit spoke with a disappointed expression when he couldn’t grab the scroll. Then he grasped Ark’s hand and said.

“Still, swalla swalla, you are the one who unsealed it, swalla swalla,

for the first time, swalla swalla, it is probably the gods' intention, swalla swalla, when you return with the appropriate fame then it will be waiting for you, swalla swalla, please learn the founder's secret techniques through any means swalla swalla."

"I understand!"

Ark shook the hobbit's hand and replied. He had accidentally discovered a secret technique in a place like this. Who would give up because of a lack of fame?

"I will gain fame as quickly as possible and return for the secret technique!"

Ark instantly ran out of the dojo.

'Now the question is how I should raise my fame.....'

There were many ways to raise fame in New World. There were usually three common methods. It was solving quests, receiving a title or doing some big services for a city. Though in Ark's case, he received a lot of fame from Miracle Nursing.

'But it isn't easy to use Miracle Nursing or receive a title, and this was the first time he visited the village so it wouldn't be easy to render some services for the city.'

The only way left was to complete quests. And this city had a large number of NPCs eager to commission quests. Of course, he wouldn't receive any money or experience but the most important thing now was fame. Ark rushed to the village square where the NPCs were giving quests.

"A short time ago you, swalla swalla, declined?"

"No, I did it because it was my first trip here. I was also unfamiliar with the language so I couldn't understand your difficult situation. But now if you have a difficult situation then please tell me."

"If that's the case, swalla swalla. Can you find my luggage?"

"You said it was a luggage?"

“I originally, swalla swalla. am a carrier, swalla swalla, but while travelling to another village I was attacked by kobolds, swalla swalla, and ran off with my luggage, swalla swalla, kobolds carried the luggage and returned to their hideout, swalla swalla, I need it by tomorrow, swalla swalla, the miscellaneous items with the luggage, swalla swalla, it is dangerous but can you find it?”

When the old man's words finished, a quest information window appeared. Since his understanding of Bristania was 30%, the old man's words were mixed with swalla swalla and he couldn't understand it properly but luckily the quest window showed the proper information

-The old man in Ciel is a porter who has encountered a problem.

The old man has asked you to find the luggage lost to the kobolds. According to the old man, the stolen goods are piled up with a variety of other items. Infiltrate the kobold's hideout and bring back 10 luggages.

<Difficulty level: D>

“I will go straight away!”

Ark accepted the quest and ran outside like the wind.

From Ark.

I have arrived at Ciel. I have some urgent business with you so come as soon as possible when you receive this.

“Che!”

Buksil blew his nose on the letter and threw it away.

“Urgent business? Bossing me around as always.”

“Aren't you going?”

Baekgu asked after seeing Buksil's attitude.

Buksil just laughed and replied.

“I’m going. Ark might be bullying me but I also have to go that way. But now right now. Although he says it is urgent business, I finally got away from him for a little bit so I’m going to enjoy this holiday.”

Buksil murmured as he looked out the window where there was a festive atmosphere. In fact, Buksil had meant to join Ark immediately when he was first contacted. However, Buksil had found a village called Bosaga two days north from where Ark was in Ciel. And that village was in a festival period.

“I’ve come to this village during a festival so there is no way I can go running when Ark called.

After so much struggles, finding this village from the coast is like a sign from god.”

“But if Ark finds out later.....”

“I’ll just tell Ark I didn’t see the letter.”

Buksil laughed and replied after Baekgu muttered in an uneasy voice.

“Huhuhu. After travelling with Ark, I realized how important I am. I’m going to use this chance to make my future travels more comfortable. So just trust me.”

“Yes, Master.”

“So let’s go. The first target is cotton candy. Ohhhhhhh!”

“Ohhhh, this is great!”

Buksil dragged Baekgu to a stall on the opposite side while drooling. At that time, around 30 people entered through the north gate of Bosaga.

“Really?”

“Yes, I searched the internet and accidentally came across the video. The video showed the festivities in Bosaga village and there was a pig like fellow among the residents.”

The person speaking was Isyuram. Isyuram knew that Ark was near the southwest coast. So the wanted criminals who had been searching the coast along the harbour split into two groups and moved along the northwest and southwest. If they moved to the southwest then Ark might be caught. The urgent Isyuram suddenly remembered a flyer advertising the festival at the harbour and lured the wanted criminals to Bosaga village. Garam nodded at Isyuram's words and said.

"It is really lucky that you found it. If we find that guy now then Jepeteu hyung will trust you 100%. Now, let's go search."

"Hmm, yes."

Isyuram awkwardly grinned and nodded. Meanwhile, a man and woman entered through the south gate of Bosaga village.

"Oh, really.... I like a bustling place like this but..... Furthermore, we need to find that Ark guy. There is no time to be playing around."

"Shut up, we have to pretend to enjoy the festival no matter how busy it is. A great amount of people will be coming from the surrounding cities for the Bosaga festival. If he arrived near this coast then he is likely to come here."

"If you say so."

"Huhuhu, isn't it? Right? Then let's go eat some barbecue."

"..... As expected, do you really just want to play?"

"It's legwork, legwork."

The person approaching the barbecue was a charming female magician wearing white chain armour. Her name was Redian. The man accompanying her and scratching his head was the big, burly Bread. They had pursued Ark all the way to Bristania's coast and arrived at Bosaga village.

TO BE CONTINUED

Slums

“Huk huk huk, I’ve finished.”

“Already?”

The old man looked at Ark with amazed eyes.

“It should take at least 4 hours to get to the pier and back. Yet you returned from that place overrun with dangerous monsters after just 1 hour and with my luggage?”

“It sounded urgent so I hurried as much as possible.”

“I’ll say this clearly. But I honestly didn’t expect that much from you. In regards to transportation work, there are always small and large problems. In particular, it’s not a surprise to be attacked by thieves or monsters. Of course, I can ask the garrison to look for it but it would take many days for them to accept my commission. Since it is on a very tight schedule and is an urgent delivery, I had no choice but to rely on a foreigner.”

The old man seemed to be complaining as he shook his head.

“But you’re different from the lazy foreigners in this area. Even if they accept my request, they would take many hours to do it. Since they always receive a lot of commissions so they would complete the most urgent one first.”

“I place customer satisfaction as my top priority.”

Although he was breathing hard, Ark tried to make the best impression as possible. The old man nodded and said.

“I know, I know. Even though I doubted you, I never thought that you could find the luggage so quickly. It is the first time I’ve met a sincere foreigner like you. Now, this is the reward I’ve promised.”

“Thank you very much.”

Clink, clink.

Ark spoke thankful words but he had tears in his eyes as he saw the coins. He had ran around for 1 and a half hours and all he received was 50 silver. He could earn more than that hunting one or two monsters and selling japtem. Anyway, an information window appeared after he received the compensation.

-You have completed the <Find the lost luggage at the pier> quest.

Compensation: 50 silver, +1000 experience, +7 fame

‘I ran a marathon for one hour only to receive that compensation.....’

The old man had a lot of complaints about other users but Ark could understand their feelings. If done at a normal pace, the quest would normally take 2 hours. No matter how low levelled the area, level 150 users wouldn't really care about that sort of compensation. They would only accept it when there were other quests in that area. Since there were a few quests, the users unconsciously felt like there was no need to rush. Sometimes the NPC might even become such a nuisance that they would cancel the quest. Since the level 366 Ark had completed such a boring quest, it was natural for the NPC to look favourably upon him. And the favourable impression from the NPC gave a more realistic profit.

“I'm genuinely grateful that you sincerely accepted my quest. I've decided to write a letter of recommendation so that anyone in my business who you encounter will know about the sincere and polite foreigner. I have a fairly wide network of acquaintances. If you show this recommendation to my partners then you will receive a more generous reward.”

The old man wrote a recommendation letter and gave it to him.

-You have received additional compensation since the satisfaction of the client has exceeded 100%.

The old man who commissioned the quest is an NPC who engages

in transporting baggage from Ciel. If the lost luggage was unable to be delivered on time then the transporter's reputation would receive a big hit. Thanks to your sincere work, the old man is able to keep his reputation intact. As a sign of gratitude, this client has provided a bonus compensation. You've also received a letter of recommendation from a satisfied transporter. If you show the letter of recommendation to other transporters then it is possible to receive additional rewards and fame.

Additional compensation: 10 silver, +3 fame

* Special item 'Transporter's letter of recommendation' acquired.

Transporter's letter of recommendation: If you show it to another transporter then it is possible to receive a higher rank quest. In addition, the probability of receiving additional compensation and fame will increase.

'Phew, it is a success!'

Ark sighed with relief as he took the Letter of Recommendation. This was the reason why Ark completed the quest quickly. It was unnecessary to say again, but NPCs gave various types of quests. If NPCs spoke about time running out then it was often a quest with a time limit. Naturally, if the quest was completed quickly then the NPC's satisfaction would rise. If the degree of satisfaction exceeded 100% then he would receive additional compensation. Of course, the bonus compensation wasn't that great. In addition, completion of the quest within 1 hour was needed for satisfaction to go above 100% then considerable effort was needed. Therefore a lot of users gave up on satisfaction early. If they acted greedily while thinking about consumer satisfaction, they might inadvertently make a mistake that would lead to death.

'But this is easy to do in a low level area.'

That wasn't a problem for Ark at all.

"Chik chik, he smells dangerous for some reason!"

There was a more than 150 level difference between Ark and the

monsters surrounding Ciel. If he didn't approach the monsters intentionally then they would avoid him due to fear. Even though chaotic users also regularly appeared, he was able to settle it easily with a few swings of his sword. If he rode Radunma to save some time then it was possible to achieve customer satisfaction.

"Is there any other problem?"

"You've completed all the urgent problems."

".....Really?"

Ark sighed with regret, causing the old man to smile.

"But you don't have to worry about work because transporters gather here so there is always a number of jobs. Ah that reminds me, I ran into my friend Kurad drinking alcohol at the tavern the other day and he said a big headache had occurred. If you head to the Twilight bar next to the west gateway and show him the Letter of Recommendation then he might give you a job."

"Thank you for the information. I'll go immediately."

Ark said farewell and stepped towards the west gateway. If he worked diligently then he might be able to receive additional compensation from this quest. Although he received information about the next quest, Ark's face wasn't that bright.

"How much have I gained so far? Character information window!"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +500		
Fame	6025 (+500)	Level	366
Profession	Dark Soul		
Title	Cat Knight, Oberium's Caretaker, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero		
Health	6855	Mana	6745(+25)

	(+225)		
Spiritual Power	400	Strength	745 (+38)
Agility	925 (+110)	Stamina	1,155 (+35)
Wisdom	161 (+10)	Intelligence	1,173 (+5)
Luck	155 (+60)	Flexibility	158
Art of Communication	66	Affection	89 (+10)
Resilience	436		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			153

“Huh.....”

He sighed after checking the information window. The main character information window displayed many information aside from stats. But now Ark was only concerned with his fame. Since Ark was level 366 completing level 150 quests, he only received 60 silver and fame as additional compensation. No, he needed 7000 fame in order to learn the secret technique. In order to obtain the Entrusted Volumes, Ark had forsaken food and drinks for a day in order to grind his fame.

“If this is another luggage search then I will feel sick.”

Ark shook his head with a disgusted expression. The contents of the repetitive quests in Ciel were all similar. He only found this out later but Ciel a commerce city similar to Giran in Schudenberg. So most of the NPCs did transportation work. There was even a separate transporters union in the city. Most of the simple quests around the village were commissions from transporters. They were all ambushed by monsters and wanted to get their lost luggage back.

“Well, I was transporting some luggage here last time.....”

“The items lost in a monster attack? If you tell me the place then I will look for it!”

He had heard those words coming from NPCs so many times that he could no reply in his sleep. As soon as the quest was received, he accepted it and rode towards the location on Radunma. When he arrived at the quest area, he would rush the monsters like crazy. Once the monsters were taken care of, he would look for the items.

“Chik chik, and you? Did you exterminate our kind from the beginning?”

The dying monsters looked at him with accusing eyes.

‘I don’t want to be here either!’

He really wanted to say that. If he completed the quest then he would only receive 30~60 silver as compensation.....Since he was level 366, killing level 200 kobolds didn’t give any experience. He also received no loot. The only thing he could get was quest items. This system was to prevent high level users from coming to lower levelled areas. Therefore Ark repeated one day of hunting without receiving any profit.

“Dammit, I have to hold on to gain more fame.”

His circumstances surrounding the quests was really a pity. If Ark had been initially interested in fame then he would’ve collected 5000 more by now. In some cases, there were options to choose either money or fame as a reward for several quests. And of course Ark chose money! If he knew it was possible to learn secret techniques then he would’ve chosen 100 fame over 1 silver.

“I don’t need fame while running around!”

In the past, he never imagined he would need it.

“It’s really crazy. Anyway, I have to give up japtem and experience for fame.....”

It was a low level village so he had to give up experience and items. The problem was although NPCs gave different amounts of fame, it

was obvious how much fame he would receive when the quest was repeated. In a low level area, he could only repeat the quest and receive compensation and fame a maximum of 10 times. But the problem was time. It took at least an hour and a half to receive the quest and wander to the area before coming back.

“I’ve spent 30 hours so far and completed 20 quests which gave me 150 fame. Thanks to word of mouth, the transporter quests gave an extra 50 fame which gave him 200. My current fame is 6025.”

In order to earn the required 7000 fame to learn the secret technique, he needed 975 more fame. If he continued gaining 200 fame in one day then it was 5 more days of grinding quests.

“This Jackson’s Hero title is also irritating.”

Thanks to the Jackson’s Hero title, his intimacy with NPCs increased by 30% instead of fame. So when completing quests, he would receive 30% less fame.

“Well, thanks to the high intimacy with the transporters, I eventually made up that lack of fame because of the word of mouth. Now the quests from the old man has ended but he gave me a Letter of Recommendation so I should continue getting more fame.”

But did he have to grind for another four days just to achieve his target? Thinking of the next four days really made him feel gloomy.

“But there’s no other method.....”

Ark sighed and shook his head. If he solved quests with high difficulty then he would be given more fame. But he often had to go to other areas for such quests. If he grasped the wrong information when receiving the quests then it might take him many takes to complete. So it was better to repeat quests and receive 200 fame a day.

‘Should I catch chaotic users to increase my fame?’

Ark had also thought about that method. But there was a problem with that. Most of the chaotic users in a level 100~180 area were level 200. Since there was such a huge level difference, he would

not receive a lot of fame. Staying at a village where he was 150 levels higher wasn't very satisfying. Finally he came to the conclusion that repeating quests was the best way to gain fame. It would take a bit more time to fill his target amount but it was already at the point where he felt sick at the thought.

"Still, secret techniques are hard to find so I can't possibly give it up."

Although Ark was getting tired, he firmly braced himself. He wouldn't stop until he receives the Entrusted Volumes from the legendary hobbit master! Even though it was annoying to gain 7000 fame, it was clearly a rare skill if it needed that much.

"Yes, it is more useful to have a good skill than a considerably rare item. In addition, I've already spent more than a day earning fame so it isn't possible for me to give up. It's just for now. I can recoup the lost money and experience but I can't miss the opportunity to learn the skill."

Ark murmured aloud and stepped into an alley. His movements were irritated at the thought of doing more transporter quests. When moving in the relevant area, his high level meant the surrounding monsters and chaotic users weren't a problem at all. So Ark didn't even need to summon Razak and Racard. It wasn't necessary to summon Razak and Racard and waste food. But no matter how high levelled he was, it would take time to move around. The only summon Ark was currently using was Radun.

Radun had a +500% movement speed so Ark could complete the quests 30% faster by using him. However, Ark still felt like he was moving too slowly. In order to save time, Ark used the [Quick] scroll to increase his movement speed by 20% for 30 minutes. [Quick] was a scroll for relatively low level users so it was relatively cheap. Besides, this place was the magic kingdom so scrolls were cheaper here than they were in Schudenberg. Yet a single scroll still cost 50 silver! It was something that Ark would normally never waste money on! But Ark was now tired of gathering game so spending a little money wasn't a problem anymore.

'Completing the quest will still give me 60 silver. I have to use 2

scrolls for a return trip so that is 1 gold. I lose 40 silver every time a quest is complete but I would rather spend money if it would quicken the process.'

Ark thought like that and quickly used the [Vision] scroll. It was the first time he had used so many consumables since starting the game.

'I bought 8 yesterday but after completing the quest I only have one left? Since I need a minimum of four more days, I should buy at least 30~40 scrolls.'

However, Ark didn't head towards the shopping centre to purchase the scrolls.

'If I have to buy items then it is better to help that person.'

The boy with financial difficulties had appeared in Ark's head. Ark learned that the boy who he first encountered in Ciel was called Ronnie. At the time, Ark hadn't understood the Bristania language and had tried to get Ark to buy the dictionary for 20 gold. He had misunderstood Ronnie as a con artist and almost cursed him. But after finding out information from the Magic Institute, Ark had abandoned the discount in order to buy the dictionary from Ronnie. Thanks to that Ark had bonded with Ronnie. And after getting some money from the repetitive quests, he would purchase items from Ronnie.

'I think it is quite rare.'

Ark smiled strangely and scratched his head. In fact, he had seen many pitiful NPCs while playing the game No matter how pitiful they looked in the game, wasn't it impossible to help everyone? In addition, Ark was the type of person who would say 'Yes, I will help!' Yet Ronnie weighed on his mind for some reason. Although he felt sorry because of the misunderstanding, he identified with the boy as he also lived a hard life.

"Ah, Ark hyung!"

Ronnie ran and greeted him as he entered the alley. Even though he was wearing scruffy attire, his features were quite good. In contrast

to when he first arrived in Bristania, Ark's greeting was clear and his understanding was now at 75%.

"Have you been well?"

"I've been alright like always. But why are you here?"

"This guy, is that a question someone running a business should else? Of course it is to buy things."

"Things?"

"Yes. Do you have more [Quick] scrolls?"

"Huh? You already bought eight [Quick] scrolls yesterday. Have you already used all of them?"

"This hyung-nim is working really hard. This time I need 30, no please give me 50."

"5-50 scrolls?"

50 scrolls would cost 25 scrolls. It was understandable if this was a store but Ronnie was operating a street stall so it was difficult for him to get 50 scrolls. The transaction was bigger than Ronnie expected so he made an embarrassed expression.

"Why? You can't get it?"

"Ah, no..... That's not it. Yesterday Ark hyung bought 8 scrolls so there is only 2 left and I haven't been able to get more."

Ronnie answered hesitantly. However, Ark had already expected that. Ark had worked at a street stall before and learned the inner workings of it. Since Ronnie only made a certain amount of money a day, it was impossible to have a quantity of 50 scrolls.

"Will you be able to get it? I'll wait so please bring it to me."

"But if you want 50....."

"Are you afraid I will order the scrolls and then run away? As expected, you're also a merchant. I understand. The [Quick] scrolls are 50 silver for one? 50 pieces is 25 gold. I'll give you a deposit so

bring it to me quickly.”

“Huh? Deposit?”

Ark handed him 25 gold. Once again, Ark was aware of Ronnie’s viewpoint. Ronnie normally sold japterm so 25 gold was a lot of income for him. Once supplied, Ark would buy it immediately. The place Ronnie was getting the items was probably from the shopping area.

If Ronnie didn’t have the 25 gold then then what shop owners would accept a credit for the scrolls?

‘I understand the feeling well.’

Ark smiled and looked at Ronnie. But Ronnie took the deposit with a hesitant face.

“What is it? You can’t buy the items?”

“I..... That.....”

Ronnie wavered and studied Ark’s face before saying.

“Hyung doesn’t seem to know..... If you buy it from the store then you can get it for 5% cheaper. I buy the items and then sell it at a fixed price. That also applies to the [Quick] scrolls you bought yesterday. Buying one or two is okay, but if hyung wants to buy 50 then it might be better from the store.....”

‘Oh my God!’

Ark made a strange face at Ronnie’s words. Didn’t he understand that giving a deposit and buying the scrolls was for Ronnie? Ark wasn’t a different person. Sometimes stores would give discounts when items were bought in bulk. No, anyone could know that information just by reading the flyers in every store. Still, Ark had visited Ronnie and bought items intentionally. Even Ark thought that his actions were really strange. If he could save 5% of 25 gold, which was 1 gold, 25 silver and 1 copper then Ark normally wouldn’t hesitate. He was astonished at how much his pattern of behaviour had changed.

‘I don’t know why but it might be because of my new awareness.’

Ark gave a bittersweet smile as he looked at Ronnie. Although Ark had experienced similar situations before, the crucial part that differed was Ronnie. Despite Ark giving him profit, Ronnie was overly honest. He was a pure boy who felt guilty about possible cheating Ark. Ark had abandoned his honesty early in his difficult life and truly hoped that Ronnie wouldn’t lose that. But Ark couldn’t help for nothing.

‘Well, although it doesn’t look good for me.....’

“Eh? Really? I’ve only bought a few so far so I had no idea.”

Ark put a deliberately surprised expression on his face and said.

“Hey, thanks for letting me know this good information. 5% of 50 scrolls is 1 gold and 25 silver. Then wouldn’t 200 scrolls be 5 gold? Ugh, if everybody buys scroll then wouldn’t I be able to save hundreds of gold? It is unfortunate but luckily I know now. Then.....”

Ark smiled and grabbed Ronnie’s nose.

“This guy, aren’t you being foolish?”

“Ah, ouch! Ark hyung, it hurts.”

“You’ve got to learn the basics.”

“Huh? The basics?”

“For a merchant, they have to endeavour to earn profits even if the sky is collapsing. If you’re unsure about the customer then you should use whatever sales pitch possible. How will you make money if you don’t do that?”

“B-but.....”

“Be quiet, I don’t want to hear anymore then bring me the items quickly.”

“Huh? Then?”

“Although I understand that I can use the store, I’ve already given

you the deposit. And I can save money from now on thanks to you so just buy it this time.”

“H-Hyung.....!”

Ronnie looked at Ark with eyes brimming with tears. Then Ark scratched his head and shouted with embarrassment.

“Don’t misunderstand. Don’t keep dawdling back and forth or do you not want me to buy items from you anymore?”

“U-understood. I’ll be going.”

Ronnie rubbed his eyes with his sleeve and turned around. Suddenly someone ran from the other side and shouted.

“Ronnie, Ronnie! It’s serious!”

“Eh? Tarun ajusshi? Is it serious? What’s wrong?”

“Your mother is having another fit!”

“Uh, my mother?”

Ronnie’s face turned white and terrified.

Was this Ronnie’s house?’ Ark looked around with an uncomfortable expression. After listening to the man called Tarun’s words, Ronnie urgently left for home. At that time, Ark had run after Ronnie to ask for the deposit back. When considering Ronnie’s character, of course he would return with the items but Ark had to continue doing the repeatable quests. Since there was no time, he ended up coming along to Ronnie’s house.

The rich and poor lived in completely different worlds. One of the richest neighbourhoods in Korea was called Gangnam, where they people living there had allowances of millions of won a day. Meanwhile, the poor had to gather together to rent a 100,000 won room. And that rule also applied to New World. It was natural for money to be important in the commerce town of Ciel in Bristania. But just on the outskirts of Ciel was the slums where the poor lived, who

had to worry about getting a meal every day. Ronnie's house was 10 minutes away from Ciel on the corner of the slums. Ramshackle houses were placed here and there with boarded up planks.

"Mother!"

Ronnie threw his baggage into the house and ran to the bed. The only household goods was an old pot. A middle age woman coughing could be seen lying on a wooden bench in the corner of the shack. With just one glance, it was obvious that the lady was sick. She had black and red spots all over the body, while her face was pale and sweaty.

"Huk huk huk, R-Ronnie..... Ronnie....."

"Mother, I'm here! It's me! It's Ronnie!"

"Ahh, Ronnie..... Ronnie..... My son....."

The middle-aged woman struggled to reach out her hands in order to grab Ronnie. He fidgeted with tearful eyes and shouted.

"Painkillers, the painkillers!"

"She's already taken the painkiller. But....."

"Oh, Mother, Mother!"

Ronnie cried and howled at Tarun's answer. At the same time, the body of the lady bent like a bow and she moaned. Then, Ark had a thought and his heart dropped. A middle-aged lady struggling with pain with a boy held her hand and didn't know what to do! He had seen this scene before. No, he had experienced it. The scene unfolding before his eyes was just like Ark holding onto his mother's hand in the ICU while praying. The rage and despair Ark felt at that time couldn't be described in words. He felt a horrified fear seeing this familiar scene occur in front of him.

'Damn, indeed.....'

Even though he had experienced it a few times, he still couldn't get used to it. The feeling was so unpleasant that Ark felt like closing his eyes and turning away. However, he couldn't pretend not to see the

scene.

‘This will be dangerous if I leave!’

Ark had taken care of numerous sick people in New World and intuitively sensed the danger. If this was reality then it would end like that, but this wasn’t reality. Hyun-woo was only a gamer but Ark was a great warrior, a cook and a caretaker! Ark pushed Ronnie away and gasped the hand of the lady.

“Have courage. I know it is painful. Other people might not understand but I know. I’m not saying I understand your pain. Who in this world would be able to understand the pain of a sick person? But I know. I know the pain of watch someone you love being in pain and being unable to do anything.”

“Ahh, Ronnie..... Ronnie.....”

“Yes, that’s right. Be strong for Ronnie’s sake!”

Ark grasped the lady’s hand as he prayed and gave her hope. Then a faint light started to appear around their clenched hands. The feeble light gradually expanded like a candle and lit up the room until it entered the lady’s body. Then the lady’s pain eased and her breathing gradually stabled. After a while, her breathing became peaceful and she fell into a deep sleep. The effects of Advanced Nursing was shown and the crisis was conquered. Tarun and Ronnie looked at Ark with amazed eyes and murmured.

“Oh, such a thing! You didn’t even use painkillers!”

“H-Hyung. Thank you!”

“..... It’s not a cure.”

“I’m aware of that. But..... After having a seizure, she suffers for several days. To see her fall asleep with a relaxed expression..... Thank you. Thank you very much.”

Ronnie cried out in a tearful voice and bowed repeatedly. Ark’s chest throbbed with every bow. A long time ago, Ark had repeated the same words to a doctor. After he bowed, Ronnie seemed to

remember something and took out his purse.

“I’m sorry. Here is the earlier deposit. I’m sorry but today.....”

“That’s it. I’ll take care of the scrolls so you just take good care of your mother.”

Ronnie nodded and sat down beside the bed, wiping his mother’s face with a wet towel. Ark couldn’t watch anymore and exited the house.

Investigation

“Phew.....!”

Ark who had come outside took deep breaths and made himself calm down. It was just for a moment, but Ark had thought the middle aged lady was his mother in the ICU and his chest pounded. He wanted to shake off the unpleasant feeling. Once Nursing was finished, he didn't hesitate to step outside. Tarun who exited later approached Ark and said.

“Really thank you a lot. In recent times, her symptoms have been so severe that painkiller don't work but the crisis was overcome this time thanks to you. If Margaret..... Ah, that is the name of Ronnie's mother. Anyway, I don't know what Ronnie would do if something serious happens to Margaret.”

“..... What disease does Margaret have?”

“I don't know.”

Tarun sighed and replied.

“In fact I'm a pharmacist. Well, I didn't receive formal training but I gained second hand knowledge after listening to the residents of Ciel.”

Tarun murmured and started talking.

“You can probably understand just by seeing this place but the residents can't afford expensive medicines from Ciel. Fortunately, we've been able to treat most sicknesses so far. But a year ago? Suddenly residents here acquired the same mysterious disease as Margaret and the medicine have no effect on that disease.”

“There are more people who caught the disease?”

“Yes, strangely the Ciel residents don't have a problem. Only the residents here have become ill by that mysterious disease. The

strange thing is, children with weak immunity are fine and only the adults are affected. Magaret especially has really serious symptoms. Therefore Ronnie.....”

Tarun looked at the shack with sadness and explained. His father had passed away a long time ago so it was just Ronnie and his mother. Of course it wasn't an abundant life. If it was abundant then they wouldn't live in the slums. However, his mother worked hard so Ronnie still lived happily. Then one day his mother caught an unidentified illness. And Ronnie's tough life began.

“Since then, Ronnie started trying to work in Ciel to make money for Magaret's medicine. But there isn't that much work in Ciel for a slum dweller. In my case, I was just lucky to run some chores for a pharmacist.”

However, Ronnie was 10 years old at the time and there wasn't that much he could do. Because he was young, he couldn't work carrying goods as sometimes he was couldn't be unscrupulous merchants who would work him to exhaustion without compensation. But it was the attitudes of the Ciel residents that was the harder. When a boy from the slums was seen snooping around town, he would often be cursed and sometimes beaten up by boys the same age.

“If it was just that then it would be okay. The Ciel residents hate for the slum residents worsened recently. It really is sad that they think that way about their neighbours.”

“Huh? Why is that?”

“Like I said, Margaret's illness began a year ago. Then other slum residents started showing the same symptoms. So they think that Magaret spread the illness to the residents. They don't want an infectious disease to be spread.”

Ark remembered the first time he met Ronnie. At the time, Ronnie had wounds all over. He hadn't thought it important at the time but now he got a general picture after Tarun's words. Ronnie's wounds had been caused by the Ciel residents because he was from the slums and was the son of the person spreading the infectious disease.

“Are you certain it is infectious?”

“I’m positive. Although why did the sickness spread to the residents of the slums while Ronnie and I who are closest to Magaret are fine?”

Tarun spoke in a firm tone and sighed.

“Nevertheless, Ronnie didn’t make any excuses and just endured the curses and beating silently. He probably thought he would be driven off if he showed signs of rebellion. That young child.”

Even with all the bullying, Ronnie just continued going in and out of Ciel to earn money. When money was gathered, he visited Tarun and they bought various medicinal herbs. There was not enough money to buy expensive medicines so he asked Tarun to create the medicine. However, none of the herbs helped Magaret at all. She got seizures almost every day and only painkillers can relieve her pain. But today even the painkillers stopped working.

“The painkillers is also medicine. If used a lot then tolerance will build up. The crisis is over this time thanks to you but in the future it will be a serious problem. It seems like Magaret no longer has the stamina to hold on. If she has one or two more seizures then it’ll probably be over.....”

Tarun couldn’t stop sighing at the thought.

‘Such a thing?’

Ark had some questions ever since meeting Ronnie. He had recognized him with one glance. The reason he felt a strange sense of empathy with Ronnie wasn’t simply because of an underprivileged childhood. Ronnie hadn’t said anything but Ark intuitively sensed that they had similar situations. Ark was also the same. In order to take care of his sick mother, he had to work in front of people who looked at him with indifferent eyes. Ark knew Ronnie’s feelings better than anyone. The feeling of hopelessness which made him want to curse the whole world.....Why couldn’t anyone understand? Of course he understood. He had no choice but to understand.

‘I want to help.’

That desire suddenly rose in Ark's mind. He never wanted to help without anything in return. It had been a long time since he truly felt like this. But 'Nursing' wasn't a treatment. It was possible to reduce the sick person's pain but the skill couldn't treat the sick. Even if Ark's sincerity caused Miracle Nursing, the situation wouldn't change that much. When looking at past circumstances of Miracle Nursing, it gave him the opportunity to treat the disease but not completely cure it.

'However, if Miracle Nursing is triggered then the situation will improve. Seeing that seizure just now, Magaret can't last long.'

Ark had a crazy idea and entered the shack before beginning to use Nursing on Magaret. When thinking back, Miracle Nursing was activated in unexpected situations while in other sick emergencies it wasn't triggered at all.

'I have to sincerely want to save this woman. This time I'm more earnest than others. It will be good if it is triggered in this situation. Why isn't it working?'

Ark cursed as he couldn't trigger Miracle Nursing.

Then something popped into Ark's head.

'Wait, didn't Ronnie try all sorts of herbs on Magaret after she got sick that didn't work? I've experienced this situation before!'

It was just like when he met the Galgin who had trouble with food poisoning. At that time, Miracle Nursing wasn't activated and Lariette's recovery magic didn't work either. It was because the Galgin's food poisoning was unrelated to a disease. The Galgin had received food poisoning because they ate contaminated food.

'What if Magaret is in a similar situation? That might explain why Miracle Nursing isn't triggered. Miracle Nursing was a skill that would trigger when taking care of the sick. Therefore it wasn't triggered when used on the poisoned Galgin. So a cure for disease isn't the answer.'

That reminded him, the black red dots on Magaret's body was similar to the Galgin.

‘Now that I’m thinking about it, Nursing isn’t really useful here.’

“Ronnie, take good care of your mother. I’m going to investigate a little bit.”

Ark comforted Ronnie and left the shack. Ark had treated the Galgin’s food poisoning using a different method. The method Ark used then was to investigate the area for the source of poisoning and then produced an antidote.

‘Normal NPCs wouldn’t go around picking and eating strange ingredients like the Galgin. But they’re poor so there is a possibility of eating some strange ingredients. That is also the reason why only the residents of the slums are sick. It is impossible for the rich residents of Ciel to eat strange ingredients. I have to investigate it.’

The first place Ark visited was the river by the slums. If something was contaminated in the area then the river would have the most significant impact. As expected, he found suspicious information when using Ingredient Identification on the river water.

-Common water from the unclean river flowing near the Ciel slums.

It is able to be applied to food.

* Advanced Additional Information: It seems like ordinary water but when looked at closely, the water from near the slums seems quite unclean. The unclean water is caused by serious pollution. Fortunately, there are no signs of serious pollution just yet but the descendants will need to be careful. Less than 1 year of damage will take decades for nature to recover.

‘There’s no doubt, this is the cause!’

After confirming the information about the river water, Ark picked the surrounding ingredients. Since there was no household water, environmental pollution seemed to be a real problem in New World.

And the first ones damaged by environmental pollution was the poor. Although the information window said the contamination wasn’t at a serious level yet, he didn’t know what happened to the ingredients affected by the unclean water. An ingredient might react

with the pollution to cause a poison. In reality, weren't there instances of carcinogens detected in food grown in polluted areas?

'There might be a special hidden element in the ingredients that is activated by the contamination. If I find the right ingredient and use the drug extraction properties of Food Worshipper then I can make a simple antidote. But if I want to use the Food Worshipper technique then the survival pot is necessary.....'

Ark looked at the ingredients with an unbearable expression. Currently Ark had left the pot with the Magic Institute. Even if he wanted to treat the residents of the slums, he couldn't possibly abandon his immortality pill that would be completed in 40 hours. However, 40 hours in real time was 120 hours for an NPC. That was five days. If Magaret had another seizure then he couldn't guarantee she would live.

'Ah, that's right!'

Ark was worried for a while before he thought of a method. Tarun was a pharmacist for the slums. Even if he didn't know about the contaminated river water, he was still a pharmacist. He should be equipped with appliances to handle herbs. When Ark returned to the slums, Tarun immediately gave permission. His character was straightforward.

"If you can cure the residents then I will help however possible."

"Thank you, then please assist me."

Ark arranged the medicinal herbs at Tarun's house and started actively working. Unlike the automatic function of his survival pot, he had to manually use Tarun's tools but he was somehow able to examine the ingredients.

[-The ingredients do not match!]

"Damn!"

However, the task was not as easy as he thought. Although he tried to extract various elements from the plants, none of them matched with the river water.

“Maybe there are other ingredients around?”

“Let’s see? That seems like all the tolerable ones.....”

Tarun scratched his head and replied. Of course, there might be some ingredients Tarun didn’t know about. However, if most of the slum residents were poisoned then it would have to be a common ingredient. If there was no other ingredients.....

‘Wait, Magaret was the first one to show symptoms 1 year ago. If the ingredients were the cause of the disease then shouldn’t it have been around then? The surrounding ecosystem can’t just change in 1 year.

Ark suddenly had a thought and asked Tarun.

“Was there anything that changed around 1 year ago?”

“Something that changed? Again, I can’t think of anything big.”

“Anything is fine.”

“Ah, I think the ‘Seirun Workshop’ started in Ciel at that time.”

“Seirun Workshop?”

“Yes. The Seirun Workshop is the biggest alchemy workshop in Ciel. It is among the top 5 in Bristania. Various potions that are supplied throughout the country is made in Ciel.”

Ark’s eyes flashed at Tarun’s words. ‘Job Then Ronnie’s mother caught the disease after her job was over!’ It was something he hadn’t considered. If it wasn’t a problem with the ingredients in the slums then it might be something they passed on the way to work. And it is the place where various herbs and alchemy potions are handled! So Ark’s investigation reached a turning point thanks to Tarun’s information.

-These advanced recovery potions are created using a special technique that combines 10 different herbs.
--

And the Seirun workshop has made a special high density product. It is an essential item that can treat any injuries received in a battle.

Once used, it will instantly recover +650 health. However, it will have no effect on abnormal states such as poison or disease.

“Hmm.....”

Ark shook a bottle containing a deep red liquid. After receiving the information from Tarun, he visited the Seirun workshop and bought a potion. The different areas in New World had specialty products. Then so-called brand name items existed. Simply speaking, iron goods created by dwarves were traded more often. That was because they were specialists with iron so their products had better performance. The NPCs who had mastered techniques would produce items that were brand named. Just like in reality, the branded goods were slightly more expensive but the performance was good. And the city of Ciel in the magic kingdom of Bristania was known for producing brand name potions. While Seirun's potions had a similar price to others, it recovered 100~150 more health than the other potion so it was considerably famous in Bristania. They also significantly reduced the labour costs by hiring residents of the slums.

‘Then the people who went to the Seirun workshop became ill?’

It was doubtful. However, there might be a problem among the herbs in the potion. Even if there were no problems with the herb, he couldn't be relieved. Since the herbs might be a fairly unique ingredient, sometimes combining the ingredients will cause toxicity. In fact, thieves often used ‘Poison Manufacturing’ to mix herbs together to make poisons. However, it was already a liquid mixture so there was no recognisable ingredients.

‘As expected, is it impossible to investigate the ingredients in the potions?’

When buying the potion, Ark had politely asked for the herb combinations. That was the reason why he bought the potion. However, it was a brand name item so the herbal formulation was

top secret. They wouldn't teach it just because he asked. Therefore Ark was misunderstood as an industrial spy and kicked out.

'But if it's not the river water and plants around the slums then this must be it. Is there any way to check the ingredients in here?'

Ark shook the potion and thought until a fact he forgotten popped into his head.

'Wait? That reminds me that there are a lot of transporters here. And the potions sold by the Seirun workshop was the centre of Ciel's industry. So there should be a lot of goods transported to and from the Seirun workshop.'

So Ark visited the Twilight tavern where transporters frequented a lot.

"That is correct. We deliver goods there and the finished products created by the Seirun workshop."

The old man Ark previously helped nodded and replied. Ark showed great joy and asked.

"Can you tell me what type of ingredients you delivered to Seirun?"

"That's a bit....."

The old man scratched his head with hesitation.

The Seirun workshop supplied various potions to the entire southern area of Bristania. In order to maintain that type of market, it was necessary to defend the recipe. There were a lot of regulations that forbade the transporters and regular customers from mentioning it. However, Ark now had their full trust.

"Please just a little bit. I absolutely don't have any bad intentions."

"I know you're not a bad person. But my company takes care of all the transportation around here. Rather than directly purchasing things and delivering them, Seirun just moves things around the head office. The boxes are already sealed up so I don't know the contents. Besides, if they ever know that I let such information loose then I'll be fired. I also have a wife and children."

“Indeed.....”

Ark nodded his head although his gaze lingered on the old man. Then the old man made an inconvenient expression and sighed before muttering under his breath.

“Phew, it really is difficult..... Even if I don’t tell you, there is a method to figure it out.....”

“Huh? What is that?”

“If you think it over then there is a way. Didn’t you accept my request before? Yesterday I was transporting something and received a surprise attack from kobolds, making me lose some luggage. I need to find it. It is materials urgently requested by the Seirun workshop so they are pressuring me.

“I’m sorry, but this time.....”

Ark was about to answer when he suddenly raised his head. Then the old man smiled and winked. Now Ark could understand the old man’s intentions. The lost luggage was supposed to be delivered to Seirun workshop. In other words, it contained the information Ark wanted to know. Of course, the items were related to the quest so Ark wouldn’t be able to handle it freely. When receiving a quest, there was some kind of contract that didn’t allow the related items to be sold at a store or consumed. But Ark didn’t intend to consume or sell it. In other words, he could confirm the contents of the box.

“Since the box was handled by monsters, you can’t be held responsible even if the box was opened.”

“Thank you!”

“I should be thanking you for answering my requests.....”

Ark grasped the old man’s hand who just laughed and shook his head. This was the first time Ark was grateful to the Jackson’s Hero title. Since coming to Ciel for two days, he had done the luggage quest at least 20 times so he had a high degree of intimacy with the NPC. In addition, there was the problem of what would happen if the old man was caught by the Seirun workshop. Without a high amount

of intimacy, he wouldn't have given him that hint. Thanks to the special effect of Jackson's Hero, he received a 30% bonus in intimacy with all NPCs instead of fame. Because of that special effect, Ark managed to get a hint from the old man after only two days. Anyway, Ark accepted the quest and headed to the monster's territory. After retrieving the luggage, he checked the contents.

'..... Was my guess wrong?'

However, disappointment showed on Ark's face when he checked the contents. Inside the box were ordinary herbs.

'No, I still don't understand properly. Sometimes the herb formulation can vary according to the ingredients.'

He purchased the contents in Ciel and tested them at Tarun's house, but he was unable to find anything that would cause sickness. However, there was no doubt that it played a role. Ark was introduced to other old men and completed different transporter quests. It was to investigate the herbs delivered from other areas. However, that was nothing different.

'Does Magaret's sickness have nothing to do with the Seirun workshop? I'm back to the starting point.'

Ark had fallen into a maze and once again headed into the slums. Suddenly, a middle aged person wearing flashy clothes approached from one side.

"Hey. Are you Ark?"

"Yes, that's right....."

He stopped moving and the middle aged man happily approached.

"Ah, as expected. I've heard the rumours."

"Rumours?"

"The rumours have spread between the transporters delivering to our Seirun workshop."

"The workshop..... You mean Seirun workshop?"

“You already know? Then this talk will be quick. In fact, I am Agathe the owner of the Seirun workshop in Ciel. There is so much trouble with the surrounding monsters that deliveries are often behind schedule. But over the last few days, I’ve heard that you’ve found all the goods for the transporters. In addition, unlike other foreigners you completed the task in one hour.”

Agathe made a friendly expression and moved closer.

“The transporters praised you so much that I specially came to you for a special favour. In fact, there has been a slightly unbearable problem. Shortly before they arrived, some workers were attacked near Rocky Mountain and had their luggage stolen. That luggage is more expensive than the others.....”

Agathe coughed and said.

“Ah, I’m sorry. I’ve been a little annoyed. Anyway, I need those ingredients immediately. Can you find it for me? If you bring it back this evening then I’ll double, no triple what the transporters promised.”

Ark had a sudden flash at Agathe’s words.

‘Luggage transported directly..... Oh my god, why didn’t I think of it until now?’

If the manufacturing process was a secret then would the Seirun workshop entrust the important herbs to transporters? If Ark was the owner then he would only entrust the common ingredients to the transporters for the sake of security. Just as he was thinking this, Agathe added in a low voice.

“But don’t even think about opening the luggage. These days there are many people eager to plagiarize our techniques. Just now some guy tried to question the Seirun workshop. The items were stolen just 2 hours ago so it is impossible for the sealed iron box to be opened yet. If I find any evidence that the box is open then you’ll be formally accused. Do you understand?”

‘This guy is the owner of the workshop? Why do I smell something fishy coming from his words?’

Ark thought that as he saw Agathe's unpleasant face. Anyway, a quest information window appeared after Agathe's threat.

-A request from Agathe, owner of the Seirun workshop.

Agathe, the owner of the famous Seirun workshop in Ciel has an important quest for you. While the most important ingredient for Seirun's brand potion, it was attacked and stolen by monsters. After hearing about your fame among the transporters, Agathe has commissioned you to regain the goods. If you recover the goods then you will receive three times the normal reward given by transporters. However, if there are any traces of the luggage being damaged they there quest will be failed and you will have a hostile relationship with its workshop.

Difficulty level: C

Quest restriction: Completed more than 25 transport related quests.

'This is an opportunity!'

Ark's eyes sparkled as he checked the contents of the quest. It was the herb important to the Seirun workshop! If the mysterious disease affected the residents of the slum was related to the Seirun workshop then there was a 90% chance it was this herb. This belief hardened even more after seeing Agathe's attitude.

"Please leave it to me!"

There was a faint smile on Ark's mouth as he grasped Agathe's hand.

Kuaaaaak!

The knife blade fell down weakly as the monster collapsed. It was a white monkey inhabiting the cave near the Rocky Mountains called the Etin. In contrast with the monsters he normally dealt with, this one was level 250. Ciel normally had level 200 users so this would

be a difficult opponent for them. But Ark was level 366 so he cut down the Etin and searched the cave. A small box was visible near a group of Etin. The angel stamped on the side of the box was the trademark of the Seirun workshop.

<p>-You have found the quest item 'Seirun's lost luggage.'</p> <p>* Quest completion: 10/10</p>

"Okay, with this it's finished."

Ark looked at the iron box and laughed. However, he had to think a bit before finishing the quest.

'If my guess is right, there is a high chance the substance in the box is related to Magaret's disease. But if my guess is wrong.....'

The quest from the Seirun workshop would be considered failed if the luggage was opened. Well, Ark didn't really care about failing the quest. Agathe promised triple the normal rewards, which was 1 gold and 80 silver and 30 extra fame. It wasn't to the extent that Ark would hesitate.

'It will be a problem if my relationship with the Seirun workshop becomes hostile.'

Although Agathe threatened him, Ark was the one taking care of the Etins. He could just say the Etins had already plundered the baggage. Since he was the only witness, who could prove that Ark did the crime? However, the Seirun workshop had a lot of influence in the southern region of Bristania. Even if he was acquitted, there was no guarantee what his hostile relationship with the Seirun workshop would cause. Were Magaret and the residents of the slums worth the risk? So he worried about taking back the luggage and just waited. But close just closed his eyes for a moment before shaking his head.

'It's not a problem where I can discuss the value.'

He couldn't give up after thinking about Ronnie.

‘Yes. I’ve already started it. Come, I’ll finish it!’

There was no reason to think about a bad result. If the herb from the Seirun workshop caused the illness then it could cure the residents. If he was wrong and his relationship with the workshop became hostile then he would just have to work to improve it. Who knows? Maybe the Seirun workshop will just decrease their promised additional compensation?

‘Yes, quests in New World don’t just have one ending. If I open the box then I’ll fail the quest but I might be able to receive additional rewards from a different branched quest!’

Kwakwang!

Ark drove his sword into the box. The solid iron box was crushed immediately and the contents flowed out. As he guessed, most of the goods were herbs. Ark confirmed the list of herbs. When he used Ingredient Identification on the quest item, all he could confirm was the name. After confirming the ingredients, he bought the ingredients in Ciel and investigated.

‘My guess is correct!’

After buying the list of ingredients in Ciel, he was able to investigate the ingredients and finally found the element causing the sickness. However, he became even more confused after reading through the information.

‘Eh, wait? This is clearly the cause. But this.....?’

“Ah, Ark hyung!”

He heard Ronnie’s voice as soon as he entered the slums. But Ronnie’s expression didn’t look normal. Ronnie’s pale face had tears streaming down it as he clung to Ark.

“Ark hyung, my mother..... Mother.....”

“What’s going on? What’s wrong with your mother?”

“She had a seizure. It’s more severe than yesterday. Tarun ajusshi says there is no chance now.....”

“Damn, while I was out.....!”

Ark grasped Ronnie’s hand and hurried into the shack. When he entered through the door, he shrank back from the horrible scream. Magaret was having terrible spasms. From afar, he could see that the whole body was twisted and heated like a fireball. However, Ark was more worried about the black red spots on her body.

‘As expected, all Nursing did yesterday was ease Magaret’s pain. The unknown sickness is continuing to worsen. And I know from reading the ingredients information that it was most dangerous when the spots turned fully red. In this state, she won’t be able to hold on for ten minutes before being unable to breath.’

“Have courage! If you endure just a little bit then you can win against the disease! No, you’ll definitely win. I’ll do anything to help you live happily with Ronnie again!”

Ark used Nursing continuously but her seizure didn’t stop. The unknown sickness had reached the worse stage then even Nursing didn’t have an effect.

“Ahh, Ronnie..... Ronnie.....!”

“Mother, Mother!”

‘Nursing already doesn’t work!’

Ronnie’s cries of distress echoed in his ear and he clenched his teeth firmly. If Nursing didn’t work then there was only one way left. He had to make a pill before she loses her willpower completely. Ark turned his body and ran to the table. While sweeping everything off the table, he shouted towards Tarun.

“Please bring all your alchemy tools!”

“What? You’re going to make the cure now?”

“There is no time to explain! Just do as I say!”

Ark growled at Tarun. Then Tarun turned hesitantly around and ran out.

“Ronnie, there’s no time. Go to the magic ingredients store right now and buy me these herbs!”

“But my mother.....”

“I said there is no time!”

Ark wrote down the list of materials from the Seirun box and handed it over before shouting. Of course, Ark had a bunch of materials from the boxes he recovered. However, it was a quest material so he couldn’t use it. So he was going to buy the same ingredients separately. Ronnie shed tears at the yell and ran away.

‘It is surprisingly simple to make the medicine to treat this sickness. It is different to my thoughts of food poisoning. It’s simply poisoning. Of course, the disease has developed beyond simple poisoning after being neglected for so long. But if I have the ingredients then I can use the Food Worshipper’s Herbal Decoction to make the cure. The problem is whether Margaret can hold out until then.’

Ark continuously used Nursing on Margaret. Margaret was in the final stages of the disease so Nursing only had a 1/10 chance of working. Whether in reality or the game, Nursing didn’t work properly because Margaret had suffered for so long that she had given up from weariness. But Ark knew. Even if they were tired with pain, all mothers in existence would be motivated by the magic words.

“If you give up then Ronnie will become an orphan. Do you know? What type of life an orphaned child will have? So far Ronnie had been taking care of you. But you are mistaken if you think he can live well by himself. Ronnie will be even more of an outcast if you give up.....”

Ark clenched his teeth together and continued shouting.

“You are suffering from the disease! Ronnie can’t even boil warm soup! Ronnie is scraping money together just to buy painkillers for you! This is all because of his mother’s presence. Shall I tell you the truth? If you die then Ronnie will also die. Rather, if you give up and die then Ronnie will shortly follow!”

Ark would shout similar words whenever Magaret entered a dangerous situation. Ark's eyes flashed as Magaret responded to his words. Then he bit his lower lip and clenched his fist firmly. Tears suddenly welled in Ark's eyes. Ark's strength came because he remembered his mother's existence. If he was alone then he would be filled with regret and give up without his mother's existence. Even when his flesh and soul became tattered, as a child he instinctively felt like he had to protect his mother. God was an abstract existence. Yet his mother was comparable to a god to him as he devoted his life to her. Ark held back his tears and hugged her.

"Well done. I know. It is painful enough to die. Rather, the pain is so much that you want to die. But you have to put up with it. Please be patient and endure it. Not for your sake but for Ronnie. He is your only child! I'll definitely make sure you get better!"

"Hah, hah, hah, hah!"

Magaret's harsh breathing was her answer.

"Ark hyung!"

Then Ronnie ran in while breathing heavily.

Ark stood up and left her to Ronnie, running to the table. Then he began to combine various ingredients using the tools Tarun lined up. Magaret continued breathing harshly and struggled with her pain. However, Ark blocked his ears and just focused on combining the ingredients.

'I don't have time. If this fails then it is over!'

How much time had passed? The materials which had been separated in the experimental pipe gradually harmonized together. Then it emitted a pale light and the information window appeared.

-You have created the antidote which emits a pale light.

After extracting the various poisonous elements from the herbs, you have succeeded in blending together a cure to the poison. If you use this antidote then the poison elements were be unravelled.

* However, only the poison from the poisonous herb can be used to decipher an antidote.

“That’s it!”

Ark poured the antidote into a bowl and fed it to Margaret. At that moment, an amazing thing happened. The expression which showed her suffering for over 1 year eased up and the black red spots disappeared. Margaret moaned like she had just awakened from a nightmare and raised the upper part of her body.

“Uh, Mother. The spots.....”

“R-Ronnie, it doesn’t hurt. It doesn’t hurt anymore.”

“Uh, Mother!”

Ronnie shed heavy tears and hugged her. Ark finally sighed and flopped to the ground.

“It’s lucky..... Now all the toxins in her body is dissolving. But please don’t force it for a while. Your body has become quite weak so you should rest for a while.”

At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-You have healed a sick person who was dying.

Thanks to the nature of Food Worshipper, a special bonus has been given.

<Experience +1000, Fame +70>

‘Hah.....’

Ark looked at the information window with bemusement and laughed. That reminded him of something he had forgotten. Quests, title and hunting chaotic players. There was also another way to get fame. It was to treat sick people using Food Worshipper. In the past, he also received a considerable amount of fame when treating the Galgin.

“Y-You! What did you do? What the.....?”

Tarun’s mouth dropped as he stuttered. Ark turned around and saw Tarun’s stupid expression. Then he smiled and said.

“Guide me to the other people who caught the mysterious disease.”

Under Tarun’s guidance, Ark treated the sick residents of the slums. Now that he knew the method, treatment was very simple. He used Nursing to help the recuperate then made them eat the antidote. After an hour had passed, Ark managed to treat over 30 sick people in the slums. Surprisingly, he received 30,000 experience and 2100 fame for treating them. That was 10 times more than Ark got in the last two days for the repeatable quests. Thanks to that, Ark managed to gain 1 level and acquire the needed fame. However, Ark didn’t go to the martial arts dojo right away.

There was still work left to do.

Caretaker of the People

“Are you ready?”

“Yes!”

Ronnie laughed and nodded his head. Ark and Ronnie were headed towards Ciel. After crossing the shopping centre, Agathe was pacing in front of the Seirun workshop's door.

“Well, have you finally come?”

“I was a bit late.”

“What's this? Is that an explanation?”

Agathe shouted with a displeased expression.

“I told you it was urgent! If we don't have the ingredients for one day then do you know how much damage the Seirun workshop will receive? A common person like you couldn't possibly imagine it! Damn, I knew I shouldn't have trusted a foreigner. Anyway, that's how it is. Did you find the items?”

“I found them.”

“Then it is lucky. Give it to me quickly.”

“What if I don't want to?”

Ark scratched the back of his neck and murmured. Then Agathe's face twisted up and he made a ridiculous expression.

“What? You don't want to? What did you say?”

“You heard me. I don't want to.”

“What are you doing? Did you break your promise to come back within the time limit because of some unreasonable dislike? Ah, I see. Damn, as expected of a foreigner. I was too busy and just

employed anyone but I made a big mistake.”

“Is it like that?”

Ark snorted and murmured, causing Agathe to wrinkle his nose like an orangutan and said.

“Now give me the box with the Seirun trademark stamped on it. Even if you are a foreigner in Bristania, you can’t just run around wildly! If you don’t take it out immediately then I’ll call the guards to grab you!”

“Guards..... That’s not a bad idea. Please do it.”

“What, what the?”

Agathe flinched at Ark’s retort and closed his mouth. Then Ark grinned and muttered.

“What’s wrong? I thought you were calling the guards.”

“Yes. What are you thinking.....?”

“Why? Do what you want and call them! Why aren’t you calling them? Is it a problem if the guards are called? It would be difficult if the guard checks the contents of the box.....”

“T-that’s impossible!”

“Ah, did I get a bullseye?”

Ark smirked and murmured. Then Agathe made a puzzled expression and his countenance changed.

“You, did you open the box?”

“Then?”

“That is an obvious violation of the contract!”

“Yes, I admit it. Alas, I have committed a serious sin. I broke a promise so I should be punished..... Therefore call the guards. Let’s call them in order to distinguish between right and wrong.”

“Don’t make me laugh. You think that you discovered a weakness just because you saw the contents of the box. The contents are

100% safe and have no faults. We produce potions for the entire southern area of Bristania and even the royal family recognizes our goods.....”

“Shut up, you bastard.”

Ark used his specialty of changing completely by 180 degrees. Ark’s face seemed to turn demonic as curses emerged from his mouth. After experiencing a level 366 Intimidation, Agathe’s face turned as pale as a sheet. Ark stepped closer and growled.

“Okay, I admit it. I examined the contents. The potions that Seirun makes is 100% safe. While it is safe for people who use it, it isn’t safe for the people who make the potion!”

Agathe was silenced Ark’s words. Yes, Ark had figured out the secret of Seirun workshop.

-Karadaras Claw

The Karadaras claw is a deadly poisonous herb found at the Karadaras ravine which resembles a claw. The herb is so poisonous that a troll will die one day after inhaling it too much.

Advanced Additional Information: When the Karadaras Claw is refined through the appropriate process, it can be very useful when combined with various herbs. But if you inhale the aroma or touch the deadly poison, it may cause fatal symptoms inside the body.

When exposed to that environment for a long time, a person will suffer from serious toxic symptoms. The typical symptoms is accompanied by high fever, pain, and black red spots. If the spots become completely red then it will lead to death.

This was the information that Ark confirmed from the items in the box. The secret ingredient in the popular potions sold throughout the southern Bristania was the Karadaras Claw. Of course, Ark knew about the poisonous herb thanks to Food Worshipper. Of course, the Karadaras claws within the potion were perfectly refined so they were completely safe. It was common knowledge that the production of canned goods got rid of a variety of toxic chemicals

such as hydrochloric acid during the process. However, the labourers who handled the Karadaras claws weren't completely safe. Because of that, Ark was puzzled after he confirmed the poisonous herb. When investigating the cause of the mysterious disease, he thought it was because of an error in the manufacturing process.

But when he examined the contents, the mysterious illness wasn't caused by a simple mistake. They were slowly poisoned by inhaling the toxins emitted by the Karadaras claw! As the owner of Seirun workshop, Agathe should know that. If there was a mistake in the herb combination process then it would obviously become poisoned! It was impossible not to know the poisonous plant was dangerous. However, the people who worked in the workshop were poisoned by the Karadaras claw. Even if the appropriate safety measures were taken, the residents of the slums should've at least be given antidotes so they wouldn't suffer any pain. However, Agathe wasn't visibly interested.

'Does he not care if the residents of the slums are killed?'

Sparks rose from Ark's eyes as he had a crazy idea. This guy couldn't be forgiven!

"You are misunderstanding something....."

Sweat dripped down Agathe's face as he stuttered.

"W-what do you want? As expected, is it money? Okay, then I'll do it. If you hold your tongue then I'll give you 500 gold, no, 1000 gold. How about it? Huh? It is a huge amount that a commoner like you can't never see in your entire life. Isn't this the reason why you came? Just sit back, close your mouth and you'll get 1000 gold."

"I said shut up you bastard."

Ark growled and Agathe flinched back, thinking that he was going to be hit. But Ark just sighed and shook his head. In fact, the residents of the slums wanted to rush here to kill Agathe when they heard. The person who stopped it was Ark. Ark determined that it wouldn't be useful for the residents to kill Agathe. So he persuaded the residents

to allow him to go talk to Agathe.

“Okay I will not tell the guards.”

“R-Really?”

“Instead, there are three conditions.”

“Conditions?”

“The residents who suffered in the meantime should receive 1000 gold consolation money while the ones unjustly fired should be rehired at three times the salary. Of course, this is after the perfect safety precautions is taken, which is the first condition.”

This was one of the reasons why Ark stopped the poor residents. Although the residents of the slums were relieved of their pain thanks to Ark, their living situation had suffered thanks to the price of the medicine. Even if they recovered their health, there was no possibility of Agathe rehiring them. So he devised a way for the residents to live.

“W-what? What did you just say? If I pay that consolation money than the Seirun workshop will perish immediately!”

“Yes, that’s it. The circumstances don’t matter. When you think about it, the residents of the slums were going to die.”

“T-that.....”

Agathe made a firm expression and shook his head.

“That condition is unacceptable! I can’t allow Seirun to perish!”

“Well, you control the entire southern region of Bristania so it is difficult to imagine that you can be ruined by just that.”

“What?”

“The Seirun workshop is important to Ciel so maybe I should tell the King of Bristania instead of the guards? What would happen to Seirun then?”

“You cheeky fellow. Do you think the King of Bristania will believe the

words of a mere foreigner like you? No, do you think you can even appear in front of His Majesty?"

Agathe suddenly hit back strongly. If the problem expanded then there was no guarantee of Seirun's safety even if he had the King's ear. Agathe would immediately receive punishment. However, there were various high ranking officials in Ciel who were susceptible to bribes. It was possible for him to stop the words of the poor and a foreigner from reaching the King's ear using his connections.

"Ark-nim has the qualifications!"

Suddenly someone's voice was heard from inside the alley. Confusion spread across Agathe's face who turned around.

"What the? What bastard, huck, you?"

"Yes. I am the branch manager of Ciel's Magic Institute, Rabent."

It was the magician in the Magic Institute that Ark met when he first came to Ciel who said he was a fan of Ark. Rabent nodded towards Ark and began to talk again.

"Although I don't know everything that is going on, Ark-nim is a member of the Magic Institute with a good standing."

"M-member of the Magic Institute? The guy who looked for the transporter's luggages?"

"Ark's character is someone who can't ignore it when he sees someone in trouble."

Rabent said as he once again sent Ark a respectful look. He had completely misunderstood Ark. After all.....

"It is his character that made him work at the slums. Before Ark-nim came here, he dropped by the Magic Institute and told me most of the circumstances. It is quite a serious act. If Agathe-nim refuses this request then Ark will use his qualification as a full member of the Magic Institute to draw attention to this matter. Will Agathe-nim be okay if that happens? I'm talking about my Master. He does have some influence in Bristania."

Agathe's face turned white and terrified at the magician's words.

"After hearing about the injustices of Seirun workshop, I'm honestly ashamed that the Magic Institute traded with you. I'm a mere branch manager so I can't fathom how much anger my Master would feel."

Fury flickered in Rabent's eyes as he looked at Agathe with contempt.

"But if Agathe-nim accepts the polite request of Ark-nim who cares about the plight of the poor then I will bury this fact. I'll speak clearly. This isn't for Agathe-nim but because of my respect for Ark-nim who cares deeply about the poor."

Ark hadn't known it until now but only 20 users who received the title of 'Magic Institute Member' and no more than 500 NPCs. Therefore, the Master of the Magic Institute had a special interest and affection for those members. And this was the magic kingdom, where the Magic Institute's influence was stronger than anywhere else.

'Indeed, it is great that I know someone high ranking.'

Ark suddenly realized the importance of connections. Without even needing to go to the Master, Agathe completely gave up as soon as he heard Ark was a full member of the Magic Institute.

"Now, will you accept the conditions?"

Agathe started talking politely as he realized who was holding the sword. Ark gestured towards Rabent and thanked him for helping before continuing.

"What do you say? That is just the first condition."

"Then what's the second condition?"

"Pay me 2000 gold."

"W-what?"

"That's the fee and the costs of the ingredients for treating the residents of the slums. I'll tell you in advance, but don't think about accusing me of anything. Frankly, I think I should get 10,000 gold for

my efforts. But after consulting with Rabent, he told me that it really would be a problem if Seirun workshop collapses. Do you understand? This is the limit of what I know Seirun can pay.”

Ark replied with a wicked grin. No matter the situation, Ark still took any opportunity to do some business. He knew that Agathe would decisively refuse the initial 1000 gold. After twisting the sword in, Ark used the opportunity to get compensation for the poor as well as 2000 gold for himself. He had originally decided on 1000 gold. However, Seirun really couldn't be allowed to collapse so Ark managed to grasp the full range of Seirun's assets from Rabent. When Ark presented the offer of 1000 gold for the poor and 2000 for Ark, he had taken into full account the maximum amount Seirun could afford. Since even his assets were identified, Agathe declared defeat while sweating.

“Fine. I'll pay the compensation. But I can't pay the money immediately or Seirun really will collapse. Shouldn't you already know that if you grasped the full extent of my assets? I'll divide the compensation into 3 and pay every two months. If you don't accept that then I can't do anything.”

Ark smiled at Agathe's suggestion and nodded.

“That's not a bad idea. Of course you will write a contract. If you don't keep the agreement then the Magic Institute will seize Seirun and distribute its assets to the slum residents and me.”

“How cruel!”

“I don't want to hear those words from you.”

Ark said with a smirk. After threatening Agathe, he received two contracts. One for Ark and one for the poor residents.

“Now, you should work diligently to pay off your debts.”

Ark shook the contract and laughed, causing Agathe to grind his teeth. Just as Ark was turning around, he hesitated and said.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you the third condition!”

“W-what? I don’t have anything else to give!”

“Why are you so startled? Don’t worry. I’m not asking for more money. Just to borrow your face.”

“Borrow my face?”

Agathe asked in a puzzled voice. Ark lifted his finger and pulled Agathe’s face down. Once it reached a suitable height, he smiled and spoke to Ronnie.

“Ronnie it’s your turn.”

Ppak-!

“Ugh!”

Ronnie bent down ran into his face like a missile. Agathe fell to the ground with a bloody face. While Agathe rolled around holding his nose, Ark squatted down beside him and said.

“Is this really okay?”

Ronnie nodded with a stoic expression and replied.

“Yes.”

“Fine, if you are satisfied with that.”

Ark praised Ronnie and stroked his hair.

“Do you understand? Apart from your mother who almost died, none of the other residents were in a really severe state. Only your mother was in a serious situation. That is because she endured the symptoms and continued working even after being punished by the Karadaras claw. Even when it wasn’t possible to move, she clenched her teeth and endured it.”

Ark grabbed Ronnie’s shoulder tightly and emphasized his words.

“It was for you. So that you could be proud of her. And she is proud of you.”

“Ark hyung.”

Ronnie embraced Ark while crying. Ark comforted Ronnie and returned to the slums. The slum residents passed the written contract among them before Tarun opened his mouth.

“How did this.....?”

“It’s not a big deal. After visiting the Seirun workshop and telling them about your difficulties with the disease, Agathe willingly wrote the contract.”

Ark didn’t explain everything to the residents of the slums. Anyway, the poor would have to work for Seirun again if they wanted to make a living so it wouldn’t help if they knew everything about Agathe and became stubborn. After the whole incident was amicably resolved, the residents gathered around Ronnie.

“Meanwhile, I’m very sorry.”

“We acted like that around you without knowing the circumstances.....”

“You don’t have to say anything. I don’t expect you to forgive us.”

“It’s okay. My mother is healthy so that’s enough.”

Ronnie sniffled and replied in a cheerful voice. The watching Ark just laughed.

‘Yes, it is this boy.’

Ark couldn’t help laughing at his expression and nodded. In fact, Ark thought that Ronnie’s heart was too good after watching him with Agathe. If Ark was in the same situation then he would’ve halfway killed him already. However, Ark and Ronnie were different. The too mature child just head butted Agathe to relieve his anger and he easily forgave the residents of the slums who had bothered him. Ark was completely different.

‘Well, I got a share so this much is fine.’

Ark watched the residents of the slums and then stealthily withdrew. This time he started the work with really pure intentions. Although he extracted 2000 gold from Agathe, he had no intention of receiving

anything from the poor residents. That's why Ark sneaked out of the slums. After a while, Tarun looked around restlessly and ran up to Ark and grasped his hands.

"Wait, where are you going?"

"My business is already finished. I also have some other work to do....."

"Why are you saying such upsetting things? Do you think we're scum. You saved us. Not just from the sick but also from poverty. I realized a lot of things after seeing you. Treating the sick requires more than medical knowledge. You really are a true caretaker!"

There was a lively sound effect and an information window he never even considered appeared.

-The Miracle Nursing was successful.

Taking care of the sick doesn't just require Nursing. A true caretaker won't just think about the sick person but also the ones suffering apart from the sick. In some sense, the surrounding people are the sick are also suffering. They suffer because their loved one is sick and also from economic problems. Thanks to thinking beyond the pain of the sick to the people around them, you have reached enlightenment.

Not only did you save the sick person, but the people around them. The people of the slums were starving from the costs of medicine and their lives became more difficult until you helped them. Thus there is a deep gratitude in their hearts and they thank you for allowing them to live again.

In their minds, that is a true caretaker. It is a valuable compensation. You've instilled hope in the dozens of sick people and those around them, causing a true miracle. Thanks to this achievement, you have become a true paragon of a caretaker and have reached a higher level.

* Due to the success of miracle nursing, all stats increase by 2.

* The Affection stat increased by 40.

* Fame increased by 200.

*Alignment to good increased by 100

-The Miracle Nursing was a success and you have acquired the title 'Caretaker of the People.'

Your fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many patients.

* As a title bonus, all stats increase by 2.

* Fame increased by 200.

'Ha, this is also Nursing?' Ark looked at the information window with amazement.

'When I begged it didn't appear but now it appear after the situation is over..... This system is really irritating.'

But it really was fortunate after he thought about it. If Miracle Nursing happened then Magaret might've been rescued more quickly. However, he wouldn't have been able to help the other sick people. The slum residents would still be suffering and Ronnie would still be an outcast. Of course, Ark also wouldn't have received the perk of 2000 gold.

"Ark hyung, the village uncles want to cook a meal for hyung."

At that time, Ronnie came running. Therefore, Ark missed the chance to disappear beautifully like the main character of a movie. Although they weren't that well off, the slum residents wanted to thank their benefactor. They took out some beef jerky and a bottle of cheap booze. He was also surrounded by poor people who couldn't wash properly. But it wasn't bad. No, he was in a very good mood as he watched the festivities.

"Isn't this like a miracle? Being able to taste this beef jerky and drink alcohol is a miracle."

The people around him laughed as Ark tried to eat the really chewy beef jerky.

‘Huhuhu, now my work in Ciel is ended.’

Ark walked to the centre of Ciel and laughed. While he helped Ronnie for other reasons, he also received significant benefits from it.

Putting aside the 2000 gold he would receive from Agathe, doing repeatable quests for 2 days only gave him 300 fame. But helping the slum residents for 1 day gave him 2100 fame! In addition, he did some repeatable quests to get information and received 40 fame. But was that all? It was slightly unexpected but Miracle Nursing occurred after everything was finished and he received an additional 400 fame. That’s a total of 2,540 fame in just one day!

Thanks to that, Ark’s current fame was 8,565! Even if he learned the secret technique that cost 7000 fame, he would still have 1565 left! And Miracle Nursing also increased all his stats by 4. To receive this much rewards in a low level town! Whenever he received a title from Miracle Nursing, he always received a stat increase between 2~5. This time the bonus gained was 4 stats. That meant the ‘Caretaker of the People’ title was hard to get.

‘Anyway, I’ve spent 3 days in Ciel. The immortality pill I entrusted to the Magic Institute has around seven hours remaining. I can learn the secret technique, test its function and then return to check the performance of the pill. Now, shall I go learn the skill?’

Ark headed towards the martial arts dojo with high hopes.

‘Eh? What is this?’

Ark walked the streets of Ciel with an embarrassed expression. The atmosphere in Ciel was now subtly different from when he disconnected at dawn. In particular, the common scene of villagers looking at him and then whispering caught his eye. Although he felt uncomfortable, Ark ignored this and headed towards the dojo. When Ark entered, the hobbit immediately came running.

“Ohh, you have come. I’ve been waiting since I’ve heard the news.”

“The news?”

“You don’t know? You’re a celebrity in Ciel now. Didn’t you help the poor residents of the slums? Although everything is being kept secret, people know that the sickness was somehow related to Seirun workshop and you came and solved it.”

The hobbit approached and whispered.

“As a matter of fact, Agathe from the Seirun workshop is someone who blatantly shows off his wealth and looks down on people so nobody really likes him. So news as spread that you punished Agathe.”

‘Ah, then the residents.....’

Ark now knew why the Ciel residents were gawking at him. While Ark disconnected for 4 hours, that was 12 hours to an NPC. Ciel was right next to the slums, so in that time rumours had spread and reached the ears of the hobbit who looked at Ark and said.

“My eyes were definitely correct. You are a good person who doesn’t permit injustice so you are qualified to learn the founder’s secret technique. Finally the founder’s secret technique can be passed on!”

The hobbit praised Ark and gave him a thumbs up. The unreserved compliments turned his face slightly red. Although he blabbed on about ‘legend....,’ Ark disregarded it as he focused on learning the secret technique.

‘Now I can finally learn it.’

Ark approached the statue with an expectant face. Just like before, the statue rotated and a scroll appeared. A message window appeared in his head when he picked up the scroll.

-Thanks to ‘Pursuit of Truth,’ you have acquired a new lore skill.

<Lore skill that can be acquired: Entrusted Volumes>

* 7000 fame is necessary to learn this skill.

Do you want to learn it?

Did that question even need to be asked? How much trouble did he go through to learn this skill?

He accepted with a cheerful voice and the scroll unwound and rolled around Ark. At the same time, a three dimensional hobbit sitting cross legged appeared beside him. Then he murmured at an incredible fast pace like a tape had been forwarded x4. It was all to pass down the Entrusted volumes. After the simple even finished, the skill information window appeared.

-You have learnt a new skill thanks to Pursuit of Truth.

Entrusted Volumes (Special, Active): A long time ago, the hobbit master known for his kung fu skills used this training technique. This technique sacrifices a portion of health and makes it explode in a concentrated blast. The result of Entrusted Volumes depends on three different elements which will determine the various special abilities. So this Lore skill relies on luck. In a critical moment, the founder hobbit received a bad outcome and died as a result.

So the hobbit founder passed down this technique to the next generation.

<Lottery Attack standby time: 5 minutes

Health consumed: 500>

It is possible to use no matter what weapon is equipped.

‘Eh? What is this?’

Ark’s face distorted strangely at the information window. Ark had believed the skill would have extravagant destructive power after hearing the hobbit was legendary. But he didn’t see that when he read the skill information. Yet the specific attack and damage was determined by a lottery? In addition, the founder died because a bad result came out? Wasn’t this an unlucky secret technique? No, looking at the details it was different from kung fu. Ark thought it would be a martial arts technique thanks to the ‘Kwon’ character in the name. The ‘Kwon’ referred to a book, not a kung fu technique.

‘Did I go through all this effort to raise my fame just to learn a skill like this?’

His head turned white with anger.

“I thought he was a hero who used kung fu techniques?”

“Hero? What do you mean?”

The hobbit tilted his head to one side and asked with confusion.

“You’re the one who said it. Wasn’t the founder of the dojo a legendary kung fu master? Didn’t he defeat the devil with his kung fu?”

“What did you say? I never said that. I said that the founder was famous for his luck which could either have a good effect or be so unlucky that he was stabbed by the devil.”

“What? That’s not.....”

Ark was about to shout when he flinched and shut his mouth. Ark realised that he had been thinking about it the wrong way. Although Ark was now accustomed to the Bristania language, when he met the hobbit the first time his degree of understanding was only at 10. So he couldn’t understand the important parts and put together a scenario based on what he heard.

‘Oh my god, then.....’

That’s right. This happened because of the language communication problem. As expected, he should’ve spent money when needed. If he had bought the dictionary which gave him 100% understanding of the Bristania language then this wouldn’t have happened. Although he had built up all that fame during the last two days, he blew it all on a secret technique like this.

‘Oooh, my 7000 fame!’

Ark shook his head.

‘No, it’s still too early to be disappointed. I can’t judge the skill from the information window as it did require 7000 fame to learn. The skill

might turn out to be surprisingly useable.'

Ark considered this and exited the town.

Chweeek, chweeek! When he entered the surrounding forest, the Kobolds immediately flocked to him. They were level 200 kobold. They were a suitable opponent to test the power of the Entrusted Volumes skill.

"Okay, shall I begin? Entrusted Volumes!"

Ark ran up to the kobold and used the skill. Then there was an intense flash and something like a slot machine appeared. There were various icons drawn on the three divided slots. The icons slowly changed until with a tak, tak, tak, it stopped. Then a huge fanfare like sound effect was heard and the information window appeared.

<p>-The power of the Entrusted Volumes has been used.* Results</p> <p>【Properties】: <Pacifist> 【Alignment】: <Warrior> 【 Environment】: <Forest></p> <p>The attack method selected is the 'Byong Hammer.' (Squeaky toy hammer)</p> <p><The Byong Hammer effect will be applied to your weapon for 3 minutes></p>
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'Byong hammer? What is this?'

Ark looked at the information window with confusion. What kind of effect was it? Judging by the name along, he couldn't get a sense of its effect. But he didn't worry about it too much because he could soon know the effects. The skill was activated and the Gwisal's sword turned into a huge hammer.

"Hik, t-this is!"

It wasn't only the appearance that changed.

Byong byong byong byong!

Whenever a kobold was attacked by the Byong hammer, it would make a squeaky sound. It also only did 1 damage.

‘What, this absurd skill..... Who on earth would use such a skill?’

Ark started at the stupid hammer and muttered. What use would a Byong hammer be against monsters brandishing a sword or mace? It was really lucky that they were level 200 kobolds. If his sword turned into a hammer against high level monsters than he would be beaten to death.

‘No, I still don’t know all the uses of Entrusted Volume. There might be another kind of special effect. Yes, since it depended on luck there could be a good or bad effect. Maybe the Byong Hammer is the worst effect.’

He wanted to believe that. But Ark made a hopeless face the next time he used Entrusted Volumes. When the Byong hammer effect faded, he used it once again and received the ‘Braggart’ effect. Ark thought that the ‘Braggart’ effect was finally the right one when he saw the effects.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

It happened every time he swung his sword. A huge flash and deafening cry would occur. It was an absurd special effect!

‘Ohh, the damage seems to be incredibly high! As expected, this Entrusted Volumes skill is amazing! Just by looking, my damage seems to have risen incredibly high!’

Whenever he swung it, his sword flashed and roared! Ark looked at his sword with a proud expression. However, Ark saw that the kobolds were still composed from his attacks. Although there were really spectacular special effects, the kobolds actually only received 1 damage. Yes, just like the name the special effects were just a bluff to scare off the opponent. The skills after that weren’t much different from Byong hammer or Braggart. They were special effects that had no use in battle! Of course, some of the special effects could be used.

For 3 minutes, ‘Goblin Punch’ had a 50% chance of causing ‘Push’ or

‘Stun.’ The ‘Vile Thief’ was an effect which made monsters drop 1 copper and other similar effects. However, it was a lottery so none of the effects had a 100% chance of appearing. There was only a 10% chance of getting a good effect. In the case of the Goblin Punch, monsters were only pushed back 1~2 metres and Stun only lasted for 1~2 seconds. In addition, the ‘Vile Thief’ skill only applied to monsters who had money. And even if he gathered 100 copper, wasn’t that only 1 silver? That wasn’t the entire problem. Entrusted Volumes was a skill that consumed health instead of mana. It consumed 500 health with each use! If he used it three or four times then he would lose 1500~2000 health. After testing it a few times, he only had 1000 health. He could use it for fun against the kobolds. However, against a high levelled monster who knew what losing 500 health would do?

“Oh my god! This is an event skill!”

That was Ark’s conclusion after using Entrusted Volumes. Just like a profession, there were two types of skills. One was the typical production or combat related skill while the other was a unique skill created for events or fun. The Entrusted Volumes was the second type. Certainly Entrusted Volumes was quite an interesting skill. But that was it. It was interesting but no help in combat. Of course, there were helpful skills like Goblin Punch. However, the skill consumed so much of his health that it was not useable.

“What did I grind fame for.....”

Ark almost collapsed with disappointment. Anger welled up. But Ark didn’t consider one simple fact. Why the Entrusted Volumes skill was so shabby compared to the Ghost Knight Corps skill. If it required 1000 more fame to learn then was it just a simple event skill? Ark hadn’t discovered it yet but there was a secret hidden in the Entrusted Volumes skill! But Ark didn’t know that so he felt like crying.

Ddiririri ddiririri.

While Ark was busy being frustrated, he suddenly heard a familiar sound. It wasn’t a sound in the game. It was the telephone ringtone in reality.

“What, in the morning?”

Who would be calling my house in the morning? Ark was in a 100% upset mode so he petulantly disconnected from the unit.

“Hello.”

Ark said when there was suddenly a scream in his ear.

“Hyun-woo, there’s trouble.”

Start of a Long Festival

“Surround the assault troops and attack!”

“Wah ah ah ah!”

Hundreds of Nakujuk rushed forward at the command. Swords, spears and arrows flew like a shower towards a huge presence shaped like a giant lion. The golden lion radiated an overwhelming presence which reached over dozens of metres and covered the Nakujuk.

Kuaaang! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The golden lion roared and slammed its paw into the ground, causing the earth to tear and shake. Where the paw pressed against the ground, 10 Nakujuk were crushed instantly. It was an intense feeling of overwhelming power! But it couldn't exert its full power thanks to the number of opponents. Despite being stepped on and crushed, the Nakujuk continued attacking. Some brave Nakujuk climbed the body of the golden lion and slashed it with their spears. The golden lion's body was covered with a fur stronger than steel which functioned as its armour. The spears that hit only did 20~30 damage at most. However, there were hundreds of Nakujuk surrounding the lion. Even though each person only did 20~30 damage, it combined together to reach 5000~8000 damage. Thanks to that, the golden lion was in dreadful shape but it still hadn't lost its fighting spirit.

“It really is a bastard. It has already been 30 minutes since the battle started. In the meantime, more than 300000 have been damaged.....”

The man inside an armour with an eerie pattern embossed on it shook his head. Then an old man wearing a hood said.

“This is one of the guys who once drove back the forces of darkness. This much is natural.”

“The forces of darkness?”

“That’s right. Rather, it’s quite weak now compared to then. Maybe it’s because the dimension is different. You probably feel it too. Here mana recovers several times slower than on middle earth.”

“Come to think of it.....”

He abruptly stopped and confirmed his mana. He had previously used 50% of his mana. Usually it would take 15~20 minutes tops to recover. But now he had only recovered up to 75%. His mana recovery was two times slower than when he was on middle earth.

“That is because your source of mana is far away. From the moment that monster was born, its existence had breathed in mana. Although it isn’t much, that lessening of mana density caused its power to weaken. If this was middle earth where the mana density is doubled then I wouldn’t have dared fight it using this number of Nakujuk. We’re fortunate.”

The old man raised his hood and laughed. The old man covered in wrinkles looked a hundred years old! The old man holding a stick of bones was the archbishop of the Asyeosu church, Maseutyu. And the knight wearing the black armour was Alan.

“Then it would be many times stronger in middle earth?”

Alan stared at the gold lion with surprised eyes after hearing Maseutyu’s explanation. Currently Alan was in the dimension called ‘Scale.’ Two months before Alan came to Scale, he had met Maseutyu and changed jobs to a Ruin Knight after swearing revenge on Ark. In the meantime, he had been improving his capabilities because he acknowledged that Ark was a powerful opponent. After learning the special skills of a Ruin Knight, his confidence had increased and then the Red Man appeared in front of Alan. Then the Red Man told Alan some amazing secrets about New World. After revealing the secrets, the Red Man had asked for Alan’s help. After thinking for a while, Alan had accepted. Although the Red Man’s ultimate goal was unknown, he decided to cooperate since Ark was their enemy. The Red Man’s first command was to make the ‘Scale’ dimension rise to middle earth. In order for Alan to achieve this, the

Red Man created a 'spatial-temporal' tunnel to allow him to enter Scale.

Scale was originally an area which belong to middle earth. But when the Dark Lord triggered his final destruction magic, a number of areas controlled by the world trees sank. Just like Seutandal, if Scale's world tree was resurrected then it could return to middle world. In other words, Alan had to resurrect Scale's world tree! But Alan had bumped into a wall after he came to Scale.

'I never thought it would be so difficult to cause a different dimension to rise.....'

Alan hadn't known this until he heard Maseutyu's words, but Yggdrasil and Yuzuria were the weakest among the world trees. After the Dark Lord used his final destruction magic, their weaker magic meant that they received less damage and didn't sink that far. However, there was still an undisclosed number of world trees. The deity who created the world was called the father and mother of the world. But when talking about the game settings, this was actually related to the episodes. The 'Scale' dimension occurred in a later episode than Seutandal so the degree of difficulty was higher. The monsters in Scale had an average level of 400. Although it was rare, some level 500 monsters was also visible. But the problem was not the monsters. The biggest obstacle to Alan's resurrection of the world tree was the guardian of the world tree.

'It is a level 950 guardian monster, the Beast Dragon Baras!'

Although the name was Beast Dragon Baras, it took the shape of a golden lion. Even though he used 50 『Penetration』 scrolls, he barely found any information about it. But the Beast Dragon Baras was not a monster but a high ranking NPC. In other words, if Scale was recovered again then it would give quests to users instead of being an opponent. However, the NPCs reacted different to users depending on their alignment. Especially towards Alan who was a Ruin Knight.

-Foreigner, there is a dark smell coming from your body. There is an endless hatred towards the world within your body! I can't allow

a scoundrel like you with evil intentions to approach the world tree!

The Beast Dragon Baras became hostile as soon as he saw Alan. But Maseutyu knew the 'secret of the world' from the Red Man and already expected such a situation. When Alan had used the spatial-temporal tunnel to enter Scale, Maseutyu mobilized the Nakujuk who had sword allegiance to the Red Man. After the Beast Dragon saw through Alan's identity, they attacked without hesitation.

-These guys.....!

Kwaaaaah-!

While Alan was recalling the past, the Beast Dragon had opened some huge wings and flew away. It judged that there were too many Nakujuk and that a ground battle would be disadvantageous. But that was the moment Alan had been waiting for.

"Now! This is a chance for the strike force to stop his movements!"

Although shouted towards the demonic beasts hiding behind the steep mountain slope. Dozens of winged demonic beasts flew towards the Beast Dragon and threw a black net over it. Despite causing a storm and trying to move upwards, the Beast Dragon was immobile! It was tangled in the black net and fell to the ground.

-The Beast Dragon Baras was caught in the 'net of corruption!'

<The net will last for 10 minutes and consume 100 mana every 10 seconds. Movement speed and attack speed reduced by 30%>

-Ugh, what, what the, this net is sucking my power.....

When the Beast Dragon struggled and groaned, Maseutyu laughed and said.

"Huhuhuhu, have you already forgotten? Try to remember. We caught you hundreds of years ago using the 'net of corruption.' The curse magic weaved into the net was conceived during the 100 years of darkness."

-Curse magic weaved into the net you made! Then you

expected.....!

“You’re still slow. Yes, the descendant of the great darkness.”

-Oh my god..... The cursed prophecy.....

The Beast Dragon stumbled and groaned like it had received an impact. But after a brief moment, the Beast Dragon raised its head violently and roared.

-No, that prophecy can never come true! Even if this is decided by fate, this Beast Dragon Baras won’t let it come true! The existence of the darkness will eat everything up! The dark forces will die in this place!

The Beast Dragon then opened its mouth, causing the surrounding air to swirl and be sucked in. Alan and Beseutyu were 100 metres away and they were still sucked in by the destructive force! It was the worst weapon the Beast Dragon could use. The Beast Dragon had the attribute of the forest and the earth, and its breath melted everything it touched. While an elite level 950 NPC used it, it was impossible for the level 300 Nakujuk to resist. In addition, the wide area effect spread over hundreds of metres so there was nowhere for the Nakujuk to run. However, Maseutyu’s eyes lit up with delight.

“Now, Alan! Do it!”

Alan rushed forward like an arrow and shot off a black ball. The black ball emitted a sinister aura as it flew forward. Then it was drawn forward by the vortex and entered the Beast Dragon’s mouth. The Beast Dragon flinched and stepped backwards, before he screamed painfully and rolled across the ground.

“Cough, t-this is..... Kuaaaak!

“Hahaha, you fool! Yes, this is the dark energy from the Devil’s Jewel. Do I need to explain what the Devil’s Jewel is? Your power will soon be used to solve the problems of the great darkness!”

Maseutyu shouted with an insane light in his eyes. The Devil’s Jewel was what Alan had used to build up his power in the hideout. When he drove it into the body of a specific monster, it had the effect of

absorbing its power. Then the Ruin Knight was able to absorb the powers within the Devil's Jewel.

"Alan, it's time to stop that guy's breath!"

At Maseutyu's words, Alan took out his sword and started participating in the battle. When Alan appeared, the dark aura strengthened. It was the special effect of a Ruin Knight, 'Ruin Spirit.' Under the effect of Ruin Spirit, the eyes of the Nakujuk and demonic beasts turned mad. Thanks to Ruin Spirit, his troops only cared about death and destruction. It was a skill which increased attack and aggressiveness instead of defense! The Nakujuk and demonic beasts developed a murderous intent and ran enthusiastically up to the Beast Dragon.

-You! For the peace of mankind.....!

The Beast Dragon who only had 2% health left ran up to Alan. Alan was a villain who was threatening the peace of mankind after centuries.

"Berserk activate! Desire for Survival! Absolute Anger!"

Berserk was a skill which amplified hatred and increase attack by 5% for 20 minutes! Desire for Survival also increased defense by 50% for 20 minutes! Both of these weren't a Ruin Knight's skills. It was the skill option attached to the 'Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred' and 'Steel Shield of Despair' items that Ark sold him. Alan was also wearing the 'Helmet of Hatred' which reflected all attacks by 30% so he attacked recklessly. When the three options were activated, Alan was covered in a dark red special effect which rendered his body not visible. It was the set effect of equipping three items with hatred!

".....Three effects at the same time is not a joke."

Alan looked with satisfaction at the effect of the overlapping skills. However, the opponent was an elite level 950 NPC! Just a swipe from the Beast Dragon's claw decreased his health by 40%. However there were dozens of demonic monsters so his health recovered instantly using 'Touch of Darkness.' When Alan judged that

the degree of damage and recovery was balanced than he approached the Beast Dragon and used various skills.

“The lesser demon skill ‘Disruption,’ sword skill ‘Frenzied Sword Dance’!”

He used all the skills he learn via the Devil’s Jewel without stopping. The hundreds of Nakujuk and demonic monsters continued the battle that had lasted for over 30 minutes, and the Beast Dragon’s 2% health gradually fell. After the Beast Dragon’s body was torn to pieces, Alan’s sword stole its last breath and it collapsed.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

When the Beast Dragon collapsed, Alan gained 9 levels at once. It wasn’t only Alan. The cross signs appeared over the heads of the remaining Nakujuk and demonic beasts and they all gained 9 levels. The experience from the level 950 Beast Dragon NPC was enormous as it was enough to raise the level of all Nakujuk and demonic monsters who participated in the battle.

“Phew, he really is a strong bastard.”

Alan looked at his armour which became ragged after only a few minutes and sighed. But despite the difficulty, there was no other price. As well as experience, the Beast Dragon also dropped a few rare items. But first Maseutyu took out the Devil’s Jewel which had absorbed the power of the Beast Dragon.

“It was that difficult when it was already weak. This is just to resurrect the Scale world tree so the guardians in the future will be even more difficult. But you don’t have to worry. These guys are strong but you will also become stronger. Although the amount of power the Devil’s Jewel can absorb is limited, you will become much stronger with the essence of the guardian. This is the reason why he entrusted this to you.”

“.....But will the other side be okay?”

Alan asked as he took the Devil's Jewel. Maseutyu tilted his head to one side and asked.

“The other side?”

“The Red Man. We came with a large group of Nakujuk and somehow defeated the guardian but didn't he go alone to a different dimension? Although there are a number of world trees, wouldn't they all have guardians defending it?”

Maseutyu chuckled and answered Alan's question.

“Heh, you don't have to worry about him. Don't you remember the prophecy the Beast Dragon previously spoke about? Before the Dark Lord fell, he left a cursed prophecy. And he is the 'Executor' who will carry out that prophecy! Of course his body is still incomplete but he has already gained the dark heritage, the aerial fortress Rwigenberg. No, I imagine that he could accomplish the goal even without the Rwigenberg.”

Maseutyu's eyes were filled with the light of respect. For the dark NPC to trust the Red Man, what was his true identity? Alan thought for a bit and asked again.

“Then why didn't that person resurrect the other world tree?”

“Until now, he still hasn't completely awakened his full abilities. There is also another reason. If he visited now than he could defeat the guardian and resurrect Scale's world tree. But he previously needed the Sacred Branch in order to resurrect Seutandal's world tree Yuzuria. And that was an artifact which sprouted from the world tree Yggdrasil. So he tried to revive Yuzuria, the most complicated one first.”

“But wasn't Ark the one who resurrected it?”

“That's because he made it happen.”

Alan's forehead wrinkled at Maseutyu's answer. Then Ark had just been used by the Red Man in that video? Complicated problems

rose in Alan's chest at the thought. Ark was Alan's arch rival. He was an enemy that Alan would step on and make miserable one day! Ark's misfortune made Alan happy. However, he felt something strange at the thought of Ark being used by the Red Man.

'The person who will push Ark into despair is me. I don't approve of others doing it!'

"Don't worry. He knows about your goal. If you follow him than your goal will definitely come true."

Maseutyu said after he guess Alan's real intention.

".....What exactly is the purpose of the Red Man?"

Alan asked with an expression that indicated he couldn't understand. He was someone who knew the unknown secrets of New World! At first, Alan had thought he was an employee of Global Exos like Ark. However, he had some misgivings about that thought. There were some level 700 monsters wandering around Scale. Meanwhile, the monsters in Seutandal were only level 300. And the current average level of users in New World was 250-300. When considering that point, it would take a long time for Scale to rise. It was a design of the game system since users wouldn't be able to deal with monsters in Scale if it rose.

In New World, <Episode III> was triggered when Seutandal rose so Scale was supposed to be a part of <Episode V~VI>. Even so, the Red Man was using a shortcut by rushing the resurrection of the world tree.

What reason would an employee of Global Exos have to do such a thing? In addition, the NPCs would not just blindly follow anyone. However, Maseutyu's answer was always evasive whenever Alan asked.

"You just have to follow him. If you are loyal to him then you will receive limitless glory that you can't even imagine."

'It really doesn't matter who he is.'

Alan nodded. Anyway, from the moment Alan changed into a Ruin Knight he forgot all thoughts about being an ordinary user. No, he

didn't want to go back even if he could. Alan had already seen a small part of the Red Man's knowledge and abilities. According to Maseutyu, he would rise to the top spot of New World if he followed the Red Man. In addition, Alan's goal wasn't to play the game mediocrely. It was only to get revenge on Ark! The moment the task was completed, Alan could rise to the top and wait patiently to kill Ark.

'The Red Man has that type of strength and power!'

"Ah, is the prepared work going well?"

Maseutyu seemed to suddenly remember something and asked.

"Yes, a friend of mine is getting things ready on middle earth."

"I don't want to meddle but that power will definitely be useful. A flimsy power is better than nothing."

"I know."

The work Alan was preparing was a guild called 'Avenger' that Andel was organizing. Currently, Andel had already organized over 500 top class users that were over level 300. Although Andel wasn't over level 200, he was able to recruit that many users because of 'money.' Despite being a game, money still exerted an incredible power. Although Andel was pitiful and weak, he knew better than anyone how to use money. Alan became filled with self-confidence and Maseutyu nodded with a satisfied look.

"If you speak like that then I'll believe you. But it will be a problem if you run out of funds. The items dropped from the Beast Dragon should help that."

"Thank you."

"Now we should depart. There are still plenty of mountains we have to go over in order to resurrect the world trees. Will you be slower than that person who was by himself?"

"I understand."

Alan and Maseutyu ordered their troops and moved to the next

place. However, it wasn't the guardian that he would be meeting that was on Alan's mind.

'Just wait Ark! Your days are numbered! Scale will soon rise and the preparations to hold a festival for those who ignored me will begin. A festival of blood.....!'

Pang, pang, pang, pang!

The gorgeous fireworks exploded in the night sky. It was the height of summer and the beach town Bosaga was full of excitement about the start of the festival. Bosaga was a city adjacent to the Bristania harbour and there were no special monsters in the vicinity. Thanks to the wide sandy beach and stretches of ocean, there were tourists gathered from all over the place during summer. So Bosaga always held a festival for tourists during this season. When the festival was at its peak, Bosaga was a melting pot of excitement. Various flags of every country fluttered at appropriate distances. The acrobats and musicians marched down the street and showed their skills. Various rides and commotions were heard from the central plaza. It was some rides, street performances and colourful parades that were rarely seen in reality! Thanks to that, there was no place people could step in Bosaga without running into tourists.

Chweeeek!

The festival was at its full peak in Bosaga. The fireworks flashed across the sky like meteors. Then a flash struck the soaring tower in the sky which belonged to the Magic Institute. The flash sparked and was drawn into the tower. The sparks were collected by a transmitter unit inside the tower and formed particles of light. The particles of light moved inside a glass tube and magic was sprinkled. Then like sand falling inside an hourglass, the particles of light gradually formed a person. The user wearing unusual leather armour was Ark.

"Welcome to the Bosaga Festival!"

As soon as Ark's body was full restored, a group of people holding

bouquets flocked around him. They were residents waiting to welcome tourists who used the Letter Movement. However, Ark just pushed past the people with a dreadful expression and ran into a corner.

“G-get out of the way! Ugh, eek!”

He leaned against the wall and vomited as it felt like his internal organs were being twisted.

‘Damn, I should’ve known considering it is the temporary Letter Movement.....’

In order to get to Bosaga, Ark had to quickly move from the Ciel Magic Institute Branch to Bosaga’s. Since the Letter Movement system was mainly built on the west harbour, Bosaga village hadn’t had one. However, the Lord of Bosaga had asked for permission to temporarily install the Letter Movement for the duration of the festival. It wasn’t surprising that he felt like vomiting!

“It is ten times more awful than when I used the Letter Movement of Jackson! Urgh!”

It was just a temporary install. Therefore it 100% ignored the user’s comfort and safety! Thanks to that, Ark had to go back and forth between hell for over 5 minutes.

-You have begun to feel dizzy.

<The symptoms of dizziness and vomiting will continue for 30 minutes. Rest is recommended>

What a ridiculous situation.

‘I’m never using the Letter Movement system again!’

Yet he willingly submitted to the risk because he had a reason to get to Bosaga quickly. Thanks to his method of using Letter Movement, he was able to arrive in Bosaga after only 5 minutes. After only vomiting gastric fluid, Ark shouted.

“Radun, give me Buksil’s eyeball!”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

After Radun spat out the eyeball, Ark shouted at it.

“Buksil, can you hear me? Buksil, answer me!”

“Ya, eh? A-Ark-nim!”

After being shaken sharply a few times, the eyeball suddenly focused. The eyeball looked at Ark with a stupid expression and then started clamouring.

“Ark-nim is here..... Atch! R-right now.....ah!”

“I already know the situation! There’s no time to speak so just answer me! Where are you now?”

“I’m not sure. I’m too preoccupied.....”

“Idiot, look around at the area. Isn’t there something that should be recognizable from a far place?”

Ark interrupted Buksil’s words and shouted. Yes, Ark had used the Letter Movement to quickly get to Bosaga because he knew the situation involving Buksil. Ark knew about the situation in Bosaga thanks to a phone call 10 minutes ago. The person who called in the morning was Lee Myung-ryong.

“It’s me Hyun-woo. The situation is urgent! I can’t speak for long because I had to sneak away from the unit to call you while playing New World!”

Lee Myung-ryong.....Isyuram quickly explained the situation. While explaining the infiltration investigation, Isyuram heard that Ark was in a south-western coastal city. Ark was supposed to make contact with Buksil soon and Buksil was supposed to move there.

‘I have to lead the thieves to another place.’

While thinking this, he remembered the flyer from the harbour and mentioned it to the thieves.

“I heard some rumours about the festival so I watch a video and accidentally saw someone looking like a pig among the tourists!”

“What? Really?”

“There’s no doubt. It is impossible not to recognize the pig like fellow.”

So 30 of the thieves headed towards Bosaga at Isyuram’s words. Isyuram used various reasons to move the bandit group away from southwest region. Then.....Buksil unexpectedly showed up in Bosaga.

“Ohhh, it really is him! As expected from the friend of my heart!”

Garam cheered and praised him but Isyuram wasn’t happy. From then on, dozens of thieves started chasing Buksil. This was the reason why Ark submitted to motion sickness through Letter Movement.

‘Even though Teacher-nim has infiltrated them, he has no choice but to appear to be helpful. Fortunately Baekgu is there so Buksil won’t be caught easily, but they can’t possibly escape from dozens of thieves. After I help Buksil escape, I’ll have to protect the memory crystal.’

Just as Ark was thinking this, the eyeball’s scream was heard once again.

“Huk huk huk, there is a big ferris wheel near me! Hik!”

“Ferris wheel? I see it. I’ll move to that area soon so just hold on!”

“U-understood. Ack, Baekgu!”

The eyeball screamed non-stop so it was possible to imagine the situation. Ark ran away from the Magic Institute immediately. And.....he stopped and sucked in a deep breath.

“Huk, what is this?”

A sea of black could be seen in front of the Magic Institute. It was morning in reality but in New World it was night time. However, it didn’t simply look black. The only thing visible was the huge crowd present at the festival. He had heard about the Bosaga festival when leaving Ciel but it really transcended imagination. There were various

rides in the central plaza, small street performances all over the place and tourists swarmed the taverns.

“Dammit, how will I find him in a place like this? Ah, is that the ferris wheel?”

He discovered the ride in the central plaza.

“This is no time to be stuck here, Dark Dance!”

Ark used Dark Dance to broke through the crowd like a ghost until he reached the central plaza. Bosaga was more like a city than a village. Fortunately, the central plaza wasn't far from the Magic Institute and he reached the ferris wheel after 10 minutes of using Dark Dance. But the problem was after he arrived. There were even more crowds gathered around the ferris wheel. He had to find a him. But.....finding one person was like looking for a needle in a desert.

“Summon Demon, Dedric!”

“You called, Master?” Eh? A festival!”

Racard exclaimed with joy as he saw the dazzling sights.

“I didn't call you here to play! Use satellite mode to look for Buksil!”

“Sheesh, so it's like that..... I understand.”

Racard grunted and turned into a bat before trying to fly away. Racard was suddenly discovered by children and they swarmed around him and tugged at Racard.

“Aw, a bat!”

“It is a bat!”

“Hahaha, how marvellous. Bat, come over here!”

“Get away you rude things! I'm not a bat but a great vampire..... Ouch! Tickle, it tickles! Ugh, ouch! These damn kids..... Ouch!”

“Hahaha, this is great! If I press its stomach then it talks.”

“Fun, how fun! Let's play with it!”

The children grabbed his wings and just laughed as Racard wriggled. Ark was impatient and was about to approach the children.

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

Then he heard Buksil’s voice again. It was a vivid voice coming from near him, not the eyeball. Ark hurriedly stopped and turned towards the voice. But no matter how he looked, he couldn’t find Buksil. Then he saw a big dog running and jumping among the rides. And a round object that resembled a balloon jumped up and waved its hand.

“Over here, here!”

‘What the? That guy.....?’

Ark stared at the round object with an astounded expression. The rounded balloon shaped person was Buksil. He was wearing polka dot clothes with a variety of ribbons hanging off him. In addition, he was wearing speckled makeup under his hat. It was the same costume that clowns wore. Buksil and Baekgu were wearing a couple clown look.

‘He seems to have gotten a bit heavier.’

While Ark have been suffering in Ciel, Buksil and Baekgu had been enjoying the festival. In order to protect Buksil, Ark had rushed and paid the expensive letter movement fee so he felt anger well up at the sight.

‘Damn, if it wasn’t for the memory crystal.....’

At that time, he saw mobs of thieves behind Buksil and Baekgu.

“Ah, Ark-nim, hik!”

‘The thieves! To hold a sword so openly in a village.....’

Usually taking out swords in a village would be punished by the guards. Even if there weren’t guards present, the eyes of users and NPCs would be concentrated on them. But there were people dressed up and running round holding toy knives in the festival. So there wasn’t anybody who thought that the thieves were strange for holding swords. The thieves were even holding masks. If nobody died from a battle then the guards wouldn’t move.

‘Dammit, this is bad.’

Ark broke through the crowd and ran towards Buksil.

“M-Master, what are you doing? Ouch, these damn guys..... Ouch!”

Racard who was caught by the children screamed from behind him and Ark didn’t have time to worry about that. By overusing Dark Dance, he was able to penetrate the crowd and got near Buksil. Meanwhile, Buksil and Baekgu ran between people while sweating. They were chased by the bandit group.

“Okay, I can reach them before the thieves catch up. Summon Demon, Razak!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

“Take the defense position and prepare for the enemy’s attack!”

Ark spread a safety net and made a defense camp with Razak. Now the top priority was to help Buksil escape. Even if he joined Buksil, it would be difficult to escape when surrounded by dozens of thieves. Especially with the enormous crowds gathered in the vicinity. Until Ark, the thieves wouldn’t care about other users and NPCs and would attack without care. Fighting a battle in a place like this would be absolutely disadvantageous. That was the reason why Ark created a safety net where only three people could pass. Ark would block the entrance after Buksil and Baekgu arrived. Although there were 30 thieves, only 2~3 people could enter through the entrance. If he used the terrain then he might be able to be time for Buksil to escape to a safe place. Even if the guards would move when the battle fully began, it would be difficult with the thieves chasing directly. Ark planned a strategy and raised his voice.

“Buksil, over here! You have to come over here!”

“Yes. U-understood. Baekgu!”

At Buksil’s order, Baekgu leaped over some obstacles and run towards Ark.

‘That’s it! There’s enough time to get that back from Buksil.....’

Ark took out his sword and watched as Buksil and Baekgu arrived.

“Ark-nim, I’m saved……. Huh? Huh huh huh huh? Waaaaaahhhhhhh!”

“Huk, Master!”

Buksil who had been running with tears in his eyes when he suddenly dangled from something. Had the thieves caught up to him? Buksil shrank with fear and struggled. Baekgu realised too late and hit the emergency brakes before running back to Baekgu. Then Buksil was dragged sideways as the thing he was stuck to moved at an extraordinary speed.

“What, what the?”

Ark and the chasing thieves just stared simultaneously with a dumb expression. They were looking at a small wagon moving along the rails spread all around Bosaga at a tremendous rate. What on earth was this? Ark looked around with confusion until he saw a big sign.

【High Speed Barrel Train!】

An ambitious ride prepared by the Bosaga festival committ

Able to travel at 300 kilometres per hour thanks to the magical engine, it is Bosaga’s state of the art magic carriage racing! With 100% safety equipment, it is possible to enjoy the exhilarating sense of speed!

<Fee to ride: 1 gold>

* Because the vehicle is moving at 300 kilometres per hour, it is dangerous to go on the rail.

It was the information on the sign next to the safety net. Buksil’s clothes had been caught on the carriage and he disappeared as it moved. In addition, the place Buksil was caught was the rear of the magic carriages.

Therefore Baekgu and Buksil had become a part of the ride and moved along the rails at 300 kilometres per hour.

“Aaaaaaaah, ssssave meeeeeeee!”

“Masterrrrrrrr!”

“Dammit, we had almost caught up!”

“We can’t miss him, get out of the way!”

The thieves who had just missed Buksil and pushed users out of the way before taking a magic carriage. When a coin was inserted into the slot, they started to chase after Buksil at an extravagant speed.

“Dammit! Razak, transform!”

It wasn’t possible for Ark to just stay there. After Razak transformed into a blade, he pushed people out of the way and took the available magic carriage. The people waiting in line cursed but he had no time to pay attention to public morals. After inserting 1 gold, the carriage rumbled and departed.

Pepepepeng, pepepepeng!

Fireworks were still displayed in the night sky.

The Carnival (I)

Kwaaaaaaah-!

300 km per hour!

The carriage moved on the rail so quickly that the surrounding landscape was distorted.【High Speed Barrel Train】was a ride where the rail structure 8 metres high spread all through Bosaga village. By angling against the guard rail, the carriage was about to be freely controlled like a racing game. It was also safe for carriages to collide because the bumpers had special magic absorption coating. It was quite an interesting ride so many people enjoyed it. However, there was no time to be enjoying the ride.

Buaaaang, kiiiiik! Buaaaang, kiiiiik!

Ark exerted 120% of the skill seen in TV games and continuously drifted around the corners. Then he saw the carriages containing the thieves in front of him entered a cave.

‘There must be some way to overtake Buksil and reduce the number of thieves!’

Ark handled the carriage with one hand and brandished his sword as he approached the enemy. The Saw blade stretched out like a whip and reeled around one of the robbers.

“Eh, what, what the? Aaaaack!”

The thief struggled to untie the Saw blade from around the neck. But it was going at 300 meters per hour. The carriage was made with the latest techniques and with the speed it was going at, even one pebble could overturn it. The thief lost control of the steering wheel and the magic carriage ended up smashed against a wall. While the carriage guaranteed 100% safety, the airbag that appeared still did damage to warriors. However, the thief flew into the sky when the carriage was smashed.

‘Okay. I’ve made one guy retire..... I’ll take care of them one by one!’

Ark laughed and gripped the handle tightly.

“Oh, t-that guy.....?”

“He was the one who interfered that time. He’s trying to interfere again!”

“Number 5, number 6, block that fellow!”

The thieves had discovered Ark so two of them regulated their speed and approached him. They surrounded Ark on both sides and fired random magic. It was a 300 km per hour death race. Isyuram was also mixed in with the group of thieves chasing Buksil. He had no choice but to act like he was with the thieves. While rounding the corner, he caught sight of Ark being surrounded by two carts and bit his lips with a worried expression. Of course, he knew that Ark could handle the thieves. But it was different fighting while riding a magic carriage going 300 km per hour. In that situation, driving skills was more important than actual combat power.

“This is bad, that Ark guy, he has no driving license.....”

With Ark occupied, it was only a matter of time until the bandit group caught up with Buksil. If Buksil was caught then the memory crystal would be gone.

Kiiiiik, kwa kwang, kiiiiik, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

But Isyuram’s worry was needless. Ark used extravagant handling and pedal techniques to drift and avoid the overflowing magic. He used exquisite skill to rotate the carriage and counterattacked with the Saw blade. Isyuram was worried because Ark had been too busy to get his driver’s license. On the other hand, the thieves all had driving licenses and usually drove a lot. When thinking about it, it was natural for Ark to be pushed back. But there was something Isyuram didn’t know. Although Ark had never tried to drive, he had played racing games like Grand Turismo and Ridge Racer. Driving at this speed transcending common sense and just used the acrobatic design of the game. He didn’t understand driving in reality,

but Ark was like a fish in water while driving at 300 km per hour in the game. Ark's cart slid all over the rails and avoided the flying magic. However, it wasn't easy to counterattack with the Saw blade while going at 300 km per hour.

"Sheesh, that rat bastard! Hey, block the front!"

When the magic didn't work, the magician grinded his teeth together and shouted. Then a magic carriage accelerated suddenly and stopped in front of Ark. While the car in front slowed down, the one behind accelerated with the intention of trapping Ark in the middle.

"Now! Surround that fellow and break him!"

Buaaang!

The magic engine heated as the surrounding magic carriages narrowed their distance. At that moment, Ark stepped on the brake and instantly jumped up from the driver's seat.

"Huh? What, what the? Waaahhh!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Ark's magic carriage stopped and suddenly collided with those of the magicians. Ark then twisted his Saw blade and it closed around the bumper of the magic carriage in front.

"Radun, shield!"

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Just before Ark's foot touched the ground! Radun spat out a shield. Ark set his good on the handle of the shield while in mid-air and landed on the ground. The Saw blade then wrapped around a magic carriage that was still going at 300 km per hour. After it wound around the bump, he used the shield to do something similar to water skiing. Sparks flew from the surface of the shield as it began to slide along the rails.

"Oh, t-that guy.....!"

After seeing Ark hanging from his bumper, a thief twisted the

steering wheel. The thief's ulterior motive was to make Ark crash into the guard rail. When the magic carriage veered sharply, Ark flew towards the guard rail thanks to the inertia. The moment it looked like Ark was going to hit the guard rail at 300 km per hour, he once again switched to the sword.

“Razak, transform back into a sword!”

The whip returned to a blade and Ark was drawn forward like an elastic band.

“Take this!”

Ark flew towards the back of the thief sitting in the driver's seat. The thief screamed and fell down. His shield had slammed into the back of the head and caused 'Stun.' When the driver lost consciousness, the magic carriage rotated around. Ark quickly unlocked the thief's seat belt and kicked him out.

"Y-you bastarrrrrrrrrd-!"

The thief yelled with distress as he fell from the magic carriage and rolled along the rail. After Ark took over the driver's seat, he once again started pursuing the bandit group again. Ark took care of three thieves and instantly caught up, making the bandit group murmur.

“What a monster like fellow!”

“Is he making a movie by himself?”

“Who on earth is he?”

“What an annoyance. Number 7, 8, 9, stop him!”

Then the thief at the head of the group chasing Buksil burst out.

“Ah, o-over there!”

The thief pointed to the rail ahead of him. When the cave ended was a 90 degree corner. The magic carriage in front was rotating rapidly and Buksil's clothes who had been caught was torn to pieces. At the same time, Buksil and Baekgu were thrown towards the guard rail thanks to inertia and centrifugal force.

“Kweeeeeeeek-!”

The pig screamed as he fell over the rail. The rails which connected outside the cave were 30 metres off the ground. At this rate, the falling Buksil and Baekgu would be squashed and turned into a broken set of pork and dog meat. However, Buksil had a very strange luck.

Puong, puong!

There was a lake located in Bosaga village that was underneath the rails where he fell. Thanks to that, Buksil and Baekgu were able to avoid becoming flattened meat. After being submerged, Buksil and Baekgu finally resurfaced after a while. However, they couldn't afford to sigh with relief.

“That pig, he fell into the lake!”

“We can't lose him! Everybody just jump straight down to the lake.

The determined thieves rushed straight at the guardrail, breaking it and falling down to the lake. As dozens of magic carriages fell into the lake, the users riding the duck boat cried out with distress. Buksil and Baekgu also screamed.

“Hik, why do they want to kill me so much?”

“Master, hold on tight!”

Buksil held on to Baekgu who started dog paddling and ran away.

“Damn, those bastards..... Get out of the way!”

The thieves threw away the magic carriage and seized a nearby duck boat. Thanks to that, the peaceful lake where the duck boats floated suddenly became chaos.

“Get out of the way, get out of the way! Kill everybody who gets in the way!”

Kirik, kirik, quack quack quack! Kirik, kirik, quack quack quack!

The bandit group stepped on the pedal and the duck boat quacked and rushed forward. So dozens of duck boats were chasing after a

pig riding on a dog. However, the situation would be very serious if Buksil was caught so Ark couldn't find it very comedic.

'Damn, there really are various methods.'

He really didn't want to do it. But once again, Ark didn't have a choice. Ark stepped on the accelerator pedal and rushed through the guard rail that the thieves broke. The magic carriage fell over 30 metres into the lake. Ark quickly released his seat belt and climbed into the water. After looking around, he saw dozens of empty duck boats floating freely. Buksil riding Baekgu had escaped from the lake so the bandit group had also exited.

"Buksil, where are you now?"

"I'm not sure. I just passed by a place with a stone gargoyle..... Hiik!"

'A place with a stone gargoyle?'

Ark quickly scanned around the lake. Then he saw a huge statue slowly moving that was gathering a brilliant light. It seemed like a moving parade where dozens of wagons were holding festival icons. However, there was a large crowd as it was one of the most popular festival activities and he couldn't see Buksil at all.

"Dammit, trying to find him..... Racard, what are you doing?"

Ark suddenly shouted through the remote communication and Racard petulantly replied.

"Damn, why are you yelling at me? Do you know how much I suffered after Master didn't save me? Anyway, I've been looking for Buksil after leaving the children. Where is Master?"

"At the lake in the centre of the village. No, can you see a huge statue?"

"Statue? The strange one being carried by carts?"

'Yes. Buksil is around there so you move there and search for him.'

Ark ran away from the lake while giving the order to Racard. He

used Dark Dance to navigate around the crowds and headed towards the parade.

“Oh, good!”

The huge figure lowered his wine cup with a happy expression. Then a Elf female looked at the barbecue with sour eyes and said.

“Hey, this is a festival right? Why does it look like you are enjoying it more?”

“Who wouldn’t like the festival? The alcohol is good. Hey, one more drink over here!”

The huge man shook his wine cup and shouted. The elf female pouted and said bluntly.

“Aren’t you drinking too much?”

“What? I’ve only drank five cups.”

“Isn’t that five servings of alcohol? Does your stomach contain a ghost that drinks alcohol?”

“Well how much barbecue did you eat? You already ate one pig.”

“You fool, don’t you know the difficulties of a woman who seeks beauty? This isn’t food, it is medicine, medicine. I had to diet because of the stress that piled up every day. If I can’t eat as much as I want in New World then I’ll go on a rampage. This is like a stress relieving pill.”

“But isn’t that pig too big? I don’t want to be involved with a woman who can eat one whole pig. You know that I’m a vegetarian.”

“W-who said that we were involved?”

The female elf’s face turned red and she kicked the man’s thick belly.

“Ouch, what the? Aren’t we involved?”

“You must hate living. Talking such nonsense, do you have a suicide

note written?”

“Kikiki, you must be shy..... Ouch, got it, I understand. Huh? T-that.....?”

The playful man shouted winced and jumped up.

“What is it? What the?”

The female elf followed his gaze with surprise. But the man just shook his head without looking away. He had seen a dog with silver fur running among the crowd. The man was spellbound by the sight of the dog and muttered.

“To be able to see such a wonderful dog in a place like this! The gloss of that silver fur flying in the wind and the sleek muscles of the dignified body. Who is its owner? I don’t know but it clearly as an excellent pedigree! Is the owner the pig riding it? Ohhh, I’m envious. That is my dream dog. Furthermore, it is a dog that can carry people on its back! Damn, how can I get a dog like that?”

“Hah, you’re being foolish again. Dream dog? Do you wake up dreaming of a dog? At any rate, it’ll just be a problem for you. What good is such a messy animal? You stupid dog otaku! And why do you want another dog? You’re already raising ten at home.”

The female elf scowled and shot the man a glare. Then the man looked offended.

“What was that? Don’t you also have a cat at your house?”

“Yes, I’m raising one. One cat. This is a normal standard. Raising one or two is normal for a dog otaku. But you’re raising ten. Is that normal?”

“Hah, you really don’t understand. It is a dog. It is a pet which deserves love. For a cat to be compared to it is ridiculous. Have you seen the famous art masterpiece ‘the Homeless Angel? It is a pitiful looking child hugging a big white dog..... Oohhhh, Nero.....no, was it the Flanders’ dog?”

The huge man was moved to tears and exclaimed loudly.

“Apart from the ‘Homeless Angel,’ dogs also appear in various movies and cartoons. Isn’t that proof that it is an existence that is loved worldwide? On the other hand, cats are mainly seen next to gloomy witches. I don’t understand how you can raise such a gloomy animal in your house.”

“W-witch? Are you saying I’m a witch?”

“.....I didn’t exactly say that. You’re a magician. Isn’t a female magician a witch?”

“Is that an otaku language that only you know? Stop talking like that!”

“Ah, I’m going crazy. The dog is fine, the dog! Eh, what the? That pair!”

The man suddenly frowned and cursed. The female elf who was about to throw an angry punch flinched and studied the man’s face.

“What, what the? R-really.....you’re angry?”

“Eh? Ah, I’m sorry. That’s not it.....eh? T-those guys!”

The man’s embarrassed expression once again became angry. The female elf realized the reason why the man was so angry too late. The man wasn’t looking at the silver dog just then. Instead, some fellows wearing masks were surrounding the dog and hitting it. The dog was standing in front of its pig owner and protecting him despite its many wounds.

“Those bastards dare to beat up a cool dog like him.....!”

The man ground his teeth together and pulled out his bayonet. The female elf spoke with an annoyed look.

“Wait a minute. We don’t know what the situation is.”

“Why do I need to know? That dog is loyal to its owner. He must be a good person. Anyone who can raise a dog like that is not a bad person. And the ones attacking the dog are the bad guys! I’ve decided!”

Wasn't that an assertion tied closely to bias? But the man had no doubts that they were villains and ran towards them with his bayonet out.

"Ah, those guys, it's already over for them."

The female elf looked at the villains with compassionate eyes. She knew that the man had a severe dog mania. He had never seen anyone who loved dogs so much. No matter how angry he was, he would smile and stroke a dog if he saw it. These days he was also raising dogs so she was sincerely worried. Didn't he also go to an animal hospital to play with the dogs? Anyway, those dog otaku tendencies were also applied to the game. No, those tendencies were even further expanded because of the game. No matter how rare the item in front of him, he would leave it to chase after rabbits and squirrels.

"That a fool like that is one of the top 5 warriors in Bristania....."

The female elf sighed and mumbled. While the man was indeed skilled, he had a particularly severe love for animals. It's because of his love for animals that he switched to the druid profession 'Beast Master.' Beast Master! Yes, the man and female elf arguing about the cat and dog was Bread and Redian.

"Although is a pretty good guy, he becomes quite strange when it comes to dogs."

Redian complained with pouted lips. She initially knew Bread from New World's beta test, where they were the last two remaining from the battle royale. She encountered Bread right before the beta test ended and he was the only opponent she couldn't win or lose against. After the game was commercialized, they frequently kept in touch and hunted together by chance until they became quite close. In fact, Bread was a pioneer who earned quite a lot of respect from other users. Even though he normally looked quite foolish, he completely changed when battling. As the leader of a party, he showed a surprising ability to take charge and he always took the most dangerous roles. He would also run to help colleagues without any concern about the danger. So word spread among the pioneers that 'Bread is the one to capture a dungeon with.' It was natural for Redian who was constantly around him to get a good impression of

Bread. She also realized that Bread didn't hate her. Therefore they rapidly became close.....It was around that time. Bread's weakness was that he was a dog otaku..... Of course, she could understand the feelings of someone who liked dogs. She also didn't hate dogs. But Bread's love of dogs has long surpassed common sense and was at an almost psychotic level.

"I really have little luck. The only decent man I found is strangely obsessed with dogs....."

That was why she didn't like dogs. If Bread's head wasn't so strange about dogs then their relationship would've certainly developed more by now. It was because of that rebellious heart that she suddenly mentioned cats to Bread. While Bread seriously loved animals, the only one he showed an adverse reaction to was cats. Anyway, beating a dog in front of Bread..... she didn't have to see the results to anticipate it.

"I don't understand. How annoying. I'll just continue eating the barbecue."

After a short hesitation, Redian sat back down at the barbecue. Empty plates were already piled up on the table.

"Ah, Baekgu!"

"Ack, M-master!"

Baekgu stumbled as he was cut by the sword again. But Baekgu showed his commitment to his master by stabilizing his balance and showing his fangs.

"Grrrrrr, I'll protect Master!"

"Damn, this annoying stray dog.....!"

The bandit group surrounding Buksil stared at Baekgu with irritation. After exiting the lake a step ahead of Ark, the thieves managed to catch up with Buksil. But they ran into unexpectedly strong resistance from Baekgu and were unable to capture Buksil yet.

“But he is now in a critical condition. Let’s deal with him before that fellow comes!”

The thieves raised their swords and ran up to Baekgu. The thieves had an average level between 250-300. On the other hand, Baekgu was level 310. In addition, Baekgu was a member of the Wolrang clan. He was able to endure even when surrounded by 10 thieves. But even if there was a 60 level difference, there were still 10 of them. Even though a number of them had split up to search, there were still 7 thieves surrounding Baekgu. With that many people, it was only a matter of minutes before Baekgu entered a critical condition. When pushed by the thieves, it wasn’t possible to endure.

“Sob sob sob, Baekgu. Somebody help!”

Baekgu looked at the bloody Baekgu and whined pitifully. However, a frenzied parade was occurring outside the alley. Buksil’s voice was buried under all the noise. Also people weren’t very interested in looking in alleys. Even if someone saw it, the situation wouldn’t change. Magical Princess Minky Momo, Ultraman, Taekwon V, etc. Lots of stores in Bosaga sold those types of masks so who could imagine the situation if they came across the thieves masquerading as heroes. If others saw the sword then they would think it was just for show.

“Just hold on a minute. I’m almost there!”

Ark’s voice was heard in Buksil’s ear. But Ark wasn’t in the area. His voice was coming through the eyeball.

“No. Baekgu is already in critical condition!”

Buksil yelled tearfully. Meanwhile, Baekgu had been forced into a corner by the thieves and shouted.

“Master, don’t worry about me and just escape. Keuaaaaang!”

“Ah, no. Baekgu! Even if I die, I can’t just leave you and run away! Ack!”

Buksil screamed and ran towards Baekgu as the sword descended.

Hwiiiiing, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Then there was a sudden tremendous wind and the thieves attacking Baekgu fell down. Buksil and the thieves looked at the entrance of the alley simultaneously.

“Ah, Ark-nim? Eh? Who are you?”

“Huhuhuhu, just a dog lover passing by.”

The person who attacked the thieves wasn't Ark. He was a huge man wearing leather armour with a bayonet leaning against his shoulder. Despite their confusion, Bread just calmly uttered those shameless words. Yes, the reason Bread did those things was because of Baekgu. Baekgu was a member of the Wolrang clan with a wonderful outer appearance.

‘Huck! This was the person leading the pirate fleet.....!’

Buksil flinched after he saw Bread and retreated one step. When the ferry was raided by pirates a while ago, Buksil had seen Ark fighting against Bread. Fortunately, Bread failed to recognize Buksil. At that time, Buksil and Baekgu had been hanging on from the mast. They didn't even dare to breathe in case Bread or Redian would attack them. Anyway, Baekgu looked at Bread through bloody eyes. Bread raised the bayonet and showed his teeth before making a threatening posture.

“I deal with them so you two retreat.”

“Huh? H-how come?”

“The dog.”

“Huh?”

“I have no interest in people killing each other. But I can't allow them to attack a dog!”

Bread answered while staring at the thieves. Then the words Bread said to the thieves popped into Buksil's mind.

‘What the? Isn't he just a fool?’

But that thought disappeared after a few minutes. The group of thieves rushed towards Bread with their swords withdrawn.

“I don’t know who you are but I won’t allow you to interfere!”

“You won’t allow me to interfere? You really are bad guys. Then I don’t have to explain. This skill might be a bit excessive for guys like you but I’ll show you the greatness of the dog. Beast Spirit Possession, power of the dog rise!”

Keuaaaaang!

The shape of a huge dog appearing around Bread and he roared, causing a small earthquake. After being possessed by the soul of a dog, a huge blast of wind appeared whenever he swung his bayonet. It was an alarming momentum! The thieves flinched and took a defensive posture. But when Bread’s weapon collided with them, the thieves’ defensive posture collapsed and the thieves flew to the ground. Thanks to the dog beast spirit possession, his attack increased by 50%! As a dog enthusiast, it was the skill Bread had the most confidence in. Bread was also a level 400 character who invested most of his stats into strength. It was a reckless strength which cut the mast of a ship in half and freaked Ark out, so the level 250~300 thieves had no chance of defeating him.

“Hik, this monster like fellow!”

“Hahaha, this is the power of the dog that you ignored!”

Bread burst out and started to step on the thieves.

“Hyaaaaa, protect animals! Love dogs!”

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

.....The seven thieves lying on the ground cried and babbled as the level 400 Bread continued beating them. Of course, it might’ve been a little bit different if there was a combination of professions such as warrior, archer and healer. However, they were so flustered from chasing after Buksil that there was no time to consider professions when separating. The thieves who found Buksil were 5 thieves, 1 magician and 1 archer. The roughly made party were disorderly and

had no proper chance against Bread.

“Huhuhu, how is it? Can you feel the love of animals in your heart?”

Bread raised his bayonet to his shoulder and laughed.

“Huk huk huk, I’ve arrived!”

Someone jumped between the parade wagons and shouted. Bread who was kicking the body of the thieves flinched and looked with surprise.

“Eh? Y-you!”

“Eek? You’re that moron? Why are you here?”

Ark shouted as he looked at Bread with confusion. After exiting the lake and hearing Buksil’s relentless SOS calls, Ark had come running! But when he arrived, the thieves were crumpled up in a corner. And Bread was unexpectedly standing in front of Buksil and Baekgu protecting them? Ark moved his eyes and looked at Buksil.

‘Why is this idiot here?’

‘How should I know? Just pretend you don’t know me.’

Buksil instantly answered with his eyes. Their current position in the narrow alley was Ark, Bread then Buksil and Baekgu all lined up. In addition, Buksil and Baekgu had been so beaten up by the pursuing thieves that they barely had any health left. If Bread learned that Buksil was with Ark and hit them then the game was over. How should this situation be sorted? While Ark was busy thinking, Bread burst out laughing.

“This is good. You really did come to this place.”

“Ah, I’m actually a little busy? Can you wait and look for me again?”

“Uh, really? Well it can’t be helped.”

Bread scratched his head and turned his body before swinging his bayonet. Of course, he had no intention of falling for Ark’s tricks. Ark avoided the bayonet at the last minute and Bread shook his head.

“.....Did you think I would fall for that? Only someone stupid would allow you to escape this time.”

“Damn, can't you just pretend you didn't see me? I'm really busy!”

“Ha, if you're busy then just defeat me quickly. Of course, I won't collapse so easily. I'll conclude it this time! Beast Spirit Possession, power of the bear rise!”

Bread once again acted like a space sheriff and brandished his bayonet. Ark retreated and escaped being damaged by the bayonet before biting his lips.

‘Damn, I have to get away from this uncouth guy with Buksil before the next group of thieves come. Am I cursed or something?’

It was enough to make him want to run and curse. In fact, Bread was a level 400 user with a cheat like skill. But who was Ark? Wasn't he a strong warrior who managed to knock down many users in PVP? Of course, he couldn't be 100% certain when considering Bread's capabilities. However, the situation was so tangled that it didn't matter if he won or lost. But what kind of curse was this? He didn't know why but the situation was always tangled after he met Bread.

On the ferry he had to shake the pot to make the immortality pill so he couldn't fight properly. And this time his mission was to help Buksil escape. Fortunately, he didn't understand why but Bread had taken care of the thieves attacking Buksil. But according to Isyuram's information, the bandit group had 30 people so there were still 23 thieves left. If he left Buksil unattended while fighting Bread and he was found by the thieves then it would be a problem.

‘I have no choice. I have to look for a chance to escape from this guy!’

Ark glanced at Buksil and Baekgu and thought fiercely. It was impossible not to look at Buksil and Baekgu with uneasy eyes. He had no idea where the other thieves were. Even when looking through the eyeball, there were too many people so it wasn't easy to find the thieves. So he wasn't able to make a daring move.

“Jerk, where are you looking?”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Bread aimed at a gap and brought down his bayonet. Ark had been looking away and couldn't possibly avoid it so he blocked with his sword. The absurd pressure pushed Ark back and his body rolled across the ground. He had barely got his balance back when the bayonet fell again. Ark rolled his body to avoid the bayonet again and bounced up like a spring before jumping on a platform. After maintaining a proper posture, Ark breathed roughly as he looked at Bread.

‘Huk huk huk, as expected he isn't an easy opponent!’

“Hahaha, you definitely have skills. I absolutely won't miss this time. It will be concluded!”

Bread said as he followed him onto the platform. It was at that time. Why could cheering suddenly be heard from around him? Ark's face distorted as he looked at the strange situation around him. Ark had jumped to avoid the attack without confirming the place, and he belatedly realized that he had jumped onto one of the parade carts. In addition, the one he jumped on was a theatre carriage performing a play. When Ark and Bread had suddenly jumped onto the stage, the NPCs and spectators thought it was part of the production and applauding.

‘I have to get back. Well, in this case.....’

Ark was mortified as he looked around the festival. But there were some people making different expressions. Behind the stage curtain, two actors holding swords stared with stunned expressions. After a while, an old man appeared between the two actors and hit the back of Ark's head with a frown.

“Who the hell are you? Do you know how long I've prepared for this stage? If you wanted to be the actors then you should've auditioned. Ah, it can't be helped. I can't let guys like you ruin my play. Fortunately the next scene is a fight.....you two on the stage, do something!”

Then Bread looked at Ark and laughed.

“Isn’t this good? Since this is a stage, don’t you have no choice but to see this through to the end? This is the request of that old man so shouldn’t we put on a show? Beast Spirit Possession, power of the cheetah rise!”

Bread chose the soul of a cheetah and ran up to Ark. The cheetah maximized agility and speed so the bayonet fell like lightning! Thanks to the power of the bear, each blow shook the stage and it seemed like it might even collapse. There was no room for mistakes as one hit would be a deadly attack! Ark carefully stepped back. However, the audience cheered and applauded every time.

“Oh, isn’t this directing awesome?”

“Doesn’t it really seem like they’re fighting?”

“It’s true. The production is so radical that the stage is cracking. I can’t even imagine it!”

When the audience exclaimed with admiration, the director interjected.

“Ohhh, good, very good! Isn’t this nicer than I thought? Okay, let’s go with it. But why are they so aggressive? It’s so exciting they might not survive. Hey, the small fellow! Don’t just escape like a squirrel and attack as well!”

‘Damn, I need to do something!’

Ark ground his teeth together and frowned. In fact, there were other reasons aside from Buksil as to why he couldn’t fight properly. While Buksil had been playing tag with the thieves, Ark had continuously used Dark Dance in order to get through the crowds. Although it didn’t consume as much mana as other skills, it still used 300 mana with each use. Even if he had 6000 mana, who wouldn’t run out after using it so much? Even Flash and Dark Blade which didn’t use a lot of mana wasn’t available in this situation. Still, it was imperative to rescue Buksil from the thieves so he blindly used Dark Dance and thought he could deal with being without mana. He wasn’t supposed to meet a monster like this.

‘Dammit, I shouldn’t have summoned my pets.....’

Ark had thought about using the Ghost Knight Corps skill. When considering the level of the skill, they wouldn’t be able to deal any damage to Bread but 30 ghost knights could distract him for 5 seconds.

Distracting Bread for 5 seconds would be sufficient for Ark to escape. However, he had summoned his familiars twice so he only had 200 spiritual power left. The Ghost Knight Corps skill required 300 spiritual power.

‘Well, I can do normal attacks.....’

But once again, Bread was a level 400 user who could use the spirit of the turtle to raise his defense. His normal attacks would do limited damage. Even if Ark managed to attack that uncouth guy ten times, being hit just once would reverse the situation instantly.

‘Why is it that I can never fight properly whenever I meet this guy?’

Although he could avoid the bayonet thanks to his hell training against the zombies, he couldn’t defeat Bread. Ark had no choice but to escape like a loach.

“Huk, t-those guys! Ark-nim, the thieves! Hik, they found me. The bandit group is pursuing me!”

The eyeball attached to his back burst out screaming. Ark panicked and looked around at the scream. He could see Buksil and Baekgu running away. And there were pursued by 20 thieves with only a few metres difference.

“Catch him!”

The sound of the thieves shouting was audible from the stage.

‘Dammit! Now is not the time to be doing this.....’

“I told you not to look away from me!”

Then Bread shot forward like an arrow and swung his bayonet. Ark was looking at Buksil and couldn’t avoid getting hit in the side. Blood spurted and he instantly lost 1000 health. At the same time, he

received an abnormal state and his movements were slowed.

‘A mistake!’

A warning bell rang in Ark’s head. Once a user’s level was above a certain point, their equipment really wasn’t a joke. There were various skills to increase stats and one strike would often cause an abnormal state. It wasn’t necessary to explain to people familiar with online games, attack was no good if it couldn’t penetrate the armour. Therefore PVP battles at low levels often took over 10 minutes, fights between high level users were settled as fast as lightning. In a fight against a high level PVP user, concentration was needed to avoid even one mistake. However, Ark couldn’t concentrate on the battle. Once he permitted a critical hit, he became even more impatient.

‘Dammit, as expected I can’t defeat this guy without mana. In this state it is impossible to win. I also can’t leave Buksil alone. But I have no chance without any skills available. What is an alternative method?’

Then something popped into Ark’s head.

He didn’t have enough mana and spiritual power. He couldn’t be in a worst situation! However, didn’t Ark have a skill that doesn’t require mana or spiritual power? It was the skill he learnt just a while ago in Ciel, Entrusted Volumes! The so-called lottery skill. Yes, didn’t the skill use health instead of mana and spiritual power? Of course, there was no guarantee about what effect would come out.

‘It couldn’t possible get worse. I have no choice but to rely on luck. If it lands on the Byong hammer or the Goblin punch then it can stop that guy’s movement for a short time and allow me to escape.’

“Okay, let’s try it once. Entrusted Volumes!”

Ark raised his fist to Bread and shouted. With a flash, the slot machines that he had seen outside of Ciel appeared. The icons slowly changed until with a tak, tak, tak, it stopped. Then a huge fanfare like sound effect was heard and the information window appeared.

-You have used the power of Entrusted Volumes.

* Results

【Properties】: <Smile> 【Alignment 】: <Magician> 【 Environment】: <Theatre Stage>

The attack method selected is 'Comic Magician.'

<The 'Comic Magician' effect is applied to all attacks for 3 minutes>

'Comic Magician effect for 3 minutes? What is that?'

Entrusted Volumes had once again had an unexpected special effect. What type of effect will it have? He couldn't grasp what Comic Magician would do and hesitated to attack.

"Ohu, I don't know what it does but that is a skill. Are you planning to fight properly now?"

Although he initially flinched at the thought of Ark's counterattack, Bread just stepped back and laughed. And he fixed his attitude and raised the bayonet again. The bayonet came at him right after Ark used Entrusted Volumes. Since it was an attack right after using a skill, there was no time to avoid it! He blocked using his sword like before, but this time Ark lowered his centre to decrease the power. After a short moment, Ark determined that he could attack and kneeled before lifting his sword at an angle.

Pyorong!

Yet why did a bouquet of flowers abruptly came from Ark's sword? Both Ark's and Bread's eyes widened at the ridiculous situation. The spectators, actors and directors also stared at Ark with a foolish expression. After an absurdly long second passed, the audience burst out laughing.

"Hahaha, this is a hit! I never thought a bouquet would appear in this situation!"

"Is he proposing to the enemy?"

“A proposal of marriage in the face of death! This is really funny!”

“Hey, please take it. He’s really pitiful.”

The audience whistled and cheered with stupid expressions. After looking at the audience’s reaction, the director raised his thumb and shouted.

“Ohhhhh! Good, very good! Now it’s a comedic angle? I like it! You can get a job as an actor immediately!”

However, Ark and Bread just seemed confused about their reaction. Then Bread’s face turned red and he ground his teeth together.

“This, this bastard.....until when.....are you trying to mock me?”

“Ah, no this isn’t.....”

“Shut up!”

Bread frowned and ran up to him. Ark hurriedly swung his sword. This time a pigeon and rabbit appeared when he swung it. Yes, this was the effect of Comic Magician. The Comic Magician effect was literally a funny magician.

‘Oh my god, what kind of comic effect is this?’

In a desperate situation, he lost 500 health and trusted Entrusted Volumes for this effect? Despite his resentment for it, he had put his trust in Entrusted Volumes. However, he couldn’t possibly imagine the ridiculous Comic Magician effect.

“This bastard, mocking me again..... Ah, what a cute rabbit..... No. I need to kill that bastard..... Huck, a puppy! Aigoo! These guys are dangerous! Ugh, don’t cling! I’m so happy. No, this can’t be. This bastard, this devilish bastard, how did he know my weakness? Using such innocent animals in order to win.....what a coward!”

Once again, Bread was an animal lover. When the rabbit and puppy appeared like ghosts from Ark’s sword, Bread’s face instantly became absent-minded. Bread couldn’t attack since it might injure the animals and he couldn’t move either. But Ark couldn’t understand the circumstances and just remained confused.

‘Eh? What’s with that guy? Is there an unusual effect like ‘Hallucinations’ to Comic Magician?’

Just as Ark was thinking this. Among the audience, a female elf wearing white armour shouted angrily.

“You really are a stupid bastard. Fireball!”

She was Redian. She was with Bread when he went off to deal with the thieves. She realized she couldn’t stop Bread from beating the thieves up so she just continued eating her barbecue. Then she heard noisy laughter from the theatre carriage and witnessed the play(?) between Bread and Ark.

‘Dammit, I’m screwed! That female was also nearby!’

Ark saw her absurd flying magic a little too late. Then Bread appeared in front of Ark and blocked the fire magic with his bayonet. Redian shouted as soon as Bread struck the magic.

“What are you doing? Are you still thinking about a macho duel?”

“Why are you throwing around magic like that? It’ll hurt the animals!”

“You dare say such things in this situation?”

“It’s because this is the situation that I’m saying that!”

‘What the, what is this?’

Ark looked with bemused eyes as Bread and Redian started arguing. Ark couldn’t understand anything that happened after he used Comic Magician but they were too busy arguing that Ark wasn’t their priority.

‘I don’t know what’s going on but this is an opportunity!’

While the two were arguing like alley cats, Ark sneaked away to the back of the stage. Redian belatedly noticed Ark’s behaviour and shouted.

“You idiot, that bastard is escaping!”

“Eh? This bastard is thinking about escaping again?”

Bread raised his bayonet and rushed after Ark.

‘I have no choice but to believe in Comic Magician. I’ll leave it to the rabbit hallucination or something!’

Ark swung his sword and a message window appeared at the same time.

<p>-The lasting effect of Entrusted Volumes is over!</p> <p><It is always important for a magician’s stage to be finished properly. The magician’s finishing move is normally his best magic! When the effect of Comic Magician ends, ‘Magician Finish’ will automatically be triggered></p>
--

‘Magician Finish? Eh?’

Pepepeng!

Ark made a perplexed expression. Huge amounts of pollen suddenly emerged from the sword and exploded into smoke. Ark flinched and when he closed his eyes and opened it again, he was behind the stage. Yes, Magician Finish was an effect where the magician disappeared behind a smoke screen. It was an absurd technique but it benefited Ark at the moment.

‘Ohu, isn’t this a perfect hit?’

Ark managed to escape from Bread and he didn’t look back. At that time, Bread rotated his bayonet like a windmill and got rid of the smokescreen.

“What, what the? Where is that bastard?”

Bread realized that Ark had disappeared from the stage and looked around restlessly. Then Redian ran forward and exclaimed.

“This idiot, look away from the stage!”

“Eh? How did he get there? Did he use Warp or something?”

Bread jumped off the stage and ran after Ark who he could see escaping in the distance. But when he jumped off the stage,

someone suddenly grabbed Bread's shoulder.

"Sir, please don't forget about the bill!"

"Eh?"

"You drank 3,000cc of beer and that woman ate 18 servings of barbecue so the total cost is 36 gold. That woman you were with told me that you were paying for the bill. It will be a problem if you try to eat and run away."

The man was the owner of the tavern that Bread and Redian had eaten at. Bread looked around with an angry expression while Redian looked away and pretended ignorance. When the drama ended under such unexpected circumstances, the audience burst out laughing.

"Hahaha, this is the real deal! The last scene is paying off the accounts?"

"I don't know why the contents changed but it is the best!"

"This is the best play the festival has staged!"

"Ohhh, this is the first time my plays have received so many cheers!"

The director wiped away impressed tears..... Anyway, Bread and Redian were caught by the tavern owner while Ark ran after Buksil.

'Entrusted Volumes can be used in this style. That's right, I still don't know that much. It is still too early to give up on Entrusted Volumes. Of course, most are useless when the effect has gotten the wrong skills depending on the situation, although it might help. There is still more worthy research.'

Ark was starting to consider Entrusted Volumes again thanks to the unexpected situation. But it was more important to ensure Buksil escape than worry about unravelling the secrets of Entrusted Volumes right now. While Ark was caught by Bread, Buksil had already been running away for a few minutes. But no matter how much he looked around the area, he couldn't see Buksil or the thieves.

“Buksil, where on earth are you? Surely you haven’t already been caught?”

“I don’t know. While being chased by the thieves, I ended up hiding somewhere..... Hik, t-there’s something strange. M-monsters..... Hiik!”

The eyeball winced and stuttered.

“Monsters? Why would monsters be in a village?”

“Master!”

Ark tilted his head with confusion. In the meantime, Racard had been flying around and shouted.

“I saw something while flying this way. Buksil went in there just now!”

“There?”

Ark looked at the building that Racard was pointing to. It was a building which gave an eerie impression with a huge sign in front of it.

【Horror Castle】

Welcome to the castle of terror! Escape the midsummer’s heat and experience the castle of terror! If you escape from the maze within the time limit then you will get a fixed item!

<Admission fee: 50 silver>

The Carnival (I I)

“It is a haunted house this time?”

Ark's veins popped out on his forehead as he glared at the eyeballs. The place that Buksil entered was a common site in amusement parks, the haunted house. It was a shabby building where adults could find enjoyment like a child for several minutes. Frankly, Ark couldn't understand why people would pay money to enter a place like that.

‘Well, it does seem to be different from the haunted houses in reality.....’

Anyway, Ark stood in front of the haunted castle and realized that it was at a different level. Unlike the normal haunted houses that were in shabby buildings, it was a horror castle. It was a real house that had been remodelled. In addition, magic was a part of the daily life in New World. Just like the 300 km magic carriage, the experience of the horror castle would no doubt be beyond his expectations. That was exactly the problem.

‘Now's not the time to be playing around!’

Was this that pig's idea of escaping? First the 300 km per hour magic carriage, the duck boat floating on the lake, the theatre carriage and now a haunted house maze? Why did he keep running away to these sorts of places? Wasn't that pig just playing around? Or maybe he just wanted Ark to suffer?He contemplated that thought.

“Turns out there aren't that many places to hide here. Wait, what is this switch? Do not touch? Aha, this might be something to open the door. Eek, ugh!”

The eyeball suddenly burst out screaming. Ark asked with an urgent voice.

“What’s going on? What happened?”

“S-something rolled over..... Uh, what’s this? It’s soft and squishy? Hik! It’s a thief!”

“Thief? Were you found by the thieves?”

“Hik, hik, the thing that fell was the head of a thief!”

“You stupid asshole! Are you playing around? Why would you touch a switch that says do not touch?”

“But, but.....”

“Dammit, just run away! I’ll enter immediately so just escape for the moment! Keep up the communication and tell me if there’s any unique terrain. Do you understand?”

“Okay! Hik! Baekgu, let’s go!”

‘Just hearing the situation through words is crazy.’

He complained as he looked at the eyeball shrieking. Ark could guess the current situation through the eyeball. But he didn’t know exactly where Buksil was or what kind of situation he was in so it was quite frustrating.

“Anyway, the situation is urgent. I have to hurry.....”

Ark started walking forward before he winced and stopped. A man and woman were in front of the Horror Castle staring at Ark. While Ark had been thinking, Bread and Redian had caught up with him.

“Huhuhu. I didn’t understand at first but now I know better than to underestimate you and let you get away. I made sure to memorize your scent.”

Bread had used Beast Spirit Possession of the dog and used its sense of smell.

“Now, shall we play like a short time ago?”

“I won’t miss this time.”

Redian also muttered as she shot Ark a poisonous look.

‘That’s right. Damn, what are these guys?’

Ark really felt like his breath was being blocked. The opponent was the level 400 Beast Master Bread! Even if he was properly prepared for the battle, he couldn’t be assured against that opponent. Ark had also failed to recover the health that he lost in the previous battle. He had also only recovered 300 mana. In this state, there was a 100 in 100 chance he would lose.

‘There is no way to get away from them.’

Ark’s eyes moved towards Redian standing to one side. Both her hands currently contained magic ready to explode. Ark had fought against many magicians and knew what kind of skill it was. It was the assistive magic ‘Quick Spell.’ In order to do magic, a chant was needed to be memorized and recited before the magic would work. Usually magicians could only use one hand but Redian had magic on standby with both hands.

‘The Quick Spell will make her attacks faster. But.....’

He didn’t know why but Bread was eager to fight against Ark in a 1-on-1 battle. If Bread’s purpose was just to step on Ark then he would’ve called the nearby Redian to help. And Redian always complained about Bread’s attitude.

“If Redian is preparing the ‘Quick Spell’ then there is a high possibility it is a movement restriction magic.”

Redian planned to tie Ark’s foot while Bread settled it. A magician who had the ability to move a pirate ship alone was now preparing a movement restriction spell with Quick Spell. It was also in both hands so she intended to tie his two feet. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that he wouldn’t be able to avoid the magic.

‘Even without the magic, it is impossible to run away.’

Unfortunately, both of them were blocking the horror castle. There was no meaning in escaping and leaving Buksil alone. Of course, the result was the same even if he defeated Bread and Redian. It was a

dilemma!

While Ark was thinking, Bread approached with his bayonet.

“I’ll settle it this time.”

“Okay, good. You want to settle it. But can’t you just wait a bit? I really do have something incredibly important to do. It is a request. Can’t you wait a few more days before settling this fight between us?”

Ark tried to appeal to the pair. Until now, he had never asked for anything from other people in New World. Ark was proud of that in his own way. But now wasn’t the time for his pride. Wouldn’t it be a problem if Isyuram couldn’t catch the wanted criminals? However, after the ferry Bread wasn’t stupid enough to fall for it again.

“This bastard, do you think I look funny? Do you think I’d be fooled twice?”

.....Once again, this was why his normal behaviour was important.

“No, this time it really is urgent. If you would just listen to the circumstances.....”

“No questions!”

Bread gripped his bayonet with both hands and approached Ark. Suddenly there was a noisy sound and dozens of people came running.

“Over there, it’s that person!”

“What, what the?”

Bread hesitated as the guards came running and stepped back. Even Bread wouldn’t dare swing his bayonet in front of dozens of guards. The incoming guards surrounded Ark.

“He fits the description. Yes, we need you to come with us.”

“W-what’s going on?”

Ark was at a loss from the situation and asked the guard.

“A report from the Festive Committee has come in just now. There has been several lawless behaviour in some of our facilities that interfered with sales. Your description was among the information.”

While chasing after Buksil and the thieves, Ark’s description had been reported to the guards by the duck boat operator. With the festival being disrupted so much, it was natural for the garrison to be dispatched.

“But I wasn’t the one who broke the guard rail and seized the duck boats. I.....”

“Yes, we’ll listen to the matter at the guard headquarters. Arrest him.”

Things had really gotten worse.

Aside from Bread and Redian, now he was even being hassled by the village guards? Of course, it was possible to get away from Bread and Redian if he was taken by the guards. Although Ark had caused various scenes of confusion, he hadn’t done any substantial property damage like the thieves. If the guards listened to the situation then it was likely he would be released with a light penalty or warning. But what if Buksil was caught by the thieves in the meantime.

‘I’m really going crazy.....’

Then a question suddenly popped into Ark’s head.

‘Wait? Why are the guards only talking to me?’

Ark stared at Bread and Redian. Bread also appeared in the parade with Ark but the audience and director was satisfied so there shouldn’t be any complaints. Certainly, Bread hadn’t done anything at the festival for the guards to be interested in him. But the issue wasn’t the festival.

‘Bread and Redian were chaotic when I met them a few days ago!’

Yes, Bread and Redian were chaotic when they were leading the pirate fleet. In addition, it wasn’t a standard level of chaotic. In New World, chaotic users who committed a lot of crime would have their

ID turn increasingly redder. When Ark had met the two of them for the first time, their ID was so red it was almost black. Ark didn't know it yet but the reason Redian and Bread have such high chaotic levels was because they broke into Haman fort and killed NPCs at the tourist information centre. Killing NPCs stacked a few more chaotic value than killing users.

'In addition, Bread was beating up that group of thieves just then. The thieves just then aren't chaotic. But now their IDs.....?'

It wasn't necessary to confirm it with Eyes of the Cat. If the guards standing right next to them didn't take an interest then that meant they had a normal status. How could they wander the village after they committed murder just a short while ago? Ark only knew of two different methods. One method was to use Shambala's Death's Agent. But that was a profession specific skill of the Saint Assassin. What would a regular player use?

'That's right, there is that!'

A smile formed on Ark's mouth.

"It's them. I unintentionally caused a commotion by chasing after them!"

"What?"

"They're brutal criminals who killed a lot of people!"

Ark pointed to Bread and Redian as the guards turned their heads.

"But they weren't in the reports....."

"It is a lie, please watch carefully!"

Ark quickly pulled out two scrolls and shouted.

"[Sword of Truth] activate! Target Redian and Bread!"

"Heok, t-that bastard.....!"

Bread and Redian freaked out and screamed as they saw the situation. When the necessary conditions were met, there was a 100% chance of the scroll hitting the target! When the scroll was

triggered, two enormous swords appeared in the sky and hit the back of their head. When [Sword of Truth] was activated, Ark expected it to hit the target. Yes, the reason the chaotic Bread and Redian was able to walk around the village was thanks to the [Lie] scroll. [Sword of Truth] would only be triggered if the target users were under the effect of the [Lie] scroll! It was a scroll to release the effect of [Lie].

‘Huhuhu, it worked as expected.’

Ark smirked as Bread and Redian was hit by the [Sword of Truth]. In fact, Ark hadn’t gathered the scrolls intentionally. He hadn’t felt the need for it. But since he collected money from the repeatable quests in Ciel, he sometimes bought the scrolls in order to help Ronnie. [Sword of Truth] was one of those scrolls. Anyway, their IDs instantly turned red when hit by the [Sword of Truth]. Then the guards suddenly remembered something and shouted with surprise.

“Ah! That is.....?”

“I remember. They’re the leaders of the pirate party who made the ferry sink last time!”

“Now the pirates are trying to attack the festival, catch them!”

The guards shouted with indignation and rushed forward.

“God dammit, Quick Spell activate, Vortex trap!”

Redian activated the movement restriction magic with the Quick Spell she had prepared. An enormous gust of wind emerged from Redian and hit the guards running up to them. It was the Vortex Trap which caused stiffness for 2 seconds and decreased movement speed by 50% for 30 seconds! But there were a huge number of guards deployed to protect the Bosaga festival. When the magic hit six guards, the remaining ones became even more resentful.

“Huk, t-those guys.....!”

“They are resisting. Send a signal and gather the guards!”

One guard blew a whistle and other guards flocked from all

directions. Bread glared at Ark as the situation deteriorated.

“That bastard.....!”

“Idiot, now’s not the time for that! Let’s go!”

After Redian raised her voice angrily, they both ran away. No matter how strong Bread and Redian were, they couldn’t take care of all the guards. Redian once again used the prepared Quick Spell to activate Vortex Trap and hurriedly ran away. Ark smirked and laughed as he watched their retreating backs.

“Kukukuku, this is why you have to live a good life.”

“Hah? Master is saying that?”

“Shut up! I never committed brutal acts like that.”

Ark glared at Racard and declared sharply. Anyway, he managed to escape from Bread and Redian thanks to the guards. If the two of them with red IDs were caught then they would be eating beans with rice for a month.

“Would Bread and Redian be caught that easily?”

However, they couldn’t annoy Ark in Bosaga village anymore.

“Now those two are dealt with. I need to look for Buksil quickly!”

Ark ran towards the horror castle with Racard.

“Huhuhuhu, a stupid human has visited. Would you like to step foot into this castle of fear? If you have the courage than 50 silver.....”

When he arrived in front of the horror castle, the NPC stretched out his hand. Ark threw the coin with an annoyed expression and ran into the horror castle.

Ohhhhhh, kya kya kya kya, kuoooooh!

When he entered the horror castle, a fearsome noise was instantly audible. It was crying, moaning and intimidating roar of ghosts and monsters! The acoustics truly created a scary atmosphere. But the problem wasn’t the noises.

“Damn, what is this?”

When he communicated through the eyeball earlier, he didn't know where Buksil was. It was normal to make the haunted house slightly complicated. Didn't the words on the signpost also talk about a maze? But when he came in, he didn't realize it would be this complicated. Dozens of paths in the maze spread out like a cobweb from the entrance. No matter how complicated the dungeon terrain was, it normally wasn't a problem. Thanks to the cartography skill which mapped out the terrain features of a dungeon, he never wandered a route twice. But this was a ride not a dungeon. The cartography skill wasn't available. In addition, there weren't any distinct geographic features to be marked.

“How can I find Buksil in here?”

“Waaahhh! Ark-nim, what are you doing? Please come soon. There are a lot of them in the area!”

The eyeball explained some rough features but it wasn't any help. He didn't know how to find the place. The horror castle also had so many footprints that he couldn't use Radun's Stalking. In the end, he had no choice but to go around and look for the place Buksil mentioned. Ark worried for a while before he said.

“It can't be helped. It is better to split up and look for him than to stay together.”

“But Master, that guy is a skeleton.”

Racard muttered as he tapped Razak. Just like Razak said, this was a village. A skeleton wandering alone could cause problems. But Ark just shook his head.

“This place is a haunted house. People who are disguised as monsters are intentionally scattered around so there won't be an uproar if a skeleton is seen. But Razak has no way of making contact if Buksil is found so he'll move with you. It isn't necessary to say again but don't let them catch Buksil. Once you've found him, do whatever it takes to protect him.”

“Okay. Hey, skeleton! Follow me.”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Ark and his summons split up and started looking for Buksil.

“Over there!”

“I saw him run over there!”

It was an underground area with old coffins and tools everywhere. There was dozens of people running around and crying out in loud voices. Buksil had run around the maze avoiding the thieves for 10 minutes, and the 20 thieves had narrowly missed him because of the complicated maze. Just like Ark, the bandit group split up and started looking for Buksil. However, it wasn't easy to find one person in a maze. Furthermore, there were traps laid out everywhere on the castle floor. The traps weren't ones that would threaten lives but some of them stopped people from moving or were slides which moved them to lower floors, so it wasn't easy to catch Buksil. However, Buksil was also worried about falling into the traps. He had been caught a few times by the traps. He had also been pursued by NPCs disguised as monsters while wandering around lost. Therefore the thieves had caught up with Buksil and the siege was narrowing.

“He is definitely near here. You guys over here and you guys look over there!”

Buksil jumped every time he heard the voice of the thieves.

“Hik, there are thieves everywhere! I'm surrounded!”

“Master, there is a hole in that corner!”

At that moment Baekgu pointed at a corner and shouted. When he turned his head, there was a small hole between some gruesome torture tools. There were also some secret passages prepared in the horror castle for fun.....it was also the only escape method for Buksil to survive. Buksil ran towards the hole without looking. Just as he was about to squeeze his abundant body in, a zombie suddenly fell out of the hole.

“Aaaagh!”

Buksil screamed and flopped down onto the ground. But the zombie just grinned and walked to the other side.

“Hihihi, it is another success. Now, who shall I tease next?”

Buksil trembled while Baekgu just sighed and muttered.

“Ah Master, it was just a fake monster.”

“I know, I know. But.....”

Tears fell down Buksil’s face as he spoke. Of course Buksil knew that all the monsters were just NPCs dressed up and his safety was guaranteed. In addition, he had encountered all sorts of monsters while travelling with Ark. There was no reason to shrink in fear when he saw a monster. But knowing that and not being afraid was different. Didn’t people watch horror movies for the sensation of fear? In that unexpected situation, anyone would be surprised. Thus Buksil shed tears with every encounter in the game.

“Eh, this way!”

Then a few thieves shouted from the opposite corner.

“Hik, B-Baekgu!”

“Master, please hurry!”

Baekgu bit Buksil and dragged him through the hole.

“Damn, that bastard!”

The thieves cursed and tried to follow. Suddenly 10 black hands appeared and grabbed the thieves’ clothes. This was also one of the events of the horror castle. Thanks to these events, the thieves had ended up missing Buksil a few times. When the thieves shook off the hands and entered the hole, Buksil couldn’t be seen anymore.

“Dammit, we missed him again!”

“If only there wasn’t that NPC just now..... This place is really irritating!”

“But we’ve almost completed surrounded the area. We’ll catch that guy soon.”

“Yes, now it’s only a matter of time. And we’ve gone down this passage earlier. We’ll continue down this way while some of the guys will block the other side. No matter where he appears, we’ll catch him shortly.”

A thief kicked a coffin with an irritated expression as they ran down the passage. After a while, the coffin which the thief kicked opened and Buksil and Baekgu emerged.

“Huk huk huk, I’m alive!”

Sweat dripped down Buksil’s face as he murmured. Baekgu had learned too late that the hole was actually a trap. As soon as they passed through the hole, the trap had been triggered and shut the two of them in a big coffin. But it was because Buksil was trapped in the can that he was able to elude the thieves. Buksil sighed with relief before he suddenly made an angry expression.

“But what on earth did I do to those people?”

Buksil still didn’t know why the thieves were pursuing him so desperately. In fact, Buksil should be the angry one since he was attacked first in Seutandal. However, Buksil had a wide generosity and forgiven them. So why did these villains have a grudge against him?

“In the outside world, there are even more unscrupulous humans than Ark-nim.”

Buksil was tired by the persistence of the thieves and shook his head. Then Baekgu suddenly jerked with wariness and his eyes stared into the darkness. A man that was approaching from the other side flinched and stopped. After looking around for a moment, he approached Buksil and Baekgu. When Baekgu growled, he instantly stopped moving again.

“Wait, I’m not an enemy.”

“.....?”

“Over there, is your name Buksil?”

The man surveyed the area like the main character of an intelligence movie and spoke in a low voice.

“I actually know Ark really well.”

“Ah, Ark-nim?”

“Yes, I can’t explain it in detail but I’m on your side. I came here to save you. There are a lot of guys in this area so try to avoid the place. Those fellows have split up and are methodically narrowing the net. A few of them will soon come here. But I’ve grasped almost all of their movements so if you follow me then you can escape unharmed. I’ll give you the details after we escape. Follow me.”

“Wah, thank you!”

Buksil lowered his guard and was about to approach the man talking about Ark. Then Baekgu tensed and growled.

“Grrrrrr, Master! Do not be fooled. It is a trap!”

“What, what the?”

“I don’t smell Ark at all on this human. There are only the scents of the fellows chasing us. He is a part of their group. He can’t handle us alone so he is trying to lure us to the group!”

“Heok, it was like that? This bad person!”

Buksil cursed and stepped back. Then the man made an embarrassed face and tried to explain.

“Oh, no, that’s not it! Certainly I haven’t met Ark here…….”

“See, he hasn’t met Ark!”

“Dammit, just listen to my story first! No, I don’t have time to explain. I’ll explain once we get out of here…….”

“Don’t make me laugh! Do you think I will be fooled by such a lie?”

Buksil snorted and raised his voice.He wasn’t going to be

fooled. Baekgu stepped in front of Buksil. Meanwhile, the man once again tried to approach Buksil as he shouted.

“There is no time! I’ll explain everything once we get out!”

“Master, please retreat!”

The Baekgu jumped up and grabbed the man’s neck. The man flinched and moved his upper body to avoid it, but his neck was still scratched and blood splattered.

“T-this.....!”

The man grabbed his neck and glared at Baekgu. The man.....is probably already known but he was Isyuram, also known as Lee Myung-ryong. Isyuram hadn’t expected Baekgu and Buksil’s reaction.

‘Why is this guy here?’

While Ark was wandering around the south west, Buksil had stayed in Bosaga causing the situation to be tangled after Isyuram lead the thieves there. Thus he desperately called Ark because he was afraid of Buksil being surrounded by the thieves.

‘I can’t let them catch Buksil!’

If that happened then the infiltration investigation wouldn’t be his concern. If he was with the thieves when they met Buksil then he couldn’t do anything. So Isyuram made an excuse and separated from the thieves. Then he mobilized his police knowledge and traced the bandit group’s tracks to find Buksil.

‘I’ve done it!’

Isyuram inwardly cheered as he saw Buksil. By identifying the thieves’ search route, he was able to determine an escape route for Buksil. Yet Isyuram hadn’t considered a flaw with his idea. It was good that he found Buksil but there was no way to prove that he knew Ark. He was undercover so there was no way to explain it. Even if he explained, what guarantee was there that Buksil would believe him? Of course, the situation would be different if Isyuram

and Buksil communicated with Ark through the eyeball. Because he could give his real name and receive confirmation. However Isyuram didn't know about the strange skill.

"There are already a lot of them in this area. This passage will be swarmed pretty soon. If those guys find us then everything would be ruined! I don't have time to persuade Buksil. There is only one way left!"

Isyuram clenched his teeth and stared at Baekgu. The important one to Isyuram was Buksil. Even if Buksil died here, there were thieves waiting at the resurrection place. If the thieves swarming the resurrection place got the memory crystal and moved then there was no chance of Ark reclaiming it. In the end, Isyuram was forced to take an extreme action.

'Buksil is a merchant so he doesn't have combat capabilities. The problem is Baekgu. If I take care of the dog than Buksil will have no choice but to go with me. After I meet Ark at a safe place and remove the understanding then he will hand over the memory crystal.'

Isyuram avoided Baekgu's following attack and counterattacked with a shark kick. Then Buksil jumped with surprise and shouted.

"You've exposed your true colours you villain!"

Thanks to that, the misunderstanding deepened even further. But Isyuram didn't have that many choices.

'I have to handle that dog before the other guys come!'

Isyuram used some wonderful foot movements and started kicking Baekgu.....

Snap!

.....Baekgu ran up to him at a tremendous pace and kicked his thigh. While playing the game, Isyuram hadn't figured out that he was using an experimental unit with 100% pain sensitivity. When Baekgu injured his thigh and blood came pouring out, he really felt the acute pain. At the same time, an embarrassing message window

rose.

-You have been injured by the NPC with a wolf attribute. 650 damage!

<The serious damage to your thigh will decrease movement speed and reaction rate by 30% for 10 minutes!>

“What, what the, this guy!”

Isyuram burst out with confusion as he stumbled. Isyuram didn't have a skill or scroll to confirm the level of his opponent. In addition, he had never seen Baekgu fight the other thieves. He thought that the dog would be at a similar level to him. However, it couldn't be compared to facing against the gnolls. Buksil made a gleeful expression and shouted.

“Bah! Baekgu is level 310! He can easily deal with one opponent!”

“L-level 310?”

Isyuram looked at Baekgu with shocked eyes. Isyuram had thought Buksil had no combat capabilities because he was a merchant but Isyuram was also a merchant. While playing against the gnolls, he had polished off his combat techniques. However, this was also a game. In reality, the person's knowledge and vision was needed for their combat capabilities. There were no such things like the strength or stamina stats. Moreover, Isyuram had the basic taekwondo but also some specially designed military martial arts to suppress violent organizations. But any criminals wouldn't fail to recognize the special martial arts of the police agency. Therefore Isyuram avoided using those moves in a fight just in case the thieves recognized it. So Isyuram and Garam were at a similar level 230 when they first met. But no matter his superhuman fighting ability in reality, Isyuram was a level 230 merchant fighting against the level 310 Baekgu from the Wolrang clan.

“W-wait a minute! Time, time!”

Isyuram belatedly grasped the situation and asked for time. But there was no way it would be accepted.

“Bah! So you can call you colleagues? Baekgu, take care of him!”

“Yes, Master! Keuaaaaang!”

Baekgu sensed that Isyuram was weaker than him and started all out attacking. Isyuram used 120% of his taekwondo skills to oppose him but it was ineffective. Levels had an absolute impact on the game. The difference between their attack, defense, strength, stamina and agility was like heaven and earth. In addition, Isyuram was a merchant while Baekgu was a beast warrior. Even if Isyuram hit the vital spots, he only dealt 50-80 damage to Baekgu at most. Meanwhile, one scratch from Baekgu took 300-400 of his health. The level difference was too big. Isyuram was bloody after just a few minutes.

‘Oh my god, one this hot summer day..... I’m being eaten by a dog.....’

But that wasn’t all.

“Yes, yes! Bastard, you bastard!”

Buksil cursed and kicked Isyuram’s prone body. The pig had experienced so much misery that he had shed tears.

“Master, I can hear the footsteps of other people!”

Buksil stopped kicking after hearing Baekgu’s voice. He got on Baekgu’s back and they quickly ran away.

“I heard some sounds over here. Eh? This.....?”

After Buksil and Baekgu had disappeared around the corner for a while, the thieves finally appeared. They belatedly found Isyuram’s dead body.

“I-Isyuram!”

Garam held Isyuram’s body and screamed.

“Ugh, how did this happen..... Wait, the wounds look like he had been bitten by a dog..... Ugh. It was the puppy with that pig..... Damn, I told him not to go alone..... That guy who got involved in our

business. Who is he?"

Garam turned his body and shouted.

"Will those guys who don't trust Isyuram keep talking? Please speak. Can you still say that after seeing his body? How many times have I told you? This person will never betray us! This guy, this guy is.... He never complained even when you sent him doubtful looks. He ran after that guy for our sake and became so miserable....."

Garam could barely talk as he sobbed. Then the thieves nodded with solemn expressions.

"Uhh, he went this far for us."

After he became dog food, the thieves now thought that Isyuram was reliable. Anyway, flames of anger ignited in Garam's eyes as he held Isyuram's corpse.

"Ughhh. How dare that hybrid dog and pig kill my friend? I absolutely won't miss! This body is still warm so they couldn't have escaped far. Catch them and make them pay the price! Tear them to pieces!"

'..... Please endure it. Please miss for me.'

Isyuram sighed as he was forcibly shut down.

"Geez, what are you doing? Quickly!"

"Huh? No, I mean....."

Racard hesitated and scratched his head. Racard who had changed into a boy released his breath as he saw four zombies.

'Hah, what is this?'

After splitting up with Ark at the entrance of the castle, Racard started searching for Buksil with Razak. Then he found a similar room to what Buksil had described.

'Huhuhu, I quite like this place?'

Racard was in the lowest floor of the horror castle where there were various coffins and torture tools scattered around. But that wasn't the reason why Racard stopped moving. The zombies had suddenly appeared in front of him.

"Kuaaaaaah! Eat everybody..... Eh?"

The zombies tilted their heads with confusion before one stepped in front. He stared at Racard and Razak before smiling.

"What the? Is this a company in the same line of business? Did you also receive an assignment in this area?"

'Assignment?'

Racard thought for a while before he figured out the situation. Needless to say, but the zombies were disguised NPCs. They saw the skeletal Razak and misunderstood that he was another worker of the castle. Racard thought it was too troublesome to clarify so he nodded.

"Yes, so can we go now?"

Then the zombie said to Razak.

"But isn't that really well made?"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak became angry at the zombie's words and expressed his dissatisfaction. The zombies were at a loss by Razak's response.

"Huk, what the? This is really a skeleton?"

Then Racard interjected quickly.

"Oh, he is real. He is my familiar that I summoned."

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack?

Racard whispered to Razak in a low voice.

"You fool, Master said not to cause an unnecessary disturbance."

"Summon? Then you are a summoner?"

The zombies became their wariness as Racard nodded. The NPCs worked at the horror castle so they naturally had a fear of summoners. The residents wore monster makeup so they couldn't tell the difference between real monsters.

"But isn't this too extreme?"

"You look 10 years old yet you're summoning a skeleton?"

"Aha, you must be someone young assigned here."

"Your clothes look like you are disguising as a vampire but it is quite crude. Not only is such a little child assigned here but also his pet skeleton...."

'What the? Dressed as a vampire? Isn't it different? And crude?'

They thought a real vampire was disguised as a crude vampire? What were they saying? Racard glared angrily at their words.

"Aaaaack!"

He suddenly heard a scream from one side. The zombies exchanged glances and started laughing.

"Ohhh, a guest!"

"Huhuhu, that person has been screaming all night from our surprised appearances."

"I really am thankful for such reactions. Teasing sincere guests is the most enjoyable part."

"Now's not the time to be doing this. One person in each location!"

The zombies voluntarily scattered and hid themselves. Then a zombie opened the lid of a coffin that it was hiding in and shouted.

"Ya! What are you guys doing?"

"Huh? No, we....."

"You two go to that place. Can't you see that spacious coffin? It is a good place to hide and surprise guests. Huhuhu, if you take the

guests off guard then they'll be surprised. Try it a few times and it is surprisingly fun. You will be fine."

The zombie insisted that Racard and Razak squeeze into the coffin.

"Hah, making a real vampire and undead do a part time job in a haunted house....."

Razak sighed as he entered the coffin with Racard. Then Razak glanced at him with dissatisfied eyes and said.

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

"What the? Why are you blaming me? Master was the one who told us not to cause any difficulties. And if you were in this situation alone then you would already be dragged to the guards."

Clack clack clack, ttadadak!

"Who? There is no other way. We have no choice but to go along with the zombies. Let's just watch the situation for a little bit."

"Hey, rookie! Why aren't you staying quiet? Do you want to be paid?"

The zombie in the opposite coffin declared sharply towards Racard and Razak.

".....Yes, I'll work hard. Ya! They said to be quiet!"

Racard shut his lips and pouted. How much time had passed? Then there was the sound of footsteps approaching before it ran around the corner. The strategy was starting! As expected from the veteran zombies, they had exquisite timing as they emerged from the coffins.

"Hahaha, we're going to eat everybody!"

As expected, the guests stopped as they saw the zombies. It was at that time. An arrow abruptly flew and pierced the thigh of one guest. The guests kneeled to one side and screamed with distress.

Bark-!

'A bark? What the, this sound? Wait? This familiar sound.....?'

Racard who was still waiting peeked through a hole in the coffin. At the same time, confusion spread on Racard's face. To his surprise, the one who collapsed from the arrow was Baekgu. When Baekgu fell down, the pig riding up fell off and rolled into a corner. It was Buksil. Then over ten thieves came running.

"We've finally caught that pig scum!"

"Huh? W-what is happening.....?"

The zombies were confused as some people appeared holding weapons. Then the thieves brandished their swords and shouted.

"It's time for you to die!"

"Huck! Murder! There are murders at the horror castle!"

"Garam, we can't leave these guys alone. It will be annoying if they report it to the guards. Kill them all!"

"Ah, that's right. Catch them!"

Garam and the bandit group attacked the zombies with swords and arrows. They were just regular NPCs so they instantly collapsed as the thieves fired skills at them. After taking care of the zombies, the thieves cornered Buksil and Baekgu in a corner.

"Huhuhuhu, there is no place for you to run!"

'M-Master, it is serious!'

Racard inwardly cried with distress as he watched the scene.

The Carnival (I I I)

“Huhuhu, I will suck every last drop of your blood!”

There was the sound of a wall sliding back and a monster suddenly popped out. It was a production effect to catch people off guard! But the guest just looked at the monster absent-mindedly and sighed before walking past.

‘It really is crazy.’

The person scratching his head with annoyance was Ark. After entering the horror castle and separating from his summons, Ark went up to the 2nd floor by himself. He was in a place known as the ‘Room of Mirrors.’ It was a maze like everywhere else but the walls were made of mirrors. The mirrors on the wall reflected everything around it.

‘I should turn around, damn!’

While he had been thinking, his feet had just been wandering around. Besides.....

“Hahaha, I will suck your blood! Blood! Isn’t it scary?”

The monster who Ark ignored just then stood in front of him and shouted. The monster disguise of the NPC just made Ark’s blood pressure rise even more.

“I don’t want to talk to you so get out of my way, huh?”

“.....Ah, yes. I-I’m sorry.”

Ark used the full force of ‘Intimidation’ to scare off cowardly monster. Ark glared at the monster and continued walking.

“M-Master, it is serious!”

Racard’s voice abruptly shook his eardrums.

“What the? What’s going on?”

“I found Buksil and Baekgu. But they are already surrounded by a group of thieves!”

“W-what? Where? Where are you now?”

“I was dragged by some zombies so I don’t know the exact location. All I know is that it is downstairs.”

“What does it look like? Tell me more!”

“There are various torture tools as decorations scattered around.”

“Okay, wait a minute! No, stop it somehow!”

“B-but there are 10 people there.”

“Dammit, just stop them until I get close!”

Ark shouted urgently and ran through the Room of Mirrors. However, he only walked a few steps before he stopped. Once again, this was the Room of Mirrors. The mirrors reflected in every direction and it was easy to lose his sense of direction in the maze. Ark couldn’t just wander around directionless. But now that the situation was so urgent, how could he find the exit?

‘It is an emergency. I have no time to be lost in a place like this. I need to escape this maze.....’

Then Ark raised his head and looked back at the monster. Yes, that was the fastest way to escape the maze! The horror castle maze was designed to make its customers wander around. What reason would people who weren’t customers have to wander around? Ark turned around and grabbed the monster’s throat before shouting.

“Hey, you!”

“Kyak! What are you doing Sir?”

“I don’t have a lot of time to talk. Do you have a map of this place?”

“M-map? I have it but.....”

The monster stuttered as he was grabbed by the neck.

“Shut up! Don’t consider me a guest. A person’s life is at stake. Now give me the map!”

“But Sir, the rules.....”

“I said a human life is at stake! Do you also want to risk your life?”

When Ark used Advanced Intimidation, the monster instantly took out its map. Once again, the maze was designed to make the guests wander around so they could be scared. But that only applied to the guests. It wouldn’t do for NPCs disguised with monster makeup to wander around lost. In order to prevent this, the hidden NPCs had detailed maps to prevent this. Ark opened the map he had seized using Intimidation and checked it.

‘As expected!’

Sections marked blue were seen on the map. They were the passages designed for staff to move easily. If he used the passages designed for the staff then he could reach his destination without getting lost.

‘This must be the place Racard talked about.’

The ‘Underground Torture Chamber’ caught Ark’s eye and he headed to that area. Racard said there were various torture tools around so Buksil was probably somewhere in that area. Ark looked for the staff passage that had the shortest distance and ran to the underground torture chamber.

“The problem is where exactly Buksil is being held by those thieves.....”

Ark saw various props lying around as he wandered the complex passages. The ‘Underground Torture Chamber’ matched the atmosphere of the horror castle so it had the widest area assigned.

Plus there were coffins and torture tools scattered everywhere. It was impossible to narrow down a specific location. So even when Ark arrived at the ‘Underground Torture Chamber,’ Ark couldn’t move for a while. Then he suddenly lost 500 mana and the information

window appeared.

-Your summon Razak has drained your mana to use Steel Loyalty. <His body has become like steel and defense has increased by 926>

‘Steel Loyalty!’

Ark’s eyes instantly flashed. Razak could only use Steel Loyalty when he was within 10 metres of Ark. In other words, Razak was somewhere in a 10 metre radius. And Ark had sent him with Racard so Buksil would be in that location as well!

“That’s it! Radun, Stalking! Track that flow of mana just now!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun bobbed his head and pointed to one side. Ark confirmed the direction and used his remaining mana on Sprint. After turning various corners, he heard the voices of the thieves.

“What, what the, this guy?” Where did this thing suddenly come from?”

“He is the familiar of that interfering guy. We have to take care of this before that guy comes!”

“Eh? Why can’t my sword hit properly?”

The thieves were perplexed after their sword bounced off Razak. The instant the thieves had herded Buksil into a corner and attacked, Ark had entered the vicinity. So Razak left the coffin and stood in front of Buksil before using Steel Loyalty. After Razak turned into steel, all the attacks from the thieves bounced back. When Razak changed to steel, his defense rose according to Razak’s loyalty which was 926. Thus Steel Loyalty added 926 defense. The thieves were only level 250-300 so it was impossible for them to damage Razak.

“Well done Razak!”

When Ark appeared, the thieves flinched and turned their heads.

“Huk, t-that guy is.....?”

“Racard, Blood Lane!”

“Ohhhh, the blood curse!”

Now was the opportunity to rescue Buksil! Ark sprinted forward and made Racard use Blood Lane. Then Racard emerged from the coffin and spouted blood from his mouth. It wasn't so strange when it was a bat, but the sight of a boy spouting blood was oddly weird. But despite being a boy or a bat, the effect of Blood Lane was amazing. It flowed up and covered a range of 10 metres like a rain shower. The descent of the cursed blood caused a large number of unusual states. Furthermore, this place the skill was used wasn't a wide swamp like before. The thieves were gathered in a small passage. The odds of Blood Lane causing an abnormal state were 50%. Among the ten people, six of them were caught by 'Despair' or 'Helplessness.' Among them, two were also caught by 'Confusion' and attacked their colleagues.

‘I'm lucky that Blood Lane is a skill that doesn't consume mana. Anyway, there are 6 fellows with abnormal states. I need to deal with the remaining four.....’

Ark was very cool-headed and calmly judged the situation. Obviously, dealing with four thieves wasn't difficult for him. However, that was the usual him....Ark had recovered some mana but he was still in a bad shape. There were 20 thieves who had entered the horror castle to chase Buksil. Even if he took care of these guys, there were still 10 remaining. Ark wouldn't be able to endure it if they joined.

‘It is imperative that we escape from Bosaga!’

“Razak, skill off! Sword!”

Ark decided on a course of action and shouted to Razak. Razak then changed into the Saw blade. Ark swung the Saw Blade like a whip and dealt chain damage to the thieves before shouting.

“Now! Buksil, Baekgu, run!”

“Hehehe, I’m a King! Everybody kneel down!”

But Buksil just smirked and started rattling nonsense. The range of Blood Lane was 10 metres so Buksil was also caught by its effects. Fortunately, Baekgu was able to resist and wasn’t caught by the abnormal states.

“That stupid bastard! Baekgu, bite Buksil and run with him to the opposite side!”

“Yes, Ark-nim!”

Baekgu bit the back of Buksil’s collar and quickly escaped. The thieves who weren’t caught hurriedly lifted their bow. After Ark swung the Saw Blade and blocked their attacks, he ran after Buksil using Sprint. At that moment, Racard who had been lying on the ground as a side effect of Blood Lane groaned.

“Awooooo, blood.....blood..... Master.....you are abandoning me..... I.....help.....”

“Go to your house. Summon release!”

Racard disappeared as Ark commanded without even looking back.

“Stand up!”

The four thieves shouted as they wildly shot arrows. However, they had already made it quite a distance thanks to Ark’s fast judgement of the situation. Arrows flying from a distance place wasn’t a problem. Ark hit the arrow with his Saw Blade and ran to an exit.

“To the right, this time it is the left side!”

Ark checked the map as he ran and soon the exit appeared. When he saw the dim light of the fireworks outside, Ark sighed with relief. When Baekgu ran through the exit, he immediately slammed on the brakes and stopped.

“What are you doing?”

“Ah, Ark-nim, there.....!”

When Ark shouted angrily, Baekgu indicated in front of him and stuttered. Ark followed Baekgu's finger and stiffened. He had barely found Buksil and came to an exit. When the 20 thieves entered the horror castle, they wanted to block the exit to the village. So they contacted the chasing thieves scattered about the village using 'Feather of Whispering' and made them gather at the exit.

'Dammit.....I came all the way here.....!'

Ark's face darkened. He had no mana left. Racard had also returned to his vampire castle. In such a situation he encountered 10 thieves. With the four thieves behind him, he couldn't escape back into the horror castle. The situation couldn't be worse than this.

'But.....!'

The only lucky thing was that this was a village. Furthermore, Ark's current exit wasn't far from the central square. If the 10 people caused a scuffle here than the guards would gather. Once the guards gathered than the thieves couldn't attack Ark anymore. In addition, the four thieves had killed NPCs in the horror castle so they were chaotic. He had to run away before the situation became larger. The problem was whether he could endure and protect Buksil at the same time.....

'But there is no other way! I have to hang in there!'

Ark made a firm resolution and clenched his sword. Then one of the ridiculous thieves wearing a mask of Sailor Moon said.

"Heh, did you want the guards to come?"

"Even with all of you, it will be hard to catch for you to take care of me. Do you want to confirm it?"

"No, that's not necessary. We've already confirmed your skills in the swamp. I even admired your skills which took care of Jepeteu hyung-nim. In other words....."

The Sailor Moon's voice suddenly became cold.

"I honestly want to step on you. But you're not our purpose right

now. We'll take care of you later once the pig is caught."

"Then try to kill me before the guards come."

"Ah Ark-nim, to go that far.....!"

Baekgu looked at Ark with impressed eyes at his resolution for death. The dog was still unaware of the situation. It was natural since his owner Buksil didn't know anything either. Anyway, Baekgu had some unexpected misunderstandings but Ark had no choice but to protect Buksil.

"Let's see? Is it really like that?"

At that time the Sailor Moon took out a strange scroll from his bag. It was a scroll with gold letters on it. He wasn't familiar with the scroll. However, he thought he had seen it somewhere. After staring at the eye-catching scroll for a while, Ark realized what it was too late.

'That's impossible.....no, there's no doubt! That is the [Banish] scroll Buksil previously used!'

Yes, it was the rare [Banish] scroll Buksil used in Seutandal on the Red Man. It was a scroll which sent the designated person to a place 10 km away! And the Sailor Moon was planning to use the [Banish] scroll on Ark! It wasn't necessary to say but the effect of the scroll was absolute. Didn't the [Banish] scroll exert tremendous havoc on the Red Man? There was no way for Ark to stop the effect of the scroll. If Ark was blown away 10 km then the situation would be over. Without Ark there to sabotage it, the thieves would seize Buksil and rob him of the memory crystal!

'Oh my god, this is.....!'

While Ark was sighing with despair, the Sailor Moon used the [Penetration] scroll on Ark. They needed his name in order to use the [Banish] scroll. Ark used footwork to try to avoid it but he couldn't avoid the absolute power of the scroll. Once the Sailor Moon figured out Ark's name, he was convinced of victory and lifted the [Banish] scroll.

“His name is Ark? I’ll remember that. But today you have to disappear. Target Ark, [Banish]!”

The red light from the scroll impacted with Ark. It was an attack he couldn’t avoid! Once it touched Ark, a red warning message appeared.

-The [Banish] scroll had been activated. <You will be banished to a random destination 10 km away>

‘Ah, no-!’

At the same time, there was an enormous sucking force and he was propelled into the air. Ark would be blown away 10 km in a blink of an eye.

‘It’s over. The memory crystal.....’

At that moment, a miracle idea appeared in Ark’s head. The opponent had used a rare scroll. This was truly the effect of a rare scroll. But he couldn’t afford to think about it now. The moment he was sucked into the air, Ark reflexively shouted. It had only been a few seconds since the scroll hit but Ark had already flown 20 metres.

“Radun, [Magnetic] scroll!”

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun spat out the scroll and Ark triggered it.

“Target Buksil, [Magnetic]!”

“Hehehe, I am the King..... Huh? Waaahhh!”

It was at that time. The abnormal effect disappeared and Buksil flew through the sky after Ark. Yes, the desperate method Ark came up with was to use a scroll to oppose the effect of another scroll! However, [Banish] was a very expensive and rare scroll. The scroll to stop it was probably another rare scroll. Ark’s purpose wasn’t to oppose the scroll but to escape with Buksil. So he came

up with the method of using the [Magnetic] scroll! It was a scroll to pull the target to the user. It had been dumb luck that he bought the scroll from Ronnie. In fact, [Magnetic] was completely cheap compared to the [Banish] scroll. However, he had managed to use the effects of the cheap scroll to counteract against the rare scroll. That was the charm of using scrolls in New World! Anyway, Buksil flew towards him when he activated the [Magnetic] scroll. The Sailor Moon looked at the distant Buksil and Ark with disgusted eyes.

“What, what the? This is?”

Ark and Buksil managed to escape thanks to the [Banish] scroll. The thieves were lost for words at the absurd situation.

‘Damn!’

Ark glared at Buksil. Buksil instantly froze as he saw the look. But he didn’t care if Ark was staring and just continued crying.

“Sob sob sob, Baekgu! Baekgu!”

The reason that Buksil had shed tears for several hours was Baekgu. When Ark had been hit by [Banish], he used the effect of [Magnetic] to save Buksil. In fact, he had a few more [Magnetism] scrolls. Ark thought that Baekgu was important so he also wanted to save Baekgu. However, he only used [Magnetic] after he had been hit by [Banish]. The effects of [Banish] only worked within a certain range so it was a miracle that he had managed to save Buksil. Anyway, Baekgu had been abandoned while surrounded by the thieves. Even if he couldn’t see it, Baekgu’s fate was clear. During the hot summer, the faithful dog Baekgu was unfortunately simmering in a pot thanks to his Master. After escaping from Bosaga village, Buksil was in a crazy state. It was to the extent that Buksil tried to attack Ark.

“Why did you rescue me? If I die then I would be resurrected but Baekgu won’t!”

“Damn, do you think I did it on purpose? Don’t I look troubled as

well?”

“I don’t know! It’s Ark-nim. Ark-nim killed Baekgu! Waaaaah, Baekgu should be alive! Ahh, poor Baekgu. Sob sob sob! Baekgu!”

Buksil lay soulless on the ground and continued shedding tears. But that wasn’t the reason Ark was annoyed. Ark also felt pain at the death of Baekgu the faithful dog. Anyway, he had succeeded in defending Buksil and the memory crystal. Thankfully, the [Banish] scroll had also sent him 10 km away from those guys. The destination of [Banish] was random. And because it left no marks, the thieves wouldn’t be able to track Ark.

Fortunately, Ark had been moved near a village. He waited until Buksil calmed down before mentioning the main subject.

“I didn’t want to say this but Baekgu’s death is your fault.”

“What are you saying?”

“The thieves were chasing you so desperately for the memory crystal.”

“Memory crystal? What do you mean? You can buy that at any store.....”

“That’s not what I mean. Those fellows want the video stored in your memory crystal.”

“V-video?”

“When you saw those guys for the first time, weren’t they doing some sort of business? They think that you recorded the scene with the magic projector. It’s because of the magic projector on your head. The uproar is because they want to take away the memory crystal with the video preserved in it. How about it? I’ll confirm it first. Did you take a video of those guys?”

“I haven’t checked the scenes yet. The video was filmed from the crystal inserted in my eyeball.”

Ark sighed with relief at Buksil’s answer. What if there had been all that commotion just to discover Buksil hadn’t taken the video? Then

Buksil asked in a voice that indicated he didn't understand.

"But why? The video is the same as everybody else!"

"That....."

Ark finally explained the whole story. In reality, the thieves were a part of a wanted criminal syndicate. And Buksil had accidentally filmed a black market transaction by the criminals. If the police saw the video of the transaction then they might be able to discover some clues to where the criminals were hiding.

"That's why those fellows were pursuing you so much."

"That's such a ridiculous thing.....!"

As expected, Buksil's face became ridiculous when he heard the explanation. That was the reason why Ark confessed it. Buksil wasn't in a normal state from losing Baekgu. If he just told Buksil to take out the memory crystal then he didn't know how Buksil would react. But if he talked about a criminal organization, then Buksil would shrink with fear and take out the memory crystal. That was what he thought. However, Ark made a mistake in confessing everything.

"Do you see now? It is really dangerous. Luckily, I know a detective really well so hand me the memory crystal. He'll take care of the rest."

"I don't want to."

Buksil said as he turned his head. Ark stared with stunned eyes at the unexpected situation.

"What? You don't want to? Why are you saying that now?"

"Yes. What about it? In the end, Baekgu died because of that memory crystal. So shouldn't I keep the memory crystal that Baekgu risked his life for?"

"What are you talking about? The dangerous criminals are targeting that!"

“Sheesh! Don’t make me laugh. A crime organization? I’m not afraid of those guys. Anyway, they only know my New World ID. If the police can’t find someone using just the ID then how can the criminal organization? And aren’t they wanted criminals?”

Buksil was surprisingly smart. However, he still had a trick up his sleeve to persuade Buksil.

“Yes, they’re wanted! It is an obligation of the public to cooperate with the police!”

“It is my freedom to decide whether to cooperate or not. Korea is a free democratic country!”

.....But his trick failed. Ark tried a few more times but Buksil wouldn’t budge.

“I was contracted to film scenes of Ark-nim. So Ark-nim has no rights to any other videos that I take. The memory crystal was also bought with my money.”

His words did make some sense. Buksil had been with Ark for a long time. It was natural for him to pick up some things. But Ark really was in a horrible situation. Why did that guy have to be so smart at such a time? In addition, if he tried to kill Buksil to retrieve the memory crystal then he would just revive in Bosaga. So he had no way to make Buksil cooperate.

Of course there were methods to take away the opponent’s goods in New World. One common method among chaotic users was to use the [Robbery] and [Seize] skill. The thieves were probably planning to use this method on Buksil. However, Ark had no such scrolls. While he bought a lot of scrolls from the thieves, only chaotic NPCs sold the [Robbery] or [Seize] scroll. It was impossible that Ronnie would have those sorts of scrolls.

‘Even if I have the scrolls.....’

No matter what, he didn’t want to use the scroll on his colleague and then kill him. In addition, if he used the scrolls clumsily and then Buksil disconnected then the problem would be even more serious. Not only the memory crystal but the japtm he entrusted to

Buksil would fly away.

‘So far, that guy hasn’t quit playing the game despite the many abuses he went through. But now Buksil is insane from Baekgu’s death. I can’t be assured of his actions.’

In this situation, Ark eventually lifted the white flag. In fact, Ark knew this. Buksil wouldn’t give it up even if he had to die. He meant it when he said he wouldn’t give the memory crystal. However, Ark also didn’t want to beat up Buksil. But personal feelings aside, he still needed the memory crystal.

‘I guess Buksil’s request will be to improve his treatment.’

.....Okay. Then what do I have to do to make you give me the memory crystal?”

When Ark asked in a weakened voice, Buksil immediately replied like he had been waiting for it.

“800 gold.”

“What?”

“Didn’t you hear me? 800 gold!”

“Y-you want money? Weren’t you upset by Baekgu’s death just now?”

“I’m saying this because Baekgu died protecting the memory crystal.”

Buksil said tearfully as he thought about Baekgu.

“Didn’t you say the memory crystal had a clue about the crime organization? If what Ark-nim said is correct, Baekgu was a smart dog who helped the real police. If we be terrible if such a smart dog devoted his who life to it only to receive no repayment!”

“.....So?”

“I will use the money from Ark-nim to build a statue of Baekgu in the square of Schudenberg’s capital city, Selebrid. Once I accomplish it, everyone will know about Baekgu. I checked and 800 gold should be

enough to erect a statue in Selebrid.”

“You want money just to build a statue of a dog?”

Ark muttered with amazed eyes. Then Buksil shouted with a displeased expression.

“It’s not a dog, it’s Baekgu! The smart dog Baekgu! Baekgu is.....ugh, Baekgu!”

Buksil once again started wailing as emotions welled inside him. Then Racard muttered with an impressed face.

“Ohhhhh, I really can’t see this scene without tears. I don’t know anyone who would think about building a statue for their pet dog. Normally they would throw them away once dead from old age or illness. Huk, I would’ve preferred to meet such a Master. I’m sorry for ignoring you in the meantime Buksil. You really are a great owner.”

“Shut up, huh?”

Sparks flew from Ark’s eyes as he glared at Racard. No, sparks also flew between the left and right side of his brain. 800 gold? 800 gold for a pet dog? No, apart from the price. Wasting 800 gold just to build a dog statue? He really thought the guy needed a bullet in his head. Even without the bullet inside his head, the pig needed his sanity back. Unfortunately, the person holding the gun was Buksil. Just like Buksil said, there was no way for the criminals to find him in real life. That also applied to Ark and Isyuram. With no way to find Buksil in real life to get the memory crystal, his hands were tied.

‘But 800 gold for one memory crystal.....’

He wanted to put aside the investigation. But he knew how important it was for Isyuram. Isyuram was the one who wanted the information so he could pass on Buksil’s request of 800 gold to him. But Ark didn’t have the same thought. Isyuram was more than a simple taekwondo teacher to Ark. Ark was in Isyuram’s debt. If it hadn’t been for Isyuram then Ark would’ve ended up in hospital from the gangsters Andel sent after him. And knowing Andel’s character, he

would've continued sending gangsters after Ark.

'At that time, Teacher was the one who talked to Andel's father. In fact, Teacher might've even been disadvantaged by that incident. But Teacher didn't waver.'

Normally he wanted money for favours. However, Ark didn't think about money when helping Isyuram. If Ark was in danger than Isyuram wouldn't hesitate to jump in. Ark always paid back any grudge. That was Ark's cardinal rule. With one word from Buksil it would be over and he wouldn't be able to help Isyuram. Now he strongly wanted to leave the money to Isyuram. No, how much money was needed to build a dog statue in New World?

'Yes, I can't ask Teacher for 800 gold. If I tell Teacher the 800 gold is for a dog statue.....ah, that's not money well spent!'

Ark thought like that. No, he might go crazy if he thought about it too hard. Fortunately he still have the monthly salary from Global Exos and thanks to his new sale strategies, he had been receiving more money for his items. But when he tried to hand over the money, as expected his hands stopped moving. Ark was tortured for a while before he made a suggestion.

"Okay. I'll give you 800 gold for a dog statue."

"Eh? R-really?"

When Ark obediently agreed, Buksil looked at him with shocked eyes. Of course, Ark was agreeing obediently.

"There is one condition."

"Condition? Are you trying a trick?"

"No, that's not it. Didn't you say you wanted to build a statue of Baekgu in Selebrid square?"

".....So?"

"Then can you wait for the money until we return to Selebrid? I don't have 800 gold on me right now. Give me until we reach Selebrid for the deadline for payment. How about it?"

Buksil looked at him suspiciously.

“You’ll definitely sign a contract?”

“Of course! Do you think I would trick you?”

“Aren’t you going to look for a way to cheat me in the meantime?”

That was correct. He really was a sharp fellow! As more time passed, the pig’s awareness of his tricks only increased. At Ark’s expression, Buksil spoke in a decisive voice.

“I won’t hand the memory crystal to you until you write the contract. Don’t try to decrease the amount of money. Once again, Baekgu sacrificed his life to defend it. This time I won’t back down. The amount is 800 gold. No matter what happens, that payment amount won’t change. The date of payment is until you reach Selebrid and it can’t be longer than a month. Once a month passes, you have to pay immediately no matter what. It is the Baekgu statue establishment fund.”

“Okay, I understand. Write the contract! Stop talking about Baekgu so much!”

Ark was fed up and forced him to write up the contract.

-A Merchant’s Agreement.

<Contractor: Ark=Buksil>

Once Ark and Buksil arrive in Selebrid, you will pay 800 gold. If you don’t arrive in Selebrid before the time limit of 1 month then you will have to pay the money immediately. If the promised amount isn’t paid then the Merchant’s guild will extract a penalty of 2,400 gold from Ark’s Comprehensive Store in Lancel village. And Buksil will receive 80% of the penalty, giving him the right to 1920 gold.

It was a humiliating contract.

‘That dog statue really will be built with my money.’

Whenever he saw the contract, a sigh automatically emerged. In

fact, Ark had a plan when he decided to write the contract. He needed to pay Buksil the money after arriving in Selebrid. However, Ark was presently in Bristania and had no intention of returning to Selebrid yet. He thought it was possible to give excuses and delay payment for infinity while he never returned to Selebrid. However, Buksil had become smarted and embedded a payment date of 1 month. Even his last plan had been blocked.

‘Dammit, during that one month I have to think of a way to save my 800 gold.’

Fortunately, not long ago Ark had threatened Agathe and received 2000 gold. The payment extended over 6 months so in two months he would have around 670 gold. Two months in game time was around 20 days so he had already secured 670 gold. If he continued hunting and collecting japtem then he should be able to raise enough. Of course, he still had to pay the bill even if he dragged it out for 20 days. It didn’t change the fact that money would still be lost. However, it wasn’t possible to take the money he currently had in his pocket so he devised this method. Anyway, Ark was handed the memory crystal after the contract was written. After the video files were extracted, the memory crystal was soon destroyed. The video files he paid 800 gold for! Ark searched through the videos but couldn’t find a clue.

‘Did I lose money for no reason?’

Ark suddenly had that thought as he received the video files. Well, this was police work so Ark didn’t want to intervene anymore.

“Anyway, the situation is finished with this!”

Ark sighed with relief as he sent the video file to Isyuram’s email. Despite receiving 800 gold, Buksil was still crying over Baekgu but Ark shook off his displeasure. He felt a sense of accomplishment after helping Isyuram. And now that the dire situation was over, an item popped into his head.

‘Now I can finally eat my Necromancer’s Immortality Pill!’

Yes, it was the Necromancer’s Immortality Pill that he left at the

Magic Institute warehouse in Ciel! With 81 hours required, it had finally been completed after four days. That was the reason Ark came running to a village with a Magic Institute branch. Yet he had no intention of going back to Ciel through the Letter Movement. Not only was it hard to endure but the Letter Movement was too expensive. One use cost 50 gold! He received a discount as a full member of the Magic Institute but it was still 42 gold and 50 silver. Anyway, it wasn't necessary for Ark to return to Ciel. The private warehouse for a Magic Institute member could be accessed from every branch.

"I'd like to take out the item I left in the private warehouse at the Ciel's Magic Institute branch."

"I understand. What's your name?"

"It is Ark."

"Ah, you are Ark-nim. I'll send it immediately."

All the magicians at the Magic Institute were familiar with Ark. The magician who transferred it had a respectful expression, just like Rabent the branch manager in Ciel. Fortunately, Ark finally regained his Survival Cooking pot after 4 days. Inside the pot was a small black pill.

'The Necromancer's Immortality Pill!'

An information window appeared as soon as Ark grabbed it.

-The maturation process has ended and the Necromancer's Immortality Pill has been completed.

You have completed the 'Necromancer's Immortality Pill' from the secret technique that has been passed down since ancient times. The Immortality Pill is one of the hidden secrets in New World. It allows you to maximise the power contained in the Monster's Essence and apply it to the player.

Making the Immortality Pill is one of the biggest honours for Survival Cooking chefs and is an achievement that has significant implications.

*Fame increases by 800
*Intelligence increases by 30.
* Survival cooking skill increases by 40.
* The 'Monster's Pill' information has been updated.
<Number of Immortality Pills completed: 7>

"I finally finished it!"

Ark lifted the pill with trembling hands. When calculating the time used to gather the ingredients, he had invested several months into it. Then the immortality pill was finally completed after a long 96 hours. Was making it easy? When thinking about the trouble he went through on the ferry to prevent the degree of completion from falling, he really felt like crying. However, he finally received a tangible item for his enormous time and effort. He couldn't know the effects before he ate it so he wouldn't be able to sell it, but that wasn't a problem.....

'Even if it is possible to sell it, I never even thought of giving up an item I put so much effort into. Besides, it has been strangely noisy around me lately. Apart from the thieves, it would really be a headache if I encounter Bread and Radian again. I need to increase my stats a bit more.'

Ark tried to calm his heart and swallowed the pill. With a loud sound effect, the information window appeared.

-Necromancer's Immortality Pill (Immortality Pill Rating: A, Degree of Completion: A)

A powerful immortality pill which contains the Necromancer Tamura's strength. It grants the special abilities of a necromancer.
*There is an added bonus according to the degree of completion.
<All stats +8, Intelligence +20, Magic Resistance +20%, Resistance to all Diseases +20%>

-The 'Dark Fog' stat has been created.

*Dark Fog (+20):

'Dark Fog' increases resistance to magic and physical attacks with the darkness attribute.

As an added bonus, it also increases the attack power of all physical and magic attacks with the darkness attribute. For every 1 point in the Dark Fog stat, it will increase physical and magic resistance to the dark attribute by 0.1%. Your damage will also rise by 0.1%. Stat distribution is impossible and Dark Fog will rise slightly every time you use attacks with the darkness attribute.

-Racial skill 'Soul Extortion' has been learnt.

Soul Extortion (Beginner, Active):

The specialty of a necromancer is to use their knowledge of life and darkness to summon creatures from another dimension. The power needed to control such creatures is Spiritual Power. Soul Extortion is dark attribute technique which extorts the souls of monsters to increase Spiritual Power.

When using Soul Extortion, it is possible to deal 50 damage. In addition, it is possible to exceed the maximum amount of Spiritual Power is Soul Extortion is used a lot. (Extorting strong monsters will cause Spiritual Power to rise faster.)

* Soul Extortion will succeed when it deals 70% of the damage. The user's soul will receive terrible damage if they die and the resurrection time will be increased to a maximum of 72 hours.

"Ohhhh, it is indeed an A class immortality pill!"

Ark exclaimed at the sight of the information window. The additional bonus was all stats +8, Intelligence +20, Magic Resistance +20% and Resistance to all Diseases +20%! If he included intelligence, it was like he had gained 7 levels. There was also addition magic resistance and disease resistance! A lot of high level monsters caused disease so it was a very useful stat. But was that all? A new

stat and skill were also created.

“I don’t need to see anything else. Dark Fog is a jackpot!”

Dark Fog was similar to the Resilience stat he learnt when he ate the Slime’s Immortality Pill. But there was one part that was decisively different from Resilience. The stat increased his attack and defense against the dark attribute. It didn’t apply to his general skills but most of Ark’s profession-specific skills were of the dark attribute. In other words, wasn’t it a stat specifically for his profession?

‘There’s also Soul Extortion.....’

Ark looked at the information for Soul Extortion with an ambiguous expression. Recently Ark had really noticed the shortage of Spiritual Power. Even before he changed professions, Ark had been worried about his lack of Spiritual Power. Then he received the Area Declaration skill Glory of the Night which consumed 400 Spiritual Power and 2000 mana. The Area Declaration used 400 Spiritual Power with just one use. Spiritual Power also had an unusually slow recovery time so he wouldn’t be able to summon his familiars. In addition, the Ghost Knight Corps skill also required 300 Spiritual Power. When considering that Soul Extortion could increase Spiritual Power beyond its maximum, it really was a jackpot. However, the information window didn’t explain how he could successfully use Soul Extortion to raise Spiritual Power beyond its maximum.

It would be useless if it only increased his Spiritual Power by 1 since he would have to use it hundreds of times. Besides, there was also an effect on the user. Soul Extortion had to deal 70% of the damage to have a proper effect? It only did 50 damage so how many times would he have to attack to deal 70% of the damage?

‘Well, it is a skill that doesn’t eat mana.....’

Ark was content with the skill since it could hopefully raise his Spiritual Power. Even without Soul Extortion, the bonus stats and Dark Fog were rewarding enough. How many users in New World would be able to receive such stat bonuses at once?

“Now that is finished. All that’s left is the <Home of the Fire

Draconian> quest!”

Ark’s next destination was Hwaryong Mountain in the north of Bristania! After eating the immortality pill, Ark ran across Bristania filled with motivation.

“Baekgu~!”

With tears and a runny nose, the pig followed behind him.

Pirate Clean-up!

“Did you wait long?”

“No, I just came.”

“Really? I’ll get you something.”

Lee Myung-ryong called a shop assistant over with a gesture and took a seat.

“What will you eat?”

“For the moment, 2 servings of the parfait special set! And I.....”

Lee Myung-ryong ordered without looking at the menu. Hyun-woo asked doubtfully.

“Are there more people coming?”

“No. I promised you before. If you help me retrieve the video file then I’ll buy you 3 servings of the parfait special set.”

“.....I didn’t mean to buy it all at once.”

“Really? Then 2 servings of the parfait special set.”

After the sales assistant grabbed the menu and returned to the counter, he started whispering about those two. It was reasonable. It was currently 10.30 in the morning. Those two were the only people in the cafe so the atmosphere was uncomfortable. Since they ordered parfaits as soon as they sat down, it was impossible for eyes not to be drawn to them. Furthermore, Hyun-woo was over 180 cm tall. Although his build didn’t look that extraordinary, exercise had hardened his body. In addition, Lee Myung-ryong’s sharp gaze was enough to make gangsters cry. The first time Hyun-woo saw Lee Myung-ryong, he thought he was more like a gangster than a policeman. Yet the two men just sat down and ordered parfait? What business did they have? However, Hyun-woo wasn’t concerned

with the eyes of other people.

‘The parfait still isn’t done.....’

Hyun-woo looked at people drinking coffee and thought they had it good. At a cheap cafe, coffee costs 8,000~9,000 won. Vending machine coffee only cost 1000 won and he could drink eight times more coffee. It was so absurd that he could only laugh. So every time Hyun-woo came to the cafe, he would order the parfait. He didn’t even like the parfait. But it wasn’t possible to buy parfait from the vending machine so at least he could think it was a fair price. In other words, he felt less ripped off. No matter the game or reality, Hyun-woo related everything to money.

“But does Teacher also like parfait? Why are you eating a child’s food?”

“I haven’t slept for two days. My body now wants a lot of sugar.”

Lee Myung-ryong muttered as he stroked his scraggly beard. It wasn’t just his beard. Lee Myung-ryong normally didn’t wear neat attire but it was particularly serious today. His eyes were also really haggard with thick dark circles beneath it. It was a face which was the symbol of fatigue.

“This is all thanks to you.”

“Me?”

“The video file you sent me.”

“Oh, that’s right! Then you couldn’t sleep because of the video means....?”

“It is safe.”

Lee Myung-ryong laughed and replied.

“If I delayed for even a few hours then the video file would be worthless.”

“What are you saying?”

Hyun-woo asked as the shop assistant lowered a parfait. A sigh

automatically emerged as he saw the parfait decorated with juice and ice cream.

‘This is a parfait worth 542 gold and 50 silver.....’

When he considered the money that went into this parfait, it was enough to cause tears. Lee Myung-ryong crunched the ornamental umbrella that was plugged into the parfait and began to talk again.

“Originally I’m not supposed to tell information to people unrelated to the investigation but I figured I can tell you. However, you wouldn’t understand if I tell you all the details. So I’ll just summarize the situation.”

The contents were related to the criminal organization. In dramas or movies, people normally talked about it in a serious voice. However, Lee Myung-ryong just seemed like a next door ajusshi talking as he ate the ice cream while playing with the umbrella. Although the case was related to a criminal organization, Lee Myung-ryong seemed completely different from the captain of the SWAT team who incited fear in criminals. Although it was an investigation, he didn’t feel the need to be serious.

“You said you saw the video?”

“Yes. But wasn’t the information just insubstantial?”

“It’s natural that you would think the contents were insignificant. Because those guys only used code words during their dialogue in the movie. No, it was closer to a password than a code word.”

“Password?”

“If a criminal organization isn’t clever these days than they wouldn’t be able to survive for long. These days they often used indirect words when referring to specific things. Furthermore, the meaning often changed so the police often don’t know that it means. But they made a mistake once. There was the word H-56 in the video.”

When Hyun-woo heard the word H-56 in the video, he also thought it was questionable.

“That word refers to one of the various trading methods that they used.”

According to Lee Myung-ryong’s words, the criminal organization had various illegal trading methods. They would change the route according to the situation. ‘H-56’ was one of the prepared methods which the police still hadn’t completely figured out.

“But by listening to the conversation around the password ‘H-56,’ I could figure out the general principles.”

That was why Lee Myung-ryong hadn’t slept for two days. By watching the video and determining the general principles of the transaction method, the police had figured out their last transaction place. To his surprise, the transaction place Lee Myung-ryong figured out was a coin locker at the train station.

“H-56 is the transaction method which takes advantage of the train station which people from all over the nation uses to communicate with other people in their organization or to deal business. Although sometimes it goes through a courier or post office, there was the chance it could fall into the hands of the general public and then there would be police supervision.”

It was also easy for the criminal organization to discover the police supervision. And if things went bad in the middle and the police had to pounce then they wouldn’t be able to capture the people affiliated with the organization.

“In addition, those ‘items’ go through New World so it won’t be easy to track the funds. Even if we attack and seize the ‘thing,’ there is no evidence that it isn’t just a lost item.”

‘That’s amazing!’

Hyun-woo once again realized that Lee Myung-ryong was a police officer. It felt like a war between policemen and criminal organizations in Hong Kong movies. In fact, Lee Myung-ryong hadn’t even explained 1/10ths of the information. The criminal organization’s dealings were more calculated than it appeared and the method Korea’s police force used to combat it was unimaginable to the

public. But don't misunderstand. Despite the public not knowing, Korea's crime rate was low. Korea's low crime rate was thanks to the police fighting against the criminals in order to maintain the public's lifestyle.

"But it is a little strange."

Hyun-woo suddenly said.

"That video was taken a few days ago. If they knew that the video was taken than wouldn't they move quickly to take back the dangerous contents?"

"They tried but it wasn't possible."

"They can't?"

"Clearly they monitored the route of the thing clearly. The items are worth a few billion won so it would be a fatal blow if they lost it. But there is a chance that a henchman could leak the information. So the only one who can accurately monitor the transaction route is the boss of the organization. Garret and Jepeteu who appeared in the video are only middle ranked bosses."

Although Garrett and Jepeteu thought it was dangerous, they couldn't interrupt the transaction. Since they weren't supposed to talk about the transactions but it was caught on video in the game, they couldn't bear to tell the boss. There was also no reason to think that Buksil would take the video to the police. Still, they couldn't ignore the possibility which was why they tried to so desperately recover it. Lee Myung-ryong then laughed and said.

"Anyway, that stuff finally arrived at its final destination last night. In other words, if we were a few days late than the video would have no value. That's why I told you it was safe."

After Lee Myung-ryong grasped the situation, hurriedly rallied people from the Special Crime Countermeasures division and hid them near the coin locker. By midnight, they managed to arrest the person and collected the thing.

"If we tracked that fellow then we could discover the place the

wanted criminals are hiding. But the henchman we caught is a subordinate of Jepeteu. Jepeteu probably wouldn't show up until the end. The subordinate would've probably disposed of the goods and then hand it to Jepeteu through New World. So we decided to catch him for the moment."

Of course, it was still a secret that the police force was investigating in New World. Because of that, Lee Myung-ryong had to be careful that Jepeteu didn't sense he was the one who arrested the henchman. If the police could figure out the henchman's route and deploy traffic police to search similar vehicles then they could grab other henchmen.

"That's actually why I wanted to talk to you today. When we captured him there was a murder nearby and we questioned the henchman after that. Jepeteu was still searching for the video. I think he had no luck. And the risk from the video is gone after the thing was reclaimed so they shouldn't chase you anymore."

While there was no obvious connection with the video, his henchman was caught by the police. In this situation, Jepeteu and the organization members would have no choice but to be tense. It was like that in reality but in the game, they could take a break while watching the situation. Fortunately, Ark's bad relationship with the thieves was ended.

"But you didn't catch most of the organization."

"Why do you think I stayed up all night?"

Lee Myung-ryong inserted the remaining parfait into his mouth and laughed.

"After we arrested him at midnight, we questioned that fellow for a long time. This is a fight against time. It would probably only be 12 hours until they discover that a follower was caught. But the police had already obtained the necessary information after 5 hours."

"Was it Teacher? I don't need to see to understand what happened to that person."

Hyun-woo was familiar with Lee Myung-ryong's violence after

experiencing his version of sparring and muttered. Then Lee Myung-ryong jumped at the unexpected words and exclaimed.

“Hey, Hey! What are you thinking? Do you think I would break his two arms? I am a democratic policeman.”

“Does the democratic police beat people up?”

“Am I a bully? Anyone who listens will be scared. And recently his arms had been in pain so there was no need to beat him up. Have you heard of a plea bargain?”

“Plea bargain? The one that frequently appears in foreign movies?”

“Yes, that’s right. Our country also does it. While that guy is a criminal, we cut him a deal. He’s just a henchman so he did odd jobs and chores. In exchange for the plea bargain, he will tell us what he knows.”

“I’m glad, but I also think it is a bit pathetic.”

“I don’t know what you’ve imagined but this isn’t a movie. Will you die for you hyung-nim? Would he sacrifice himself for you? Don’t make me laugh. Gangsters in the past and present don’t have any guts.”
The gangster became nervous as he heard Lee Myung-ryong’s voice.

“I’m only going to offer this just once. You’re different from your hyung-nim. While you could live a new life thanks to your hyung-nim, you don’t have that much moral obligation to him. Since you’re hyung-nim has surrounded himself with guys like you.”

After the henchman heard Lee Myung-ryong’s ‘threat,’ he confessed a great deal of information in exchange for the plea bargain. Of course, he was just a henchman so they were unable to obtain satisfactory confidential information. But they were somewhat lucky? The henchman was quite close to some people in the organization so he knew their hiding place.

“Before they heard the news that the henchman was caught, the detectives had surrounded it. Those fellows didn’t expect that we could move that fast.”

The purpose of the detectives surrounded the hideout wasn't to catch the criminals. Lee Myung-ryong's purpose was to arrest all of the criminal organization! In order to catch the big fish, he had to release the small ones. Once the organization members heard the news that a follower was caught, they would have to take action. The detectives kept an eye on their movements and collected information, while planning a way to arrest Jepeteu the interim boss.

"It's just starting now."

Despite not sleeping for two days, Lee Myung-ryong was full of energy. It reminded him of his youthful days fighting against gangs and criminal organizations. In fact, Lee Myung-ryong hadn't expected that he could attain this result from the game when he first started New World. Finding one person in a city of hundreds of thousands wasn't easy. It was a lot harder when considering that millions connected to New World! He couldn't even understand the game system so how could Lee Myung-ryong find the wanted criminals? But Lee Myung-ryong's efforts, Ark's help and a little luck managed to bring him to these results. If he didn't have a keen interest than he wouldn't be a policeman in South Korea. Of course, there was a long way to go before he could sweep up all of the criminal organization. But Lee Myung-ryong was full of confidence from the excellent results so far.

"While those guys are hiding, they will concentrate on building a base in New World. And I'm already trusted immensely by those guys."

Lee Myung-ryong laughed and spoke. However, he couldn't be that smug about it. Lee Myung-ryong's credit rating within the bandit group had only risen because he was killed by Baekgu in the horror castle. The thieves had misunderstood the reason why Lee Myung-ryong was there. Thanks to Garam's claims, Lee Myung-ryong was now formally a member of the bandit group. Of course, he didn't have enough influence yet but he could seize the opportunity. While the hidden detectives investigated in reality, Lee Myung-ryong would infiltrate the group in the game.

"Therefore I will be busy for a while."

Just as he was standing up from his seat, Lee Myung-ryong

suddenly remembered something and said.

“Ah, I spoke to the section chief of the Special Crimes Countermeasures division about you. While the incident isn’t over yet, the investigation has opened because of the video so the Police Commissioner might give you a commendation.”

“Please don’t worry about it.”

Hun-woo laughed unpleasantly and shook his head. Hyun-woo didn’t want to appear in front of other people. Then Lee Myung-ryong smiled and added.

“You don’t want the bonus reward for the crucial tip?”

“.....Thank you.”

“Then wait for the good news.”

Lee Myung-ryong laughed and went back to the police agency. After separating from Lee Myung-ryong, Hyun-woo went home feeling refreshed. After starting New World, Hyun-woo escaped from the life where he had to worry about meals. After helping Lee Myung-ryong this time, he realized he had a sense of social justice. Hyun-woo was satisfied at the idea of helping. Yet Hyun-woo never guessed what would happen next. The effort to catch the wanted criminals had started to affect New World.....

“Mother, I’m home!”

“Ah, you’ve come?”

After Hyun-woo entered, a booming voice could be heard from the living room. The man sitting down on the living room sofa was Gwon Hwa-rang. It wasn’t an abrupt visit. After his mother started the outpatient treatment, Gwon Hwa-rang could often be seen visiting the house. Why? Well, wasn’t the reason clear?

“Did you come to flirt with my mother?”

“He only came here to talk.”

Although his mother scowled, Gwon Hwa-rang just naturally laughed.

“Well, that’s right. I have to flirt before I lose her to other guys.”

After Gwon Hwa-rang started New World, this was the part that changed the most. While Hyun-woo first met Gwon Hwa-rang, he had seemed like a bear. At that time, Gwon Hwa-rang had been really blunt. After dozens of years as a special instructor, he wasn’t an ordinary policeman. After he got injured and retired, that tendency to be blunt got a lot worse. Thanks to his disappointment with the police agency and society, his mind had been damaged for a bit. It was only after starting New World that Gwon Hwa-rang began to change. After playing the game and interacting with NPCs, Gwon Hwa-rang had his passion in justice restored. If somebody didn’t bother working then they wouldn’t receive a reward. To the frustrated Gwon Hwa-rang, New World was like paradise compared to reality.

‘That is also one of the ways his character has changed.’

Hyun-woo thought this as he saw Gwon Hwa-rang walk to the kitchen. Gwon Hwa-rang had become more active in pursuing his mother. Before Gwon Hwa-rang had used his injury as an obstacle. Since Gwon Hwa-rang was so proud of his strength, it was an obstacle that was difficult to accept. So he had been passive when caring for Hyun-woo’s mother. Previously Gwon Hwa-rang had gotten drunk and started complaining to him.

“I really like your mother. Despite what other people said, it’s not just because of sympathy. I’m serious. I don’t care what other people say. Although I don’t care.....I was scared that you or your mother would be uncomfortable by my attention. And taking care of your mother with an injury like this.....”

His strong sense of responsibility was a burden to Gwon Hwa-rang. But while listening to Gwon Hwa-rang recently, it appeared like a lot of those worries had disappeared. In fact, Gwon Hwa-rang’s physical obstacle had disappeared a long time ago. However, sometimes the mental state was the biggest obstacle to somebody with disabilities. Despite his limp healing, his mind and body hadn’t accepted it so he still behaved like he was injured. But after spending most of his days in New World, that mental obstacle had

relaxed a lot. Hyun-woo had heard that virtual reality games could also be used as a therapy for those sorts of mental obstacles.

Now Gwon Hwa-rang was almost back to normal. The confident Gwon Hwa-rang didn't hide his feelings about Hyun-woo's mother anymore. It was unnecessary to say but Hyun-woo preferred this Gwon Hwa-rang.

'I hope my mother improves quickly so those two can get married.....'

Hyun-woo was hoping for that.

"Then you should flirt harder. I'll go to the studio so I don't interfere."

"Oh, then I'm thankful. Aren't your senses really quick now?"

Gwon Hwa-rang laughed and praised him. Hyun-woo was about to leave for his game studio when he suddenly asked.

"But ajusshi, how is that work you started?"

"Huh? Work I started? What do you mean?"

"I'm talking about the clean-up of the lawless port."

"Ah, you mean that?"

Gwon Hwa-rang scratched his head with an irritated expression before sighing.

"It has become slightly troublesome."

"Troublesome? Then you failed to track the pirate ships?"

"No. Tracking was a success. In the end....."

Gwon Hwa-rang drank cold water and explained the situation. The day that Hyun-woo had been attacked by the pirates, Gwon Hwa-rang had followed them and determined the location of the lawless port. The lawless port was a small island near the east coast of Seutandal. Once JusticeMan figured out the location, the battle fleet was dispatched as planned and they tried to attack the lawless port.

"But I lost two combat ships and retreated."

“Were the pirates at the lawless port that strong?”

“Well, it’s not that they’re strong. But the problem isn’t the pirates. With Isabel’s investment, the battle fleet consisted of 40 transport and battle ships. On the other hand, the pirate ships gathered at the lawless port only added up to 30 speedboats. After arriving, I could batter them in a matter of hours.”

“Then?”

“.....I can’t enter the lawless port.”

Gwon Hwa-rang sighed and muttered. Neither Gwon Hwa-rang nor Hyun-woo thought that there would be an ambush near the lawless port. The ambush was the reef spread near the lawless port like a landmine. Yes, the Hermes alliance knew about the island when they entered Seutandal thanks to the Nakujuk and built the lawless port there. The only way to enter the lawless island was through the ocean. But the sea surrounding the island was dangerous. Under the ocean was a spread out reef waiting to sink its teeth into boats that enter the lawless port. Furthermore, the influence of the reef meant that there were sometimes whirlpools that would swallow ships. Although it seemed like an ordinary ocean, it was the same as a maze holding traps for unsuspecting ships. And naturally the lawless pirates knew the location of every reef and whirlpool perfectly. The battle fleet knew nothing about the reef and whirlpools as they chased the pirates. The results of the naval battle could be easily seen.

“We sent some divers underwater but it wasn’t easy to grasp the terrain. The underwater terrain is too complicated and we couldn’t watch the movements of the pirates either. So the battle fleet is just surrounding the lawless port for the moment. Fortunately the pirates can’t go around plundering either.....”

But it wasn’t possible for the battle fleet to be stuck at the lawless port forever. Not all the pirates in New World were at the lawless port. There were also pirates aimed at the merchant fleets from the continent. Ever since Seutandal rose, the maritime activity had increased so the pirate strongholds had extended to the continent and Seutandal. If the entire battle fleet was tied to the lawless port

than they had no way to stop those pirates. However, it wasn't possible to turn the battle fleet around. The battle fleet consisted of 40 ships while the pirates had 30. They had the numerical advantage but it wasn't an absolute. If the combat ships near the lawless port were reduced then there was a chance the pirates would counterattack. In a geographically disadvantaged area, the battle fleet would have no chance if they were outnumbered.

"The problem is even more serious than that. Information that we blocked the lawless port went out to pirates near the continent. If the pirates from the continent and the lawless port join hands then we'll be attacked from the front and behind. That is the most fearful thing. If the battle fleet is destroyed by the pirates....."

It wasn't necessary to hear the rest. Currently Seutandal was under the authority of the Baran and the Eastern Nation which is how they managed to attack many users and trade business from the continent. If the pirates seized the sea then that advantage would disappear. Originally Seutandal was a land which lived separately from the continent with no trade between them. If they didn't trade with the continent then they would have no problems surviving. But going back to the previous talk. While they didn't exchange in trade at the beginning, once the exchange took place they had developed rapidly. As a simple example, what would happen if modern day Korea couldn't trade with other countries anymore? Seutandal would rapidly lose its power and their forces would weaken. At that time, if the Hermes alliance invaded with the Nakujuk then there would be no way to defeat them. In the worst case scenario, Haman Fortress might fall under the influence of the Hermes and Nakujuk alliance.

'Now I understand. This is the scenario that the Hermes alliance was planning on!'

Even after Hyun-woo discovered that the lawless port was related to the Hermes alliance, he didn't pay it that much thought. It was annoying but he hadn't thought that the occupied Seutandal could be shaken by pirates. But it was different if they joined hands with pirates from the continent.

'The pirates also need a safe place. But there is no room for the

pirates to penetrate the three powers on the continent. Yet the situation is different in Seutandal. If the pirates really accomplish it then the scale will exceed imagination. That strength could make Seutandal into a pirate kingdom.....no doubt. The Hermes alliance had that in mind from the beginning when they constructed the lawless port.'

When he thought about it, Hyun-woo was suddenly afraid. If they got their hands on Seutandal as planned then the Hermes alliance would obtain tremendous power. The Ark's dream of creating a triangular trade route between Lancel-Silvana-Seutandal would burst like a bubble. No, if the Hermes alliance gained that power then Ark wouldn't even be able to live in New World.

'But if the lawless port is their fortress.....'

A sigh emerged from Hyun-woo's face. It wasn't necessary to say again but Gwon Hwa-rang was a tactical strategist. When participating in the Seutandal war, all the general strategy tactics relating to warfare came from Gwon Hwa-rang. If it wasn't for Gwon Hwa-rang at that time then Seutandal might've already fallen into the hands of the Nakujuk and the Hermes alliance. Yet even Gwon Hwa-rang couldn't find a way to clean up the lawless port. Even if Hyun-woo ran to Seutandal immediately, he wouldn't be able to change anything.

'Is there a way to pass through the deadlock area to reach the lawless port?'

Then an abrupt idea came to Hyun-woo's head. It was the conversation he just had with Lee Myung-ryong. Lee Myung-ryong had managed to capture one of the henchmen in the organization. And he didn't know the hiding place of the other criminals except for his close friends. However, that henchman was in charge of disposing of the goods and then handing it to Jepeteu in New World. Well it was just one henchman and he wasn't the one who moved the funds. Anyway, there was a high probability that he was beside Jepeteu in the game. And Jepeteu often stopped by the lawless port!

'In other words, that henchman must go to the lawless port often

with Jepeteu. Then he must know a way to pass through the deadlock area. That's it. Because he had never met a pirate, there was no chance to get information about the lawless port. But now one of the pirates is caught by Teacher. And even with the plea bargain, the henchman will still go to jail for a little bit so there is no need for him to hide information about the lawless port.'

"I might have a method to find a way through the reef!"

"What? R-Really? How?"

"Please wait a moment."

Hyun-woo ran to the living room and called Lee Myung-ryong.

"I understand. In fact, I've actually gone to the lawless port once as well. It was just before Jepeteu attacked you at sea. But I didn't know that you were related to the lawless port and I also didn't know that there were reefs in that zone. The henchman has been with Jepeteu longer so he will likely know the route. I'll hang up for the moment. I'll check and call you back later."

Lee Myung-ryong was presently a part of the bandit group. If Hyun-woo mentioned the lawless port to Lee Myung-ryong then he could get information. However, Hyun-woo had been unaware that Lee Myung-ryong was playing New World. After waiting 10 minutes, Lee Myung-ryong called back.

"Hyun-woo, I found it!"

"Huh? Really?"

"Yes, as expected he is one of the followers who accompanied Jepeteu. After hearing his words, I realized that I met him in New World. He is the one called Sunfish who was always next to Jepeteu. I never imagined that he had used plastic surgery in New World."

Lee Myung-ryong explained and laughed with amazement.

"Huhuhu, that guy has confessed information about the organization so there is no point hiding anything else. After I bought him a bowl of

noodles, he immediately drew a map to cross through the reefs to get to the lawless port. It was sent to your house on a motorcycle courier. Then.....”

Lee Myung-ryong hesitated and continued talking.

“The one who needs this map is Hwa-rang hyung-nim?”

“Yes, but why?”

“Then could you tell Hwa-rang ajusshi something before you give him the map?”

“What?”

“No, I mean.....I was listening to Sunfish. He said that the lawless port contains several warehouses where the items they looted are stored. I’m not trying to be patronizing but isn’t it because of me that he will manage to occupy the lawless port? It’s been a little hard for me these days so could you ask Hwa-rang hyung-nim to split a bit with me? Of course don’t say that. If you mention that I’m involved then he won’t do it. Oh, of course you can have half of the share that I receive. How about it?”

“.....!”

Hyun-woo listened to Lee Myung-ryong’s words and realized he missed something important. Yes, the lawless port was the stronghold of the pirates! Naturally it would be the place where the pirates disposed of their loot. If the lawless port was occupied, then the Seutandal battle fleet would collect all the items stored. Since it was the spoils of Seutandal, it was natural for it to go to Isabel. But the number 1 contributors of the lawless port invasion were Hyun-woo and Lee Myung-ryong. They had the right to claim a share of the spoils.

‘But for Teacher to be the first one to suggest it.....’

It was proof that Lee Myung-ryong was becoming addicted to the game. However, Lee Myung-ryong didn’t want a share of the spoils for money. After Lee Myung-ryong had encountered Baekgu, he realized how important level was. Even though Lee Myung-ryong

was a merchant, he had no chance against Baekgu because of his level. As expected, he needed to raise his level. This was the first time Lee Myung-ryong had been greedy in the game. And the fastest way to raise the level of a merchant was to trade! The more profit he obtained, the more experience he would receive.

The best thing for a merchant was the loot of thieves, aka stolen goods. It wasn't the buying of stolen goods of course. When selling it, the purchase price would be '0'. In other words, the entire sales price was calculated as profit. If he received 10% profit after a business transaction of 1000 gold, he could make 100 gold from the stolen goods. After his troubles in Giran, Lee Myung-ryong came to know about this system. But a law existed in New World where experience was cut after trading with stolen goods. In some cases, they could even become chaotic. But what if the Seutandal battle fleet legitimately took it back from the pirates?

As the representative of Seutandal, Isabel could make it as 'safe stolen goods.' And as it was the pirate's home base, the number of stolen goods would be frightful. Just a bit of the stolen goods would be an extravagant quantity for a normal user! When handling the stolen goods, Lee Myung-ryong's level would rise quickly! It was a dream for any merchant!

"I understand. I will tell him."

Hyun-woo hung up and started to negotiate with Gwon Hwa-rang. However, it wasn't a negotiation. Gwon Hwa-rang didn't have a choice.

"Hrmm, I have to give a fee if I want the information. Because the lawless port is a threat to Seutandal's survival if left untouched. Our primary purpose is to clean up the pirates. In addition, Isabel will definitely agree if you are the intermediary. Okay, I can persuade Isabelle to give you 20% of the stolen goods recovered. Once I occupy the lawless port, I will speak with Isabel and send the promised stolen goods to Ark's store."

"Thank you."

Hyun-woo smiled and replied. 20% of the loot in the lawless port! As it was the base of the pirates, the stolen goods would go for a

minimum of thousands of gold. If the goods was worth an estimated 30,000~40,000 gold then 20% would be 6,000~8,000 gold. When considering the deal with Lee Myung-ryong, he could receive 50% of that. In other words, couldn't he just sit back and receive 3,000~4,000 gold?

'Hahaha, didn't I suffer thinking about the price of the memory crystal when the video is actually getting me thousands of gold? If I can get the stolen goods then giving 500 gold to Buksil is nothing. Isn't this like falling over and picking up money?'

Thus, the National Police Agency's investigations accidentally led to the clean-up of the pirates.

.....Ark seemed to have gained a financial windfall.

Hwaryong Mountain

There was a small island located on the east coast of Seutandal. It was a seemingly ordinary rock island. However, there was a cave in the centre of the island where dozens of ships were docked. While the various ships had all types of crazy patterns like a motorcycle, they all had a skeleton drawn on their flags. Yes, this was the home base of the pirate's that had been attacking Seutandal. Not long ago, 40 battle ships from Seutandal surrounded the area and blocked the lawless port. However, the atmosphere of the pirate ships docked in the lawless port was so laid back it was enough to make someone sleepy. This was because the battle fleet couldn't enter the port due to the reefs and whirlpools strewn around like landmines.

"Heh, those guys are still relaxed."

JusticeMan pierced through the darkness and observed the lawless port through a telescope.

"But that relaxation will come to an end today!"

JusticeMan put away his telescope and unfolded a map. Complex lines were drawn on the scroll. Thanks to an 'anonymous informant,' he managed to obtain a chart of how to navigate to the lawless port. After obtaining the chart, JusticeMan made preparations and organized the troops. Finally, the fate of Seutandal would be decided in a decisive battle against the pirates on 'D-day.'

"We can now enter the lawless port with this chart! Now, spread all the sails! Divide the fleet into units and enter the lawless port! It's time to expel the outlaws from Seutandal!"

After JusticeMan gave the orders, the sailors busily moved around the deck. After tugging at the rope, the anchor was pulled up and the ropes bounding the sails released. Then the 40 ships anchored started to move towards the lawless port. While the ships were moving, the Baran clan on board drew their weapons. The

rehabilitation members and Lariette who were the leaders of the autonomous group in Seutandal was present. There was also the assassin Shambala who had his profession quest 'New Killer' to change professions to 'God Killer' interrupted.

"How dare these guys trouble Isabel?"

Shambala prepared two daggers in both hands. Aside from the Baran, there were quite a few people from the Eastern Nation on board. In fact, the majority of the pirates included the Nakujuk clan, the Hermes alliance and chaotic players like Jepeteu. JusticeMan judged that the Baran clan would be insufficient against them so he persuaded Isabel that this mission was important for Seutandal.

-Pirate clean-up! (Seutandal Mission Quest)

In the few months since Seutandal rose, many heroes had helped defend against the threat of the Nakujuk. But in recent times, Seutandal's peace is once again threatened by the appearance of the pirates. Fortunately the Military Commander had discovered the location of the lawless port but volunteer troops were needed considering the scale of the pirates. As the representative of Seutandal, Isabel is asking for assistance from the heroes in Seutandal. If you help the Military Commander of Seutandal kill the pirates then awards will be given according to the achievements.

<Difficulty: B+ Quest Restriction: Level 280 or more>

* Basic Compensation: All users participating in the operation will be given a 'Golden Ticket.'

The mission quest gathered users like clouds. Aside from participating in the operation, it was also possible to obtain a golden ticket by hunting the Nakujuk commanders. In recent times, the number of Nakujuk surrounding Haman Fortress had decreased so there weren't that many chances for users to obtain it. But there were quite a few users who would've participated despite the mission quest.

"Ughhh. When I think about my previous encounters with those

guys.....”

“At that time they took my armour!”

“I’m going to pay them back this time!”

Most of the people participating in the operation had encountered the pirates before. In order to pay back the grudge from that time, they participated voluntarily. So the battle fleet had 4,000 people that were all split into troops! They were all strong users level 300 or more. The Baran and Eastern Nation had a combined force of 3000 people. The fleet consisting of 7,000 troops advanced on the lawless port. However, the pirates scouting at the lawless port’s watchtowers still hadn’t grasped the atmosphere.

“Eh? Those guys are trying to enter again?”

“Heh, just leave them. They’ll just be caught by the reefs and the whirlpools.”

“Only the selected people can enter this place. Like us.”

“Kukukuku, that’s right. So let’s just leisurely watch as they rush to their deaths.”

When the battle fleet approached, the pirates just picked their noses and laughed. In contrast to the pirate’s expectations, the battle fleet weren’t caught by the reefs even after a long time passed. When the battle fleet came within a short distance, confusion spread over the face of the pirates.

“What, what the? What is going on?”

“There’s something strange. The whole fleet is moving through the deadlock.....”

“Hasn’t it been a long time since they’ve entered the deadlock area? Wait? Don’t tell me the information leaked?”

“What? Is now the time to be talking about this?”

“It is an emergency! We need to inform the headquarters!”

The pirates grasped the situation too late and hurriedly entered the

cave to inform the headquarters.

“We’ve entered the range! The leader of each battleship target one watchtower respectively!”

“Mark!”

Lariette used holy magic to mark the watchtowers around the lawless port with different colours. And a ship at the forefront fired its cannons and started spewing flames.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The pillar of flame roared across the dark sky towards a watchtower. It received a simultaneous attack from four directions! All 10 watchtowers surrounding the lawless port was engulfed in flames and crumbled.

After the battle fleet neutralized the watchtowers, they entered the lawless port inside the cave. When they entered the cave, 30 pirate ships docked at the harbour could be seen. The pirates had noticed the situation too late and were only now boarding the ships. However, JusticeMan’s eyes were turned towards the gun turret inside the lawless port.

“There is no need to rush. The pirate ships docked at the port will require 5 minutes for preparations before it is ready to attack. Instead of the pirate ships, we’ll concentrate our attacks on the gun turrets for now. Attack!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The battle fleet lined up in the port fired without taking a break. The lawless port was enveloped in flames from the huge number of shells. Although the gun turrets also fired, it was no use against the battle fleet that had already invaded. The cannons which were shot in a blind rush weren’t effective.

“Mark, mark, mark, 1st unit the red target, 2nd unit the blue, 3rd unit the yellow!”

On the other hand, the battle fleet was attacking in an orderly fashion. Once Lariette marked a target and shouted, 10 battle ships

would concentrate their fire on that target. Therefore the 20 gun turrets were all destroyed while only a few combat ships were damaged. The battle fleet then started cleaning up the pirates.

“All troops disembark in the lawless port. The fleet will seal up the harbour while the combat troops will take control of the pirate ships. Attack!”

“”Wah ah ah ah!”

7000 users, Baran and people from the Eastern Nation came pouring out of the battle ships. The pirates screamed as the combat troops landed.

“Huk, what, what the?”

Originally the lawless port had a total of 6000 Nakujuk and pirates gathered. However, there weren't that many pirates in the lawless port at present. The pirates had been full of tension when the battle fleet surrounded the lawless port for the first time. But when the battle fleet couldn't enter, they had completely relaxed. Since the pirates couldn't do anything because of the siege, a lot of them had disconnected. Even the NPCs were partying and playing poker.

“T-these guys are from Seutandal..... How did they get in?”

“Run, everybody escape.....! Aaaack!”

So the 7000 combat troops swept through a relatively empty port. Furthermore, JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and Lariette were the ones commanding them!

“Warrior's Willpower, Virtuous Vitality, Pure Light!”

Warrior's Vitality increased health and stamina, Virtuous Vitality recovered a certain amount of health for 3 minutes and Pure Light sped up mana recovery! When Lariette's buffs overlapped, the capabilities of the combatants rose tremendously.

“Batter the rotten pirates with the hammer of justice and smash them to death!”

Furthermore, the special qualities of JusticeMan's Guardian

profession increased various stats. The morale of the troops rose to an absurd amount.

“Hahaha, finally a fight after a long time!”

“We’ll settle the stress from training the Baran clan!”

But was that all? The rehabilitation members all had special profession qualities as a Guardian and added various bonuses to the troops. Thanks to the bonuses, the capabilities of the Seutandal battle troops doubled.

“Oh, my power has increased!”

“I’ve been waiting for the day I could get revenge on those who plundered from me!”

“I’ll smash them quickly!”

The 7000 troops split up and stormed through the port. Meanwhile, an eerie aura surrounded the masked Shambala. Shambala flew like a bomb over the combat troops and landed among the pirates.

Kwa kwa kwa bang, flash-!

At the same time, a light which looked like a net rose from Shambala’s body and spread quickly. When Shambala’s net of light penetrated the pirates, they received enormous damage and there was a fountain of blood.

“What the, what is that?”

“The sword, no dagger is used so quickly that it looks like he is brandishing a net of light!”

Overwhelming strength! The pirates and even Seutandal’s combat troops were entranced for a moment. Then 1000 masked people suddenly appeared at the pirate’s back. The members of the Eastern Nation had waited for a chance and used ‘Stealth’ to approach the pirates from behind. The Eastern Nation unleashed their attacks, causing the pirates to scream and roll on the ground. The users stared at Shambala and the Eastern Nation with gaping mouths.

“A-amazing! They seemed like ordinary NPCs in Seutandal.....”

“I heard they played an active part in the Seutandal War.....”

“Now’s not the time for this. We receive rewards for this mission quest according to our achievements. We can’t let our achievements get taken away by that masked fellow!”

“Okay. We should group up and take care of one person!”

The users who participated more actively in the battle would receive more rewards. Thus the pirates of the lawless port were cleaned up in only two hours. 15 pirate ships were destroyed in the clean-up operation while 17 pirate ships were seized. And JusticeMan was also able to obtain the stolen goods within the warehouse worth 27,000 gold. When the value of the pirate ship was changed into gold, it was equivalent to 120,000 gold. Every user and NPC who participated in the operation was awarded according to their achievement. That left 50,000 gold left. A few days later, stolen goods worth 10,000 gold were delivered to Ark’s Comprehensive Store in Lancel village.

Kiaaaaaah!

A cry of distress rang out from the steep mountain slope battered by violent gusts of wind. A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

-The ‘Hair-raising Scream’ was used!

<For 3 minutes, you will be gripped with fear and have your attack speed and movement speed decreased by 10%. This effect can be stacked up to 5 times.

Currently overlapped 3 times: Attack Speed and Movement Speed decreased by 30%>

“Ouch!”

Ark flinched and looked at the sky with irritation. The wild wind also stirred up the rough sand, causing him to be battered by a

sandstorm on the mountain. If he raised his head and peered through the sandstorm, a hazy silhouette which seemed like a mirage could be seen. It was the form of a female body with wings.

‘Encountering something this strange in a place like this.....’

Pabababa, pabababa!

While Ark was complaining, the woman stretched out a wing and a projectile flew at him. It was feather which was as sharp as an arrow!

“Damn, it’s starting again.”

Ark rolled and hid his body behind a rock while cursing. After escaping from the thieves in Bosaga village and eating the Necromancer’s Immortality Pill, Ark had been filled with motivation. Although there were some minor problems, everything was put in order as planned. The only thing he had left to do was the <Home of the Fire Draconian> quest! So Ark began to cross the magic kingdom of Bristania to the destination of his quest in the north. In fact, Ark hadn’t been that worried about the quest. <Home of the Fire Draconian> was a quest he received from an item with a level 120 restriction. Of course, he couldn’t have confirmed the item when he first received it. So he delayed the quest and now Ark was over level 370. Who would be worried about a level 120 quest in such a situation? He was only worried that he would be wasting time completing the quest.

‘No, I still don’t know.’

But Ark soon shook his head. <Home of the Fire Draconian> was from a quest item so it wasn’t an ordinary quest. It was a quest item from the Event Quest where thousands of people participated. That is to say, it was a unique quest which only one person in New World could start! Then of course the reward would be a unique item. Even if the level was a bit low, a unique item would sell for a bit more than a level 300 magic item. The value of unique items wasn’t their attack or defense but the special effect attached to the item.

‘Considering the background of the quest, there is a chance that the

quest will lead to one with a higher level of difficulty.'

When considering that point, he couldn't ignore it even if it was a low level quest. With his expectations of the quest, he was eager to start it. After living in the magic kingdom of Bristania for a bit, Ark's knew that the environment, buildings, NPCs and even the quests were completely different from Schudenberg and Seutandal. It really felt like he was on an overseas trip. Therefore Ark was really able to enjoy the feeling of the online game and travelled happily. It was only after arriving at the northern mountains that Ark started to become upset.

"Dammit, why did those monsters chose here of all places to inhabit?"

Ark glared at the feathers flying continuously and sighed. After travelling through Bristania for a week and arriving at the Hwaryong mountain range, Ark had encountered a level 350 monster the Harpy.

'Fortunately I can collect a lot of experience.....'

The quest had a restriction of level 120 so he had thought the monsters on Hwaryong Mountain would be low levelled. If the monsters were level 200 then he wouldn't receive any experience. Although he thought this, he wasn't really worried about the level 350 Harpy. But after he fought with the Harpy, Ark would've rather preferred a low level monster. The Harpy was a monster in the form of a woman with wings. But it absolutely didn't look like a pretty woman. With a deep blood skin colour and many wrinkles, it was a monster designed to look scary. However, the problem wasn't the Harpy's appearance.

Even though he would rather it not look like a woman, it was a monster so Ark didn't have reservations about hitting it. The reason for Ark's annoyance was not the Harpy's appearance but its wings. Wings..... Yes, the Harpy was a flying monster which Ark found the most troublesome. In fact, there were quite a few flying monsters in Bristania thanks to its geographical conditions. However, the users in Bristania didn't have any problems with that. Bristania was a magic kingdom so there were a high percentage of magicians. As magicians were experts in long ranged attacks, flying

monsters were an easy opponent. However, Ark was a warrior so it was a nuisance for him.

‘I have to avoid the flying monsters that inhabit this area as much as possible.....’

If he avoided the quest destination Hwaryong Mountain then it wouldn't be a problem. In particular, Ark was forced into a corner thanks to the ‘Hair-raising Scream.’ Just like its name, the ‘Hair-raising Scream’ sounded like fingernails scratching down a chalkboard. Thanks to that, Ark's motivation to fight fell. Furthermore, the technique was classified as a ‘Sound’ attack so it couldn't be avoided or blocked. Hunting flying monsters in that state wasn't easy. After hearing the ‘Hair-raising Scream,’ his body really felt sluggish.

Ark hid behind the rock and didn't move until the Harpy rushed through the sandstorm with its claws extended. It was an attack which fell vertically through the sky from 10 feet. It was a dangerous attack which had a high probability of being a critical hit if Ark was damaged by it. Ark rolled out from the rock and twisted his blade.

Chwarararak, ttadadadang!

The Saw Blade separated the wind and subsequently dealt damage. The Harpy stumbled from the impact and lost its balance. Ark once again swung his sword. However, the Harpy instinctively perceived the crisis and flapped its wings quickly. Ark changed the direction at once but the Harpy had already escaped from his attack range. The flying speed of the Harpy exceeded imagination. On the other hand, Ark couldn't even bend properly thanks to the rough winds on the mountain. When the Harpy moved so quickly in such a state, he couldn't determine its location properly. The environmental effect gave Ark a considerable penalty while granting an advantage to the Harpy. Once the Harpy flew like that, not even the Saw blade that changed into a whip could reach it.

Kikikiki, kikikiki!

The Harpy smirked and teased him as it flew beyond his range.

“Okay. So you want to die?”

Ark stared at the Harpy before clenching his fist firmly and shouting.

“I’ll hit you this time you stupid old crow, ‘Lock on.’ Soul Extortion!”

At that moment, a transparent emerged from Ark’s fist. The Harpy flapped its wings and tried to escape. But Ark moved the translucent hand with his fist, tracking the Harpy’s movements before finally grabbing it tightly. Then like a rubber band, the transparent hand returned to Ark while holding something which vaguely resembled the Harpy.

-You have taken away a part of the Harpy’s soul using Soul Extortion!

<After extorting the Harpy’s soul, you have dealt 50 damage and your Spiritual Power has been slightly elevated.>

“Huhuhu, this use of this skill is quite surprising.”

Ark laughed as he checked the message window. It was the newly learned ‘Soul Extortion’ that he gained after eating the Necromancer’s Immortality Pill. In fact, Ark had thought it was slightly regrettable when he first checked the information window of the Soul Extortion skill. But after he used it a few times, he thought that the information was slightly insufficient. When utilized in an actual fight, the effect was quite good.

While the skill only raised his Spiritual Power and no other stats, Ark’s favourite part of Soul Extortion was that it had a range of 30~40 metres. It was equal to the range of archers who had mastered Advanced Archery. Ark was able to deal with the Harpy thanks to Soul Extortion. Although it only did 50 damage, the effect was 100 times better than his beginner’s Archery. Furthermore, Soul Extortion was a skill which didn’t consume mana and had no cool down time. The only difficulty with using Soul Extortion was that he had to ‘Lock on’ to the target first. Lock on required a certain amount of time to be fixed onto the target but it wasn’t easy with the Harpy flying around in the sandstorm. So while attacking, Ark had to stare at the monster. But once Lock on was successful, it didn’t go

away until the end of the battle.

“Now shall I start attacking earnestly? You are already screwed. Soul Extortion! Soul Extortion! Soul Extortion!.....No, it’s not enough. Soul Extortion!”

Ark ran after the Harpy and fired Soul Extortion blindly. The transparent hand shot forward like an arrow every time and removed a part of the soul. Since it was infused with the spirit of the monster, he felt a little ill absorbing it but he didn’t question it too closely. Eventually its health would fall below 10% and the Harpy would try to run away. It was a cowardly monster that would hide until its health was 100% again. Before escaping to a place he couldn’t reach, Ark had to reduce its health.

Kiiiiik, kiiiiik!

When the Harpy’s health fell to 7%, as expected it instantly flew away up the rocky mountain.

“Now Racard. Dark Dash!”

“Okay!”

Racard who had been hiding behind the rock at Ark’s order shot forward and impacted with the back of the Harpy’s head. The Harpy who had been hit wobbled and shook. However, Racard was a ruthless bat. Racard soared through the sky and continued head butting the falling Harpy. Each hit was like a nail being beaten by a hammer.

“Make it descend so that I can finish this!”

Once the Harpy entered his range, Ark swung the Saw blade and wound it around the Harpy’s ankle. When he flipped the Saw blade over his shoulder, the Harpy was flung and impacted with the ground. This was the method he devised to capture the Harpy who ran away. When he first arrived at the rocky mountains, Ark didn’t know anything about flying monsters and used Racard and the Saw blade to fight. However, the Harpy was a monster which instinctively attacking the flying object first. No matter what Ark did, if Racard was visible than he would die first. Since aerial combat was often

dozens of metres in the air, it was impossible for Ark to do anything. Racard's current ability was at a level 270 standard. No matter how trained his pet was, he had no chance of winning a 1 on 1 fight against the level 350 Harpy. Thanks to that, Racard had died many times in Hwaryong Mountain. So Ark didn't utilize Racard during the battles after that. He instead made in lie in ambush and only used Racard for the element of surprise against the Harpy. Racard faithfully played the role this time.

Once the Harpy had been caught by the Saw blade and thrown into the ground, Racard started head butting it and stamping on its wings with fury. The Harpy was stuck on the ground. Even a flying monster wasn't able to easily get back up. Ark also realized this.

"Now it is time to finish this!"

Ark used Sprint and pierced the chest of the Harpy with his Saw blade. He could feel it as the sword penetrated the ribs. The Harpy's wings flapped a few more times until it couldn't last any more.

[-Your level has risen.]

When the Harpy collapsed, he received the wonderful message.

"Phew, I gained one level. The experience gained is quite good when comparing the time it takes to hunt."

Ark nodded as he browsed the character information window. Even though the Harpy was lower levelled than Ark, as a flying monster it gave 20% more experience than general monsters. Although it takes a lot of time to hunt one, the rate of experience gain is similar to hunting monsters of the same level.

"Character information window!"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +500		
Fame	2,365 (+500)	Level	371

Profession		Dark Soul	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero	
Health	6,965 (+225)	Mana	7,155 (+25)
Spiritual Power	407	Strength	757 (+38)
Agility	947 (+110)	Stamina	1,187 (+35)
Wisdom	173 (+10)	Intelligence	1,255 (+5)
Luck	167 (+60)	Flexibility	168
Art of Communication	69	Affection	134 (+10)
Resilience	439	Dark Fog	24
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		153	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
* <Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20, Defense +40			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available			
Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When			

health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense.

* Skill points: 80

"Not bad."

Ark closed the information window with a satisfied expression. Ark deliberately only went to places on Hwaryong Mountain where the monsters were high levelled. Thanks to that, he managed to gain 5 levels in a week and was currently level 371. Of course, If he grabbed a good hunting spot than he could gain 2~3 more levels, but he never expected that much experience from this quest. However, it

was quite annoying because Hwaryong Mountain had quite a lot of harpies.

“It seems like recently I’ve swept almost all of them up.....”

When he first arrived at Hwaryong Mountain, he had been attacked by quite a few harpies. Sometimes he would be attacked by three or four at once. But after walking around Hwaryong Mountain for a couple of days, it became difficult to see the Harpies. It had taken him 20 minutes to handle that previous Harpy.

“Now that the surroundings have been cleaned up, I should be able to climb up.....”

In fact, Ark hadn’t taken care of the Harpies on the slopes of Hwaryong Mountain because he wanted to. Although it gave 20% more experience, hunting Harpies took a while and it was quite tedious. And the japtem dropped wasn’t that good either. Since the sandstorm limited the topographic range of his map, he decided it was more efficient to hunt the harpies at the base of the mountain. While hunting the Harpies, he had climbed the mountain for two days. The slope was pretty amicable until halfway up the mountain. However, suddenly sheer cliffs were blocking the way and he couldn’t go any further.

‘When I received the quest, the destination was marked on the map as the centre of Hwaryong Mountain. In other words, it is the top of Hwaryong Mountain.....but no matter how many times I went around, it wasn’t possible to find a path to reach the top. There is one route where I can ascend.....’

Ark checked the map once again and looked at the hill on the opposite side. When the sandstorm stopped yesterday evening, he was able to confirm there was a route from the hill on the opposite side. However, the hill on the other side was dozens of metres from Ark’s current location. However, the bottom of the cliffs between the hills weren’t even visible. So Ark had given up on the other hill and spent the next two days looking for another route but eventually gave up. He came to the conclusion that he had to go over the ravine.

“But how can I do that?”

Ark worried for a while but eventually acknowledged that there was no choice. Yes, Ark knew about a method to go over the cliff since discovering the hill on the other side. It was the hang glider method he used to escape from the vampire territory!

“While the hang glider can get me to the place I desire, it is not an aeroplane. Fortunately there are strong winds in this area. If I correctly guess the timing of the wind then it could take me to the hill. Yes, that is the only way left.”

Of course, it wasn't going to be that easy to ride the hang glider and navigate past the ravine. But it wasn't possible to wander Hwaryong Mountain forever so he had no choice. If he used Slime's Time then he didn't have to worry about the fall damage. Of course, if he fell to the ravine bottom then he would have to wander again but the worst situation could be avoided. Ark made his decision and shouted towards a pile of rocks in the back.

“Buksil!”

Then Buksil who had been hiding behind the rock wandered out. After losing Baekgu, he was still depressed and looked shabby. The absence of Baekgu cast a large shadow on Buksil.

“Why?”

“We have to use the hang glider to move to that hill. Even with a good wind, I won't be able to reach the other hill with two people riding. So just place the eyeball on me and set up a campsite at the base of the mountain.”

“Whatever.”

“Don't just play around when I'm not there and collect some ingredients. We only have a few left.”

“Okay, I understand.”

Buksil waved his hand like it was troublesome. While Buksil's attitude was bad, Ark showed patience and held his tongue. These days Buksil was more aware of the game. In such a situation, a beating really might make him quit the game. If Buksil quit the game then it

would cause significant problems for Ark. Because of that, Ark decided to maintain his patience. However, he couldn't help feeling annoyed every time.

'The weather is hot, the wind was blowing sand continuously for a few days and Buksil is acting like a damp rag..... It really makes my impatient.'

Ark stared at Buksil before speaking.

"Radun, hang glider."

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun opened his mouth absentmindedly and spat out the hang glider. Ark grabbed the hang glider and waited for the wind direction to change. After the wind blew towards the ravine for a while, Ark used Sprint to run off the cliff and threw his body. While his body wobbled for a while, Ark eventually maintained his balance and the hang glider flew steadily on the breeze.

"That's it. This should be enough to get me to the hill on the other side! Huh?"

Ark was just sighing with relief when it happened. When he had flown halfway, a gust of wind suddenly hit his side. The hang glider shook and lost its centre. Ark hurriedly moved his weight to catch the centre again but the blast had caused him to go lower than he wanted.

"Dammit, I'm screwed!"

Ark burst out as he raised his head and checked the distance to the other hill. The worst situation that Ark was worried about had occurred. To be exact, the flight of a hang glider was to descend. An aeroplane could rise whenever it wanted but the hang glider depended on riding the current of the wind.

"When I calculated the wind, I would've made it with a close distance....."

Yet his height had decreased by several metres in the middle of the

ravine. With his current path, he would be slammed into a cliff instead of reaching the hill.

‘Dammit, it’s a failure. Because I was annoyed by Buksil when calculating the direction of the wind, I departed a little late.’

Regret showed on Ark’s face.

‘If I slam into the cliff at this speed then I don’t know what will happen. I’ll probably die if I fall in this state. Should I jump down now and use Slime’s Time at the appropriate height?’

However, the problem wasn’t that simple. If Ark jumped down then the hang glider would impact with the cliff. It wasn’t durable so the hang glider would shatter with one blow.

“No! I struggled so much just to make this..... Something....there must be another way!”

At that time, a Harpy flying from the opposite hill caught his eye. An idea sparked in Ark’s head.

“Racard, that fellow! Use Taunt to pull that guy here!”

“Huh? Why?”

“Shut up! Just do as I say!”

“U-understood!”

Racard hurriedly flew towards the other hill after Ark shouted.

“Hey, you wrinkled old crow! Where are you going?”

The Harpy shrieked and approached after Racard used Taunt. Racard avoided the attack and flew towards Ark. Then Ark wound his Saw blade around the Harpy’s ankle and shouted.

“That’s it. Now lead it back to the hill on the other side!”

“Aha, I understand now. Hey, you crow! Where are you looking? This way! Come and catch me~.”

Racard stuck out his tongue and used Taunt again. Once again, the

Harpy's instinct was to attack the flying object first. When Intermediate Taunt was also used by his low level pet, it was perfectly caught. The Harpy chased after Racard and forgot that Ark had his blade wrapped around its ankle. Ark had aimed for that. While he would have no chance with Racard who was the size of a mouse, the Harpy's wings reached two metres so the altitude of the hang glider gradually increased. After a while, Ark managed to land on the opposite hill.

"Thank you Harpy! This is for you. Dark Blade!"

After putting away the hang glider, Ark laughed at the Harpy.

Kiiiiik? Kiiiiik?

The Harpy finally noticed that something was wrong. However, it was already too late. It eventually died flapping its wings and Ark sliced it up like chicken meat.

"Phew, that's it. I found a way."

After taking care of the Harpy, Ark surveyed the area. When looking from the other hill, he had seen that there was a path between the rocks. Ark hunted the Harpies who appeared and started to climb Hwaryong Mountain again. While the slope on this side was more gentle, it still wasn't easy. Ark wound his Saw blade around the rock like climbing gear and used Jump. How much time had passed? After climbing another 5~6 metres, Ark used Jump and landed on a rock. The sandstorm gradually subsided and revealed a wide plateau in front of him.

"Is this normal?"

Ark looked around the surroundings with a vacant expression. When he reached the top, it seemed like a new world. The plateau stretched out so far into the horizon that it really seemed to touch the sky. While a sandstorm raged underneath him, there was no hint of sand to be seen on the plateau. It seemed like a place that was just floating in the sky. Standing alone in that place really gave him a refreshing feeling.

"Is this the reason people like to climb?"

However, Ark's purpose wasn't climbing. The reason he ascended Hwaryong Mountain was to settle a quest. As soon as he reached the top, Ark found the quest destination. No, it wasn't that he found it. There was a large dome located in the centre of the plateau that reached dozens of kilometres that could be easily seen with one glance.

"That is absolutely the quest destination....."

Ark approached the dome emitting a black aura with eyes filled with curiosity.

"This fellow!"

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

There was a loud roaring and the earth started shaking. Ark turned his head with surprise and saw something he never expected. After confirming the approaching presence, his face stiffened.

"Huk, what, what the? That guy is.....?"

A huge monster reaching 20 metres was getting closer to Ark. The 20 metre monster also had black fire around its body! While the lower part of the body was a dragon, the upper part was in the shape of a man wearing red armour. Ark had seen that monster a long time ago in Jackson. It was the leader of the Army of Darkness who died by Ark's hand! The name.....

"....Eek? No way.....Valderas?"

"Sob, Baekgu....."

Buksil cried as he descended the slope. After putting the eyeball on Ark, Buksil had no interest anymore. No, it wasn't just Ark. After Baekgu died, Buksil had lost interest in the game itself. Among the large number of NPCs in New World, Baekgu was only one. Baekgu's behaviour was just an illusion created by the artificial intelligence of New World. Buksil also knew this. However, it was different understanding it with his heart than with his mind.

.....When thinking about the feel of stroking Baekgu's body and his smell, Buksil's chest became pained from the memories. He thought it would become okay over time but that feeling only intensified when he connected to the game.

"Not even videos can interest me anymore. I.....if I hadn't taken the video then Baekgu wouldn't have..... Sob, everything is my fault. But if I quit the game then wouldn't Baekgu's death be useless? I should at least build the statue of Baekgu in Selebrid before quitting. Yes, I can't quit the game until then. But.....but..... Sob, if I close my eyes it seems like I can still hear Baekgu's voice....."

Buksil sniffled and muttered.

"Master!"

Was Buksil sleeping? After separating from Ark, he could vividly hear Baekgu's voice. The thought made Buksil even more emotional as tears dripped from his eyes.

"Sob sob sob, Baekgu. Your voice is still so vivid....."

"Master!"

Once again Baekgu's voice could be heard. Then he had a thought. He definitely heard Baekgu's voice somewhere. Buksil suddenly raised his head and looked everywhere as he shouted like a maniac.

"Huk, what, what the? Baekgu? Is it really Baekgu? Where? Where are you? It's really Baekgu?"

"Master, I'm here!"

Then a blurry image appeared on the other side of the sandstorm. Buksil rubbed at the one eyeball left and froze. When he stared again, the image became clear. Something was running down the steep slope through the sandstorm. While the distance was still far and only the silhouette could be seen, Buksil knew with one glance. It was his pet dog who he would never forget, Baekgu! The Baekgu he thought had died was running towards him tearfully.

“B-Baekgu!”

“Master!”

Buksil ran down the steep slope so fast he almost fell. Then Baekgu jumped onto him and waved his tail while hugging and licking Buksil. Dog saliva was getting on his face but Buksil didn't worry about such things.

The dog he thought was dead had returned alive! He was at Hwaryong Mountain which was hundreds of kilometres from Bosaga village. If this was a dream or illusion then he didn't want it to break.

“Ohhhhh, B-Baekgu. I made a mistake. I should've never.....”

“Sob sob sob, no Master. I didn't properly protect Master.....”

Buksil and Baekgu embraced each other while brimming with tears.

“Ohhh, it really is Baekgu. Baekgu is really alive. Sob, thank you, you're alive. But how did this happen? How did you get away from those villains? I don't see any injuries.....”

“Huh? T-that is.....”

Baekgu scratched the back of his head and hesitated. Then a man exited the sandstorm after Baekgu and muttered.

“Hmm, what a good scene. The dog and his owner is like this. My nose is also dripping because I'm moved.”

Then the female elf following behind him declared in a curt voice.

“Bah, did we follow that dog all the way here just to see a good scene?”

“Huck, y-you are.....?”

Buksil's face paled as he saw the huge man and female elf.

‘Those guys.....?’

It was the pair Ark and Buksil had least expected to be standing there.

Over 1000 kilometres away in the far south, someone else was in the same situation. It was the masked Shambala hiding himself in the dark using Stealth. After cleaning up the pirates from Seutandal a while ago, Shambala had arrived in Lancel village. He had transported 20% of the stolen goods as Isabel promised; however, Shambala had another reason for going there. In order to finish his 'New Killer' quest to change professions, he needed a ridiculous item and JusticeMan directed him to Roco in Lancel village who would have information about it. But Shambala encountered an unexpected event at Lancel village and changed his plans. No, it was because he saw an unexpected person.

'How is that guy here? If he is the ringleader of the events happening around Lancel village lately.....this problem might be more serious than expected. I can't solve this problem by myself.'

Shambala looked at the group and sneaked out of the cave.

The Quest that Shouldn't have been Accepted!

Kyakak, kyakak, kyakak, kyakak!

A sound could be heard that irritated his peripheral nerve from all directions. At the same time, dozens of red eyes appeared in the darkness like street lights turning on. The area underneath the eyes split apart to show a red space. It was a huge mouth which would swallow Ark in one bite. The sharp fangs weren't visible in the mouth. Instead, small sharp projections like needles were densely packed on the tongue and glossy with saliva as it poked out. He had laughed when it first appeared. But now those features seemed like a horror move as it approached.

"Dammit.....!"

A moan emerged from Ark's mouth.

'I thought I could catch my breath.....'

Ark confirmed how much mana and health he had left. He had just finished fighting those guys. Thus he needed a rest to recover his health and mana. However, the prospect of success didn't look good so he had run away. But he had been surrounded again before he could. He currently only had 50% health and mana left. That wasn't the only serious problem.

"Damn, what the? Is there another way?"

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

His familiars' health was also in danger from the battle.

'It is impossible to fight them in this state. But.....!'

Ark moved his gaze and checked the surrounding area.

.....He had no choice.

While escaping from the battlefield, he hadn't taken terrain into account and just blindly proceeded. Now even the route backwards had disappeared. It was truly a dilemma. The path to retreat had disappeared because of the area's special terrain. It.....

Kukyakyakyakya, kukyakyakyakya!

The black forms narrowed the distance and shrieked. The monsters had a number of features that Ark hadn't seen before.

"Anyway, I don't have time to complain!"

Ark clenched Gwisal's sword firmly and raised his voice. It was the worse situation where he had to fight against dozens of monsters without a short rest! 'Do I have to become the food of those guys in this place?'

"Racard, use Taunt to lure those guys to the other side!"

"U-understood. I haven't brushed my teeth for two days so take this spit attack! Spit! Spit! Spit! Spit!"

Racard spat wildly all over the place and shouted. The black forms gathered around Ark turned their bodies. Racard freaked out at the ensuring sharp tongue and ran away. 5 of the black forms started chasing after Racard.

"Now Razak!"

Clack clack clack clack, ttadang!

Razak ran up to them at Ark's command. Razak powerfully swung his shield and hit three monsters before withdrawing.

"Dark Strike!"

Ark had stuck close to Razak's back and rushed out before striking with his sword. The darkness assimilated into the blade rushed out and dealt a critical hit. But after a brief moment, those guys gathered again.

"Heok!"

Ark hurriedly retreated behind the shield wielding Razak. The ensuing violent collision caused Razak to be pushed back several metres and he knelt down. While Razak tried to stand up again, the monster flew towards Razak and grabbed him. The confused Razak swung his sword and hit the fellow. But more of those guys surrounded him and Razak wasn't able to endure before falling down. Then they flocked like hyenas.

Kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwang!

While Razak struggled to get up, those guys wrapped their sharp tongues around him. Razak's health was quickly drained by the tongues.

"Dammit.....Razak, summon off! Summon Demon!"

Razak disappeared and then re-appeared near Ark. Although the crisis was overcome, the situation was still serious. Razak had become like a rag after receiving the concentrated attack. His remaining health was only 15%. If the same situation repeated again then he wouldn't even last a minute.

'But there is still a way to use Razak!'

"Steel Loyalty!"

Razak's body hardened and changed to steel. When Steel Loyalty was triggered, the amount of loyalty was converted to defense and then added to Razak's base defense. Even if his defense rose, his health was still the same. However, Razak's loyalty was 952. Even with 15%, the considerable addition of 952 defense meant it was possible for Razak to endure for a significant amount of time. Of course, Steel Loyalty did have one huge weakness. It was impossible to move while the skill was activated.

'It is useful that an obstacle has formed between those guys.'

That was the reason why Ark summoned Razak again and used Steel Loyalty. The place Ark was fighting had no special terrain features. With Razak turned to steel, it was possible to form a type of wall. In other words, he could reduce the enemy attacking from 4 sides to 3.

‘But even so.....’

It was only putting out a bit of the fire. The fact that he was surrounded by dozens of opponents didn't change.

‘The problem now isn't whether I live or die!’

Ark glanced uneasily at his body. Armour, gloves, shoes and cloak..... With just one look, he could tell that all his equipment was ragged. There was no time for an equipment check so the durability had reached the bottom. If the impossible battle continued then several of his equipment would be destroyed. That was the reason Ark couldn't fight aggressively. He wanted to take off the equipment before dying but the battle had started before he had time to. In New World, it was impossible to change equipment aside from a sword and shield during a fight.

‘I need to find a chance to escape. I have no choice but to endure it and look for a way to escape.’

“Dark Blade! Dark.....cough!”

While using Razak as a wall, Ark received a sharp impact in his side. When the tongue covered in sharp projections struck his side, the edges immediately started bleeding. His vision started shaking while a message window appeared.

-You have received a ‘Blow.’ 300 damage!

<Until ‘Bleed’ is stopped, you will receive 4 damage every 10 seconds until the battle ends>

‘This is serious!’

Ark inwardly screamed with distress. 300 damage. He only had 50% health left so Ark couldn't ignore the damage. However, Ark was in distress because of that. He also was affected by ‘Bleed,’ making him lose 4 health every 10 seconds. The problem was the Bleeding. When blood appeared, the gaze of the opponents fixed on Ark. They smelled the blood! While they gathered around Ark, the opponents hadn't been overly aggressive. When surrounded by

20~30 monsters, Ark would instantly be turned into a dust cloth if they all attacked intensively. But they were monsters so they weren't organized. There were some fellows attacking the steel Razak while others were quite a distance away.

'Dammit! Of all things.....'

Ark rushed to make a 'Salve' using the Food Worshipper skill and stopped the Bleeding. But after they smelled the fresh blood, all of them flocked to Ark. It was literally a stampede.

'If I'm pushed like this than I'm screwed!'

If he was stamped on by those guys then his health as well as his equipment wouldn't survive.

"No, absolutely not! Riposte!"

Ark hit the tongue in front of him with an angry expression. He intended to push them to free up some space to move. However.....

Grrrrr.

Suddenly the tongue faded like fog. It was a special technique to avoid attacks, 'Transparent!' So his sword separated the sky in vain and he was hit in the chest by that tongue.

-You have been hit by a Counterattack. 400 damage!
<A penalty is applied for receiving a counterattack from Riposte>

Riposte was an attack which pushed the enemy back 10 metres. After receiving a counterattack for Riposte, the penalty was applied and Ark was thrown back 10 metres instead. Ark hurriedly stuck his sword down in the ground. Thanks to his fast reaction speed, the velocity that he was pushed back decreased. But before he could sigh with relief, he felt something empty beneath his feet. Ark grabbed a protruding stone with surprise.

'Oh my God!'

Ark who had barely stopped his momentum looked down with

stunned eyes. Ark was standing unexpectedly on the edge of a cliff..... At the bottom, a river of boiling lava was flowing. The river of lava which stretched over 100 metres in the floating island with cracks in it was an surreal sight. The place Ark was hanging onto was the edge of that land. Although Ark was in a crisis, this was the reason why he couldn't escape from the area. In order to move to another land mass, either jumping or flying was required. Just one mistake meant he would fall into the lava.....Dying like that wouldn't be so bad. But in this situation, the fire damage would destroy his equipment which had low durability.

'That absolutely can't happen!'

Ark barely avoided diving into the lava by grabbing the protruding rock. However, he couldn't be relieved just yet. While Ark was holding onto the stone rock, the monsters were approaching while swinging their tongues.

"M-Master!"

Racard belatedly realized the situation and screamed.

"Ah, that's right. Racard, leave those fellows and lure the ones over here to the other side!"

"Eh? U-understood!"

Racard flew towards Ark at full speed. But that was a fatal mistake. Racard had lured 5 monsters using Taunt, so when he flew towards Ark than they also followed. Then they collided with the monsters gathered to attack Ark. There was no need to explain the results.

"Master, I came! Eh? Eh eh eh....heok!"

"You idiot! I told you to get rid of those guys.....wah!"

Ark belatedly grasped the situation and screamed but it was too late. Grrrrrr. Those guys gathered at the edge was pushed like dominos and fell into the lava. A few of them also collided with Ark and he let go of the stone rock thanks to the impact.

"I, I don't know. I just did what Master told me to!"

Racard shrunk away and tried to explain.

‘D-dammit! I’m falling!’

Ark felt a sense of vertigo as his seen became black. He shouldn’t have come to a place like this. No, before that.....

‘If I knew this was such a disgusting place then I wouldn’t have accepted the quest!’

“This fellow!”

A rock fell as he heard a booming voice. After turning his head he saw a huge monster.

“Stay away! This is the territory of the Fire Draconians. This isn’t the place for a human!”

The giant form approached Ark. While the upper part was a body, the lower half was a completely alien form. With sharp claws on the four legs and flames wrapped around and scales stretching over the tail, it was unmistakably a dragon’s body. And Ark had seen a monster with the same form before. Then Racard reacted before Ark.

“Hiik, V-Valderas!”

Racard screamed and quickly hid behind Ark. That’s right. It was the final boss that appeared in the Event Quest, Valderas! But Ark realized the monster who appeared here wasn’t Valderas. Even if the monster revived for no reason, it was impossible for it to appear in this distant place. The more Ark looked closely, the more different it appeared from Valderas. Valderas was a warrior wearing plate armour who wielded a mace, while the monster that appeared on Hwaryong Mountain was wearing red leather armour. It also felt a bit small when compared to Valderas.

‘Did it say Fire Draconian just then?’

Ark came here in order to complete the <Home of the Fire Draconian> quest. In other words, the quest destination was

Valderas' hometown. It was natural that there would be an existence which resembled Valderas. It was highly likely that the Fire Draconian in front of him was an NPC related to the quest. However, Ark still couldn't relax. Even if he received the quest, what guarantee did he have that the Fire Draconians would be friendly?

'Since it hasn't attacked yet, it doesn't seem to be that aggressive but.....'

Ark was the one who defeated Valderas. There was no guarantee how the Fire Draconians would react to the person who killed someone in the same clan.

'Should I check the atmosphere?'

Ark thought for a while. The Fire Draconian then lowered its upper body and asked.

"Valderas? Did you say Valderas just now?"

"Huh? That....."

Damn, did he hear Racard say the name Valderas just then? His eyes were quite sharp for someone so big. Ark glared at Racard sitting on his shoulder. Anyway, it was difficult prevaricate now that the name Valderas was heard.

'I'll just have to break through the front. Well, if that guy attacks then I'll just take care of him like Valderas.'

Ark had already taken care of Valderas who was a Fire Draconian. Of course, there were thousands of users at that time and he fought the weakened Valderas underwater or else he would've had no chance of winning. But Ark had been level 75 at the time. Currently Ark was level 371. Even if it wasn't underwater like with Valderas, he had confidence that he could win. Was there a reason for him to be scared? Ark considered and asked with a dignified attitude.

"Do you know Valderas?"

"Who are you to say his name?"

"I am Ark. A few years ago I came across Valderas and had no

choice but to kill him with my own hands.”

“Really..... It was you? You defeated the revived Valderas?”

The Fire Draconian looked at Ark with new eyes. After a while, he sighed and rubbed his neck.

“I was passing through the southern part a while ago and listened to the news. Unfortunately, Valderas’ spirit which should’ve passed on a long time ago was resurrected to live a nightmare. But poor Valderas who had been captured by a curse was finally freed thanks to the brave actions of a human.”

The Fire Draconian shifted his gaze to Ark and spoke again.

“I am the oracle of the Fire Draconians, Lumines. As a Fire Draconian, I would like to express my gratitude for you.”

“Thank you?”

“You killed Valderas. But that is wrong. The great Fire Draconian warrior Valderas had died a long time ago. No, he was forced to disappear. It was a terrible curse which resurrected him again. Your act of defeating Valderas broke the curse and sent his spirit to where it should’ve originally gone.”

Valderas also said this just before he died. Lumines looked into the sky like he was recalling something and murmured.

“Valderas.....Valderas..... Although he is the clan’s disgrace, he is also an object of sympathy. By released the wicked curse which was holding Valderas captive, you have restored his honour. As a spokesman of the Fire Draconians, I would like to express our regards and gratitude for your great achievement.”

.....The talk seemed to be going well. Since the conversation was going well, Ark trembled and replied modestly.

“I just did what I had to.”

“Humility is the greatest virtue of a human. But it is a pity.”

“Huh?”

“You might not be aware of it but there is more meaning to the Fire Draconians behind your action of freeing Valderas’ soul. Whether you want it or not, the Fire Draconians have an obligation to repay you.”

“You don’t have to go that far.....”

Ark waved it off with his hand while his eyes sparkled. Lumines mentioned there was something meaningful about the death of Valderas but Ark was more interested in the ‘price’ of the repayment. Repayment price! Wasn’t that a quest reward? The Fire Draconian was different from humans. In fantasy settings, a draconian was the symbol of honour!

‘What kind of compensation will be given....?’

Ark was full of expectations but Lumines’ words poured cold water on him.

“It is slightly regrettable. What you’ve done for the Fire Draconians is really great. If I had gold of jewellery than I would hand it all to you. But the glory of the Fire Draconians is nothing but a memory of the past. The only thing we have left is old armour and staffs.”

‘What the? All that expectation just for a horrible reward?’

Ark looked around with an absurd expression. Lumines looked at him with bittersweet eyes and started talking again.

“As an oracle of the Fire Draconians, I am allowed to give you the ‘Blessing of Fire.’ Come this way.”

‘Blessing of Fire?’

Ark followed Lumines until he stopped at a magic circle carved into the ground. Once the complicated magic in the centre of the circle was completed, Lumines struck it with his staff and shouted.

“I am the oracle of the Fire Draconians. I order the sacred fire which has existed since the beginning of the world! Those who are unqualified will be burned to ashes and disappear while those who are qualified will receive the Blessing of Fire. Come forth!”

Ku ku ku ku. Ku ku ku ku!

It was at that time. Suddenly there was a crack under Ark's foot. He was surprised by the sudden situation and retreated. No, he tried to retreat but it was like his body was tied with a rope. Then a white flame which soared dozens of metres high swallowed Ark.

'Huk, what, what the? That bastard surely didn't.....!'

Ark looked at Lumines with shocked eyes. But Ark soon realized something strange. The flame which appeared from a crack on the floor was so hot it even melted rock. Yet Ark felt nothing from the flame. It wasn't hot and there was no change to his health.

"What on earth is going on? What just happened?"

Ark murmured and looked at the fire wound around him with stupid eyes. Suddenly the fire around Ark's body started dancing and quickly surged into his mouth. His stomach felt hot for a moment before an information window appeared.

-You have received the 'Sacred Blessing of Fire' from the oracle of the Fire Draconians.

Although the Fire Draconians are classified as a draconian, their attribute is fire. They were born in fire and will continue to live as the guardians of fire. The oracle of the Fire Draconians has the power to use 'Blessing of Fire' on a chosen person. When the Fire Draconians were flourishing a long time ago, many heroes visited Hwaryong Mountain in order to obtain the Blessing of Fire.

<Permanent effects of Blessing of Fire: 20% Fire Resistance, 50% Burn Resistance>

'Ohhh, w-what is this?'

Ark read the information window with widened eyes. A permanent increase in flame resistance and burn resistance! Fire magic had the most destructive power among all magic. So a lot of magicians preferred to use fire magic. Thus it was important for warriors who fought against magicians to have fire resistance. Items which had fire resistance as a special option would sell for 1.5 times more expensive than similar items.

‘To have the ability go up through this method.....!’

If he received fire resistance items then it was possible to sell it later on. However, the stats would disappear once the item wasn’t equipped anymore. Previously Ark had worn the Veil of Fire cloak which gave 50% fire resistance but he ended up changing it. Naturally having the stat rise permanently was better than from a magic item.

‘I thought he wouldn’t give proper compensation but isn’t this a jackpot?’

He had already halfway given up on the quest reward thanks to Lumines’ words so it was like being hit in the back of the head. However, he would willingly be hit in the back of the head hundreds of times if it was like this!

“Thank you very much.”

“It is a small thing compared to what you did.”

Lumines smiled and shook his head. Ark was satisfied with the compensation and turned his body with a light feeling.

‘Wait? Is this really the end of the <Home of the Fire Draconian> quest?’

It was natural for Ark to be doubtful. Although it wasn’t necessary to say again, quests were more than a simple request in RPG games. Quests were a story. Quests were a device that allowed users to experience various stories and worldviews of the game. Although the quest was solved and compensation received, it still wasn’t completely cleared up. Then.....

‘The <Home of the Fire Draconian> quest might not be completely finished!’

Ark had been playing New World for 2 years now. The content was still unclear but it was obvious that it was a connection quest. Then he went over his conversation with Lumines. There might’ve been a subtle hint within Lumines’ dialog. If <Home of the Fire Draconian> leads to another quest then the rewards would definitely be better. It

was possible to receive the Blessing of Fire again as a reward.....If that happened, his flame resistance would increase to +40% and burn resistance to 100%. It would be the jackpot of jackpots. Ark had the thought and quickly turned his body back around.

‘I can’t miss this opportunity! Given the overall situation, this should be a linked quest.’

And there were two types of connected quests. To ‘receive’ or to ‘ask about it.’

‘I have to ask the NPC before I can receive the quest. Sometimes it was necessary to have a ‘keyword’ before the NPC would give out the information. The keyword needed.....’

The one for <Home of the Fire Draconian quest> was Valderas! Then the keyword for the linked quest so be something related to Valderas. Ark reached such a conclusion and quickly suggested to Lumines.

“I was wondering one thing.”

“What it is?”

“I heard that Valderas was a wonderful Lord before.”

“Yes, that’s right. He was a great Lord.”

“Then why did Valderas become a subordinate of the Dark Lord?”

“T-that.....”

Lumines made a confused expression.

“If it is you.....you’re qualified to hear this.”

After closing his mouth and thinking for a long time, Lumines sighed and started talking.

“Originally.....Valderas was a guardian who protected the shrine of the Fire Draconians. No, he was about to become the guardian. But all the misfortunes started when the guardian went on a pilgrimage in accordance to the rules of the Fire Draconians.”

While Lumines was originally hesitant, now that he started then he continued babbling on. Frankly, Ark didn't have that much interest in the history of Valderas and the Fire Draconian. Unfortunately, he couldn't skip the dialogue of NPCs in New World so he was forced to listen. According to Lumines' words, the person selected as guardian was entrusted with going around to the shrines built all over the continent to receive the fire blessings.

"At that time, the oracle wanted to delay the pilgrimage."

"How come?"

"At the time, there had been rumours about deformed monsters showing up at sacred Fire Draconians sites all over the continent. I suspect it was an omen of the precursor to the Dark Century. And at that time, the guardian was weakened from old age and couldn't perform his duties anymore. A new guardian was needed quickly."

So despite the Oracle's worries, the Fire Draconians chose some youths as candidates to become the guardian and they went on the pilgrimage. The person elected as the leader of the pilgrimage was Valderas. Unlike previous anxieties, the pilgrimage trip was smooth. After the pilgrimage left and 1 year had passed, they arrived at the southern part of the continent. When the pilgrimage arrived there, they witnessed a horrific scene. The deaths of so many lives had devastated the earth! It was the doing of demons from the north. Valderas' sense of justice couldn't pretend not to see it. Valderas and the pilgrimage resolved to fight the deformities and finally defeated the demon Magura. In the aftermath of the long battle, everything around them was ashes and ruins.

"Valderas had to make a choice. Either lead the Draconians and continue the pilgrimage or stay and take care of the residents in the area."

".....He decided to remain."

Ark nodded and murmured. After hearing that, he could guess the rest of what happened next. Lumines nodded and replied.

"Yes. Valderas chose to remain and become the Lord. Although he

was a guardian candidate, he didn't only think of himself. Valderas restored the territory with the Fire Draconians that remained. That land is now the Jackson territory."

"Then how did Valderas become a subordinate of the Dark Lord?"

Ark tilted his head to one side and asked. Lumines sighed and replied in a pained voice.

"Valderas....no, no one could imagine. It was the appearance of the evil Magura. And Magura's death. It was all a scheme that the Dark Lord arranged....."

"Scheme?"

"Yes, it was a scheme. It was frighteningly effective.....!"

It had been several years since Valderas became the Lord of Jackson. After the territory had stabilized, Valderas came back to the home cite Dragonian. He was to be punished for forsaking the guardian position and abandoning the pilgrimage. But the Fire Draconians knew the circumstances and welcomed him warmly. And their congratulations to the Lord Jackson were sincere. Valderas confirmed that his decision was wrong and went to sleep among the Draconians feeling happy. But that night.....Valderas had a terrible nightmare. In the dream one of the Fire Draconians was engulfed in madness and broke into the shrine, killing the guardian and destroying the wards before slaughtering the rest of his kinsmen. Valderas screamed and woke up. Then he realized something. The scene he saw wasn't a dream.....

"It wasn't a dream.....?"

"Everything he saw in a dream actually happened. It wasn't someone else but Valderas who had committed the crime. No, to be exact it was the influence of Magura."

"Evil influence of Magura? But Magura and Valderas....."

".....He thought he defeated it. Everyone believed it. But it was all the scheme of Magura to make the Dark Lord descend to earth."

At that time, there was a book called the 'Immortal Book' seal in the shrine of the Fire Draconians. It was an ancient artifact which passed down the secret to immortal life. Magura needed the Immortal Book to make the Dark Lord descend to his world.

"So Magura pretended to die and hid in Valderas' body for a chance."

Valderas realized too late and was already enveloped in anger and insanity. Anger and insanity was the food that the darkness loved the most.

"Besides, Valderas had been secretly influenced by Magura for 10 years. The moment Valderas became irrational, his soul was completely captured by Magura and the darkness. He died a hero's death at that moment."

"Then you are the last survivor of the Fire Draconians?"

"That's true but it could also be not true."

"Huh?"

When Ark made a doubtful expression, Lumines clenched his teeth tightly and continued.

"The terrible evil controlling Valderas wasn't satisfied with the mere destruction of the Fire Draconians. That fellow trapped their souls within the ruins for hundreds of years."

Ark looked at Lumines with eyes that indicated he didn't understand.

'If the souls of the Fire Draconians are stuck then why are you here?' his expression seemed to ask.

Lumines sighed and shook his head.

"Originally Dragonian was a Holy Land where is protected by wards. In order for Magura to infiltrate it, he had to use Valderas. By killing his kin, the wards were corrupted and allowed Magura in."

It was located inside the black dome on Hwaryong Mountain. After being violated by Magura, the attribute of the wards completely

changed. It now had the demonic property. Ark realized that Lumines was wrapping up his talk.

“In the end, there are two ways the souls of the Fire Draconians can be saved.”

One way was to reset Magura’s corruption and reset the wards to their original form. However, Magura hid somewhere after the incident.

‘The first method is impossible at the moment.’

The second way was to enter through the wards directly and kill the demons who had captured the souls of the Dire Draconians. But that was also impossible to achieve in the present state. Thanks to the demons’ unexpected addition, even the Draconians couldn’t enter the ward.

‘If I can’t enter then it is also impossible. But.....’

However, Ark felt doubtful at this part. Just before Lumines arrived, Ark had touched the black dome. Unlike what Lumines said, he felt like his finger was being sucked in.

“Why did my hands enter when I touched it?”

“S-such a thing? The wards.....”

“Is it true? Take a look.”

Ark put his hand on the black dome and spoke again. Then Lumines made an absurd expression like he suddenly remembered something.

“Maybe.....no, I think it should work!”

“Huh?”

“Didn’t you previously say that you were brought here because of Valderas’ insignia? Can you show it to me?”

Ark pulled out Valderas’ insignia without thinking about it. But then Lumines took the insignia and a spark occurred? Lumines looked up with a convinced expression.

“That’s it. It is this!”

“Eh? What is it?”

“Isn’t this Valderas’ insignia? And Valderas is a person who had been corrupted by Magura’s magic. This insignia also contains Magura’s magic.”

“.....So I’m not affected by the wards because this contains Magura’s magic.....?”

“There is no reason for a backlash against the same type of magic.”

‘Valderas.....’

All the fragmented information Ark knew then connected. At the start, the Valderas left in the medal wanted to return home. Ark had thought it was just a part of the game. But there was an inevitable reason he wanted to go there. Just before dying, Valderas had escaped from the dark chains that tied him. At the same time he recalled all his memories. He left the key to enter the wards as well as the fate of the Fire Draconians to the hero who defeated him. It really was a pity the Fire Draconians didn’t know that about Valderas.

‘Which reminds me, Lumines never once spoke badly about Valderas.’

Anyway, it became clear what Ark had to do. The next step was to enter and save the souls of the Fire Draconians. That was the next part of the <Home of the Fire Draconian> quest.

“It’s not a coincidence that Valderas left this to me. It was his last will. So I will enter the wards and fight against Magura’s power to save the souls of the Fire Draconians.”

“Y-you will really do that?”

Lumines looked at Ark with eyes overflowing with expectation. Ark nodded without hesitation and the quest information window instantly appeared.

-The quest has been updated.

The Suffering Souls of the Fire Draconians (Special Quest).

After receiving the guidance of Valderas' insignia, you have arrived at Hwaryong Mountain. And you have heard about the Fire Draconians' tragic history from its only survivor, Lumines. Even after the souls died hundreds of years ago, they are even now suffering from the wards. Magura who is the main culprit in all events had his subordinates restrain the Fire Draconians. While defeating Magura's subordinates, you should look for and free the Fire Draconians' souls.

<Difficulty: ??? Quest Restriction: Completion of the preceding quest 'Home of the Fire Draconians,' possession of the Lord of Darkness Valderas' Insignia. Level 300 or more>

"I don't know why we have to find such an annoying thing."

Racard waiting on the side complained with disgruntled eyes. Of course an NPC wouldn't understand the viewpoint of a user who deliberately hunted down difficult work.

"Shut up. It is natural to want to help when seeing someone in difficult circumstances."

"Hah? Did Master have such a character?"

Naturally he didn't have such a character. The reason that Ark risked his life on quests was for the profit. At first, Ark thought it was a jackpot if he received the Blessing of Fire again. At first, Ark thought it would be a jackpot if he received the Blessing of Fire again. But after seeing the contents of the quest, he grasped that it was different from the previous quest he received from the insignia. It was a quest to release the souls of the Fire Draconians who had been suffering for hundreds of years!

'The reward will be much more extravagant!'

Anyway, Ark understood the information from Lumines' words and instantly accepted the quest. Within the influence of the black sphere, a 'space of chaos' was created. Since the wards were influenced by the power of darkness, wicked souls were drawn in

the space of chaos.

“But the identities of the subordinates Magura placed inside is still unknown. They are all huge.....

“Don’t worry, I’ll figure out a way once I go inside Dragonian.”

Ark answered with a light tone. At this point, Ark had just been thinking about the bonus quest. He judged that a quest linked to the level 120 restricted quest wouldn’t be that difficult. Ark finished the suitable preparations and moved inside the wards. At first he felt a repulsive force but he was instantly drawn into the wards when he took out the insignia.

-The Lord of Darkness Valderas’ Insignia has qualified you to enter this dark restricted area.
--

After a long time, it felt like he foot was stepping on mud. How many metres did he walk? Suddenly Racard’s cry rang in his ear.

“Hik, Master. The ground, the ground! Stop!”

“What? Why.....heok!”

Ark stared at the ground and flinched before retreating. In front of him was a cliff dozens of metres high.

“Is this the space of chaos Lumines talked about?”

Ark looked around stupidly. The dark space had rivers of lava flowing. Just like an asteroid belt, it was thousands of floating lands stretching over hundreds of metres. Looking at the landscape caused a sense of fear but also mystery and magnificence. However, the first emotion that surfaced on Ark’s face wasn’t fear but annoyance.

“Is this land mass the place called Dragonian?”

Ark really felt like it was a game after entering this space. In order to pass through the chaos space, he had to calculate the speed and direction of the land masses before jumping.

“I don’t really like this type of game.....”

That wasn't the only reason Ark was irritated.

Kukyakyakyakya, kukyakyakyakya!

Then Ark was surrounded by a group of monsters. Forty dark auras began rising from the ground. Their silhouette resembled a monkey while they had red eyes and sharp projections on their tongues which dragged on the ground. It was a level 300~350 monster called Wendigo. It was the parasitic monsters feeding on the chaos space that Lumines mentioned.

"Hasn't this become more troublesome?"

The Wendigo with its spirit body was the type of monster that Ark disliked the most. It was a monster with an insubstantial body like a spectre. Although all monsters were different according to its body, they normally invalidated 50~80% of physical attacks. Of course, using Elemental Sword made it slightly better but it was difficult to hunt compared to normal monsters.

'I still don't know what type of compensation.....'

But the wendigoes were level 300~350. Meanwhile Ark was over level 370. The level difference was large but at the same time it was possible to receive good loot and experience from hunting them. Even with a 50 level difference, he could still get 50% of experience from hunting.

'But why are there so many of them?'

Whenever he moved to a land of suitable size, the wendigoes would appear. Furthermore, their numbers were proportional to the land mass. The larger land mass meant that more of them would appear. Every time he moved to one region then he had to check his equipment, so it took many hours to only move a few regions. That wasn't the only problem.

Kuaaaa!

"Phew, I've cleared this one already. Damn!"

Ark cursed as he saw another group of wendigoes. Ark's destination

was the Fire Draconian's city, Dragonian.

'Dragonian is probably at the end of the chaos space. I entered from the east so I had been heading to the west, but the land that I was approaching changed just now.....'

That was the problem. The chaos space wasn't a fixed location. If he wanted to get to another region then he had to move across before the land changed. If he made a mistake then he would go to the wrong place. However, it was hard to take notice of the timing to move when he had to concentrate on the fight. If he lost the timing then he would have to wait until the land came around again. Well, it is irrelevant since he could hunt while waiting. But the wendigos were monsters who didn't give loot. Ark started to think it was a waste of time.

'Damn, it can't continue like this. At this rate I can't be assured that I will reach Dragonian in a few days.'

In the end, Ark decided the wendigos were annoyances and decided to ignore them. It was common for users to ignore the monster and move directly to the destination in low level areas. However, this judgment brought about the worst results. In the beginning, there were small rocks so not that many wendigos appeared. He hadn't considered it a problem. However, the land masses became increasingly larger so the number of monsters increased. Eventually 30~40 wendigos appearing was normal! The number of monsters that approached whenever he landed wasn't a small amount. Therefore Ark ended up being surrounded by wendigos. After being pursued, he ended up cornered and hanging on the edge of a cliff. Because Racard led the wendigos stampeding over, he let go of the rock.

'It is the end if I fall. Not only will the land I took ages travelling over reset but my equipment will be destroyed. If I fall into the lava then three or four equipment will be destroyed!'

The loss of all his equipment would be over 20 million won! No matter what type of compensation he received from the quest, it would be a 100% deficit!

“Dammit, I shouldn’t have accepted this quest!”

.....It was too late for regrets.

Using a Crisis as an Opportunity!

‘This is the end!’

His expression instantly became dark. It became dark the moment he let go of the protruding rock. He would be turned to powder the moment he touched the lava. However, he had no regrets about his life. But if his armour broke.....

‘That absolutely can’t happen. A way, I need to find a way! A foothold.....’

But nothing could be seen in the area. At that moment he heard Racard’s voice over his head.

“I-it’s not my fault! Isn’t that right? Isn’t it?”

‘That bastard! Are you a government employee? A politician? Why are you saying such things in a situation like this?’

You’re trying to avoid responsibility when your Master is about to dive into lava? Wasn’t it just like government officials blaming each other in a state of emergency? Sometimes he really wanted to step on that person’s mouth. That was when he had a thought. There was an intense spark inside of Ark.

‘Wait? Step on? Racard?’

Ark came up with a brilliant idea to save the situation. He considered it an absurd method but there was no time to think about it. As soon as Ark came up with a way, he raised his head and shouted.

“Racard, summon release! Racard, summon demon!”

“Huk, what, what the?”

Racard who had been claiming his innocence from a distant place

disappeared. Ark recalled Racard back to his side and grabbed him.

“Hik! W-why are you doing this? Do you intend for us to die together? No, I don’t want to!”

“Who is intending to die with you? Shut up and stay still!”

Ark shouted angrily and placed Racard underneath his foot. Then he stepped on Racard’s head and used all his power to push off.

“Jump!”

It was the Jump option attached to his Wolf’s Feet! When Ark used Jump, his thighs swelled up and he used explosive power to push off Racard’s head. When he used a springboard, it allowed Jump to make up the remaining metres and he managed to grab the protruding stone again. But Racard who had become a foothold screamed as he was forced to fall towards the bottom. He hadn’t suspected Ark’s ulterior motive but he desperately flapped his wings to avoid falling into the lava the moment his head was stepped on.

“Ack, my head! Ack, my butt! I’m going to die!”

“Shut up, hurry up and lure those wendigoes away from here!”

“What? What? You dare say that now? Don’t you see that my butt is on fire?”

“Do you really want to fall into the molten lava?”

Kwa kwa kwang!

Then the rock was struck by one of the wendigoes’ tongue. Ark quickly moved to another rock before growling at Racard.

“If I fall again then I’ll grab you and bring you with me no matter what. Definitely!”

“Okay! I understand! Ya, you damn tongue ghost demons!”

Racard rubbed his butt to put out the fire and used Taunt on the wendigoes. After Racard lured the wendigoes away, Ark could climb up onto the land again. He had managed to avoid having his

equipment melted in the lava for the moment. But that was it. There were still dozens of wendigoes swiping with their tongues in front of him and his health and the durability of his equipment was at the very bottom.

‘It is better than falling into the lava but my equipment will still be destroyed when fighting against the wendigoes. I have to concentrate on finding a way to escape!’

Now the important thing wasn’t to win but to move another land mass when it approached. Ark considered and put away his sword. His sword had low durability like his other equipment but putting it away could raise his evasion rate. Without his sword, he could concentrate everything on evasion.

“Dark Dance!”

Hwiririg, kwa kwa kwang! Hwiririg, kwa kwa kwang!

The bloody tongue with sharp needles passed closely by. Even with his evasion raised to 100%, he couldn’t escape all attacks.

‘Just one attack would decrease my durability.’

It also had its limits. It was raining and his clothes were wet. Even minor damage couldn’t be ignored. After approximately 3~4 minutes passed, a red warning message popped up in front of Ark.

<p>-The durability of『Guardian Armour of the Merpeople』,『Cat Paws』,『Raccoons Pith』and『Warrior’s Transcripts』has decreased to 2%. Immediate repair is needed!</p>
--

‘Oh my god!’

It felt like his heart had suddenly fallen. In this situation it was easier for the durability of armour to fall more easily. It was the same principle as the loose screw would fall more often. If his equipment was at 2% then one hit would be a fatal blow!

“Master, it is coming!”

Then Racard's voice who had lured the wendigoes to the other side could be heard. When he turned around, a piece of land was fast approaching. It was a piece only 1 metre in diameter but Ark felt like it was his saviour.

'If I miss that then it is the end!'

Ark quickly calculated the orbit of the approaching land. If it maintained its orbit then it would pass by in a few seconds! But the surrounding wendigoes can't see him move to the other land!

'I have to get away from these guys first!'

Ark became determined and used Dark Dance to move between the wendigoes. The wendigoes followed behind Ark. Then Ark ran perpendicularly and moved towards Razak who was still using Steel Loyalty.

'That's it, this is my last chance!'

"Razak, Steel Loyalty off! Transform!"

Clack clack clack clack, ttadadadak!

Razak instantly changed into the Saw blade and Ark caught it. Ark ran towards the edge and jumped with his full power. The tongues of the wendigoes tried to follow but Ark quickly twisted the Saw blade.

Chwararak!

The Saw blade unfolded like a whip and entwined around the rapidly approaching piece of land. Ark dangled from the fast moving land and passed over the head of the wendigoes. He didn't know where the land was going but he had avoided the worst situation for the moment.

"I-I lived!"

Ark looked at the rapidly retreating wendigoes and sighed with relief. No, he was about to sigh.

Kukyakyakyakya!

Suddenly cold laughter was heard above his head. Ark lifted his face

and stiffened. Before he could feel relieved, a wendigo had appeared on the piece of land. The wendigo that appeared brandished their tongues and attacked Ark. Ark moved side to side to avoid the tongues but then the wendigo's eyes focused on the Saw blade.

'D-dammit.....!'

Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped. Currently the Saw blade was hanging from a corner of the piece of land. If that guy broke the corner with their tongues then Ark would fall into the lava again. It wasn't possible to pull his blade like a rubber band to climb up. If he flew up there was a 100% chance of collision with that guy and Ark would fall into the lava.....it was indeed the end.

'The only way.....!'

"Racard, above! Block that guy!"

"Huh? O-okay! Dark Dash!"

Racard shot forward like an arrow at Ark's words. But the floating land was moving at a tremendous speed. Racard used Dark Dance but the speed of the land was slightly faster. He had no way of blocking the wendigo. The wendigo only took light damage and brought its tongue back to the corner.

"D-damn, no! Soul Extortion!"

Ark hastily fired the only long distance attack he had. There was no other way! But Soul Extortion exerted an unforeseen effect.

Pepepepeng!

The moment the transparent hand grabbed the wendigo, there was a violent explosion and the wendigo stumbled. Instead of just tearing a part of the soul, it grabbed the whole thing? Furthermore, the wendigo's health was reduced by 15% with one blow.

'W-what is this? What is going on?'

Ark was dumbfounded by the unexpected situation. He used it in his desperate state but Soul Extortion wasn't an attack magic. It was a

magic which grabbed some of the soul. Naturally it only did 50 damage. So why did the wendigo lose 15% health when it was caught by Soul Extortion?

“I don’t know why but this is a chance! Before it can use the tongue again, Soul Extortion, Soul Extortion, Soul Extortion!”

Pepepepeng, kuaack! Pepepepeng, kuaack!

Ark focused on the tongues and extensively used Soul Extortion. Every time the wendigo screamed as their bodies were slowly destroyed. But the wendigo was very tough. Even after being hit, the wendigo continued beating the corner with their tongues. However.....

Tick.

“.....?”

Tick, tick, tick, tick!

The wendigo stopped tapping the edge with their tongue and looked at Ark with confusion. Ark laughed at their expression and muttered.

“Kukukuku, isn’t the wendigo quite cute like this?”

The wendigo swung their tongue around the floating land. But the wendigo already looked completely different from before. The exact reason was unknown but Soul Extortion tore off some of the wendigo’s body. But the wendigo had a spirit body so it quickly repaired everything. Yet even with a spirit body, the wendigo couldn’t repair everything without a penalty. The spirit body had a fixed amount so decreasing the soul would decrease the size of the body. The wendigo which had lost a lot of its soul due to Soul Extortion had decreased to the size of a fist. Now the wendigo didn’t have enough power to crush the corner.

Kiiiiik, kiiiiik!

The wendigo belatedly realized the situation too late and retreated.

“What are you going to do now? Soul Extortion!”

In the end, the little wendigo was completely swallowed up by the hand.

-Your spirit has risen thanks to Soul Extortion!
<Spiritual Power +1>

“Hahaha, now I can relax!”

Ark muttered with a rapt expression.

-The fatigue of your mind and body has been swept away by the hot spring.
<Your wound have been cured and health and mana recovery increased by 200%>

The chaos space wasn't a completely perilous place. There were also lands with hot springs floating among the river of lava. The spa area floated among the chaos space. If the hot spring was used as a campsite then naturally his recovery rate would quicken. It was also a safety zone where wendigoes wouldn't appear.

“It's lucky that there are hot springs here.”

Soaking in the steaming hot water really loosened his fatigue. And the location where the hot spring wandered was the chaos space. Below it was a river of boiling lava. It was fantastic scenery to watch while floating around. It was also possible to relax in places like hot springs in New World.

Clack clack clack clack.....

Ssak ssak ssak ssak.....

Ark laughed as Razak and Radun also plunged into the hot springs with fascinated expressions.

“Chet, chet! You must be enjoying this.”

However, Racard just frowned and glared at Ark.

“What the, what did you say? Why are you so dissatisfied?”

“Do you need to ask? Am I a stone? Why did you step on my head?”

“It couldn’t be helped at that time.”

“Ha, is that it? Is that all I am to Master? I almost fell into the lava because Master stepped on me. Did you see it? My butt caught on fire and all my fur was stripped! Do you have any remorse after seeing this?”

“That’s why I brought you to the hot spring. Come quickly into the springs.”

“How can you just say that? My butt is blistered from burns yet you want me to enter hot water?”

“You really are so troublesome. If you don’t want to come in then scout or something.”

“Master really is.....”

“What? What are you about to say?”

When Ark glared at him, Racard pouted and turned his head. He seemed annoyed but Ark’s head was full of other thoughts.

‘It’s fortunate that I came to a land with some hot springs.....’

In fact, the hot spring Ark was resting in this time wasn’t the first one he found. He had found a hot spring soon after he entered the chaos space. Yes, after all his troubles Ark returned back to the area where he found it and entered the hot springs. But that was not the problem.

“What was that? That attack just then?”

Ark carefully thought about the situation. Ark had tested the Soul Extortion skill on various monsters after he learnt it. And he came to the conclusion that it was ‘spirit.’ Even if it contributed to his Spiritual Power, it only raised it by 1. Despite frantically using during the week he spent in Hwaryong Mountain, his Spiritual Power had only

increased by 7. So Ark only used Soul Extortion for half of its purpose.

‘But it had a completely different use just then.’

The wendigo lost 15% health when he used Soul Extortion. The wendigo didn’t have low health. If the wendigo’s health was low then he wouldn’t have so much trouble.

‘If it’s not an accident then I can only think of one answer!’

Ark ended up reaching a conclusion.

‘If my idea is correct.....’

After coming to the conclusion it wasn’t possible for him to sit down anymore.

“Come on, get up!”

“Eh? Already? But the swelling on my butt hasn’t gone down yet!”

Racard muttered as he grabbed his butt.

“Forget about your butt. Let’s go. The place isn’t that far away so just follow.”

“The place isn’t far away? Where are we going?”

“To test something out. Racard, look for a land of suitable size that I can move to immediately. The size....something 5~7 metres wide should be suitable. If it’s that size then only 4~5 wendigoes should appear.”

“Sheesh, I understand.”

Racard flapped his wings and looked all over the place. After a while, he finally discovered a suitable sized land.

Kukyakyakyakya, kukyakyakyakya!

As expected, the wendigoes appeared as soon as he arrived on the land.

‘5 of them should be suitable.’

“Razak, defense stance. Racard, taunt 3 of them!”

“What are you saying? You want me to lure them in a small place like this?”

Although Racard complained, he used Taunt to lure 3 of them to a corner. And Razak stood close to Ark with his shield outstretched. It was the basic formation of Ark and his summons. In fact, it wasn't necessary to prepare anything when dealing with these numbers but Ark's purpose wasn't to kill the wendigos. Ark used Razak and his shield to avoid the tongue while keeping an eye on the wendigos. After a while, an arrow pattern appeared on top of a wendigo's head.

“Lock on. Soul Extortion!”

Pepepeng, kuaaaaak!

A clear hand stretched out in front of him and grabbed the wendigo. Although it recovered its spirit and body, the size of the wendigo had diminished. The wendigo became smaller with every attack of Ark's. He also confirmed that the damage decreased when the size became smaller.

“It is following my expectations. Next....Soul Extortion, Soul Extortion!”

Ark rampaged with the skill and struck the wendigo. Soul Extortion decreased the defense by 15%. Moreover, Soul Extortion had no cool down time. And it didn't take longer than 30 seconds to use the skill once. So he managed to take care of 5 wendigos.

-Your spirit has risen thanks to Soul Extortion!
<Spiritual Power +1>

“As expected!”

Ark was convinced once the message window popped up. In RPG games, the damage wasn't just decided by defense and attack power. The attack and defense power displayed in the information

window was just an average figure. How it was applied depended on the situation. It was commonly known as attribute. The wendigo was a soul monster while invalidated physical attacked by 50~80%. Yet Ark had overlooked one important fact. Soul Extortion was literally soul magic. And he was dealing with a monster with a soul body. When used on a normal monster, the amount of damage and soul absorbed wasn't that much.

'Soul Extortion is a skill which shows its primary effect when hunting soul monsters!'

Once confirmed by the experiment, Ark's attitude changed 180 degrees. Before now Ark had only thought about heading to Dragonian. He had thought it was a waste of time to hunt the wendigoes.

"But if I use Soul Extortion on the wendigoes then I can extract dozens of Spiritual Power. Then....."

Ark's eyes widened. The quest wasn't a problem anymore. It wasn't necessary to say but the amount of Spiritual Power wasn't something to be disregarded. Yet he couldn't put stat points into Spiritual Power and he hadn't seen an item to increase it. In the end, Soul Extortion was the only way to increase his Spiritual Power. Although it had seemed inefficient, he used Soul Extortion in his desperate situation.

"After changing to my 2nd profession, my skills require even more Spiritual Power. But Soul Extortion only increases by 1 so it would take several days to increase it by one hundred....."

So this place was where he could get the maximum effect for Soul Extortion. Furthermore, there were so many wendigoes in the chaos space that it was almost tedious. If he hunted all the wendigoes here using Soul Extortion than how much would his Spiritual Power increase by?

"I need to grind to raise my Spiritual Power.

Amazing.....this is a jackpot!"

Ark felt like dancing. He could solve his problem of increasing his

Spiritual Power here.

“If it is 3~4 opponents like now then hunting won’t be a problem.....”

The problem was when dozens of wendigoes emerged in a wide place. If there are 30~40 in a limited space then he could use Blade Tempest but it would still be difficult. It wasn’t necessary to say but he had to use Soul Extortion in order to increase his Spiritual Power by 1.

“Should I reduce the number and then absorb the rest of them?”

But the wendigoes were similar to cockroaches even if there was a limit on their numbers. Of course, he could be killing wendigoes forever. When he killed 5 wendigoes he only received 1 spiritual power.

‘That absolutely can’t happen. Despite these monsters giving a bonus, he couldn’t just rush in to kill them. He had to squeeze even 1 Spiritual Power using Soul Extortion. But to deal with 30~40 wendigoes in a limited space.....”

Ark looked at his summons. Racard could only lure 5 monsters using Taunt. That left 25~35 opponents left. Ark wouldn’t be able to deal with the remaining wendigoes even with Razak helping. He had to think outside the box.

“I need to have Racard somehow lure half of them.....”

Ark murmured until he had a brilliant flash in his mind. He stared at Racard for a moment before smiling.

“Aha, why did I forget about that?”

“What? Why? Why are you looking at me with those eyes?”

Racard averted his gaze with unease at Ark’s expression. Then Ark turned his head and showed off his neck.

“Racard, suck my blood!”

“Eh? Really? I can eat? Really? It’s not a joke?”

“Don’t talk nonsense and just suck!”

“Ohhhhh, understood. I definitely won’t be in trouble later on?”

Suck, suck, suck, suck.

Racard instantly flew to him and bit his neck.

‘Ugh, this dirty feeling..... But.....Huhuhu, today’s suffering is tomorrow’s prosperity. Slaughtering a huge number of wendigoes won’t be a problem if I follow this plan. These damn monkey ghosts will die. I’ll catch you and devour you all!’

Ark’s face became pale as blood drained from him.

“Oh, I’m dizzy.....”

He naturally frowned as he experienced dizziness. He had anaemia because Racard sucked his blood thirteen times.

“Still, it is lucky that he succeeded on the thirteenth time.....”

Anyway, Ark’s accomplished his purpose on the thirteenth try. Ark brought his preliminary preparations to an end and started his wendigo hunt.

“Now shall I begin?”

Ark looked at the approaching land and laughed. As soon as he stepped on the land mass that was 50 metres, black energy started to rise from the ground. With a black form and red pupils, it was the wendigoes! The space soon filled with 30 wendigoes as they surrounded Ark. At any other time Ark would be filled with tension. But this time his mouth overflowed with saliva from the anticipation.

“Huhuhu, give me Spiritual Power!”

Ark instantly showed his teeth when the wendigoes appeared.

“I’ll grab and eat all of you!”

Kukyakyakyakya, kukyakyakyakya!

The 30 wendigoes shrieked as they responded to his voice and ran up to him. Ark wiped at the saliva on his teeth and smiled.

“Racard, it’s starting! Use your Blood-sucking skill!”

“Ohhhh, Blood-sucking skill activate!”

Racard opened his wings and flew from behind Ark. Then he was wrapped in a blue light as he used the skill. Then the ring of light moved up and down Racard’s body before it turned into the shape of a bat. The ring of light split into three. Then four bats flew around the wendigoes and shouted.

“These trivial boogeymen, if you’re hungry then eat my shit!”

The wendigoes flinched and stopped moving. Their eyes followed Racard before the shrieked and started running after him. Then Racard laughed and flew upwards before laughing.

“Cherish your life and run away!”

The three bats scattered at Racard’s order.

While some ran away, others shook their hips and laughed before running away. The wendigoes scattered as well and started running after the bats.

“Huhuhu, this is an easy method.....”

Ark watched the scene with a warm expression. This was the method Ark devised to deal with the wendigoes. Just use the ‘ Vampire ‘ skill card, ‘ Moon illusion ‘ is a way to light fires.

‘There is no place to hide from the number of wendigoes here so all I can rely on is Racard’s Taunt. But Racard could only lure 5 monsters with Taunt. Racard wouldn’t be able to draw all the wendigoes away.’

Then Ark came upon the idea of using Moonlight Illusion. Wouldn’t it be different if he could increase the number of Racard? If it was to lure the wendigoes then it didn’t matter if Ark was the one who used Moonlight Illusion. But the problem was there was no place to run away from the wendigoes. The alter egos created by Moonlight

Illusion didn't have any battle ability. If he tried to go around in such a small place then they would be caught by the wendigoes and destroyed. However, Racard's alter ego could fly so it was different. It was possible to avoid the attacks from the wendigoes without worrying about the limited space and terrain.

'If I use Racard's Blood-sucking skill then there is no need to wait for the cool down time!'

Originally Moonlight Illusion was a skill that was only available once a day. But just like when he used Slime's Time, the restrictions didn't apply with Racard's Blood-sucking skill.

"If I use this method then I won't have to suffer."

He thought as the stupid wendigoes ran after Racard. However, Ark still didn't take anything for granted. If he just went directly to Dragonian that he wouldn't need to devise such a strategy. The game was a place where some laws of reality still applied. When Racard and his alter egos flew around the area, 20 wendigoes chased after them so 10 were left. It was still a lot of opponents even when the numbers decreased by 1/3rd. If the 10 of them turned into one solid mass and rushed him then he would risk being pushed off the cliff like before. However, Ark already took precautions against that.

"They're surging! Razak, defense stance! Prepare for impact!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak stood in front of Ark with his shield in front of him and took a stable stance. With one foot forward and the other back, it was a stable stance. The 10 stampeding wendigoes ran into that stance and there was a loud ringing sound. While Razak flinched, he wasn't pushed back by the charge. His stance had taken the impact.

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

After Razak fended off their assault, he then swung his shield. There was a clanging sound and 5 of the wendigoes were thrown. Thanks to the affection stat Ark poured on Razak, his Shield Stroke had risen to Advanced level.

-The level of your pet Razak's Shield Stroke has increased.

Shield Stroke (Intermediate, Passive): your ability to handle the shield has become more precise and you can now push the enemy more effectively. You can also use Shield Stroke to strike five enemies at the same time. If all five attacks succeed then the distance pushed back will increase.

<The defense of the shield increases by 30%. Damage to enemy when struck with the shield +45%, probability of stiffness increased by 20% and Advanced Shield Stroke can be used 5 times in a row>

'It is good that I raised Razak's skill.'

In fact, Ark had worried for a while about whether to use his Affection stat on Racard's Taunt or Razak's Shield Stroke. He had 134 Affection but unlike rising from beginner to intermediate, it cost 100 Affection to raise a skill to advanced. After contemplating for a while, Ark ended up choosing Razak's Shield Stroke skill. While the number of monsters lured would increase with the skill level. Racard's body was insufficient to deal with the numbers that would be attracted. So Ark judged that it would be better to increase Razak's skill and have him back Ark up.

....It was an excellent choice.

Razak hitting 5 of them with his shield meant that 5 monsters would be tied up. With both Racard and Razak, Ark only had to deal with 5~6 opponents.

"Okay. Well done Razak!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak's spirit increased from Ark's praise and he swung his shield even more energetically. Meanwhile Ark extended a hand and shouted.

"Soul Extortion!"

A huge, transparent hand was released from his fingertips. The

shape of the hand was slightly different from before. The nails sharpened and grew like the hand of a devil. It wasn't only the appearance that changed. The speed which it flew at the target was faster and it also grabbed a larger piece of soul. The hand of a devil grabbed the wendigo and tore off a piece of its shoulder. The wendigo lost 20% of its health from the attack.

'As expected, increasing it is good!'

Ark laughed at the tattered sight of the wendigo. Ark's preparation wasn't just increasing the skill of his summons. The degree of proficiency in which Soul Extortion rose was actually pretty slow. Despite using it hundreds of times since coming to Hwaryong Mountain, it only increased to 30. Well, he hadn't thought it was useful at the time so he hadn't really been interested.

'If the level of Soul Extortion increases then wouldn't the Spiritual Power absorption be more efficient?'

It was a perfect chance for some investment. So Ark invested the 80 skill points he had saved into Soul Extortion.

-Soul Extortion (Intermediate, Active 117/300): The rating increase means Soul Extortion can target more powerful and evil cursed souls. The physical damage to the target won't increase but the amount of Soul gathered will increase. In addition, the souls drawn will be more easily absorbed and will increase your Spiritual Power more quickly.

<Intermediate Bonus: When using Soul Extortion, there is a 2% chance of causing a low level curse for 10 seconds>

* Soul Extortion will succeed when it deals 70% of the damage. The user's soul will receive terrible damage if they die and the resurrection time will be increased to a maximum of 96 hours.

It was worth investing points in the skill. Before this he had to catch 5~7 wendigos before his Spiritual Power increased by 1. Now that it increased to intermediate, he only had to catch 4~6. The absorption rate had become better.

‘There is only a difference of one but that difference will have a huge impact when hunting dozens of monsters!’

Now there was also a chance of inflicting a curse on the wendigos. The curse was one which decreased stats. Even a low level curse would decrease stats by 10%.

‘It is a surprisingly worthwhile skill to grow!’

“Soul Extortion! Soul Extortion!”

Ark looked around with an excited expression as the soul of the wendigoes was eaten. The wendigoes instinctively felt fear and hurried away but with Lock on, Soul Extortion had a 70% chance of hitting! Besides, the area was only 50 metres in diameter. Since the range of Ark’s Soul Extortion was 30~40 metres, it was a great space for him. The transparent hand grabbed the neck of a wendigo and tore a piece of its soul.

Kiiiiik, kiiiiik!

After he grabbed it a few times, the wendigo became the size of an eyeball. When seeing such a shape, it was slightly pitiful. But Ark had no pity in these circumstances.

“Don’t pretend to be cute! Soul Extortion!”

Ark transferred the hand to the wendigo and picked it up. After the small eyeball was taken care of, he looked for other prey. The remaining four were flocking towards him. Four against 1 was slightly burdensome on Ark. But Ark had already taken counter measures for the problem.

“Not a chance. Dark Dance!”

Ark’s feet moved quickly and he disappeared like a ghost.

[-Dark Dance’s percentage of completion: 60%!]

As soon as he used Dark Dance, his degree of completion reached 60%. Fortunately his evasion rate rose sharply but Ark shook his head.

‘No, it’s not enough. I’m in trouble even if the degree of completion increases even more!’

Dark Scale was triggered when his percentage of completion on Dark Dance surpassed 70%. And Dark Scale decreased his evasion while increasing his defense by 30%. It was good up to that point. The problem with Dark Scale was it had a low probability of reflecting attacks. That was unacceptable if Ark wanted to eat 100% of the wendigo’s soul. So Ark deliberately made mistakes and maintained his completion rate at 65%. He was about to start eating as much as possible when Ark had a horrible thought.

“I can’t waste even 1 point of Spiritual Power on Razak’s Shield Stroke!”

Already the wendigoes weren’t monsters in Ark’s mind anymore. They were just energy to increase Ark’s Spiritual Power.

“Huhuhu, your actions are futile! I have to eat your souls before your health decreases more! Soul Extortion, Soul Extortion!”

Ark went around like a ghost without resting and swallowed the souls of the wendigoes. And the fist continued chasing after them when the wendigoes ran away. He didn’t care which monster it targeted. Ark took care of the surrounding wendigoes after 5 minutes but he had lost 30% of his health. In the meantime, Razak also received 60% damage from fending off the wendigoes. But that wasn’t a problem at all. In fact, the most dangerous part of dealing with the wendigoes was up to now. Racard and his alter egos had lured most of the wendigoes. But now it was simple to handle them.

“Racard, take care of all of them!”

“I understand. Alter ego no. 1, attack everything!”

This was a command of Moonlight Illusion to fight with the enemy. When Racard gave the commands, the alter egos immediately chased after the wendigoes. However, they disappeared with one hit from the wendigo’s tongue.

“Ohh, it is my alter ego but why do I feel slightly ill for some reason?”

Racard rubbed his cheek and murmured. When the alter ego disappeared, Ark and Razak looked at the wendigoes with sparkling eyes. Yes, when an alter ego disappeared then Ark would take care of the 5 wendigoes that it lured.

“Once again. Be prepared Razak!”

Clack clack clack clack! Clack clack clack clack!

It was obviously much easier to care for 5 opponents than 10. Razak easily blocked their charge and Ark started to eat again. After eating those 5, he made another alter ego disappear and took care of the next 5..... So Ark managed to wipe out the pitiful wendigoes after 30 minutes.

“Huhuhu, it’s pretty salty?”

Ark clicked his tongue and murmured. His experience had hardly changed after taking care of 30 wendigoes. And his Spiritual Power had only increased by 4 after 30 minutes. It had been around one week since he first learnt the skill and came to Hwaryong Mountain. During that time Soul Extortion only increased it by 7. It really was a reckless growth rate. However, there was no compensation in return.

“Master, I’ve already used all the Moonlight Illusion.....”

Racard approached Ark and murmured with a voice full of hunger. Ark’s satisfied face instantly turned pale. All the skills obtained by Blood-sucking had been used. In other words, he needed to suck blood to obtain new skills. Yes, that was the only fear Ark had about hunting for Spiritual Power. Racard’s use of Moonlight Illusion was essential for hunting the wendigoes. And Racard had to suck blood from Ark in order to obtain the Moonlight Illusion. The problem was that the skill absorbed was random. He didn’t know what skill would be absorbed. Previously Racard had to suck his blood thirteen times before his slots were filled. It would have to be repeated many times if he wanted to hunt the wendigoes. Thanks to that, it was like Ark had been caught by Karakul again. Ark frowned as he looked at the approaching Racard.

What do you mean? No skills? Didn't you fill two slots?"

"Eh? Didn't you know? One of the alter egos died when Master was fighting against them. So I quickly renewed the skill for Master. Didn't I do well?"

'This guy.....'

Ark had wanted to diligently save Moonlight Illusion. However, Racard had tasted his Master's blood and ended up using the Moonlight Illusion in both slots during the battle. Now he was free to request blood. Ark could clearly see through Racard. Perhaps he even let his alter ego die on purpose. However, he had no evidence to prove it.

"You.....aren't you afraid for your future?"

"What do you mean? I used it because it looked dangerous. I am a loyal summon."

Racard retorted with shining eyes. On the other hand, Ark's eyes were filled with bitterness and a desire for revenge.

"Dammit, I understand. Let me just quickly do this."

Ark sighed and made a meal. He needed to resupply his herbal decoction which would prevent him from getting anaemia. After eating the herbal medicine, Ark stretched his neck for Racard who muttered with dissatisfaction.

"Eew, you have a herbal medicine smell after eating those pills that is making me uncomfortable....."

".....Do you want to die?"

"U-understood! Okay. I'll just start eating. I'll eat well. Aang!"

Suck, suck, suck, suck!

Ark sighed as he started to feel dizzy. This time it took twenty times before Moonlight Illusion was absorbed. Radun and Razak looked at him with regretful eyes as Ark turned pale. But Ark clenched his teeth tightly and raised his body.

“Uhh, there’s no time to be resting. Spiritual Power. I have to quickly fill my Spiritual Power!”

“Hihi, okay. Let’s hunt quickly Master. I want to hunt!”

Racard wiped his mouth and smirked.

Ark had goose bumps. It was the first time he was frightened of his summon.

Rehabilitation Treatment

“Phew, yesterday was really dreadful.”

His eyes were half-closed and his hair was like a magpie's nest. Hyun-woo finally crawled out into the living room looking like a shabby person after the sun had already risen for ages. He was always in such a state thanks to the chaos space in New World. It was a life where he played the game for 20 hours before sleeping for a little bit! It wasn't an exaggeration to say it was a hellish relay. The physical and psychological damage wasn't small. It had reached the point where he felt sick after seeing the colour red because it reminded him of lava!

“..... But it's still not there yet.”

This was what made Hyun-woo different from other users. Most users thought of it as an online game while Hyun-woo thought of it as a different dimension. A few hours? A few days? That was a level where it was just enjoyment. In the first place, Hyun-woo had no concept of time. Once he started an area, he would stay until he judged that there was nothing left for him. It was squeezing out everything he could from his labour. And he was able to.

“Why so far.....?”

Some people wondered this. But it was to get ahead of others. He considered New World his job so he needed to get ahead of other people. He had to be stronger and receive a lot more than other people.

“Yes, I don't have time to be doing this. I have to quickly exercise and enter the game.”

Then he heard the sound of his front door opening. When he turned around, Gwon Hwa-rang was entering while pushing his mother's wheelchair.

“Oh, you came to visit?”

“Did you just wake up?”

“Before I noticed it was already 5 o’clock in the morning.”

“Act moderately.....I will not say that.”

Gwon Hwa-rang grinned and muttered. Recently Gwon Hwa-rang had been visiting once every two days, and he alternated with Hyun-woo to help take his mother to the hospital for treatment. When Gwon Hwa-rang first visited, Hyun-woo had accompanied them daily. But when Gwon Hwa-rang’s eyes seemed to indicate ‘Hey, are you trying to interfere?’ then Hyun-woo only accompanied his mother every second day. She didn’t say it but his mother’s expression indicated that she liked it too. But it was slightly strange today. His mother was silent and Gwon Hwa-rang was looking perplexed at his mother.

“What have you been doing?”

“That..... Let’s have a cup of coffee first since you seem tired.”

At Gwon Hwa-rang’s suggestion, the three of them sat down in the living room. Hyun-woo was reminded of something while sipping coffee and suddenly asked.

“Ah, did you find what I was looking for?”

“What you was looking for?”

“I asked Gwon Hwa-rang for something.

“Then you must be referring to New World.”

His mother smiled wryly and lowered her mug. When thinking back, he should’ve noticed it at the time. However, Hyun-woo didn’t notice his mother’s subtle expression change and continued looking at Gwon Hwa-rang. Again he didn’t know why but Gwon Hwa-rang hesitated for a long time before replying.

“Are you talking about the evidence from before?”

He was referring to evidence that there was a relation between the

Hermes alliance and the lawless port.

‘There is no doubt that the Hermes alliance is associated with the lawless port. And there’s bound to be some traces left in New World. An agreement between Hermes and the Nakujuk or some proof that they were receiving the pirates’ goods.....’

If there was even one of those things then he would be able to prove a relation between the Hermes alliance and the lawless port. Previously Hyun-woo had found a link between Alan and the secret religious society of Ankh, causing them to be ruined. The reason that was possible was because laws also existed in New World. In New World, ‘everything was possible.’ It was a game which offered infinite degrees of freedom. In the game there was the ability to become a general or help NPCs in a coup against the King. Of course it was also possible to harm soldiers.....But just because anything was possible didn’t mean that it was recommended. Laws to defend the balance of New World also existed and those that broke the laws would be penalized. And the penalty was proportional to the size of the crime. That was why Alan had been ruined and lost his followers.

‘If I find some evidence of a coalition between Hermes and the lawless port then their fates will be similar to Alan’s. If they are branded as a criminal group then they will also lose their rights to the Lordship of Silvana.’

So Hyun-woo had asked Gwon Hwa-rang to find evidence while sweeping through the lawless port. However, Gwon Hwa-rang just shook his head.

“I couldn’t find it. Those fellows thoroughly hid it.”

“Hmm. As expected, it couldn’t be settled that easily. Was there anything different?”

“Different?”

“The amount invested into the lawless port by the Hermes alliance should be significant. They would dispose of the pirate’s stolen goods and then take the profit. If the lawless port collapsed then

they should've lost their investment fund. That kind of damage would not be enough to make them resign."

"I also think so as well....."

"Hmm, we won but I am still slightly uncomfortable."

"There's no need to worry. The strategy to clean up the lawless port is a success and we can turn it into a military base for Seutandal. Those guys won't be able to use the same scheme again."

"Military base?"

Hyun-woo asked with curiosity. The change in Seutandal was important for Hyun-woo. Seutandal was one of the places in Hyun-woo's triangular trade scheme so he needed to build a trading post there. But he had been so busy hunting the wendigoes that he hadn't had a chance to ask what was happening in Seutandal.

"Ah, you still don't know yet. Although it was originally the lawless port, when I looked around the terrain conditions were very good. The cave can easily store 50 battle ships we can use the buildings that the Hermes alliance has already built. So it will be converted to the headquarters of Seutandal's navy."

"Navy Headquarters?"

"Seutandal is an island so it requires a navy to protect it. Even with the lawless port gone, we will still need to deal with the pirates from the continent. If we increase the navy then the current harbour won't be able to hold it. Separating the headquarters from the harbour will make it easier to manage."

As expected, Gwon Hwa-rang's tactics were completely different from Hyun-woo's ideas.

"The lawless port is a natural fortress. Well, the Hermes alliance is familiar with the surrounding terrain but if we take precautions then it won't be an easy place to attack. At least it is a hundred times better than Seutandal's current harbour. Budget is also no problem thanks to the profit we got from sweeping up the lawless port."

At first Gwon Hwa-rang hesitated a bit but then he started babbling on. Then his mother who had been quietly listening moved her wheelchair.

“.....I’m tired after going to the hospital. I’m going to rest for a short while.”

Gwon Hwa-rang flinched and jumped like a frog.

“|-|.!”

“No. Just continue. I don’t understand entirely but the criminals sound important to Hyun-woo. I’ll be fine by myself.”

His mother moved her wheelchair and went to her bedroom.

‘Eh? What’s this? Didn’t Mother just say something that seemed really stinging?’

Hyun-woo turned his head to peek and winced.

“Ow, ow, ow, w-what have I done.....?”

Gwon Hwa-rang squeezed his head while muttering helplessly.

“W-what happened?”

“It’s just.... In fact.....”

Gwon Hwa-rang trembled and explained the circumstances. Something had happened when Gwon Hwa-rang took his mother to the hospital. He was talking happily with Hyun-woo’s mother when he received a telephone call. Like Gwon Hwa-rang said, Seutandal was currently in the midst of turning the lawless port into the Navy Headquarters. Gwon Hwa-rang was an expert in tactics so of course he was in charge. If there was even a small problem then the rehabilitation members would call him.

“What? The fort installations are insufficient? Did you consult Isabel? Then return to the entrance for the necessary materials since completion of the fort is the most important thing.”

After it disconnected, the phone rang again. While at the hospital, he received over 6 telephone calls. It interrupted Gwon Hwa-rang’s

conversation with Hyun-woo's mother. But his mistake was after that.

"Isabel? Navy Headquarters? What's going on?"

"Ah, So-mi ssi doesn't need to know about it."

Gwon Hwa-rang unconsciously said. He belatedly noticed what he said but it was too late to take it back.

"No, I mean..... It's really complicated..... That is....."

"That's okay. Please drive."

Hyun-woo's mother replied normally. But his mother was a person as well. Gwon Hwa-rang's insensitive words definitely hurt her. So he kept his mouth shut while heading back to the house. That's why Gwon Hwa-rang's expression wasn't good when entering the house. It was also why he hesitated when Hyun-woo asked about New World.

"Wahhh, what did I do.....?"

Gwon Hwa-rang whined like a puppy while looking at the firmly closed door.

"Ohhhhh. I just..... Information about the Navy Headquarters is so complex that I thought it would be inconvenient for So-mi ssi..... Really. Then..... Ah, no, it's my fault. How stupid must I be to talk about the Navy Headquarters as soon as I enter the house..... Of course she would be angry."

'She's angry?'

Hyun-woo scratched his head. Honestly, Hyun-woo's mother wasn't really angry. Gwon Hwa-rang didn't know how his mother would really behave if she was angry. But Gwon Hwa-rang insensitively mentioned those things so of course she would get prickly. She had deliberately acted angry in order to point out Gwon Hwa-rang's mistake. In fact, Hyun-woo had often received 'education' like that when he was younger.

'At any rate, my mother really seems mischievous after seeing this.'

Is she already starting her husband education?’

However, Gwon Hwa-rang didn’t know this and he was completely panicked. Hyun-woo felt like giggling after seeing his panicked features.

‘But should I leave it like this? Hwa-rang ajusshi has been neglecting Mother lately for New World. Since it is also therapy for him.....’

Hyun-woo was thinking about the circumstances when he realized something.

‘Wait? Which reminds me, these days I also.....’

Hyun-woo was living with his mother 24 hours a day. However, it felt like he talked to his mother more when she was at the hospital. They were always in the house together so he didn’t think about starting conversations. So it was quite negligent. In addition, recently his conversations with Gwon Hwa-rang after the rehabilitation was always about New World. His mother didn’t play New World and she felt a sense of isolation. While his mother wasn’t seriously angry, her dissatisfaction had built up over time.

‘I’ve been so insensitive.’

“Uh, what should I do? Hyun-woo?”

“Even if you ask me.....”

“Isn’t there something you can do? You were the one who brought up Seutandal.....”

“I didn’t know about what had happened previously. If I knew then I wouldn’t have mentioned it. You’re the adult who couldn’t grasp the atmosphere and continued talking away.”

“T-that.....”

Gwon Hwa-rang sighed and his shoulders slumped.

“.....I’ll repent.”

“.....I’ll also repent.”

Hyun-woo realized that he also had to reflect on his actions. He never knew that he had been lacking in the time spent with his mother before this. But New World was like work for Hyun-woo. The cost of living, his mother's medical expenses, loan payments, etc.....the money that went into it was 5 million a month. And Hyun-woo earned all that money through New World. The money was earned for his family. But while trying to earn money, he had neglected to spend time with his family. It was a dilemma that everybody in the world experienced, not just Hyun-woo. Anyway, it was true that Gwon Hwa-rang and Hyun-woo had offended his mother by talking about New World. The two men drank coffee and reflected quietly. How much time had passed? Suddenly Gwon Hwa-rang raised his head and shouted.

"That's it!"

"What? What are you saying out of nowhere?"

"The solution is surprisingly simple. So-mi ssi should also play New World!"

"Eek?"

Hyun-woo asked in an astounded voice.

"Really? Isn't she still sick?"

"That's right! Hah, why didn't I think of that before?"

Gwon Hwa-rang described with a heated look.

"Think about it. What was the reason you made me play New World in the first place?"

"For rehabilitation....."

Hyun-woo answered without thinking before it felt like he had been hit in the back of the head. Then Gwon Hwa-rang's eyes lit up and he nodded.

"Have you finally realized? That's right. Didn't the doctor also say it? So-mi ssi has physically recovered 90% and the remaining obstacle is mental. So these days she has been spending more time in

psychiatry treatment. Just like the old me.”

Gwon Hwa-rang's words were right. Now his mother was almost completely physically recovered. Although there were several issues with muscle recovery remaining, the biggest problem was that her body was stiffened from lying down for so many years. The best way to treat that was to move her body. No, to be more accurate it was to get her brain familiar with the sensation of moving like a normal person. However, his mother still hadn't recovered her muscle and physical strength so she was limited to rehabilitation.

‘But if its New World.....’

It gave orders to the brain to move but it didn't drain the actual physical strength! There was no danger of injuring something while training! And the best thing.....

“If So-mi ssi enters New World then I can be with her 24 hours a day!”

.....That was it. Gwon Hwa-rang's ambition wasn't completely selfless. These days Hyun-woo, Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members spent most of their time in New World. In other words, it was possible to spend more time with her if his mother came to New World. And the issue of her being unable to understand the conversation would disappear. Why hadn't he thought of making his mother play New World?

“Ohhhhh! Dating in the game! Okay, I have to start quickly. Buying the unit immediately.....!”

Gwon Hwa-rang snorted like an excited wild boar and stood up.

“Wait a minute!”

“Eh? Why?”

“It's good but we have to check one thing.”

It was his mother's health problems. They couldn't just decide with their feelings. The virtual reality game had a huge effect on Gwon Hwa-rang but his mother's situation was different. After the traffic

accident several years ago, she had undergone brain surgery. New World directly connected with the brain so who knew how it could affect her? Hyun-woo made Gwon Hwa-rang calm down and called the hospital. But unlike his worries, the doctor gave permission.

“Virtual reality game? Ah, yes I know about it. In fact I firmly recommend it. I can’t guarantee the therapeutic effect in So-mi’s case but I’ve never heard of any side effects. Some doctors do look at it a bit negatively. But in my opinion, it has a significant stress relieving effect.”

Hyun-woo then connected to the internet and searched for hundreds of similar cases. Fortunately there was nothing about side effects.

‘.....Instead it is quite helpful?’

Now Hyun-woo could start the plan without any worries. Of course, he realized the price wasn’t small once he made up his mind. But if it was even a little useful for his mother’s treatment than the price of the unit wasn’t a problem. In addition, he didn’t want Gwon Hwa-rang’s help for this matter.

‘I want to help my mother with my own strength. And now I can do it.’

Gwon Hwa-rang was willing to help him but Hyun-woo had been working non-stop to earn money. When he scraped together the money had saved in the meantime and the gold from Ark’s Comprehensive Store, he had enough funds to buy the game unit.

‘I’ve earned quite a bit of money in the meantime. I can easily buy the unit.....’

He had enough money in his passbook after half a day. If his mother needed something then he would do whatever it took to get it for her.

“Now it’s time to speak to So-mi ssi and go buy the unit!”

“No, that won’t work.”

“Eh? Why?”

“The biggest problem is still left.”

“The biggest problem?”

“Mother.”

Hyun-woo answered with a serious expression. Yes, the biggest stumbling block in this plan wasn't money but his mother. Hyun-woo knew his mother's character better than anyone. After Hyun-woo had been born, she never bought a set of new clothes. She was a person who would wear the same clothes for 10 years while repairing them. Even if the game had a therapeutic effect, the unit cost millions of won so it was impossible she would agree. If Hyun-woo pressed it on her using force then she would just secretly get a refund.

“T-then what do we do? Even if we recommend it, won't it be pointless if So-mi ssi doesn't agree?”

“You don't have to worry about that.”

Hyun-woo smiled slyly and replied.

“Leave it to me ajusshi. I'll handle this matter.”

“Hyun-woo, what's all this?”

His mother asked with a puzzled expression. The reason for her confusion was the huge box occupying the living room. With the trademark of Global Exos clearly labelled on the box, it was the unit for New World.

“Ah, you've arrived. This is a unit for New World.”

“Then why is it being delivered to our house?”

“Eh? “Oh, didn't I tell you?”

Hyun-woo trembled and attempted to talk. While the unit installation person tore the box, his mother shook his head.

“Wait a minute, why is the box being cut open.....?”

“It’s okay. Because these is an item from a Global Exos event.”

“Event item?”

The installation person interrupted at his mother’s response and explained.

“Yes, not long ago Global Exos held a commemoration event for its 2nd anniversary among users. Ark-nim applied at that time and won 1st place. The unit is the prize for 1st place. Congratulations.”

“But our house already has a unit....”

His mother muttered with an awkward expression.

“Well, I was also slightly burdened when I heard that I won the prize from the event. But after thinking I realized I didn’t need to worry. Because Mother should use this.”

“M-me?”

His mother shook her head at his words.

“Me playing the game? I don’t know anything about it so how can I play the game?”

“It does not matter. Since this is an event prize, you can just comfortably lie down and relax in New World. Your doctor also said that it wouldn’t be a problem and that it might even be helpful in treating you. That’s great. It’s a free unit and it can even help treat you.”

“But even with the unit, won’t you still have to pay money for the game every month?”

“Well, a little bit.”

“Then it’s okay. Couldn’t we receive money from this?”

His mother’s reaction was like Hyun-woo predicted. But Hyun-woo had already thought of a way around this. Hyun-woo stealthily winked at the installation technician who nodded.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you in advance. When he applied, Hyun-woo nim

agreed to the terms and conditions which stated that this prize is unable to be sold or given to someone outside the family. You also can't return it."

"Huh? You're not giving it to us?"

"It is a conditional lease. The purpose of this event is to bring in new customers. If you use the unit for more than 800 hours in 1 year then we will give you the rights to the unit. Think of it as similar to a cell phone contract."

The installation person smiled and added.

"As you know, the unit for New World is a fairly expensive product. In my position, I would recommend you use the unit for 1 year and then receive it."

"That's right."

Hyun-woo laughed and nodded.

"Like he said, one machine costs millions of won. If we sell it then you can get 2,3 million won. If you use the unit for 1 year then we can get an unit costing millions of won for free and Mother can also receive treatment."

"Yes, but....."

His mother was unable to say anything. The situation made too much sense. To receive a unit worth millions of won out of nowhere and to have the condition that it should be used for 800 hours in one year was strange. It was all leading to her playing the game. She didn't know everything but she couldn't argue. Then the installation person handed her a business card and said.

"The contract has gone through the formal procedures. If you have any questions about the contract then please call. If you directly call this number then you won't have to go through the reception desk. Just ask for Ho Myung-hwan."

The installation technician raised his hat and laughed. The person who showed his shiny teeth was Ho Myung-hwan who worked at

Global Exos. Yes, it was unnecessary to say but this was all Ark's plan. A unit worth millions of won! In order, he also had to pay thousands of won to play the unit every month. When the game cost 100,000 won every month, there was a 100% guarantee that she wouldn't accept the unit. So Hyun-woo made up the contract and created a situation where his mother couldn't possibly refuse. He called Ho Myung-hwan for two reasons. The first reason was that a staff member of Global Exos could purchase the unit for a slightly cheaper price. While he was willing to spend millions of won on his mother, wouldn't it be good if he could purchase it for a little cheaper? Since Ho Myung-hwan was a fan of Hyun-woo, he bought the unit for 30% cheaper. The second reason in using a Global Exos staff was to stop the return of the unit. Hyun-woo knew there was a high chance that his mother would call the company later to return the expensive product. But there was no event. Then the unit would clearly be 100% refunded. He requested Ho Myung-hwan's help to prevent such a situation from happening. He had met Ho Myung-hwan a few times so they had already become quite familiar with each other. Since the contents wasn't anything bad, he willingly joined in the play. Therefore, the unit occupied a corner of the living room with pride.

"I'm looking forward to the video."

Ho Myung-hwan said to him in a low voice after finishing the installation.

"Ohh, it came! It came!"

Gwon Hwa-rang ran in with a satisfied smile and grabbed his Hyun-woo's mother's hand.

"Now So-mi ssi can also play New World. That's good. It might seem a little strange at first but I think you will do well. No, I'm sure of it. I'll guide you through everything. Well, there are some monsters but you don't need to hunt them. Just walking around will be good for your body. I'm sure of it."

"But I....."

"Hah, Mother, didn't the installation person say it a while ago. If you

use this unit for 800 hours in one year then it will be ours. And I already have a unit registered. If Mother doesn't use it then should I return it? We can do that. I'll call and request to return the item....."

"Ah, stop it!"

Hyun-woo who was holding the telephone stopped at his mother's words. A 100% South Korean mother wouldn't be able to give up the unit worth millions of won.

"Huhuhu. That's right. It is no different from throwing money on the road if we return the unit. If you play the game then you don't have to spend any money. It is also possible to make money in the game. And if you try to play the game then it will come naturally. Just try it once. Come, come."

"Hwa-rang ajusshi is right. Come, come!"

The two men pushed his mother towards the unit. His mother eventually gave up from exhaustion.

"U-understood. I'll give it a try. It is done. Now leave me to try it!"

"Huh? But it is your first time so I should teach you....."

His mother blushed and scratched her head at Gwon Hwa-rang's words.

"Hah....."

The woman sat on a bench and sighed. Her name was So-mi and she was Ark's mother who had recently connected to New World. In fact, she had actually been interested in New World before. Everybody around her was always talking about the game so it was impossible not to be interested. And the game was beyond her imagination after she connected to it. The ambient scenery, the sky and the earth was amazing. However, there was something else that surprised her.

"The appearance is no different....."

It was so realistic that she felt distanced from it. Once connected, a person in a wheelchair could stand without any support! So-mi stared spellbound at her legs and started walking slowly. It had been so long since she could stand using her own strength. Was that all?

Sway, totter.

So-mi couldn't maintain her balance properly and sat down. Naturally it wasn't a physical disability. The muscles wasn't moving the character. It was the idea of walking. So-mi had spent so long in the hospital bed that she had a fear of walking. Therefore her behaviour towards walking had become passive. So it wasn't necessarily easier to move in the game. Ark had found many cases on the internet of near vegetable people enjoying the virtual reality game. Regardless of what body they had, people could do anything in a virtual reality. That was the reason why he encouraged So-mi's will.

'I have to play 800 hours in 1 year!'

If she spent all her time inside the game then she could easily fill 800 hours. However, New World had a monthly subscription fee. Although the subscription fee was several thousand a month, she had no choice. If she had to pay something then she should get the most out of it. Wouldn't it even help with her rehabilitation treatment? In addition, she heard from Ark and JusticeMan that she could also make money. So-mi wanted to pay the amount for the subscription fee with her own hands. After thinking about it, So-mi once again stood up. Despite her anxieties, she was able to walk around the village using her own power after a few days. At first So-mi just cared about the price but she became filled with deep emotion at the experience.

"Ah, really.....I'm really walking."

Other people took walking for granted but she was just grateful she could do it. But no matter how it looked like reality, it was still a game. However, she was unable to repress her emotions after being able to walk under her own power after several years. Now she started to look around.

“No. It is natural to walk in a game. I can’t be satisfied with this degree. What do I do now?”

It was natural since So-mi didn’t know anything about New World so she left the village after a while. Ark and JusticeMan had talked about New World every day. Through her second hand knowledge, So-mi knew that levels was one of the most important things in New World. And she knew that she had to raise levels through monsters. But So-mi quickly abandoned levelling up after going outside the village.

Kuaaaang!

“They’re coming. Avoid it!”

“You retreat to the back. Surround that fellow on both sides and beat it to death!”

Outside the village, beginner users were jumping in all directions and fighting wolves. Beating, escape, beat, escape..... After many repetitive actions, the user finally defeated a wolf. So-mi had barely just got used to walking so there was no way she could fight against the wolves like that.

“I can’t catch monsters like that.”

So-mi sighed and returned to the village. After seeing how difficult it was, So-mi sat down on the bench.

‘Hunting is the most important thing here..... How can I hunt in this condition? My body is in bad condition and I can’t play the game directly. As expected, New World isn’t that superficial. How can I make money? I have no chance.’

So-mi was despondent.

“Yet another failure!”

Suddenly a girl sat down next to her with a tearful face and whined. So-mi saw that there was a crumpled piece of cloth in the girl’s hand. So-mi was interested so she asked in a friendly voice.

“Excuse me..... Are you trying to create something with that cloth?”

The girl pouted as she looked at the cloth and answered.

“I was trying to create gloves but it isn’t working.”

The girl showed her the several layers of cloth and some kitchen gloves. The problem was that the gloves were torn in half.

“The gloves are my mum’s prized possessions. I ruined them while baking this morning. Mum said it was okay but..... I wanted to make her the same ones.....”

The girl indicated the cloth that was in pieces and sobbed. The girl’s fingers were wounded by her attempts. Despite the pouting lips and wounded fingers, the girl was cute so So-mi stroked her head.

“Do you want me to make it instead?”

“Huh? Really? You know how to make it?”

“This much is easy.”

The girl seemed to consider it before speaking.

“Excuse me..... Then unni, please make this for my mother.”

“Of course.”

So-mi replied.

-The Mischievous Girl Laura’s Request

Laura who lives in the settler’s village of Harun played a trick while baking and ruined her mother’s important gloves. Laura tried to make her mother the same gloves but she was unable to. Laura would like you to make her some new kitchen gloves. However, you have to keep it a secret that you made the gloves from Laura’s mother.

‘What’s this?’

So-mi’s expression was confused.

“Give it to me. I’ll make it immediately.”

She didn't pay the information window any regard and started making the gloves for the girl. In fact, she had been interested in the girl because she saw the cloth. So-mi might not know anything else but she specialized in sewing. It was a distant memory but her hobbies in high school was knitting and cross stitching. It was to the extent that she made Ark's clothes when he was younger. Well, she did it until Ark was embarrassed by his friends in junior high. After being released from the hospital, she had started the hobby again. Thanks to that, her needlework skill was almost at a professional standard. It was easy for her to make the kitchen gloves.

"Now, all done. How is it? Is it similar?"

"Wah. It is just like it!"

The girl skipped around with surprise and indicated that she liked the gloves.

"Thank you very much unni. Like I said a while ago, you can't tell my mum that you made these. Okay? I don't need this so I'll give it to you instead."

"W-wait a minute, I....."

"Goodbye."

Laura handed her a needle and thread and ran away.

<The Mischievous Girl Laura's Request> quest has been completed.
--

-Fabric: Cotton cloth (10th rank general sewing material) has been acquired.
--

-Thread and needle (10th rank general material) has been acquired.
--

So-mi involuntarily received the thread and needles. So-mi picked up the needle and thread with a wry smile.

"Hmm, I don't know what happened but it worked out. Anyway, I can also do needlework in the game....."

It was good since she didn't have to spend the 800 hours hunting. After searching through her bag for the basic equipment of a knife, she made some gloves out of the cloth. After some familiar movements, an information window appeared.

-Common Cloth Gloves (A class production item)

Armour type: Cloth gloves

Defense: — Durability: 5/5

Weight: 1 User restriction: Level 1 and higher

Gloves made of ordinary cotton gloves that can be found anywhere. However, this item was made with experienced workmanship.

'Oh, it is also possible to make something I can use.'

The fact that she could make something like this in New World was fascinating. So-mi became interested and started making more things using the cloth. Aside from the gloves, she also made a hat and scarf. She used the leftover cloth to make it. But after making it, she thought it looked somewhat lonely.

'It looks a bit flat..... Ah yes, I have enough thread.'

So-mi excitedly turned over the gloves to the back. She used her experienced sewing skill and created a colourful flower shape in seconds. She also placed the same design on the hat and scarf set. Suddenly she heard someone's voice in front of her.

"Excuse me unni. Are you selling that?"

"Huh?"

So-mi raised her head and inadvertently flinched. While she was distracted by the sewing, dozens of people had gathered around her. When So-mi made a puzzled expression, the previous girl ran up to her and asked.

"Would you sell this to me? No, please sell it to me!"

“S-sell?”

“Yes, it’s a request. It’s the first time that I’ve seen gloves I liked so much!”

“Eh? You’re selling?”

“T-then sell that to me! The hat, sell me the hat!”

“No, sell me the hat instead! How much is it? 50 silver? 1 gold?”

The girls surrounded her with bright eyes. Once again, items created in New World could be classified as clothing. And creating armour and robes required more advanced sewing skills. In other words, the gloves created by So-mi was just a decoration. Naturally a man would feel the charm of armour but women were more interested in beautiful clothes. So simple decorations were important for women. Honestly, what girl wouldn’t like jewellery if she could get it? It was the natural instincts of a woman to like something beautiful. Furthermore, it was possible to layer general clothing on top of armour. In other words, it was possible to wear flashy attire on the battlefield! So clothing was the number one desired item for some female users. Those females couldn’t miss the chance to obtain So-mi’s unique clothing.

“W-what is happening?”

So-mi looked down at her hands with a foolish expression. After selling the gloves, hat and scarf, the people surrounding her disappeared. And So-mi held 3 gold in her hand. The money was gained in a truly unexpected way.

“I can get money like this?”

Then she visited the general store and bought 30 cotton cloths.

“It is also possible to make money this way!”

So-mi grabbed her bag filled with cloth and became motivated. She didn’t know how much 3 gold was in reality. However, this was something for her to do in New World since she couldn’t catch wolves. It was something for her to do after spending so long in the

hospital. It happened after making dozens of flashy clothing.

-Sewing (Beginner, Passive): You have gained the sewing technique and can produce various types of clothing.

When the level increases, you can handle more sophisticated designs and high grade cloths. In addition, you can create clothing with the 'charm' option that will increase the probability of creating luxury items. When your sewing skills reached the Advanced stage, you will be able to produce armour and robes with defense. However, you need to acquire the relevant recipe to create the armour.

<When using cloth and leather, you can create clothing and armour between the 7th to 9th ranking>

-Embroidery (Special, Beginner, Passive): Technique to embroider clothing.

This technique is a special skill which requires dexterity. When embroidering clothes, there is a high probability of adding a special option. The type of option added by embroidery depends on the degree of completion. The use of high grade materials and embroidery will improve the option.

However, if it fails then the durability of the clothing can be decreased.

<When embroidery is placed on clothing, you can create 7th to 9th rank items>

When the clothes were completed, the skill proficiency bonus was applied to the clothes. And when she used the embroidery skill, options such as 'courage +1' and 'recovery rate +5%' was added. Although it was a beginner skill and not that many options were applied, it was a starting village so items with those items were quite attractive. No, it was already attractive since embroidered clothes in New World. Thanks to So-mi, a new trend in

fashion was created. After a week had passed, So-mi became a well-known costume designer in the starter village of Harun. She was also happy since it was the first time she didn't need anybody's help after leaving the hospital. And she was excited for users to wear her clothes so she poured hard work and sweat into it. Thus So-mi began to increasingly log into New World.

Dragonian

“Character information window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good +500	
Fame	2,365 (+500)	Level	374
Profession		Dark Soul	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero	
Health	7015 (+425)	Mana	7205(+225)
Spiritual Power	786	Strength	757 (+38)
Agility	957 (+110)	Stamina	1197 (+35)
Wisdom	173 (+10)	Intelligence	1265 (+5)
Luck	167 (+60)	Flexibility	181
Art of Communication	69	Affection	49 (+10)
Resilience	439	Dark Fog	36
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		153	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			

Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%

Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10

*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20, Defense +40

Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3

Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available

Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense.

Ark smiled with satisfaction as he checked the information window. It had been one week since he entered the chaos space. He had reduced his sleeping hours to 3~4 hours a day and continued eating the wendigoes. The wendigoes were level 300~350. Since the level 370 Ark was fighting the wendigoes with an average level of 320, he didn't receive a lot of experience. Even when he hunted the wendigoes that were level 350, he only received 60% of the experience. After hunting for a week, he fortunately managed to gain 3 levels.

‘But.....’

Ark's goal was to raise his Spiritual Power! And the result was a great success. He managed to gain an enormous extra 380 Spiritual Power. After seeing the results of his efforts in the information window, a giggle escaped.

“Huhuhuhu, 786 Spiritual Power..... Did you see? This is it! Now I can use the Ghost Knight Corps and Area Declaration skill! Huhuhuhu, hahaha.....ugh!”

Ark suddenly felt dizzy and stumbled.

Clack? Clack clack clack clack!

Razak who had been watching approached with anxiety. And sighed as he looked at Ark with pitying eyes. Right now Ark wasn't in a position to be energetic. His eye sockets were so hollow they looked like something on a dead person. Cheekbones protruded from his face. His skin was tight and dehydrated. Ark had become a perfect mummy after one week. The reason Ark looked like that.....

“Oh, Master. Don't force it too much. Well, it was my pleasure.”

Racard folded up the many layers of fat on his stomach and spoke. Racard's appearance was the complete opposite from Ark's. His face was greasy and his stomach was so fat that it

wobbled as he moved. Yes, it was him. He was the culprit who turned Ark into a mummy. For the past week, Racard had sucked Ark's blood in order to use Moonlight Illusion. Even though he ate the stamina tonics, it was ineffective in recovering his physical strength. Racard absorbed energy from the blood and the result was the fat stomach. Therefore Ark was skin and bones from the malnutrition and lack of blood while Racard was obese and stuffed full of nutrition from the abuse of his Blood-sucking skill.

"It can't be helped. Moonlight Illusion is needed to hunt a lot of wendigos. And as planned, I managed to raise my Spiritual Power by 380. But, but....."

"Now all the wendigos are dried up. How regretful! Right Master?"

He felt his spirit darken as he listened to Racard's words. However, Racard had now 100% grasped Ark's personality. Because after sucking the blood so many times, he confirmed that there would be 'absolutely no retaliation.' No matter what he did, Ark wouldn't change his attitude because he needed Racard.

'Dammit, my summons are getting smarter and more ambitious as time goes by.'

Although Ark initially beat his pets for no reason, now that their heads became smarter he couldn't beat them for no reason or else there would be backlash. If he wanted to discipline them then he always needed a new reason and that wasn't easy.

'Well, now that Racard is like this.....'

Ark looked at the pieces of land floating around him. For example, if a monk at a temple developed a taste for meat then wouldn't he have to leave? After hunting for Spiritual Power through the week, he had managed to navigate through all the floating lands and killed the wendigos. Fortunately the wendigos were now gone like Racard said a short while ago.

"Now there's only the quest left?"

For the past week Ark hadn't even been thinking about the quest. If he freed the souls of the Fire Draconians inside Dragonian then the

chaos space might reset to its original state. If that happened then the wendigos which were dragged inside would also disappear. Therefore Ark wanted to maintain the chaos space even if he had to give up the quest. But after one week, he confirmed that the wendigos didn't respawn anymore. He had no choice but to complete the quest.

"There are no more wendigos here. Let's finish this."

Ark recuperated using food and headed to his destination. Moving through the floating pieces of land in the chaos space wasn't a problem for Ark anymore. At the first the land masses seemed to move erratically but after a while he realized that they moved in patterns. Just like planets orbiting the sun, they flowed around a central point. That point was right in the middle of the chaos space!

"There!"

Ark looked at the huge object occupying one of the land masses. It was the huge dome he saw at the top of Hwaryong Mountain. At the heart of the chaos space was a semicircle of stone arches which seemed to resemble a mountainous place. The only difference from the outside dome was that this one was formed out of rocks. The size was approximately 4~5 kilometres in diameter. It was also half submerged in lava.

"This must be Dragonian!"

Ark moved to the land mass and arrived at the stone mountain. It formed a dome but the surface was made out of rock so there was no concern about slipping.

"My guess is that the entrance should be somewhere here....."

Ark crawled around the rock surface and examined it. Everything in the chaos space rotated around this location so it had to be the right place. If Dragonian was here then it must be inside this huge rocky mountain. Therefore there must be a passage to enter the rocky mountain. But after searching around for 3 hours with Racard, he couldn't find a passage inside the rocky mountain.

'That's strange? No matter how much I think, shouldn't this place be

Dragonian?’

Ark scratched his head with confusion.

Ku ku ku ku. Puswiiiiii!

“What, what the?”

Suddenly the mountain started shaking roughly and the ground where Ark was sitting split open. In the ensuing blast, a powerful suction force surrounded Ark’s body and he was sucked in.

“Waaaaah”

Ark screamed as he was sucked into the darkness.

Syuuuuuuck, kung!

-The ability of the Cat Knight has reduced the fall damage by 50%.
--

-Thanks to your flexibility, the fall damage has been reduced by 40%.

There was a tingling from the impact and the message window appeared. After hitting the ground, Ark hurriedly raised his head and looked around.

“Huk, what, what the? This is?”

The place where Ark fell was a ruin. Debris from the broken fort and buildings were scattered around. But the fort and building wreckage wasn’t ordinary. The bricks scattered around were huge and one surviving door was dozens of metres high.

“I’ve found it. This is the city of Dragonian where the Fire Draconians lived!”

Ark instinctively perceived that he had found the place he was looking for. The Fire Draconians was a species 20 metres high. It was natural for their residence to be huge. The door dozens of metres high was proof that the Fire Draconians lived here.

“You bastard!”

Suddenly a huge roaring sound shook the dome. A huge shape showing its fangs looked down at Ark. The shape was a mix of lizard and human and resembled Valderas and Lumines. But the form of the monster wasn't ordinary. Here and there on the body.....pieces of rotten skin peeled off and revealed the bones. And the gaping wounds were maggot infested.

‘What’s with this guy?’

“I found you, you evil bastard!”

The monster sucked in a deep breath and blew out. Deep red flames came pouring out from that guy’s mouth. Ark freaked out and rolled along the ground to avoid the damage. The monster followed after him.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

Deep footprints were imprinted into the ground wherever it stepped. One hit would be a critical attack!

‘But it is slow!’

Ark rolled along the ground and through the legs of the monster. That area was the largest blind spot of a big monster. As expected, the monster panicked and stepped back. Ark quickly stood up and used Dark Dance. With the monster’s slow attacks, it couldn’t catch Ark who was using Dark Dance. Ark managed to get some distance away from it and stared.

‘When looking at those abominable features, that guy is definitely Magura’s subordinate. Although I was slightly confused at first, now I’m more comfortable. Its attacks are powerful but it is a slow monster so it won’t be a difficult opponent for me. Fortunately I didn’t receive a lot of fall damage so I should have no difficulty if a boss appears.’

“Razak, Racard, get ready!”

Ark drew his sword and ordered Razak and Racard to get ready.

“Racard, the opponent is slow. Attack his occipital nerves to disturb that guy! Razak, his attack power is huge. It is impossible for you to block his attacks with your shield head on. Attack its legs from the side to stop its movements!”

“Heh, this fight will be simple. Shall I work off some of this fat? Kuaak!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Racard started flying while his belly fat continued talking while Razak easily ran forward. Ark also grabbed his sword firmly with both hands and moved to his position. The monster in the centre while Ark and Razak flanked its side and Racard was behind. It was their regular triangle formation.

“Now, shall we start?”

Ark took an attacking stance and prepared to begin his attacks.

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

Suddenly the ground shook like an earthquake was occurring. Racard’s scream could be heard from behind the monster.

“M-Master, over there!”

“What....what the? That is?”

Ark turned around and instinctively stiffened. There was a dust cloud on the hill opposite Ark from 10 monsters running forward. The monsters had huge rotting bodies while holding a spear and mace! No matter how slow they were, he couldn’t handle 10 monsters at the same time. But that wasn’t the reason why Ark was confused.

‘Aren’t they? But.....huk, don’t tell me?’

“Eyes of the Cat!”

Ark thought something was abnormal and used Eyes of the Cat on the monsters.

‘T-this.....! No way..... Then these guys are.....?’

“Damn, no!”

Ark frowned and shouted.

“Racard, don’t you have one Moonlight Illusion left? Activate it! Lure them to the other side!”

“Ohhhh, Blood-sucking skill activate!”

Racard was engulfed in a flash of light before his alter egos flew towards the monsters.

“Now! Razak, transform back into a sword! Let’s go!”

Ark ran away using Sprint without looking back. Fortunately the monsters were chasing Racard’s alter egos so they didn’t pay attention to Ark. Meanwhile Ark had managed to escape. After confirming his combat status, he collapsed with a sigh of relief.

“Huck huck huck, dammit.....didn’t I almost ruin the situation?”

Ark sighed and cursed. The reason he ran away from the 10 monsters was because the information confirmed that they were ‘Cursed Fire Draconians.’ Yes, the monster that Ark attacked wasn’t Magura’s subordinates. They were Fire Draconians who had been caught by Magura’s subordinates.

“Why are the trapped souls wandering around?”

After listening to Lumines’ words, he had guessed that the trapped souls were being forced to do hard labour somewhere. So he never imagined that they would be wandering around freely like this.

‘But why are the souls of the Fire Draconians attacking me? After talking to Lumines, the Fire Draconians don’t seem to be hostile towards humans. Perhaps the trapped souls are being controlled by the devil? No, that’s not it.’

Ark thought back to the situation just now. Just before attacking Ark, the Fire Draconian said that it had finally ‘found the devil.’ It was impossible for it to say that if the devil was controlling it. That meant.....

‘I need to check this!’

“You guys wait here for a while.”

Ark found a suitable hiding spot for his summons and used Stealth. Then he went inside Dragonian. Dragonian was located inside the stone dome which only had a diameter of 4~5 kilometres. After checking every corner, Ark managed to sneak into a gathering of Fire Draconians. The Fire Draconian souls that attacked him just then were gathered in the centre of the ruins. He approached closely and listened to them talk.

“Was he really the devil?”

“But was the devil that small?”

“Um..... I don’t know. I don’t remember. I just feel this awful gnawing sensation on my soul. And my memory..... Aside from the devil, now I can’t even remember my name..... All I can remember is my vengeful feelings towards the devil.”

“It doesn’t matter what the devil looks like. We’re trapped in a place where only the devil can enter. If there are any existences other than us then that person is the devil.”

“Yes. He must be the devil. We have to find him before even our vengeful feelings become blurred.

“But it is dangerous if we scatter to look for him. If he is the devil then we absolutely can’t defeat him by ourselves. Let’s find him altogether.”

The spirits of the Fire Draconians buzzed noisily and rushed out of the area.

‘It is like I guessed.’

Now Ark was sure of his reasoning. Dragonian was a large area with its own clouds and valley. However the structure wasn’t that complicated. It wasn’t a place where someone could spend time hiding. Despite the Fire Draconians sweeping through every corner, they could only find their own presences.

‘Clearly the souls of the Fire Draconians have a hostile relationship with the devil. But they said they ‘found’ it when they saw me. That fact that I was mistaken as the devil meant they haven’t discovered his location yet. However, Dragonian was inside a stone dome and it had limited space. Dragonian has been in this situation for hundreds of years. The fact that the Fire Draconians haven’t found the devil yet..... Yes, it is indeed like Lumines said.’

Ark now started to realize the meaning of Lumines’ words. Lumines had said that Magura hid himself after deceiving the Fire Draconians. The souls of the Fire Draconians were bound to the devil but they couldn’t find him. Lumines mentioned that Magura had a large body which meant that the devil looked similar to the souls of the Fire Draconians. Ark hid himself while searching around Dragonian to confirm his theory.

‘Then all the souls of the Fire Draconians are currently searching for the devil?’

Ark looked with amazement at the souls of the Fire Draconians. While it was difficult to separate them, he could see approximately 30 of them. It was impossible to figure out if one of them was the devil just by the appearance.

‘I don’t know if you’ve ever gotten ... the end. ‘

Ark already firmly believed that the devil was among the Fire Draconians. According to the Fire Draconians’ words, no presences other than the devil could enter here. No, the devil was also mixed among them so couldn’t resolve the misunderstanding. If Ark showed himself then they would attack without asking any questions. Just as he was thinking that.

-A part of your ability was absorbed by an unknown presence.

<Abilities that disappeared: Strength -3, Stamina -3, Intelligence -8, Spiritual Power -6>

* Once you find the cause of the absorption, you can take back the removed abilities.

* If you die before taking back the ability then the absorbed ability will disappear forever.

“Huk, what is this?”

Ark freaked out as he checked the information window. The status window said that some of his stats had decreased? Ark then realized that the situation was more serious than he thought.

“Damn! What on earth is going on?”

The devil hiding here had the power to gnaw on souls. That was why the Fire Draconians lost their memories and changed to that horrible appearance. Then it also had the power to take away Ark’s abilities. But right now Ark was using Stealth. How was he found by the devil.....? Anyway, now wasn’t the time to be thinking such things.

“Before it is too late, I have to find the devil and defeat him!”

However, Ark didn’t know how he came in here. Then the only way was that the devil pulled him in here.

“If I die then my lost stats will permanently disappear! If the devil controls all those Fire Draconians.....”

The devil could just hide while controlling those guys. If he killed the souls of the Fire Draconians then he would definitely fail the quest. However, the quest wasn’t the problem anymore. If he lost a bunch of stats then what use was the compensation? But the problem wasn’t that simple. Of course, the Fire Draconians already had a lot of their power taken away by the devil so they were weaker. However there were 30 of them. Moreover, one of them was the devil. In other words, he had to fight against the boss monster and 29 Fire Draconians.

‘The problem is those guys are going together.’ This method he used to take care of the wendigoes needed at least 10 opponents. But it was impossible no matter how he thought about it. Those guys were slow but they stayed together and could use their fire for ranged attacks. If only there was a way to expose the devil from the Fire

Draconians.....’

Then something popped into Ark’s head.

‘Wait? Didn’t the Fire Draconians have a weakness?’

Ark raised his head and surveyed the area. After thinking for a while, Ark’s eyes started sparkling.

“Maybe..... No, with this there is a much higher possibility of winning against the Fire Draconians. Okay, this is it. There’s no choice. I have to try this!”

“Uh? This place.....?”

The souls of the Fire Draconians looked down and frowned.

On the floor pits were open like rats had chewed on it. It wasn’t only here. Since he started, Ark had already dug up over 10 places in Dragonian.

“What on earth is that guy thinking?”

“I don’t understand, is he hoping that we’ll fall into the holes?”

“Surely he isn’t that stupid..... He’s obviously arranging something.”

“He fooled our eyes for hundreds of years. I don’t know when he’ll begin hiding again so we have to find him quickly. Hurry!”

“But doesn’t it seem to have become slightly colder?”

“Uh? Now that you mention it?”

“Could it be connected to the reason why he is digging the land?”

“I haven’t heard that temperatures would go down if the ground is dug up. Let’s just go!”

The Fire Draconians began to move on from the place where the earth was dug up. None of them noticed the set of eyes watching from the sky. The eyes belonged to Racard who flapped his wings and followed them. Racard guessed the direction the Fire

Draconians were moving in and instantly contacted Ark.

‘Master, those guys are moving in Master’s direction from point D!’

“Damn!”

Ark’s voice was heard through the wireless communication. Then Ark frowned and shouted towards Razak.

“Those guys are coming. Hurry and move out from the pit!”

Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak who was carrying dirt using his shield hurriedly jumped out of the pit. Ark also collected his shovel and exited the pit. When he came outside, he immediately saw the dust cloud approaching from the other side. They were the Fire Draconians that Racard mentioned.

“Damn. I’ve barely started digging here..... Are they getting faster?”

Ark complained as he ran in the opposite direction. Yes, it was unnecessary to say but Ark was the one going around digging holes in Dragonian. He was digging in order to find a weapon to reveal the devil!

‘If I find it then there is a 100% chance of revealing the devil. Once the devil is revealed, there is no reason to fight against the Fire Draconians. No, the Fire Draconians would probably end up helping me against the devil.’

So Ark assigned Racard to watch the Fire Draconians movements while going around digging the ground. But to be honest, this method was a gamble. There was no guarantee that he would find ‘it’ inside Dragonian or that he would be able to trap the devil in it. And he hadn’t found any trace of ‘it’ yet even after working a couple of days.

“Well, at least I found an unexpected treasure while digging.....”

Ark pulled out a red gem similar to a ruby from his pocket. It was a Hearthstone that Ark discovered when he first started digging. After shovelling at the land for a while, a small stone had appeared.

“Eh? T-this!”

-Fire Stone (Hearthstone)

A hearthstone that has absorbed magic for a long time while under the earth. It isn't uncommon in New World to find mysterious stones that can absorb the magic around it. The nature of the stone would change depending on where it is buried. A stone buried near the volcano would absorb a fire attribute while a stone buried near a snowy mountain would absorb an ice attribute. A stone which has taken on such attributes are called Hearthstones.

This Hearthstone has absorbed an aura of fire. If the Fire magic is absorbed incompletely then it will explode when receiving an impact. Players mainly use it as a combustion magic ingredient or it can be used as a bomb. In addition, it will give a mysterious power to items when inserted in a socket.

<Directly used: When thrown, all those within a 5 metre radius will receive 1-100 fire damage>

<Used in socket (Armour exclusive use): Fire Resistance +2>

“Hearthstone!”

Ark shouted with joy as he found an unexpected item. Of course the flame stone itself didn't have great stats. But there was a reason Ark cheered when he found the Hearthstone. In fact, while travelling Ark had been digging at the ground after setting up campsites. After being captured by Karakul and forced to do hard labour, he discovered it was possible to find japtem while using 'Excavation' to dig the land. But Ark's purpose wasn't finding japtem. To be honest, if he wanted japtem then it was easier to find them while hunting. Ark continued digging in order to find a massive treasure! He only used 'Excavation' to find that treasure. The Hearthstone! Yet he hadn't found anything despite his persistent efforts..... Hearthstones were generally excavated in a place which a strong power, in other words a power spot. And this place had been sealed up for hundreds of years! In other words, the power of fire which couldn't be released for hundreds of years had accumulated in the ground.

‘That’s right. Why didn’t I think of that? Hwaryong Mountain has some of the most powerful magic on the condition so of course the conditions to create a Hearthstone would be right. Then.....!’

Ark took out a small stone from his bag. While digging everywhere, he had sometimes found an empty Hearthstone. The reason Ark hadn’t thrown them away and carried them around was because he had the chance to turn them into real Hearthstones. Ark inserted the empty Hearthstone in the place where the Fire Stone emerged. Then he pulled out the Phantom Hourglass and used it.

“Maximum acceleration!”

Then the sand at the top started to fall at a tremendous speed. Ark waited until all the sand had fallen to the bottom. The empty Hearthstone was filled with sudden power. If it was incomplete then it would change into the Fire Stone. But instead of becoming a Fire Stone, it became a Hearthstone with a red tint.

“It’s a success!”

Ark lifted the Hearthstone and investigated the information window.

-Explosion Stone (Rare Hearthstone)

It is a Hearthstone which has absorbed the heat of Hwaryong Mountain for hundreds of years. Hwaryong Mountain is a sacred place which contains the energy of fire. This Hearthstone which has absorbed the power of Hwaryong Mountain contains one of the stronger fire energy in the world. A Hearthstone which has absorbed this much power can be found once in hundreds of years. It can be used as a deluxe magic ingredient and when inserted into a socket, the item will display a special quality.

<Used in socket (Weapon exclusive use): When the Hearthstone is added to a weapon, there is a 33% possibility of causing an explosion and dealing additional 50-100 fire damage. There is also a splash damage which will deal 10-50 fire damage to all enemies 5 metres in front of him>

A rare Hearthstone! The rare Hearthstones only appeared once in

several hundred years! A 33% chance of causing 50-100 fire damage! Furthermore, when the effect was exercised then all enemies within 5 metres in front of him would receive 50-100 fire damage. The Explosion Stone had an enormous effect which suited its name. When the rare Hearthstone absorbed the surrounding power, the area instantly felt like it had become colder.

“I found a rare Hearthstone with fire power! All this is worth it just for the rare hearthstone.”

Of course he would insert the Rare Hearthstone into the Promised Sword. And the Fire Stone was a consumable so he could also sell it at the auction and make quite a good amount of money. He once again packed the Hearthstone in his bag with a proud feeling.

‘This definitely feels like a bonanza.’

However, the message which appeared next poured cold water on his happy mood.

<p>-A part of your ability was absorbed by an unknown presence.</p> <p><Abilities that Disappeared: Strength -4, Wisdom -7, Luck -5, Health -200></p>

“Damn, again!”

Ark’s face which had been remembering the happy memory distorted. For the last two days, Ark had his stats absorbed dozens of times a day. During this time, the amount of stats he lost was equivalent to losing 50 levels! Ark’s summons also had their stats disappear.

“I really don’t have time anymore. If I lose any more stats then there is no guarantee I can win against the devil. If I can’t find ‘that’ by the end of the day then I’m screwed!”

The cornered Ark hurriedly rushed to the next place and began shovelling. Thanks to his digging while travelling, his Excavation skill was currently at the Advanced level. The shovel dug at the soil every time he swung it. Razak also used his shield to help dig and even

Radun swallowed the earth before throwing it away somewhere else. After Ark and his summons were digging awhile, a large puddle formed. However, Ark still hadn't recovered 'it.' Ark released the shovel and started thinking.

'Was I mistaken? Is 'that' really here?'

Even if 'it' was 100% here, there was still a problem. Dragonian was a limited space but it was still 4-5 km in diameter. It was impossible to dig and find it with just one shovel. And the more time dragged on, the more the devil would absorb his abilities.

'I made a mistake. From the beginning it was a gamble with a low rate of success.'

He should've fought the Fire Draconians when his stats were absorbed the first time. Even if he had to give up the quest to escape from Dragonian, it was better than dying and losing his stats. But now he had stats equivalent to 50 levels absorbed. If he died then he would lose 50 levels. Would all the effort he put into raising his stats be in vain?

'It is better to give up here than to quit the game!'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

"Huck huck huck, M-Master!"

Racard flew towards him with his tongue hanging out.

"What? Are the Fire Draconians coming here?"

"No, those guys moved in the opposite direction. Please give me water. It is unbearably hot."

"What did you say? Don't you know what kind of situation this is?"

"Damn, I know. But I already have no strength in my wings. Can't you give me a little bit of water? Ey, I don't know! I can't do anymore! Kill me or do whatever you want!"

Racard fell to the ground and acted like a child having a temper tantrum.

“This guy is acting like this when his Master might have to give up the game.....”

However he couldn't blame Racard. Even if the Hearthstone had absorbed some of the fire aura, there was still a lava area. While Ark had been tirelessly shovelling for the last two days without any work, Razak and Radun were also exhausted. Racard had been flying around the whole time while monitoring the Fire Draconians. Since he was fat from Ark's blood, Racard in particular had double the energy consumed.

“It can't be helped.”

Ark sighed and took out his sword. Of course even one drop of water couldn't be found in Dragonian. At first he had worried about hunger and thirst but Ark soon found a way to get water. He used his Elemental Sword to give his sword a magic attribute! He used the ice attribute on his sword which would heat up and melt. However, it wasn't that easy to obtain water using that method. The magic attribute was heavily influenced by the surrounding environment. At a river it was possible to make enough ice to eat Patbingsu (shaved ice). But the atmosphere of Dragonian made it difficult to create ice. Ark placed his sword about the pot and received a drop of water which fell. Aside from his pets, he was also suffering from thirst. When he saw a drop of water, a sigh naturally flowed out.

“Hah, this really is pitiful. There must not be water around..... No, if there was water in the area then I wouldn't need to use Elemental Sword to create water.”

Ark murmured with a pitiful expression until he suddenly received a jolt to his brain.

“Eh? What, what the? What have I been doing?”

Ark stood up and looked around a stupid face. There were already a few pits within a 10 metre area.

‘Oh my god. Doing this kind of thing..... Did I become really stupid? Why did I waste two days when there is such an easy method? Was

there a reason to go around digging at the land like crazy?’

Ark hurriedly put away his sword and shovel.

“Racard, Razak there’s no time so follow me!”

“What? W-water?”

“Shut up. There’s no time for that!”

Devil's Identity

"I've found it!"

The gazes of the Fire Draconians concentrated on a hill as they heard someone's voice. Then one man appeared on top of the hill and hurled curses at them.

"Damn. Yes, it's me. What are you going to do? You stupid lizards! No matter how much your spirit has been eaten, how can you confuse me for the devil that trapped you? Huh? I'm a human! That guy called Lumines was whining so I came in to look for you!"

"Nonsense!"

"The fact that you entered here is evidence that you are the devil!"

"Kill him, get revenge for the Fire Draconians!"

The Fire Draconians immediately took out their weapons and climbed up the hill. When the herd of Fire Draconians came within 20 metres of him, the ground shook like there was an earthquake. Ark instantly turned his body around and ran off.

'These guys use blunt weapons. While Resilience will allow me to withstand it a bit, if I am surrounded by those guys then I would be stunned and it will be game over! I have to keep the maximum distance while luring them!'

But just maintaining the distance was difficult. If he got too far away from them then the combat state would be released. Ark's purpose wasn't to lure 1 Fire Draconian to his destination. If even 1 Fire Draconian fell behind then it would cause a problem. For Ark's plan to 100% succeed, all of them had to chase after him.

"Racard, if any of them fall behind or watches from a distance then use Taunt on them!"

"Okay!"

Racard flew to the side at Ark's command. Then he cursed at any Fire Draconians that slowed down. The Fire Draconians became furious and caught up. However it wasn't easy to lure 30 opponents. Ark controlled his speed and the Fire Draconians chased after him as one group. After about 10 minutes. The destination Ark was luring the Fire Draconians to was just beyond the hill.

"Racard, are there any Fire Draconians remaining?"

"Okay, I'll check!"

"One, two.....all 30.....I'm certain."

After finishing the personnel check, he lured them within a short distance and turned around. At the same time, the place covered with a hazy vapour appeared.

"That's it, we've arrived! Ya, these stupid lizards! Try attacking me!"

Ark ran into the fog and shouted. Then he turned around and stared at the Fire Draconians chasing him. One of the Fire Draconians rushed towards him wielding an iron bar.

"Die, you demonic fellow!"

Ark quickly rolled to avoid the iron bar and pointed towards him.

"You've finally shown your true identity you devil!"

"W-what? Devil? Are you talking about me? The devil....."

"You."

Ark's confident answer caused the Fire Draconian to flinch and stop moving. Ark stood slowly and said with a decisive voice.

"Yes, the devil. The one who trapped the souls in Dragonian and slowly chewed on the souls of the Fire Draconians like a parasite is you!"

"You're talking nonsense....."

"Nonsense? Heh, why don't you look around before saying that?"

“.....?”

The Fire Draconian looked around with a perplexed face. Until then the Fire Draconians had been chasing Ark. But now the remaining 29 Fire Draconians weren't in front of Ark. They were on the outskirts of the water vapour and looking around absent-mindedly.

“What, what is this? This guy.....”

“It is useless. They're not going to come in.”

“What?”

“You still don't understand? What happened to your cheerful expression?”

Ark tapped the ground and a noise like a splash could be heard.

“T-this.....?”

“Yes, it is water. To me more exact, it is the hot springs underneath Dragonian.”

Ark laughed and replied. That's right. Ark had been digging in order to find the hot springs. The reason Ark thought of the hot spring was because he remembered his fight with Valderas. Hundreds of people fighting at the same time couldn't defeat Valderas, but Ark managed to fight him along because he used the Fire Draconians weakness to water. Since the Fire Draconians were spirits of fire, just touching water would cause them massive damage. In other words, it was like poison to the Fire Draconians! If there was a place with water than the Fire Draconians would instinctively stop walking. But if it was the devil? If the devil had been hiding among the Fire Draconians for hundreds of years then of course it would be aware of their weakness. But the devil's excitement meant that it would continue forward.

Therefore Ark looked for the hot springs because he thought it would reveal the devil. There had been many hot springs drifting in the chaos space. And those pieces of land had all fallen off Dragonian. Naturally he thought that a hot spring would be somewhere in Dragonian. The problem was that it would be difficult

to find the hot springs in the ground in an area that was 4~5 kilometres.

But the problem was settled surprisingly easily.

‘Elemental sword!’

If there was water nearby then he could add an ice attribute to his sword. Then it was natural for it to be influenced by hot springs buried in the ground. So Ark ran around Dragonian and continuously used Elemental Sword in order to find water. Then he dug at a place which showed the strongest effect and.....bingo! The hot springs he was waiting for appeared.

“The fact that you entered here and didn’t receive any damage from the hot springs is evidence.

Now, how about it? Do you still have something to say?”

“Ugh!”

The Fire Draconian burst out with confusion and stepped backwards. Then it saw the group of Fire Draconians who had been gathered together and stopped. It scratched at its neck for a while before laughing creepily.

“Kukukuku, you saw through my act!”

“Hey!”

The crowd of Fire Draconians burst out with anger. The body of the Fire Draconian who entered the hot springs melted down and a black shape appeared. It was a slippery, black form that almost looked like slime. Maggots? Anyway it was a creepy, black monster with one red eye. Its name was Cell. Unexpectedly, it was only a level 300 monster.

‘Level 300? Is it similar to the wendigoes? Isn’t that strange?’

The look and level of the devil was completely different from what Ark expected. But he soon shook his head and concentrated on Cell.

‘This is a boss monster so I can’t be careless.’

“Kukukuku, this mischief ends here. You cheeky bastard! I’ll melt you slowly and make you wander around this place forever……. Nothing has changed even if you know my true identity. I’ll rip you apart and digest you!”

Cell shrieked and ran up to him. Then sharp projectiles rose from its skin. Ark threw his body out of the way and a wave of water rose into the sky as the projectile impacted with the ground. It was infused with tremendous speed and power. However, Ark was still composed. Ark rolled across the ground and stood up before shouting coldly.

“Hey, Pudding.”

“What? P-pudding?”

“I’ve already discovered your true identity. All the Fire Draconians also know.”

“Do you expect the Fire Draconians to help you? Those guys are scared of water so how can they come in here?”

“Oh, then you’re not afraid of water?”

“Kukukuku, scared of water? Does my appearance look scared? You sound like a fool talking.”

Cell’s whole body shook as he sneered at Ark. Ark’s body also shook like Cell’s and he scoffed.

“Kukukuku, you don’t understand the meaning of the word pudding. If you don’t want me to receive the help of the Fire Draconians then why don’t you come in deeper? You say that you’re not afraid of water? Let’s see if you can say that after a while. Racard, now!”

Ark shouted powerfully. There was a sudden bang and something approached at a tremendous speed. Kwa kwa kwa kwa! The roaring sound was a huge amount of water pouring down.

“Huck, w-water!”

The Fire Draconians screamed and stepped back. The hot spring water flowed down the hill into a pit that Ark had dug. Ark’s

Excavation skill.....it managed to dig a hole 30 metres big. Both Ark and Cell were trapped in the pool of water.

“T-this is.....”

The slippery, slimy pudding like monster with maggots couldn't swim in water. The pudding wriggled as it floated in the water.

“Now, shall I slowly release my resentment?”

Ark bit the ‘Mermaid Scale’ and laughed. Then Ark shot forward like an arrow. He didn't use any special skills. He just ran forward and swung his sword. Cell freaked out and tried to avoid it but all he could do was wriggle in the water. There was a splash as the sword fell and Cell was cut in the side.

“Kuak, y-you bastard.....”

“Huhuhu, I'm slightly strong in water.”

In fact, the place where Ark discovered the hot spring wasn't here but on the hill above it. However, Ark had been worried after finding the hot springs. Obviously he could reveal the identity of the devil using the hot springs. But it would be insignificant if he wouldn't 100% defeat the devil. The idea Ark came up with was to use a ‘sacrificial rite.’ He found water after such a long time so shouldn't he take advantage of it? The hot springs which appeared under the mountain was dozens of metres deep. By making a channel into the pit, he blocked it off to build a sort of dam. After luring the devil to the pit, he ordered the blockage to be broken which allowed the water to flow down from the top.

‘If it is an underwater battle then I have confidence against any opponent!’

Ark was already an expert at fighting underwater. He had the Guardian Armour of the Merpeople which invalidate the water penalty by 100%. Thanks to that, there was no opponent who could fight equally with Ark underwater. Once the pudding was in the water, it couldn't even move let alone attack.

“You're screwed now!”

Kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang!

Ark hurled attacks at Cell like an evening shower. After a few minutes, Cell's health had already reached the bottom.

'What the? Even if it is a level 300 monster, isn't this too easy?

Is this really the devil which trapped the Fire Draconians for hundreds of years? No, isn't there something strange?'

The battle was proceeding so easily that Ark made an upset face. Then Cell seemed to melt and disappear after being hit by Dark Blade. No, it happened when he thought Cell disappeared.

"What, what the?"

Ark's eyes showed his shock.

Syu syuk, syu syuk, syu syuk!

Ark looked at the Fire Draconians. Cell had appeared among them. Its eyeball rolled around and it laughed in a grotesque voice before speaking.

"Kukukuku, I used teleportation while you were running wild.

You fool, it was impossible to beat me the moment you entered this place. Now do you want to wander eternally while your soul is slowly absorbed or you can choose to die immediately? If you die immediately then it will just allow me to absorb your soul quicker. Just like the stupid Fire Draconians."

"U-unbelievable.....!"

Ark now noticed the subtle feeling of goose bumps. In New World, a warning message always popped up whenever a boss monster appeared. However, that message didn't appear when he encountered Cell. In other words, Cell was not the real devil inside Dragonian.

"Aaaaack, you evil bastard!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

While Ark was thinking that, Cell started attacking the Fire Draconians. But Ark just watched with a soulless expression. No, to be exact he was looking at Cell's body. While Cell wasn't the devil, it was obviously a part of the body. Unless the body was destroyed, Ark wouldn't be able to escape from Dragonian.

'If Cell is a part of the devil's body then the devil should be somewhere around here. Where the hell is it.....?'

Ark avoided Cell's attack and surveyed the situation until he had a sudden flash. He realized why his nerves had been subtly irritated. So far Ark had managed to walk around undetected by the Fire Draconians and the devil. Then how could the devil steal Ark's stats? Ark's stats were stolen while he was away from Cell who had been hiding among the Fire Draconians. In other words, the power of the devil worked inside this entire space. Yet Cell wasn't able to find Ark. That meant the devil was able to steal Ark's stats but it couldn't know where his location was. It wasn't logical.

"It was also strange when I entered Dragonian. I was looking for the entrance when I suddenly felt a sucking sensation and fell inside.....huck, don't tell me? Oh my god, if that's true then the devil has tricked us from the beginning!"

Ark raised his head at the thought and winced. The conclusion he came to seemed like nonsense. But this was a game so anything could happen. Moreover, Ark had already seen an existence like this before! When he realized this, Ark had to change the direction of his thoughts by 180 degrees. Yes, he absolutely couldn't win against Cell and the devil like this. From the beginning he couldn't defeat the devil and escape from Dragonian. Conversely, escaping from this place meant it might be possible to defeat the devil. Ark's thoughts inside his head turned at 700 kilometres per hour.

"Then the way to get out of this place.....?"

He pushed back Cell using Riposte and looked around. Ark had received fall damage when he entered. That meant the entrance was somewhere in the ceiling. Normally it would be impossible to escape that way but Ark guessed there was another method.

“Hey Fire Draconians!”

Ark shouted from the hot springs.

“You know that I’m not the devil. You might’ve forgotten but Lumines is the sole survivor of the Fire Draconians and he asked me to save your souls! But everybody needs to help me to accomplish this purpose!”

“Ack, w-what?”

The Fire Draconians asked while avoided Cell’s attacks.

“Your fire. Please work together to pour your flames into the hot springs!”

“Into the hot spring?”

“There is no time to explain! Please trust me and follow my instructions!”

The Fire Draconians were confused but they looked at the hot springs after hearing Ark’s desperate voice. They took a deep breath and blew out fire. The fire of 29 Fire Draconians hit the hot spring, causing it to heat up and exude a massive amount of water vapour. After a while, so much vapour had risen that nothing could be seen in front of him. Then the ground convulsed and shook. Ark ran out of the water vapour and stared up at the ceiling.

‘That’s it!’

Kukukuku, kueeeeeeee-!

A giant door seemed to open in the ceiling. With a roar, the surrounding water vapour was continuously pushed up to the ceiling.

“Now Radun. The hang glider!”

Ssak ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

“Razak transform into a sword, Racard ride the air currents and follow!”

Ark grabbed Razak and ran with his full strength before

jumping. Then he pushed his hang glider and rode the air current to the ceiling. He was pushed by the water vapour and seemed to be flung at the ceiling. Ark rode the air current up through the doors until he turned around and landed on a nearby floating land. At the same time, a warning message flashed before his eyes.

[-The soul predator boss monster 'Soul Eater' has appeared!]

“Indeed.....!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The enormous stone mountain in front of Ark that contained Dragonian started to collapse. Once the rocks fell down, it revealed the huge shape of the devil which resembled a catfish. Just like its name Soul Eater, it was made out of a translucent material resembling gelatine and had a huge size. The forts, buildings and hot springs were all inside it..... Surprisingly, it was Dragonian before Ark. Yes, Ark and Dragonian had been inside the huge Soul Eater the whole time. If Dragonian was inside Soul Eater then everything started making sense to Ark. While he had been drawn inside Dragonian, the sucking sensation was similar to what he felt when he was swallowed by the White Whale Gallic. Since he was inside the stomach, the monster was able to absorb his stats.

‘Cell is just a parasite that lives inside!’

Yes, Cell was similar to the worm like parasites which lived inside Gallic. The difference between Cell and the worms was that Cell was mentally controlled by the catfish. The Soul Eater couldn't look inside itself so it used Cell to keep an eye on the Fire Draconians.

‘The level 500 monster which swallowed Dragonian is the devil's true identity!’

That was the reason why Ark used the hot springs to create water vapour. There was suddenly a huge amount of water vapour within the stomach. Naturally the Soul Eater would have to expel all the air. In other words, Ark made a situation where the Soul Eater would have no choice but to burp. He then used the hang glider to ride the air current from the burp and came outside.

“Heh, who would’ve thought the devil would look like this?”

-Kuaaak, you bastard!

The Soul Eater took off its outer shell and was completely exposed. Ark was overwhelmed by the colossal size of the Soul Eater. It was a monster large enough to swallow a 4~5 kilometre city! Gallic seemed like a child next to the humongous Soul Eater. It was to the extent that somebody didn’t even have to be on the battlefield to see the Soul Eater from a distance away. It was also level 500! Since the Soul Eater had devoured his stats, Ark was currently around level 300. It was a 200 level difference.

“M-Master.....”

Racard stuttered as he trembled away from the enormous size and the level difference. However, Ark’s eyes just shone with an eerie light as he stared at the Soul Eater.

“It is rice!”

“Eh?”

Racard made a stupid face at Ark’s cry.

“What nonsense are you saying? Did you suffer while inside that thing?”

“You idiot, please see straight. That guy is my meal!”

“Meal? It is a catfish. The pot isn’t big enough for the catfish. I think spicy catfish soup is too.....”

“That’s not it! Look at the translucent, gelatine like skin and how similar it is to the wendigoes!”

“What are you.....hik! Master perhaps?”

“I’m going to devour it!”

Ark laughed crazily. Yes, the Soul Eater was just a huge monster with a soul body. And a soul body monster was like a pill giving Ark Spiritual Power. The level and size was all unnecessary. To Ark the Soul Eater was just a huge lump of Spiritual Power.

“That huge body.....how much Spiritual Power will it give me?”

Ark drooled as he stared at the Soul Eater. Then dozens of tentacles sprouted from the Soul Eater's body.

Swiiiiik, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When the tentacles stretched out hundreds of metres and struck a rock, it instantly turned to powder. Ark immediately threw his body and wrapped the Saw blade around a rock. Then he rose in a parabola and swung to another stone using his Saw blade. It was the whip action Indiana Jones used several times. Ark flew across the sky using the whip and stared at the Soul Eater. After a short time, an arrow appeared on top of the Soul Eater's head.

“Lock on! Soul Extortion!”

At the same time, a hand stretched out from Ark and grabbed the skin of the Soul Eater. Normally the 200 level difference meant that his sword wouldn't really hit properly. However, Soul Extortion which grabbed some of the soul was unrelated to the level. When the hand grabbed the skin, there was a loud tearing sound and the skin was torn. And the Soul Eater let out a pained scream.

“Eh? What the?”

Ark looked at the piece of Soul Eater's skin with stunned eyes. With one single blow, several hundred metres of the Soul Eater's skin had been torn. It seemed a little extreme for his level of Soul Extortion. But Ark soon discovered the reason why. The sections of skin were so thin that they were only a few millimetres.

“This guy, is he totally empty on the outside?”

Yes, the Soul Eater was a huge monster but it wasn't 4~5 kilometres. Its original size was only a few hundred metres. However, it was a soul body so it could be expanded or reduced freely. So it could inflate its body like a balloon to swallow Dragonian. That's why the skin was only a few millimetres thick. On the other hand, Soul Extortion was a skill which allowed him to rip out a certain amount of the opponent's soul. So he peeled off a wide

but thin piece.

-Kuaaak, this human dares!

When a whole bunch of skin was ripped off, the Soul Eater swung even more tentacles at him. Ark swung his whip and ran away but the tentacles destroyed several pieces of land, making the places he could escape to disappear. When there was no longer any place to move then he would receive simultaneous attacks from the tentacles.

“Sheesh, is this a level 500 monster?”

Ark bit his lip and glared at the Soul Eater. It was so large that he could close his eyes to shot an arrow and it would still hit. However, the range of Soul Extortion was only 20~30 metres. Once outside that range then Ark couldn't use Soul Extortion at all. By moving between different pieces of land, he couldn't stay within range.

“Besides, the pieces of floating land are quickly decreasing. If I'm hit by the tentacles then I will fall into the lava. Some way.....”

Ark looked around for a while before looking at the Soul Eater again and laughed.

“Aha, can't I use that as a springboard to attack?”

Then a tentacle separated the wind and fell. The tentacles turned a land mass to powder. But Ark didn't care about the land masses anymore. The Soul Eater rolled its eyes and surveyed the area. Then it found Ark unexpectedly hanging from a tentacle using the Saw blade. The moment the tentacle had hit the land mass, Ark had transferred to the tentacle. The Soul Eater roared and struck its tentacle into the lava. Red lava flew up as the tentacles impacted with it. Ark used his flexibility to jump between the tentacles. When compared to the Soul Eater, the tentacles were 10 metres thick. Ark used 'Sprint' to run up the tentacles. When Ark ran up, dozens of tentacles instantly dived towards him.

“Hey, you idiot! Where do you think you're looking? Block his gaze!”

“B-but that guy is so large.....”

“Do you think dying to him is better? Or do you want me to kill you?”

“Ugh, damnnnnnn!”

Racard closed his eyes tightly and used Dark Dash at Ark’s threat. And.....

Puk!

-Kuaaaaaaaah!

The Soul Eater suddenly screamed and emitted a light. When Racard had used Dark Dash, he literally embedded himself into the Soul Eater’s eyeball. The Soul Eater had swelled up several hundred metres like a balloon. Racard was just like a piece of dust next to it. However, even a piece of dust could make a big difference when stuck in the eyes.

“Eh? What? Isn’t this plain water?”

-This flying bastard.....come out right now.....

“Fly? How dare a balloon demon like you insult a noble vampire? You, you!”

-Kuaaaack, come out!

The huge Soul Eater stumbled from Racard’s attack. Racard swam around in the Soul Eater’s eyeballs and punched away. The Soul Eater screamed painfully and tried to hit Racard with his tentacle, but all it did was hit its own eyeball.

“Okay, that’s good!”

Meanwhile Ark had been travelling along the Soul Eater’s tentacles.

“Huhuhu, there’s no need to worry now.”

Racard jumped around and used Soul Extortion continuously. Thanks to Racard poking around in the eyeball, Ark could jump around to tear off pieces of skin. Whenever it was hit, the Soul Eater would yell out and stamp its feet. The space shook and lava flew up everywhere. But that wasn’t a problem for Ark since he was on the

Soul Eater's body.

"Ooooooh!"

"That devil swallowed Dragonian....."

"He's eating! A human is eating the devil!"

The Fire Draconians who had fought against Cell in the stomach exclaimed. Since the rocks surrounded the Soul Eater had collapsed, the Fire Draconians were watching the battle through the transparent skin. And the scene was a small human overwhelming the hundreds of kilometres wide Soul Eater.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

When Ark had torn nearly half of the Soul Eater's skin, dozens more tentacles appeared. But these tentacles were much easier to avoid. He didn't need to jump around the land masses and the Soul Eater couldn't see Ark so it couldn't hit him.

"Your mistake is inflated your body you stupid catfish. Soul Extortion!"

Ark avoided the recklessly flying tentacles and peeled off the skin.

-Your spirit has risen thanks to Soul Extortion!
--

<Spiritual Power +1>

-Your spirit has risen thanks to Soul Extortion!
--

<Spiritual Power +1>

His Spiritual Power gradually increased as the Soul Eater's body disappeared. When Ark used Soul Extortion to eat the soul, one side of its head faded away. With the Soul Eater in that state, a part of Dragonian inside the stomach shook and emerged. It was like a goldfish swimming in excrement. While Ark was jumping around and peeling the skin using Soul Extortion, he was concerned as the piece of Dragonian fell into the lava. At the same time, the lava welled up hundreds of metres.

“Eh?”

It was at that time. The Soul Eater suddenly deflated and shrunk. After decreasing to 100 metres in size and Dragonian emerged. Fortunately, Ark who had been on the Soul Eater’s back wasn’t damaged by the fall.

“That fellow!”

“It is the devil who deceived us for hundreds of years!”

When Dragonian appeared from the devil’s stomach, Cell instantly disappeared. The Fire Draconians who had been fighting against Cell rushed towards the Soul Eater. Ark ran like the wind in front of them and shouted.

“Don’t touch! It is mine!”

“What does that mean? For hundreds of years.....”

“Mine!”

“Ack!”

He had to convert every last bit of the Soul Eater to Spiritual Power! Therefore he had to stop the Fire Draconians. The Fire Draconians flinched from Ark and retreated. Meanwhile Ark moved his eyes from the Fire Draconians towards the Soul Eater. The Soul Eater that had been several kilometres in size had decreased to 100 metres and it looked completely like a wet rag. When Ark approached it tried to swing its tentacles but they just dropped and crumpled like a wet rag.

-Kuuuuuu.....don’t come....stop.....!

Ark just hit the annoying tentacles with his sword and approached the Soul Eater. Then he raised his hands and said with a bright expression.

“I’ll eat well.”

.....His happy mealtime had started. Just like that, the Soul Eater which swallowed up Dragonian disappeared into Ark. When it only

had 3% health left, a viscous liquid flowed out and the Demonic Seal information window disappeared. Ark glanced at the Soul Eater and stopped attacking.

“Demonic Seal.....should I make a cursed japtem or eat it? No, my Spiritual Power won't rise that much with the remaining portions. And the cursed japtem has surprising uses so shouldn't I create it this once? Demonic Seal!”

Ark used the remaining soul to seal into one of the swords he picked up in Oberium. At the same time, a stream of message windows appeared.

-You have received 30% additional experience for using Demonic Seal.

-The source of the wicked power disappeared and the absorbed stats will be returned!

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.....

When he defeated a level 500 boss he instantly gained 9 levels. Moreover, he had gained 170 Spiritual Power just from eating one Soul Eater. The gelatine like Soul Eater was a monster who gave him a bunch of nutrition.

“Now shall I check out the loot?”

A bunch of items were scattered around where the Soul Eater died.

-Nightmare Sealed Old Sword

Weapon type: One-handed sword

Attack: 7~10 (+60) Durability: 2

Weight: 45 User restriction: Level 250 and higher

A sword used by ancient warriors of Oberium. However, the sword has absorbed the demonic magic and changed its nature. The enchanted magic within the sword has enough energy to destroy an opponent. At the same time, the sword's durability has weakened

because of the magic. In addition, the user will be affected by the curse and will receive constant damage until it is destroyed.

* Cannot be repaired, reinforced, enchanted or unequipped.

* Greater demon [Soul Eater] sealing effect.

<Soul Eater: When using the magic of the Soul Eater to attack, you can deal strong mental damage.

When mentally attacking the opponent, there is a chance to deal 1~3000 damage to mana and there is also a 50% chance to steal a random stat from the opponent>

-Skin of a Greater Demon (Rare, Material)

<Advanced Leatherwork skill is required to view the detailed information>

(Number: 5)

“Oh, what is this?”

Ark's eyes widened as he looked at the sword. It was a boss monster so he had expected a good effect. The result was a perfect bingo! An option he never imagined had appeared when he sealed the Soul Eater. Damage to mana and a 50% chance to steal stats from the opponent? When considering the absorption ability of the Soul Eater, it really was a cheat like option.

“But it only has 2 durability so just using it 10 times will destroy it.

Since the probability is 50%, I'll probably only get between 5~10 points before the sword breaks. When thinking about it like that, the option is not that great. Damn, it would be an absurd sword if the durability was higher.”

Ark packed the sword with a regretful face.

“But what is this? Even though I defeated a boss monster.....”

Aside from the sword, it seemed like the Soul Eater only dropped

one option. It was a rare material item. Ark had expected a lot more from a level 500 boss.

“Wait? Didn’t something seem to shine and fall when that guy died? This skin isn’t shiny. Then there is still something left?”

Ark looked around carefully. But he couldn’t find a special item not matter where he looked.

“That’s strange? Am I wrong?”

Ark asked as he tilted his head to one side.

Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark looked around restlessly when Radun suddenly appeared. Radun entered a small gap in a rock and then an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-Radun has acquired ‘Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian.’
--

“Oh, so it rolled in there! Well done Radun!”

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak!

Ark stroked his head while Radun shook his tail eagerly.

“Now please throw it up. I want to check out the information.”

Radun immediately opened his mouth at Arks’ order.....ssak! Throw up....ssak! Throw up....he couldn’t. No matter how many times he tried, the Burning Heart couldn’t be spat out. Ark thought something was wrong and tried to hold Radun upside down but it was no use. Then Radun was covered in dead skin and the information window appeared.

-Radun has absorbed the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. Your pet Radun ate a special item which is producing changes in his body. As an Alamone, the secret of growth for that species is still unknown. It cannot be confirmed what type of changes the item
--

would bring but it will become evident when the 'Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian' will be completely absorbed. However, Radun's current ability does not allow him to completely digest the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. It will take some time until Radun can completely digest the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian.

<Presently digested: 1%>

"Eh? What is this?"

Ark read the information window with a stupid expression. He had forgotten. Radun could grow using specific items. Then wasn't Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian similar to the Fruit of Basium that Radun ate before?

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

After seeing Ark's expression, Radun dropped his head like someone who committed a sin and apologized. But Ark just laughed and shook his head.

"No, you did well."

He couldn't think of another purpose for the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian aside from as a growth item. The reason Ark bore a grudge against Radun when he ate the Fruit of Basium was because he couldn't use Radun's Item Storage. But this time there didn't seem to be such restrictions. Furthermore, he didn't need to find something else to assist the digestion of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian.

"Then there's no problem. Radun, since you've already ate it then try your best to digest it."

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun's eyes sparkled as he received praise instead of hostility.

"Huhuhu, you cutie. My pet is too charming. Now everything is finished....eh, what the?"

It was at that time. He suddenly felt a pain as both wrists

throbbed. Ark frowned and looked down with confusion.

“Eh? T-this.....?”

The pain he felt was from the tattoos on his wrist. It was the trademark of ‘Eternal Soul.’ The tattoos burned and a light was suddenly emitted from it. After a moment, cracks appeared in the tattoos and a piece broke off. A new information window then appeared when the broken tattoos sunk into his skin.

-A seal of ‘Eternal Soul’ has been released and you’ve acquired a new profession-specific skill.
--

[Demonic Response II]: Eternal Soul stage 3 (Passive)

‘Demonic Response’ is a necessary stage to learn if they want to reach the enlightenment needed for Eternal Soul. When you find a demonic response, you will deal 20% additional damage against demonic monsters and the probability of resisting the demonic attribute will increase by 30%. In addition, you will be able to detect hidden demonic power within the bodies of monsters.

<When sensing a demonic attribute, +20% damage against demonic monsters and 30% resistance to demonic attribute>

[Demonic Detection]: Eternal Soul stage 4 (Active)
--

A technique which can read the flow of demonic power. It is possible to read the flow of demonic power within a 100 metre radius in order to find the location of the demon. By cutting off the flow of demonic energy inside the body of the demon, you can deal fatal damage. Demons who receive a direct blow to their demonic energy will receive 100~1000 damage and have their defense temporarily reduced.

<When your insight into the demon reaches +50 points, you can deal 100~1000 damage and reduce defense.

Spiritual Power consumption: 50>

“Eh? Eternal soul?”

He hadn't considered that Eternal Soul would awaken. But Ark was able to understand most of the methods to awaken the Eternal Soul after this. It wasn't surprising that Eternal Soul would awaken whenever he dealt with monsters of the demonic attribute. And every time Eternal Soul awakened, one tattoo on each wrist would be unsealed.

"At first I thought it was a coincidence but now it is certain that two seals are released every time. One gives a passive skill which will increase my abilities while increasing my resistance to the demonic attribute. The other seal will give an active skill which such as Demonic Seal or Demonic Detection which could assist in fighting monsters. But now Demonic Detection....."

Ark smiled wryly at the information window. It was a skill for detecting demonic energy and finding demons. If he had this skill before then he could've discovered the Soul Eater instantly. Wasn't that just a case of receiving the skill after the need was over? It also appeared too late when he was dealing with Karma.....However, he discovered that there was more to the skills learnt after the seals were released. In New World it was possible to change to the 3rd stage profession. In other words, there was still one profession left after Dark Soul. And Eternal Soul was probably the profession after Dark Soul. So releasing the seals quickly was a good thing.

"Anyway, has all my business here finished?"

Ark looked up at the clear, blue sky with a refreshed look. The black dome which had been present on Hwaryong Mountain for hundreds of years had disappeared. When the Soul Eater disappeared, Dragonian was also returned to normal. All the pieces of land which had been floating around the chaos space for hundreds of years re-joined with Dragonian. The lava now only circled Dragonian like it was an architectural feature. The reason for this was because the Soul Eater had broken the surrounding pieces of land when fighting Ark. When Dragonian returned to normal, Lumines instantly appeared.

"Existences born in the presence of fire, go to your eternal rest!"

Lumines used the purification power of his flames on the souls of the

Fire Draconians and they disappeared. After ensuring that all the souls were gone, Lumines walked over to Ark.

“I really thank you.”

Lumines said with an expression mixed with sadness and joy. He was happy that the souls were freed after hundreds of years but felt grief when they had to leave.

“It is just lucky that I could help.”

“It’s regrettable but this will be the last time I see you.”

“Huh?”

Ark asked Lumines who replied.

“I’ve been protecting this place for hundreds of years. I said I am the only survivor but I should’ve died a long time ago. But I couldn’t bear to leave the souls of my kin enslaved by the devil so I used to holy power of the Oracle to live. Now that the souls of the Fire Draconians have been liberated, I will also move on to that place.”

“Then the Fire Draconians.....?”

“We probably won’t appear in this world anymore.”

Lumines murmured with a sad expression. The Fire Draconian who had been waiting hundreds of years for the curse to be released also knew the whole time that it meant the extinction of his clan. But then Lumines shook his head and gave a small smile.

“Obviously the Fire Draconians will disappear from this world when I am gone. But I don’t think it is the end of the Fire Draconians.

The will of the Fire Draconians will live on through you.”

“Huh? What are you.....?”

“I’ve been worried for a long time while looking at the wards. Even our enemies didn’t care about this place until you came with Valderas’ keepsake. And you used great strength and courage to free the souls of the Fire Draconians. You have shown me everything a true hero requires. As the last Oracle of the Fire Draconians, I

have the responsibility to compensate you for what you have done.”

‘Quest reward?’

Ark’s eyes lit up like a lantern. In fact, Ark didn’t really have any interest in Lumines’ extinction. To be honest, there was nothing he could do so why should he mourn? He had been worried about the reward for completing the quest while listening to Lumines’ words. But this atmosphere seemed like he was going to receive something.

“Come along.”

Lumines turned around and headed towards a castle in Dragonian.

‘What will he give? I’ve saved the Fire Draconians so shouldn’t the reward be pretty good? Of course it will be good. How much did I have to struggle before completing it?’

Ark was filled with anticipation as he followed. Lumines guided Ark to the centre of the castle where some stone statues resembling the Fire Draconians were lined up in a circle. Lumines indicated towards an altar in the centre of the statues and said.

“Step up to that altar.”

‘Eh? What? He’s not giving an item? Perhaps it is the ‘Blessing of Fire’ again?’

The atmosphere turned fiery. Of course, Blessing of Fire gave him extra fire and burn resistance. And he thought he would receive Blessing of Fire again when he had entered the wards. But it took almost ten days to complete the quest. Well, he did waste one week consuming the wendigoes. Anyway, didn’t he suffer a crisis in Dragonian from the decreased stats? If he went through such troubles then Blessing of Fire alone wouldn’t be sufficient. Then Lumines slammed his staff into the ground and shouted.

“Original fire, please bless this chosen hero with your sacred fire!”

It was at that time. The statues of the Fire Draconians lined up started to spin. They all faced the altar where their mouths opened

and streams of fire emerged. He was subjected to flames from dozens of statues! While Ark was in the midst of the flames, there was a white light and the information window popped up.

-Thanks to the sacred altar fire, you have learnt the 'Descent of the Fire Draconian' skill!

[Descent of the Fire Draconian]: Divine Skill

After being blessed by the sacred altar fire, you are the brave warrior selected who can use the Fire Draconian's ultimate skill. Descent of the Fire Draconian is a revered skill which causes an explosion of sudden power. This skill is only meant for one person to use. It has been passed down through generations of Guardians protecting the temple. When using Descent of the Fire Draconian, you will accept the holy power into your body which will cause an 'Immortal Fire Draconian' effect.

<Immortal Fire Draconian>

- * 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.

- * Attack speed, movement speed and Reaction rate will increase by 50%.

- * All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.

- * Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.

- * When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

<Spiritual Power consumption: 400>

-You have learnt a Divine skill.

The Divine skill is a high ranking skill passed down from ancient forgotten gods. The only way humans can learn this skill is through the ancient secret arts. In addition, tremendous energy is needed to use the power of the gods. Therefore humans can only use the Divine skill in special areas. It is the skill which can amplify the

user's abilities, Area Declaration.

* Divine skill can only be used within the Area Declaration territory of your profession.

If you leave the area after using the Divine skill then its effects would disappear.

‘D-divine skill!’

Ark’s mouth dropped at the sight of the information window. It was a skill with 5 different effects. Moreover, the effects were so strong it was like an advanced skill. Especially the one where he dealt 1000 fire damage while recovering 50% of his health. There was also a 50% increase in all types of speed! And the additional fire damage! The fire resistance also increased for all his party members! Enemies who attacked him would also receive fire damage! It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that he was almost invincible for the 10 minutes the skill was activated.

‘It is truly worthy of being called a Divine skill!’

The Divine skill Ark had experienced before was the ‘Indra’s Lightning’ that the Red Man had used. It was an enormous magic which took care of Ark, Shambala and Lariette with one blow! Just like the name ‘Immortal Fire Draconian,’ he was certainly immortal while the Divine skill was triggered. However, there was a fatal weakness in the Divine skill. It was only available within the territory of Area Declaration. That is to say, it was a meaningless skill if he couldn’t use Area Declaration. If he knew that information in advance then he wouldn’t have lost so badly against the Red Man.

‘Even though a user might know the weakness, I can take advantage of it when fighting against monsters. If I’m fighting a really strong monster then I can use it to win.’

“Now it is like you are a Fire Draconian.”

“I will use it wisely for the honour of the Fire Draconians.”

Lumines thought for a short time after Ark’s answer before talking

again.

“.....Can I ask you for one last favour?”

‘A favour?’

Was his true colours revealed after giving Ark something? However, he always welcomed the request of an NPC. A request from an NPC meant a quest. Although he hadn't received any money from the Fire Draconian's quests, he did receive a lot of stat increase.

“Please say it. I am already a member of the honourable Fire Draconian clan.”

“Thank you. You've proven your courage and capabilities through rescuing the Fire Draconians. I believe in your courage and capabilities so I want to ask this of you. The other day I said that Magura stole the Immortal Book which had been house in the Fire Draconian's temple. The Immortal Book is an ancient treasure of the Fire Draconians that I can't stand to see in Magura's hands. Please look for the Immortal Book.”

“Magura.....I understand. Where is he?”

Ark asked with a questioning expression. But Lumines just shook his head and sighed.

“I do not know the details. The only clue is this slab left behind when Valderas returned to Dragonian. I've been trying to find clues using this slab but I still haven't figured it out.”

Lumines took out a small stone tablet. An eerie aura surrounded it and it seemed like blood was flowing from the back. Lumines might not know the exact location but he did have a clue.

“I understand.”

Ark nodded and the quest information window updated.

-The quest has been updated.

Souls of the Fire Draconians= Demon Magura!

The demon Magura was one of the demons who spearheaded the Dark Lord's attacks. Hundreds of years ago, Magura led astray one of the Fire Draconians which led to their destruction. You must find the Immortal Book that Magura stole from the Fire Draconians and take it back. If you find the demon Magura then you will also find clues to the Dark Lord.

<Difficulty: ☆☆☆ Quest Restriction: Completion of Home of the Fire Draconian III quest>

-Bloody Slate (Quest Item)

A carved slate with ancient characters written using the blood of a demon.

<200 Knowledge of Ancient Relics is needed to confirm the item>

‘A Lore quest!’

The degree of difficulty indicated that it was a lore quest. These quests were deeply associated with the history of New World. When he had previously completed Lore quests, he had been given stars as a special reward. Ark had currently gathered 7 of them. If he completed the Magura quest then he would receive 10.

‘I don't know what kind of compensation will be given.....’

When considering the degree of difficulty with his Lore quests so far, the reward shouldn't be trivial.

‘I have to settle this. But I can't find Magura until I can decipher the slate? I need to wait until I have 200 points in Knowledge of Ancient Relics.’

“I understand. I will be happy to solve the feud of the Fire Draconians!”

“I believe.....”

Lumines sluggishly nodded at Ark's answer. Then his eyes closed. His body then turned to stone like the other Fire Draconians before there was a crack and the statue turned to powder. He was

moving on just like he said. So all the missions were solved but the Fire Draconians had become extinct. Ark looked at the powder and clicked his tongue.

“Somehow there is a bitter aftertaste to this quest.”

Ark murmured with an uncomfortable expression. While all the other statues had turned to powder and scattered, only Lumines’ pile of powder stayed in one spot.

“Is he not leaving this place even after dying? Maybe Magura’s curse on the Fire Draconians also had an effect on Lumines. Elemental sword, Wind attribute!”

Ark thought it was slightly pitiful and used his Elemental Sword wind attribute. He created wind using his sword to blow Lumines’ ashes over Hwaryong Mountain.

“Now he’s probably free. Uh? What the, this is?”

Ark tilted his head to one side as the powder flew away. When he blew away Lumines’ powder, a large skull appeared. At first he thought it was a simple skull but when he approached closely he realized it wasn’t ordinary. He looked at the information window.

-Fire Draconian Skull (Rare, Material)
--

<It is impossible to confirm the information on Fire Draconian skull>

‘What the? A material item?’

Ark hadn’t expected to find an item when Lumines had left. Anyway, Razak showed extreme interest when a bone was found. However, Lumines’ skull was 3 metres. If Razak put on this skull then it would be impossible for him to move. Razak looked at the skull for a long time before sighing and shaking his head.

‘Heh, even Razak realizes the bone can’t be used. But it is a rare material item so it will probably become useful.’

Ark put away the skull and left Dragonian. Then Dragonian started to shake. Cracks spread through the ground and lava emerged

everywhere. And it gradually sank into the lava.

Dark Soul VS Beast Master

“That was fairly profitable.”

Ark smiled warmly at his bags. At first he thought it would be easily solved but the work had taken ten days. But this time he didn't think it was a waste of time. No, it was a highly profitable ten days. During the ten days it took to devour the wendigoes and Soul Eater, his Spiritual Power had increased by 549! Currently Ark had 956 Spiritual Power. He never thought it would be a number that was possible. There was also the Blessing of Fire and Descent of the Fire Draconian skills after the quest completion. But was that all? He also carried the Fire Stone and rare Hearthstone he found in Dragonian. Since the wendigoes were level 300~350, he didn't gain that much experience despite all the time hunting but he still managed to gain 9 levels. The results were more of a jackpot than he expected.

“Honestly, at first I thought I had made a mistake.”

When he first entered the chaos space and hunted the wendigoes, he hadn't made that much profit. If he hadn't figured out Soul Extortion then he wouldn't have been able to survive the wendigoes and the Soul Eater.

‘As expected, I can't throw away any skills. When I first received Soul Extortion, I thought it was just a skill I would seal up. Excavation was also like that but there is a way to make use of all of them. Besides.....’

While hunting the wendigoes in the chaos space, he received half as much experience and items. It was to the extent that his bags were bursting with japtem.

‘Some rare ingredients were dropped by the Soul Eater but everything else are relatively cheap items. There are several magic items with the japtem so I should receive at least 100 gold for it.

What should I do next after organizing all the japtem?’

He had finished all Fire Draconians’ quests. He couldn’t complete the Demon Magura quest because he needed more Knowledge of Ancient Relics.

“Once in town then I can gather more information about new quests and dungeons. I’ve come to Bristania after a long time so I should do everything possible.”

Ark decided on a plan for the future and descended Hwaryong Mountain. Then he found a small cave hidden on the bottom of the mountain. This cave was a safety zone that he found while looking for the Fire Draconians. No matter how many monsters wandered around New World, there were always hidden safety zones present. The place that Ark told Buksil to wait was this cave.

‘Ten days have passed so I wonder what Buksil has been doing?’

Once he was on the mountain than that person would have no motivation. Buksil who had lost Baekgu had been causing Ark quite a lot of stress. Ark entered the cave to look for Buksil. Then his foot caught on something and he fell down.

‘Huh? What is this?’

He looked down and saw an empty bottle of alcohol.

‘What the? This liquor bottle? That brat Buksil. Was he drinking while I wasn’t here?’

Ark made a disgusted face and kicked the empty bottle. It wasn’t just one. Empty bottles were scattered on the ground at the entrance of the cave while boxes of alcohol were also piled up. It was at least hundreds of bottles! The cave seemed like an alcohol warehouse.

‘This cheeky bastard. I told him to gather ingredients instead of just waiting around..... Yet now he’s having a drinking party? He lost his head completely after being depressed. Where on earth did he get this much alcohol.....’

Ark was grinding his teeth together when he suddenly realized something.

‘Wait? That guy. Where did he get the money to buy this much alcohol?’

Even if a merchant like Buksil entered a village to buy it, alcohol was quite expensive in New World. The cheapest bottle was at least 2~3 gold. In some cases, it wasn’t rare for a bottle to go for 10 gold. Even hundreds of bottles of cheap alcohol would cost several hundred gold. Buksil only received a small allowance from Ark so he wouldn’t have hundreds of gold. Then what was with these bottles?

‘Don’t tell me that bastard.....?’

“Ah no! There is no way! That Buksil bastard!”

Ark shrieked as he thought of the worst situation and dived into the cave. He quickly arrived at the campsite inside the cave.

‘.....?’

An improbably scene was unfolding in front of his eyes.

“Kuah. Good! Hehehe!”

Buksil rubbed at the fat on his stomach and set the bottle down. It was good up to that point. Ark’s eyes popped out at the other people present.

“Uwah, uwah, the alcohol is good, the alcohol is good!”

His eyes felt like it would fall out from looking around so much. On one side was a pair drinking alcohol and Baekgu who he thought had become dog soup in Bosaga. It was incomprehensible. But this was not the end.

“Hahaha, is it delicious? Delicious?”

“Wah, it is absolutely delicious. It is the first time I’ve tasted something so good.”

“Oh, you understand the taste of alcohol. I really do like you!”

The huge figure who patted Baekgu's back while holding the alcohol bottle was Bread.

"Hey, don't do that. I don't want dog hair to fly in this narrow area!"

The woman who threw the bottle at Bread was his partner Redian. People he never expected were gathered inside the cave and having a drinking party. Now all their eyes simultaneously concentrated on Ark when he ran in yelling.

"....."

An awkward silence flowed within the cave for a short time.

'W-What on earth is going on?'

Ark was the one who showed a response first. But Ark ignored Baekgu, Bread and Redian and just headed towards Buksil. Ark grabbed Buksil's collar and shook him.

"You, you bastard. What is going on?"

"Ouch, what, what the?"

"The alcohol bottles! Did you buy then alcohol bottles with my money? Did you sell them? Did you sell them? Did you sell my japtem?"

Yes, that was the reason Ark rushed in. It wasn't necessary to say again but Buksil was Ark's personal cameraman. The japtem that Ark gathered was left in Buksil's bag. Ark was worried that Buksil would've emptied out the bag while he was gone for a week. If Buksil disposed of all those items then wouldn't he receive hundreds of gold? Normally he wouldn't have thought of that. There was a contract where Buksil would receive a huge penalty if he disposed of Ark's goods selfishly. But the supposedly dead Baekgu was alive so he didn't know what Buksil would do from the shock. Ark couldn't see Baekgu, Bread or Redian anymore. Now the most important thing was money! He needed to know if Buksil had really embezzled his money.

"Japtem? Sell? Heh!"

Buksil looked at him stupidly and snorted. Then he removed Ark's hand and shrugged. Needless to say, it was possible to drink alcohol in New World. The person would return to normal after a bit, but they really were drunk while drinking. That was the state Buksil was in. Buksil had at least 10% alcohol in him judging by the smell and he shouted.

"You're always like that. Money, money, money! Do your eyes only see money?"

".....What, what the?"

"Baekgu has returned alive and the first thing you talk about is money? It's always about earning money..... I'm tired of it! Damn! Yes, I sold a little bit of japtem and drank alcohol. Why? Can't I do that? Can't I drink a bit of alcohol after following you every day and being exploited? I sold all of it to buy alcohol. What will you do?"

'He sold my japtem for the sake of drinking alcohol?'

Ark looked at Buksil dumbly. Then a cold voice emerged from his mouth.

"..... Do you want to live?"

Buksil flinched and took a step back but it was only for a brief moment.

"Why are you staring at me like that? Damn, I'm also a person too! You think I'm afraid after hearing your words? I've been enduring it so far. But now I can't stand it. No, I won't put up with it. Then go ahead and kill me! Do it, do it!"

Buksil lost his mind after drinking alcohol. Ark also lost his mind after hearing that his japtem was changed to alcohol. Ark looked at Buksil with anger and laughed before moving.

"..... Kill."

"Kill? Yes, kill me!"

"Wait a moment!"

Then Bread pulled the collar of the excited pig and moved forward. He looked at Ark and said.

“That’s not it. Is there a reason to react like that in this situation? Don’t you know? Shouldn’t you react to my presence first?”

“.....Let go of the pig.”

“No, no, I won’t. No, there seems to be some misunderstanding about where this alcohol comes from. I’m the one who bought it, not him.”

“What?”

Ark’s eyes started to return to normal. Then Bread scratched his head and sighed.

“Hah. He didn’t know what was going on but he calmed down after that guy explained. He seemed to want to talk to Ark. “That’s right, I bought the alcohol for everybody. This guy just drank the alcohol. By the way, don’t you seem to be quite hated? He only drank a little bit yet he keeps on cursing you.”

“Is it true?”

“What? That he cursed you?”

“No, that my japtem is safe.”

He already knew that Buksil was full of complaints. Naturally the talk about his japtem would be more important for him.

“Why would I lie about it? Do you want to see the receipts?”

Ark gave a huge sigh of relief. After that, he finally realized that the people in front of him were Bread and Redian.

“By the way, why are you guys here?”

“You finally asked.”

“This bastard, what do you want? Are you now holding hostages?”

“Hostages?”

“Aren’t they hostages? Then why are you here with Buksil?”

Then Buksil shouted angrily from behind Bread.

“Hey, don’t mess with him. Bread is the one who brought Baekgu back!”

“What?”

“Let’s clear up the situation. Please sit down. I’ll explain.”

Bread put the liquor bottle away and indicated a seat. Ark looked at Bread and hesitated. He hadn’t noticed it because of Buksil but the situation was quite serious. Bread and Redian were his enemies. And it would be difficult for Ark to avoid both their attacks in this narrow cave. He couldn’t guarantee his odds even in a 1-on-1 fight. It wasn’t necessary to talk about 2 against 1. But it wasn’t possible to run away. Even if he could get away, Bread already noticed the relationship between Ark and Buksil. If he didn’t then he wouldn’t be waiting for Ark in a place like this. The moment Ark tried to escape then Bread would use Buksil as a hostage.

‘By the way, Bread’s attitude seems a little different from before. He’s not attacking recklessly like last time.’

When Ark didn’t lower his guard to sit down, Bread explained the situation. The reason for this situation went all the way back to Bosaga village. When Ark had set the guards on Bread and Redian, they had planned to escape from Bosaga. They escaped the guards and hid around the outskirts of the village. They planned to track Ark when he left the village. But it was the bandit group that caught Bread’s attention. The thieves who missed Ark had captured Baekgu and dragged him out of the village. And then they hung him upside down and tortured him to get Ark’s next destination.

“Then I appeared.”

Bread bragged. Even though there were 10 thieves, Bread and Redian were furious about the animal cruelty. After rescuing Baekgu, they decided to return the pitiful dog to his owner. It was only after they asked Baekgu that they discovered he was in Ark’s party.

'Isn't that like jumping from the frying pan to the fire? This stupid dog!'

Ark shot a glare at Baekgu who was just eating in a corner. However, Baekgu had his own reasons for telling them Ark's destination. Baekgu didn't tell the thieves Ark's destination no matter how much he was tortured. He knew the goal of the thieves was Buksil. However, Bread's goal was Ark. As long as Buksil was okay, he honestly didn't care what happened to Ark. But the biggest reason he blabbed about Ark's destination was to get back to Buksil.

"Ugh, Ark..... I'm disappointed."

Baekgu also smelt of alcohol.

"I heard everything from Bread-nim."

'Why is he referring to Bread so formally while talking informally to me?'

The dog crept closer to the pig when he saw Ark frowning. Since the entire group was drunk, Baekgu's nerves had become stronger.

"What are you looking at? Didn't Bread-nim ask you for an honourable warrior's fight during your confrontation at sea? Aren't you the one who deceived him using various lies and ran away? Are these the actions of Hero Maban's descendant? Aren't you embarrassed? I'm disappointed, disappointed! Ah. The elder believed in you so much and even gave you the Three Marvel's fragment....."

"What? Embarrassed? Disappointed?"

Ark glared back. But Baekgu just snorted and took a gulp from the bottle. That's right. Baekgu had instantly blabbed about Ark's destination for this reason. Although he was branded a traitor, he still felt pride as a member of the honourable Wolrang clan. Furthermore, Bread was the one who saved him from the thieves. After Bread explained the reason why, Baekgu became indignant and guided Bread here for 'justice.'

"That's right. You made the mistake!"

Buksil shook an empty bottle and shouted. Ark's blood pressure instantly soared.

'These brats really.....!'

Buksil and Baekgu had waited with Bread for Ark. After one day, two days, three days..... They were bored waiting for Ark after such a long time so Bread decided on a drinking part and Baekgu and Buksil became drunk. Baekgu and Buksil then shouted in unison.

"Shameful! Coward! Accept a fair showdown!"

'This group is really annoying me.'

The pig and dog were causing a huge commotion. No, it was inevitable sooner or later. Right now the drunkards weren't the problem.

"Why is this happening? What did I do that made you pursue me like this?"

When Ark raised his voice angrily, Bread scratched his head and murmured.

"Well, that.... The reason is..... It doesn't matter right now. It is unrelated to why I'm here now. Since my competitive spirit has been fired up."

"Competitive spirit?"

"I can't give up now that we've come this far. Isn't that right?"

"That's just you! This is a nuisance to me!"

Bread waved his hand with a serious expression.

"I've been reflecting."

"Reflecting?"

"Yes, when I first met you I thought you were a cowardly guy who ran away. But I asked Baekgu. There was a situation then. You needed to create an Immortality Pill? I realized that I was wrong once I reflected. I just wanted to beat you to death without

questioning the circumstances. Anyway, I will forget about the past after knowing the situation..... That's why I went to the guild and prepared this."

Bread took a scroll out of his bag and handed it to him.

-Warriors Challenge. Bread=Ark

High ranking members of the Warrior's guild can issue this challenge.

The duel will proceed immediately when the opponent who receives this agrees. When the duel starts, nobody except for the users concerned can participate. Unlike regular PVP battles, no penalties are applied. You will not become chaotic if the opponent is killed. If you die then you won't drop any items and will be revived on the spot. However the winner of the duel will take 500 fame from the loser.

<Winner: +500 Fame. Loser: -500 Fame>

"Now it doesn't matter if you win or lose."

Bread looked at Redian and confirmed it.

"Is this okay?"

"I don't know, I'm already tired of this."

"As expected, only you understand my feelings. I love you."

"Shut up you idiot."

Redian turned her head and nervously muttered while eating beef jerky. Bread grinned at her cute reaction and turned back to Ark.

"How about it? The conditions aren't bad right?"

"....."

Bread's suggest was very unexpected. Over the past month, Ark had been plagued by the thieves and Bread. The thieves were taken care of for the moment. Only Bread and Redian remained. But

Bread was suddenly asking for a 1-on-1 showdown. He even prepared a duel challenge so there was no need to worry about the death penalty.

‘This isn’t a bad offer. If I win then I can even receive 500 fame. Although I don’t have any choice but to accept!’

If Ark rejected the challenge then his relationship with the pair would continue to be hostile. Then he would have to fight against Bread and Redian on the spot. In such a situation, the percentage of victory was 0%.

“Okay, I accept the challenge.”

“You made a good decision.”

“So give me some time to prepare for the duel. I need to rest and repair my equipment. You should also sober up in case it affects your capabilities.”

“.....You’re not going to run away again?”

“You would just kill me if I run away from a formal challenge.”

“Oh, kill you? That would be a petty thing to do.”

“Let’s stop talking.”

“I understand. Then let’s start in 30 minutes.”

Bread withdrew and started to inspect his bayonet and equipment. Ark also sat in a corner opposite Bread.

‘I inevitably accepted the challenge but.....’

Ark was connected in his own way to PVP. Bread had considerably misunderstood a part of Ark’s character. Ark had avoided fighting Bread so far because of two reasons. One reason was Redian and the other reason was the situation was also cursed whenever he encountered them. He had no choice but to run away but Ark’s original character wasn’t the type to avoid a fight. There was no reason to avoid a 1-on-1 fight without any penalties. No, Bread was clearly a quite difficult person. Now he didn’t need to worry about the

death penalty. But he hadn't accepted the challenge without thinking.

'.....If I fight then I have to win!'

Although there was no death penalty, he would still lose 500 fame if he lost. Losing 500 fame wasn't a small penalty.

'But the prospect of success isn't that high if I think about it. Bread was level 410 when he last checked. Wouldn't it have obviously become higher? I have the dark attribute bonus but Bread can use Beast Spirit Possession to raise his stats.'

Ark had considered Bread a few times. In particular, Ark was interested in Bread's special skill Beast Spirit Possession. In fact, Ark had thought Beast Spirit Possession was better than his dark attribute bonus at first. But he later confirmed that it wasn't a problem. His dark attribute bonus raised all stats by 50% which included useful ones like strength, wisdom or even luck. But Beast Spirit Possession was a skill which selected the stat to be raised. Moreover, the animal spirits could only be stacked 3 times. If he stacked the Beast Spirit Possession then he could raise his abilities by 150%. Furthermore, the animal spirits of Beast Spirit Possession had different characteristics so it was possible to switch characteristics whenever he wanted. The movement of a dolphin was possible with Beast Spirit Possession or even it can even cause a disease like 'rabies' with the dog Beast Spirit Possession.

'But there is no substitute for my dark attribute bonus. I am level 383. Bread is 41 levels higher than me so there is still level difference. When considering Bread's capabilities, the ratio of victory is 4:6.....'

That was his conclusion when thinking positively. Therefore some preparations were required to win. Ark busily moved his hands as he started the preparations. In this situation, Ark's most reliable skill was Survival Cooking! Ark made various dishes at extravagant speed and ate them.

Secondary Effects Information Window

* Food effects

Tuntun Roast – Strong Chicken Breast Salad- Herb Soup- Fried Shrimps -Lightly Grilled Poco Leg- Slime Marinated Meat- Ratosu Steak- Monkfish Mushroom Soup
--

Total stats raised by the food effects: Strength +65, Stamina +36, Agility +40, Intelligence +15
--

* Effects of Tonic currently taking

Sipijeondaebotang (Strength +2, Stamina +2) Time taken: 16 days

‘Amazing.’

Ark looked warmly at the information window. In the old days, he couldn’t eat that many dishes because of the limit. Now thanks to the Monkfish Mushroom Soup, he could eat up to eight dishes before his satiety was full. Therefore his stats increased by 156! That was like gaining 15 levels.

‘Huhuhu, how is it? The level difference has narrowed even more!’

Ark elatedly looked to the other side where Bread was preparing. Then his complexion instantly turned gloomy. Bread was also buffing up in preparation for the battle. The Beast Master was a Druid profession so it had a lot of buffs. But Ark turned gloomy because of Redian. Redian was a magician and it was the profession with the strongest buffs after the priest.

“Sheesh, how annoying.’Blade Force’, ‘Immortal Armour’, ‘Elemental Defense.’ Eh..... What else is there?”

Blade Force increased damage. Immortal Armour increased durability and defense of equipment. Elemental Defense increased resistance to magic of various attributes. Etc..... Redian meticulously buffed Bread like a wife preparing his husband’s clothes before he went to work. The preparations for battle were similar.

‘What the? Then isn’t it a standstill even after I ate the food?’

However Ark still had a secret weapon left.

‘I definitely have to use this!’

He finally took the Promised Sword out of his bag. The Promised Sword had higher level restrictions than Gwisal's sword but the stats and options were worse. But the Promised Sword was an item with 4 sockets! If he inserted Hearthstones in the sockets then the sword would become much stronger than Gwisal's sword. Currently Ark had three rare Hearthstones which had a strong effort.

'Damn, I wanted to wait until I found four rare Hearthstones before using this..... It can't be helped. It will still be stronger than Gwisal's sword with three Hearthstones inserted.

Ark took out the three rare Hearthstones which flashed. It was the blood red jewel he received from vampire territory, the 'Vampire Stone.' The blue sheen came from the Mana Steal Stone. And finally there was the Explosion Stone which seemed like a fire was burning in it.

'Then shall I begin?'

Ark inserted the stones with a sense of expectation. First the sword trembled violently and turned cold when he added the Vampire Stone. Then a red line was drawn in the centre of the blade. Next he inserted the Mana Steal Stone which caused a blue light to spread. Finally the sword was wrapped in flames when the Explosion Stone was added and the information window appeared.

-Promised Sword (Rare)

Weapon: Two-handed sword

Attack: 40~50 Durability: 200/200

Weight: User restriction: Level 250, Advanced Sword Mastery skill

An ancient sword inscribed with complex magic symbols. The symbols engraved on the sword can't be decrypted using the current knowledge. However, the aura it gives off indicates that there is still an undisclosed hidden secret. There is also a space to fit something between the sword blade and hilt. It seems related to the sword's secret.

<Option: Strength +20, Stamina +10>

- Socket 1: (Vampire Stone) 5% of the damage dealt to an opponent is absorbed as health.
- Socket 2: (Mana Steal Stone) 5% of the damage dealt to an opponent is absorbed as mana.
- Socket 3: (Explosion Stone) There is a 33% chance of dealing 10~100 fire damage and 5~50 splash damage in a 2 metre area.
- Socket 4: (Empty)

All the trouble was worth it after seeing the information window about the set of rare Hearthstones. The real sword damage was unchanged but he could absorb his opponent's health and mana every time he attacked. There was also additional splash fire damage! A truly cheat like option! It was completely different from the appearance of Gwisal's sword. This sword was embellished with red and blue and it had flames wrapped around it. Now even the visual of the Promised Sword was satisfying.

'With these options how much would I get for it in the auction?'

It would probably be worth two times the highest price he received so far.

'That's it, this is the best thing I can do for now! The only thing left is to use Blade Maintenance to raise attack and Laundry to raise defense.....'

Thus Ark finished his preparations for the fight. Suddenly Buksil and Baekgu came up to him.

"I..... Ark-nim."

They had recovered from the alcohol they had drunk in New World. If players didn't drink then they would return to normal after 1 hour. While Buksil looked sober, Baekgu still seemed slightly drunk. Buksil shrunk back and tried to make excuses.

"T-that is..... Before you go....."

"It's okay."

Ark smiled and gave him a pat on the shoulder.

“I realized it this time. You’re always full of complaints. It’s all my fault. I’ve realized it.”

“Huh? T-then....”

Buksil and Baekgu’s face brightened. Then they froze at Ark’s next words.

“Your complaints are evidence that you need some discipline.”

Ark whispered sweetly into both their ears.

“.....You are dead.”

Using the Divine Skill

[TL] I've been using bayonet as Bread's weapon since that's what all the translation sites and dictionaries gave me. However that didn't really make sense to me especially considering this chapter. So I split up the korean and it translated more into greatsword, so that is what I will be using as his weapon from now it. If you want to have an idea of what it looks like then check out these [google images](#).

Kwang, kwang, kwang!

The noises rang out on the previously quiet mountain ridge. The earth shook like there was an earthquake coming and there was a dense cloud of dust. Then everything suddenly seemed to stop. The deafening roar quieted as the dust storm slowly settled down. The only thing moving quietly was the dust floating in the air. After a while.....!

"Dark Blade!"

The dust was split in half by a sword enveloped in flames. Then the dust exploded and scattered as a greatsword descended from the other direction.

"Earth storm!"

When the greatsword collided with the sword, a storm occurred once again. The form of two people could be seen through the storm. The one holding the flaming sword was Ark. Opposite Ark was the distinctive form of a huge person. The man wearing animal leather was obviously Bread.

"Take this!"

Bread ran up and brandished his greatsword.

Buuuung!

The dust on the ground was sucked up at a tremendous speed and started twisting. Ark fell down to avoid being hit by the greatsword. He rolled his body to another spot and sprang up before swinging his sword at Bread. However, Bread's reflexes also weren't inferior to Ark's. Bread moved his greatsword to a diagonal angle to deflect the attack before striking downwards.

"Huh?"

It was a really unexpected attack. Ark took a quick breath and stepped back but the greatsword had already grazed his shoulder. He instantly lost 400 health from the attack. Just a graze had seriously wounded him! However he couldn't hesitate in this situation. In the short time Ark had stopped moving, Bread had pushed forward and continuously wielded his greatsword. Ark stumbled and the greatsword barely missed his nose. Bread murmured as the greatsword descended into an empty space.

"Damn, I really thought I would cut you this time."

"Huk, do you think I'm that easy to kill?"

Ark laughed and replied but he was inwardly sweating.

'Damn, he interrupted it and counterattacked? If it had hit correctly then he would've received a critical hit. As expected, he really has troublesome power. Not only are the skills great but he is also familiar in a fight. No, not just a fight.....'

Ark used Dark Dance to avoid the attack and observed Bread's movements. Ark had been astonished by Bread's weapon when he first saw it. Bread used a two handed greatsword. It was similar to Ark's Promised Sword but much larger. The greatsword was the largest of the two handed swords. Of course its attack power and durability were among the strongest. When compared to an average long sword, it had an average of 1.8 times more damage. In addition, it automatically dealt 1.5 additional damage to large monsters. But despite its enormous damage, there were few people who used the greatsword in New World. There were a number of reasons but the largest penalty was that the size and weight meant the attack speed was extremely slow.

‘But this guy.....’

When in close combat, there was no difference between the number of times Ark attacked.

‘How can he attack so quickly when carrying a greatsword? Did he increase attack speed with his other equipment?’

He had thought this at first. But he still wasn’t convinced. After exchanging a few blows, Ark realized that it wasn’t that simple.

‘There is no waste!’

Yes, Bread didn’t waste any of his movements. He avoided the opponent’s attack and then struck back. It was a very simple movement but difficult to do in the middle of battle. Only people accustomed to holding a sword were able to perform such movements. It required being accustomed to the body in order to change movements. Yes, that was the secret to Bread’s attack speed. Bread’s movements were similar to a machine. There was no rush whenever he stabbed. While attacking and defending, he minimized any unnecessary movements and counterattacked. It was some tight movements! Even though he was holding the greatsword, he could match Ark’s movements.

‘He can also utilize his class skills.’

Bread’s profession was a Beast Master. The feature of a Beast Master was to stack up to 3 Beast Spirit Possessions. As soon as the battle started, Bread instantly chose three animal spirits to possess him. He chose the soul of the bear which raised strength by 50% and the cheetah soul which raised agility by 50%. That was only two Beast Spirit Possessions. He had seen Bread use them on the ferry and in Bosaga village. Ark hadn’t understood at the time.....

“Beast Spirit Possession, power of the Bull rise! Dash!”

Ark instantly used Dark Dance as Bread yelled. Then Bread grew horns on his head and shot forward like an arrow. Ark used Skill Penetration and the information window floated in front of him.

-Bread's profession skill: Beast Spirit Possession

* Additional skills of Beast Spirit Possession identified.

[Bull] When possessed by the spirit of the Bull, the breakthrough power increases by 50%.

When attacking an enemy with the 'Dash' skill, movement speed will increase by 100% and attack power by 50%. When Dash is successful, the defense will decrease by 30% and the abnormal state 'fall down' will be induced.

"Huck, another strange skill.....Riposte!"

Ark panicked and hit the horns with Riposte. Riposte was an attack which pushed the enemy back 10 metres. But thanks to the power of the bull, Bread barely moved. Rather, Ark was the one pushed back several metres thanks to the breakthrough power.

"How many spirit animals do you have?"

"A dozen."

Bread laughed proudly as he touched his horns. The reason why Bread had only used two Beast Spirit Possessions was because of this. Two of them were necessary skills which raised his stats. The remaining spot he could switch between attack or defense as needed. And that strategy was considerably successful in PVP. Especially when combined with other skills. His basic skill 'Rush' increased his movement speed by 50% and his attack speed rose by 25%. When combined with the power of the bull, the Dash effect became twice as powerful. Bread often linked his skills with Beast Spirit Possession. If the user was unable to grasp the skill beforehand then they would suffer.

'If I hadn't used Skill Penetration beforehand then it would've caused a lot of damage.'

Ark would've needed herbal medicine if he had been hit. Luckily he used Skill Penetration to see through it. If he knew the special effects of Bread's Beast Spirit Possessions then Ark could cope with

it.

‘That Bread, he is definitely strong but.....’

Ark stopped Bread’s series of attacks and clenched his sword firmly.

“Is it my turn? Take this. Dark Strike!”

Ark released the charged up aura. The black aura shot like an arrow from his sword. Bread moved his greatsword to block it before swinging his sword vertically downwards towards Ark. It was the accurate timing needed to switch the greatsword from defense to offense! But Ark suddenly braked and the greatsword vainly split through air.

‘It is indeed the weakness of the greatsword.’

A small smile spread on Ark’s face. It really was amazing that Bread could move the greatsword at such an incredible pace with both hands. However, the disadvantage of the greatsword wasn’t just its attack speed. It was possible to grasp the direction of the greatsword’s attack with just one look. Of course, estimating the greatsword’s trajectory with one look while it was moving so quickly and reacting to it wasn’t an easy task. But he had trained for many years so it was possible for him.

‘Bread certainly isn’t an easy opponent. However the odds are in my favour if it is only this much!’

Ark determined that after 10 minutes of fighting Bread. When comparing capabilities, the two of them were almost equal. Bread used a greatsword as a weapon. Each swing took 500~700 health in one blow. On the other hand, Ark wasn’t as powerful but he dealt more hits. Therefore the consumed health was similar. Then the only thing left was stats and level! After calculating it, Bread was superior to him in stats. But if they compared the remaining health left, Ark had 60% while Bread had 57%. Ark was a little ahead of him. The reason why.....

“This is the real attack!”

Ark noticed a gap and thrust his sword.

“Cancel power of the Bull! Beast Spirit Possession, power of the turtle rise!”

Bread's skin looked like the shell of a turtle after he used Beast Spirit Possession. There was a roaring sound and Bread stumbled. This was the perfect chance to attack the opponent. Ark pressed forward with his sword. As expected, Bread was a user with a lot of fighting experience and he blocked the attack.

But.....pepepepeng! Hwarrrrruk!

An explosion occurred when the two swords touched. Then flames spread over Bread's face and skin.

“This is it, this is it!”

A satisfied smile appeared on Ark's face. The explosion was the effect of the rare Hearthstone, the Explosion Stone. It gave a 33% chance of flame 50-100 damage, and caused an explosion dealing 10~50 splash damage within a 2 metre range! This 33% chance didn't occur when the sword damaged the enemy. The 33% chance occurred when the sword impacted with another weapon. Of course, this wasn't a direct blow so the 50~100 damage didn't apply. However, the 2 metre range of splash damage couldn't be avoided. Even though the damage was 10~50, Redian's Elemental Defense meant only half the damage was applied. But it was still some damage!

Kang, kang kang, pepepepeng! Kang, kang, pepepepeng!

Ark tirelessly swung his sword and caused flames to soar. Bread's health slowly went down. Moreover his sword was left intact despite the flames. Bread's movements while holding the greatsword became slow. Ark's method of 'pouring continuous attacks like an evening shower' made it difficult to avoid the attacks.

“Damn!”

Bread frowned as he was pushed back by the flames. Then he stepped to Ark's side and swung his greatsword. Rather than being on the defensive, he had been looking for a chance to counterattack. Ark was so engrossed in attacking that he couldn't

avoid the greatsword which hit his shoulder. He received a violent impact to the shoulder and lost 700 health.

“Ugh, this bastard.....!”

Ark stumbled and stepped back. However Ark wasn't the only one hit. He had hit Bread's side at the same time that his shoulder was damaged. When his sword hit, fire emerged and a blue and red pattern also flashed.

-The 'Explosion' effect has dealt the enemy additional 73 fire damage.
-The Vampire Stone has absorbed 5% of the 523 damage and 26 of your health has been restored.
-The Mana Steal Stone has absorbed 5% of the 523 damage and 26 of your mana has been restored.

“It really is crazy.”

Ark laughed as he saw the effects. This was the true power of Promised Sword. Every time he inflicted damage to the enemy then he would absorb health and mana.

‘Unfortunately it isn't as effective in a 1-on-1 fight.....’

In fact, the health and mana absorption would show the best effect when dealing with a large number of monsters. When fighting a lot of monsters, it was normal to deal a lot of damage. This meant he could absorb 5% of the health of all the monsters. If he attacked 10 monsters for a total of 10,000 damage, 5% of that meant he would absorb 500 health. Even if he recovered 500 health at the end of the battle, that just meant he didn't need to waste time recovering his health. In 1-on-1 PVP battles, the effect was cut in half even against a strong opponent like Bread.

‘Bread's level and health is quite high. His maximum health probably exceeds 10,000. It might be possible to recover 500 health by the end of this fight.’

Of course, in this fight 500 health would be lost with just one blow from either Ark or Bread. But an extra 500 health couldn't be ignored

when it could be the difference between life and death with a strong opponent. Yes, Ark was currently a little bit ahead because of the rare Hearthstones in the Promised Sword.

‘If this keeps up then I can win!’

Ark was sure of his victory. Of course, the prerequisites were necessary for Ark to win. In a wide open place, Ark was at disadvantage since his defense and offense were inferior. And preparations were needed to use some of his skills. Some warrior skills needed a certain amount of time or action to be used. Ark indiscriminately attacked without giving Bread time to use those skills. His attacks were to stop Bread’s offensive rather than to decrease the health. It wasn’t just the splash damage gnawing away at Bread’s health.

“Ugh, this bastard..... You’re stuck like a leech.....”

Bread had noticed Ark’s strategy. No matter how much he wanted to maintain a distance, Ark clung to Bread to prevent his attacks. Then he used the 33% chance of explosive damage to shave away at Bread’s health. Of course, it wasn’t that easy to maintain that state. Bread had a few skills that were difficult to prevent. Just one hit would cause 500~600 damage. The health which Ark took 3~4 minutes to shave away using splash damage was caught up with just one blow. Was it like a war between a needle and an axe? So that situation continued for 30 minutes while Ark and Bread’s health remained close to each other. Ark had 55% health left while Bread had 48%! If he concentrated and maintained this state then it was possible to win against Bread. It was at that time. Bread who had been unable to break through Ark’s shower of attacks suddenly jumped forward.

‘Heh, he realized he can’t win so he is running away. That makes me feel more comfortable.’

Ark swung his sword and laughed as it impacted with Bread’s greatsword. Then Bread lost his centre of balance and stumbled. What could he do in this desperate situation? Bread made a huge mistake considering his skills. It was a chance to win!

“Victory after all that patience!”

Ark's feet shot up like the wind. His kick shot out at an incredible speed. A flying kick! If this kick hit then there was a high possibility of causing a rigid state. It would only last for 1~2 seconds but that was a decisive difference in PVP with high level users. Ark would put an end to the duel with this attack. However Ark had a hunch that something was wrong the moment he started the kick.

‘How.....?’

It was an attack that couldn't be avoided judging by the timing. Moreover, Ark had never used kicks against Bread so far. It was an attack with unexpected timing and method! However, Bread seemed to know what attack was coming and the timing as he avoided it. At the same time, a light smile appeared on Bread's face.

“Victory after all that patience?”

“.....!”

“This is thanks to my preparations! Earth storm!”

Bread swung his greatsword like a golf swing. At the same time there was a massive storm which swirled around Ark's body.

“Now shall I pay you back? Knife Blade Storm!”

Bread's greatsword split into dozens of copies and floated in the air around Ark. It was the devastating combo of Earth storm and Knife Blade Storm which flew him into the air! Ark's health drained out after he was hit by them. Just before he fell to the ground, Bread used the spirit of the Bull again and used Dash. Ark flew many metres and bumped into several obstacles before finally hitting the ground. 30% of Ark's health was lost in an instant. But the situation just puzzled him further. How on earth did Bread perfectly know the timing of Ark's kick?

“Ugh, h-how on earth.....?”

Bread laughed and murmured after he saw Ark's confusion.

“I told you. I made preparations to win. What do you think I did

during the last 10 days?”

“What?”

‘What he was doing during the last 10 days? What does that have to do with this situation.....? ?’

Ark’s forehead suddenly wrinkled.

‘T-that damn bastard Buksil.....!’

Ark now understood the situation. Bread was able to perfectly calculate the timing of Ark’s kicks because of Buksil. Bread and Buksil had been waiting together for Ark for 10 days. Clearly Bread had watched Buksil’s memory crystals. All of Ark’s combat scenes were recorded on the memory crystals! Yes, during the last ten days Bread had been learning Ark’s attacks, kicks, habits and skills from the memory crystals. However, the Promised Sword was an unexpected item. The reason it was so one-sided in the beginning was because Ark had never used the Promised Sword before so no countermeasures were taken against it. The moment Ark had used his habit of a kick combo, Bread managed to deal him a decisive counterattack. Ark paled as he belatedly realized the situation. Thanks to one moment of carelessness, he had instantly lost 30% health. Now Ark had 25% health left while Bread had 48%! The distance was now huge. Previously Bread had engaged in close combat but now he would stay at a medium range. No, with his health like this then there was no chance even in close combat.

“I’m screwed. Victory or defeat was decided with one combo!”

Ark intuitively sensed his defeat.

‘Is it going to end like this?’

In fact, there was no reason to really worry about victory or defeat in this fight. He wouldn’t receive any experience, items or skill proficiency from it. Anyway, he had just accepted this duel to make Bread give up chasing him.

‘I’d rather not have a user like Bread chasing me.’

But he couldn't accept his defeat so easily after accepting the duel. It would hurt his pride.

'However there is already a 4000 health difference.'

Ark felt hopeless as he checked the information window. He had roughly 1,700 health left. If Bread had 10,000 health like Ark guessed, then he should have approximately 5000 health left. If Bread stayed at a medium range and fired his skills then the odds weren't in Ark's favour.

'If only there is a way to reverse the situation.....'

There was the Area Declaration skill of the Dark Soul called Glory of the Night which could increase his attack and stats by 50%! If he used Glory of the Night then the fight might become balanced. However, Bread already knew the way to stop the Area Declaration skill. It was by making Bread's Area Declaration skill overlap to cancel it. Area Declaration was a skill which couldn't be used between two users with a 2nd stage profession.

'.....Is there another way?'

Ark had completely lost his will to fight. Suddenly a brilliant idea came to his head.

'Wait? The Area Declaration skill invalidates each other. Can't I take advantage of this weakness? That's right, wasn't there that unexpected skill? If I use it.....That's it! There is a chance if I use that skill! The problem is using it..... Anyway, I don't have a choice. If I don't try it then I'll die.'

"What is it? You're already giving up?"

At that time Bread muttered as he approached. Ark took out the Fire Stone from his bag and threw it. A column of flame appeared causing Bread to flinch and retreat. Meanwhile Ark escaped using Sprint.

"Ugh, what? Are you running away?"

"You idiot. It is a strategic retreat!"

“I won’t let you retreat. Beast Spirit Possession, spirit of the cheetah!”

Bread used the cheetah spirit to chase after him. But just before he caught up with Ark, something wound around his leg.

“Ugh, what is this?”

“Huhuhu, this Nadingka’s Fruit is the specialty of Seutandal!”

The Nadingka’s Fruit reduces movement speed by 50% for 1 minute! Ark gained some time and blindly used his skills. The skill Ark used at that moment was Entrusted Volumes. When he used Entrusted Volumes, the slot machine appeared.

-You have used the power of Entrusted Volumes. Results: [Properties] <Brave Skills> [Alignment] <Warrior> {Environment} <Mountain> The selected effect is ‘Slightly Brave Warrior.’ <For 3 minutes attack power will increase by +5%>

It was an amazing effect for Entrusted Volumes. But Ark just frowned and shouted!

“No, not this one!”

“Take this!”

Then Bread caught up and swung his greatsword. Ark used Nadingka’s Fruit on Bread and once again ran away. This time he hid behind a rock and waited for Entrusted Volumes to end before using it again. However, this skill couldn’t be used for an unlimited amount of time. It consumed 500 health each time he used it.

‘I’ve already failed twice so I only have 700 health left. But if I use the Power of Resurrection from the Mantle with a Strange Power than I have 1700 left. I can use the power of Entrusted Volumes three more times!’

Ark was about to recover his health using Power of Resurrection

when he hesitated.

‘Wait? The effect of Entrusted Volumes is not completely random. The effect that appeared depended on the situation. The last time the effect appeared was when my health was less than 10%. Then?’

After considering it again, Ark used Entrusted Volumes when he only had 700 health left. After praying desperately, the information window he wanted to see appeared.

-You have used the power of Entrusted Volumes.			
Results:	[Properties]	<Pretence>	[Alignment]
<Swindler>	[Environment]	<Rock Forest>	
The effect chosen is that of a swindler.			
<The ‘Swindler’ effect is applied to all skills for 3 minutes>			

“T-that’s it. It came. My guess was correct. The effect of Entrusted Volumes is not completely random.

If I grasp the situation in advance then there is a 50% chance the effect I select will appear!”

Ark discovered a new fact about Entrusted Volumes. But he didn’t have time to study it now. At that moment he heard Bread’s voice from behind him.

“Bastard, disappointing me this way.....!”

Bread had become angry because Ark kept on running away. Then Ark turned his body and shouted.

“Area Declaration. Glory of the Night!”

“What? You used Area Declaration? You fool, haven’t I already told you that it is ineffective against me? Area Declaration, Land of the Beast!”

Bread’s Area Declaration spread over the same area as Ark’s Glory of the Night. Normally the two territories would collide and disappear. But strangely this time the two territories overlapped and

remained?

“Eh? What’s going on?”

Bread seemed bewildered but a look of glee spread over Ark’s face.

“That’s it, Bread successfully used Land of the Beast!”

But that was only 50% of his plan. The important part was from now on. Ark used Nadingka’s Fruit to run from Bread before calling to Racard.

‘Racard, use satellite surveillance mode to find a hollow place that can’t be easily escaped!’

‘What? What are you saying out of nowhere?’

‘Just do it!’

In fact, both Redian and Ark’s summons couldn’t be used in this duel. But Bread didn’t know that Ark could use remote communication with his pet. While Racard couldn’t directly participate in the battle, he could still be used for reconnaissance. So Bread never suspected that Racard was helping with the duel.

“You idiot, why did you use Area Declaration?”

Bread yelled while searching for him. But Ark didn’t respond to the provocation.

‘Heh, you’ll soon see!’

Ark hid like a snake in the grass or behind rocks while using Nadingka’s Fruit. After a while. The ‘Swindler’s effect’ had disappeared when he heard Racard’s voice.

‘Master, I found it. If you climb up the hill on the opposite side then there is a pit underneath it. The depth is approximately 10 metres and the width 20 metres. Is that okay?’

‘Okay, that’s it!’

Ark immediately went up the hill Racard mentioned. Just like Racard described, there was a pretty deep pit at the bottom.

'I'll fight to win in this place!'

"I found you!"

Bread had discovered Ark and ran up the hill after him. Ark pretended to run away to escape and used his skill.

"Summon Ghost Knight Corps!"

When Ark used the skill, the space split open and the ghost soldiers appeared.

-Oberium Knights. Our saviour has called. Where is the enemy?

"The target is bread!"

Ark shouted and pointed to Bread. Then the leader of the ghost knights pointed to Bread and shouted.

-Over there, defeat the enemy threatening our saviour!

-For the glory of Oberium! Ohhhhhh!

The 30 ghost soldiers rushed like a storm towards Bread.

"Huh, what is this? Beast Spirit Possession, defense of the turtle!"

Bread swiftly used the shell of the turtle to defend against the ghost knights. As expected from a beginner level skill, the ghost knights hardly dealt any damage to the user over level 400. However, Ark's purpose wasn't to injure Bread but to drive him down into the pit. Then Bread was right on the edge!

"Jump!"

Ark charged towards Bread.

"Huk! What, what the? Kuak!"

Before Bread could use his greatsword, Ark grabbed his body and drove them both into the pit.

".....Do you intend for us to die together? Not a chance. Power of the Cat!"

Bread used the spirit of the cat to land inside the pit. Ark also avoided the fall damage as he landed on the ground. Bread couldn't understand the situation and just looked around the pit before snorting.

"You fool, this is what you came up with? Dropping me into a pit? But making me fall is meaningless. Anyway, it worked out well. Since you can't run away anymore. Now it is time to finish this. Just give up and die bravely!"

Bread ran forward with his greatsword.

"Area Declaration skill, Glory of the Night!"

When Ark used Glory of the Night, a black form appeared in front of him. It was the dark spirits! When the dark spirits appeared, the area surrounding him turned pitch black.

Kikikikiki.

The eyes of the dark spirit flashed and a black aura surrounded Ark. The black aura swirled around his body and sword like fog.

<p>-You have used the Area Declaration skill Glory of the Night.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* There is a 50% increase in attack power within a 100 metre area.* There is a 50% increase in defense within a 100 metre area.* There is a 20% increase in magic resistance within a 100 metre area.
--

Bread became startled.

"What.... The cool down time of Area Declaration is 24 hours....."

"I'm sorry but I haven't used the Area Declaration skill yet."

Ark replied with a wicked grin. That was the reason why Ark used Entrusted Volumes to try and get the 'Swindler' effect. The Swindler effect applied to all his skills. It meant..... When the effect was applied, it made it seem like the skill had been used. In other words, the skill seemed to be triggered. Yes, Ark just pretended to use

Glory of the Night. But Bread had actually used Land of the Beast. It was used up for the day. That was the reason why the Area Declaration skill didn't disappear when it seemed to overlap.

'And there is the second weakness of the Area Declaration skill!'

It was no use if the enemy escaped outside the territory. That was why Ark grabbed Bread and threw him into the pit. The width of the pit was 20 metres. The range of Glory of the Night was 100 metres so there was no way to escape it!

"What on earth is going on?"

Bread didn't know this so of course he was puzzled. But he just lifted his greatsword and clenched his teeth together.

"I don't know what your plan is but Area Declaration does not make you invincible. It just raises your stats a bit. But I have 4000 more health than you! You can't withstand it even with Area Declaration!"

Currently Ark only had 200 health remaining because he used Entrusted Volumes. Meanwhile Bread still had approximately 5000 health left. Even with the strong buffs applied, the odds weren't in his favour. However, Ark was still composed.

"Is it really like that? Descent of the Fire Draconian!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, hwarrrrruk!

Ark then used a skill. The ground abruptly split open and a ball of fire rose up. The flame ascended dozens of metres before forming a scale of the Fire Draconians! It rose to a great height before falling like a lightning bolt towards Ark. His Area Declaration skill consumed 2000 mana and 400 Spiritual Power. Then the Divine Skill consumed an additional 1000 mana and 400 Spiritual Power. If he hadn't hunted the wendigoes and Soul Eater then he would've never been able to use the two skills at the same time! But the effects were absolute once triggered.

-You have used the Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!

The <Immortal Fire Draconian> effect will be applied for 10

minutes.

- * 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.
- * Attack speed, Movement speed and Reaction rate will increase by 50%.
- * All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.
- * Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.
- * When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

50% of his health was restored and various stats were increased. When the information window appeared, flames also wrapped around Ark's body. It was like an armour of fire and he could feel the sense of vitality welling up inside him. It really felt like a Divine Skill.

"W-what is that? Perhaps.....?"

Bread's mouth gaped open as he simultaneously received 1000 damage. Ark moved a finger covered in fire and laughed before explaining. Flames even emerged from his mouth every time he talked.

"Have you heard of Divine Skills?"

"D-divine skill!"

All the blood drained from Bread's face. Then he hurriedly turned around and jumped onto a nearby rock. A Divine skill had been activated in that territory. He wouldn't feel comfortable even with his health at 100%. Bread instantly judged that and used the power of the Cheetah to try to escape by jumping on the rocks.

"A wise choice but..... It's too late!"

Kwang!

The ground rumbled as Ark jumped 10 metres. Then he grabbed Bread's collar who had jumped too late and dragged him back down. The pit then shook as a flame pillar spouted him dozens of metres.

"Kuaaaak!"

When Bread hit the ground, he lost 1,200 health instantly. It was the extreme power of the Divine Skill!

"Now, take this. This is my strongest attack!"

Ark jumped up and brought his sword down vertically. The sword penetrated Bread's chest and swirled with flames.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

A flame tornado rose into the sky. It's shape.....was definitely a Fire Draconian. Then a message window rose among the flames.

-You have won the honour duel. <Fame +500>

"Kuahahaha!"

Powerful laughter rang out through the mountain. Redian looked at the charred and burnt Bread with scathing eyes.

"Why are you causing such an uproar when you were beaten?"

Redian seemed sour about the duel result. However, Bread just looked at Redian with eyes that indicated she couldn't understand.

"Women won't understand. Victory or defeat isn't important to a man."

"Are you an idiot? Naturally it is better to win."

"Ahh, it really doesn't matter. I'm satisfied now."

"What about me? My grudge?"

“Well, that isn’t possible anymore.”

Bread poked his finger into his ear and looked at the distant mountains. His attitude was like a husband pretending ignorance while his wife scolded him.

‘Yes it’s not possible.....’

Ark looked at Bread strangely. Honestly, he had been worried about Bread until now. It was a honour duel against Bread..... Even if he won, there was no guarantee that he would stop pursuing Ark. Bread wanted to win so much he studied Ark through the memory crystals for 10 days.....

‘He pursued his target for so many times so there is no guarantee he will be satisfied with this kind of result.’

Bread was level 410. Ark was anxious that Bread would continue to fight even after the Ark won the duel. Bread had chased him all the way to Hwaryong Mountain for a reason he didn’t know. But he was defeated in vain. He thought Bread would think up an excuse or Redian would interfere. But Bread really hadn’t been lying about the grudge being settled with the duel. The result was good despite the trivial issues.

‘It is hard to understand but it is fortunate.’

Ark felt relief in his chest at Bread’s response. Anyway, Ark was quite satisfied with their duel. However, he didn’t want to fight Bread again. It was doubtful that he would win if they fought again.

“Then what’s going to happen now?”

“Well, we won’t bother you anymore. Isn’t that right?”

Bread looked at Redian who replied in a sulky voice.

“Got it, I understand! I’m tired now.”

“Indeed.”

Bread smiled and said. Ark nodded before he suddenly remembered something.

“But I was wondering something. Why have you been chasing me? I don’t remember every seeing you guys.”

“Well, that is.....”

Bread blushed and scratched his head. Ark’s mouth dropped open at Bread’s ensuing description. Ark had thought there was so large grudge since they pursued him so persistently. But the actual reason was ridiculous. The tourists flocked to the dungeon that Bread and Redian were capturing when Seutandal rose. A tourist made a mistake and touched something so they were locked out of the dungeon. So they decided to get revenge on Ark who had caused Seutandal to rise?

“W-what is that? Aren’t I totally innocent?”

“I understand how you feel but..... Well, it is just a game. Hahahahaha! Well, it is just a game but the minor problem is solved so it doesn’t matter anymore.”

‘Isn’t that ridiculous?’

Ark’s throat swelled up at the thought. But like Bread said, the problem was now resolved amicably. Even if he felt irritated towards Bread and Redian, he held it inside him.

‘It is unfair but there is no point stressing about it.’

Then Ark noticed Buksil and Baekgu in a corner and glared at them. While all the problems were settled and he even received an extra 500 fame, he still had to deal with Buksil and Baekgu. Buksil had tried to swindle 800 gold from him when Baekgu was still alive. Ark was also going to make him pay for whining the whole way to Hwaryong Mountain. He even leaked the memory crystal which pressed Ark into a corner.....plus he drank alcohol. Death penalty confirmed!

Baekgu’s crime was guiding Bread and Redian to Hwaryong Mountain. And he called Ark a coward, making him unable to refuse Bread’s challenge.....plus he drank alcohol. Death penalty confirmed!

He wouldn’t go easy on Buksil anymore. When Baekgu supposedly

died, he had worried that Buksil would give up the game. However Baekgu had been returned. Now Ark didn't have to worry about Buksil quitting the game anymore. But he couldn't educate Buksil and Baekgu right now. After the duel ended, he knew that Baekgu had a huge influence on Bread. When casually talking to Bread, he mentioned the Wolrang clan and realized the reason why Bread had changed his mind about Ark. Anybody who liked dogs couldn't be a bad person. Thanks to that bias, he came to the conclusion that Ark was a good person.

'Isn't he a fool?'

Ark thought it was ridiculous but anyway, Bread was a person who loved dogs. How could he enforce the death penalty on Baekgu in front of Bread?

'It will have to wait until we separate from Bread.'

Ark thought about what he would do to the two of them after separating from Bread. The two pieces of cattle instinctively sensed Ark's thoughts and trembled in the corner. Then Bread clicked his tongue and murmured.

"By the way, it seems a little strange to separate now. There are a number of things I still want to talk to you about. Let's create some friendly ties for when we meet in the future. I'll treat you so let's go together. I'd like to talk about the duel again. There's a good city that is like my hometown not far from here."

"No, I....."

There were various reasons why Ark wanted to part from Bread quickly. Just as he was about to refuse, there was a sudden flash from the corner. It was Buksil who had been waiting in the corner for the death penalty. Buksil's eyes brightened and he ran to Bread before grasping his hand tightly.

"Yes, Hyung-nim. I also don't want to part from Hyung-nim! Naturally men should drink together after a cool fight. Ark-nim?"

'That bastard.....!'

Ark glared at Buksil through narrowed eyes. Thus Buksil's life was extended a little bit thanks to Bread and Redian. Ark couldn't refuse anymore thanks to Buksil. Come to think of it, it might be better to annoy Buksil and Baekgu for a bit.

'Huhuhuhuhu, stupid fools, you dug your own grave. Just wait.'

Ark inwardly smiled wickedly before nodding.

"I understand. Let's have a drink in the village."

"Good. We communicate well. Hahahaha, let's go!"

Bread laughed powerfully and led the way.

Finding the Lost Dream of a Jackpot!

“Seeking a party!”

“Only available at night, vacancies available for ‘Chamber of Horrors!’”

“Looking for priest and warrior to capture the Slaughter Gardens!”

“Looking for a fellow buddy to hunt continuously for 24 hours on the weekend!”

“Receiving applications for an attack group to raid Necromancer’s Tower. Profit distribution is thorough. Users should be at least level 270, have 30 potions and at least 3 rare equipment.”

Users were gathered like a swarm of cockroaches. The city Bread guided them to was 3~4 hours away from Hwaryong Mountain and called Paradon. Ark’s mouth widened at the sight of users gathered in front of the gate and Bread explained.

“This city is the closest one to King’s Grave.”

“King’s Grave?”

“Eh? You don’t know? It is a very famous hunting ground.”

The King’s Grave were ancient ruins not far from Hwaryong Mountain. It was a quite widespread area and a suitable hunting ground for users level 200~300. So users always formed a party at Paradon and headed to the King’s Grave after equipment inspection. The party always returned with a lot of profit so the place swarmed with users.

“Once I was almost living in that place.”

Bread looked around with a nostalgic expression.

“Ah, Bread hyung-nim!”

“Redian noonim is also here!”

Hundreds of eyes concentrated on the pair after someone spoke. Then Ark and Bread’s group were swarmed by the cockroaches.

“It has been a really long time!”

“Hyung-nim, do you remember me? The magician who previously hunted with you.”

“I managed to beat ‘Naked Fist’ thanks to Hyung-nim. We managed to clear the area because you were our party leader.”

Are you forming a raid party? I’ll come whenever you call.”

The users started talking from all directions that it reached a point where he couldn’t understand anything. In fact, Bread was a legendary user in Paradon. The first time he was the leader of a party and entered King’s Grave, he managed to defeat the boss ‘who scattered despair’ after a fierce battle! He also set the record for clearing all the areas in King’s Grave solo in the shortest amount of time. And Redian also had a similar amount of popularity. Bread and Redian were the strongest pair in Bristania. When he heard this, he thought it was lucky that he didn’t receive more damage.

‘I was chased after by those two.....it’s fortunate that this is over.’

Then Buksil looked over and said.

“Wow, Hyung-nim is a very famous person.”

“Huhuhu. Well, it is normal. I’ve helped half of the people here.”

Bread hummed and gobbled up the attention before Redian interjected.

“Stop playing around. You were beaten to death by Ark just now.....”

“Beat to death? I was winning a few times.....”

Bread muttered with a dissatisfied expression.

“What? Bread hyung-nim was defeated in a duel?”

“What person managed to fight against Bread hyung-nim in a 1-on-1 fight and win?”

“Is that true?”

“Ah, that’s right. I lost. It is this guy.”

Bread indicated towards Ark and instantly hundreds of eyes concentrated on him. At the same time, Bread and Ark were flooded with a huge amount of questions.

“Is it that person Bread hyung-nim?”

“What level are you?”

“What equipment do you have? What profession?”

“Have you joined a guild yet? Why don’t you join our guild? You’ll get VIP treatment!”

Ark started feeling dizzy from the surge of questions. He had no idea how to respond to all the interest in him.

“Ya, why don’t you calm down? Everybody stop right now and disappear!”

At that moment, Redian frowned towards the crowd and shouted. Then both her hands caught fire as she glared at the users.

“Who dared pushed me? Don’t you know how uncomfortable I feel? If you don’t want to die than just go, yes?”

Redian threatened the users who retreated. Then Bread went forward and saved the users.

“Now, now! Stop. We have other business.”

‘Phew, I survived.’

Ark was amazed by Redian’s rough attitude but he managed to escape from the siege thanks to her. They left the players and entered Paradon where Bread sighed and muttered.

“Hey, can’t you control your temper?”

“Bah, what am I? Can’t I express it if I don’t feel good?”

The atmosphere around Redian and Bread was getting a bit temperamental.

“What’s not to like? Eh?Is it that time of the month?”

“Do you want to die?”

.....Redian said but her fist had already struck Bread’s jaw. Bread staggered before he suddenly smiled and spoke to Ark.

“Ah that reminds me, don’t you have a lot of things to put in order after hunting so much?”

“Eh? No....that.....”

What the hell? Why did the topic change so fast? Where was the reaction to being hit? He just got over it? However Bread just ignored Ark’s strange look and pointed to the clock tower.

“There are plenty of things for Redian and I to do in the town. We should split up and gather again at 5 o’clock. The place will be ‘Camel’s Oasis.’ If you ask anybody in the central square then they will tell you. The alcohol at Camel’s Oasis is really delicious. If you taste it once then you would want to live there. So see you later!”

Bread was turning around when Buksil shouted with shock.

“Huck, Hyung-nim! You’re just going?”

“Huh? What? I’ll see you soon.”

“T-that.....let me go with you!”

“Eh? Why?”

Bread asked in an expressionless tone.

“You have me japtem. Of course we have to go together to organize it. Isn’t that right?”

Ark stared at Buksil as he spoke. Bread was unable to sense the

subtle atmosphere and just laughed.

“I don’t understand exactly but you can’t come with me. I am going to spend some ‘adult time’ with Redian.”

“Do you want me to hit you again?”

“Huhuhu, relax..... Anyway, let’s meet at 5. At the Camel’s Oasis.”

Bread dragged Redian into an alley. After Bread and Redian disappeared, Buksil looked around with worried eyes. Then blood drained from his face as he saw Ark’s wickedly gleaming eyes.

“That.....that.....Ark-nim?”

“Huh? What?”

Ark murmured as his lips slowly curved upwards.

“Ah that reminds me, how was your week? But let’s not talk here. If you want to settle the problem between us then it should be when no one under the age of 18 is around. So let’s forget it for now. We’ll drink a cup of alcohol happily after finishing our business. Well, someday that problem will absolutely be settled. Come, let’s go!”

Ark just licked his lips and circled around Buksil and Baekgu. Ark had already devised a method to punish Buksil and Baekgu. It would relieve his stress instantly.

‘He intends to hide behind Bread? Let’s see how long he can hold up. I’ll make him tell me to kill him with his own mouth.’

In fact, Ark’s purpose was more than killing him. Ark had a contract to pay Buksil 800 gold for the memory crystal! At the time it was urgent but now the situation was resolved. And the reason Buksil needed the 800 gold had come back alive. There was no reason to give him 800 gold. But Buksil wouldn’t invalidate the contract obediently. Although he wouldn’t destroy it now, let’s see how long he can last. So Ark would create a horrifying atmosphere over Buksil and Baekgu that would make him want to get rid of the contract. Therefore Ark just stared at them before heading towards the shops. If the one sleeping stretched his foot than the one he hit

wouldn't be able to sleep. He intended to make it so that Buksil couldn't sleep at all. Buksil and Baekgu jumped every time Ark looked at them so they were haggard by the time Ark entered the store.

'Huhuhu, this is kind of fun?'

Ark's newly developed method of torture had another effect.

"Hmm that's quite a lot, so how about 180 gold?"

The shop keeper looked at the pile of japtem and made an offer. It had been a fortnight since Bosaga so he had a large pile of japtem from hunting. Of course, he excluded all the magic items or items with vague descriptions from the japtem. The goods sold to stores were only japtem. 180 gold was a decent price for a fortnight's worth of collecting. But Buksil shook his head and said.

"What do you mean? Take a look at this! It should be 30 silver for one piece of this. And this too. Do you think this is our first trip? In addition, there is supposed to be an advantage when trading with goods of this magnitude. 185 gold!"

"Hah, but there is a decline in the market price these days. If I buy it and the market slumps then what will I do?"

"That is the risk you take when operating a store. 184 gold!"

The merchant's 'Bargain' skill to convince NPCs would have different effects depending on the enthusiasm. But normally Buksil didn't care about the price received. No matter the price, his transaction skill would still increase. In addition, he wouldn't get a penny of it even if the 'Bargain' skill raised the price offer. However this time his eyes were filled with a desire to get even 1 more silver and he rampaged using 'Bargain.' Before that 'destined' time came, he wanted to get into Ark's good books a bit more.

'Hah, this is.....'

The shop keeper made an awkward expression as Buksil continuously used Bargain. Ark left the bargaining to Buksil and started looking at the shelves.

“Ah, do you like this doll perhaps?”

“Huh?”

“Then let’s do this. 180 gold and I’ll include that doll.”

The shop keeper said when he saw Ark looking at the doll on the shelf. It was a doll shaped like a rabbit.

-Poco Poco Doll (General)

A deluxe doll which resembles the famous Poco Poco of the northern mountains. The texture of the Poco Poco feels very wonderful. In addition, there is a magic equipment inside which will allow the Poco Poco to make sounds and move. It also contains a crystal to record your voice. It is best given as a gift.

<Price: 3 gold>

“Hmm.....”

Ark scratched his head for a moment before nodding.

“Okay. I accept.”

“Okay, it is a deal.”

So Ark received the Poco Poco doll and exited the store.

‘It went well. My heart was feeling slightly uncomfortable.....’

In fact, the reason Ark wanted the doll was for Roco. Ark had discovered that it was Roco’s birthday the other day. Although he gave her a salary for looking after Ark’s Comprehensive Store, he still hadn’t given her a birthday present. He had been worried for a while but he finally found a suitable doll.

‘I got it as a bonus but it is still like I bought it.’

“Do you like dolls? Hehehe.”

After exiting the store, Buksil twisted both hands and approached. It was said in a condescending tone. But Ark didn’t pay him any

attention and just put it in his bag.

“Now, the next thing to handle.....”

It was the Skin of a Greater Demon he obtained from the Soul Eater. It was a rare material obtained from a boss monster.

“Hmm, this is the first time I’ve seen this type of item. Some type of magic seems to dwell inside it.....I’ll have to ask the profession artisans more about it. Well it seems like a rare item so I can give you 20 gold for one piece.”

That was the shop keeper’s reaction when he had shown it to him. 20 gold per piece. 5 pieces was 100 gold. It wasn’t a bad price for a material item. However Ark rejected the deal. The shop keeper wasn’t an expert in this type of item. In such cases, the prices often wouldn’t be fair. In other words, if he visited an NPC with more specialized knowledge then he could receive a higher price.

‘But it is a rare item but it might not be easy to find a specific NPC for it.’

Even if he searched several cities for the NPC, it might not be possible if it was a unique item. It was a waste of time to sell the material item to the NPC.

‘There is only one way left.....’

The method was selling directly to the user. It was an obvious statement but in New World, the trading price with an NPC was just a reference. Depending on how many users needed the item, the price could vary infinitely. A typical example was an item called ‘Black Crystal.’ When selling the Black Crystal to NPCs, they would only give 10 silver. But the need for Black Crystals among alchemists increased so these days it would go for 1 gold if traded between players.

‘So selling unusual or rare materials to NPCs is detrimental.’

First he should collect information about the market price of Skin of a Greater Demon among users. And the quickest way to check that was through the auction room. The auction room was a place where

unique japtem and items could be sold and the market price determined. Therefore Ark also dropped by the auction house whenever he visited a city. And users headed towards King's Grave often visited the auction house in Paradon.

"Isn't this huge?"

The auction house in Paradon was a huge 5 storey building. There were so many items from King's Grave sold that the auction house had grown. The five floors of the auction house were split up by the type of items sold. Ark entered the auction house and asked the manager NPC.

"Where is the place to deal with special ingredients?"

"Go to the D section on the 4th floor."

"Thank you very much."

"Good luck shopping."

Ark went up to the 4th floor and looked at the showcases.

"Let's see..... Skin of a Greater Demon. Skin of a Greater Demon....."

Moon Dust, Cro-Magnon's Eyeballs, Brilliantly Coloured Claw of the Murania. Strange and special ingredients were scattered everywhere in the showcases. The area had relatively high level users gathered so the items stood out. The best ingredients cost several hundred gold. There were even some cases where one ore cost dozens of gold. Some ingredients which were required to create rare and unique ingredients also traded for a high price. And materials not available at stores would sell for three or four times more at the auction.

"Here. I'm glad someone else put it up for auction. Heok!"

Ark's eyes widened as he looked at the flyer of information placed on the showcase.

-Skin of a Greater Demon

* Registrant: Invincible Sword King

* Present Selling Price: 108 gold

* Instant Purchase Price: 120 gold.

<Registrant's Explanation of Goods: Rare material for creating armour in the 'Dark Soul' series. Please buy>

'What, what the? 120 gold for one piece?'

Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped. That was 100 gold more than the price the shop keeper offered. But the price was unmistakeable once he saw the item explanation. He had seen the rare 'robe of a Dark Soul' and 'shoes of a Dark Soul' in the auction room. It currently cost 800~900 gold because it was a popular piece of equipment among magicians which had an option to increase casting speed.

'If I sell the Skin of the Greater Demon' than I can get at less 600 gold!'

That was equal to the price of a rare equipment.

'But I don't have to put it down for auction right now.'

Ark was satisfied after checking the price. If he sold it at the auction house then he would have to pay the 2% handling fee. 2% of 600 gold was 12 gold, which wasn't a small amount of money. Then it was better to find someone who needed Skin of a Greater Demon and trade it directly to them. Even if he gave a 5 gold discount, it was still a profit of 7 gold. Bristania had a lot of magicians so they would require that equipment.

'It won't be too late even if I go to a different place.'

Ark smiled with a pleased expression and turned around. He was looking for information on 'Fire Draconian Skull' when a familiar item caught his eye.

"Eh? What? Is that.....?"

Ark suddenly stopped and looked at the showcase with surprised

eyes. A black lump was placed in the showcase.

“Is that really.....?”

Ark hurriedly read the information notice below the item.

-Necromancer's Essence C rank

* Registrant: Area

* Present Selling Price: 10 Gold (No auction participants)

* Immediate Purchase Price: 15 Gold

<Registrant's Explanation of Goods: I don't know, I don't know.
More investigation needed>

‘N-Necromancer's Essence!’

Ark inwardly screamed. Necromancer's Essence! That's right. It was the core ingredient required for the Necromancer's Immortality Pill! However, the ingredient was placed on where side of the auction room gathering dust. And the instant purchase price was 15 gold! It wasn't just one. The showcase had at least 20 essences!

“Such a thing.....!”

Ark hurriedly called to a nearby NPC and asked.

“Excuse me.....can you tell me a little bit about this ingredient?”

Then the NPC replied with a slightly perplexed expression.

“Let's see? In fact we have almost no information about this stuff. Do you know the area King's Grave located to the north of Paradon?”

“I don't know that much about it.....”

“Ah, then I'll explain a bit. Actually, the King's Grave was said to be inhabited by an Undead King. Since the entrance was sealed, there was an explosive increase in undead until it was opened to foreigners. So these auction items are sometimes found from the

Necromancers infesting Necromancer's Tower in the area."

"But these prices.....?"

"Oh, are they slightly expensive?"

The guide laughed before speaking.

"The numbers which appeared are too little. The auction room currently has 20 of them but they actually don't appear that often. They've been registered for several days but it's not popular so it hasn't sold. At first various magicians and alchemists were interested and studied it but they haven't found a purpose for it yet. They expected something at first so it sold for 100 gold a piece but the price has gradually started to go down and now people just put it on the auction for 10 gold."

"These things have been registered for several days?"

Ark's mouth gaped open. Anyway, Ark was able to understand the general principles thanks to the guide's explanation. According to the guide, one Necromancer appeared on random floors of the Necromancer's Tower every few days. So it was a type of special monster. While the Necromancer's Essence was a rare item, it dropped quite a lot for users at the Necromancer's Tower. So the Necromancer's Essence sometimes appeared when the Necromancers were killed. Of course users would be interested in the rare item dropped by the Necromancer. But they didn't know the purpose of the essences. Yes, the essence was an essential item in Survival Cooking to create the immortality pills! Although Ark wasn't the only one who learnt Survival Cooking in New World, there weren't that many of them. It was impossible for people to know how to use the Necromancer's Essence. In fact, Ark only figured out how to use the essence by accident.

'Although it is C rank.....'

The Necromancer's Essences that appeared in auction room were only C rank. The Necromancer's Essence that Ark used as A rank. The same type of essences had different ranks depending on the level and abilities of the monster that dropped it. However, it was still

an essence even if it was C rank. Although it wasn't A rank, it would still give a special skill.

'Such an item is being sold for 10~15 gold?'

Ark's thoughts started furiously spinning in his head. There was a hunting ground infested with Necromancers! Furthermore, there were a lot of users in front of Paradon heading towards that place. In other words, the Necromancer's Essence would continue to appear. If users were unable to figure out the purpose than the price would continue to fall.

'Doesn't that mean I can continuously creating immortality pills?'

Even with a C rank immortality pill, the abilities would increase around the same amount as the Mongoose' Immortality Pill. However, the item permanently increased stats. Presently only expert alchemists could create 'Elixirs' like that. The Elixirs raised one type of stat by +10 but it cost 300 gold! Also, the elixirs could only be used 5 times per user.

'Based on the Mongoose's Immortality Pill, the C rank pill should increase stats by 15~20 points. It might also increase the resistance to certain attribute and stats depending on the percentage of completion. The Elixirs can't even be compared.'

Since there were a lot of magicians in Bristania, a lot of them would want to purchase it. Once created he could get a minimum of 800.....no, it will be possible to receive 1000 gold! The problem was the remaining ingredients needed.

'The Necromancer's Immortality Pill requires at least 4000 of the skin and heart of the dead to create one.'

But Ark was level 380 so he was already beyond the level 200~300 King's Grave. That meant Ark couldn't obtain the ingredients. He had no choice but to buy it. Even if the essence was cheap, if the remaining ingredients were expensive then it wouldn't fit in his calculations. But there was no need to worry about it.

'Ohhh. The skin and heart of the dead is only 10 silver?'

A lot of users from Paradon hunted the undead in King's Grave. Therefore ingredients dropped by the dead were overflowing. Since there was an oversupply of skin and heart of the dead, the price was low. Ark's heart became excited as he confirmed it.

'Let's calm down and make some calculations.'

Ark quickly visualized the calculator in his head. The skin and heart of the dead were 10 silver per piece. In order to make the immortality pill, he needed 4000 of them which was 400 gold. If he bought the Necromancer's Essence then the cost would be 410 gold.

'If the final goods are sold for 1000 gold.....?'

That was a profit of 590 gold for one!

'The problem is creating the Necromancer's Immortality Pill. A C rank will still take 2 days.'

But there was also no need to worry about that. The Easter Nation sold [Vision] scrolls! If he added the recipe for Necromancer's Essence to the [Vision] scroll than anyone could create it.

'Then I can create my Immortality Pill factory which I gave up on again!'

Previously Ark had a plan to distribute the 'Slime's Immortality Pill.' But the rehabilitation group only obtain 6 essences after labouring in the underground labyrinth for several months. In addition, the main ingredient the Unicorn Horn was too difficult to obtain so he abandoned that plan. Ark was forced to close the factory's doors. But this time the situation was different. Thanks to the users congregating in King's Grave, there was a reliable and cheap supply of ingredients.

'It is a bonanza. This is a huge profit! I can earn money without doing anything!'

Ark smiled and looked at Buksil.

'This method will be simple.'

“Buksil, from today on you will be the manager of the Paradon branch of Ark’s store!”

“Huh? Branch manager?”

Buksil blinked his eyes with confusion. Ark explained the business outline and added.

“For the time being, you will stay here and purchase the Necromancer’s Essence, the Skin of the Dead and the Heart of the Dead. But be careful when buying it. If users think it is popular than they might raise the price. Do you understand?”

In fact that was Ark’s only worry. The price was determined by supply and demand. If someone bought all of the ingredients in the auction room than the users would raise the price. If it went up by 1 silver then the price would continue to rise. The rising costs would soon cause a decrease in profit. Therefore the items had to be quietly bought. It was important not to be noticed. Ark didn’t intend to have his Necromancer’s Pill become a short term business. With the ingredients supplied at the low price, he would receive a jackpot if he sold it 1-on-1 with another user. With such a grand ambition, he had to pay attention to the stabilization of the ingredients cost. So he needed someone here to monitor the market closely and adjust the purchases according to need. Ark would leave that role to Buksil. Buksil’s face lightened after he heard the explanation.

“I-I’ll do it! Please leave it to me!”

Buksil was a merchant so he could also calculate quickly. He was convinced about the business. He could also get away from Ark’s threats if he became the Paradon branch manager. Of course, Ark had been irritated with Buksil. There was no reason to pay attention to such things when there was a windfall of money.

“One thing, if you stay then there will be a problem with the videos.....”

“You don’t have to worry about that!”

Buksil quickly interjected.

“Actually, when Ark-nim was on Hwaryong Mountain than my ‘Vampire’s Eye’ reached intermediate level. Even if I’m far away from Ark-nim, I can still record videos with that skill. Communication isn’t available yet but it’ll probably work once the skill reaches advanced level.”

“Ohhh, then there is no problem. Then you’ll sometimes get in contact?”

Ark’s new business plan was rapidly processed. For the moment Buksil was to collect the ingredients. After he purchased the required quantities and sent them to Ark, Ark would place the Necromancer’s Immortality Pill recipe on the [Vision] scroll! He would scrape in money. Buksil would also get 10% of the proceeds. If the profit for the immortality pill was 490 gold, 10% of that would be 49 gold. The only thing Ark had to do was place the recipe on the [Vision] scroll. Even if 10% of the profit was given to Buksil, it was worth it since the ingredients needed to be purchased.

‘When this works.....’

It would be a money cushion! It would be possible to earn several thousand gold from this. With that much profit, Buksil could also earn some gold.

‘Hehehe. Thank you. Chairman-nim, I will follow Ark-nim for the rest of my life.’

“Yes. Work hard. Paradon branch manager. Until the day everybody earns gold in Bristania.”

“I look forward to it. Baekgu, I’ll be able to feed you a meat dish every day.”

“Wah, really?”

While following Ark and Buksil, Baekgu could only eat kimchi soup. So the contract was signed and it was soon 5 o’clock.

“What? What happened to your expression?”

Bread asked as soon as they arrived at Camel’s Oasis. Ark and

Buksil's expressions were completely different from when they split up. Money made a person happy. It was a normal phenomenon. But the plan was top secret so Ark coughed and spoke with a straight face.

"What do you mean? Don't you also look completely different?"

Ark asked after seeing Redian. Before they separated, Redian's expression was 'cloudy with a slight typhoon warning' and now it was 'clear.' When she made a bright expression, Redian was quite a beautiful woman. Then Bread laid his hand on Redian's shoulder and smirked.

"I told you. We spent some adult time. Children won't understand such things."

".....Stop joking around."

Redian declared sharply but she didn't hit him like she did before. Instead she just grumbled a little bit.

'What did they do in the meantime.....?'

Ark stared at the both of them before shaking his head. Well, who cared? Ark's only concern was with his factory.

"Okay, so the alcohol here is good?"

"Ah, it is the best. Owner, alcohol and appetizers over here! "

Bread stared to order alcohol in a light voice. Ark, Buksil and Baekgu started drinking the alcohol. In a short time they all became drunk.

Diririri, diririri.

Then his phone ringtone could be heard in his ear.

"Oh, wait a minute."

Ark asked Bread for understanding and left his unit. Then he picked up the receiver.

"O-oppa." It's serious! It's a crisis! Lancel village is in a crisis!"

Roco's voice shook his ears.

Crisis of Lancel Village

“Is it here?”

Shambala looked at the village nestled at the foot of the mountain.

“Yes, this is it.”

No. 358 who was riding near a horse-drawn carriage nodded. Shambala had finally arrived at Lancel village after crossing the sea. The reason Shambala arrived at Lancel village was to bring the stolen goods they recovered from the pirates. Since Ark's tip from an anonymous source was the reason they swept up the lawless port, it was agreed that 20% of the goods would be sent to Ark's store in Lancel village. The Easter Nation swept up 50,000 gold from the pirates so 20% of it was 10,000 gold. It was so much that the carriage could barely carry it. If any thieves attacked and stole it then it would be a terrible loss. So Shambala protected the carriage while it was brought to Lancel village. But that wasn't the only reason why Shambala came to Lancel village.

“This place is Lancel village?”

“Is this the first time you've seen it?”

“No, I briefly saw it a while ago. But.....”

This wasn't the first time Shambala had seen Lancel village. When Seutandal rose a while ago, he had used the dimensional gate to transfer the Sacred Soil. There was no time to sightsee then but he had still entered the village. But now the village felt completely different from then.

“Isn't it quite a peculiar village?”

No. 358 laughed and replied.

“Peculiar? No, it's rather.....”

It was the epitome of an odd village. Either way, Lancel village was completely different from what Shambala remembered. It was a completely different scale from before. When Shambala first visited, it was a village surrounded by a wooden fence with barely 100 houses inside. But now the wooden fence had turned into a stone wall. The stone wall was properly built and arranged to a height of 1 metre. Along with the stone wall, the size of the village was 50% larger than before. Now it contained 200 houses. Not only was it a larger scale, it had also become stranger. Among the 200 buildings, none of them had an identical form. The shape and colour were all so different that it looked like a flower garden when seen from a faraway place. The buildings were linked like spider webs by overpasses and there was also a huge, hollow hole in the village. It was something that Shambala couldn't understand.

"What's with those overpasses and hole? Why are they in the village?"

"Oh, the overpass and hole?"

No. 358 looked at the places Shambala referred to and replied.

"The overpasses are made for the Meow. Do you see the Meow climbing up there to take a nap? The Meow really like high places."

"Then the hole?"

"The raccoon clan dug that. Since they find moving in buildings troublesome, they made an underground village. The raccoons feel more comfortable in the ground."

Lancel village also contained an embassy from Seutandal. Because of that, the political and commercial ties between Seutandal and Schudenberg ran through Lancel village. Since no. 358 had been helpful to Ark and Shambala, he had been appointed the interim manager of the embassy for the Eastern Nation. Thanks to that, he knew quite a bit about Lancel village.

"Then is that pillar somewhat significant?"

Shambala pointed towards a pillar in the centre of the village. Not only was the pillar strange, there were tents erected around it. When

asked about the pillar, no. 358 just laughed.

“Ah, that pillar is to indicate the territories.”

“What? Territory indication?”

“Yes, several beast clans have moved to Lancel village recently. So when the Wolrang arrived then they decided to use the pillar to indicate the different territories. At first, they tried to use the trees around the village but that didn’t work so the mayor built a pillar.”

Shambala muttered with an absurd expression at no. 358’s explanation.

“.....This truly is a village suited to that Ark guy.”

“The good part? Or bad?”

“Of course, the bad part. Where good part does Ark have?”

No. 358 winced and raised his finger to his lips.

“I’ll tell you in advance but please don’t slander Ark in front of the residents.”

“Huh? Why do I have to watch what I say?”

“All the residents here have received help from Ark-nim. If you speak badly about Ark then you’ll be in a bit of trouble, and do you know the branch manager of Ark’s store? You must absolutely say nothing in front of her!”

“Then this is that guy Ark’s home town? That explains the atmosphere in the past.”

Shambala remembered the Seutandal war. When Haman Fortress was on the brink of destruction from the Red Man’s strike, the Lancel residents had come through the dimensional gate to help. If they hadn’t helped then the Seutandal mission might’ve been a failure. Then the Eastern Nation wouldn’t have occupied a spot in Seutandal and they would still be drifting around. So Isabel and the Eastern Nation held a soft spot for Lancel. It was also the reason why the embassy was built in Lancel.

“Well, the development speed really is awesome compared to when I first saw the village. When I was first dispatched here, it looked like a normal village but now there are several different features which bring in significant revenue. Lancel’s specialities are also a good source of revenue for Seutandal.”

No. 358 spoke proudly about the village. One speciality he was talking about was the raccoons’ swords and equipment. The raccoons were gifted artisans so the quality of their produced items was already a speciality of Lancel. Lancel village was also at the food of the Argus Mountains which had abundant magic ingredients and the Wolrang and Meow were also major specialties. And 30% of Lancel’s specialities were consumed by Seutandal. Naturally Ark’s Store in the centre of the village monopolized most of the transactions.

“.....That Ark is only good at things like this.”

Shambala snorted with a sour look.

“Some of the residents here also used to be thieves. Aside from the Meow and raccoons, there are also some orphans from the Baran clan taken in after the Seutandal war. Ah, and there is the popular dance performances by the beautiful Meow shaman Jana that is famous throughout Schudenberg. Although the relationship between the Meow and Wolrang isn’t that great.....”

No. 358 continued talking about Lancel village.

‘Damn, it’s already irritating that I have to separate from Isabel for a few days but now this guy keeps chattering. The Letter Movement tower should be built more quickly.’

Shambala ignored no. 359 and looked at the construction site in the village centre. The building being constructed was the Letter Movement tower manufactured by the Magic Institute. The royal family of Schudenberg thought it was inconvenient that the embassy was at the foot of a mountain so they decided to construct it. However, there was still a lot of time until it was completed. Meanwhile the carriage had arrived at Lancel village. The guards were familiar with no. 358 so they greeted him and allowed

him to enter. There were so many people inside the village that it was difficult for the carriage to move around. The embassy was here and this was also the first place in Schudenberg where the specialties of Seutandal could be bought. While the various local specialties and merchandise of Ark's Store, it was now an essential stopping place for a lot of level 100 users. They soon entered a residential area where the sign for Ark's Comprehensive Store appeared.

"Hmm, this is Ark's store?"

"Yes. Isn't it amazing? It has only been created for 1 year but it is already one of the most famous shops around. There are so many items that it requires 2 warehouses to be rented."

"I've already heard that explanation."

No. 358 was also a part of Seutandal's tourism business. So no. 358 hadn't stopped talking until Shambala spoke sharply to him. Suddenly a pig like person ran up to him.

"Welcome. Sir?"

"Where is the store manager?"

Shambala was irritated by the talkative person so he spoke in a sharp voice. Then the pig stuttered and withdrew hesitantly.

"W-why are you looking for the store manager?"

"Why do I have to tell you anything?"

"H-have you come here to return something?"

"What? Return?"

"I-I'm right! Heok. P-please endure it! Have you come because of that sword? I might've made a little mistake while taking care of it..... Or is it a herbal medicine set I sold you? There is the risk that it will spoil if left too long....ah, no, that's not.....anyway please endure it and don't return the goods!"

"What, what the? This guy? I said let me see the branch manager!"

“Sob sob sob, please bear it for me. I might’ve made a mistake when selling the goods..... If the manager finds out then I’m dead, sob. Please forget it just this once. I am poor and have no money for a refund.”

The pig grabbed his pants and cried. Shambala looked at the scene with astounded eyes.

“Omo, Shambala oppa?”

Suddenly a voice was heard from behind him. He saw that it was Roco when he turned around. Roco had returned after receiving some harp lessons from the ghost. After the pig saw Roco, he wiped off his tears and asked.

“Sniff, store manager. You know this person?”

“Yes. He is Ark oppa’s friend. Please enter.”

“Sheesh, I cried for no reason.”

The pig pouted and went back into the store. Shambala stared blankly at the back of the pig’s head before saying.

“What on earth? He?”

“Oh, is this the first time Oppa saw it? He is a salesperson for our store.”

“Salesperson?”

“Yes, sometimes there are people who buy items and then use an excuse to try and refund them. That person is Ulmeok who has a specialty in crying. Whenever he cries than the customer won’t want to make a return anymore. Hohohoho!”

That’s right. This store had a 0% return or refund policy. It was the secret to Ark’s store which boasted 100% customer satisfaction. Well....Shambala really had nothing to say. That Ark.....Shambala sighed. Roco then saw the carriage and asked.

“Oh, these are the stolen goods recovered from the pirate’s hideout?”

“You heard?”

“I went to Oppa’s house a few days ago and he told me to expect it with Shambala oppa.”

“Well I don’t really mind the scale of the items. If it hadn’t been for Ark then wouldn’t we have lost those guys in the middle of the pursuit? If the pirates aren’t caught than things will become difficult for Isabel.”

Roco laughed at Shambala’s words. Then Shambala frowned and asked.

“.....Why are you looking like that?”

“Hohoho, it is still hot. Isabel, Isabel, does Oppa still have that single-minded devotion?”

Roco nudged his side, causing Shambala to cough and avoid her gaze. However, the pieces of skin revealed through the mask had reddened. Shambala coughed before speaking again.

“Actually, I also have some business with you.”

“Huh? Me? What is it? Love advice?”

“Don’t joke around. I heard you are raising a unicorn?”

“I am raising it.....but why are you asking about the unicorn?”

“There is a new seal on my dagger so I haven’t been able to use it yet. I need some magic ingredients to unseal it and the ‘Unicorn’s Mane’ is one of them. But I haven’t been able to find a unicorn.”

That’s right. It was the reason why he left his beloved Isabel to come to Lancel. A while ago, Shambala had gathered all three treasures to change to his 2nd profession. It was the ‘Dark Veil’, ‘Blood Armour’ and the ‘Thousand Human Blood’ dagger. Among them, the Thousand Human Blood dagger had a strong seal on it. And special magic ingredients were needed for the ceremony to unseal it. One of them was the ‘Unicorn’s Mane’. He had found all the other magic ingredients so he came running when JusticeMan told him Roco was raising a unicorn. He explained to the surprised Roco.

“Unicorn’s Mane? Do you need all of the mane?”

“No, a handful will be enough.”

“Well, if it is that much.....”

Rocco blew a sigh of relief and nodded. In fact, the unicorn was quite sensitive these days. It was expected. Twice the unicorn experienced having its horns severed thanks to Ark. Fortunately it had grown halfway back but the unicorn still had some trauma from the memories. If someone even sent it a little suspicious look than it would instantly run away.

‘I feel a bit sorry for Unicorn but he is Ark oppa’s friend and he only wants a little bit. Hohoho!’

“Just hold on a minute. I’ll call Unicorn and check.”

Roco smiled and answered. Shambala looked at the stolen goods loaded on the carriage and murmured aloud.

“But that guy Ark is really never tired. He provided a tip about how to get the stolen goods and he even managed to get a commission for it. He got a profit without even doing anything. Damn guy, at this rate.....”

That’s right. It was indeed Shambala! But Shambala had forgotten about no. 358’s warning. Never talk badly about Ark in Lancel village. Particularly in front of the manager of Ark’s store! Shambala was muttering to himself until he looked at Roco with a puzzled expression.

“Eh? Why? You’re not calling the unicorn?”

Roco twitched and spoke with a strange expression.

“I was too short-sighted.”

“.....?”

“The unicorn is indeed my pet. Although it will heal, I just can’t strip it of its mane. There should be a price for it.”

“A price?”

“Yes. I mean.....um.....ah. The carriage will block business to the store so Shambala oppa, please help Ulmeok transfer it to the warehouse. And you should also arrange the warehouse while you’re there. I’m so busy these days that I haven’t had time to arrange the warehouse. I will think about giving you the Unicorn’s Mane after that.”

“So you want me to bring these goods to the warehouse and then arrange it?”

“If you don’t want to then that’s too bad.”

Roco exploded and turned around. Shambala couldn’t understand why Roco’s attitude had suddenly turned so cold. However no. 358 who was sitting in the carriage sighed as he noticed the reason.

“Deliverer-nim....he can only get along well with Isabel-nim.....”

Shambala stared at Roco before muttering.

“The way you’re handling that pig and your attitude gradually resembles Ark.”

“Omo, thank you.”

Roco laughed loudly with pleasure. Thus.....Shambala was forced to labour for Roco. Suddenly there was an uproar above him as the Meow jumped through the overpass and shouted.

“Damn, it happened again!”

“Those bastards, where on earth are they hiding?”

“Those mice, when I caught them I’ll tear them to pieces!”

Then Roco ran to the Meow with a surprised expression and asked.

“What’s wrong? Perhaps.....?”

“Eh Roco, ah, yes. 3 of the Meow encountered them this time!”

‘The Meow encountered?’

Shambala sensed that a serious problem was occurring and looked

at no. 359 but he just shook his head. Shambala jumped off the carriage and approached Roco.

“What’s going on?”

“That.....”

Roco hesitated for a while before explaining. In fact, an incident had occurred in Lancel village a few days ago. While the ex-thieves were patrolling, the Meow and Wolrang who had been looking for magic ingredients were killed. Initially it was just one or two people, but it had occurred more frequently until three or four people were killed at once in a matter of days. The mayor Galen had covered up the incident for the moment. If the visitors and residents found out then the lively village would become confused and worried. So the guards had been secretly investigating the incident. But they still hadn’t managed to find the killers.

“They don’t seem like simple thieves.....”

Roco murmured with a stiff expression. Several members of the beast clans and the guards had been killed around the village. Normally NPC thieves wouldn’t go so close to a village. But it was also difficult to think that the attackers were users. The reason why users normally PKed was to get money and goods. However, the residents of Lancel village killed were NPCs. NPCs had an incredibly low probability of dropping items. In addition, the guards only wore basic equipment and the Meow didn’t have any. The increase in chaotic value when killing an NPC was also much higher compared to killing a user. In other words, there was no profit in killing NPCs.

“Should I check it out?”

Shambala asked after thinking for a while.

“Huh? Shambala oppa?”

“It is better than me moving the baggage. I am a professional.”

“Ah, that’s right. Shambala oppa is a brutal assassin so you would also understand assassins!”

“Do you have to say it that way? Anyway, will you give it to me if I resolve this?”

“The Unicorn’s Mane? I understand. Since Lancel village isn’t profitable when everybody feels uneasy.”

“Okay, no 358. The warehouse arrangement is up to you!”

“Huh? Huh? Huh?”

Shambala forced the work onto no. 358 and left the village. There were two reasons why Shambala offered to do this task. The first reason was that he preferred fighting unknown enemies to carrying goods. And the second reason was because he guessed where they could be hiding.

‘I have to find them quickly and return to Seutandal.’

Shambala used the skill he learned after changing professions and searched around the village. Shambala didn’t encounter them often but he knew about the beast clans’ abilities. Just like their name, the NPCs had several animal like abilities. While the raccoons could dig tunnels, the Meow and Wolrang had a keen sense of smell. If the members of the beast clans couldn’t find the scent after several days then they must’ve been using skills to hide their trail.

‘But they are hiding near the village. Hiding in a remote place and then coming to the village to kill is a lot more dangerous. If that appears then the residents might notice them. And they could hide and watch for when the guards mobilized.’

If they wanted to monitor the village and hide from the beast clans’ keen sense of smell then there was only one place.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Shambala reached a waterfall that wasn’t that far from Lancel village. The reason the beast clans couldn’t find them was because they moved through the water. So the only hiding place possible was the waterfall.

‘Huhuhu, indeed.....!’

As expected, he found a small cave where he searched around the waterfall.

'If they only killed three or four NPCs at one time then there should just be 10 of them. But I can't be sure so I should take a look at the situation.'

Shambala used Stealth and entered the cave. The entrance was small but inside it was quite deep and wide. After he walked around 10 metres, he suddenly heard people talking.

"Kukuku, the village should be in an uproar by now."

"No, not necessarily."

"The guy who infiltrated the village said that the guards are keeping it quiet. But the atmosphere is gradually becoming worse."

'Users? They're not NPC thieves?'

Shambala hid himself near the entrance and surveyed the interior. In the spacious area, 8 men were sitting around. When he used Penetration on them, he confirmed that their names were deeply red-black. In order to become so chaotic, they must've been the users who killed the inhabitants of Lancel village.

'Why on earth are they killing the residents of Lance village?'

At that moment one chaotic user sighed and murmured.

"Hey, aren't we somewhat stupid?"

"What?"

"Deliberately raising our chaotic level just to learn the death skill. If we're caught then we'll be in prison for at least two months."

"That is true. But we're doing it because of the guild."

'Death skill? Guild?'

Usually when Penetration was activated, the name of the user and the guild would be shown together. However no guild names appeared on the chaotic users. They must've temporarily withdrew

from the guild to commit the murders. But the reason they were killing NPCs was to learn the death skill? What did that mean? Then they started to talk again.

“There’s no need to worry. We’re not the only suicide group. If all the people selected to be a part of the suicide group by our guild participates then we’ll stack up the chaotic value. The guild has also promised to support us if this strategy works.”

‘Suicide group? Wait.....then these guys.....!’

Shambala had experienced the strange skill they were talking about before.

‘Self-destruct.’ It was literally a skill which exploded the character to deal enormous damage. But Self-destruct wasn’t a skill that could be learnt using normal methods. The only way to learn Self-destruct was to build up the chaotic value until it reached a certain amount and then visit a NPC in a secret society to learn it.

‘That’s right. This is the reason why they killed the residents. Killing NPCs instead of users will increase the chaotic value faster. But why are they going so far just to learn Self-destruct? And this is the strategy of a guild.....’

However, the chaotic users had stopped talking.

‘Anyway, I can’t just let them keep killing residents.’

Shambala left the cave and went back to the village. He then informed Mayor Galen about the meeting. The beast clan members instantly ran wild in the street. However Shambala shook his head.

“Those guys will just rise again 24 hours after you kill them and repeat the same actions. The only way to prevent it is to have the guards kill them. Lancel village is a part of Jackson. If the guards kill the chaotic users then they’ll automatically be locked in the jail at Jackson. Since they’ve killed many residents, they’ll be locked in the jail for at least two months. And they’re chaotic values will return to normal so they can’t acquire the Self-destruct skill anymore.”

‘It is better to not strike their hiding place directly.’

After that Shambala used Stealth to watch the cave. When they appeared to hunt the next day, the NPC guards surrounded them in an ambush.

“Now, surround and exterminate them!”

“These bastards, I’ll repay my colleagues’ grudges!”

The guards swung their swords and rushed to attack.

“Heok! How did the guards.....?”

The chaotic users were level 250. However, the 8 of them couldn’t deal with the 30 guards surrounding them. Apart from Shambala, the Meow and Wolrang also attacked to get their revenge. Of course they allowed the guards to deal the final blow in order to lock them in jail.

“You’re dead!”

“Grrrrr, take this!”

“Go, clear my family’s grudge!”

At Shambala’s command, the beast clans beat them up before allowing the guards to kill them. Thus it took only 5 minutes to wipe the chaotic users out. Now they would rot in a prison cell in Jackson. But Shambala still felt uncomfortable.

‘Those guys are dealt with. But I haven’t figured out the reason why the guild wants to learn the Self-destruct skill. It might be needless worry, but if it is somehow related to Lancel village.....’

Lancel village was also important to Seutandal. If a serious problem occurred in Lancel village then the effects would even cross into Seutandal.

‘There are still a few days left before I need to return to Seutandal. Then I can return when the Letter Movement tower is finished. Yes. I’ll stay here and watch the situation a bit more.’

Shambala sensed something sinister so he stayed in Lancel and checked the area. He would sometimes visit the waterfall cave while

hunting. Since the chaotic players used the cave as their hideout, Shambala expected their colleagues to visit there. After a couple of days, Shambala's ominous prediction turned into reality. No, the reality exceeded Shambala's worries.

"Those morons, they were caught and locked in jail! Luckily the other squads in the area were successful and managed to achieve a sufficient number."

There were as many as 300 users gathered in the waterfall cave. They all had high chaotic numbers from killing NPCs in villages near Lancel. Judging by the situation, they had already learnt Self-destruct. The fact that they were gathered here meant Lancel village was their goal!

'And those guys.....!'

Shambala stared at the man standing in front.

Shambala didn't need to use Penetration to know their name and guild.

'Jewel....then the ones behind this.....'

The Hermes alliance!

"As you know already, we lost the lawless port so we are in a crisis. The guild is in such a state thanks to Ark. Lancel village is just like his home base. The Hermes alliance will annihilate Lancel village. Our main goals are Ark's store and the Letter Movement tower."

Jewel eloquently spoke towards the other guild members.

"But our mission doesn't end with Lancel village. Our final goal is to recapture Seutandal. We are the hidden forces of the Hermes alliance selflessly devoting ourselves to recapturing Seutandal. Therefore the Hermes alliance has spent enormous time and money to support us in our efforts to recapture Seutandal!"

"Ohhhhhh!"

The alliance members lifted their swords and shouted.

“I’ve received word from Duke and the troops he is leading. Their estimated time of arrival is 3 days. Once the support troops arrive, we will commence the operation to annihilate Lancel village.”

Shambala realized the situation was even worse than he expected.

‘That Ark, he allowed the Hermes alliance to find out about Lancel village? Ah, that’s right. The dimensional gate..... Anyway, those Hermes guys have made up their minds and aimed at Lancel so it is serious. Furthermore, their end goal is Seutanda! But the troops in Lancel don’t have any hope of stopping those guys. I need to contact Ark immediately to prepare countermeasures.’

Shambala realized the urgency of the situation. He instantly used Stealth to leave the cave. The news was then conveyed to Ark through Roco. And after two days.....

“Those Hermes alliance bastards!”

Ark flew from Paradon in Bristania to Giran using Letter Movement and finally arrived in Lancel village. However, Ark wasn’t alone. Accompanying Ark was Bread and Redian, Bristania’s strongest combination. So Lancel village was surrounded and the 3rd part of the battle against the Hermes alliance begun.

Return of the King

“Phew.”

A heavy sigh flowed out. His expression sank even more as he looked at the residents gathered in the town hall. Galen the mayor of Lancel village, the Meow and Wolrang representatives as well as the thieves who were the representatives of the Samcheong College of Education were gathered. The group of people were why Shambala was sighing. An unidentified bandit group was scheming to loot Lancel! He grasped that the bandit group had 300 people and that the numbers would increase even more. After Galen heard the shocking information, he summoned the representatives of each species for a meeting. And the meetings to prepare a counterattack continuously repeated. Since they were unable to come up with an answer over the last two days, a tired sigh would naturally emerge.

“Why is this happening.....? The number of residents had increased and the village was finally becoming stable.....if we’re attacked then Lancel village will become like it was before..... Ah, why do these things always happen to Lancel village.....?”

Galen murmured with a pained expression. Then Shambala replied in impatient voice.

“Are you going to complain or resolve the problem? This is not the time for that. Like I said, this isn’t long left.”

“I know that. I understand.....”

Galen sighed again with his haggard complexion.

“It’s really frustrating! How can we solve this problem?”

Then someone struck the table and shouted. With a flowing, silver ma, the big figure was the elder of the Wolrang clan.

“What’s the point of this meeting in the first place? We know the

enemy will strike. In addition, they've also killed many of our species! Then isn't there only one answer? Fight! Fight them to the death!"

"That's right!"

"There is no need to wait for those guys!"

"Instead, we should go out and show them an example!"

The Wolrang clan members showed off their fangs and growled. Until recently, the Wolrang had been slaves in the vampire territory. After travelling to Lancel from the vampire territory, their wild instincts had awakened while travelling the continent. Therefore the Wolrang had awakened their instincts as warriors. When the Wolrang expressed their savagery, the atmosphere instantly became serious.

"No, that is....."

Galen stuttered with an unbearable expression.

"Bah, these dogs never change."

The Meow elder Hassan who was sitting on the other side of the table snorted with her nose in the air. The eyes of the excited Wolrang simultaneously focused on Hassan.

"What you do mean by that you hairy balloon?"

"Didn't you hear me? As expected from dogs, never listening to other people speak."

"What? Dogs?"

"Haven't you been listening? There are at least 300 of them. Furthermore, aren't they all foreigners equipped with considerable skills? If we haphazardly attack without a plan than there is no telling what will happen."

"Those cats.....do you want to try us?"

"Try you? It wouldn't be bad."

Hassan laughed and showed her claws. The Meow and Wolrang in

the room growled at each other after being provoked. Then the raccoon clan representative cautiously said towards the two clan elders.

“My opinion is a little different. There is no way to stop the enemies with Lancel’s current power. Then shouldn’t all the residents take shelter and wait for those guys to pass? If they stay too long than the soldiers of Jackson will get involved and those guys will be forced to leave Lancel. If we protect the residents then we can reconstruct the town.”

“What?”

The two elders shouted simultaneously.

“Are you running away because you’re a little afraid? Do you expect the Wolrang to take such dishonourable actions?”

“Bah, what a typical idea from the raccoons who only dig tunnels! They’re no different from the dogs!”

Thus another shouted match began. Both the Wolrang elder and the raccoon representative hit the table with an unpleasant expression.

“Tunnel? What do you mean? Aren’t you the ones who created the overpasses? We’re the ones who struck the nails in most of the buildings in this village! Do you think we want to leave it?”

‘Damn, it’s starting again.’

Shambala shook his head with a disgusted expression. There were a number of reasons for the unsuccessful meetings but this was the biggest problem. Lancel village was split into four different types of inhabitants. The ex-thieves, the Meow, the Wolrang and the raccoons. And the species that had the most right to speak were the natural warriors the Meow and Wolrang clan. But these two were literally cat and dog and didn’t get along. Since their living areas were separated and any big problems were arbitrated by Galen, this problem hadn’t really occurred before. Now if the Wolrang gave any advice than Hassan would just laugh, while the Wolrang would ignore Hassan is she tried to speak. Even the raccoon clan would sometimes interject their feelings, so the fighting meant the meetings

couldn't proceed properly.

'Besides, there is also an issue with the mayor.'

Shambala clicked his tongue and looked at Galen. Galen was no doubt a good mayor. That was obvious since he was able to manage the Meow, Wolrang, thieves, racoons and the Baran clan in one village without any major problems. But unfortunately Galen had no ability as a field commander. No aside from his talent as a field commander, he couldn't even handle it when the beast clans started arguing like this. And Shambala also didn't have any talent as a field commander.

'It really is crazy. Isn't this a problem that occurs when different species are gathered together? But it will be impossible to defeat those guys just by listening to this.....'

Shambala surveyed the meeting room and sighed again. If it was a battle than Shambala had confidence in himself. But leading a meeting and commanding troops wasn't in Shambala's nature. That was the reason why he entrusted the autonomous group in Seutandal to JusticeMan. In addition, this wasn't Seutandal. It was impossible for Shambala to command the Lancel NPCs.

"There's no need to think about it. Let's find their hideout and beat them to death!"

"You stupid dogs! They have a support army!"

"As expected, we should take refuge and avoid trouble!"

"Mayor, what do you think?"

The eyes of the people quarrelling focused on Galen.

"I, I....."

Galen was stuttering when it occurred.

"Everything is rejected!"

The doors of the meeting room burst open and a rough voice could be heard. Every eye reflexively turned to focus on the door. Then

they all started shouting.

“Ark!”

“Ark, you came. Thank you, thank you.”

Galen was moved to tears as he got up to greet his saviour. It wasn't just Galen. The ex-thieves and beast clan members also flocked towards Ark.

“Ark hyung-nim!”

“Ohhhh, it is Hero Maban's descendant!”

Ark panted as he ran out of breath and nodded.

“Pant pant pant, fortunately I'm not too late.”

“You're late enough you idiot.”

Shambala murmured in a curt voice.

“Have you just been wandering around since you were contacted?”

“Wandering around? Can you say that even after looking at my face? Ugh!”

Ark's face was pale white and it seemed like he was going to vomit.It was the side effect of traversing the continent in just two days. Once again, Ark had been drinking alcohol in a tavern in Paradon when Roco had contacted him. And Paradon was a city in the northern area of Bristania. Lancel was the exact opposite and it was located in the south of Schudenberg. Even if the Letter Movement allowed ease of travel around cities, it wasn't omnipotent. There were restrictions in the distance that could be moved. In addition, the places where the Letter Movement tower had been placed were limited. Therefore Ark had to continuously use the Letter Movement and Radun to travel between cities before finally reaching Giran. It was constant riding and travelling! Thus the ramen that Ark ate in the morning felt like it was going to come back up.

‘But there is no time for me to vomit!’

Ark swallowed down the noddles that felt like it was coming up his throat.

“.....Did you swallow? Are you coming over?”

Shambala slowly withdrew while giving him a dirty look. However Ark didn't care and just slowly entered the hall. Ark had shown up like a comet when Lancel was in a crisis! Galen, the thieves and the beast clans all looked at Ark with expectation. After everything that Ark did in the past, none of them looked at him with doubt. Ark who had all the expectations on him was about to finally start the formal meeting.

“Uha!”

Suddenly there was a strange sound by the door. The residents reflexively turned their heads and flinched. It was a huge figure holding a greatsword! But it wasn't because of his physical form that the residents flinched. The man surveyed the group of beasts and was brought to tears.

“Dogs, cats and raccoons are gathered to hold a meeting..... A holy land! This place is a holy land!”

“W-what, what's with this human?”

The beast clans murmured at the appearance of the strange human.

“Kyaaaaak!”

Then there was a scream from behind the man and a woman popped out. And her hand lodged in between Hassan's stomach fat.

“What, what the? An attack?”

Hassan burst out with confusion as she fell down.

“Heok! Heheok! What are you.....! S-stop! It tickles!”

“T-this is false! So fluffy, I've never seen such a cute creature! Yes, it is cotton! Cotton? It is impossible for a doll to be this cute! Zipper, there must be a zipper hidden somewhere!”

The woman rolled around the wriggling Hassan and shouted. The

residents looked at the two people who suddenly appeared with foolish eyes. Shambala was staring with foolish eyes as well and he asked Ark.

“What the, these guys?”

“They came to help.....”

“Help?”

“It is a long explanation.”

Ark sighed and scratched his head. Yes, the pair who appeared with Ark was Bread and Redian. The reason that Bread and Redian came to Lancel was because of Ark’s plan. They had been drinking together when Ark had been contacted by Roco about Lancel village.

‘Wait? Wouldn’t Roco only contact me if the situation is really serious?’

Naturally having people with a lot of power would be good. And Bread and Redian were known as the strongest pair in Bristania! Dragging those two along would certainly help. Of course, even with the misunderstanding those two wouldn’t traverse the continent to help Ark. But didn’t those two have a weakness? Ark came up with a crazy idea.

“Damn, I’m sorry but I have to go.”

“What the? Why? Weren’t we just beginning to drink?”

“A slightly serious problem as occurred in a village I know.”

“Village? A serious problem? What?”

“I don’t know yet. Just that some guys are trying to attack the village.”

“Attack the village? But why do you have to go to the village?”

“That village is a special place to me. Did you hear Baekgu’s words? After I rescued the Wolrang clan, they immigrated to a new village. The place I guided them to is the village being attacked. If the village

is attacked and the Wolrang family exterminated than it is my responsibility.”

“The village where the Wolrang live?”

Bread suddenly ate the bait.

“The users are attacking the village where dogs live peacefully!”

Bread had a crazy dog mania! That’s why he rescued Baekgu from the thieves. Thus Ark let him know that the village where the dogs were gathered was in danger. The next sentence was bait for Bread.

“Those guys would definitely abuse the animals.”

“Damn.....! Where is it? Guide me there right away!”

As expected, Bread threw away his wine glass and jumped up.

“Wait a minute, you idiot!”

Then Redian spoke in an irritated voice.

“Where on earth are you planning to go? We already have some work to do. Now that we’ve settled things with Ark and the seal on the dungeon is released, shouldn’t we go back to capture the dungeon?”

“But the dogs. The dogs! If I don’t go then the dogs might die!”

“I don’t care, I already followed your actions earlier but no more!”

Redian frowned and turned her head. Then Bread started sweating. But Ark also prepared some bait for Redian.

“It’s not just the Wolrang. The Meow will also be sacrificed.....”

“Meow?”

“The cat clan. There are also a lot of Meow living in Lancel village.”

While Bread loved dogs, she was weak to cats. After coming to Paradon, he learnt that Bread and Redian loved dogs and cats. It was to the extent that they fought verbally over it. Of course

Redian's ears pricked as soon as he brought cats into the conversation. Ark put on a fake pained expression and deliberately murmured.

"Ahh, it is so dreadful to think that the Wolrang and Meow might be killed....."

Before he could even finish, Redian threw away the chicken leg she was eating and jumped up. Then she said to Ark and Bread.

"What are you doing? Isn't it urgent?"

Thus Ark was able to attract Bristania's strongest pair to help him. Well, it was good until they went nuts after seeing the Wolrang and Meow at the town hall. Thanks to Bread and Redian sticking to the Wolrang and Meow, the meeting couldn't progress. Ark sighed and muttered.

"Hey, you guys should go explore the village."

Ark made one of the Wolrang and Meow their guides and drove them out of the meeting.

"Hmm hmm, then let's start meeting again."

Ark said while coughing awkwardly. The residents stared blankly at the two people who disappeared before concentrating again.

"Those two people.....well, it's lucky that you came. First, let me tell you the situation in the village....."

"That's okay. I heard it while coming here."

Ark waved his hand and interrupted Galen's words. Then he deliberately glared at the residents and said.

"What on earth have you been doing?"

"What? The meeting for a counter of course....."

"Meeting?"

Ark shook his head with outrage.

“It has been six days (game time) since Shambala brought the information to me. The remaining time left isn't that long. Yet the only thing you have done is have meetings?”

“It's because of that damn cat! She has to comment every time I give an opinion.....”

The Wolrang elder stood up and pointed to Hassan. Then Hassan grabbed her beard and also shouted.

“I wouldn't comment if you didn't keep on talking nonsense!”

“Nonsense? Aren't the raccoons the one talking nonsense?”

“No, why are we being dragged into this?”

The raccoon representative jumped up and once again the meeting room became a mess. When the elders got into an argument again, several beast clan members frowned. This situation had repeated for two days. Galen just sighed as he lost all his willpower to break them up.

“Stop!”

The shout was like a bomb had exploded. The cry emerged from Ark's mouth and swept like a storm through the meeting room. When the stormy voice swept past, the excited elders instantly shut up. The effects of advanced Intimidation combined with charisma had overwhelmed the audience. In fact, normally he wouldn't use Intimidation on the residents of Lancel village. If he used Intimidation then he could lead the dialogue but if it failed then the intimacy would fall by 50%. Since it was his hometown, having his intimacy with the Lancel village decrease will be a significant loss. Yet he didn't have time to worry about the results of Intimidation.

‘.....What I was concerned about has happened.’

In fact, it had weighed on his mind the whole time. Just before Seutandal rose, Lancel had been connected to Haman fortress using the dimensional gate. At the time, most of the residents had helped Ark but some of them were users as well. And some of them had posted about the experience on the bulletin board. Of course, the

Hermes alliance would notice and realize the existence of Lancel village.

‘Even if I only visit Lancel sometimes, it is possible to call it my hometown. I guessed that those guys would take some action.’

But he never imagined that they would attack the NPCs of the village like this. Of course, the Hermes alliance had targeted the NPCs in Seutandal. There was no reason for them not to aim at the NPCs in village.

But Seutandal was different from Lancel. If they occupied Seutandal with the Nakujuk then they would be recognized as the power there. However, Lancel was a part of the Schudenberg kingdom. Even if they plundered it, the village couldn’t be occupied.

‘Lancel doesn’t have a lot compared to other villages the same size. If their reason was looting than they wouldn’t bother to target Lancel. As expected, their target was him. There’s no doubt about it since Shambala said that their main goals are my store and the Magic Tower.’

The main point was why it was occurring now. Presently the Hermes alliance had suffered significant losses thanks to the destruction of the lawless port. Of course, when thinking about it than those guys wouldn’t leave it alone. But he had expected retaliation against Seutandal not Lancel. So Ark had often checked the situation in Seutandal through JusticeMan. However they had unexpectedly aimed at Lancel.

‘Why are they attacking Lancel when the lawless port had just been destroyed.....?’

After such a large loss, what reason why they have to waste hundreds of guild members to attack Lancel? But Ark soon discovered the reason why.

‘The stolen goods brought from Seutandal!’

20% of the stolen goods from Seutandal had been brought to Ark’s store thanks to his tip. Of course, the Hermes alliance suffered a significant loss when the lawless port was destroyed but the

confiscated goods were also a large part of their investment. The warehouse where the stolen goods were stored in the lawless port was leased to other pirates. In addition to leasing the warehouses, they were also responsible for disposing of the stolen good.

‘If they confiscate the stolen goods then it will become the property of the Hermes alliance! If they have the stolen goods then they can recover from the loss of the lawless port.’

That was Raiden’s thought. But in this situation, they couldn’t attack Seutandal to take back the stolen goods. Then they somehow received information that 10,000 gold worth of goods was being carried to Lancel?

‘That is enough reason to attack Lancel despite the various risks.’

And if they really succeeded in attacking Lancel.....

Not only would they steal the goods worth 10,000 gold, they would also plunder the stock kept for Ark’s store! But there was even more. Ark had a significant investment in the real estate of Lancel. He was 100% convinced that he would make a profit so he hadn’t regretted the investment. Whenever Ark received some profit from his store, he would invest it back into the village. Therefore he currently had a 4% stake in the village. Ark’s investment strategy of investing 200 gold for every 0.1% share had increased to 250 gold. It had grown 25% within a few months. In other words, Ark’s current real estate worth was 10,000 gold!

‘Of course, there is no way to govern Lancel even if I have a stake in the real estate. But if those guys attack they won’t just take some goods. If the village suffers serious damage.....’

The real estate market would fall to the bottom! It would be an astronomical loss! Ark would suffer tremendous losses the moment Lancel was plundered. Ark’s dream of a trade route through Ark’s store, the real estate price jump, the lawless port commission etc. would be ruined. No, those thousands of gold could have a huge impact on people’s lives. But such an important battle was being affected by the emotional quarrels of these people! There was no time to consider his degree of intimacy with the NPCs.

‘I have to defend the village!’

“It is really pathetic!”

Ark glared at the beast clans and shouted roughly. Currently Ark was at a crossroads of whether he would live or die. That explosive sentiment caused Intimidation to have enormous strength. Like a bomb exploding in the meeting room, the beast clans shrunk and hung their tails between their legs with fear.

“Isn’t this a meeting to determine a plan? Fighting among the Wolrang and Meow, as well as the raccoons’ suggestion to flee is not helpful!”

Ark spoke using Intimidation and glared around the meeting room.

“B-but.....”

“Of course, there is some truth in the raccoon’s opinion.”

Ark restrained Galen from voicing an objection. Shambala confirmed that it was Jewel’s group in the cave. All the users belonged to the Hermes alliance. There were 300 users between level 250~300!

As a village in the mountains, Lancel had quite a few combat troops. The ex-thieves, Wolrang and Meow were 300 people, and when added with the raccoon were 500 people. However, the former thieves were people who switched jobs after graduating from the Samcheong College of Education. In fact, there were only 100 members of the guard that could be utilized in actual battle. Despite being level 200, the thieves only had an actual combat ability of around level 150 since that was when they switched jobs. Although they had some special abilities, the Meow and raccoons were the same. Only the Wolrang were level 300.

‘In the end, the numbers that could be considered battle worthy are around 300 people. When comparing Jewel’s group and Lancel, the combat power is almost equal!’

The problem was that Duke would soon join the party.

‘Those guys have already collected information about Lancel village and worked out a strategy. And since they withdrew from the guild,

the Hermes alliance won't be risked by the mission. It was natural for thing to invest everything into winning. Thus the support forces wouldn't be dozens but hundreds of people. In the end, those guys would have about 500~600 people!'

Even if their numbers were less, their levels were higher which would even it up. However, they also had more people. If they attacked then there was a 100 in 100 chance of Lancel village losing. That's why there was some merit to the raccoon's plan of escaping. If they didn't have a chance than they should escape the crisis and seek assistance from Lord Jackson. As a species full of artisans, it was natural for them to give that opinion. In fact, after Shambala brought the information Galen had sent a message to Jackson stating that Lancel would be attacked. But Lancel was a free village so it was difficult to send soldiers to help just for a possibility. Of course, Ark had 120% with Lord Jackson so he could convince the Lord to move but there was already no time. Anyway, if there was a surprise attack than Jackson would have no choice but to move. Once the soldiers moved than Jewel's group would have no choice but to leave Lancel. Ark summarized the raccoon's idea and Galen sighed before nodding.

"That does seem to be the only way to protect Lancel."

".....Do you really think it is possible to protect Lancel like that?"

Ark declared sharply.

"Lord Jackson can't protect Lancel village forever. One day the soldiers would have to return to Jackson. But those guys who have plundered the village will never give up on Lancel. They will keep on vigilantly watch Lancel in order to wait for a chance. Isn't it likely that they would return to the village?"

In order words, if the village was captured by those guys once than it would be the end. Now there was only one day remaining. There was no chance to move the goods from Ark's store to another place. Even if he could protect his store's assets, there was nothing he could do about the real estate. If the village was occupied than 10,000 gold worth of real estate would be taken away. Yes, Ark had no choice in the first place.

“The only thing we can do is unite and fight against those guys!”

“.....!”

The meeting room was as quiet as a mouse after Ark's words. It wasn't because of the contents of the speech. It was the dreadful force emitted from Ark's eyes. It was natural. Thousands of gold hung on the battle! No, it was a battle where lives were at stake!

“.....Do we have a chance?”

Galen swallowed his saliva and asked Ark. The ex-thieves and beast clans also looked at Ark tensely. Ark knew what they wanted him to say. He closed his eyes and allowed the residents' tension to rise before smiling and answering in a firm voice.

“Of course!”

“That's it! The answer we waited for!”

The Wolrang elder suddenly slammed his fist on the table and shouted. Hassan also burst out laughing.

“Hohoho. As expected from Hero Maban's descendant!”

“If Ark-nim says so than we can't object!”

“We will follow Hyung-nim!”

The raccoons and ex-thieves also spoke firmly. Yes, there was a reason they had been arguing during the meetings for the last two days. It was because there was no one to say in a voice of conviction ‘we have to do this.’ But Ark who they had a 120% degree of intimacy with had shown up and said ‘it is possible to fight and win.’ When he spoke, the opinions of the Lancel residents instantly changed to his view. Galen also looked relieved that Ark had taken the burden off his hands.

“You are indeed the only person I can believe in. Then I'll leave the commanding to you. Please protect Lancel village.”

There was a ringing sound and the quest information window popped up.

-Find New Settlers!

+ Sub Quest: War to Defend Lancel Village.

Thanks to your efforts, Lancel village has been developing. But some outlaws have obtained information about Lancel village and decided to attack it. If Lancel village is occupied by the outlaws then it will be difficult to predict the damage. The residents of the village will lose their homes and the reputation will fall so few people will visit the village. The only way to avoid this is to stop the outlaws.

The interim mayor Galen has entrusted the rights of the defensive war to you and you have the ability to command the residents. Minimize the damage on behalf of Galen and stop this situation (If you fail this quest then the <Find New Settlers> quest will also be failed).

<Difficulty: ???>

<Additional Fact: If more than 30% of the village is destroyed and 30% of the residents are killed then the quest will fail>

‘Damn!’

Ark frowned as he read the information window. In fact, his <Find New Settlers> had been finished when the Wolrang arrived in Lancel village. The quest had ended after 1 year and a half. However he hadn’t felt it was necessary to receive the compensation straight away so he had delayed and went to Bristania. But now the quest which took 1 and a half years to complete might fail if he couldn’t protect Lancel.....

‘Although it is natural.’

What good would new settlers be if Lancel village was destroyed? Anyway, even without the quest Ark would be screwed if Lancel was occupied.

‘Okay, it just has to turn out well. If hit by a bullet I’ll die and I’ll also die if hit by a missile. There is no room for me to withdraw.’

“Don’t worry. I will do everything possible to defend Lancel village!”

Ark grabbed Galen’s hand and answered. Ark had returned. The true leader of Lancel village had been handed the baton!

Crime File

“I understand. We’ll do it and immediately report.”

The guards of Lancel village saluted and ran away. As the commander of the war, Ark had organized the troops for different tasks. Once again, NPCs also had levels like users. The Wolrang were level 300 and their abilities were roughly equal to a user with the equivalent level. But those rough estimates were difficult in this situation. Several of the ex-thieves and beast clans had raised their level and learn skills as well. It was important to know oneself as well as one’s opponent. If Ark didn’t have a proper grasp of the military power than he would be unable to map out a proper strategy. So the first thing he had to do was determine the accurate information of his allies. Of course, the NPCs had no concept of things like level but an approximate guess could determine their position.

‘After I grasp the number of allies and their abilities, I can build a detailed strategy.....’

The next place Ark visited was the raccoons.

“Ark-nim, I heard that you came.”

The raccoons welcomed him as he entered their place.

“Will I be able to use the things I requested last time?”

Ark asked with a sense of expectation. Just like the Hermes alliance had always been thinking of Ark, Ark had always been thinking of the Hermes alliance. Ever since the Hermes alliance occupied Silvana, he was sure that he would one day conflict with them. So Ark had visited the raccoons and requested a secret project from them. He thought it was still too early to use but he had no choice in this situation. If ‘it’ would help in battle then he would use it. But the raccoon in charge of it shook his head.

“It’s at the finishing stages but some time is still needed for completion.”

“.....That’s right. It’s fine if it’s not possible but please hurry as much as you can.”

“We’ve mobilized all our staff and have been staying up all night.”

“Then I have another request for you.”

“Please say it.”

“How many members of the raccoon clan can you rally immediately?”

“All the works except for the ones Ark-nim requested have been currently suspended. If necessary then we can rally everybody.”

“Then please work according to my directions from now on.”

Ark spread out a map and explained it to raccoon in charge. As expected, the emphasis was on the defense of the main buildings. Through the information obtained, Jewel’s main goals was not slaughtering the residents but the magic tower, Ark’s store and looting the village. There were hundreds of people so once the confusion fight started than he wouldn’t be able to 100% stop them. So Ark’s top priority were some countermeasures.

“Please create a barrier using steel plated wood around the main buildings. How long would that take?”

“It is a good idea. If we assemble it onsite than 2~3 hours should be enough to create a barrier around one building. The design won’t take that long so it will be mostly assembly time.”

“Then get started straight away. Their goals are Ark’s shop and warehouse, the magic tower and the town hall so those should be your top priority. Come find me when you are done. If possible, you should also build a barrier around the village.”

Ark explained while pointing at the map. Of course there was no meaning in building the barriers if the village fell. But by placing the barriers around the main buildings in advance, some degree of

defense was possible through guerrilla attacks. However the money used for the war preparations was provided from the village's public funds. Galen had appointed Ark as the special commander of the village so he had the authority to use the public funds. Naturally even the commander couldn't embezzle the funds so he had to provide receipts to Lancel village. Ark had finished settling the payment when Ark remembered and asked.

"Ah, can you also check how this can be used?"

"Huh? This is.....?"

-Fire Draconian Skull (Rare, Material)

<It is impossible to confirm the information on Fire Draconian skull>

Ark had taken out the skull left by Lumines. He couldn't check the information or price of the Fire Draconian skull in the auction room at Paradon. But if it was the raccoons then they might be able to figure out its purpose. The raccoons had made accessories using unidentified special ingredients in the Underground World. The raccoon chief looked at it a while and showed some interest.

"This is a very unusual material. It is the first time I have seen something like this. But I have a sense of how to handle it. I know there are other tasks needed but can you leave this with me?"

If the NPC showed this response then it meant he could use it somehow.

"Will it take a lot of time to work with it?"

"If you leave it with me then I should finish it sometime this evening."

"Then I'll leave it to you."

Ark considered for a while and nodded. Since the information and price was unknown, it would be difficult to sell. But if the raccoon chief created something from it then it was possible to sell that item. Even though the processing cost was 200 gold, he wanted to see the results. The more expensive the processing cost was, the

higher probability there was that the finished item would be good. So Ark entrusted the Fire Draconian skull to the raccoon chief. Once the raccoons built the barriers, the defense of the main buildings should increase quite a bit. But if the worst case situation appeared and the village was occupied than it would be for nothing. In the present state, the chances of the worst case situation happening was very high.

‘Now, the remaining problem is.....’

The next place Ark went to was his store. Although he had mobilized the residents, the main axis of the battle was Ark, Shambala and the helpers he recruited Bread and Redian. Despite the disadvantageous battle, Ark had some hope because of them. The users who belongs in the top 1% of New World! They were an unexpected power that Jewel couldn’t expect.

‘I have to organize the Lancel troops around them.’

After Ark finished his business, he decided to join them at Ark’s store to discuss the measures.

Ttukttuk, ttukttuk, ttukttuk!

When he approached the shop, the booming sound of hammers could be heard.

“What are you doing?”

“Ah, Oppa!”

Roco then came running out of the store. Then she explained with a pleasant smile.

“We’ve been preparing too. I couldn’t hear such talk and continue to stay still.”

The moment Shambala had mentioned a war, Roco had closed the store door and boarded up the windows and doors with thick wooden planks.

“This is slightly better.”

“.....It is better than nothing.”

“Don’t worry Oppa. I’ll protect the store somehow!”

“Yes, no matter what happens we’ll protect it with Manager-nim!”

Ulmeok and Sapjil cried out while holding a pot and a golf club. They were also equipped for combat in their own way. He honestly didn’t think it would be very helpful but it was 100 times better than them running away. Roco had educated her staff properly. No, maybe their loyalty increased when Buksil started to also earn money from the business.

“Okay, you should hide the expensive items deep inside the warehouse as well as layer them inside your bags. Those guys attacking the village have probably brought chaotic scrolls but it is better than leaving them in the warehouse.”

“I understand, Chairman-nim!”

Sapjil and Ulmeok ran towards the warehouse.

“By the way, did Shambala and a couple come here looking for me?”

“Huh? There hasn’t been anyone looking for Oppa.”

“How far did those guys wander?”

Ark spoke in an irritated expression so Roco smiled.

“They seem to be a little late. Have a cup of tea with me in the meantime.”

“No, that.....”

Ark restlessly surveyed the area before coughing and approaching Roco. After hesitating with an awkward expression, he searched through his bag. It was the Poco Poco doll he bought Roco from Paradon. But his hands shook nervously when he tried to grab the doll. His tongue had also become stiff.

“This is.....just.....”

It wasn’t unreasonable for Ark to hesitate. Since the only women Ark

had really interacted with were Roco and Lariette, this was the first time he had deliberately given a female a gift. In addition, the Poco Poco doll wasn't a simple gift. The Poco Poco doll had a built in device to record voices.....after much wavering, he decided to personally record a message but now he hesitated once he actually had to give it.

"It's nothing. Once the battle spreads then I will have to supervise the whole village. The situation is urgent so you should take as much care as possible."

Ark eventually spoke ambiguously after a while and scratched his head. Yes, he used this situation as an excuse for giving gifts. But Roco couldn't understand his inner thoughts and just shook her head.

"Don't worry. This store is Oppa's and my.....hum hum, no, this place is also important to me. And do you remember what I told you before? Recently I've been training in different melodies with the ghost. While he seemed to teach ridiculous skills at first, I learnt some good things. If those guys try to attack this store then I'll give them some trouble."

"Huh? What does that mean?"

"I'll use the melody skill I just learned to punish them."

Roco elatedly explained the skill she learnt not long ago. Ark who listened to the explanation was suddenly surprised and asked.

"Eek? Is there really that skill?"

"Yes, I've tried it once and it worked out quite well?"

"W-wait! Then can that skill affect the whole village?"

"To be exact, it is different from giving an effect to the village. Because it is music. Thanks to the maximum output range, it is able to be applied to quite a large area. But it isn't a buff or an attack magic....."

Ark eyes shone brightly at Roco's words.

'This is a huge weapon that I never even imagined!'

Roco didn't think the skill was that big a deal. She thought it was just a good skill for playing fun tricks. But despite not being an attack magic, the skill could exert an enormous effect. Ark instantly started planning strategies to take full advantage of Roco's skill. When almost all of the strategy was prepared, Shambala, Bread and Redian finally arrived.

"Have you finished visiting the entire village?"

"Ah, we saw it. It's so lively that I want to defend it even more."

"I agree."

Bread and Redian replied absent-mindedly. The sight of cats and dogs living so peacefully in the village was an enjoyable sight to them. Then Bread belatedly noticed Roco and asked Ark.

"Oh is this the first time you've met? This is....."

When Ark tried to introduce them, Bread went forward and stopped him.

"Wait a minute. Hmmm, hmmm, I got it. You're Ark's girlfriend!"

"W-what are you saying?"

"Eh? You're not? But you guys give off a positive energy? Huhuhu, you're still young. There's no need to worry. Although Redian and I are already like that. We have a sticky relationship.....ouch!"

Bread had been smirking impudently when he suddenly shrieked and fell down. After kicking Bread, Redian sighed and muttered.

"I'm really sorry about him. I'm Redian and that stupid person is Bread."

"It's okay."

Roco grinned and replied. Redian looked at Roco before smiling and nodding.

"Though that fool sometimes gets it right as well."

"Huh?"

“Nothing.”

Redian smiled subtly and shook her head. After the group exchanged greetings, they moved the meeting to the second floor of the shop. Ark provided Bread and Redian an overview of the situation in Lancel village. Bread murmured with a serious expression at the end of his explanation.

“When I heard this I guessed that Raiden was involved.....he finally took such a bold move? That fellow might be shabby but he is as persistent as a snake. He absolutely won't start a war until he is sure about it. He would have perfectly investigated Lancel's present state beforehand. He would only take action when he judged that the odds were 100% in his favour. But you don't have to worry. Because you have me.”

Bread laughed and praised himself. Redian just sighed and shook her head back and forth.

“I don't know where that confidence comes from.....”

“No, Bread and Redian will definitely play a considerable role in the upcoming war. Unlike Shambala, Raiden won't be expecting you two. Your power will be able to change the tides of the war.”

“We appreciate the compliment but we're also users. There is a limit to how much we can against all those people.”

“That's okay. It doesn't matter whether it is 100 or 1000 people.”

“You should be quiet!”

Redian said to Bread in an irritated voice. Ark looked at the two of them before talking again.

“Of course, I also don't think you two can go against so many people. But we also have something in our favour. Those guys still haven't realized that we know about their plan to attack. When they arrive at Lancel village then we'll be able to cut down a considerable amount of their power without fighting.”

“Decrease their power without fighting? How?”

Ark laughed at Shambala's question and looked at Roco. Then he explained the strategy he just devised using Roco's Minstrel skill. Shambala, Bread and Redian simultaneously looked at Roco after hearing the plan.

"Oh, a Minstrel? That's an unusual profession? No, did a Minstrel originally have this type of skill?"

"New World is indeed wide. Even though I've seen considerable amounts of skill and experienced many things, I've never heard of such a skill. It will indeed be able to inflict a large blow on those guys. But we can't expect a decisive effect with just that. Even if those guys suffer a blow, it still won't make up for the power difference."

Redian started organizing her thoughts.

"As expected, the biggest problem is the difference in troops. The most number of troops you can gather from Lancel are 300 people. On the other hand, they currently have 300 people as well. If the support army arrives then the difference will be huge. With fewer troops it won't be possible to fight as well as defend the village."

Redian was a magician and she grasped the situation instantly. Of course Ark knew that the biggest problem was the lack of troops. In a war, the most important thing wasn't level but numbers. In addition, Ark didn't just have to protect the village. Unlike Jewel's group, the Lancel troops consisted of 90% NPCs. He had to minimize their losses in the fight. But in this situation it was impossible to minimize the sacrifices of the NPCs. Let alone be able to keep the village!

"There is a method."

At that time Ark spoke with a smile. After obtaining the information for Lancel village, Galen hadn't been doing nothing. He instantly concealed the information that the village was being attacked. If rumours of a battle spread then the users would run away from the village. Since the secret was concealed, users were still crowding Lancel. They numbered around 300~400 people! Yes, Ark's secret intention was to drag the users into the battle. Of course, 70% of the users gathered in Lancel were level 100-150. When compared to the

level 250 average of Jewel's group, it was at least a 100 level difference. It would be hard even if a couple of people attacked one person. However, 300~400 users were enough to be a threat. Moreover, Ark didn't care if users died. So Ark was going to employ the users as a shield for Lancel.

'Even if they don't play an active role in the battle, the good points of low-level users are that they are cheap to employ. Even if level 100~150 users entered the ware for 10~15 gold, it is possible for them to help. Even if only 70% of them were employed because of the merchants, that is still 200~300 people. If I add the troops of Lance village then it is worth a try!'

That was the countermeasure Ark thought of when flying to Lancel from Paradon. Of course, hiring 200~300 users would still cost 3,000~4,000 gold. However Ark had permission to use the public funds of Lancel village so cost wasn't a problem. After receiving the mission, Galen had delegated full power to him. It was possible to grant users rewards based on their contribution like JusticeMan did when cleaning up the lawless port. When Ark presented his idea Redian instantly nodded.

"Yes, if we use the plan you mentioned before and hire 300 people then we can overcome the difference in numbers. No, now there is no other way."

"Okay, then I'll start collecting the troops."

Ark finished the meeting and exited the store. Then he walked to the plaza where a lot of users were gathered.

"See, doesn't it fit? Ark's Store has closed its door."

"Hrm, then it must be true. The atmosphere of the village also seems strange lately."

"There's no time to be doing this. Did you see the video? They're ruthless and don't care about other users. We should go before sparks fly for no reason."

"Sheesh, I quite liked this village."

The buzzing noise of many upset users could be heard.

‘Video? What does that mean?’

Ark rushed to a user and asked.

“Wait a moment. What do you mean? What about a video?”

“Eh? Haven’t you seen it yet? It is.....”

The blood drained from Ark’s face as he listened to the user’s speech.

“T-this.....!”

Hyun-woo looked at the monitor with a devastated expression. From the monitor a combat scene in New World was taking place. Several hundred videos of battles occurred in New World each day, but the video Hyun-woo was watching now wasn’t an ordinary video. After being posted for only 1~2 hours, it had already reached 7000 views and drew serious attention from users! The reason was because the video didn’t show normal gameplay but that of a crime scene.

“Aaaaack!”

At that time, someone in the video started bleeding and collapsed. It was a user not a NPC. Yes, the ‘crime file’ showed the Haruna camping ground which was a small village in the southern mountains of Schudenberg where users were being attacked. It was a video of users attacking an NPC village, something previously considered taboo in New World. The users invaded the village and murdered NPCs. Their faces were covered in masks but Ark instantly knew their identity. No, to be exact he knew the user leading them. The archer moved his hands at a tremendous speed and shot arrows which scattered like an evening shower!

‘Duke.....!’

That archer was indeed Duke. The players Duke was leading were the support army for Jewel’s group. But why was Duke invading a small village like Haruna a day before the invasion of Lancel? The

reason was obvious in the next scene. The small village only had 10 NPCs but it sold supplies and gave simple quests to complete in the area. It wasn't much but there were 20~30 people resting in the village to inspect their equipment. After Duke raided Haruna, most users managed to escape. However, some users with a strong sense of justice stayed behind to help the NPCs. But the NPCs died from the overwhelming power and the users were surrounded by Duke's party.

"These bastards, are they insane attacking an NPC village? What's the idea?"

The users had been driven to a critical condition. Then the masked Duke snorted and replied.

"Heh, you're the stupid ones. You should've escaped with the others but your strong sense of justice made you stay behind to help the NPCs. Are you thinking that you won't lose a lot of experience if you die since you're low level? But I'm not that good natured."

When Duke raised his hand, his party members simultaneously took out a scroll.

"Huk, t-that is.....!"

The users' faces paled when they saw the scroll. The scrolls Duke's group were holding were the [Peel], [Robbery], [Seize], [Unfortunate] etc.....it was a set of chaotic scrolls.

"I'll make you shed tears of blood and regret this!"

Duke clenched his fist firmly and the party simultaneously activated their scrolls. At the same time red light emerged and the effect of many scrolls piled up on the users' body. If he was killed like that than half of his equipment would fall! The users were panic stricken and tried to run. But Duke just laughed and killed the users one by one.

"Aaaaack!"

Then the users' items fell thanks to the effect of the scroll.

“We won’t forgive anyone who opposes us.”

Thus Duke killed all the users and collected their loot. Then another member of the party muttered.

“Now, shall we go to the place called Lancel?”

‘That Duke bastard.....!’

Ark glared as Duke’s part disappeared.

-This is a video I risked my life to hide and shoot. New World is so frightening these days that users would even attack NPC villages. At the end they said they are visiting a place called Lancel..... If anybody is in the area then it would be good to leave early.

That was the comment attached to the video by ‘Information Source 24 hours’ who posted it. However Hyun-woo didn’t believe the comment. The user who took this video wasn’t ‘Information Source 24 hours.’ No, he would’ve never been able to hide and take the video. The battle scene and voices was too clear for the user to be hiding.

‘Perhaps....no, it is definitely Duke who took the video and gave it to someone to post on the bulletin board!’

The reason Duke took the video was simple. Jewel and Duke thought that the users would be a variable while they attacked Lancel village. Because they were low-level, they didn’t really have to worry about the death penalty. Duke made the video and distributed it in order to account for the users. They would feel fear after seeing the scene of the user being murdered and having their equipment stolen. Normally users who participated in fights like this had a low chance of dropping equipment. If hired by NPCs to participate in a village defense war then there was no need to worry about being chaotic. That’s why Hyun-woo came up with the idea of hiring users. But the situation had changed with the video of users’ equipment being plundered. When thinking about it with common sense, that wasn’t possible in a battlefield with hundreds of users but the effect of the video was sufficient. There were no users who would participate in a battle where they could lose equipment for

10~15 gold. And the effects of the video were already appearing in Lancel. Duke's goal was to scare users away from the village by proclaiming that Lancel was their next target. The users wouldn't accept Ark's invitation to become hired mercenaries anymore. It was indeed a clever trick to use the video!

‘.....Jewel and Duke are starting to use their heads.’

It was different from the time where they just believed in their level and blindly rushed in. However, in this situation he couldn't applaud them.

‘7,000 people have already seen this video. There is still one day before they will attack Lancel so the people who watch the video will be able to get in touch with their friends. The plan to hire mercenaries for Lancel village was impossible! In addition, approximately 200 people had appeared in the video with Duke. When added to Jewel's group, it is 500 people. There is no way we can defeat such a number without the help of mercenaries!’

In this situation, the only way to hire users was to pay them enough to cover the cost of lost equipment. Even if they didn't have that many equipment since they were still low levelled, it would still be at least 200 gold. Hiring a level 100~150 user for 200 gold? It was a ridiculous price. Even if they managed to defeat Jewel's group, the cost of hiring the 300 mercenaries was so much that Lancel would still perish.

‘Is this the end? Is there really no other way?’

Hyun-woo felt complete despair. The video had perfectly blocked one of Ark's plans. It was a game strategy that would be impossible to use in reality. Then a random business card thrown near the monitor caught his eye. Hyun-woo who had been without ideas felt a sudden flash as he looked at the business card.

‘This business card.....wait, maybe.....yes, I can use this method! But will it be in time? No, fortunately there is still one day before those guys will attack. That should be enough time! I just have to persuade this person and drag them to my side!’

The storm of sparks finally settled inside Hyun-woo's head. Hyun-woo had a breakthrough and instantly ran towards the telephone. And he called the number on the business card. With a small smile of satisfaction on his face, Hyun-woo talked on the phone for a while. Hyun-woo's proposal worked. Now the only thing left was time!

"The battle will begin tomorrow. Can you come before that?"

"Giran contains some of my personnel. If they ride horses then they can arrive within 3~4 hours."

'That's it! That Duke bastard, you dared play a trick with the video? Then I'll crush your hard work in the same way!'

Ark disconnected the phone with flames burning in his eyes. A breakthrough was found in a place he couldn't possibly consider. It was 19 hours until the Lancel defensive war would begin!

"Ark....."

Jewel spat out in a bitter voice. Over the past few months, every day had been dismal for Jewel. It was because of the failure of the Seutandal conquest war. The Seutandal conquest war was like a chance passing through the sky above Jewel. If Seutandal had become a colony of the Hermes alliance as planned then the profits obtained would be terrific. And gold in New World was cash in reality. Just like any gamer, Jewel's dream was to become a tycoon from the game. But that dream had been destroyed right underneath his eyes. All because of Ark! Jewel still clearly remembered the failure of the Seutandal conquest war. He wasn't able to forget. How could he forget a winning lottery ticket being torn right in front of him? Since then Jewel's only goal had been to destroy Ark.

'And I've finally made it.'

Jewel looked at the users gathered in the cave. It was a secret society of the Hermes alliance formed to destroy Ark's home base of Lancel village. When Duke's support army was added, there were 500 of them! Only 100 people had been required to destroy the

village in the mountain.

‘I should have done this earlier.’

In fact, he had found out a long time ago that Lancel was Ark’s home base. During the Seutandal conquest war, unidentified NPCs had appeared through the dimensional gate from Lancel. The NPCs of that village ruined the plan to conquer Seutandal! Besides, there was a store in the village called Ark’s Store. Jewel’s pent-up anger burst after he confirmed that fact. The siege of Silvana and the Seutandal conquest plan, Ark kept on shooting pepper spray at the Hermes alliance. As a result, the Hermes alliance received thousands of gold worth of damage. And those losses had gone into Ark’s pocket. That’s right, Ark’s store was created with their money. Jewel had determined to go to Lancel village straight away after confirming that fact. However, Jewel’s request had been rejected by Raiden.

“Of course I want Ark to pay for it. But the priority is to concentrate on using the lawless port to recapture Seutandal. Moreover, Ark is closely linked to Seutandal. It might become complicated if we touch Lancel village in vain.”

That had been Raiden’s reply. It was one of the reason they didn’t touch Lancel despite knowing of its existence. However, the lawless port created by the Hermes alliance had been destroyed by Seutandal’s navy. Thanks to that, the Hermes alliance was quickly buried in a huge pile of debt. They invested money in the lawless port and its facilities since they would receive the profits back if it operated normally.

“It fell, we’re ruined!”

Raiden completely fell into a state of panic. But Jewel thought the destruction of the lawless port was a chance.

“I have a way to solve this.”

“A way to solve it?”

“There is no way to recoup the loss using normal methods. But we have a lot of troops. Then can’t we use the troops to make money?”

The method proposed by Jewel was to create a secret society offshoot of the alliance. If those users raided villages and plundered the loot then it could recoup the loss!

“But the probability of normal NPCs dropping items when killed.....”

That is why I suggest plundering the town. Didn't we previously occupy the valley village in Seutandal? We didn't get items from the NPCs but we confirmed that we could steal items from the stores. That was only a small village in Seutandal so we should get considerably more profit from villages in the continent.”

“If you do such a thing and a problem occurs.....”

“The members of the secret society will withdraw from the guild beforehand so there won't be a problem.”

“Would members of the alliance want to join the secret society?”

Invading a NPC village was a level of crime different from PK. While users would become chaotic if they PKed, they would truly become a bandit group if they looted a village. Raiding a village was classified as a special crime so they would gain an absurd number of chaotic points. While Jewel would receive some experience as the leader of an attack group, the members of the bandit group with such high chaotic values wouldn't be able to play the game normally. If they died at the hands of a guard then they would be rotting in jail for at least half a year. But such penalties already didn't matter to Jewel. As long as Lancel village was destroyed and Ark was dropped into the hell of despair then Jewel was prepared to accept any penalty.

“I am already prepared. And if sufficient compensation is promised then other users will apply. Once the proceeds of the loot are distributed and the alliance recovers from its losses, the alliance will help the secret society members level up and give them equipment.”

It was similar to a gangster in a crime organization who willingly went to jail for sufficient compensation. If the alliance recovered its losses then that wouldn't be a problem. As long as they weren't stuck in jail, the chaotic value would even decrease when completing

quests.

“The method’s not bad.”

Raiden said with an enthusiastic expression. Whether it be reality or the game, money always played a huge role. The plan of creating the lawless port to handle stolen goods and earn money had failed and now they had a massive pile of debt. In the end, Raiden accepted Jewel’s request and the secret society filled with 500 members was created. Yes, the origin of the secret society was to save the Hermes alliance from the huge pile of debt. However, Jewel had established the society with one goal in mind and he borrowed its strength to attack Lancel. It was a plan to stab Ark to death. Of course, the secret society’s first target was Lancel. Raiden also agreed with Jewel’s plan in that regard.

‘Ark, now it is your turn. I’ll smash everything of yours to pieces. But this is only the beginning. As long as the secret society exists you can never run away. I will kill your fellow colleagues and any NPCs who give you quests. You will realize your big mistake in making an enemy of the Hermes alliance. Hahaha!’

“Hahaha!”

Eyes suddenly concentrated on Jewel after he burst out laughing. The laugh had escaped his head to emerge from his mouth. Jewel coughed and pretended ignorance.

“Hum hum, is everyone assembled?”

“Yes, all 528 members have connected.”

Jewel nodded at the report and stood up. He took a deep breath before speaking quickly.

“I don’t need to say it again, but our goal is the resurgence of the Hermes alliance. However that will not be possible without a big achievement first. Ark and the people who follow him are the cause of our crisis. If we don’t destroy him then there will be no future for the Hermes alliance. Is there anyone with any doubts?”

“No!”

“For the glory of the Hermes alliance!”

They hadn't connected to New World in three days while waiting for this chance. All the members lifted their weapons in the air and shouted out their frustration.

“Okay, let's go!”

Jewel led the 500 players and advanced towards Lancel village.

Prelude: Illusion Sonata

“The heavens are helping us.”

Jewel murmured as he looked up at the night sky. Since the early evening, dark clouds started to spread across the night sky so the lights from the stars couldn't be seen anymore. The forest was therefore so dark it was impossible to distinguish anything moving within it. While it wasn't okay for moving through the forest, it was perfect for a night attack. He felt good for some reason.

“Is that Lancel village?”

While crossing the forest, it was possible to see a faint light through the bushes. It seemed to be light coming from open doors and through windows in Lancel village. A low laugh emerged from Jewel's mouth as his goal came within sight.

“Huhuhu, that village sounds as quiet as a mouse. 1~2 hours should be sufficient.”

“Wait, why is it so quiet?”

Duke who had been observing the village narrowed his eyes and muttered.

“Didn't you film the video so that users would know we are attacking Lancel?”

“Yes, so there village is quiet because there are no users as planned.”

Jewel thought it was because of the video that no users were in the village. But Duke still looked unsure.

“No, even if the users ran away the NPCs shouldn't be this quiet.”

“That's because the NPCs wouldn't know. Think about it. There is no reason for the users leaving the village to give a reason to NPCs.

The NPCs also can't search the internet to watch the video. So there is no possibility of the NPCs taking countermeasures from rumours flying between users."

"I guess, but....."

Jewel just laughed without any worries and spoke.

"There won't be a problem even if the NPCs sensed something. The video was only posted last night. It would be impossible to gain reinforcements during that time. Besides, look at their stupid expressions. Is that the expression of someone facing a crisis?"

Jewel pointed to the residents of Lancel wandering around the suburbs. He could find no awareness of danger in any of the residents.

"It is good to be careful but you don't have to worry. The opponents are NPCs."

Jewel spoke lightly as he surveyed the village.

"Duke, lead units 4,5, and 6 to the left. I'll lead units 1 and 2 to the other side. Once the town is surrounded then we'll attack.

A cruel light appeared in Jewel's eyes.

"Once the battle starts then don't spare a single one of them in the village. Then the suicide squads will move to Ark's shop and the magic tower and will loot it before blowing them up. It is a low-level village but it is in the midst of growing so the profits should be quite good."

The troops split up and moved according to the plan. Their goal for surrounding the village was to not allow any Lancel residents to escape. The members crept through the bushes after dispersing and moved to their target point.

'Huhuhu, that Ark, I want to see what kind of expression you have when you come here.'

The smile never left Jewel's face even while crawling through the bushes. After approximately 1 hour, Jewel's group had finished

surrounding the village. After taking a short break, he heard Duke's whisper from the other side.

-Jewel, we're ready.

A beast like smile flashed on Jewel's mouth.

"Now, everyone attack! Wall of Flames, Fire Wall!"

Jewel stood up and waved his hand, causing dozens of flame pillars to engulf the village. The residents ran away from the flames into a barrier created beforehand. After Jewel's pre-emptive strike, the stone wall was soon destroyed and they invaded the village. Duke also poured arrows from the opposite side and led his troops into the village.

"Let's finish this in one breath! Everybody charge!"

"Wah ah ah ah!"

When the 500 members charged the village, it was instantly turned to fire and dust. However, it didn't take a long time before Jewel realized something was strange.

"What, what the? What on earth.....?"

Jewel stopped attacking and scratched his head with confusion. Jewel had been firing magic blindly at the village. Not only Jewel, but the 500 members had shot various arrows and magic at the village. The constant explosion and dirt meant that it was difficult to see. But the residents showed no reaction to the attack. They acted like they couldn't see the people attacking the village and there wasn't any damage on their clothes. Even the swords just went straight through the bodies of the residents.

"Leader-nim, over there!"

Then one of the members shouted and pointed to the town square. Jewel reflexively turned his head and looked at the sight with amazement. Dozens of residents were running around the square. But that wasn't what caught Jewel's attention. The person he saw in the village centre wearing leather armour was.....

“.....Ark!”

Yes, the person was Jewel's enemy Ark. Jewel stiffened after finding Ark. His biggest reason to attack Lancel was to get revenge on Ark. But he never imagined that Ark would be here now. After a while, Jewel started using magic despite his confusion.

“Rise flames of a burning inferno! Take this, Hellfire!”

Huge flames signed the area from the explosion. Ark was swallowed up by the flames. No, Jewel thought the flames hit but it just went through Ark. Ark stared through the flames at Jewel and chuckled. Then Ark slowly lifted his hand which had his middle finger raised. Duke's voice shook his ears at the same time.

-We were tricked Jewel. It is a trap!

‘Trap?’

Jewel jumped and stepped backwards.

Clang, snap!

There was a sudden mechanical sound and something sprung from the ground. It was the size of a fist with letters written on the surface. Blood drained from Jewel's face as he read the letters.

Beok~ kyu!

‘That Ark bastard!’

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The sphere exploded and there was an enormous blast of flame.

“Ugh, Fire Shield!”

Jewel quickly used the Fire Shield to protect himself from the flames. As expected of a pioneer to be able to react so quickly with Fire Shield. But that was just the beginning.

Clang, snap! Clang, snap! Clang, snap! Clang, snap!

While Jewel was protecting himself, 100 other spheres bounced into

the village. Sweat dripped down Jewel's back and he confirmed the presence of the spheres. Needless to say, the spheres which appeared were all traps! These traps sensed the presence of people stepping on them before activating. It was the type of workmanship that Ark specialized in. But Jewel had no room to be angry. A warning emerged from Jewel's mouth.

"Avoid it! It is a trap!"

Kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwang!

The 100 spheres exploded at the same time and the entire village was in flames. It was a desperate attack on all the secret society members in the village. The sphere exploded before they could react to Jewel's voice. The members quickly lost 10~20% of their health. Moreover, the flames in the village continuously did damage to them.

"Ugh, it is dangerous! Quickly escape!"

"Once we get out of here.....waaaaah!"

The one of the suicide members engulfed in flames suddenly disappeared. The ground had collapsed once he stepped on it. A trap! The bottom of the hole was a trap containing sharpened blades. The man in fell into the trap had his health quickly disappear and he died.

"U-unbelievable.....!"

Jewel looked at the suicide squad members who had fallen into disorder with an expression that indicated he was unable to believe it. It was constant traps that he hadn't even considered! But that wasn't the only thing that confused him.

'T-this is.....!'

Flames were still soaring dozens of metres high in the village. But the buildings in the village were perfectly fine. No, it wasn't just the buildings but also the NPCs going around the village calmly. Jewel knew of only one occupation which could produce this phenomenon.

'Illusion.....this is an illusion? Then someone conjured the illusion?

But.....’

Conjurers used illusion magic! However, a conjurer could only create an illusion that was several metres in size. Yet the illusion had created a whole village and NPCs who never talked. But one thing was clear in the midst of all the confusion.

‘Ark.....!’

Ark had returned to Lancel village. That’s why the battle proceeded in an unpredictable direction!

“Hehehehe!”

Huge flames and continuous screams continued over the village. Flying over the flames which rose into the sky was a chuckling bat. It was Ark’s scout Racard.

“Master, caught, they were caught. Those fools were properly caught!”

“The flames are also visible from here. What is their situation now?”

“I can’t see properly because of the flames. But judging by the smell of raw meat, quite a few of them were caught?”

“Okay, observe the situation and continue stay in contact with me.”

Ark nodded with satisfaction after listened to Racard’s message. Then he turned his head to the raccoons standing next to him and grinned.

“The traps are working well.”

“It is thanks to the materials Ark-nim brought. I’m also surprised. To think this little jewel has so much power once added to a simple device.”

The raccoon chief said while tinkering with a red gem. It was the Fire Stone Ark excavated from Hwaryong Mountain. When Ark had used the Phantom Hourglass, he also made as many as 180 Fire Stones. Ark had invested half of those stones into this operation. It was the raccoon chief who thought of adding it to the spheres. The

Fire Stones didn't cause that much damage. However, that changed once it was placed in a sphere filled with gunpowder. The explosiveness was amplified by the gunpowder and created unknown damage. Thus the Fire Stones had turned into a bomb.

"And the person with the most merit in this plan is Roco."

The raccoon chief turned his head and muttered.

'Indeed, this plan wouldn't be possible without Roco.'

Ark stared at Roco. Roco was perfectly immersed in playing her harp.

"So awesome, Manager-nim!"

"You weren't just lazing around while playing the harp!"

Sapjil and Ulmeok gave her a thumbs up and praised her. Sapjil and Ulmeok were talking about the time Roco took to learn the 'Rhapsody Melody' from the ghost. 'Melody Rhapsody' was divided into 5 movements, with each movement having a unique effect. And the song Roco was currently playing was the prelude 'Illusion Sonata.'

-Melody Rhapsody Prelude:【Illusion Sonata】(Intermediate, Active)

The tragic fate of the genius musician who composed the Melody Rhapsody dwells within the 'Illusion Sonata.' All those who listen to such wonderful magic will be lost in a world of illusion. The people listening to such music on the battlefield will really feel like the main character of a tragedy. Illusion Sonata uses that to target the area where it can project an illusionary landscape. However, the images produced by the illusion have to actually exist. In addition, the realistic sense of the illusion will change depending on the degree of completion.

<Mana consumption: 5 mana every 10 seconds. Cool down time: 12 hours>

Yes, the Lancel village that Jewel's group entered was a mirage

created by Illusion Sonata.

‘The illusion seems perfect.’

Ark had seen the illusion of Lancel village that appeared not long ago. After Roco had used the Illusion Sonata, Ark had checked the degree of completion. The result was indeed amazing. Even Ark who knew about it in advance was 100% deceived by the illusion. Furthermore, there was no size limit on the illusions that Roco could create. The reason was simple. It was an illusion but the one Roco produced was different from illusion magic. To be exact, it was a hallucination not an illusion. The Illusion Sonata dragged Jewel’s group into a fantasy world and made them ‘see it as reality.’ That’s why it could show a ridiculous effect like copying a whole village. Although a Minstrel was treated as a boring profession, music was able to create tremendous illusions like this. It showed that there was more to each profession. The only downside was that the target had to be listening to the music. But that problem was easily solved with Redian using her amplification magic on Roco’s harp. Roco’s present coverage of the Illusion Sonata was several hundred metres! Jewel’s group didn’t realize that they were hallucinating because of the music. Then Ark placed traps in advanced and they walked right on top of them.

“It really is rewarding watching those guys suffer.”

Ark said with a smirk. Anyway, it wasn’t necessary to listen to Racard’s live coverage. Those guys undergoing the terrible ordeal in the fake Lancel was only 200 metres away. Therefore Ark could see the rising flames and the screams from Jewel’s group. After a while, the screams seemed to decrease and Racard’s voice could be heard.

“Master, I think all of them have escaped the traps.”

“The damage?”

“Um, there aren’t that many that burned. Around 30~40 or so?”

‘It wasn’t that strong.’

Ark looked disappointed after Racard’s report. However Ark hadn’t

expected that he could deal critical damage to them like this. Even if the bombs maximized the power of the Fire Stones, they were still just traps. At the beginning quite a few of them suffered but once they grasped the situation then they managed to avoid the traps.

‘Well the traps were mainly for the magicians and priests who have low health. In a war the magicians and priests have tremendous influence. I’ve achieved my purpose of reducing the number of priests and magicians. And the illusion hasn’t been broken yet.’

“Roco, from now on maintain your maximum output.”

“I understand.”

Roco’s fingers began to move even quicker. Her ten fingers raced like the wind over the 47 strings. Dozens of tones were created and a captivating melody flowed out. Then lights from 3~4 more Lancel villages appeared. The degree of completion of the ‘Illusion Sonata’ has increased and made it more welcoming.

“Hihihihi, they’re overwhelmed and don’t know what they’re doing!”

Racard giggled as he used satellite surveillance mode to watch them. As expected, Jewel’s group were in a state of chaos. But it was impossible for them to retreat now. One by one Jewel’s group followed the light.

And that was what Ark aimed for.

Snap, bang! Snap, syu syu syu syuk!

The mechanical sounds rang out throughout the forest. He had placed pitfalls along that area. Those guys didn’t know about the welcoming lights and just rushed in blindly. He had created a few copies of the same village. Although they weren’t stupid so they didn’t blindly rush into the village like before. So Ark had buried traps between the different villages. Those guys who were fooled by the lights fell victim to the traps.

‘It won’t deal a serious blow but the damage will cumulate. The cumulative damage will be a significant penalty when the war begins.’

His plan was to take care of the magicians and priests with traps. However, the ones in the forest weren't traps to deal damage. They were traps to make the magicians and priests consume their mana. If someone was caught in a trap than the magicians and priests would have no choice but to use magic. And even the smallest loss of mana would be helpful on a battlefield.

'They've already lost dozens of priests and magicians and they should've lost 20~30% of their mana from the traps. That will increase the chances of winning the war! Of course they will start using scouts to carefully search for traps as they move through the first but it will be good for buying some time.'

Yes, the biggest reason Ark developed this plan was to gain some time. However, that time wasn't to build up defences for Lancel village. The raccoons had already finished all the defences for Lancel.

The reason he needed time wasn't for defense preparations.....

Snap, syu syu syu syuk!

<p>-The Poison Arrow trap has been activated. 300 damage.</p> <p><Thanks to the poison, you will lost 20 mana every 10 seconds for 3 minutes></p>

"Damn, another poison!"

"Hurry up before I lose any more mana!"

"Dammit....."

Racard's live coverage showed the real condition of Jewel's group. Of course, the ability to detect traps was one of the vocational skills of the Rangers and Hunters. However, the welcoming lights of Lancel were spread out across the forest. In other words, the spreading forest was full of traps. It would take a few days just finding all the traps in the forest. So Jewel had his warriors with high health and defense lead the group.

If it wasn't possible to find one by one than they planned to ignore it and head straight to Lancel. But the traps in the forest were different

from the traps in Lancel. The traps in the illusion were damage oriented traps.

Since 100 spheres were triggered at the same time, quite a few magicians and priests with low health were sacrificed. But the traps in the forest had the effect of draining mana. In this situation losing mana was more threatening than losing health. Health could be restored with recovery magic but there was no way to recover mana within a small amount of time. Even if they were warriors, they wouldn't be able to use skills without mana. Skills played a huge role in battle. No matter the level difference, if no skills were available than the odds couldn't be guaranteed. But despite their efforts, the warriors' mana still flew away. In fact, their mana drained even faster as they struggled blindly.

"Jewel, have you caught anything?"

Duke asked in a pained voice.

".....I don't know. I've been using Mana Track but I can't seem to find anything."

But Jewel's answer was also pained. Jewel's original occupation was 'Force Stalker.' The primary accomplishment of a Force Stalker was their ability to trace mana. After changing to his 2nd stage profession 'Force Officer' with the help of the alliance, this mana tracking technique was reinforced even further. Yet Jewel still hadn't found any traces of mana in the forest.

"There are 3~4 villages visible. If the illusion is of this magnitude than wouldn't there be some traces of mana?"

"I'm going crazy."

Jewel murmured in an irritated voice.

'Dammit, there are also people like this at Lancel.....'

Jewel had previously had members of the suicide squads hide around Lancel village. The reason Jewel had them hide beforehand was to keep an eye on Lancel. However, those guys had been caught by Shambala and were now rotting in jail. Therefore Jewel couldn't risk anyone else scouting around the area. They were

trapped in the cell but he had received all the basic information so there was no reason to check again. He never imagined that a situation like this could happen. No, in fact the situation would've still been similar even if he scouted beforehand. The suicide squad members didn't just see the illusion inside the village. The illusion was made with many layers that some of them overlapped with the trees. In addition, the night was so dark that not even starlight was visible. It would be difficult for them to identify anything strange in the forest.

"Damn, I should've known that Ark would play a trick like this....."

Then Duke spoke in a worried voice.

"Jewel, should we still proceed with the plan?"

"You want to retreat because of some traps?"

"It's not that. You saw it as well so you know that Ark is in the village. He probably came back after seeing the video."

"Yes, but that was one of the purposes of the video."

Jewel murmured in a cold voice. In fact, Jewel's goal in making Duke film the video wasn't just to scare away users from Lancel. Jewel knew that Ark wasn't in Lancel. That was the main reason why Jewel made the video. If Ark saw the video then he would return to Lancel village. If Ark lost his store and Lancel village then it would be a big blow to him, so he would come rushing back. And that was what drove Jewel's strategy.

"But other users seeing the video is different from Ark seeing it. While users wouldn't have any reaction to the rumours, Ark would move to save the NPCs of that village. Because that fellow cooperates with NPCs a lot. He could also possibly pull in other troops from different areas."

"You still don't understand? That is the reason why the video was posted 18 hours beforehand. Even if they were in the closest city, Ark would be able to move troops in 18 hours. He has no time to bring in reinforcements. That is why he is tying up our ankles with this illusion."

“I guess so.”

“Besides, in the video you only commanded 200 troops. Even if Ark called in reinforcements, it would only be enough to deal with 200 troops. But there are actually 500 of us. If that Ark saw us than he would be upset and not know what to do.”

Yes, there was a few reasons why Jewel circulated the information on the internet. One was to seal off the users' intervention in the war. Secondly, it was to call Ark back to Lancel. The third reason was to make Ark think that only 200 people were going to attack Lancel. It was a psychological war with three different effects from just one video! However, Jewel was unaware that the psychological war was destroyed by Shambala's eavesdropping. Anyway, they were tricked and received considerable damage from the illusion but Jewel still didn't doubt his victory.

“When we escaped from the village didn't the illusions also increase? It is because he grasped the number of our troops too late. That fellow is intimidated. If we just manage to find the village than Ark will be finished.”

“.....We just need to find it.”

Duke kicked the wreckage of a trap which activated a short while ago with frustration.

“Damn, why is there this sweet music when I am already annoyed?”

“Sweet music?”

“What? You can't hear it? A while ago the background music became rather sweet.”

Jewel's eyes narrowed at Duke's answer. In fact, Jewel always had the habit of turning on music in his room while playing the game. In order to find inspiration during this fight, he had turned on a grand marching tune. So he couldn't hear the low music that Duke was talking about.

‘What's with the music? Perhaps.....?’

Jewel considered something before turning off his music and listening. Then Jewel could hear the soft sound of a harp in his ear. In New World the background music would change depending on the situation. But the music right now was somewhat strange. Jewel suddenly realized something and shouted.

“That’s it, I get it now!”

“What?”

“The reason why I don’t see any traces of mana. Damn, we were tricked. The village we saw wasn’t an illusion. It is a hallucination! Stupid! That’s why I couldn’t detect any mana.”

“What do you mean? Hallucination?”

“The Minstrel. We’ve been seeing hallucinations thanks to the Minstrel’s music. Damn, there was a Minstrel who followed Ark in Lancel. It is certainly her work!”

Jewel was truly a pioneer as he figured out the entire situation from a small clue. Once he knew the skill of the opponent, it wasn’t difficult coming up with a way to handle it.

“Hearing Paralysis!”

Hearing Paralysis was a magic to stop being affected by monsters who used sound attacks like Sirens. If even one person used Hearing Paralysis then they could confirm if the village was a hallucination.

When the music was blocked off, the lights in the forest started flickering and gradually disappeared. It seemed like all the villages in the forest were hallucinations. Since he couldn’t see any villages with the hallucinations turned off, it meant that Lancel had turned off its lights and was hiding. In this situation Jewel didn’t know the exact location of the village but he just laughed.

‘Now that I know what trick he is using, it isn’t a problem to find the location.’

It was a Minstrel’s skill that was causing the hallucinations. And wherever the music reached was the skill range of the Minstrel.

‘The hallucinations began as soon as we entered the forest. And the welcoming lights appeared all over the place. If I apply the scope of the effects then it is obvious that amplification magic has been used. The range of amplification magic is a 500 metres radius. In other words, it is a 1 kilometre diameter.’

Once he grasped that then the real location of Lancel village was clear. He determined the two villages that were most distant from each other. The source of the music had to be somewhere in the centre between those two villages.

“There. There is no doubt!”

Jewel soon found the location of Lancel village. Once he figured out the place, there was no reason to rush and run into the traps. It was obvious that Lancel village was prepared for an attack. On the other hand, the suicide squad members had received quite a bit of damage before the battle even began.

“Scouts, search for traps and secure the path. The remaining members should check their equipment and recover in the meantime. Once the scouts secure the path then we will immediately attack Lancel.”

They had already made enough mistakes. No more mistakes would be tolerated.

-I understand.

Since Jewel had used Hearing Paralysis, the members answered using hand signals. Anyway, Jewel carefully rearranged the formation before finally moving through the forest. How much time had passed? Soon they passed through the dense forest and wide, flat ground appeared. There was a village situated at the top of the plains. The village looked pitch black..... Yes, it was Lancel village! They had finally found Lancel village 2 hours after entering the forest.

“We found it!”

Jewel and Duke’s eyes lit up as they looked at Lancel village. Then someone suddenly walked forward from the village. Despite the

considerable distance, Jewel could still recognize the opponent. It was a wolf with a black mane flying, none other than Ark who was disguised as Dark Wolf. But there was something V shaped sticking out from his head. It was like an insect's antennae. After seeing the antennae of an insect on a wolf, Jewel just laughed.

"Hmm, you found us faster than I thought."

But Jewel couldn't hear since he was deaf. Jewel released Hearing Paralysis and clenched his teeth together.

"You bastard, I'm going to start attacking now!"

"Don't you remember I'm a lot more powerful than you?"

"Shut up, I don't know how you knew and returned to Lancel to play such a trick but our bad relationship ends here. Lancel will die with you!"

Jewel shouted furiously. Ark just looked at Jewel and sighed before shaking his head.

"Hah, why are you so persistent that you even came this far?"

"W-w-w-what? You dare say something like that? After collecting 4,000 gold and a rare item from selling Silvana and interfering with our Seutandal conquest plan, you dare ask why I'm so persistent? What did you just say?"

"I don't understand the meaning of your words."

Ark looked at him with a pitiful look and clicked his tongue.

"While you have a somewhat spicy taste, you're not worthy of being my opponent. Yet you couldn't grasp this and still attacked? Do you want to give me even more money? Do you even have anything left to give? I'm thankful but my heart is quite troubled by it. Why don't you just leave peacefully this time while you can?"

"W-what? This bastard.....! Talking like that....."

Ark's words caused Jewel's blood pressure to rise. But after a moment, he clenched his teeth and shouted orders.

“Attack! Kill, kill! Do whatever it takes to defeat him!”

“Wah ah ah ah!”

The 500 suicide squad members raised their weapons and rushed forward. Then Ark turned back and shouted.

“Standby!”

The lights in Lancel village turned on at Ark’s voice. When the lights turned on, Lancel village became so bright it was like broad daylight. Jewel’s eyes which had been adapted to the darkness winced from the sudden light.

Chwa, chwa, chwa, chwa, chwa, chwa!

Smalls screens abruptly rose in front of Ark. Inside the village surrounded by stone ways, 15 screens shot up in every direction. Ark laughed at the suicide squad members and laughed pleasantly before shouting.

“The system has signalled a green light. Action!”

“Wah ah ah ah!”

It was at that time. All of a sudden, here was a thundering shout and warriors hiding behind the stone wall stood up. Jewel’s face was dyed with confusion at the troops. The soldiers which appeared from behind the stone wall weren’t residents of Lancel. The hundreds of warriors were all users!

“Huk, this is.....”

Jewel hesitated with a perplexed expression. The secret society members had only posted the video of them attacking users 18 hours ago. It was natural for the users to become scared and leave Lancel. But what was up with all the users?

“It was quite a good idea making that video and distributing it.”

Ark laughed at his expression and muttered.

“But it’s nothing compared to the game being broadcasted.”

“B-broadcasted?”

Jewel’s face caught from different angles then appeared on the 15 split screens.

Media Power!

“I guess it has begun now.”

A man muttered as he looked at the clock on the wall. With a bushy beard and thick potbelly, it was a man in his late thirties wearing pyjamas. He looked like any ordinary father living next door. And he was actually a common neighbourhood ajusshi. But that was in reality. Once he entered through the magic door to a fantasy world called New World he was Raiden, the leader of the Hermes alliance filled with hundreds of people. Yes, this ajusshi was the leader of the Hermes alliance Raiden! It was currently 8 o'clock in the morning. It was still too early to be active in the game. Raiden's normal pattern was to log on at 12 o'clock. However he had been unable to sleep last night.

“It has to work.....”

It wasn't possible to hide his anxiety as Raiden muttered before taking out a cigarette. The reason he had a sleepless night was because today was 'the day.' It was the formal debut stage of the Hermes alliance's secret society!

“Today I will see if the secret suicide squad can play an active role.”

Raiden had a lot of expectations towards the suicide squad. No, to be exact they were the only thing he could rely on. It wasn't necessary to explain but the Hermes alliance was in massive debt after the lawless port was destroyed. That was not the whole problem. At the time, Raiden had gathered funds from the alliance to invest into construction of the lawless port. The amount of profit gained from the lawless port depended on the funds invested. If it had gone as planned and they were able to recapture Seutandal then the dividends would be enormous. The lawless port seemed to be a business plan with a 100% success rate. In addition, Seutandal would be a golden goose once it was recaptured! Everybody in the Hermes alliance invested with the dream of making a fortune and the

lawless port was able to be created in a short amount of time. But the lawless port was smashed before it could give any profits. At the same time, the investments of the alliance members became toilet paper overnight. Whether it be dozens of gold or hundreds of gold, all the alliance members' blames were directed at Raiden. That wasn't all. The person who most believed in the success of the lawless port plan was Raiden himself! He believed that shares in the lawless port was a guaranteed blue chip (stock where growth, profitability and stability was secured) and he believed that the one who held the most shares would profit the most. He had mobilized his offline and online contacts and prepared money to invest. Thanks to that, Raiden was backed into a corner in both New Word and reality.

'But if the suicide squad succeeds today.....'

As much as 10,000 gold (from the lawless port stolen goods) would come into his possession. It wouldn't be enough to settle all his problems but it would turn off the heat.

'There is also one more important thing aside from the money coming in today. I will be able to gauge if the secret society will be profitable. In the words of Jewel, obtaining the 10,000 gold won't be a problem. It will be possible to recover all our losses and have a reserve source of income if they prove successful today.'

"And once again Seutandal..... Huhuhu, hahaha!"

Raiden cackled at the thought of the rosy future. Then the door suddenly opened and a sharp voice could be heard.

"Shut up! You're laughing when I just received an early morning call from debt collectors!"

A woman who was Raiden's wife yelled into his ear. Raiden winced and closed his mouth before stuttering.

"Oh, no, this is....."

"I really can't live like this. How could you borrow money without saying a word to me? Do you know what it is like receiving called from loan companies? If you don't pay it off within a week then they

will send someone!”

“U-understood. It can be solved today if everything goes well.”

“Bah, are you certain? I’ll tell you in advance but I can’t live with debt-stricken people. If you don’t fix it in a few days then I will take the children and go to my parent’s house!”

His wife shouted as she poked him angrily.

‘Damn, I have to pay off that borrowed money.’

Raiden continued smoking while sighing. He had stayed up all night chain smoking. He couldn’t possibly eat until he heard news of Jewel’s victory. Well, if he didn’t pay back the money then his wife wouldn’t be setting the table for him. Raiden restlessly pulled out some milk from the refrigerator. He was drinking the milk when his son turned on the TV and its sound could be heard.

“Today’s game exclusive scoop will be a special live broadcast!”

‘Game exclusive scoop? Is it already that time?’

Raiden drank the milk and turned his eyes towards the TV.

Originally the game exclusive scoop was broadcasted once a week during the evening. But since viewers started to protest that the information was coming in too late so a program called ‘game scoop hot issues’ began in the morning hours.

‘Anyway this is a special live broadcast? Had an event begun in New World?’

“I’m curious about the special live broadcast. Since it wasn’t in the schedule.”

The female reporter asked the question that Raiden was wondering about. And the host laughed and nodded.

“It’s not a surprise that you don’t know. I heard some talk a few hours ago and decided in a hurry. But there is no doubt that every minute will be interesting. I’m very curious in the results as well.”

“Ah, your words have made me even more curious. The audience is

also interested so please tell me quickly.”

“I understand. But before that, have you seen the video titled ‘Crime File’ which spread like wildfire over the internet yesterday?”

“Yes, I received a notification from my friend and watched it. Since beginners from Schudenberg often visit the Haruna camp. I’ve also been there before but the NPC captain of Haruna was really beautiful and kind. Seeing such a good NPC get killed was really heartbreaking. Well, a new NPC appeared not long afterwards in the game but he is just a bearded grandfather.”

The female reporter said with a deliberately angry expression. Then the host laughed loudly and nodded.

“Hahaha, I know as well. While users have killed NPCs before, this is the first time an NPC village was decimated so it is was a shocking incident. But the even more shocking contents of the video was the advance attack notice.”

“A village called Lancel.”

“That’s correct. Lancel village is located in the Argus Mountains in Schudenberg. After building the village, it has been rapidly growing thanks to its eager residents. In addition, there are many unique goods and a variety of species so the village has been quite famous these days.”

“Are they going to be killed like the residents of Haruna camp?”

“Yes, that might be so. But where there is evil in the world, there is also justice.”

The host shook his finger and spoke.

“The thieves who appeared on the video are strong and vicious. When they said they would attack Lancel, I thought all the users would run away. However justice is still alive. Surprisingly many people have decided to oppose the bandit group! And even more amazingly, the one who rallied them to stand against the thieves is none other than Dark Wolf!”

“Omo, isn’t Dark Wolf the one who became a hot topic after Seutandal rose?”

“That’s correct. The hero who caused Seutandal to rise will make an appearance on the game exclusive scoop! After he heard the news, he ran to Lancel and rallied the users to fight against the bandit group. And the combat scene of him fighting against the thieves will be aired live!”

Then a lamp which was placed in front of the host started shining.

The person standing nearby wearing earphones received instructions and nodded, causing the host to shout.

“The images are being transmitted now. We will see the true identities of the thieves who attacked the NPC village and see if Dark Wolf can stop them, creating a new legend. All the viewers are cheering for Dark Wolf.”

Puhak!

Milk spouted like a fountain from Raiden’s mouth as he idly watched the screen. The face which filled Raiden’s 54 inch LED TV was Jewel.

After seeing Jewel’s face on the TV, his six year old son asked.

“Eh? Isn’t that the person who appeared in a video with Daddy before? Isn’t that ajusshi Daddy’s subordinate? Then Daddy is also bad like him?”

“Oh, no! I don’t know that person!”

Raiden wildly shook his head.

‘Huhuhu, that Jewel still doesn’t know what is going on.’

Ark laughed at Jewel’s confused expression. Yes, this was the method Ark came up with 18 hours before. In order to oppose the Crime File circulating the internet, he had received the help of the broadcasting station!

Ark had been desperate before he thought of that method. If the Crime File scared users off then Lancel would only have 300 people protecting it. On the other hand, Jewel's force numbered 500 people. Furthermore, they also had high levels. No matter how he thought, he couldn't think of a method to win. In order for the mission to be a success, he had to ensure that the damage to NPCs and the village remained below 30%. But in order to reduce damage to the residents, he would have to sacrifice the village and vice versa. Those two challenges weren't compatible at the same time. And if that quest failed then the <Find New Settlers> quest he spent 1 and a half years on would also fail. That wasn't all. If the town received a serious blow then the real estate price would slump! Even if Ark managed to stop the thieves, Ark had no choice but to submit to considerable damage.

'The only way to minimize the damage is through the users.....'

While they were only level 100~150, it would be possible to do something with those numbers. Furthermore, if the users died then Ark wouldn't receive any damage. He could use risky strategies without any burden.

However, the users would be too scared from the 'Crime File' to be hired as mercenaries anymore. Then Ark's eyes caught sight of the business card with the name of the journalist from the game exclusive news on it. In fact after the 'Netherworld exploration of a Wicked Wolf' video, Ark had been contacted many times by the game scoop reporter. The viewers were really interested in the identity of the black wolf so the reporter wanted him to appear on the broadcast. However Ark had refused the offer. While he would receive a performance fee for going on the broadcast, he wasn't an entertainer so the fee would be small. The amount wasn't large enough to tempt him. Ark knew that having his face on the broadcast might have even bigger disadvantages. No, he wasn't going to show his face for that amount of money.

'But it won't be a problem if it is a video of the game. And if it is broadcasted on the TV.....?'

Ark's thoughts rolled around wildly and he quickly called the broadcasting station.

“Dark Wolf-nim, you’re accepting the offer to appear on the broadcast?”

“No. I have a different request today.”

Ark explained what he wanted to the reporter.

“Do you know the Crime File which circulated a while ago? That bandit group will be raiding Lancel village tomorrow. I was wondering if you wanted to broadcast the battle?”

“The battle of Lancel village? Tell me more.”

Although the Crime File had circulated on the internet, it had also attracted close attention from the game exclusive news. Because users giving an advance notice before they attacked an NPC village was unusual. Naturally, the plan was for the game exclusive news to dispatch a reporter in New World to the site.

“Could it be that Dark Wolf-nim is also participating in the village?”

“It’s not just me. From the Evil Silrion, Blue Sword also known as Shambala and Bristania’s strongest pair Bread and Redian will also appear in the battle to defend Lancel.”

“Is that true?”

The reporter from the game exclusive news was excited by Ark’s proposal. Since the game exclusive news was based on information about New World, naturally he knew the names Bread and Redian. Not only Dark Wolf, but the Crime File video was also an incredible topic. Blue Sword, Bread and Redian were also going to be there! It was to the extent that everybody in New World would be interested in the video! If they broadcasted it then the audience ratings would be secured.

“Team Leader-nim, it is a huge event!”

“What? Dark Wolf, Shambala, Bread and Redian are all going to appear in Lancel village? There’s no need to think about it. Organize the airtime immediately! Schedule an opening in the hot issues section which will be followed by the video of the battle!”

It was given the green light.

“Are there any reporters close to Lancel village?”

“There is. We have some reporters in Giran ready to film the scene of Lancel being attacked by the thieves.”

“That’s great. Then tell them to quickly make contact with Dark Wolf!”

“By the way, Dark Wolf says he will edit it directly from that site and send in the video.”

“What? Why?”

“I think he wants to ensure that the scene comes out wonderfully.”

The reporter scratched his head and muttered. But it was in fact the opposite. No, the reason Ark wanted to be the director of the camera was to ‘hide that thing.’ In this battle, it was inevitable that he would sacrifice the users’ lives to protect the NPCs and the village. Of course he would have to give some unreasonable commands. Then wouldn’t it be broadcasted to the entire country? However, the Team Leader didn’t know Ark’s intentions and nodded without thinking.

“Anyway, the viewers will show a huge amount of interest since Dark Wolf is entering the war. The appearance of Dark Wolf isn’t bad. Tell the reporters who will make contact with Dark Wolf to do whatever he says. This fight that will be televised live will be a hot issue!”

And approximately 10 hours ago, a reporter from the game exclusive news arrived in Lancel. He established a simple base station at Lancel village to film the battle. Then 15 cameras and equipment to connect it to the broadcasting station was installed. And the person who was controlling the images was Ark! The antennae on top of his head was to relay the information from the 15 cameras to the base station.

‘Huhuhu, it really is a brilliant idea!’

Ark looked at the hundreds of users who appeared on the screen

and smirked. There was a reason Ark dragged the broadcasting station into this. Ark implemented his plan shortly after the reporter arrived in Lancel village. Ark transformed into Dark Wolf and called the users to the square along with the reporter.

“Everyone please pay attention!”

“What? We’re busy.... Eh? That person?”

“Dark Wolf! Dark Wolf who caused Seutandal to rise!”

The users who were busy trying to escape after seeing the Crime File stopped and started paying attention. Most users in New World had seen the video, so there was nobody who didn’t know about Dark Wolf. After their attention focused on him, Ark quickly started talking.

“Everybody already knows this but the bandit group which appeared in the Crime File is planning to attack Lancel tomorrow. There is no time to receive help from other villages in this area. If this is left alone then Lancel will be plundered like they planned.”

Ark said as he looked at the users.

“Are you really going to just sit back and watch? Even though it is an NPC village, this is a place of shelter within the Argus Mountains. Yet they want to trample this place! Are you going to ignore the users who intend to destroy this shelter?”

“That is true however.....”

“We still haven’t completed all the quests in this village.....”

“But.....those fellows will attack NPCs as well as loot the village. There is no reason for us to intrude in vain.....”

The users whispered among each other. In fact, the users didn’t want Lancel village to be threatened. Lancel village was the only resting place for users hunting in the Argus Mountains. It was also unnecessary to say that users received quests from Lancel village. But the burden was too big for them to participate in the battle.

“I will not tolerate the atrocities of those fellows. No matter what, I

will oppose them and protect Lancel. And just now, the game exclusive news has decided to live broadcast the battle of Lancel during the 'hot issues' section."

"What? The game exclusive news?"

"That's correct. This person right here is a reporter from the game exclusive news."

Ark pointed towards the reporter. Then the users started buzzing around with astonished voices.

"That's right, I've seen that reporter before on the game exclusive news."

"Then the battle for Lancel village will really be broadcasted on the TV?"

"If we fight in the battle then we'll appear on TV?"

The users gradually began to understand the situation. There was a serious chance that their characters in New World could be broadcasted! Ark then drove another wedge in the shaken users.

"Everybody knows that Lancel village will be attacked by those in the Crime File tomorrow. We have to stop it. And if we win the battle then you'll be a hero. Naturally users who show more achievements will receive more attention. Those users might be given a chance for an interview. Isn't that right?"

"Ah yes, that is....."

The reporter nodded his head. Lights appeared in the users' eyes at that reply. A TV which a common house appliance which was spread out all over the world. But now they had a chance to appear on it. Plus, if they did something notable then there was a chance for an interview. Anybody would be happy about a chance to appear on TV! The players were buzzing for a while before one user stood up and shouted.

"That's right, we can't just rest while the village is attacked by thieves!"

“Besides, the hero of Seutandal Dark Wolf is also here!”

“Let’s all fight together!”

The attitude of the users changed 180 degrees once they heard the word ‘TV.’ While a video might die down quickly, appearing on TV was no comparison. Thanks to that, the users now swarmed and frantically tried to apply to participate.

“Oh, a celebrity!”

“If my character appears on TV then I can boast to my girlfriend!”

“Eh, what? It’s true. The Lancel battle will be broadcasted live on the game exclusive news. Huh? Of course. Where? Don’t make me laugh and just return soon! This is the opportunity to be a celebrity! Don’t worry about your equipment being taken away!”

Some users even whispered to their friends who had already run away.

‘Huhuhu, this stupid crowd!’

Ark inwardly smiled with satisfaction as he looked at the user. Yes, this was the reason why Ark dragged in reporter from the game exclusive news. An appearance on TV. This also had another effect aside from gathering users. With the images being streamed on the television, it was impossible for them to cowardly run away or disobey orders if the situation became difficult. If they had to die while on TV then they would rather die with honour.

‘You’re already my puppets. Now I can control you as I wish!’

Thus Ark was able to get his hands on 400 people free of charge. Despite their levels, these puppets were those who didn’t fear death and would submit to his orders.

‘Also Jewel’s group has been perfectly branded as a villain!’

Ark looked at Jewel with a stupid smile. Ark was managing all the images shown in the live broadcast. And the picture he sent to the broadcasting station was that of Jewel’s face! The close up shot of the villain attacking Lancel village was displayed for the whole

country to see. Of course the TV broadcasts didn't have any influence on New World. But at least Jewel's face was imprinted sharply in the minds of players in New World. Even if he managed to lose his chaotic status later on, it wouldn't be easy for him to get along with other users. Jewel had already lost even before the start of the battle. And it wasn't just Jewel, it also applied to Duke and the rest of the group. However Jewel still hadn't grasped the situation.

"What the hell? How come these users are still in the village?"

Jewel couldn't understand and just stared at the users. He hadn't expected that all the users would run away after watching the Crime File. But at least 70-80% would've run away. However, there were at least 400 users standing in front of him. It seemed like the numbers had actually increased instead of decreasing. Furthermore, there was an unusual fighting spirit in the users' eyes. But there was a reason for it.

"Hey, did you see?"

"Yes, I just checked right now and it really appeared on TV."

"It was only for a little bit but my face definitely appeared."

"Really?"

"Thankfully I'm taping it!"

"If we participate then we'll become celebrities like Dark Wolf!"

"Will we make a new legend?"

After seeing that it was broadcasted on TV, the morale of the players increased even more. But Jewel didn't know that and was frightened by their intention to fight. Jewel was only able to understand one thing.

'There's no mistake, that bastard has definitely arranged some schemes!'

"Leader-nim?"

"There's no need to worry! Those guys are only level 100~150 at the

most! It might become a little more troublesome but our victory is still assured! It will go as planned. We'll show them what will happen if they try to attack us! Step on them one by one!"

"Charge!"

Snap, snap, chwa chwa chwa chwa!

Dozens of members from the suicide squad rushed forward. They were wearing thick metal armour, shields and holding spears! They were the assaulters, the profession with the strongest breakthrough power in New World.

"Break through into Lancel! Dash!"

"Wah ah ah ah!"

The assaulters used their shields and spears and surged forward.

"Heok, it is the assaulters!"

"Stop them! If you collide with them then some will fall down!"

The users became confused and started firing magic and arrows. But.....ting, ting, ting, ting! The magic and arrows just bounced off the shields. It was the defensive power of the assaulters who had the strongest breakthrough power! The Assaulters also consisted of the highest ranking users in the suicide squad. Level 300! When the assaulters used their skill 'Dash', the movement speed increased by 50% while their defense increase by 30%. There level 100~150 were unable to stop the rush. Thanks to the thrust from the assault corps, Lancel's defences quickly became disorderly!

"So they appeared like I expected."

However Ark was still composed. Jewel's purpose was to destroy Lancel village. It was expected that they would use the assault corps as soon as they began to break through to Lancel. It was impossible for Ark not to prepare for such an obvious attack.

"Hahaha! Those stupid guys, I'll make sure they regret jumping in so rashly....."

One of the assaulters rushing forward suddenly disappeared. It wasn't just one person. One by one more assaulters started disappearing.

"What, what the? Why.....?"

Jewel looked at the sight with puzzled eyes. Only then did he discover that a hole had appeared where the assaulter disappeared. Holes had been dug all over the place and camouflaged using wooden branches.

"A pitfall trap? That guy, still using such boring methods until the end..... But they are assaulters. A trap like that won't be enough to give them a fatal wound. They'll soon leave the trap....."

"Will that be possible?"

Ark laughed and murmured.

Tutututung, pepepepeng!

All of a sudden there were loud sounds and smoke rose from the hole. What had just happened? While Jewel was still looking, some assaulters climbed out of the hole with looks of fear on their faces. But before they could fully exit, a black hand grabbed their arms and legs and pulled them back in. There was a violent sound and the assaulter disappeared again.

"Aaaaack!"

'What is happening in that hole.....?'

Jewel stared with shocked eyes until some ears emerged from the hole again. They were ears that he had seen on an NPC before.

'They previously accompanied Ark.....!'

Yes, the hand while pulled the shocked warrior into the hole was a raccoon. The hole and the raccoons was the plan that Ark devised to deal with the assaulters. In other words, the holes that the assaulters fell into weren't a trap. They were complicated underground tunnels created using the raccoons specialty. Then Ark covered the entrance to the underground passages using the

wooden branch and camouflaged it. The assaulters wore heavy armour so they were vulnerable to fall damage. It was natural for them to be 'stunned' by the impact of falling! Then the raccoons waiting in the underground passage would swarm and shoot them with the cannons. Even with their high defense, the assaulters were unable to withstand the barrage of so many cannon fire while in a 'stunned' state. It was a 100% chance of death once they fell into the hole!

"This is ridiculous.....!"

Jewel's mouth started foaming. Jewel had thought it was just traps laid out. But he believed in the assaulter's defense and judged that it was possible to ignore the traps. He never could've guessed that it would turn out this way. However, 'Dash' had already begun. While 'Dash' boasted overwhelming breakthrough power, its weak point was that it couldn't be stopped until the skill was finished. No, even if Jewel told them to stop then they wouldn't be able to.

'The raccoon holes are unexpectedly but only 10 assaulters fell into the hole. There are still 30 of them left. 30 assaulters are enough to shatter their defences! Once their rampage stops then I will reorganize their formation and batter their defences!'

Just like Jewel said, there were still 30 assaulters who managed to reach the users. If the assaulters collided with them then it was possible to shatter dozens of users! The overwhelming power might also impact the moral of the users! Once the suicide squad broke in then any hope those users had would be lost. Clearly the users would run away with fright. Then the assaulters rushed into the users like Jewel planned! Ark then jumped onto a user's shoulders and raised the Saw blade.

"Razak, transformation off! Iron Fire Wall activate!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

The Saw blade transformed back into Razak. But Razak's outward appearance was different from before. Previously he carried around a tattered shield but now it was one covered in flames. It was a magnificent fire shield which looked like a skull!

Clack clack clack clack clack!

Razak shouted (?) and raised his shield over his head.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwang, pepepepeng, hwarrrrruk!

At the same time, wings of fire opened up on either side of the shield and hit the assaulters. The assaulters that had been travelling at top speed wobbled and fell. This was the power of Razak's new 'Blazing Fire Draconian Shield!' After Ark gave the Fire Draconian Skull to the raccoons, they had made the 'Blazing Fire Draconian Shield' out of it. Frankly, Ark never imagined that a shield would be created from it. Since the information couldn't be confirmed, he thought that an unusual item would be made. Because wasn't the material a skull? Yet an unexpected shield for Razak was created.

-Blazing Fire Draconian Shield (Rare)

Armour type: Steel Shield

Defense: 250

Durability: 150/150

Weight: 70

User Restriction: Exclusive use for a Skeleton Warrior

A shield made with the skull of the Fire Draconian Oracle Lumines. The oracle was originally had a mission to protect the Fire Draconian species so the oracles have learnt strong protective magic. All the protection magic that Lumines has learnt over the hundreds of years has been concentrated in this skull. A skilled craftsman can create a powerful artifact out of this skull. But only those with a deep understanding of bones will be able to draw out all the power within the skull.

<Option: Strength +10, Stamina +10>

<Special Option: 'Iron Fire Wall' is available. Iron Fire Wall uses the magic of the shield to stop the enemies 'Dash' within a 10 metre area. When the skill is activated, 10~100 fire damage will be dealt. Once 'Dash' is cancelled, the opponent will fall into a 'stunned'

state. However, only warriors who have learnt 'Shield Stroke' can use this skill.

Mana consumption:100 Cool down time: 5 minutes>

'This is worth the 200 gold production cost.'

Ark looked warmly at the shield roaring with fire. A rare shield with a special option attached was a lot different from a general magic shield. With the special option, Razak has another defensive skill. The Iron Fire Wall had the ability to stop the enemy's rush when within a 10 metre area! The skill alone was worth more than 200 gold. The problem was that it was a pet exclusive item so it would be difficult to sell. But if it was an item to this degree then he wouldn't want to sell it. Thanks to that, his summons managed to stop the 'Dash' of the 30 assaulters. It also caused flame damage and a 'stun' effect!

"Kuaaaaak!"

Thanks to the stun effect, the assaulters couldn't move a finger.

'That's it. The cool down time of Iron Fire Wall is 5 minutes. It is similar to the cool down time of the warrior's 'Dash.' Then I can block their next Dash.'

Razak had also been steadily eating food so his current stats were equivalent to level 290. So that stat difference wasn't that much compared to Jewel's group. Moreover, Razak had also received considerable training from Ark so his combat abilities weren't inferior. Using the 'Blazing Fire Draconian Shield,' it was possible to stop the 'Dash.'

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Even without the need for Ark's commands, Razak knew to use his shield and was the main axis of the users' defense. It was a scene where he could see Razak's growth.

'That's it, their momentum has been broken. Now.....!'

Ark raised his fist and let out a large roar.

“Now’s the time. Exterminate the villains who are threatening the peace of New World!”

“Waaaaaah, for New World!”

Then a wave of 400 users raised their weapons and rushed Jewel’s group. The users.....the first group they attacked was the assaulters affected by ‘stun.’ The assaulters were normally an impregnable wall of defense. But that didn’t matter. Although the users were only level 100~150, there were still 400 of them.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The users swarmed like a group of ants and the assaulters instantly lost all their health. Since they were caught by ‘stun’, the only thing the assaulters could do was send an SOS signal.

“S-save me!”

“These bastards..... Stop them! Block those guys!”

“Damn, these guys are like mayflies..... Smash them all!”

Jewel’s plan to smash the users with ‘Dash’ failed so their group had no more room to breathe. They had to mobilize their power before colliding with the users. Thanks to the imitation of Lancel village created by Illusion Sonata, Jewel’s group had quite a few casualties. And now the 40 assaulters had also received damage. But Jewel still had more than 400 forces left. Despite having the same numbers as the users, their level was higher! So Jewel’s group thought they could smash them quickly but the users were surprisingly persistent.

“To the tired bodies, listen to this cheerful song.”

A soft singing voice could be heard over the steel clanging sounds and screams of the battlefield. It was the Minstrel Roco singing from Lancel. A Minstrel’s singing buff! While the priests and magicians could also apply buffs, the buffs of a Minstrel were different. While the Minstrel specialized in buffs, unlike the magician they couldn’t use any attacks. That was the reason why users avoided becoming minstrels. In other words, it was just a profession that specialized in buffs. When Roco used her support magic from the rear, message

windows appeared in front of the users.

-The Advanced 'Song of Life' effect has been applied.

<You will recover 600 health within 3 minutes>

-The Advanced 'Song of Wind' effect has been applied.

<Your attack speed will increase by 15% for 10 minutes>

-The Advanced 'Song of the Brave' effect has been applied.

<Your attack and defense will increase by 10% for 10 minutes>

Roco's many skills had increased to advanced level after training with Melody. And thanks to Gentle Reverberation, it was possible to stack the effects three times. But that strong point of a Minstrel was something else. A priest and magician could only apply buffs on 5~10 people maximum. Furthermore, buffs consumed mana so they couldn't fire it continuously. On the other hand, the minstrel's buff applied to all allies who heard the music. One buff could affect 400 people at once. The efficiency of the buff was like the difference between heaven and earth.

"Damn, that stupid female again.....!"

Jewel aggressively glared at Roco. But the problem wasn't just Roco.

"Why on earth are these guys just jumping in rashly?"

Jewel shot out fire and muttered as some users were burnt. No matter how many buffs Roco used, the level difference was overwhelming. Even if three or four people attacked one person, it would still be difficult. But the users just jumped it recklessly like that wasn't a problem. Plus.....

"Kuaaaack, it is regrettable. But at least I defended the justice of New World before I died....."

"Heok! Damn, can I only last until here? Yeong-sook, I love you!"

The users talked nonsense even while collapsing. They were putting on an act because they were conscious of the broadcast. But Jewel couldn't understand the circumstances.

"This is irritating. What happened to the weakening effect of the Crime File? Then I'll have to let them know it isn't a joke. 1st unit, surround the enemy on your right flank! Make them realize this isn't a joke!"

"Yes. 1st unit, surround a target!"

Soon dozens of the suicide squad members had surrounded a few users. They simultaneously took out a scroll and used them. It was the chaotic scrolls which could turn users into beggars in no time! If that many users were turned into beggars then they would realize it wasn't a joke.

"Aw, it is the chaotic scrolls!"

"If we're hit by those scrolls then our equipment might drop!"

As expected, the users stopped once the chaotic scrolls were used. Once the obvious threat was used, clearly the users would realize it wasn't a joke and would run away.....but they didn't.

"Your opponent is me! Use the scrolls on me!"

"I'm not scared of those scrolls!"

Instead of shrinking away from the scrolls, the users were even more fired up.

"W-what is this.....?"

It was impossible for Jewel to understand the users' reactions. But there was a small smile on Ark's face who was watching from a distance away.

'Huhuhu, that method is more effective than I thought.'

The users weren't afraid of the scroll because of something Ark devised. Thanks to the broadcast, he had succeeded in engaging users without wasting any money. However the situation could

change if Jewel used the chaotic scrolls. Since it was being broadcasted then they wouldn't run away, but there was no telling how they would waver on the battlefield.

'Is there a way to stop the users' fear of the scrolls?'

Ark thought for a bit before coming up with a brilliant idea. It was the contract that was in each user's bag. When looking at the terms of the contract, it said.

-A Merchant's Agreement.

<Contractor: Ark's Store= Users who signed the insurance>

When users insure one of their items and pay the relevant insurance price of 5%, the contract will be signed. If the relevant item is dropped while fighting the thieves in Lancel village, Ark's store will pay 200% of the price.

"This.....insurance?"

"Yes, in fact I've been a regular customer of the famous Ark's store for many years. The staff are always friendly and you can get high quality items for a cheaper price than other places..... Anyway, I discussed with the store manager about a way to reduce everybody's burden. They eventually came to the conclusion of offering everybody insurance."

Ark showed the contract like an insurance sales representative and said.

"You can insure a valuable item for 5% of the market price and if you drop that item during the battle then Ark's store will pay you back 200%."

"R-really?"

The players' eyes widened at Ark's words. In this battle users were most concerned about dropping their equipment! Yet if they paid the 5% insurance price first they would be able to receive 200% of the market price if they dropped the item? Rather, wouldn't they receive

a profit if they dropped the item? After quickly calculating, the users immediately bought 'Ark's Compensation Insurance.' Thanks to that, the scrolls from Jewel's group weren't a threat anymore. Rather, some people aimed to get hit by the scroll in order to receive the payout.

"These guys....."

Jewel was completely puzzled. But Ark was hiding another trick within that scheme. The equipment was from level 100~150 users. The price of the equipment would only be hundreds of thousands of won. On the other hand, the price of the scrolls Jewel used in the Crime File cost dozens of gold. Even if the equipment was taken away using the scrolls, it wouldn't be profitable. Despite using the scrolls on all the users in the Crime File, it could hardly be used on a battlefield.

'They will probably use the scrolls a few time at the beginning to scare the users. Once intimidated then there is no more need to use the scrolls.'

In the end, only 12 users actually ended up dropping equipment! Then the rest of the users' insurance payment all went into Ark's pocket. So despite some equipment dropping, Ark would still 100% make a profit. But users were scared by the Crime File and signed the insurance for 3~4 equipment. So lots of users paid 3~4 gold per person and some even paid 20 gold. He could receive a profit of 3,800 gold! Even if he had to pay the insurance money to some people, he would still receive a profit of 2,500 gold. The business was a big hit thanks to their anxiety.

'Huhuhu, this insurance business is profitable.....'

Ark had used the insurance money to mobilize the users to fight!

"It is like I'm meeting you for the first time again. You really are scary."

Shambala shook his head with a tired look.

However Ark just ignored him.

“Why are you still laughing? You’ve tricked those morons into fighting but it doesn’t change the fact that they have more power.”

“I know. Now I will move in earnest. Are you ready?”

“I’m always ready. Where do we begin?”

“There place where there is the most money of course.”

Ark replied with a wicked grin.

“You really never stop.”

Ark laughed at Shambala’s words and nodded. After a short time, Ark and Shambala plunged into the battlefield.

Under their Feet.....

Kwa kwa kwa bang, flash-!

A flash of light ripped through the darkness. The sky had been cloudy since the early evening and now it was pouring heavy rain with occasional lightning. But even the heavy rain couldn't cool off the heat of the magnificent battle.

“Wah ah ah ah!”

“These guys who have no idea of fear, die!”

“Shut up, you villains! We'll defend the peace of New World!”

The users didn't rest and kept on swinging their weapons towards Jewel's party. In the heavy rainfall, hundreds of people were tangled together and their use of skills caused various flashes in the darkness. When the flashes reflected off the raindrop, an amazing firework like view could be seen. The two groups plunged towards each other like lions in the light.

“These bastards, so sloppy..... Annihilate all of them! The great spirits of the wind.....”

Then an Elemental Shaman stared at a user and chanted a spell. It was a wide area magic! In a battle, the magicians' wide area attack was the most devastating attack. It was risky if used incorrectly, but the wide area magic was something which could completely change the situation. Especially considering the huge level difference between the secret society and the users. For lower level users, their magic resistance would be low so wide area magic would deal them a fatal blow.

“Huck, a wide area magic!”

The users discovered too late that an Elemental Shaman was chanting a wide area spell.

“Huhuhu, it is too late. One with the wind.....”

Then just as the wide area magic was about to be completed.....

“Over here!”

One person shot an arrow in the darkness. Then something kicked the Elemental Shaman’s chin as the arrow impacted with their knee. The magician mouth was forced shut and the spell was cancelled. The man who interrupted the spell landed nimbly on the ground.

“It would be dangerous if that was completed.”

“Ack, my teeth.....heok, you’re Ark!”

“I’m thankful that you recognize me but I’m busy so please die.”

Ark laughed and stabbed the Elemental Shaman in the back. Next he used Dark Blade and combined with backstab, 30% of the Elemental Shaman’s health was instantly lost. The Elemental Shaman tried to attack but it wasn’t easy once Ark caught his target. Ark used Dark Dance to attach himself like a leech and hurled quick attacks.

“Ugh, over here! Ark is over here!”

The Elemental Shaman who was in a critical condition screamed and tried to run away. Then four of the secret society members ran up and acted like a bodyguard to the Elemental Shaman. But Ark didn’t pay any attention to the attacks of the secret society members. No, to be exact there was no reason to pay attention to it.

“This bastard, you’ll die for rushing in here recklessly!”

The secret society members said as they swung their weapons towards Ark. Then a black shadow suddenly appeared at Ark’s back.

“.....He didn’t come alone you morons. Sun, Gae, Yeol, Seom!”

The black shadow who muttered was Shambala who spoke in a cold voice. A blue dagger flew through the darkness towards them. When Shambala followed, dozens of daggers were stabbed into the body

of the secret society members. It was a skill which summoned daggers made of mana which increased damage by 10 times, 'Ten Strikes.' It was Shambala's new skill which he received after changing his occupation to 'God Killer.' The secret society members were hit with 'poison' and 'bleed,' causing their health to drain quickly. But that was just the beginning. Shambala also used his 'Cruciate Flower Wave' which had reached Master level to attack the members. After taking care of the escaping Elemental Shaman, Ark approached the group to help.

"Is it tough taking care of them by yourself?"

"Don't play around. This much is just entertainment for me."

"Well I'll help since I'm already here. Dark Blade!"

"Sheesh, you want me to hand them over? Cruciate Flower Wave!"

It was the pair of Ark and Shambala that had conquered the Evil Silrion! The secret society members who couldn't even handle Shambala died after a few moments.

'Phew, now we've dealt with the priests and magicians to some extent.'

Ark panted as he ran out of breath and looked around. While Ark had used various schemes to shave down the power of Jewel's group, once the battle started it had tilted to Jewel's favour as expected. Those strategies couldn't overcome the 100 level difference. But despite the overwhelming disadvantage, the users' formation hadn't collapsed yet. The first reason for that was the power of the broadcast. The fight would be broadcast in real time. Therefore the users showed enormous concentration in battle in order to improve their appearance. In order to increase the atmosphere, they were willing to drink potions like water. And the second reason was because of Ark and Shambala who intruded right into the enemy camp. In fact, it wasn't the warriors but the magicians and priests that controlled a battlefield. It was because of the wide area magic of a magician and the support magic from the priests! In New World, these two occupations had the most influence on a group battle. So Ark infiltrated the enemy camp to assassinate

the magicians and priests. He was level 383. With the dark attribute bonus he was level 574 so he didn't hesitate to jump into enemy lines where hundreds of people swarmed. But even if he was over level 400, it would still be difficult alone. However, Ark wasn't alone.

'It really does feel different whenever I fight with this guy.'

Ark looked at Shambala after killing the secret society members. Ark had fought in wars with thousands of people and also hunted with various professions. But he only felt this comfortable feeling while fighting with Shambala. When paired with Shambala, they didn't need to speak at all. Most times Shambala had already moved before Ark could even speak a word. And Ark also knew where to move to help Shambala just by watching. It was thanks to the sense of solidarity gained from fighting together in the Evil Silrion and in the Seutandal conquest war.

'It is also the same with Shambala.....!'

Then Shambala who had been observing the war situation pointed to one side and shouted.

"Ark, this time it is over there!"

Shambala was pointing towards the left side of Lancel's defense formation. Jewel realized that the users' resistance was more stubborn than he thought and concentrated the secret society members in one place to try and breakthrough. Thus the users who were maintaining that spot immediately started to die.

"We have to hurry. In that state they won't be able to hold it!"

"Understood, wait a minute!"

Ark nodded and started feeling around in the mud on the ground. Then he picked something up from where the elemental shaman had died.

-Elemental Shaman's Gloves (Magic)
Armour type: Cloth Gloves
Defense: 26

Durability: 150/150

Weight: 30

User Restriction: Level 180, Elemental Shaman exclusive use.

A pair of luxury magic gloves created using silk woven from fairies. Thanks to the magic of the fairies, the affinities of the Elemental Shaman will increase.

<Option: Intelligence +20, Elemental Shaman's magic attacks +5%>

‘Huhuhu, I got another one!’

Ark looked warmly at the information window. That was another reason why Ark broke into enemy lines. In New World, users who were a part of the NPC faction during the war wouldn't become chaotic if they murdered the opponents. Meanwhile, the users who attacked the NPC village were chaotic. And when a chaotic player died, they always dropped one equipment. However this was a very important point.

‘The chaotic players also know that they will drop an equipment if they die. And it is impossible to think there isn't a slight chance of dying in a battlefield.’

Therefore Jewel's group mostly wore cheap equipment. The level difference was so big that they thought cheap equipment would be sufficient. On the other hand, the Lancel defenders weren't chaotic so their chances of dropping equipment were very low except when a scroll was used on them. There was also the insurance so they felt comfortable wearing magic equipment. That was another reason why the Lancel defenders were able to endure the attacks.

‘But the rear support like magicians and priests has a low chance of dying so they are far more likely to be wearing magic items!’

Thus Ark risked danger and plunged into enemy lines to dispose of the magicians and priests because of this reason. Compared to the others, their chances of dropping good equipment were much

higher. And the result was a bingo. 70% of them had dropped magic items. Thanks to that, Ark's bag was already filled with 30 magic items.

"Is gaining items your only thought in a situation like this?"

Shambala who was standing next to Ark muttered under his breath. Ark replied with a grin.

"You wouldn't do it. That's why we have good chemistry."

"Don't talk nonsense. Hurry up and collect the items!"

"Okay, let's go!"

Ark and Shambala rushed over to the defensive line. The situation was more serious than he thought. When Jewel and Duke led the secret society members directly, the users under fire couldn't even last 1 minute. While Ark had placed a lot of users in the defensive line, there were only 40~50 users remaining who were in a critical condition.

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak was also trying to maintain the defense formation using Iron Fire Wall. But even more of Jewel's group struck him and he collapsed like a sandcastle.

"Ark, it has begun! Heavy Rain Sword!"

Shambala dived towards the place where Jewel's group was crowded and used his skill. Hundreds of daggers emerged from the darkness and dealt considerable damage.

"It's my turn now. Flash!"

Ark followed up with his wide area skill Flash. It was Ark and Shambala's wide area skill combo. The secret society members who were attacking the defense formation received extravagant damage and stumbled.

"It is Dark Wolf and Blue Sword!"

The users cheered as Ark and Shambala appeared. The secret

society members were just puzzled. Then Jewel who had been commanding them from the rear shouted.

“K-kill them! Your target has been changed to those guys!”

Jewel yelled while withdrawing and using long distance attacks. While he had a high amount of pride, he could admit that he wouldn't win with frontal attacks. Thus Jewel avoided engaging with Ark and commanded the secret society members to. Anyway, they flocked like vultures at Jewel's command. Meanwhile, the archers simultaneously started to pull their bows while the magicians started chanting spells. Then Shambala saw Ark and shouted.

“Ark!”

“I know. It is close.....aha, here it is!”

Ark had been looking around for a short time before laughing and striking the ground. Then a mechanical sound was heard and poison arrows flew towards the magicians. But that wasn't the end. Every time Ark struck the ground an explosion of arrows would occur and strike the opponents.

“T-this is.....heok!”

Jewel who had been chanting a spell also stumbled as a poison arrow hit him. Then Ark smirked and looked like he was muttering a soliloquy.

“Stupid bastards, you shouldn't have plunged into enemy territory without some countermeasures. Furthermore, did you really think I would not build some defences against you?”

Sometimes being the one attacked was more advantageous than attacking. The strong point was that they knew the place being attacked so they could make preparations. Ark took advantage of that and laid some traps operated by a switch. When the traps didn't activate while the assaulters were charging, Jewel's group assumed that there were only holes and no traps. The traps also didn't activate in the midst of the confused fighting.

“Y-you really.....kill! Kill him!”

“Not a chance!”

Ark triggered another hidden switch and smoke appeared. A smoke trap! The visions of the secret society members were suddenly trapped so they hesitated. At the same time, Ark and Shambala ran up to them. And unleashed a feast of spectacular attacks!

“Petrification of Blood!

“Dark blade!”

Pepepepeng, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

It was the cooperative technique of Ark and Shambala. Shambala's Petrification of Blood turned the warriors into stone. They couldn't move or attack but their defense also increased by 500%. However, Ark's Dark Blade ignored all defense so that didn't matter. The warriors turned to stone could only glare as their petrification loosened the moment they died. It was a basic coordinated technique. Shambala created a gap in the enemy's attack while Ark took advantage of it to deal critical hits. And when Ark's kicks caused an enemy to stiffen, Shambala's dagger would be driven into their stomach! It was a harmony so perfect there was no room for even a needle to enter! But that wasn't all of Ark's weapons.

“There are four archers 10 metres to the right!”

Ark shouted as the archers prepared to use ‘Precision Fire.’ Then the raccoons emerged from a hole and fired cannons at them. Yes, the holes of the raccoons weren't just to prevent the assaulters' charge. The raccoons would move along the underground passage for strategic firing of their cannons.

“Damn, those stupid raccoons again!”

The secret society members exclaimed angrily before swinging their swords at the raccoons. However, the raccoons disappeared into the hole like the moles in the ‘Whack-a-mole’ game. And they instantly emerged from another hole to fire their cannons. There was also the possibility of the opponents entering the hole. But how could ordinary users deal with the inhabitants of the Underground World inside their tunnels? If they plunged into the hole then they would just

die in vain like the assaulters. It was the method of using switch operated traps and the raccoons! Meanwhile, Ark and Shambala were dealing with 40 members of the secret society. Ark didn't care about his health and mana and just continued firing his skills. It was because of the Vampire Stone and Mana Steal Stone inserted into the Promised Sword. Just like with Bread, the Hearthstones couldn't display a huge effect against one opponent. However, this was a situation with many opponents.

He could steal the health and mana of dozens of users in one go! The Explosion stone also wrecked some havoc. The effect caused splash damage to all surrounding enemies.

“Ooooooh.....”

“Is that really Dark Wolf and Blue Sword fighting?”

“That....no way. No matter how strong they are, it's still two people against a lot of opponents.....”

The users forgot they were in a battle and just idly watched the two of them fighting. If this scene was broadcasted then it was normal to think the opponents were weak. But the users had been beaten to a critical condition just now by the secret society members. It wasn't possible to think of them as weak. Then the answer was that Ark and Shambala were too strong! No, there was no need to compare them. It was a fight which transcended the imagination of a general user! The standards that Ark and Shambala showed couldn't be simply compared anymore.

“I can't just stand by after watching this!”

“We have to help Dark Wolf and Blue Sword defeat the villains!”

“Wah ah ah ah!”

The users' spirits were ignited and they pushed back onto the battlefield. Despite Ark and Shambala's actions, Jewel's group still had the upper hand in power. However, the users' morale doubled which increased their power when they attacked Jewel's group. On the other hand, the secret society members had their morale fall to the bottom and couldn't counterattack properly.

‘That’s it, the urgent fire has been put out.’

Ark instantly checked the 15 split screens floating. The reason Ark sent the video to the broadcasting station directly wasn’t just for the sake of a lucrative video. By using the 15 cameras installed, he could fully grasp the entire battlefield. By looking at the split windows, he could see that it was still disadvantageous to the Lancel defenders. While Ark and Shambala moved quickly and conquered the crisis, dozens of users on the other side of the defensive wall were falling down. Yet Ark and Shambala couldn’t leave here to go support the situation!

‘.....It’s not possible.’

“Racard, commence the operation. Point A on the right.”

“Chik.....chik.....understood. I’m going.”

When Ark communicated wirelessly, Racard used satellite surveillance mode and flew down through the heavy rain. And he glided over the heads of Jewel’s group that were his target.

“I’ve arrived in the mission area. Over!”

“Okay, commence the operation!”

“Yes!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Then Radun who had been clinging onto Racard opened his mouth. The sphere bombs used in the illusionary Lancel village emerged from Radun’s mouth and fell. That was the reason why he previously only used half of the Fire Stones.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When Radun hanging onto Racard dropped the bombs, the area was filled with fire. It was using a flying monster to bomb from the air! Ark who had been watching the screens saw the secret society members receive the bomb baptism. Unlike the explosion in the fake Lancel, this time the bombs 100% hit. The result was fatal! The secret society members received a blow which nearly destroyed

them.

“Ohh, now! Attack!”

The users who regained their moral started attacking the secret society members. But Racard’s and Radun’s part hadn’t ended yet.

“Radun, you did well. Return to the scheduled point to finish your job!”

Racard fly down low and dropped Radun off. Radun crawled along the battlefield at a tremendous speed and flicked his tongue around. Then the users on the battlefield started to become confused.

“Eh? The chaotic users have been killed but why haven’t any equipment dropped? Has someone already collected it?”

Yes, this was Radun’s mission after being dropped into the battlefield. Lots of secret society members died from the bombs and the users’ counterattack. Of course there would be a large amount of equipment which fell. Radun’s mission was to plunge into the battlefield and collect the items. Of course, this operation was risky. It wasn’t unusual for Radun to go around a battlefield by himself. But this time they were users. They were different from stupid monsters. They were likely to be suspicious of snakes wandering the battlefield.

‘But he won’t be found in this confused fighting.’

The reason Ark was sure about this was because of Radun’s new skill.

-Radun has manifested an ability of the Alamone.

The Alamone is a mysterious species of snake living in the Netherworld. However, treasure hunters have attacked it thanks to its ability to swallow japtem and they are currently in the state of extinction. Thanks to that unfortunate history, the Alamone has developed the long overdue ability to hide themselves. The last Alamone Radun has realized that power after a lot of experience.

* Protective Colouration (Beginner, Racial Special Quality): Radun can assimilate his skin to the colour of the surrounding environment and decrease the probability of being found. With Beginner's Protective Colouration, 60% assimilation to the surrounding environment will be applied. But the effect of the assimilation will rise when the enemy's range of vision is restriction such as at night time or in bad weather.

<60% assimilation with the surrounding environment. 5 mana will be consumed every 10 seconds when moving>

Since Radun often collected loot alone, he had manifested the Alamone's ability to hide. If it was daytime then it was difficult for Radun's Protective Colouration to completely hide himself. But right now the battlefield had the three conditions 'night', 'mud' and 'heavy rain!' His assimilation rate had reached 90%. So Radun was completely assimilated and he ran around licking his tongue.

-Radun has acquired the 'Steel Metal Shield.'

-Radun has acquired the 'Nameless Bow.'

-Radun has acquired the 'Silky Sword'.....

'Hahaha! Okay, okay. Eat away!'

Ark had no time to rest as new information windows continued popping up. They were just general equipment but the number of them was truly a jackpot.

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun swept up the equipment and returned to the safety zone after completing his mission. Then Racard flew towards Radun and grabbed him.

"The Airborne division has completed the collection and is awaiting the next instructions. Over!"

"The next mission area is 30 metres ahead of you."

"Okay, I'll begin bombing preparations!"

Flames followed him when Racard flew over in the night sky.

‘Okay, those operations are going as planned. Now all that’s left is.....’

Ark paid attention to the split screen and checked the military situation. The military situation wasn’t that good when he checked it. The defensive line had barely held up thanks to Ark and Shambala’s efforts but there were already 250 users dead. And the remaining 150 users only had around 10~30% health left. On the other hand, Jewel’s group still had 350 people left. It was overwhelming power.

‘But the results are proceeding as planned.’

In fact, Ark had intended for there to be a lot of Jewel’s group left alive. Usually the commanders in a battle used the direct strategy. The most common one was to focus the attacks on reducing the enemy numbers. However Ark didn’t use this method. Rather than reducing the numbers, he concentrated on shaving away the enemy’s health. Despite the damage the users did, from Ark’s view they were just an inevitable sacrifice. The average health of the secret society was 30~40%. 250 users had sacrificed their lives for that.

‘And now is the time!’

Ark judged it was time and threw firecrackers in the air. Then several flashes appeared in the night sky. It was at that time. The forest started shaking and there were thundering shouts.

“Wah ah ah ah!”

The people who rushed into the battlefield were from the beast clans. They were the real troops of Lancel village, the Wolrang and the Meow. Yes, Ark hadn’t used the Wolrang and Meow even when the defensive line was in a crisis. The Wolrang were around level 300 while the Meow were around level 200. If they had fought from the beginning then the situation might be easier now. However, Ark’s purpose wasn’t simply to protect Lancel village. It was to minimize the damage on the NPCs. After using the users to decrease the

health of the secret society, he made the beast clans appear. Thanks to that, their health and mana was still 100%. They were also full of willpower. On the other hand, the health of the secret society members went all the way down to 30~40% after a long battle.

“Grrrrr, this is our home!”

“Nyaaaaa, angry cat punch!”

“Bark bark bark bark!”

“Nyang nyang nyang nyang nyang!”

The beast clans swarmed around the secret society members with low health. But the thing that surprised Jewel wasn't the beast clans. It was the pair among the beast clans firing magic and swinging a greatsword.

They were Bread and Redian! Yes, the pair who had intruded on the battlefield was Bread and Redian who were Bristania's strongest duo.

“Uh, why is hyung-nim and noonim.....?”

Jewel stuttered with an incredibly confused expression. Bread and Redian snorted as they started at Jewel.

“Shut up. Anybody who attacks a dog is my enemy!”

“Those who push a cat are my enemy!”

“Dog? Cat? What are you.....? No, are hyung-nim and noonim really going to become enemies with the Hermes alliance?”

“The Hermes alliance? Oh, haven't you withdrawn from the alliance?”

“Eh?”

Jewel flinched and shut his mouth. Then Bread laughed and slammed his greatsword into the ground.

“Heh, I don't care what you guys do. And I have no memory of us being friend in the first place. I won't leave it alone if I see animal cruelty in front of me! If you're dissatisfied then attack. I'll prevent

you from doing wicked things in front of me!”

“T-these bastards....! Stop them! Smash those cats and dogs!”

“Wah ah ah ah!”

The secret society raised their weapons and ran up.

“I won’t let you bother the dogs in front of me. Earth Storm!”

Bread used various Beast Spirit Possessions and swung his greatsword. Bread who had reached level 410 and had the 50% bonus had swung his greatsword! An absurd gust of wind blew out and the secret society members were thrown like autumn leaves. It was also the same situation with the Meow.

“Bah, you’ve become thieves? Furthermore, you dare disturb the peaceful town where cats live. Despite being a pervert, Bread is 100 times better than you! I’ll get rid of that rotten spirit. High speed incantation, highest magic unsealed! The unquenchable flame burning in the bottom of hell! Under the name of the Elemental Master Redian, descend to this land. Volcano of Hell!”

After Redian finished chanted the spell an enormous magic circle formed. Then the magic circle started to shake like an earthquake was occurring and the earth split because lava rose up. But Redian’s magic didn’t end there. Redian then used the chain skill ‘Lava Rain,’ causing the lava to form into fireballs which were hurled. It was the highest ranking magic of a level 400 elemental magician. The fire magic that Jewel used was no comparison.

‘Indeed.....I can be relieved about the beast clan if I leave it to them two!’

That was the reason why Ark left the Wolrang and Meow to Bread and Redian. If the Wolrang and Meow were in danger then Bread and Redian would do everything to protect them. Instead of being in danger, the beast clans would be protected by them.

“What’s this? You dare touch a dog in front of me? Do you hate living?”

Whenever the Wolrang was hit, Bread would show his teeth and growl. And the secret society members collapsed under his greatsword.

‘Now the military situation is in our favour. As I expected.....’

Ark looked at the split screens for a while. Then the scene of Jewel, Duke and several high level members moving caught his eye. Ark immediately grasped the situation from their movement. He turned to Shambala who also seemed to grasp the situation and nodded. The two exchanged glances before Ark and Shambala split up at a quick pace. Then just as Jewel was trying to use a skill.....Ark used a scroll on Duke who was using the same skill as Jewel from a distant place.

“[Magnetism]!”

Ark pulled Duke with [Magnetism] while Sprinting towards Jewel.

“Huk! What, what the?”

Duke became confused as he was dragged by a strong, magnetic force. But the person even more confused was Jewel.

“T-this, Ark? Ah! N-no!”

Then Duke was dragged next to Jewel. Something suddenly rose from the ground before disappearing. It was the Area Declaration that a player who changed to their 2nd stage profession could use. When Ark used Eyes of the Cat, he identified that Jewel, Duke and two members of the secret society had changed professions. If the situation became disadvantageous then they would definitely use the Area Declaration skill.

Of course, Ark and Shambala could also use the Area Declaration skill. But if they did that then Ark and Shambala’s area declaration would also disappear. So he came up with the idea to make their collide using [Magnetism]. But the range of [Magnetism] was only dozens of metres. On the other hand, the range of Area Declaration was 100 metres. That’s why he used [Magnetism] before using Sprint to pull Duke as much as possible. Shambala who had run to the opposite direction also did the same thing to the two members of

the secret society to seal off their Area Declarations. Thus their Area Declarations was used in vain.

“You, you bastard.....!”

Jewel glared at Ark.

“What will glaring at me do?”

“What?”

“Did you think you were the only one to change to the 2nd profession?”

Ark muttered and laughed.

“Oh, I can finally use it! Land of the Beast!”

Bread plunged his greatsword into the ground and shouted. Then a giant totem popped out of the earth and a blue area spread around him. At the same time, Bread was covered in a golden fur and the muscles on his body became many times larger. Bread was also flanked by two semitransparent wolves. The Beast Master had used his Area Declaration skill Land of the Beast. Attack and defense +50%! While within the territory of Area Declaration, the summoned spirit of the wolves can attack the enemies but won't deal any physical damage.

“Go, souls of the brave wolves!”

Awooooo! The souls of the wolves flew forward like an arrow at Bread's command and surrounded the secret society members. The secret society members trapped by the spirit wolves died as the greatsword attacked them.

“Bah, I can't let you have all the fun alone. Land of Fire and Ice!”

Redian also used her Area Declaration skill on the left hand side. Then cubes of fire and ice appeared within the 100 metre area. Magic attack +50% and additional 500 fire and ice damage! Once within the area of fire and ice, the opponents will continuously receive fire and ice damage. It was the Area Declarations of the level 400 Bread and Redian. The level 250~300 secret society

members within the Area Declaration were no match.

“A-avoid it!”

“Run away. The effects of Area Declaration will only work within that territory!”

The secret society members screamed and retreated. But behind them were Ark and Shambala.

“Don’t they seem overconfident? I feel like I’m being treated as weak because of my style of attack. It can’t be helped. Area Declaration, River of Blood!”

The ground around Shambala started becoming muddy and changed into a river of blood. It increased attack and defense by 50% while increasing the damage of backstab by 200%. When the retreating secret society members ran into Shambala’s territory, one hit instantly reduced their health by 10%.

“Now it’s been decided.”

Ark muttered as he saw the three Area Declarations used on the battlefield. The secret society members were surrounded by the beast clans so there was no way to escape. The ensuing siege thrust them back into Bread, Redian and Shambala’s Area Declarations.

“Now, is it my turn?”

In order to obtain victory, Ark decided to use the Area Declarations at the end. Sweat dripped down Jewel’s face before he suddenly shouted.

“Damn, I can’t fail like this! Suicide squad, use your last resort! Charge into Lancel and blow up the magic tower and Ark’s store! For the glory of the suicide squad!”

“What? Suicide squad?”

Ark flinched and turned his head. The looks on dozens of secret society faces completely changed. Then they suddenly pulled out something like a wick and stuck it to their heads. Then the wick

started burning at an incredible speed. The suicide squad members with the wicks on their heads rushed towards the defensive line with determined expressions.

“I’ll go first!”

“For the glory of the Lord! Waaaaaah!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The suicide squad member collided with the users and a huge explosion occurred, sending dozens of people flying away. The explosive power couldn’t even be compared to the Fire Stone bombs. It was the suicide squad’s weapon ‘Self-destruct’ which caused enormous havoc. The defensive line quickly collapsed from the suicide squad members exploding. Thus the suicide squad penetrated the defensive line and entered Lancel village.

“Stop them, block those guys!”

Ark hurriedly screamed. Then the raccoons pulled the suicide squad members into the hole. However, that was a mistake. When the suicide squad members in the hole exploded, the damage was even worse. The underground passages were connected like a spider web in the ground underneath Lancel. When the ground collapsed from the explosion belowground, many buildings were destroyed. Not to mention the raccoons hidden in the ground. Meanwhile the suicide squad members had entered the village and exploded near some buildings.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

-Lancel village has received a serious blow! <NPC- 12%, Structure- 17%>
--

‘Oh my god!’

Sweat started dripping down Ark’s back. He was careless while planning his strategies. He never expected them to blow themselves

up. Anyway, the serious was serious now that the suicide squad members had penetrated the village. Even if they won the battle, he would fail the quest if 30% of the NPCs and structures were destroyed! Besides, their number 1 goal was Ark's store. If Ark's store exploded then Ark's entire fortune would be turned to ash.

"Hahahaha, let's die together!"

Jewel said as he glared at Ark. In fact, there was a reason Jewel hadn't used the suicide squads until then. Self-destruct caused enormous havoc but it also had a huge penalty on the ones who used it. The Self-destruct used by the suicide squads was different from the ones magicians used. Since an enormous chaotic value was required to learn it, those who used it received 5 times the death penalty. In other words, all of their stats would be -5 and they couldn't resurrect for 5 days. Also the durability of their equipment would be reduced by 80%. If they used it when their equipment had lost 20% of its durability then all the equipment would break. But now they had no choice. They didn't mind dying as long as they achieved some of their goals. That was the decision the suicide squad made.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Meanwhile, a few buildings had once again collapsed. And they were heading towards Ark's store. At that time, a barrier rose from the ground and blocked the suicide squad. It was the barrier that the raccoons had installed! But even such a barrier was destroyed in one shot by Self-destruct. If the suicide squad rushed again then Ark's store would be smashed to pieces.

'No. I have to do whatever it takes to stop them!'

The cornered Ark turned his eyes to the users. Then a solution came to his head. If they want to use the suicide squad then we will also use a suicide squad. Those guys had about 10 seconds before exploding once they placed the wick. The users had 10 seconds to grab their ankles. The question was whether the users would be willing to die along with the suicide squad members. If a person was damaged by Self-destruct then the durability of their equipment would also fall by 50%. The users had been in a long battle so their

equipment had already fallen by 50%! If they got caught by Self-destruct then their equipment would be destroyed! But Ark had a plan for convince the users.

“Stop them! The contract was only for equipment stolen by those guys. But if your equipment is destroyed like this then the insurance money will still be paid!”

Yes, most of the users had signed up for ‘Ark’s Compensation Insurance!’ While the original contract was just for equipment stolen by the scrolls, Ark declared that he would pay the insurance for equipment broken by Self-destruct. It was a 200% payout! Of course, Ark would receive damage if most of the users’ equipment was destroyed but he had no time to think about such a thing.

“In addition, if you block the suicide squad then it is possible to be the hero who saved Lancel! But the insurance will only be paid to the first one who caught the suicide squad members. If many people stick to one fellow then the insurance money won’t be paid!”

Ark meticulously controlled the terms of the contract even in this situation. Anyway, the users’ eyes lit up at Ark’s words.

“What? I’ll get insurance money if my equipment is broken?”

“I can be the hero who saved Lancel village!”

“Oh, I can get money and fame at the same time!”

“I, I’ll go and stop them!”

Thanks to the thought of money and fame, the users agreed to sacrifice their bodies. Then they swarmed and stuck to the bodies of the suicide squad. The suicide squad members were pulled down and covered with the users’ body..... In the end, the users and the suicide squad members both died together from the explosion.

-Lancel village has received a serious blow!

<NPC- 13%, Structure- 23%>

‘That was close but I managed to block it.’

Ark sighed with relief as he looked at the information window. But now he had to pay the insurance claim to the users who interrupted the suicide squad. If they had insurance then he would have to pay 200% of the items they insured.

‘This is because of that guy!’

Ark grinded his teeth together and approached Jewel. The shabby looking Jewel was pale white and discouraged. The plan to loot Lancel village was thwarted. The strategy of dying together had also failed. More than half of the remaining members had died within Bread, Redian and Shambala’s Area Declarations Jewel who had risked his life on this strategy felt all the spirit escape him.

“T-this isn’t reality..... Yes, it is a dream..... Huhuhu, I’m just dreaming and the raid hasn’t happened yet..... It’s a dream..... Just a dream.....”

Then a black aura suddenly appeared under Jewel’s foot. Jewel winced and turned his head where a black object was floating. It was Ark’s Area Declaration, Glory of the Night. But that wasn’t all of it.

“Descent of the Fire Draconian!”

Ark shouted and a fire pillar rose from the earth. The flames then turned into a giant scale. The flames formed a Fire Draconian which ascended the sky before falling like a lightning bolt to hit Ark’s body. It was a huge fire storm. When the flames appeared, the water on the ground quickly became water vapour.

“Kuaaaaak!”

Jewel looked through the flames and water vapour with bemused eyes. The person standing in front of him was Ark with the power of the Fire Draconian swirling around him.

<p>-You have used the Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!</p> <p>The effect of <Immortal Fire Draconian> will be applied for 10 minutes.</p>
--

- * 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.
- * Attack speed, Movement speed and Reaction rate will increase by 50%.
- * All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.
- * Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.
- * When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

"Now, how should I kill you?"

Ark stared at Jewel with cold eyes and muttered. Then Ark started moving at an incredible pace. Every time Ark moved, fire will appear in the ground behind him. There were continuous ringing sounds and the secret society members went flying away. The users just looked at the scene with dumb surprise. While not a lot of users had a 2nd profession, it could sometimes be seen. So Area Declarations were sometimes seen on TV but this was the first time they had seen a Divine skill used. Anyway, the Divine skill had overwhelming power! Jewel also couldn't run away since Ark's territory was surrounded by Shambala, Bread and Jewel's. Furthermore, several beasts and users were surrounding the outside so there was no place to escape. However Ark, Shambala, Bread and Redian only decreased their health to 1~2%. There was a reason why Ark commanded the users not to kill the secret society members. That's right.....

"Now's the time!"

100 people ran out of Lancel at Ark's shout. It was the guards of Lancel village which consisted of the ex-thieves! Yes, the reason why Ark didn't kill the secret society members was because of this. If they died by the users or beasts then they could just revive in 24 hours. Then they could come back and attack Lancel. However, they would be stuck in prison if the guards killed them. Since they had become chaotic from attacking NPC villages, they would be stuck in

jail for a long time. Thus Ark had left the guards until the end.

“Heok! G-guards!”

“K-kill! Kill them now!”

Jewel was in a complete state of panic as the guards appeared. Some of the secret society members even grabbed their colleagues and asked them to kill each other. However it was already too late. They only had 1~2% health left. Despite the level difference, the level 200 guards could kill them with one or two strokes. Jewel’s group instantly collapsed as the guards advanced. After 5 minutes, Jewel and the secret society members had collapsed. At the same time Shambhala, Bread and Redian released their skill. Ark’s Area Declaration was the only one remaining with a huge dragon floating in the centre of the battlefield. Ark looked at Jewel’s corpse before raising his fist and shouting.

“A victory for justice!”

The users also shouted along.

“W-we won!”

“I did it! Now we’re heroes!”

“We defeated the 500 thieves!”

“Oh, hooray for the Lancel defenders! Hooray for Dark Wolf!”

“It was a pleasure to fight under Dark Wolf! He’s unbeatable!”

The users who survived after an intense battle jumped wildly and cheered. However, the cheering users didn’t realize something. There was a reason why Ark was inciting the cheers despite disliking attention. While the users’ gazes were focused on him, they were unaware of what was going on under their feet. Radun was secretly crawling and gathering equipment under their feet.

The rain and wind gradually stopped. Dawn was breaking after a long night.

Game Exclusive News

“Dammit!”

Ha Myung-woo opened the door and entered the office violently.

“How are you managing the candidates?”

Ha Myung-woo shouted and threw the document onto the desk. The reason was the video of Lancel village broadcasted yesterday morning. No, the video itself wasn't a problem. The important thing was that the main character Ark was one of Global Exos candidates. It was a problem because he was one of the special management targets. Once again, the reason for the examination was for the Planning Department of Global Exos to find the master code. However, so far the Planning Department had no idea of where the master code could be found.

‘According to the information, the master code should be closely related to the scenario of New World.’

New World was a game with infinite degrees of freedom. But even certain scenarios existed in New World. And the scenarios proceeded according to the users' growth. If the users grew quickly then the scenario would progress quickly and if growth was slow then the scenario would also slow down.

‘By hiding the master code in the scenarios, Park Woo-seong left a challenge for gamers. The master code is unable to be found using luck and chance. Park Woo-seong made it clear that the master code could only be found after several checkpoints are passed.’

As the main designer of the game, Park Woo-seong had designed those checkpoints to be within the scenarios. Therefore over the last 2 years the Planning Department had been reviewing reports and videos from the candidates and looking at their quests and how it might relate to future scenarios. And it was very important to manage this information. The master code being hidden in New

World meant that users could get their hands on it. If information about the master code flowed into the hands of a user who wasn't a candidate then Global Exos would be in an unbearable situation.

"The master code is a program which controls everything in New World. If the person with the master code wanted then they could delete thousands of users' information at once or they could deliberately cause system errors which would paralyze the whole game."

That was what one of the game developers said. If such a thing happened then Global Exos would be damaged by several billion won. But that was only a part of what the master code could do. There was an even worst situation.

"The New World system connects directly to the brain. If there is a serious bug which affects the system then that bug could impact the users' brain. In the worst case scenario, the user would suffer serious brain damage."

Yes, that was the situation they were most concerned about. Such dangers always existed since virtual reality connected to the brain. Therefore all virtual reality games had safety equipment which double and triple checked safety New World was the same. The problem was that the master code could even control the safety equipment. If a person with the master code unlocked the safety device and restarted the system then hundreds of terabyte information would flood into the users' brains. It was a tremendous amount of information beyond the limits of the brain! Users who received such a bomb of information might become brain dead. Then what would happen if a user who didn't know about the master code obtained it? In the worst case scenario, they would have to discontinue New World and lose the billions invested in it. Yes, obtaining the master code was like a life or death situation for Global Exos.

'Even if we have to use hundreds or thousands of personnel, we have to find it!'

But keeping this information secret was just as important. If any of the other rival companies knew about the master code then the

situation would get out of hand. The second problem was if a rival company obtained the master code. If the competitors knew the truth about the master code and the risks to users, Global Exos would receive a lot of criticism for commercializing New World anyway. Therefore it was more important to hide the information that they were looking for the master code. So the staff decided to use the candidates.

‘We can freely obtain information about the game through the candidates.’

Ha Myung-woo also often turned on the broadcast at night to monitor news. Fortunately, the war between users in the mountain village would cause no big problems. But if any information about the master code had been in that video then it would’ve been a huge problem. As the manager, he couldn’t just let it pass!

‘Of all things, a video of one of the special management targets.....!’

“Where is Ho Myung-hwan? Bring him here right now!”

Ha Myung-woo shouted angrily. At the same time, Ho Myung-hwan ran into the Planning Department and shouted.

“T-Team Chief-nim, it is huge!”

“Huge? What could be bigger than this problem?”

“Huh? That’s.....no, please look at this data. The Public Relations Department called this morning and showed me this. It is truly a jackpot!”

Ho Myung-hwan explained in an excited voice.

“What the, this is?”

When he woke up in the morning, he had become a big star. He never imagined that it would become like this. After arriving in Lancel and participating in the defensive war, Hyun-woo had felt a huge sense of burden. This war was different from other situations. Depending on the outcome, two years of hard work and

sweat could fly away. The stolen goods, the real estate invested in Lancel village and the goods from Ark's store. The estimated amount was tens of thousands of gold. Tens of thousands of gold..... When converted to money it was a huge price which reached hundreds of millions of won! It was an extravagant amount that people would kill over. Such a huge amount could fly away in one moment from the war. Therefore Hyun-woo couldn't get any rest during the last two days. He wasn't able to sleep. Although it was inside the game, Hyun-woo also had his life at stake.

'If I was defeated then I would really die of a heart attack.....'

But luckily the war ended with Hyun-woo's victory. He had risked his life and protected his assets. All the tension within Hyun-woo had been cut and he had fallen asleep and only just woke up. Then he logged into the computer without really thinking about it and his mouth opened absentmindedly.

-I really was thrilled!

-He was silent for a while after Seutandal rose but this really was a tremendous job.

-As expected from Dark Wolf. Dark Wolf really is the hero of New World!

-Dark Wolf, Dark Wolf, Dark Wolf!

Hyun-woo had logged into the auction site to examine the market prices. New world's homepage. The various bulletin board and information sites were all talking about Dark Wolf. That wasn't all. While it was rare for a non-celebrity to reach the top 10 in search rankings on portal sites, the Dark Wolf fan club had reached 3~4 in the search rankings. It reached the extent that there were even fan clubs from foreign countries.

'What's going on?'

Hyun-woo looked at the monitor filled with the name Dark Wolf with a stupid expression. Of course Hyun-woo had expected quite a bit of interest after broadcasting the Lancel defensive war. He hadn't really

been thinking about that when negotiating with the station. However, the actual reaction was a dozen times more than Hyun-woo expected. Hyun-woo looked at the monitor with a frozen expression. Hyun-woo was someone who stayed in all day playing the game. Then one day there was an explosion of interest in Hyun-woo, no in Dark Wolf from Korea and the world. He honestly didn't know how he felt about it.

Diririri.

The phone then rang while Hyun-woo was making a stupid expression.

"Hello?"

"Is this Dark Wolf-nim?"

"Huh? Yes, but why?"

"I am the game exclusive news reported you called the other day, Lee Yun-gyu."

"Ah! Reporter-nim, why are you.....?"

Hyun-woo was still in a state of shock after just waking up so he spoke in a slurred tone. Then Lee Yun-gyu hesitated before explaining.

"That's.....no, I can't tell you over the phone. It involves a copyright problem with the video so can you come to the broadcasting station right away? Just tell the guards that you're Dark Wolf."

Since Lee Yun-gyu sounded a little weird, Hyun-woo hurried over there. When he arrived at the broadcasting station, a man quickly ran out.

"Ah, welcome. Are you Dark Wolf-nim? I'm Lee Yun-gyu.'

"Yes, hello?" But why do you need me this morning? What's the matter?"

"Problem?" There is one. A very huge problem."

"A huge problem?"

“I can’t talk about it here so please enter for the moment. The Team Chief is also waiting.”

Lee Yun-gyu guided Hyun-woo into the broadcasting station. When he arrived at the meeting room, a middle-aged man was waiting. He was the team chief in charge of the game exclusive news segment. Hyun-woo greeted the Team Chief and sat down. Once he sat down, the Team Chief laughed and said.

“Have you connected to the internet today?”

“Huh? Ah, yes.....”

“That is why we wanted to meet you today.”

“Because of that?”

When Hyun-woo tilted his head with confusion, both Lee Yun-gyu and the Team Chief laughed. Then their eyes landed on Hyun-woo and they paused before speaking.

“The results came in this morning. It is the audience ratings for the Lancel defensive war broadcasted yesterday. Do you know how much the audience rating was? 35%! Surprisingly it was 35%! When the broadcast started it was on 7% but the ratings had gone up to 35% before it finished!”

“.....So?”

Hyun-woo scratched his head and muttered. Of course, even Hyun-woo who never watched dramas knew that 35% viewership was a significant amount. But he wasn’t a celebrity so audience ratings had no effect on him. And why were they suddenly talking about audience viewership?

“This is the best audience rating since the game exclusive news started. And it’s the first time the ratings had jumped from 7% to 35%.”

“.....What is your point?”

Hyun-woo answered with an unimpressed voice. Then the Team Chief suddenly stood up and grasped Hyun-woo’s hands.

“Let’s sign a contract!”

“Huh?”

“Now all the users in the country who play New World.....no, there is nobody in New World who doesn’t know about Dark Wolf. Our station’s website and telephone line was paralyzed from calls wondering who Dark Wolf is. The audience’s interest in you can’t even compare with that of a celebrity. If Dark Wolf-nim appears on the broadcast then it will be a huge jackpot!”

‘They brought me all the way to the broadcasting station just to say this?’

Hyun-woo sighed and shook his head.

“I’m thankful for the suggestion but I already said that I have no intention of appearing on the broadcast.”

He didn’t want his face to become well-known so he was unwilling to waste time with the broadcasting station. The station had contacted him many times but he had always refused. His answer was still the same, especially with the interest concentrated further on him. There was no reason for him to accept the offer. But the Team Chief also shook his head.

“No, the request isn’t for you to appear on the broadcast.”

“But you talked about a contract?”

“What I meant.....you explain it to him.”

“Yes, in the past I wanted Dark Wolf-nim to appear on the broadcast directly but I realized I had the wrong idea after looking at the broadcaster’s ratings.”

Lee Yun-gyu explained to Hyun-woo.

“The wrong idea?”

“It will be fine if Dark Wolf-nim appears as Dark Wolf.”

“What are you talking about?”

“In fact, our team had met up prior to this meeting. We were wondering why the video got such an absurd amount of interest. While there was already interest in the Lancel war thanks to the Crime File and Dark Wolf-nim battled well, we think the biggest role is Dark Wolf’s mystery as an unidentified warrior.”

“An unidentified warrior?”

“Yes, Dark Wolf-nim is a player who has only emerged four times. The Evil Silrion, the siege of Silvana, the Seutandal war and now this incident. The users have never seen Dark Wolf outside of those incidents.”

It was natural. He only transformed during those times. Lee Yun-gyu smiled and continued talking.

“In fact, the audience was also interested in the users with you. But their interest in those users weakened quickly. Whenever you appear, the interest is only focused on Dark Wolf-nim. That’s because they don’t know anything about Dark Wolf-nim. In addition, the users never know what to expect when you appear in a video.”

Yes, the psychology of the interest in Hyun-woo was similar to that of a masked wrestler. The broadcasting station came to the conclusion that this was the reason for the huge ratings. So if Hyun-woo appeared on the broadcast then it would actually pour cold water on the viewers’ interest.

“But it is hard to give up the overwhelming interest of the viewers. So the game exclusive news planning department has organized a segment once a week which will show Dark Wolf’s gameplay. Since your face won’t be directly shown and it will be possible to maintain the interest in Dark Wolf, wouldn’t there be no burden on you?”

Hyun-woo felt refreshed by Lee Yun-gyu’s proposal. Certainly there was no reason for Hyun-woo to reject. The contract was no different from selling the ‘Netherworld exploration of a wicked wolf’ video. If Dark Wolf’s identity was concealed and the audience ratings increased then there was no need to worry about personal information leaking. Furthermore, he didn’t have to make a separate video. He was already sending all videos of his gameplay to Global

Exos. The station only required a 10 minute video once a week so he just had to pick a decent video of Dark Wolf. It was a fixed income that would come in once a week. It was an unexpected chance!

‘But.....’

There was one problem in selling the video. Hyun-woo already had a contract with Global Exos to send his videos to them. According to that agreement, Global Exos had the rights to all the videos Ark took. That right also extended to whether the video could be broadcasted on TV> He hadn’t thought about that part when he had contacted the station about broadcasting the Lancel defensive war. It wasn’t until this morning that he had worried about the contract. If Global Exos decided it was a breach of contract then it would be a serious problem.

‘If I sign another contract then I’ll be sued.’

Anyway, he couldn’t blindly sign the station’s contract.

“The offer is appreciated but I’ll have to consult somewhere else before accepting.”

Hyun-woo sighed and replied but Lee Yun-gyu just nodded and said.

“I’m aware of that. Is it because of Global Exos?”

“Huh? How do you know that?”

“In fact, we got a phone call this morning from the Planning Department of Global Exos. At first they called to protest about the video. That’s why our contact with Dark Wolf-nim is so delayed.”

‘Of course.....!’

Hyun-woo felt his heart fall.

If the Planning Department of Global Exos called than the problem might be more serious than Hyun-woo thought. However, the words which followed were completely unexpected.

“But then we received another call a little while ago. They said it

didn't matter if Dark Wolf's video is broadcasted. They also sent someone to discuss the problem....."

"Ark-nim!"

Then another man entered the meeting room and shouted. The person who called out was Ho Myung-hwan from Global Exos Planning Department.

"I tried to call your house but you were already heading to the broadcasting station."

Ho Myung-hwan wiped off his sweat as he ran in and took a seat. And he spoke with a mock-dissatisfied look.

"By the way, what nonsense is this? Shouldn't you have consulted with me before seeing the video to the broadcasting station? Do you know how much I got yelled at by the Team Chief?"

"That....."

"Well, it's fine. I'll talk about that problem later."

Ho Myung-hwan pulled out a few documents from his bag and said.

"I'm Ho Myung-hwan from Global Exos Planning Department. You already received a call about it in the morning but Global Exos owns the rights to Ark's videos. But after a brief meeting, we decided it didn't matter. We've decided to think positively about the fact that Ark-nim's video was broadcasted on the game exclusive news."

Ho Myung-hwan scratched his neck and continued speaking. In fact, the game publisher didn't have a problem with the broadcasting station. If the game showed on the broadcast then the users' interest would concentrate and it would be followed by a rise in sales. Therefore the game publishers actually lobbied the staff of the broadcasting station. However, the situation was different when it came to New World which had millions of players. In addition, Hyun-woo's video was such a hit that it reached 35%! Therefore as Hyun-woo signed an exclusive contract with him, Ho Myung-hwan was like his manager.

“However, there is one condition. Global Exos will check the video first and then we’ll send it to the station.”

The Planning Department wanted to review Hyun-woo’s videos first to check that there were no hints about the master code before sending it to the station. So they had no problem with the broadcasting station’s contract. Lee Yun-gyu looked through the contract and nodded.

“Then the fee will be 1.5 million won for every 10 minute video?”

‘Heok!’ 1-1.5 million won?’

Ark felt his breath catch as he listened to the copyright fee proposed by the broadcasting station. Of course, he had received 2 million won for the ‘Netherworld exploration of a wicked wolf.’ But that was a two hour movie. It was also selected as the winner of a special competition so the price received was the prize. But this was 1.5 million won for a 10 minute video! Since it was broadcasted once a week, that was 6 million won in 1 month! He could receive an income of 6 million won without even moving a finger.

‘T-this is a jackpot!’

Hyun-woo swallowed his saliva at the thought. Then Ho Myung-hwan muttered with a weird expression.

“1.5 million won..... That’s less than I thought.”

“Huh?”

“I know the broadcaster’s rating increased quite a bit. And the only thing the internet can talk about is the broadcast. Yet 1.5 million won for a 10 minute video when Ark-nim’s gameplay increased the rating so much is a bit low don’t you think?”

“1.5 million won isn’t a small amount for a game video.”

“That’s true but 1.5 million won is a bit.....”

“Wait a minute!”

At that moment Hyun-woo stood up and shouted.

“Wait a minute, I’m going to talk to this person and then come back in a bit.”

“But.....”

“It will only take a short time.”

Hyun-woo suddenly dragged Ho Myung-hwan out of the meeting room. After moving far away, he frowned and muttered.

“Why are you doing this?”

“Huh? Why?”

“1.5 million won is being given for one game video. Don’t I just have to edit and transfer the video? Yet why do you seem to be interfering? What is the problem with the game video that you said you would talk about later? Is this the Team Chief’s way of getting revenge on me? I made a mistake but.....”

Hyun-woo cried out as he placed a hand on Ho Myung-hwan’s shoulder who muttered in a low voice.

“..... This is a problem.”

He couldn’t understand. Ark would be really upset if the contract failed because Ho Myung-hwan interfered. It was 6 million yen in one month. That was plenty of reason for him to be upset if the contract failed. When Hyun-woo glared at him, Ho Myung-hwan spoke with an embarrassed expression.

“Well, there seems to be some kind of misunderstanding?”

“What? You’re the one interfering!”

“Why am I interfering? It’s because the figure was really below my expectations.”

Ho Myung-hwan then explained the circumstances.

“After the video was shown, the Planning Department also received offers from other broadcasting stations. They wanted to know the phone number of the user who appeared in the video.”

Yes, the game exclusive news wasn't the only game broadcast in South Korea. Since the broadcast attracted such attention from viewers, other broadcasting stations became interested in Dark Wolf.

"The highest amount proposed was 1.8 million won."

"1-1.8 million won.....!"

Ho Myung-hwan's mouth gaped open at Hyun-woo's words. Hyun-woo had honestly thought that 1.5 million won was an extravagant price for a 10 minute video. However, 1.8 million won? If he had joyfully accepted the 1.5 million won contract then wouldn't he have lost 300,000 won? It was unthinkable to Hyun-woo but other broadcasting stations were really that interested in the video?

'The situation has completely changed.'

Ark's eyes turned to gold.

'This is an opportunity!'

Hyun-woo's thoughts rolled through his head before he entered the meeting room again.

"How about 3 million won for one video?"

Lee Yun-gyu and the Team Chief's faces stiffened at Hyun-woo's words. Ho Myung-hwan's expression was even more amazed. Of course the audience rating for the video was 35%. And the interest in Dark Wolf had run out of control! If they continued broadcasting Dark Wolf-related videos then a considerable audience rating would be secured. But no matter what, it was still a game video. When broadcasting other users' videos, it was customary to only give them a few hundred thousand won. No, it was just fortunate that their videos were even being shown on TV. Yet now he wanted 3 million won for a 10 minute video not related to a celebrity? It was unprecedented for the game exclusive news which was a low budget program.

'But they'll have to accept.'

Hyun-woo looked at the dumb faces Lee Yun-gyu and the Team Chief were making and smiled. Hyun-woo had no interest in the circumstances of the broadcasting station. But thanks to his underprivileged childhood, he had the ability to sense money. He sensed that it would be possible to ask for more money after listening to Ho Myung-hwan talk about other broadcasting stations.

‘I don’t know much about broadcasting stations but I know they fight among each other to get the highest ratings. And the game exclusive news broadcasts at the same time as 2 other game broadcasts. They are probably the ones who contacted Ho Myung-hwan.’

That was the reason why Hyun-woo had courage to ask for more money. Since Lee Yun-gyu mentioned the ratings, they would do anything to secure Hyun-woo’s guaranteed audience. Like he said, the viewer’s interest would be concentrated on Hyun-woo whenever they saw a video.

‘Yet they are trying to offer me a price 300,000 won lower than other broadcasting stations? If I had been hit in the back of the head with that then my heart really would be upset. Anyway, the situation has completely changed now that I know about the other broadcasting stations. The possibilities are endless. The person holding the sword hilt is me.’

The power of Hyun-woo’s video would increase the rating of the game exclusive news. Then what would happen if that video shifted to another broadcasting station? Yes, Hyun-woo thought of all this after hearing Ho Myung-hwan’s words. It was possible to decrease the ratings rather than increase them. The video could be used to increase the ratings of the broadcasting station. However, he could also use it to increase their ratings.

‘Anyway, even if the deal isn’t accepted then I can get 1.8 million won elsewhere.’

“3 million won.....that is.....”

The Team Chief’s and Lee Yun-gyu’s resistance faded away at his next words.

“Then I’ll just have to go to S broadcasting station.”

“W-wait a minute!”

When Hyun-woo turned around without any regrets, the Team Chief instantly jumped up and stopped him. He hesitated for a while before sighing and mumbling.

“.....2.5 million won. Any more than that will be a problem.”

“I accept. Then the fee for the video this time will be 3 million won instead.”

Hyun-woo smiled and drove in a wedge. Thus Hyun-woo managed to get a fee for the video copyright at 8 times the price. The price per video was 2.5 million won. Along with the 5 million won contract deposit money, he also received 3 million won for the Lancel defensive war video. So he left the broadcasting station with 8 million won. However, there was still one problem remaining for Hyun-woo. The issue with the Global Exos breach of contract seemed to be resolved somehow. However, the rights of all Ark’s videos belonged to Global Exos. If Hyun-woo wanted to broadcast the video on TV then he should also pay a certain amount of the fee to Global Exos.

‘Do I have to give a part of the copyright fee to Global Exos?’

He had just received money and now it felt like he was being robbed. However, Ho Myung-hwan shook his head and said.

“The original agreement was that Global Exos would receive 30%. But Ha Myung-woo decided to discuss it with the team after seeing the results. Like I said when explaining the contract, the broadcasting station will have to receive our agreement first before they can post the video. If the contract is kept then all future copyright fees will be paid entirely to Ark-nim.”

In other words, it had to go through prior censorship. But Hyun-woo didn’t care as long as he earned money.

“Really? Thank you!”

“No, we should be thanking you instead.”

“Huh?”

Ho Myung-hwan smiled at Hyun-woo’s confusion.

“Didn’t I tell you? I was yelled at by the Team Chief because of Ark-nim’s video.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. The circumstances.....”

“It’s okay. It’s because Ark-nim showed the video that an unexpected thing occurred.”

“What does that mean?”

“Actually we received a call from the head office this morning. After the video was shown yesterday, at least 7 million new users have signed up for New World. Can you believe it?”

Yes, that was the reason why Ho Myung-hwan was excited this morning. Thanks to Hyun-woo’s video, there was an explosion of interest in New World. The number of those people was 7 million! And 40,000 people have also bought the game unit. The unit was tens of millions of won and combined with the subscription amount for New World, Global Exos had received hundreds of billions in sales in just one day. It was an astronomical amount beyond imagination!

‘What? Then isn’t it Global Exos who received the profit in the end?’

He thought sarcastically. Anyway, the standards were in an entirely different world. Billions of won going into their pocket was like millions of won going into other people’s pocket.

‘Anyway, I still received 8 million won. In two months I can make 20 million won!’

His heart warmed after his wallet became thicker.

“I’ll treat you to a meal since you came all the way here.”

“Huh? No, you don’t have to.....”

“It’s okay. There is a place where I used to work part time near here. It won’t be a burden. It’s not a very expensive place.”

“Hah, then I guess..... Since it is already like this.....”

Ho Myung-hwan was unable to decline and ended up following Hyun-woo. After crossing several lanes.

“T-this is it?”

“The food here tastes pretty good. It was also a good job.”

Hyun-woo laughed as he looked at the simple tent erected on a vacant land. A phrase was written on top of the tent.

Assisted by the Youth Campaign (Sandwich: 2, 000 won. Proceeds will go towards public utilities.)

‘Someone who just received 8 million won is treating me to a 2,000 won sandwich?’

Ho Myung-hwan looked at Hyun-woo with an amazed expression. But Hyun-woo just lifted an eyebrow and ordered a sandwich before sitting down.

‘Buying a meal for 2,000 won is a luxury. By the way, my mother’s wheelchair is also very old. I have a large sum of money so I should change it to an electric wheelchair. Didn’t I see on the internet that the best electric wheelchair cost 6 million won? Well, it is fine if the price is that much.’

Hyun-woo smiled happily as he ate his sandwich.

Lancel's New Town Plan

“Oppa, is it finished?”

Roco approached the warehouse with sparkling eyes. Ark nodded with a tired complexion and handed her a scroll.

“Yes, it’s done. This is the catalogue.”

“Wah, when arranged like this it really is no joke.”

Roco’s mouth widened as Ark handed her the scroll and she unfolded it. There were 10 scrolls with lists of various ingredients written on it.

‘It was hard work but very rewarding.’

Ark looked at the scroll with satisfaction. After returning from the broadcasting station, Ark had stayed at the warehouse for several hours creating the scrolls. Thanks to that, Ark completely looked like a wet rag but he felt satisfied. It was unnecessary to explain again but the battle for Lancel village was vital for Ark. During that time he barely ate at all. He was so worried about the situation that he wondered if he would have to jump off the Han River Bridge. But thanks to some smart and excellent strategies, Ark had overcome the desperate crisis. And there was always a big chance after a crisis was conquered. Of course, not everyone received that chance after the crisis. The only way was to help themselves! Ark never stopped thinking about ‘how can I earn money from this battle?’ in every situation. Since chaotic users were attacking the village, Ark couldn’t overlook the equipment of Jewel’s group. When a chaotic user died, there was a 100% chance of dropping one equipment. In other words, the equipment piled up after wiping out Jewel’s 500 strong group.

‘The problem is how to collect all of it.’

Apart from the NPCs from the village, he had also mobilized 400

users in this defensive war. It would be impossible for him to remove all the users and collect the equipment. Of course, if Ark and Radun ran around then they could collect some equipment but a lot would be claimed by other users. It would be extremely vexing that he couldn't 100% monopolize it. Ark's pride couldn't tolerate having such a huge sum of money taken away. So he came up with the method to make Radun an airborne troop. Ark was able to grasp the battlefield thanks to the split screens. He instantly knew the location where a lot of Jewel's group had died. Once he received that information, he would send Radun wrapped around Racard to that area. It was a strategy to urgently swallow the items as soon as they dropped.

'Hopefully I can monopolize 30~40%! The problem is that the users might notice Radun.....'

But there was some unforeseen good fortune once the battle started. Heavy rain started pouring down. The dark clouds also obscured the sky making it a pitch black night. Moreover, the relentless rains turned the ground to mud. With Protective Colouration, Radun was difficult to distinguish by the users and he managed to swallow the equipment. And the darkness, rain and mud were all helpful to Radun. Radun used Stalking and could quickly find the equipment near the corpses before swallowing them. After swallowing too much, he would have to throw it up at the store's warehouse before returning to the battlefield. So Radun had managed to swallow 213 equipment! In addition, Ark had also collected 38 items while running around. The total sum was 251 equipment. Ark and Radun had managed to sweep up 50% of the loot!

'Ohhhh, this is spectacular!'

Ark shed impressed tears after the battle as he saw the 251 equipment piled up in the warehouse. A mountain of japtem! No, to be exact it was a pile of money!

'Now I just have to sell it!'

If he couldn't sell the lot then he wouldn't get any money from it. However, there was a problem when he thought about how to sell

it. When he put the item in the bag there was no restrictions in volume but once taken outside it would return to the original volume. Furthermore, all the items collected this time was equipment. Just one metal armour would occupy considerable space. The store wouldn't be able to display all 251 equipment.

'I guess I have to display it little by little until it sells.....'

But the shelves in Ark's store were already filled with various items. Even if he created more space, he would only be able to display 10 equipment. He had more than 200 equipment yet he could only display 10.

'I have to think of a plan to quickly get rid of those items.....'

Then Ark had a sudden idea. It was to create a catalogue of the items. Armour, weapons, gloves, shoes, leathers, metal..... The equipment was divided into their category and the performance written down. If there was a detailed list then the shelves weren't necessary to promote the goods to customers. Yes, the scrolls Ark handed to Roco were the catalogue! Well, the idea of a catalogue wasn't exactly new. However, there was something different about the catalogue Ark created.

'I have to buy thing for as cheap as possible and then sell it for as high as possible. But it will irritate customers if I sell it for too high a price. The way to stimulate the customer's desire to buy.....'

Once again, Ark knew that the interest in Dark Wolf transcended imagination. Ark was confused by such popularity but he knew about the interest after his experience at the broadcasting station.

'There is no reason not to use it!'

Ark thought about using the name Dark Wolf for business. Ark had a description from Dark Wolf written on the catalogue for each item.

-Halben's Jack knife (Magic)

Armour type: Dagger

Attack: 20~22

Durability: 90/90

Weight: 20

User restriction: Level 220 or higher with Thief profession

A sharp retractable dagger. Among all dagger weapons, this one on average is one of the fastest. As the folding dagger is good for hiding it on the body, a lot of thieves tend to use it. Halben's jack knife is a cruel and brutal weapon known for having poison coated on it.

<Option: Agility +18, Due to the Acid Poison there is a 20% chance of causing the opponent to be poisoned for 5 minutes>

* Dark Wolf's Product Description: After trying it out, the 20% chance of poison is very good. Since a thief relies on continuous hits, a weapon which sucks health over time is the best type of weapon. It is recommended for both hunting and PVP. Your level might be insufficient but you won't regret it if you buy it in advance.

* Recommended price: 69 gold and 99 silver

-Old Steel Helmet

Armour type: Steel helmet

Defense: 48

Durability: 120/120

Weight: 33

User restriction: Level 200 or higher with Warrior profession

An ordinary steel helmet. The iron it is made of isn't very good so you can't expect a large defense from it.

* Dark Wolf's Product Description: If you look at the explanation then you know it is an ordinary helmet. But it only has 10 less defense than a magic helmet which costs 50 gold extra. In addition, the added stats on a magic helmet wouldn't be that much. If you consider the performance of the helmet and its price, this is a good

fit with other magic items.

* Recommended price: 19 gold and 99 silver.....

It was a similar method as attaching the video of Dark Wolf to the auction site. In addition, he was even more famous than he was before! Dark Wolf was promoting items in the village where the actual Dark Wolf was active! Moreover, while Ark was creating the catalogue he restored the durability using Advanced Magic Restoration. It would be difficult to sell it while the durability was decreased from the battle. Therefore he worked several hours without a break restoring the items and writing their descriptions, but it was all for the sake of his future income.

‘The equipment collected this time are mostly general items but I’m not upset about it.’

He knew that Jewel’s group wouldn’t drop any expensive equipment. The battle they started was one in which they risked life and death. Of course, they needed to secure a minimum offense and defense in order to increase the success rate so they used general items. And the rear support of the secret society were equipped with magic items. Surprisingly, the total sum for the products in the catalogue was 8,750 gold! He could obtain 87.5 million won from the 251 items Jewel dropped!

‘As expected, war is the most profitable business to earn money.’

He earned that much income in one day so he couldn’t feel tired. But that wasn’t all of Ark’s income.

“Take this.”

“What, what is it?”

“It’s the insurance money. If the users come then please check their contracts and distribute it.”

Ark said as he handed her a large purse of money. Yes, it was the earnings from ‘Ark’s Compensation Insurance.’ The insurance was needed in order to persuade users to enter the war after they

worried about having their equipment stolen. But when considering the circumstances, it was quite a lucrative business. That's because during a war it wasn't profitable to continuously use the scrolls.

'That's it. That's at least 2,500 gold profit!'

As expected, Ark made a significant profit by the end of the fight. However, there were two unexpected variables at the very last moment.

'Those bastards, if they were going to die then they should've just died. Is this a joke? If they wanted to commit suicide then why didn't they just jump into the Han River?'

It was because of the suicide squad's biggest weapon. Since they were using a kamikaze style attack on the village, he had no choice but to extend the insurance payout to equipment that were broken from the Self-destruct. Thanks to that the damage of Lancel village barely stayed below 30% but he had to pay out a lot of insurance money. So the payout ended up adding to 1,800 gold!

'Well, there's still 700 gold remaining.....'

Their equipment broke but the users managed to stop the Self-destruct. If all the equipment broke he would've suffered a loss of 1000 gold. The thought of his 2500 gold being shaved down by 1800 gold was heartbreaking.

'It can't be helped. I made some profit so I should be satisfied.'

Ark soothed his pain with the thought. And the situation wasn't completely heartbreaking. He obtained 8,750 gold from the equipment. The insurance business was 700 gold. This clean-up of this battle alone got him a profit of 9,450 gold. He also received 8 million offline from signing the contract with the broadcasting station. On the other hand, not only did he take profit from Jewel's group but they were also in jail. Even if he couldn't put all 500 members into a jail cell, putting half of them in wasn't bad. He had managed to eradicate some pests and make money.

'As expected, a person has to have an aggressive mind.'

He never would've got all of this if he kept his passive attitude! But Ark had no intention of being satisfied with this much.

'This victory is just a foothold in my future plans.'

Ark sensed the time to start the plan he prepared beforehand was fast approaching. No, to be exact it had already begun.

'But it is still premature. There is still a lot of work to be done. And the thing that is most necessary is money. I've put most of it into real estate but I still need a bit more. I need to tighten my belt even more!'

"Oppa where are you going?"

Roco's voice who received the insurance payout could be heard.

"Well, I need to do a few things before I return."

"You will return to the warehouse later? It's been a while since I've seen you."

Roco whined like a child. And Sapjil and Ulmeok who were carrying things from the warehouse to store looked like they wanted to vomit. Then Roco turned her back and started whistling as she looked at the distant mountains. Ark laughed before tapping Roco on the back and said.

"I understand. When my business ends then we'll go hunting together."

"Really? You promise?"

Roco laughed and returned to the store. Ark exited the store and walked around surveying the village. The shattered wreckage of buildings caught his eye. At the end of the battle, Ark confirmed that 23% of the structures had been damaged. It wasn't a small amount of damage. That meant 1 in 4 buildings had received damage. And out of the 60 buildings damaged, 30 had been so destroyed that repairing them was impossible. Just looking around the town it could be seen how intense the battle was. Therefore the real estate market price had fallen by 30% compared to before the battle. Ark

had a 4% stake in Lancel village so he also suffered significant losses. But Ark didn't worry about it.

'It is highly likely that this battle will cause Lancel village to grow instead.'

After the TV broadcast of the Lancel defensive war, it wasn't just Dark Wolf, Shambala, Bread and Redian who became famous. Lancel which was the stage for the battle also became incredibly famous. It hadn't even been one day since the battle ended yet a large number of users had flocked from nearby areas. It was similar to tourists gathering at movie or drama location shoots.

"Wah, it really is the same as what I saw on TV."

"Look here. This is the building that was destroyed by the thieves' Self-destruct skill."

"Ohhhh! I saw it, I saw it."

"Let's take a photo here!"

They users went around taking photos of the building wreckage. Ark couldn't understand why but it was good that a lot of people had gathered. The development of an NPC village depended on how many users visited it. Money was always located where a lot of people gathered. Without this fame, it would take a long time for the real estate market to recover.

'If a lot of users gathered then it's not unpleasant.'

Ark smirked and exited the residential area. Then he suddenly saw Bread hiding behind a building. Bread had played the game for almost 24 hours so he disconnected for a bit.

"Hey, Bread!"

Ark waved his hand and approached as he found Bread. Then Bread jumped with astonishment and quickly looked around. He sighed with relief as he saw Ark and grabbed his arm before pulling him behind a building.

"What? What is it?"

“Shhh, Shhh! You idiot, don’t be so loud!”

Bread looked around and whispered in a low voice.

“What’s going on? Did you meet a debt collector or something?”

“Damn.....I would’ve preferred the creditors.”

Bread sighed before suddenly glaring at Ark.

“Yes, that’s right. You are the source. This is all your fault!”

“What are you talking about? What did I do?”

“If you hadn’t shown my face on TV.....”

“Are you running away from creditors who found you?”

“That’s not it! Are you playing around?”

Bread looked at Ark with an angry expression. The reason Bread was in a 100% annoyed state was because of the users gathered in Lancel village. Yes, Bread’s face was shown nationwide on the TV. In other words he had become famous. Of course, Bread and Redian were already known as Bristania’s strongest pair so they were already celebrities. But their previous success was nothing compared to what happened after their faces were shown on TV. The users who found Bread and Redian in the village flocked like sparrows that had discovered earthworms.

“What are your levels?”

“What technique was that? Where did you learn it from?”

“What equipmen do you use? I also wear leather equipment so where can I get some as good as yours?”

Bread and Redian were annoyed by their relentless chirping.

“.....If it was just that much I could endure it. It is just like Paradon.

Bread sighed and shook his head. The problem was the school aged users. When creating a character in New World, it was possible to choose the age. Thus it was impossible to know the user’s actual

age just looking at the character's appearance. But it was possible to tell if someone often played online games. Who the school aged children were.....Of course, they didn't vary that much from general users. The problem was that the childish users often didn't let go once they caught something. And Bread had been tightly caught by them.

"Hey, are you Bread?"

"How did you fight that well? Can you teach me?"

The childish users chased after Bread like goldfish. Thanks to that, Bread's blood pressure went up as he couldn't escape them. But how could the village hero murder them? While Bread was chaotic, he had been using the [Lie] scroll in order to prevent being kicked out of the village. The same went for Redian. Furthermore, the opponents were just kids. Wouldn't it be slightly embarrassing if they used their power on them? Therefore Redian had separated from Bread and disconnected. However, Bread had a reason for not stopping the connection like Redian.

"Damn! I decided to go hunting with the Wolrang at a nearby cave but I can't do that with those kids around. The Wolrang will have to wait."

After participating in the battle, his intimacy with the Wolrang had increased greatly. Therefore, Bread's dream of having a good relationship with the dog/wolf was coming true. That was the best reward Bread got from this battle! And as soon as the battle ended, he made an appointment to go hunting with the Wolrang. But now he couldn't go to the meeting place while being chased after by the schoolchildren. If they chased him all the way to the hunting grounds then it would be unbearable. The dreadful power of the schoolchildren made the level 410 Bread hide from them! How should he say it.....? Was it courageous or ignorant?

'Tsk tsk tsk, this is really troublesome.'

Anyway, Ark looked at Bread with pitying eyes after understanding the circumstances. But this problem occurred because he didn't wear a mask or transform himself like Ark. But hiding the face after

finally getting to go on TV was a bit.....

“Then keep up the effort. I have things to do. I hope you escape safely.”

“W-wait a minute, can’t you do something?”

“Like what?”

“You’re more famous than me. If you transform into Dark Wolf and attract their attention.....”

“No thanks.”

After transforming into Dark Wolf, Ark would be buried in users. Why would he intentionally transform himself into Dark Wolf? When Ark snorted and refused, Bread shouted angrily.

“Do you really want to be that uncooperative? Because of you I participated in the war.....”

“Ah, there he is!”

“I’ve found him. Catch him!”

At that time a hobbit shouted and pointed towards Bread. It was the childish users annoying Bread. Bread’s face instantly became confused as the hobbit appeared and he ran away. Then the hobbit cursed and started chasing after Bread.

“Damn Ark, you should help me a little bit!”

‘How? The schoolkids are frightening. I’ll just pretend I didn’t see this.....’

Ark pretended not to hear Bread’s SOS and turned around. Then a playful smile spread on his face as he wandered around.

‘Speaking of which, how is that guy doing?’

“Blue Sword!”

Ark looked around as a hobbit yelled. The place it was coming from was the wreckage of a building. One man was sitting down in front

of it. It was the masked Shambala wearing black clothes. The hobbits had found another celebrity and flocked around Shambala.

“Oh thanks Ark! Shambala, I’ll leave this to you!”

The hobbits who had been chasing Bread showed interest in Shambala and Bread instantly escaped. Meanwhile, the hobbits just laughed at the sight of their new toy.

“Hahaha, you’re Blue Sword?”

“What the, this is?”

Shambala looked at the hobbits with bewildered eyes. While he had been lost in thought, he hadn’t realized he was in the same area as Bread and Ark.

“Are you pretending ignorance?”

“How did you fight that well? Can you teach me?”

“Huhuhu, if you want to hit then hit me. The guards will protect us!”

The hobbits laughed as they irritated Shambala.

‘Now, what will Shambala do?’

Ark smirked and waited for Shambala’s reaction. Then Shambala rose from his seat without speaking a word. Then he opened both hands and swept the hobbits inside the dim alley. Shambala’s voice could then be heard from the alley.

“Death’s Agent.....”

Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam!

“Hik, what, what the?”

“What is with this person? S-save me....heok!”

After a while, a hobbit crawled from the alley with a bruised face. But before the hobbit could escape the alley, a hand grabbed his ankle and dragged him back in. And the sounds started again.

‘He took care of the schoolkids situation in seconds. What a scary

guy.....'

Shambala was completely different from Bread. If he didn't like someone then he would beat them up. That was Shambala! However, Shambala also had a weakness. After beating up the schoolkids, Shambala once again appeared and flopped down in front of the shattered building with a sigh.

"Damn! How dare they destroy Seutandal's branch here with Self-destruct? If she finds out that it has been destroyed then Isabel will be worried..... It can't be helped. I'll have to secretly fix it before Isabel finds out, even if I have to use my personal funds. No. 358, keep it a secret from Isabel that our branch has received damage. Understood? By the way, do you know what is necessary to repair this building?"

Shambala sighed again as he rummaged through his bag.

Yes, the buildings damaged by the battle would be repaired using the village's public funds. However, the Seutandal branch was the property of the Eastern Nation. Thus the Eastern Nation would have to bear the cost of the repair fees.

"Bread and Shambala, everyone has their own worries."

Ark clicked his tongue as he stared at the dismal looking Shambala.

"Well, it's none of my business. Their weaknesses make them easy to use."

Ark muttered with an evil smile. Bread and Redian really liked dogs and cats. Isabel was also Shambala's weakness. Once Ark grasped their weaknesses, he was able to use it to his advantage. Actually Shambala, Bread and Redian had participated in the battle because of that. Therefore he couldn't understand their complicated lives.

"Compared to that money isn't bad. It is simple."

Ark muttered before turning to the residents with a dark look and sighing. The smile on Ark's face had completely disappeared. In fact, Ark didn't just feel satisfied from the results of this battle. While Shambala had a weakness, Ark also had something like that.

‘The NPCs that I know and associated with.....’

Ark looked at the NPCs with a bittersweet look. They were NPCs who had lost family in the battle. Yes, the damage was less than expected but 13% of residents were still lost. The total population was 700 people and 13% of that had died. That was 90 NPCs sacrificed. Of course, this battle determined whether Lancel was destroyed or not. He knew that a certain amount would be lost but the 13% sacrifice was more than expected.

‘Theoretically I know. Although I know.....’

If it was a different place then he would’ve enjoyed the victory. However, Ark was the one who convinced the residents to relocate to Lancel. While Ark had been worried about Lancel’s future, they were all power Ark had been acquainted with. Those NPCs had disappeared. While users could just revive, the NPCs were an existence that disappeared when they died so his chest was in pain.

‘But.....’

The NPCs were already dead. Galen had already arranged for the funerals of the victims and paid compensation to their grieving families so there was nothing he could do.

‘Yes, my chest hurts because of the NPCs but let’s think about protecting the ones remaining. Now I have to quickly begin my plan for the remaining NPCs. I have to stop even more NPCs from being sacrificed.’

Ark became determined and headed towards the Town Hall. Ark had already made some plans for the future after the battle finished. No, it was because of the battle that his plans for the future became clear. But before that plan could be implemented, he had to clean up everything first. One of them was the <Find New Settlers> quest. Since the battle finished, he was going to receive the compensation and then start the next plan.

“Although the sacrifice of the residents is heartbreaking, but public affairs was public affairs. I have to bring all things to an end. Now

the chances of Galen giving a rare or unique item wasn't very high. Then will I be given more shares in the village?"

Ark tilted his head at the thought of the compensation.

"A share in the village isn't bad. Even if it is 1% and the market price fell, it would still be 2,000 gold. Besides, once the price increases in the future then it will be 100 times better than an item. But nevertheless, there is a possibility that he will give an item as reward. Perhaps? Maybe Galen has a heirloom hidden or something?"

It was a quest which took 1 year and 6 months to complete! Whatever compensation it was, Ark couldn't be disappointed.

'Finally.....!'

After a short time, Ark arrived at the Town Hall. Then he entered with his heart pounding.

"Ark, you've come!"

Galen who was at the Town Hall grabbed Ark's hand.

'Ohh, was he waiting for me to come?'

Ark came to a hasty conclusion and became even more eager. Anyway, Galen knew he liked money. Wasn't it a nice feeling when an NPC was eager to hand over compensation?

"Well, it is natural. Don't you know? Lancel village is like my home. Fighting for Lancel village is an honourable thing to me. You can ask for anything in the future."

"Ohhh, thank you. As expected, I can only believe in you!"

"Hahaha! Well, it is natural....."

Ark boldly laughed and secretly reached out his hand. He was expecting to receive his reward now. And Galen nodded before pulling out a scroll and handed it to him.

'Scroll? Is the compensation a share in the village?'

That was the only thing he could think when seeing the scroll.

‘A share in the village isn’t bad. The question is how much percentage I was given..... Huh?’

Perplexity spread on Ark’s face as he opened the scroll. The scroll didn’t indicate a transfer of village shares.

Village Reconstruction Supervisore Appointment

You have been nominated by the council of Lancel Village to be in charge of the village reconstruction. The guidelines for the reconstruction work are enclosed on the reverse side.

Temporary mayor of Lancel village, Galen.

‘What is this? Village Reconstruction Supervisor Appointment? Is this really the reward?’

Ark looked at the appointment scroll with a stupid expression. Then Galen tapped Ark’s shoulder and said.

“Although I should be the one in charge of the work, there is an urgent situation and I need to leave for several days. So I wanted to choose the right person. You’re the only one I can entrust it to. I feel sorry for dumping this on you but I am relieved by your previous words. Then please do this for me.”

“You’re going? Where are you going? No, my reward.....?”

“I’m sorry. I’m really in a hurry. I’ll give you the details when I return.”

“W-wait a minute!”

“I’ll be back in a few days!”

Galen then disappeared into the crowd. After Galen disappeared, a quest information window appeared in front of Ark.

<Find New Settlers> sub quest has been updated.

* Sub quest: Lancel village defensive war= Lancel village’s reconstruction project

Thanks to your efforts, Lancel village has been protected from a band of thieves. Unfortunately, the damage Lancel village received wasn't a small amount. If it is left alone then the satisfaction of the residents will fall.

The war will only truly end when the village is restored to its previous state. The interim mayor Galen has left the village reconstruction to you who have obtained the trust of the residents. Repair the village within the budget of Lancel village. You cannot fail this quest. However, if you give up this quest then you can't receive any compensation for the <Find New Settlers> quest.

<Difficulty: ???>

<Additional Fact: The reconstruction of the village will depend on several numbers such as commerce, development etc. The compensation for the quest will be paid when the village reconstruction is finished. However, the additional compensation received will depend on the percentage of completion for the village reconstruction>

'Sub quest?'

Ark read the information window with shocked eyes. When Galen had run away and pushed the quest on him, anger instantly welled up. He went to all that trouble during the Lancel defensive war and now he had to reconstruct the village as well?

'What? Isn't this just taking advantage of a nice guy? I might be busy.....'

Now he had to do this task as well. At that moment, some raccoon workmen wearing helmets emerged from the crowd.

"Ark-nim, please give us some orders."

"Damn, I don't know!"

Ark snapped at the raccoons, causing them to flinch. They suddenly looked at Ark with worried eyes before starting to back away.

"Why all of a sudden?"

“I don’t know, but he doesn’t seem pleasant right now.”

“What do we do? The water is already drying up and we don’t know where to start working.”

“But we have to repair the damaged buildings as well.”

“We need instructions from Ark-nim to begin that work.”

“Yes, we’ll have to talk to him even if he looks unpleasant.”

The racoons finished a sneaky work meeting and approached.

“Ark-nim, do you want us to rebuild Lancel village the same way as it previously was?”

“I don’t care!”

Ark yelled and turned his body. He knew there was an audience. But despite it being a quest, wasn’t it too horrible? Telling a person expecting compensation to suddenly supervise the reconstruction? Although he could receive additional compensation depending on the percentage of compensation, Ark didn’t care about the reconstruction work. The raccoons were the ones clearing the debris of the collapsed building so what could Ark do?

‘Damn, that quest is just a waste of time!’

Ark complained and was returning to his store. Then there was an abrupt spark in his brain.

‘Wait? Reconstruction? Construction?’

Ark stopped walking and looked around with bemused eyes. The village entrance, plaza, shopping centre and residential street. Ark looked at the structure of the village before he had an idea.

‘Maybe.....this might be a chance..... No.....it definitely is an opportunity!’

Ark reached that conclusion and immediately returned to the Town Hall. Then he interrupted the raccoons who were about to return to their workshop and laughed.

“I gratefully accept the position as supervisor of the Lancel Reconstruction Project. Before starting work, please have a filling meal. You’ll need your strength for the work.”

“Ark-nim, the wood has arrived!”

A group of raccoons arrived carrying a bunch of wood planks.

“Don’t disrupt the passage so set it down in that corner.”

“Ark-nim, the stone has arrived!”

“It’ll be used to repair the outer stone walls so please pile it up there.”

Ark flew around and issued orders. Once Ark accepted the supervisor role, the Lancel Reconstruction Project began in earnest.

Ddok ttak, ddok ttak, ssuk ssak, ssuk ssak!

Excited sounds rang out through the village.

The wreckage of the old buildings was cleared away and scaffolds for the new buildings were erected. The former thieves who had changed professions to workmen from the raccoons were hammering in nails at the scaffolds for the new buildings. The scene really looked like the construction of a new village. Once all the NPCs in Lancel were mobilized, the entrance already looked like the old one. However, Ark’s goal wasn’t to restore the ‘old look.’

‘Was I crazy? Did I really say there was no profit from this?’

Yes, previously Ark hadn’t cared about the reconstruction project. Therefore there was no need for him to help out or give individual orders.

‘Huhuhu, luckily I thought of an amazing idea!’

Ark smiled and praised himself.

“Ark-nim.”

One of the raccoons called out to him and approached.

“I’ve been looking at the blueprints distributed by Ark-nim. Those buildings over there are so damaged that we’ll have to destroy it while it is possible to restore that building. But there is a building that isn’t shown on the blueprint. Was there a mistake?”

The raccoon pointed to a building at the entrance of the village. In fact, most of the Lancel buildings damaged were in a similar style. There were several buildings which the suicide squad didn’t directly hit. Since the users stopped the suicide squad, most of the buildings had been indirectly damaged. The building the raccoon indicated had a perfect interior but several cracks on the outer walls. However, Ark shook his head.

“No, it’s not a mistake.”

“Huh? Then?”

“Destroy any buildings that aren’t listed on the blueprint.”

“Destroy? But the building can be repaired and used.....”

The raccoon couldn’t understand Ark’s words.

“Can’t you understand by looking at the blueprint? The front of that building is blocking the entrance. It is the first thing that guests here will see. Of course it can be repaired but wouldn’t the marks from repairing it make it an unseemly sight? I don’t want that building to be the first image of our village. Would you want the village to be disagreeable to guests?”

“But it will look better if we repair it.....”

“Are you the supervisor?”

Ark shot the raccoon an annoyed look. Then the raccoon hung his tail and hesitated.

“I have my own way of thinking. Stop chattering and just do it.”

“I understand.”

The raccoon nodded and turned around. Then Ark opened the blueprint and checked it again.

“Ah, and build a new road from the building and heading to this direction. The necessary materials for the road are prepared and flank the road on both sides with a flowerbed. The seedlings are already prepared by the Meow so you just have to put down the foundations.”

“A road?”

“Well, the village will grow in the future so we’ll have to do some readjustments to the village plan. We don’t want to be inferior to other villages.”

Ark laughed as he spoke.

‘Okay, it is gradually turning into the village I want.’

Ark looked proudly at the village that was slowly changing. Yes, the reason why Ark changed his mind about the reconstruction project was because he thought ‘this is the chance to make the village I want.’ In fact, Ark hadn’t really liked the previous structure of Lancel village. The original Lancel village was a small mountain village with 30 buildings. And it had been 1 year and 6 months. It had grown increasingly larger as more beasts and people resettled here. Therefore the 30 buildings kept on increasing as more residents moved here. Gradually stores popped up and the place where there were no buildings became the town square.

It was no different from a real growth process. Thus there were also issues that occurred in reality. Just like any old city, it wasn’t really balanced. From the beginning a large town hadn’t been planned so they just built buildings where necessary. Sometimes houses made of wood or stone were mixed indiscriminately, and sometimes lanes were blocked by a new building. It was so uncomfortable that sometimes the people living there would have to exit through their neighbour’s back door. Ark thought the reconstruction project was a good chance to fix the issue.

‘Fortunately Lancel village has abundant public funds.’

When he first thought up the plans, Ark had checked the amount of public funds available. If there wasn’t an abundant budget then it wasn’t possible to begin the construction. But the budget was really

rich.

Lancel village was one co-produced and built by the ex-thieves, raccoons, Meow and the Wolrang. So the proceeds earned in the village went into the public funds. Thus the reconstruction business didn't just involve the collapsed buildings. Anyway, thanks to that the public funds weren't a problem. Ark also hadn't used any of the public funds to hire users so he could invest that money back into the reconstruction projects. And the person in charge of the reconstruction was Ark! As the supervisor Ark visited the cartographer Hanson. Then he commissioned him to produce a perfect town blueprint.

"It is a good idea. The structure of the town has also been weighing on my mind. The village will have to do some maintenance if it wants to grow bigger in the future."

Hanson strongly agreed with Ark's idea and spent all night working on the blueprint. Then he handed the blueprint to the raccoons. However, Ark's wicked scheme was hidden in the blueprint.

'Huhuhu, if the village changes according to the plan.....'

The appearance of Lancel village would certainly be cleaner than before. However, it was entirely for the sake of Lancel village. Once again, Lancel village was recovering from an attack by Jewel's group. And Jewel's main target was Ark's store. Therefore the suicide squads had headed towards Ark's store from the entrance. In other words, the buildings that received the most damage were between the village entrance and Ark's store! Then couldn't he use it as an excuse to remove all the buildings during the reconstruction project?

'Then Ark's store can be seen as seen as someone enters the village!'

Yes, this was the hidden motive behind Ark's reconstruction projects. In fact, Ark had another reason not to like the structure of Lancel village. Thanks to Ark's hard work, he had finally managed to receive a store building in the village. The building was located deep in the residential section of the village. Thus it was hard for users to find Ark's store when they first entered the village. Even if they had

visited beforehand and knew where the location was, they would have to travel through a complicated route from the shopping area to reach Ark's store.

'I can't afford to have any customers stolen away by NPC stores. All the users who come to Lancel are my customers! I can't miss even one customer.'

Therefore Ark removed all the buildings blocking his store and built a road to it.

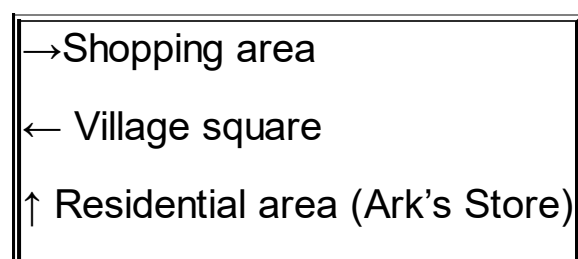
'Once entering the village, it will be visible within 3 minutes!'

This was Ark's final goal with the reconstruction project. And the plan became obvious in a few days. After knocking down the buildings according to the blueprint, Ark's shop could be seen from three village entrances.

However it wasn't enough!

"Now lay out the road and create the flower bed!"

Ark started the 2nd stage after the building finished being demolished. It was a road connected Ark's store to the village entrance. But the road had been completely designed by Ark. Using black and white pebbles, he created a design of an arrow on the road. The arrow pointed right to Ark's store! The flower beds were also the same. The plants and flowers were carefully laid and pruned to lead towards Ark's store. Now any users who entered the village would unconsciously look at Ark's store. And the third thing was the new signposts in the village.



.....There was no need to explain the village signpost. The entire village was like an advertisement for Ark's store! Of course, protests came in from other NPC stores. But the supervisor in charge of the reconstruction project was Ark! Ark played dumb and pretended not

to know anything.

“Eh? Why are the paving stones laid like this? What happened to the flower bed? Hah, this sign..... He pretended that something had gone wrong with the task instructions.

“But it can’t be helped. All this time and money has been spent so how can we just demolish the road? The next chance I have I’ll adjust it.”

Ark’s skill to prevaricate was just like a politician’s. And thanks to the TV broadcast, many players flocked to Ark’s store as planned. But Ark wasn’t satisfied with just that. He had to strike while it was still hot.

-There is an enormous volume of equipment guaranteed by Dark Wolf!

It is a great opportunity to purchase level 150~300 equipment at a cheap price!

* A three day 10% sales event is in progress.

Ark had placed such placards in front of his store. It was an opportunity to get rid of the equipment obtained from Jewel’s group. As planned, the users flocked around the catalogue and ordered goods.

“I want item no. 96, the jack knife that Dark Wolf used directly!”

“Item no. 140 that Dark Wolf recommended, the Nameless Bow!”

Once one item sold, a fire would be lit and the remaining items sold. The other goods in the store would also be sold.

“I have change left so give me one herbal medicine set!”

“Two potions please!”

“Ah, yes yes!”

Sapjil and Ulmeok said with tearful eyes as they took the orders. They were so busy that Ark’s summons had to be put to work.

“Well, well! Who ordered the potions just now?”

“Me!”

A user’s hands raised as Racard flew over their heads. Then Racard headed towards the user with Radun clinging to him.

“Here are you things!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun’s mouth opened and he spat out the potion.

“Give the money to the skeleton over there. Next, the person who ordered the herbal medicine set.”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

While Racard flew to other users, the skeletal Razak approached the user. With a clink clink, the potions were paid for and the skeleton laughed before approaching the next customer. There were so many guests that they all couldn’t enter the store, so Ark used his summons for a street sale. But the desperate plan he came up with was more popular than expected.

“A bat is taking our orders while a snake spits it out?”

“This skeleton is receiving the money without any supervision? So fun!”

“That skeleton was also on TV! The one with the fire shield!”

“I’ve also seen that bat and snake before. They were with Dark Wolf!”

“So this shop really is related to Dark Wolf!”

“How amazing. I’m here so one scroll please!”

“Me too! One herbal medicine set!”

‘Huhuhu, I am the Dark Wolf you’re talking about.’

Ark looked at the users gathered in front of the store from far away

and laughed. The gold was flying from their hands into Ark's pocket!

'The reconstruction of Lancel's new town plan is 80% complete. The remainder is entrusted to the raccoons.'

But Ark still had one thing to do that was separate from the reconstruction. The work related to Ark's store was just a part of it. Ark called over the raccoons.

"Have you finished the construction on the square? Now I want a new structure to be built near the centre of the square. Please refer to the draft on the reverse side of the blueprint."

"Huh? This wasn't in the plans....."

The raccoons carefully looked at the draft. The structure Ark wanted built was a huge tower 10 metre in height. It was a flash tower made of marble! It was a structure that used 4,000 gold in the budget by itself.

"But it is an essential structure. Please hurry."

Ark ordered with determination. Then the raccoons started to express their dissatisfaction.

"What? This structure?"

"It also seems like there is some writing on the outside of the structure."

"Don't tell me it is a propaganda signboard for Ark's store?"

"The village has been attacked and everybody is in great pain but Ark-nim is only using the public money to advertise his store.....I'm disappointed."

It was impossible for the NPCs doing the reconstruction not to figure out that the reconstruction was just improving the location of Ark's store. Even if he was the saviour who helped the village, it was too much. And now he wanted them to do this as well? The residents of the village were still grieving and they couldn't stand such greed! Even if the residents trusted Ark unconditionally, this was too much for them.

“What are you doing? I told you to hurry!”

But Ark just rushed the residents without worrying about their dissatisfaction. Despite their complaints, Ark was the supervisor so they started work on the structure. After two days passed, a 10 metre high marble tower was constructed in the centre of the village square.

“Hmm, it turned out better than I thought.”

Ark looked at the brilliant finished tower with satisfaction. Then he gave the raccoons new commands.

“Now I want these letters carved on the surface of the tower.”

‘Indeed.....’

Dissatisfaction appeared on the raccoons’ faces at Ark’s order. They thought that it would definitely be an advertisement for Ark’s store. But confusion spread over the raccoons’ faces after receiving the phrases.

“Eh? T-this.....?”

“That’s the phrases I want carved on the tower.”

When Ark smiled and spoke, the raccoons looked at him with uncontrollable emotions in their eyes. Then they spoke in an apologetic tone.

“To even consider this idea.....”

“Without knowing about Ark’s idea, we selfishly.....”

“Stop talking and start working instead. Please put off all other projects and complete this tower as quickly as possible.”

The embarrassed Ark turned his head and said.

“Yes, Ark-nim!”

Since then, the raccoons worked 100 times faster and swung their hammers like crazy. Without any more complaints, it was possible to carve the words on the tower in just one day.

'It is only 70% complete but it isn't necessary to wait until it is completed to show it.'

"Now, gather the residents in the square. We will reveal the tower!"

Ark immediately called the residents to the square. While work on the tower had been ongoing, it had been covered with a tent. Thus the residents didn't know anything about the tower. And finally the tent was pulled down.

"What? This tower is?"

"Eh? The words recorded there.....?"

"Oh, that is.....!"

Exclamations fell from the residents' mouths after they saw the tower.

Victims of the Lancel Battle Remembrance Memorial

The residents who didn't regret sacrificing their lives for Lancel. It was only thanks to them that it was possible to protect Lancel village. They are the true heroes of the battle. We're alive thanks to their sacrifice so we should not forget their names. Their names are carved on this monument and their descendants should tell any visitors to this place about their courage and sacrifice.

Yes, the tower Ark built in the centre of the square was a memorial. The names of the 90 victims from the battle were carved onto the memorial.

'The victims can't be repaid with just this but.....'

The victims in this battle had weighed on Ark's mind. If he had countermeasures for the suicide squad beforehand then so many victims wouldn't have died. Of course Ark couldn't predict every situation but the fact that NPCs he was acquaintances with were dead was heartbreaking. Since it was a virtual reality game, there was little difference from grieving in real life.

'Can I do anything for them?'

He was thinking this. Even though Galen gave compensation to the families of the victims, Ark also wanted to do something for them. And he thought of the memorial after taking over the reconstruction. He wanted to give a small consolation to the victim's family and friends.

'Seeing this for the first time is embarrassing.....'

Ark scratched his head as he looked at the memorial. Suddenly the teary residents mobbed him.

"Thank you Ark-nim!"

"These guys.....I'm really proud when thinking that they protected a nice village like this!"

"We are proud of them too!"

The residents spoke in teary voices. There was a ringing sound and an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-You have built a memorial in Lancel village.

You have completed the memorial in memory of the resident who sacrificed their lives in the battle. The memorial will be a source of comfort to many residents who have lost their family. With the names of the people who bravely sacrificed their lives to defend Lancel village carved on the memorial, all their descendants will be able to feel pride whenever they see the memorial.

* Bond among the village residents increased by 50%.

(When specific events occur in the village, the bond will either increase or decrease depending on the solution. When the bond is high, it will have a significant effect on the town's satisfaction, harmony and even development. In addition, a drop in this value will increase the number of disagreements among residents.)

-Your degree of intimacy with the residents increased with the completion of the memorial.

<Intimacy +20%>

* Your intimacy with the village residents has increased over 100% and you've reached 'Respected' status. The 'Respected' status is the best evidence of a close relationship with NPCs. If a 'Respected' person requests something from the NPC, they will absolutely not refuse even if it is illegal or they have to sacrifice their lives. If you have the respect of the residents then everything is possible.

'One part is over.'

Thanks to the completion of the memorial, the bond between residents and even his intimacy with them had increased. But the biggest effect of the memorial was the bright expressions on the faces of the residents. Thus his uncomfortable feeling was shaken off after the construction of the memorial. Despite the reconstruction project, there was still one major problem.

'I've succeeded in making visitors concentrate on Ark's store. I also feel better after building the memorial. But I've realized a huge problem thanks to Jewel's group. The utmost priority is to secure the safety. Until now he thought it was 100% safe to leave his assets in a NPC village.....'

To be honest, there had been no cases of users attacking an NPC village until Jewel's group. However, such a thing actually happened. And thanks to it being broadcasted on the TV, all users knew about it. The broadcast wasn't small and the ripples of it would spread throughout New World. New World had a huge number of chaotic users. In order to oppose the chaotic users, hunter guilds and guards were gradually organized. Jewel's attack on Lancel made them realize that it was possible to attack NPC villages. That meant Lancel village was exposed to chaotic users.

'And all my assets are tied up in Lancel.'

He had Ark's store and also the shares of Lancel. It was an enormous amount of money. What would happen if other thieves attacked and captured it? No matter how much money he earned, he would just become a beggar. Of course, it wasn't easy for chaotic users to attack a village. There were many reasons why but the

penalty caused by dying to guards wasn't a joke. In order to attack a village, a minimum of hundreds of personnel was required which wasn't easy to gather for chaotic users. But the largest reason was that there was no huge benefit to attacking a NPC village. Even if 10,000 gold was available, they would only be able to loot 10% of it. But that was different if there was a store managed by a user in the village. If certain conditions were met then it was possible to steal 100% of a user's property. Even if there was a huge penalty, that target would present a challenge for chaotic users.

'Having a store in a small village is a problem.'

Ark sighed.

'Such things won't happen easily but it could.....'

And even if other thieves didn't move, there was still Jewel's group. Even if the attack failed, those guys wouldn't leave easily. With Jewel and Duke as their leaders, there was no guarantee they wouldn't attack Lancel again.

'Fortunately, the Letter Movement tower is now completed. If something happens then we can get support troops from Jackson and Giran. But the number of people that can move using the magic tower is subject to restrictions. The Lancel magic tower isn't huge so it can only move 100 people. And if affected by Self-destruct then it might not function properly.'

In fact, Ark had only been able to protect the magic tower and Ark's store this time thanks to Shambala's information. If they were attacked without prior notice then it wouldn't be possible to call for support troops. He was severely worried about those few things. But he couldn't get rid of his store and shares and run away.

'Then the only remaining way is to raise Lancel's defences!'

Yes, if their defense was increased then the problem would be settled. Once again, there were almost no stores managed by a user in a small NPC village. User-run stores were more common in large cities like Giran, Jackson or Selebrid. And enormous profit could be gained when looting a user's store. If chaotic users

occupied a large city then they could quickly become game tycoons. But there were two reasons why chaotic users didn't do that. The first reason was that large amounts of troops resided in a large city. The number and level of regular troops stationed at large cities was also set at 10% higher than the users. Users couldn't easily attack. And the second reason was the large number of users gathered in major cities. The level and number of users who gathered in large cities was completely different from Lancel. There were tens of thousands of people! If anyone tried to attack then the users would step on them.

'Lancel is a free village. It belongs to Jackson but doesn't have to pay them taxes. While they can send support troops, regular troops can't be stationed there. And there was no merit for tens of thousands of users to flock to the village. There is one last way method to try.'

Ark thought for a while before trying out one last method. The last stage of the reconstruction business is to raise the defences of Lancel! If it went as planned then he didn't have to worry about the security of Lancel village anymore!

'The security measures are necessary to prevent the village residents from being sacrificed again. Yes, the security measures are indispensable to save my assets and prevent the loss of NPCs. And....it won't be easy but it is possible!'

Thus Ark immediately initiated his plan.

Lancel's Security Measures

"Is everybody gathered?"

"Can't you tell just by looking? How can you ask such a stupid question?"

Shambala, Bread and Redian turned towards Ark as Redian declared sharply. The three people were still hanging around Lancel village. Ark had gathered those three people in one place was to discuss the defense of Lancel village. The three of them had stayed in the village because they were all busy in their own way. Bread's dream had been achieved and he had fun hunting with the wolves, so he was staying in this place for a while. Redian was also going around the mountain with the Meow gathering magic ingredients. And Shambala.....was currently preoccupied restoring the Eastern Nation branch in Lancel village. Of course, Ark had also been busy with Lancel's reconstruction project. Despite being in the same town, they hadn't seen each other until Ark organized a meeting.

"Why did you make us come here?"

"A request?"

Shambala, Bread and Redian looked disgruntled as they muttered.

"Do you have some ulterior purpose again?"

"Don't you know this is urgent? Now please sit down."

Ark requested. While Shambala had known Ark for longer, Bread and Redian also somewhat knew him. When Ark requested the three of them had quickly gathered. If he acted like this then it must be serious. Then Ark bowed his head and said in a serious voice.

"It's not like that. This is absolutely necessary for the sake of Lancel village."

".....I will listen."

Ark's serious attitude had Bread sitting down. Once they all sat, Ark organized his thoughts before speaking.

"You guys can probably approximately guess this. Even though Jewel's attack was presently, Lancel village still can't be considered safe. There is a high probability that Jewel's group will attack Lancel again once they get out of jail. If they don't give up then one day those guys will win."

"Well, that...."

Bread scratched his head and nodded. Users could resurrect 24 hours after they died. So users were like immortal people in New World! Meanwhile NPCs only had one life. If they died it was the end. Unless the users abandoned New World, a war of attrition of NPCs against users would eventually end with the users' victory. Jewel's group being killed by the guards and put into jail had prevented the war of attrition for the moment. But Jewel's group would only be in jail for several months. And Ark guessed that there was a 99% chance they would invade Lancel again after getting out of jail.

"It certainly is possible. Because Raiden and Jewel are like revengeful leeches."

"But we can't stay here forever."

"Certainly....."

Bread, Redian and Shambala nodded with heavy expressions.

"That's why I wanted to discuss the problem with you."

Ark said as he looked at the three people.

"In the meantime I've been thinking about a way to block the enemy but I can't come to a resolution. There is an essential part required to resolve this problem."

"An essential part?"

"That users aren't able to attack Lancel, no to make them recognize that Lancel shouldn't be attacked."

“That would be good but such a thing is impossible.”

“No, it is possible. If you help me a little.”

“What do you mean?”

“Yes, I have two requests for you.”

Ark smiled and explained his plan. Ark had two purposes. The first was to defend Lancel from other bandit groups and the second was to stop Jewel’s group when they were released from jail. And it would be impossible without Shambala, Bread, and Redian’s help. After hearing Ark’s words Shambala, Bread and Redian’s eyes became increasingly wide with amazement. Then they nodded and murmured.

“I never thought of such a method. But.....it is definitely a good way. If it is possible.”

“I’ll somehow make it possible. I have no desire to surrender Lancel village to them.”

“Uh.....”

Bread sighed and folded his arms. Then Shambala thought for a while before asking.

“Ark, do you understand? The first request is hard but somewhat possible. The second one is simple but requires a significant amount of money to accomplish.”

“I know. Somehow I’ll secure it.”

“Then I can prepare my side without any problems.”

Shambala nodded and left. It meant that he was cooperating with the request. Bread pondered for a moment before nodding.

“It’s not a big deal so I’ll try it. Okay. I can’t give you a definite answer but I will try it.”

“Okay, since it is decided then let’s move immediately.”

They all rose and proceeded with Ark’s plan. Since the magic tower

had been completed during the reconstruction, they each used it to move to their destination. Ark looked at the three lights flying in different directions and turned around.

‘That’s it, I don’t have to worry about Redian and Shambala. The problem is what I requested of Bread..... Well, Bread had made up his mind and moved so it will somehow work out. Now there are two things left for me to resolve. First I have to entrust something to Sid. I can move once I’ve sent a letter to Sid.’

Ark returned to the store while thinking various things. When he arrived near the vicinity of the shop, he heard a sudden sound.

‘What the, this sound is?’

Ark who had been deep in his thoughts lifted his head like a startled dog. At the same time, 10 people poured out from his store and ran away. And something was thrown out after them. After it finally stopped rolling along the ground, he saw that it was Ulmeok. However, Ulmeok looked a bit strange. His face was dyed in various colours like he had been kicked there.

“What the? What’s going on?”

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

Ulmeok raised his head and came running to him.

“Ark-nim, save me!”

“Save you? What are you saying?”

“Sob, someone entered the store.....they mentioned Ark-nim.....then that person beat me up..... Sob sob sob, Sapjil hyung-nim is still being beaten.”

“What? Somebody dared interfere in my shop.....!”

Ark declared furiously and entered the store. Who would dare attack Ark’s store in Lancel village? Wasn’t that strange guy trying to die?

“What kind of bastard are you?”

“Did you call?”

Then a cynical voice could be heard inside the store. Ark turned his head in the direction he heard the voice. The man sitting on the corner was holding down Sapjil whose face had been flattened like a rice cake. Then he saw Ark and smiled.

.....10 minutes ago when the man appeared.

“Welcome.”

Sapjil and Ulmeok said as they prepared a sales pitch. After Ark’s event to promote the store was over, there were fewer users but there were still 10 guests browsing the products. At that moment a customer entered. After a long look around the store, he went up to Sapjil and asked.

“Where is Ark?”

“Huh? The President-nim?”

“President?”

The man then laughed and said.

“I didn’t know he was the president, but is he here? I need to speak to him.”

“.....What business do you need him for?”

“I came to pick up my goods.”

Sapjil’s expression changed 180 degrees at the man’s answer. Sapjil lost his welcoming attitude and muttered bluntly.

“Damn! What the? Is that the truth?”

“What? The truth?”

“That concept won’t work. Once dropped the items don’t belong to you anymore.”

Sapjil scratched his head before indicating towards a flyer on the wall.

“This will explain it all. Take a look at this!”

The man looked at the flyer Sapjil pointed to. The flyer had bright red letters on it.

Notification

First, thank you to all the customers looking around Ark's store. Recently unsavoury incidents have occurred so I wanted to inform you of this. There are those who willingly entered the Lancel war and dropped some equipment before finding it in this store and trying to claim it. But it is common sense that ownership of dropped equipment will belong to whoever picks it up. In addition, the people who bought the equipment from our store paid the normal price so ownership has transferred to them. Please read this note and don't claim anything ridiculous. If you hinder any sales then I will have to take legal action.

** Master White*

In fact, Ark had several guests try to claim ownership of an item they dropped. Ark had created a catalogue of equipment. After the Lancel battle, Ark and Radun had collect 251 items. But the problem was not all of those items belonged to Jewel's group. Despite the low probability of general users dropping items, some of those that participated did drop their equipment. Ark had included those equipment in the catalogue. So several users who participated in the battle found their equipment in the catalogue.

"Eh? I came here to buy new gloves but didn't this use to be mine?"

"That is the same as the armour I lost. I bought it from a luxury store in Selebrid so it even has my initials on it."

Like the flyer said, the dropped items belonged to the first person who picked it up. But the users felt it was unfair after discovering their equipment in the catalogue. In addition, some users hadn't signed up for the insurance so they had to purchase new equipment. So a lot of them became stubborn. Sapjil thought this man was such a user.

"Now do you understand? If you're not buying anything then please leave."

“No, I don’t know what you’re talking about but I came for my things.”

“You’re still saying the same thing? Then you’re going to stay and be stubborn huh?”

“No, I mean.....”

“No? Should I call the guards?”

The man was unable to endure Sapjil’s words anymore. Something very dangerous broke in the man’s head. The man’s lips curled up on one side and he stepped forward.

“What the? Why is this stupid guy smirking?”

Sapjil muttered as he looked at the man. Suddenly a punch! Then an unexpected kick! The man started to beat Sapjil up using his hands and feet. He continued punching and kicking. Sapjil turned into a flattened rice cake in the blink of an eye.

“Hey, what are you doing to Hyung-nim?”

Ulmeok cried out with surprise and rushed towards the man. However, he just ended up being hit and was flung away outside the store. That was when Ark came back and found Ulmeok. He ran into the store and found the man. Then Ulmeok jumped out from behind Ark and shouted.

“It’s that bastard! He kept on trying to claim his items.....”

“You idiot, shut up!”

Ark who had been staring at the man with a vacant expression hurriedly shut Ulmeok up.

“.....Teacher?”

There was only one person Ark called Teacher! Yes, the person was Lee Myung-ryong.....also known as Isyuram.

“Hmm, as expected the owner appears when the dog is hit. No, in this case it is the pig?”

Isyuram set the blubbering Sapjil down and laughed.

Sniffle, sniffle, sniffles.

“We apologize.”

“We were just doing what President-nim told us to.....”

Sapjil sat down and blubbered through swollen lips. He then whined as he saw his face which was various colours. As expected from Isyuram, being able to do that in only a few minutes. But he couldn't be impressed. How could he be when it was Ark's shop assistants being damaged? Yet he couldn't say a word

“So what? Do you have a complaint?”

“No. A shop assistant should be kind to the guests. Well done.”

.....Naturally he gave in. The other person was Isyuram. Other than JusticeMan and the rehabilitation brothers, Isyuram was one of the people Ark wouldn't touch. No, in this case Ark was no different from Sapjil and Ulmeok. If Isyuram had a problem with Ark then his face would easily become like Sapjil's. How could he look like that in front of Sapjil and Ulmeok?

“By the way, your punches and kicks are sharper than before. As expected of Teacher.”

“Eh? Is that so?”

‘T-that person.....!’

Sapjil and Ulmeok glared at Ark with betrayal. Then Roco who had just returned from learning from the ghost frowned and shouted.

“Oppa, what are you saying? Ajusshi, even if this was a misunderstanding that is still too much!”

‘Ohhh, Manager-nim!’

Sapjil and Ulmeok felt hopeful again at Roco's entrance. Then Isyuram looked at Roco before speaking absent-mindedly.

“Aha, I see. You're Roco?”

“H-how do you know that?”

“This is great. Ark talked a lot about you.”

“Huh? Oppa did?”

“Yes, every time I meet Ark he talks proudly about his girlfriend. By the way, you’re more beautiful than I expected. I’m envious!”

“Girlfriend? Beautiful?”

Roco closed her mouth and looked at Sapjil and Ulmeok. And she looked back at Isyuram before smiling and said.

“Hohoho, no, you didn’t go that far……. It is natural if our shop assistant is unkind, right Isyuram oppa?”

“Ohh, you understand. I like it. Ark, your girlfriend is this pretty so what do you have to worry about?”

“Hohohoho.”

“Hahahaha.”

Sapjil and Ulmeok lost all their hope as the two continued laughing. And Ark also wanted to die. Even though Roco wasn’t his girlfriend, Isyuram’s chattering had inflated her hope. And that ajusshi was the one who ended up pouring cold water on the atmosphere of a first kiss. Ark finally interrupted Isyuram.

“Teacher, let’s go to the site of the stolen goods.”

In fact, Isyuram hadn’t arrived in Lancel just to visit Ark. The reason Isyuram arranged to collect the stolen goods from Ark’s store was because of the criminals. In New World the wanted criminals were always watching him. However, not long ago Isyuram had captured a henchman so the criminals became scared and moved their hiding place. Therefore they couldn’t connect to the game for one or two months. After listening to these circumstances, Ark had called Isyuram to Lancel. Since Ark was staying in Lancel for a bit, it was convenient to dispose of Isyuram’s stolen goods.

“Yes, then let’s go see the goods.”

“Yes. Sapjil, Ulmeok, you two come with us as well.”

Ark and Isyuram went to the warehouse with the pigs. When the door was opened a tremendous amount of japtem could be seen. It was japtem worth 10,000 gold!

“Huhu, these things are mine. Do you understand you pigs?”

“Yes yes, I understand.”

Sapjil and Ulmeok instantly cringed as Isyuram addressed them. Ark looked at both of them before smiling wryly.

“Anyway it is good that you came. I have some business so I also have to go to Giran.”

“Giran? What are you saying? Why do we need to go Giran?”

“Oh, you don’t know? These stolen goods can’t be disposed of in Lancel.”

“Eh? Why not?”

“There aren’t any stores here that are large enough purchase this many goods.”

Once again, the reason why Isyuram wanted the stolen goods was to level up. The experience received with each transaction depended on how much profit was made. But there were no stores in the mountain village of Lancel that could buy this amount of goods. A store in Giran would be able to dispose of all the goods.

“After checking, the best place for a transaction like this is the merchant’s guild.”

Since Isyuram was an ignorant merchant, Ark had checked the best way to dispose of the stolen goods. As a result, he figured out that the best way was to use the merchant’s guild. If a merchant dealt directly with the merchant guild then there would be a 5% bonus applied to the experience. Furthermore, there were no restrictions on the amount of dealings with the merchant’s guild so he could receive 10,000 gold at once or even 100,000 gold. One problem was that the merchant’s guild would buy all the items at the average

market price. In some cases, the items would be sold for a loss instead if the price had gone up. But in terms of experience, it was most efficient to deal with the merchant's guild. In addition, various titles, quests or special skills were often given to merchants who dealt with the merchant's guild.

“Oh, really?”

Isyuram nodded his head. Despite being a merchant over level 200, Isyuram knew almost nothing about trading. He had started from level 150 and gained 80 levels but that was from hunting not trading. It was unprecedented in New World for there to be such an ignorant merchant of this level.

“By the way, how are we going to move all these things to Giran?”

Isyuram looked at the stacked items and muttered. Shambala had needed a huge carriage to move all these japtem. But there was a simple method to carry japtem to Giran.

“Sapjil, Ulmeok, collect the japtem. Teacher, you should also empty your bags and collect the items.”

With Sapjil, Ulmeok and Isyuram, there were 3 merchants. One merchant had 6 bags with meant a total of 18 bags! When combines with Ark's bag and Radun who had double capacity, there was a total of 21 bags. And when the same kind of item was put in a bag, it would stack up. Despite the actual volume or weight, it only took up one space. Shambala was able to transport the high volume in the carriage because of this. Anyway, it was possible to pack the pile of japtem into the bags of the 4 people.

“Take care!”

They left with Roco seeing them off. But with the magic tower, the trade route only took 2 minutes to travel. While the Letter Movement was quite expensive, it was laughable to worry about some gold when they were carrying 10,000 gold worth of goods. The reconstruction projects were still ongoing so he couldn't leave Lancel village for long, and he also couldn't leave Roco alone in the store without Sapjil and Ulmeok. After flying to Giran using the Letter

Movement, they went to the merchant's guild. The merchant's guild was the richest guild on the continent and was situated in the heart of Giran. When they entered the merchant's guild, a gold ornamented NPC approached with a professional smile.

"What service were you after today?"

The clerk indicated towards booths in 10 different areas.

"As you can see, the merchant's guild buys and sells a variety of goods. We also have the local specialties from most areas. If you are a professional merchant then you can also request something from the guild."

"We wanted to dispose of some goods."

"Then please follow me."

The clerk guided Ark's group towards a booth. Then he pointed to a big basket and said.

"You can put the things you want to dispose of in there. Then I'll appraise it and tell you the possible purchase price."

"Huh? But....."

Ark hesitated while looking at the basket and the clerk seemed to know what he was thinking.

"Ah, if you don't like the price then you don't have to accept the deal."

"No, it's just will everything fit into the basket?"

"Huh? Ah, you mean..... Hahaha, you don't have to worry about that. This basket has a special magic which will miniaturize the items."

"Well, if you say so..... Radun."

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

At Ark's command, Radun spat out the items into the basket. All the japtem were thrown up! When Ark took out the items in his bag,

there was a considerable amount of japtem. But like the clerk said, once the items entered the basket they shrank into small boxes 1/100th of their size. Then the clerk laughed. Yes, he was laughing at their expressions after seeing the items being shrunk in the basket. However his expression became increasingly puzzled as Isyuram, Sapjil and Ulmeok opened their 18 bags and poured out more items.

“You want to dispose of everything in the bag?”

“Yes why?”

Isyuram answered while holding a bag upside down.

“W-wait a minute! That.....”

The japtem that had been reduced to 1/100th of their size inside the basket started vibrating and shaking before exploding like popcorn. The japtem returned to its original size and burst out of the basket like a volcano. The surrounding booths were also swallowed up in a flood of japtem. The japtem had gone beyond the limit capacity of the magic basket. A flood of japtem! The eyes of the surrounding NPCs widened after seeing all the japtem.

“Ah, so that’s why.....”

Ark scratched his head with an awkward expression and murmured. The clerk who had been buried by the wave of japtem crawled out and stuttered.

“Y-you want to dispose of all of this?”

“Yes, is that a problem?”

“Ah, no. Bring the branch chief right now!”

Another salesman ran up to the 2nd floor. After a while, a middle aged man ran down towards them. Then his mouth dropped open as he saw the mountain of japtem. Despite his surprise, he gave a business like smile and handed over a business card.

“I am the chief of the Giran branch of the merchant’s guild. Do you want to sell all of this at our guild?”

“Yes, can you calculate it right now?”

“Of course. Hey, what are you doing? Start organizing it right away!”

After the shout, the salesman who had been standing around stupidly gathered around the items. Then one salesman approached while wringing both his hands.

“This will take a bit of time to finish. You can go to that room and have a drink while waiting.”

As expected from the merchant's guild. Their attitudes completely changed when it came to money. It was natural that the NPCs reacted like this. Merchants received experience through transactions. And that system wasn't only applied to the users. NPC merchants also gained experience through transactions. So a big customer was a chance for the NPC to grow. Thanks to that, Ark's group received VIP treatment from the branch chief. After around 10 minutes?

The previous clerk which served them approached. He looked at the group and abruptly said.

“All the items cost 11,028 gold. Is this price okay?”

Isyuram sneakily glanced at Ark. His eyes asked if he should sell it at that price.

‘The amount is higher than I expected. Teacher's profession is merchant so he will absolutely receive an advantage with big transactions.’

“Yes, we will sell all of it.”

Isyuram replied immediately after Ark nodded. Then the clerk hesitated as someone whispered something to him. His expression turned embarrassed and he spoke with an uneasy voice.

“I'm sorry but there seems to be a problem after our shop assistant investigated the items. I'm sorry to say this but the stolen goods..... It is normal to confirm it first before any deals can take place.....”

Isyuram became confused by the clerk's words. But Ark just laughed

and handed some documents over to the clerk.

Warranty

This warranty guarantees that there are no legal problems with any of the items listed. 50 silk fabrics, 120 crystals, 300 corals.....and so on.

Isabel, representative of Seutandal

Once again, these were stolen goods from Seutandal. It was okay with some general stores but the merchant's guild had a strict policy against stolen goods. Of course, there was a 80~90% chance they would still sell it but it was possible to cut the price by 50%. So Ark had received the warranty from Isabel beforehand. The guarantor was the Seutandal representative Isabel! Even the stubborn merchant's guild wouldn't be able to negotiate any more.

"Perfect! This is perfect. I understand. I'll pay the price immediately!"

Now that the anxiety about stolen goods was eased, the clerk's face relaxed and he rushed off to get the money. Then the branch chief appeared from the vault with the clerk carrying some money bags. He handed over five 2,000 gold bags, one 1,000 gold bag and the change of 28 gold..... It was a tremendous amount of money for the japtem. Isyuram's eyes widened as he saw the amount of money.

-The deal has been successfully completed!
--

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.....

It was 11,029 gold in one deal! Besides 11,029 gold was a 100% net profit. Yes, that was the point of this deal. The experience the merchant got was decided by the net profit. The more net profit was gained, the more additional experience would be applied. For example, if a deal consisting of 100 gold gained a net profit of 100, it would equal to 200 gold and 300 experience would be applied. That's why a merchant's capabilities were highly appreciated. 11,028 gold

meant constant experience. This was the reason why a merchant's level could be one of the easiest or most difficult to raise. And thanks to trading with the merchant's guild, he received an extra 5% experience. When a warrior hunted, they received an experience penalty when there was a level difference. That's why 9 levels was the maximum a warrior could gain from a battle. But that penalty didn't exist for the merchants. Therefore Isyuram's level rose in units of 10.

"20, 30, 40, 50.....heok, 64! 64 levels at once.....!"

Isyuram's eyes rolled like crazy as he saw the messages. Whether reality or the game, money was still the best. This was 64 levels! It was an unbelievable amount.

"I struggled so much before....."

Isyuram muttered with bemusement. When Isyuram had arrived at the festival he was level 230. After joining the criminals, he had died so much that he lost 10 levels. But with one deal he gained back six times what he lost. It was fortunate that he had the information about Seutandal's stolen goods and that he followed Ark's advice about how to dispose of them.

"A-Ark..... I'm really impressed.....!"

Isyuram stuttered as he struggled to express his thoughts.

"It is a really good deal."

Ark smiled warmly as he spoke. While he couldn't see the messages, he had seen the continuous cross marks over Isyuram's head. Isyuram's level had risen a lot thanks to the big deal. That also made him feel good.

After thinking for a while, the branch chief had a new proposal.

"It is unusual for the representative of Seutandal to give a warranty and to obtain so many stolen goods. Usually it is a reward if the merchant has done some big service during a war, so it is evidence of the merchant's bravery on the battlefield."

In fact, it was 100% luck that he obtained the stolen goods. But

Isyuram couldn't say that so he replied ambiguously.

"That's....."

"In a sense, a merchant is an occupation which risks its life more than a warrior. But these days the merchants are lazy and they have no meaning of the true soul of a merchant. Yet I can somehow feel the true soul of a warrior from Isyuram-nim? I don't understand why but it really feels different."

"Well, you don't have to go that far....."

Isyuram scratched his head awkwardly. The chief then said.

"So would you like try going to that area?"

"That area?"

"Yes. Actually, there is a wealthy merchant I know who retired there 10 years ago. Kuronil participated in the battlefield during the peak of the war between the Three Kingdoms so he has gained considerable property. Before Nagaran was opened, it was the battlefield between the Three Kingdoms. So the merchant Kuronil has unparalleled influence in Nagaran. With his obsession with money, he never hesitated to jump onto the battlefield to deliver an assortment of potions and weapons to the soldiers. But Kuronil is now retired and lives on the outskirts of Nagaran. I've heard that he is looking for a successor with considerable experience on the battlefield. So Kuronil requested one thing from the merchant's guild. They wanted us to find any merchants who could run into a dragon's mouth."

"Then you mean.....?"

"Yes, if it is Isyuram-nim who managed to obtain the stolen goods then it is possible for you to become his successor..... Do you want to try meeting him? If you want then I will give you a letter of recommendation. Of course, you won't automatically become his successor even with my letter of recommendation. So far hundreds of merchants have visited but they've all be eliminated. If you are willing to challenge it then I'll be happy to write you the recommendation."

At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Isyuram.

-Wealthy Retired Merchant Kuronil

You've acquired information about the wealthy retired merchant from the branch chief of Giran's merchant's guild. Kuronil is a merchant who gained considerable fame on the battlefield in Nagaran. Despite having the body of a merchant, he developed special technique to survive on the battlefield and is looking for a successor to pass on those techniques. If a merchant with considerable knowledge and experience with the battlefield is recognized by him, it will be possible to learn those techniques.

<Difficulty: A+>

<Quest Restriction: Level 300 or more Merchant. Quest can only be performed after successfully completing 1 deal worth 5,000 gold or more. Letter of Recommendation from a branch chief of the merchant's guild is needed>

"Eh?"

Isyuram's eyes widened as he looked at the information window. He then explained to the oblivious Ark the contents of the information window. Then Ark's eyes flashed and he said.

"Accept it. No matter what!"

"Eh? Huh? Ah, understood. Yes. I'll give it a shot."

Isyuram was scared into accepting the quest. The reason Ark pushed Isyuram to accept was because the quest smelt like a change profession quest. Wasn't it natural for a merchant to have various 2nd stage profession?

"Good choice. That person is living in the Hamong castle in Nagaran. If you see him then show him my recommendation letter. Good luck."

After Isyuram received the letter of recommendation, they exited the merchant's guild.

“Hmm, that is a little crazy. Anyway, I have nothing to do now so it works out well. Did he say Hamong castle in Nagaran? Do you know where that is?”

“It is a war zone.”

“War zone?”

“Yes, users are allowed to kill each other in that area. For a merchant to go there.....”

Ark thought for a moment before saying.

“I have to go there too so would you like to go together?”

“Why do you need to go there?”

“The explanation is a little long.....”

“Hmmm, no, I’ll go by myself. I don’t know anything about the war zone but I’ll be too embarrassed if I have to go with you. ThThen let’s part here. Give my regards to Roco.”

Isyuram handed half of the 11,028 gold which was 5,514 gold to Ark. Then he added one gold and laughed.

“This is a tip. You should keep it and call it your lucky coin.”

Thus the stolen goods were finally settled after one month. However Ark still had some business in Giran. After sending Sapjil and Ulmeok back first, Ark entered the Magic Institute and asked for a meeting with Shannen.

“Ark, welcome!”

After a while, Shannen welcomed Ark with a pleased expression.

“I’ve heard from the magician dispatched to Lancel that the magic tower has been completed. It is good that you managed to stop the thieves from attacking the village. As a regular member of the Magic Institute, I am proud of you. Yes, was there a reason you wanted to talk to me today?”

“I wanted to ask a favour.”

“A favour? If it is from you then I’ll have to accept. What is it?”

Ark hesitated for a bit before finally asking Shannen.

“I would like to meet with the Grand Master of the Magic Institute. Is that possible?”

Ttukttuk, ttukttuk, ttukttuk!

“Ark-nim, the landscaping work around the square has been completed.”

“The work on the building expansion has been completed.”

“The extension on the new road is complete.”

“Hrmm.....”

Ark received the information from the raccoons and surveyed the scene. With the raccoons working day and night in two shifts, the current completion rate of the reconstruction was 98%. The building repairs, new construction projects, new roads and landscaping were completed. The remaining thing left was the outer paint on the buildings.

‘It definitely looks better than before.’

There was a satisfied smile on Ark’s face. The most satisfactory part was that he could see Ark’s store from wherever he looked in the village. It was the design which Hanson put his heart and soul into and it also showcased Ark’s store. With the land readjustment, the atmosphere of Lancel village had completely changed by 180 degrees. However it didn’t give off the feel of a sophisticated city. The goal of Hanson’s new plan for Lancel was ‘simple’ with variety. Lancel was more like a neat amusement park than a city and Hanson’s vision of a new town had been born. The NPCs were also quite satisfied thanks to the memorial.

‘Now there’s only one problem left.....’

Ark sat down next to a flower bed and thought about yesterday. After meeting with Shannen of the Magic Institute in Giran

yesterday, he had asked for a meeting with the Grandmaster. He was the leader of the Magic Institute, one of the 3 largest guilds on the continent! A regular user couldn't even imagine meeting the Grandmaster but Ark was a regular member of the Magic Institute. 10 minutes after Ark asked and using a long distance spirit communication magic, Ark was able to have a meeting with the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute. The reason Ark asked for a meeting was to discuss the security measures for Lancel village. The help of the Magic Institute was necessary for that. Ark used all of his eloquence to convince the Grandmaster.

"Your request can't be lightly accepted. Despite its rapid growth, Lancel village is still just a small mountain village. The future is unknown but there is no benefit for the Magic Institute at the moment."

'Is it impossible as I expected?'

A sigh naturally emerged from Ark's mouth. However it wasn't possible for him to give up. Ark was thinking when the Grandmaster opened his mouth.

"But the growth of the Magic Institute can't be compared to before thanks to Magaro's research materials that you brought. If I refuse this request then it would impact on the honour of the Magic Institute. It is unprecedented but as the Grandmaster, I will accept this request."

'It's a success!'

Ark's eyes flashed at the Grandmaster's words. It was worth all that suffering to complete Magaro's quest. Thus Ark received what he desired from the meeting with the Magic Institute. But Ark's plan was only 33% successful. For Ark's plan to be 100% successful, he required the cooperation of the warrior's guild and the merchant's guild. Of course, his meeting with the Grandmaster had turned out favourably but he had also prepared a separate plan.

"Is it possible to let me speak with the Grandmasters of the warrior's guild and merchant's guild?"

“.....That is a difficult request.”

The Grandmaster murmured in an astounded voice. Shannen who was also listening sent Ark an embarrassed glance. The Magic Institute had a competitive relationship with the warrior's guild and the merchant's guild. Ark telling the Grandmaster that he wanted to speak with the two other guilds was like him saying he wanted to ask a favour from their competitors. Of course Ark already knew this. Ark shamelessly continued talking.

“Wouldn't having more help be better?”

“.....Hu, I don't know whether you're ignorant or brave. Anyway I can't grant your request. But you don't need to ask that from me.”

“Huh? What does that mean.....?”

“If you don't know the reason then you really are ignorant.”

The Grandmaster said before he broke the spirit communication.

‘What on earth does he mean?’

Ark continued to think about the Grandmaster's words but he couldn't understand.

‘Anyway, I have the cooperation of the Magic Institute.....’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

Sweeeeeeeek!

A huge light flew towards Lancel village. It was a giant-sized light that was just like a comet. The light hit the upper part of the magic tower and caused an intense white spark.

“That light is.....they've come!”

Ark jumped up and ran towards the magic tower. When he arrived at the magic tower, the users who had witnessed the light were already gathered. The size of the light depended on how many people were moved using the Letter Movement. The size of that light meant at least a dozen users were moved. The Letter Movement was so expensive so how would move that many people to Lancel

village? The users flocked to the magic tower because of this. Then the doors of the magic tower opened and a bunch of people poured out. The users who looked at them shouted in an awestruck voice.

“Eh, those people are.....?”

“The Magic Institute! They’re magicians of the Magic Institute!”

“Fire, ice, wind and earth, the magicians of the 4 attributes are gathered!”

“Why are the magicians here? Aren’t the 4 attribute magicians’ guards of the Magic Institute?”

Yes, there were four magicians from the Magic Institute wearing various colours indicating their attribute. The emblem of the Magic Institute was sewn in brilliant gold thread on their chests. The users started murmuring noisily among themselves. Then the leader of the magicians discovered Ark and approached.

“Ark-nim? Nice to meet you. According to Ark’s request, I am Gurana from the Magic Institute here to establish a branch in Lancel. I am pleased to be here.”

“Eek? Lancel branch of the Magic Institute?”

“The Magic Institute is creating a branch in Lancel?”

The users gaped with surprise. Yes, this was the reason why Ark had asked to meet with the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute. And this was the plan Ark devised to improve the defense of Lancel village. A branch of one of the three most powerful guilds on the continent was being established in Lancel. If the branch was established then guards from the guild would have to reside in Lancel and Lancel’s defense would be forced to increase. But that wasn’t the only benefit of having a branch of the Magic Institute. The Magic Institute was one of the highest ranking guilds! The number of NPCs that belonged to it in the continent numbered in the thousands! Among the members of the Magic Institute, 30% of them were users. If the Magic Institute opened in Lancel then numerous users and NPCs would flock to Lancel. It would have tremendous economic impact. And those NPCs and users would increase

Lancel's defense! In other words, they would be Lancel's defense.

'If only one guild has such enormous effect then what would happen if I attract three?'

That was Ark's final goal. Among the regular members of the warrior's guild, only four of them were users and one of them was Bread! Ark had asked Bread to meet with the Grandmaster of the warrior's guild to persuade him. In addition, Sid was sent to the merchant's guild. After his achievements in Nagaran, Sid had become a member of the merchant's guild.

'But is it impossible to attract the three guilds?'

If Bread and Sid succeeded then the warrior and merchant's guild representatives should've arrived before the Magic Institute. Since there was no contact before the Magic Institute arrived, he could only think that it had failed.

'Well, the economic effects of the Magic Institute should be sufficient for Lancel's defense.....'

Ark had just given up when it happened.

"Look there! There is another huge light!"

Ark hurriedly lifted his eyes at someone's voice. Then two comets of light flying from different directions hit the magic tower.

Sweeeeeeeek, kwa kwa kwa kwang! Sweeeeeeeek, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The subsequent impact made the magic tower shake and wobble. Then the sound of drums was heard from the magic tower and a cavalry appeared.

Dong, dong, dong, dong!

"Huck, isn't that the high ranking Knight's Division of the warrior's guild?"

"The Iron Armour Infantry is also following behind them!"

"That's not all. Those are carriages from the merchant's guild!"

“Impossible, all three guilds from the continent.....!”

It was the march of the three guilds! The scene completely shocked the users. At that moment, two people broke away from the guilds and approached Ark. They were Bread and Sid who Ark had sent to the guilds.

“Hahaha, Ark I’m back!”

“Ark-nim, I’ve come as well!”

“You succeeded!”

Ark shouted as he looked at the NPCs from the three guilds with disbelieving eyes. Then Bread scratched his head and said.

“That’s the thing. I don’t know why it worked. Just yesterday they were continuously refusing so I was just going to return. Then this morning they suddenly decided to depart for Lancel village.”

“Eh? That happened with me as well.....?”

Sid and Bread then looked at each other and seemed to ask ‘Who are you?’ with their eyes. Then Gurana who had been standing next to Ark smiled and said.

“Oh, I forgot. This is a message from the Grandmaster to Ark-nim. ‘The warrior’s guild and merchant’s guild are our rivals. You don’t have to push them’. That is the message.”

“Huh?”

Ark couldn’t understand Gurana’s words. But after connecting it to yesterday’s talk, he was able to understand the situation.

‘I didn’t have to ask the merchant’s guild and warrior’s guild to attract all three guilds. The Magic Institute had a competitive relationship with the warrior’s guild and the merchant’s guild. The Grandmaster said I didn’t have to push.’

Yes, the three guilds were rivals. If one side moved forward even a little bit then the other two would also move forward. The warrior’s guild and merchant’s guild didn’t feel a need to establish a branch in

Lancel village. But after they discovered that the Magic Institute was establishing a branch here, they began to believe that they needed to also build branches in Lancel. Perhaps the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute even purposely leaked his plan to the other two guilds.

‘As expected from the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute, he really isn’t ordinary.’

“Tell the Grandmaster thank you.”

Ark replied with a smile. Then there was a dinging sound and the quest information window appeared.

-The three main guilds on the continent have decided to build branches in Lancel village.

The three guilds represent the top guilds in New World. Having the three guilds in Lancel village will improve the quality and fame of the village, which will play a crucial role in its growth into a city.

*The establishment of the three guilds in Lancel village has increased the capabilities of Lancel village.

Magic Institute: Civilization +500, Development Speed +200

Warrior’s Guild: Armament +500, Development Speed +200

Merchant’s Guild: Commerce +500, Development Speed +200

-The sub quest <Lancel’s Reconstruction Project> has been completed.

The reconstruction has Lancel village that received damage from the war has been completed.

* Quest progress result: 230% achieved

‘230% achievement rate!’

Thanks to the successfully invitation of the 3 guilds, his progress had increased by 130% in one leap!

“I’d like to meet the person in charge of the village!”

The leader of the warrior’s guild and merchant’s guild went to the front of the group and shouted. Since Galen was currently absent, Ark stepped forward since he was in charge of the reconstruction project. Then a flash of light flew from the south and the magic tower shook again.

‘What the? There is still someone coming?’

When Ark looked at the magic tower, a crowd of people soon appeared. Ark’s eyes widened as he saw the young man leading the group.

‘Heok, t-that person is?’

Start of the Real Battle

“Who is that person?”

“Looking at the attire doesn’t he seem to be a nobleman?”

“I think I’ve seen those knights somewhere before.”

The users around the magic tower murmured. They were looking at the 10 knights who walked out of the magic tower. The leader of the knight procession wore shining armour. And at the centre of the group was a young man wearing white clothing who approached Ark. The first person to react to the young man’s appearance was the manager of the warrior’s guild branch. The branch manager confirmed the sentences inscribed on the youth’s clothing and moved back one step. He moved his clenched fist to his chest and shouted.

“Everyone line up, show respect to the Lord of Jackson!”

The NPCs from the merchant’s guild and the Magic Institute also followed his example. Yes, the young man who appeared from the magic tower was Lord Jackson.

“L-Lord-nim?”

“Ark, it’s been a while.”

The Lord’s white cape fluttered as he ran up to Ark and grasped his hand.

“How long as it been?”

“Why is Lord-nim here.....?”

Ark stuttered as he looked at Lord Jackson and the knights with confused eyes. Apart from the Lord, he was also acquaintances with all the knights. They were Cross and the knights who participated in the Silvana siege. When they noticed Ark’s attention, they gave him a small smile and nodded. Why had they come all this way to Lancel

village? The Lord who had become a dignified youth smiled and answered his question.

“Of course we came here because of you.”

“Me?”

The Lord tilted his head at Ark’s befuddlement.

“What’s with this reaction? You really don’t know anything about it?”

“Don’t know? What are you talking about?”

“Hah. Galen, what’s going on?”

‘Galen?’

Ark followed the Lord’s gaze. Then a person who had been hiding behind the knights awkwardly came forward. It was Galen who had disappeared after leaving the reconstruction project to Ark.

“Galen, why are you with the Lord.....?”

Ark still couldn’t grasp the situation at all. It wasn’t just Ark. Standing near him were Bread, Sid and the three guilds. The village residents had also stopped their work and gathered around. Even the users gathered around the magic tower looked on with wondering expressions. Galen’s face looked slightly apologetic before he said.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t tell him in case it couldn’t happen.”

“Hmm, so you really don’t know anything.

The Lord looked at Ark mischievously. After a brief moment, the Lord looked serious and said.

“Sir Ark, kneel and receive this Imperial Order from His Majesty the king!”

“Sir Ark? His Majesty’s Imperial Order?”

“Do as he says.”

Galen whispered in a low voice. Ark looked between Galen and the Lord before kneeling. Then the Lord pulled out a sword ornamented

with Jewels before tapping it against Ark's shoulder and speaking in a loud voice.

"I am the Lord of Jackson, Haverstein the 2nd and I hereby bestow upon Ark a knighthood on behalf of His Majesty, the King of Schudenberg. You will also gain the title of Baronet and obtain the right to own a land. The Honourable Knight Ark has been granted the Lordship of Lancel village. Although there are some who opposed this decision, His Majesty the King of Schudenberg has decided. Then let all of these contents be applied to Sir Ark!"

'Honourable Knight? Baronet? Lord?' Then perhaps.....?'

Ark couldn't believe his ears. All of a sudden he had become knighted, received a baronet and became the Lord of Lancel? What on earth was this? However, the Lord did not give him time to think. The young Lord pulled out a golden scroll, untied the silk ribbon and unrolled it.

"Sir Ark, receive the order from His Majesty."

Ark received the scroll with a stupid face and stuttered.

"Baronet? Lord? What are you saying?"

After handing Ark the scroll, the young Lord immediately looked playful again. And he pointed to Galen and laughed.

"Ask your friend over here. He is the one who arranged everything."

"Galen arranged this?"

"Yes, of course I helped a bit as well."

"What does that mean.....?"

"Galen, everything is finished so shouldn't you explain it now?"

"I understand."

Galen laughed and approached Ark.

"I don't know where to begin..... Hmm, yes there is no need for a long explanation so I'll just say it. I've been thinking about it for a

while but I finally realized after the village was attacked. You have a large presence among the residents.”

Galen said as he looked at Ark.

“It is natural. From the beginning, this village also died out until you helped us. And all the residents have found a new home in Lancel because of you. In other words, Lancel couldn’t exist without you. That also applies to this attack. If you weren’t here then we would’ve been destroyed by the thieves.”

‘Well, he’s not wrong.’

Ark shamelessly agreed. But he pretended to be humble when about the situation.

“You’re overpraising me. Certainly the residents of Lancel were collected by me. But are they able to rest here in unity because of Galen ajusshi? The residents of Lancel village are also indebted to Galen ajusshi for opening your heart to them.”

“That’s not true. I just manage the place. If it wasn’t for your existence then the beast clans, the ex-thieves and the Baran would never be able to live in unity. I’ve realized this clearly after the attack from the bandit group. So I decided that it will be best to entrust Lancel village to you. After the battle was over, I gathered the residents and revealed my intention.”

Galen pulled out a thick roll of paper. The roll of paper was stamped with the soles of a cat and dog, the palm of the raccoons, the signature of the people and so on. What was this? A cartoon? A code? A joke? Galen smiled at Ark’s doubtful look and said.

“This is the answer of the residents. They all signed that they are willing to entrust Lancel village to you.”

.....The soles and palms of the beast clans were their signatures. It seemed to pour cold water upon the serious atmosphere but he felt a pain in his chest at the sight. Then all the residents gathered here already knew about it? And they signed that they wanted to leave Lancel village to Ark? When Ark looked around the ex-thieves, Meow, Wolrang, raccoons and other residents scratched their heads

with embarrassment and avoided his gaze. Galen had gone away for a while because of him. After the Lancel defensive war finished, Galen immediately visited the Lord Jackson. Then he explained everything that occurred in the village to the Lord. The threat of Lance village closing, the movement of new settlers, making the village grow, the food crisis and finding the Sacred Soil and defending the village from thieves..... Then he showed the Lord the signatures of the residents who wanted Ark to be in charge of Lancel.

“This is a very fun talk.”

As one of Ark’s fans, the Lord Jackson happily accepted Galen’s request. Geographically Lancel belonged to the Jackson region, but since it was a pioneer village it wasn’t under the control of the Lord. And since it was a small village, it also didn’t need a Lord. But the words of the village residents changed that. How could he stop a free village from appointing a Lord? But Galen didn’t just want a Lord to be appointed, he wanted it to be acknowledged by the King. And to become an official lord, a noble rank was needed. So Galen had deliberately gone to Lord Jackson with the signatures. As an adoring fan of Ark, the Lord directly sent a letter to the King.

“His Majesty easily agreed. He hadn’t forgotten your achievement in bringing down Alan and the Ankh church. Of course, defeating the bandit group and having the signatures of the residents greatly helped.”

The young Lord placed his hand on Ark’s shoulder and said.

“Now, don’t you have an answer to give?”

“Huh?”

The young Lord pointed towards the gathered residents.

“You still haven’t given them an answer for their support. The King was the one who gave you a barony but they are the ones who appointed you as the Lord.”

Ark felt something warm in his chest at the young Lord’s words. It had been 1 year and 6 months since he first encountered Lancel

village. In the meantime, Ark had experienced an amazing adventure while gathering the residents. That was why he built the memorial for the NPCs despite his money loving personality. Yes, it was already impossible to separate Ark from Lancel. Now Lancel had truly become Ark's village. And he was chosen by the residents! Despite being NPCs in a game, Ark still recognized his feelings for them.

“.....I accept the Lordship.”

Ark answered as he released the bottled up emotions. There was a ringing sound and the information window appeared.

-You have acquired the 'Peerage Bestowment Certificate.'

The 'Peerage Bestowment Certificate' grants you the title 'Honour Knight' (Baronet) and you've gained a plot of land.

Foreigners in New World have an equal status to commoners. But sometimes a foreigner will have a big achievement within a kingdom and they were be given a chance to rise up in the nobility. Being granted a noble title has far more meaning than just a title. The increase in social status means the user's achievement has been recognized by the kingdom and it will have a significant impact on all future works.

<After becoming a nobleman, it is possible to freely enter any government office in the kingdom. In addition, you can meet directly with the Lords of each territory and if any nobility related quests are completed, it will be possible to ask for support from the guards of the village or city>

* After receiving a noble title bonus all stats will increase by 5.

* Fame has increase by 5,000.

* When completing a quest given by an NPC with a noble title, your status (Honour Knight: 100 people) will allow you to receive the support of the guards.

-You have gained the Lordship for the pioneer village Lancel.

You have been bestowed the Lordship of Lancel village by the

Schudenberg King.

As the Lord, you can set the budget, invest in facilities and equipment and decided the management policies. In addition, you have the authority to issue store permits. Every 10 days 3% of the profit obtained from the territory will be given to the Lord as a monthly salary, the village shares will be increase by 5% and the upper limit increased to 25%.

<Special Rights: If the Lord's assets are used as collateral, 3% of the territory's public funds can be used as a loan. However if the loan is not paid with 45 days the assets will be seized, shares in the village will fall below 5% and the Lordship will be lost>

* Shares in Lancel village has increased by 5%.

* Upper limit of shares which can be owned increased to 25%.

Currently owned shares in Lancel village (Owned/Upper Limit):
9/25%

-You have learnt a new Lord's skill.

All official Lords have the chance to learn this skill. This skill is a crucial help in ruling the estate and developing it. While the effects of it is still low in its current state, one the skill gains more experience and levels then it will have a huge impact.

* Leadership (Lord Skill): This skill can increase your influence over the residents. When the leadership of the Lord is high, there will be an increase in yield of various products and the growth rate of the population will increase. It will also affect the morale of the troops if attacked by thieves or monsters. Leadership will increase every time display a good impact on the territory as the Lord. Thanks to the excess achievements of Lancel related quests and the amount of respect in the residents' hearts, 300 Leadership has been added.

<Leadership: 500 (+300)>

Currently Owned Territory Information Window

【Territory】	Lancel	【Rating】	C
【Classification】	Small Territory	【Number of Residents in Territory】	732 people
【Residents' Bond】	1280 (+ 640)	【Residents' Loyalty】	970 (Respected)
【Territory's Gross Income】	7,950 gold every 10 days	【Properties of the Current Territory】	49,780 gold
【Value of the Current Territory】	6480 (+ 2,730)	【Territory's Fame】	89,479
【Development】	2,840	【Development Speed】	2950 (+ 2,075)
【Commerce】	1892 (+ 500)	【Civilization】	1,435 (+500)
【Armament】	1,676 (+500)		
* Current effects applied to the territory			
【World Tree】 Development Speed +50%, Territory Value +50%, Chances of monsters attacking -50%, 'Resting' effect 【Magic Institute】: Civilization +500, Development Speed +200 【Warrior's Guild】: Armament +500, Development Speed +200 【Merchant's Guild】: Commerce +500, Development Speed +200 【Memorial】 Bond +50%			
<Find New Settlers> quest has been updated. You have completed the <Find New Settlers> quest.			

Yes, the Lordship of Lancel village. It was the compensation for a quest which took 1 year and 6 months.

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

“Hooray Lord Ark!”

A huge cheer rang out after Ark accepted the Lordship. The

raccoons popped up from the holes scattered around and cheered while the Meow ran along the overpasses and shouted. The Wolrang also shook their tails with wild enthusiasm. The ex-thieves raised their hands in the air and cheered. They were.....now Ark's residents.

"Congratulations."

Then Gurana raised his hands over his head and lifted a finger. The dozens of magicians from the Magic Institute launched fireworks towards the sky. The magic fireworks dyed the sky in flashy lights. Then the warrior's guild raised their swords and shouted while the merchant's guild rocked their carriages and participated in the celebration. The three guilds started the inauguration celebration.

"I'm envious. I never received such enthusiastic cheers from my residents....."

The young Lord standing to one side grinned and muttered. Thus Ark became the Lord of Lancel village. Meanwhile the users just stared at Ark with confused expressions.

"Damn!"

The curse was spat out in the dark and damp area. The person leaning on the cold stone walls and cursing was Jewel.

"That Ark....."

Jewel murmured in a scratchy voice. Jewel was currently locked up in the Jackson dungeons after being killed by the Lancel guards. It was natural since attacking a NPC village was a crime. The leader of the attack was also Jewel. As the ringleader of the thieves, he received an enormous penalty of 4 months in jail. Users organizing a group to attack NPC villages could greatly disrupt the game balance so it received a huge punishment. Of course, Jewel had been prepared to receive the penalty. However, the penalty for his failure didn't end there. The most fatal problem was that Jewel's face had been broadcasted nationwide through the TV. Thanks to that, Jewel's face was now stamped as a villain in the minds of millions of

New World users. It would be impossible to play without a mask after he was released from jail. As soon as he knew this fact, Jewel had called the station to protest. However, New World's rule was 'anything disadvantageous to a user who committed a crime, or a 'chaotic' user cannot be penalized.' Therefore the broadcasting station had ignored his pleas. And there was no point since the video had already spread on the internet. But that wasn't the end of Jewel's unhappiness. Jewel, Duke and all the members stuck in jail had received a notice from Raiden stating a permanent ban. There was no need to explain the reason. If they accepted Jewel's group back then the Hermes alliance would just be branded as a 'villain' group.

"Dammit! Even if I could I wouldn't return to the guild now!"

Jewel punched the wall in anger. He ate and lived for the guild and now it resulted in eternal expulsion? So he felt anger at Ark and feelings of betrayal towards Raiden. Anyway, it was a fact that Jewel lost everything.

'Ark isn't an opponent that one person can deal with. The difference will become even larger while I'm trapped for 4 months. But now I'm even expelled from Hermes.....the chance to get revenge on Ark won't come any more. Even if being humiliated in this cell, wouldn't it be better to quit the game?'

Jewel sighed at the thought.

"No. 5003, you have a visitor!"

The voice of the guard could be heard through the dark passage.

"Visitor? Is it Raiden?"

Jewel raised his head. However the person who approached the cell window wasn't Raiden. The warrior was wearing a brown robe over metal armour and once he pushed back the robe it was an unknown user. There was a metallic sound as he moved back the hood and laughed after seeing Jewel's face.

"Is it because I saw you on TV? You look so familiar."

“.....What the? Who are you? Did you come to see the face of a celebrity?”

“Hmm, you’re quite sensitive. It is reasonable.”

The man laughed and said.

“I came because I have a proposal.”

“Proposal?”

“I’ve already checked you out. Jewel, a magician from the Hermes alliance. But isn’t that old now? With this situation the Hermes alliance won’t accept you anymore. Am I wrong?”

“Did you come just to say that?”

“You.....no, I came to scout you.”

“What? Scout?”

Jewel looked at the man with stupid eyes. This bastard, what on earth was he saying? He wanted to scout Jewel after his face had been broadcasted on TV nationwide? Was he crazy?

“What the hell are you thinking?”

“Honestly, I have a lot of colleagues at your level. But I like your tenacity in chasing Ark that you even attacked a NPC village. I need colleagues like you who want to get revenge on Ark.”

“Like me? Then.....”

“Yes, I’ve also been insulted and beaten by Ark. Now my purpose in New World is to bring that guy to despair. Aren’t you the same? I’ve almost finished the preparations for my revenge against Ark. I assure you. If you join me then you’ll be able to achieve your purpose, there’s no doubt. How about it? Do you want to take revenge with me?”

Jewel closed his mouth and looked at the man for a while. His identity was unknown. However, Jewel already had no place to return to. Yet there was a reason Jewel hadn’t quit the game yet. His pride wouldn’t let him quit the game when he hadn’t achieved his

revenge against Ark yet. If there was a chance to get his revenge on Ark then he would even be willing to sign a contract with the devil. However.....

“My punishment is 4 months. I’ll be no different from a low level user when released in 4 months.”

“Then I’ll break you out of jail.”

“What?”

Jewel’s eyes widened at the man’s answer. Then the man said.

“Why are you so startled? You’re the one who tried to annihilate a whole village.”

“That is a mountain village but this place is different. It is the territory of a Lord. For such a thing to be possible.....”

“Of course it is impossible if we attack this place like you did Lancel. But if it is just a jailbreak then it’s possible. My organization already possesses that type of power. If the jailbreak fails then your penalty will increase but you have nothing more to lose. How about it? Would you like to try?”

The man said as he tried to tempt Jewel. He was unsure but the man smelled somewhat dangerous. However, a drowning person had no choice but to grab the vine even if it had thorns on it.

“.....Okay.”

The man’s lip curled up at Jewel’s answer. The man looked around for a bit before smiling pleasantly.

“Please wait. It will take a few days.”

“Wait, what is your name?”

The man who started walking away flinched and stopped. Then he lifted his hood back onto his head and said in a low voice.

“Andel, I am Andel.”

“Phew, I’ve arranged a bit of it.”

Ark stretched his back and sighed. After becoming the Lord yesterday afternoon, everything had become hectic for Ark. After the celebration ceremony by the 3 guilds, Ark had been paraded around the village. Then the representatives of the residents gathered in the Town Hall and the celebration stretched on for 4 hours. But what really tired Ark out wasn’t the NPCs but the users. Ark had been really puzzled by the Lordship but the users watching had also been shocked. The users had often met the nobility but they never heard of user becoming a Lord outside of Nagaran. In addition, it was incomprehensible to the users about how Ark had taken part in the defensive war. Although many users took part in the Lancel war, none of them had seen Ark (because he had changed into Dark Wolf) so Ark’s inauguration as the Lord was completed unexpected. So throughout the parade the users had followed along in a cloud of confusion and continued asking questions. Thus he had escaped to the Town Hall after the parade.

‘Damn, now both Dark Wolf and Ark had become famous so it will be difficult to distinguish between them. Should I transform myself into a form other than Dark Wolf when wandering around?’

He was seriously worried about it. Anyway, the young Lord returned to his territory after the celebration was finished. Sid and Bread also became completely drunk and only disconnected at dawn. However, it was just the start of all of Ark’s work.

‘Damn, I didn’t know the work of a Lord would be so complicated.’

Ark complained as he looked at a pile of papers. Building the branches for the 3 guilds, processing the budget, settling the minor complaints of the residents etc..... Despite being a small village with only 732 residents, the Lord still had a lot of work. Of course, this wasn’t the first time Ark had been a Lord. But he had always intended to sell Silvana to Raiden so he had no interest in it. He also had the highly competent secretary Berami. Of course, in Lancel village there was also Galen. And Galen would still be handling tasks in Lancel when Ark was away. But Lancel village was Ark’s territory. As the Lord, it was necessary to grasp the issues and learn

how to process them.

‘Lancel village is different from the territories in Nagaran. This territory only belongs to me. Lancel village is like an extension of my body. If Lancel dies then I will die. If Lancel is well then I am well!’

When he thought about this, it felt like his affection towards Lancel had increase by around a million times. Besides, the profit earned from being the Lord was enormous.

“Character information window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +500	Nobility Title	Baronet
Fame	7,985 (+500)	Level	383
Profession		Dark Soul	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero	
Health	7190 (+475)	Mana	7380(+225)
Spiritual Power	956	Strength	757 (+58)
Agility	982 (+90)	Stamina	1222 (+45)
Wisdom	178 (+10)	Intelligence	1300 (+5)
Luck	172 (+60)	Flexibility	256
Art of Communication	78	Affection	89 (+10)
Resilience	468	Dark Fog	52
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient		153	

Relics
* Equipment item effects
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople (Armour): Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10
Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available
*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20, Defense +40
Promised Sword(Two-handed Sword): Strength +20, Stamina +10
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3
Mantle with a Strange Power (Mantle): Health and Mana +20, 'Power of Resurrection' available
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available
Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available
Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available
Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds
Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%
* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark
* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

- * Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.
- * You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.
- * Shock absorption is increased by 20%.
- * Poison resistance has increased by 50%.
- * 10% increased attack and defense.

Some new information caught his eyes when looking at the information window. Although he hadn't been able to raise his level while defending Lancel, it was satisfying just seeing the Baronet status. Having a barony in New World wasn't a small thing. After receiving the barony and the Lordship, he had gained +5 to all stats and 5,000 fame. Since he killed some chaotic users during the battle, he had gained 5,920 fame. And the unique thing was that he could get support from a village or city. Of course, he could only use it when completing quests given by NPCs with a peerage but being able to use regular troops was something other users couldn't imagine.

'In addition, being a Lord allows me to meet directly with the Lord of each territory.'

In other words, he had a chance to meet the rulers of each territory and receive a quest from them. If he received quests from NPCs in such high positions then the compensation would surely be good. Maybe the biggest benefit from the Lordship was the ability to directly meet with other Lords.

'But that is not all of the benefits.'

It was possible to receive profit after becoming the Lord. But since there was various duties and responsibilities required, sometimes it could be a nuisance. But just like Silvana, he could receive a monthly salary. It was 3% of the proceeds from the territory. The current income from the territory was 7,950 gold every 10 days. Since his salary was 3%, he would receive 238 gold and 50 silver every 10 days. That was only 1/10th of Silvana's monthly salary but he didn't

have to worry about sieges with Lancel. In other words, it was 100% pure profit! Every month he could receive more than 700 gold by completing just a few documents. And if Lancel grew then his salary would also grow. It was a golden goose which would be coveted by any user!

‘Plus.....’

Ark opened the relevant information window and smiled.

<Relevant Investment Information Window>

Current market price for Lancel's shares: 265 gold per every 0.1%

Currently owned shares in Lancel village (Owned/Upper Limit):
9%/25%

‘265 gold for every 0.1% and he had 9% shares!’

Ark's eyes turned to gold as he checked the information window. Shortly after the battle the shares fell to 200 gold every 0.1%, but after the 3 guilds were attracted it soared up to 265 gold. Since he received 5% shares for becoming the Lord, his shares had jumped for free. When converted to gold, it was a huge amount worth 13,250 gold! But this compensation was a trap. He would be stripped of his Lordship if his shares fell below 5%! In other words, he couldn't sell the 5% shares received with the Lordship. And he wouldn't be given a salary if his shares were sold. In other words, he had to choose between having a steady salary or selling his shares for a lump sum.

‘But my assets are money. I don't really need money urgently at the moment so there is no reason to sell it. Well, since it is like that.....’

Just possessing the shares would bring in 700 gold every month. There was no reason to sell the shares. And he could use the Lordship if he urgently needed money. A special right of the Lord was to use his village assets as collateral for a loan. Of course, he had to pay 3% interest every 15 days and he would be deprived of the Lordship if he couldn't pay it back within 45 days. But it had considerable merit if he needed some urgent money.

‘My current shares are 9% so I can safely use 4% to borrow money.’

Ark briefly closed his eyes and sank into his thoughts.

‘Now it isn’t an exaggeration to say that I’ve obtained a seat in New World. But.....’

Just a few months ago he wouldn’t have been able to see this much money. Thanks to the equipment and insurance, he had received 9,450 gold from this battle. During the reconstruction plan, he had obtained 3,470 gold from the sales of the goods in his store. After Isyuram sold the stolen goods, he had also obtained 5,515 gold.A total of 18,435 gold!

“But.....I don’t know how much more I need but it is still insufficient. If I mortgage my 4% shares then I can borrow 10,240 gold. That is 28,675 gold. It is all I can mobilize for the moment. I’ll bet all of this!”

Ark murmured in a low voice as he stared into the darkness. All that money was required for Ark’s plan. The letter Ark received earlier today had moved his plan into the execution stage.

From Shambala.

I’ve gathered the troops you requested.

I couldn’t mobilize as many of the Eastern Nation and Baran clan as you expected. After the lawless port was destroyed the Nakujuk have been invading more frequently, so we can’t remove a lot of the troops. So Isabel has decided to send 800 Eastern Nation members and 500 of the Baran warriors.

Surprisingly, there are also a lot of users who follow JusticeMan, Lariette and the rehabilitation group.

It is possible to send 2,000 troops from Seutandal. JusticeMan, Lariette and the rehabilitation hyung-nims will move to Nagaran with them.

That was the letter he received from Shambala who had left for Seutandal. Yes, Ark had originally thought of two ways to defend Lancel. One of them was to attract the 3 guilds and make any users lose their will to attack. The other method was a counterattack

against Jewel's group who won't give up. That's right, it was to destroy the Hermes alliance which was their main body. Of course, the reason Ark wanted to destroy the Hermes alliance wasn't just to defend Lancel village.

‘Anyway, I have to take Silvana back for the sake of my ambition!’

Ark's ambition! If he held the Lordship for both Lancel and Silvana then his monthly salary would be enormous. After from the monthly salary, he could also complete the triangular trade route between Lancel, Silvana and Seutandal. The profit would reach tens of thousands of gold in one month. Ark would become a game tycoon! Ark would bet his entire fortune on that gamble.

‘The Hermes alliance is under enormous pressure thanks to the destruction of the lawless port. They also lost 500 people while trying to attack Lancel village this time. Including Jewel and Duke, more than half of them were trapped in jail. ‘Then now is the time to strike the Hermes alliance!’

Ark came to that conclusion shortly after the end of the Lancel war. Now was the chance when the opponent was weakened! But even if they were weakened, the Hermes alliance was still one of the 5 powers in Nagaran. According to the secret agent Sid who had been planted, the current Hermes alliance still had 5,000 people! Even if they received a huge damage to their funds, they could still hire mercenaries for sieges. This meant the opponents were more than 5,000 people. On the other hand, Ark could only mobilize 300 troops from Lancel.

‘It is imperative to gain more troops!’

While Bread and Sid had been sent to persuade the 3 guilds, Shambala and Redian to Seutandal and Bristania to gather troops. Shambala had managed to collect 2,000 people from Seutandal and the Eastern Nation while Redian had 1,000 applicants from Bristania. They were able to collect these users thanks to the influence of the TV broadcast. The fame of Shambala and Redian were no comparison to before.

‘So I presently have 3,300 troops. Yet that is still weaker than the

Hermes alliance. I should collect some more troops from Giran and Selebrid. If I appear as Dark Wolf and say this battle will be broadcasted then I should gather 1,000 people with no trouble.'

Ark was convinced that he could gather more troops after the Lancel defensive war. But no matter how many troops he could gather, it wouldn't be enough. If he used Dark Wolf's fame and the TV broadcast then he could definitely lure in users. But while the Lancel defensive war had a cause, this battle was more Ark's private matters. Since Jewel's face had been shown, Ark could associate him with Hermes but in the end the person occupying Silvana would be Ark. There weren't many users who would want to enter a war like that for free. Even if he could gather some, they would just be low levelled. But high level users needed compensation to risk dropping equipment or the death penalty.

'The counterattack for Lancel village was a surprise which is how I was able to succeed with low level users. But the siege was different from the Lancel defensive war. The users who enter the siege should have adequate levels and combat skills.'

That was why Ark needed money. In order to gain enough troops to match Hermes, he needed to use money.

'I currently have 28,675 gold so 4,000 people will be my limit. If I don't succeed in making Silvana fall with 4,000 people there I have no more chances!'

However, he now had no choice. If he missed the chance while the Hermes alliance was weakened then the chance to retake Silvana would disappear. Ark's dream of a triangular trade route and a game tycoon would vanish. He couldn't miss this opportunity so Ark decided to gamble it all on this siege. If the gamble won then it would be a jackpot and if it didn't.....

'It will be the end. I absolutely can't let that happen!'

Ark stood up and looked out the window. It was window overlooking the north where Giran and Silvana lay. The place Ark would soon go to was there. It was the stage of the decisive battle with the Hermes alliance.

War Preparations

-The new facility 'Office of the Lord' has been registered in the name of Ark-nim.

The 'Office of the Lord' is a necessary space for the Lord of any territory and is a symbol of pride. The Lord will be able to confirm various details about the territory from the office and a loyalty bonus will be applied to help the development of the territory. When working on territory related business here, the progress rate will increase by 1.5 times.

- * Progress rate of all territory related business increases by 1.5 times in this office.

- * Development of the territory when the Lord stays in the office increases by 1.2 times.

- * The resident bond and loyalty when the Lord stays in the office will increase by 1.2 times.

"Do you like the office?"

Galen indicated the wide office with a satisfied expression.

"It can't be helped even if you don't like it. This is the Lord's private office now."

It had been 4 days since Ark became the Lord of Lancel. The original Town Hall was a three storey building, with the 1st floor being the meeting room, the 2nd floor the complaints room and the 3rd floor was Galen's office. So until now Ark hadn't had an office. However Ark didn't care about that.

'I might be the Lord but I can't spend a lot of time in Lancel. Galen will take over as the mayor when I'm gone so I don't need to bother with the office.'

If he wanted to create the office then he would have to use the public funds. But now things had changed. Lancel was Ark's territory, not simple a place where he had invested in the real estate. In other words, he used to be a stockholder in the Lancel Corporation and now he was the CEO. So his viewpoint about the territory had also changed.

'How Lancel develops will depend on me. If the territory develops then its income and fame will rise. So I can't use the public funds of the territory lightly.'

Ark was the type of user who could give up 1 gold today for 2 gold tomorrow. Because it was the public funds, he couldn't afford to spend it freely. But Galen was firm on this decision.

"It might be uncomfortable for Lord-nim but it will be worse for the residents if this office wasn't here. I know that Lord-nim will be absent a lot of times. But the Lord's office isn't just a place for business. It is a symbol of Lancel's Lord and VIPs from other areas will be offended if there wasn't this office to greet them in."

Galen used to be the temporary mayor and now his title had changed to the Lord's secretary so he was more assertive than before. Ark had risen from a shareholder to the president. So Galen who was in charge of maintaining the village was like a Director? Anyway, Ark could find no justification to oppose Galen's decision. Thus Galen pushed and encouraged the residents and after 4 days, the Lord's office had been constructed as the 4th floor of the Town Hall.

"Everything in the office is made of top quality products. The villagers also prepared the interior decorations. The raccoons constructed the table and chairs, while the ex-thieves who had taken lessons from them manufactured the tapestries and shelves. The leather goods on the walls are products of the Wolrang and the Meow planted the seeds in the indoor garden."

Galen explained the office like he was a real estate salesman.

'I honestly wasn't very enthusiastic.....'

Ark scratched his head and looked around the office. He had been reserved about it but once completed, he actually quite liked it. The office had various influences on development which Ark hadn't expected. Of course, it only applied if Ark stayed in the office but if he concentrated then he could accelerate the growth rate of his territory. But what caught Ark's heart weren't the bonuses applied but the balcony. Since the balcony was on the 4th floor of the Town Hall, it had a panoramic view of Lancel village.

'Somehow it lifts my mood.'

Thanks to the new town plan the buildings and roads were neatly arranged. A wide fence surrounded the village with fields spreading out from it. Lancel village wasn't simply a landscape to Ark anymore.

'Lancel is my territory so I can change it as I wish.'

"Can we clear the plains on the right side of the village to create a potato field?"

When Ark said such things, the residents immediately moved and the plains were cleared. And it was possible to confirm the changes instantly through the numerical values.

-The residents have reclaimed the plains and your territory has expanded.

* The villagers are joyful about the successful reclamation (Residents' Bond +70)

* The successfully reclaimed plains had improved the food situation (For 4 months food +1,200)

<The Lord can control the amount of food distributed to the residents. The distribution of food will have an influence on the residents' bond, degree of loyalty and the development speed. In addition, it is possible to sell surplus food to other areas to raise the income of the village>

Closing Statement: Clearing of plains used 2,750 gold. Additionally, the maintenance fee of 150 every 1 month is taken from the public funds to pay the farmers. There may also be additional expenses

when a disaster happens such as blight, pests or drought. The appropriate budget setting was needed.

Of course, he was previously the Lord of Silvana but he had always intended to sell it to Raiden so he didn't really care. But when it was his estate then it became quite fascinating. What was needed to develop a balanced territory? Even if he left Galen to manage the village, Ark still needed to make decisions as the Lord. Still, he couldn't excessively develop the territory. Clearing plains and creating new roads all required money. Therefore the development should be steady and properly managed. If he created new roads then cleaners and repairmen were required to maintain it, so he had to be careful not to let the residents' dissatisfaction pile up. Creating new fields also required hiring farmers as well as crops. Therefore he needed an appropriate grasp of the budget as well as figuring out the abilities of the residents before starting some investments.

'In the beginning they didn't have a grasp on a system.....'

In fact, the old Lancel village usually had 30~40% of residents with free time. Sometimes 3~4 people worked in fields that required 10 people, and other times 10 people worked in fields which required 5~6 people so the progress speed was quite slow. Now thanks to Ark, Lancel village had developed a new system.

'Isn't the Lordship quite fascinating now that I have an interest in it?'

Didn't it feel like the famous simulation games 'Sim City' or the 'Tycoon' series? No, it was a virtual reality therefore the sense of accomplishment couldn't be compared to those classic games. Although he couldn't sleep well for four days, developing the village and increase the residents' bond and loyalty was interesting enough that he forgot about sleep. Of course, he had to decide on the budget and work personnel first but if the results were good then he could feel a sense of accomplishment. Ark suddenly looked at a building that occupied a corner of the village. During the past few days he spent in the village, he realized that the NPCs in Lancel village also had a wide variety of personalities just like in reality.

'Eh? That building?'

A few days ago during the evening, he had been standing on the balcony of the Town Hall's 3rd floor when he detected some strange movements from that corner. On one corner of Lancel village was a shabby building. However this building had always been locked. Therefore he felt suspicious when he first discovered the building but he eventually forgot about it. If he hadn't been standing on the balcony at that time then he wouldn't have noticed the suspicious group of people gathered around the building.

'I had forgotten about that building. I wonder who lives there? And why are there people around it at this hour?'

Something was happening in Ark's territory! Ark was intrigued by this and moved to the area before using Stealth. He held his breath for a while and searched the surrounding people. They were all dressed like merchants but he couldn't remember their faces. In other words, they must be peddlers travelling from other areas.

"Is it time?"

The merchants in front of the building checked their time pieces and muttered.

'Time? What are they waiting for?'

Ark wondered as he tilted his head to one side. Then there was the sound of the door being unlocked and it opened. And the people that appeared from inside.....

'Eh? Aren't they the raccoons?'

That's right. The one who opened the door was from the raccoon clan.

"Were you undiscovered by others?"

The raccoons restlessly looked around and said. The merchants gathered in the area smiled and nodded.

"Huhuhu, yes. You don't have to worry."

"Okay, come in."

‘Why on earth are the peddlers and raccoons meeting together like this? Judging from their actions it doesn’t seem to be the first time..... Hmmm. Well, I’ll know once I enter.’

Ark who was hidden with ‘Stealth’ entered the building with the merchants. The building had blackout curtains so it would be dark even with the sun out. But the raccoons soon lit up several lamps. Ark instantly became perplexed.

‘Eh? What the, this is.....?’

Surprisingly there were a large number of japtem piled up in the building. The merchants’ eyes sparkled as the light showed the form of the japtem.

“Hmm, the items are quite okay this time?”

“Huhuhu, of course. After all we are the ones who made them. It is in a different class from the sloppy goods created by humans.”

The raccoons replied with a prideful expression.

“The price is the same as before?”

“No, this time it has increased by 5%.”

“What?”

“Look, as a merchant it should be obvious. It is better quality than the previous goods you bought. If we should it elsewhere then we would receive at least 5~6% more.”

“Well, I guess but.....”

“These items aren’t easy to get. If I don’t get any profit from it then it will be useless.”

“But it will be unfair if you’re the only one who leaves with a profit. Honestly, it isn’t easy for merchants like us to meet like this. Shouldn’t we divide the profit among ourselves in order to cement our bond? 3 percent.”

“Sheesh, as expected from merchants. I understand. You have to get rid of these things quickly. But just to be clear. You shouldn’t

dispose of anything bought from me nearby. This has to keep being a secret.”

“Huhuhu, is this our first time? We want to trade with you for a long time so don’t worry.”

‘Eh? These guys?’

After listening to the conversation between the raccoons and the merchants, it was possible for Ark to guess the situation. They gathered in this building during the evening in order to do black market dealings. It was unnecessary to explain but when buying or selling things through the store, a certain amount of tax was included. That subsequently became the income of the village and the Lord. But these types of black market dealings didn’t require a tax. Additionally, it wasn’t required to pay the market price for the goods. As a result, you could purchase the same goods for 30~40% cheaper than in the stores. Of course, selling it through the black market also gave benefits to the raccoons.

‘But to do black market dealings in my territory!’

He never even imagined it! Anyway, now he couldn’t wait and see anymore. One of the main sources of income for Lancel village was the tax. But now precious goods were being traded in black market dealings. While it didn’t compare to the amount that the raccoons normally produced, he couldn’t condone it as the Lord. Ark was able to drop Stealth and reveal his presence when he realized something.

‘Wait? Right now I can seize everything and lock the merchants in jail. But.....’

Ark thought for a while and sneaked out of the building. Then he visited the Seutandal branch and spoke to no. 358.

“I have a request. In the future, please keep an eye on that building every night. If merchants enter the building then please sneak in using Stealth and record the prices of the goods traded there. Of course, please keep this a secret from everyone.”

“Huh? What.....?”

“I’ll tell you the details later. If it works out well then I’ll compensate you generously.”

“I understand. If it is a favour from Ark-nim.....”

‘Huhuhu, all of the money from the black market will be mine!’

A wicked smile spread on Ark’s face as no. 358 nodded. There was a reason why Ark hadn’t dismantled it right there. If the products were sold normally through the raccoons’ workshop then Lancel would only get a profit from the taxes. It was 5% of the listed price. But how much could he get with the black market profit? In the future the raccoons would continue to sell things through the black market. And it was clear that the raccoons would collect the money from the dealings. If he stopped the black market at an appropriate time then he could seize all of that money.

‘If I intimidate the raccoons then I will be able to put that money into my own pocket instead of the estate’s. In other words, he could embezzle the income of the raccoons. Huhuhu, then I can obtain the profits from the raccoons’ black market dealings!’

That was Ark’s true purpose. Ark even made a wall which hid the building where the black market occurred. If the black market was safer than it would become more active. And he would leave it until the appropriate time.

‘But I never would’ve guessed if I hadn’t seen it. I had been thinking that the NPCs just lived without thinking. If they have no jobs and complaints pile up then they will also turn to illegal acts, just like users.’

The management of his territory was starting to feel more interesting than before. It was to the extent that he wanted to forget about other stuff and just focus on Lancel’s management.

‘But my real work starts today.’

Ark who had been locked in recollections while looking at his territory closed his eyes. When he opened them, Ark’s eyes weren’t that of the Lord anymore.

“Have you prepared what I requested?”

“Yes, it’s been prepared in cash like you asked.”

Galen nodded and laid a bag of money on the table. It was five 2,000 gold bags and one 1,000 gold bag which added up to 11,000 gold! Ark received that money for putting 4% of his 9% shares as collateral for a loan. When Ark had become the Lord it was worth 10,600 gold but by the 4th day the market price had risen by 400 gold.

‘In just four days 265 gold for 0.1% became 275 gold. Since some fields have been cleared, a new road is in progress and the buildings for the 3 guilds will soon be completed, the market price will continue to rise.’

If he had waited a bit more then he might’ve been able to borrow 1,000 more gold for the 4% shares. But Ark couldn’t afford to wait that long. In addition, he had to pay an interest of 3% every 15 days so it wasn’t good to borrow that much.

“Now I will leave Lancel to Galen ajusshi for a while.”

“Don’t worry. I will complete the work you’ve assigned perfectly.”

“Please contact me by mail if there are any problems.”

“I understand.”

Then Galen lowered his head and suddenly grasped Ark’s hand.

“I know why Lord-nim needed to borrow the money. And I have no doubt that you will accomplish your purpose. Yet if you fail then don’t take it personally. Lord-nim already has Lancel as a territory.”

Ark looked at Galen before laughing and replying.

“I know.”

Ark was also aware of this. Even if he failed and lost, Lancel would still be Ark’s territory. He had poured all his passion into Lancel during the last four days. But there was no meaning in failing!

‘From now on I have to concentrate all my nerves on retaking

Silvana!’

Ark had a determined expression on his face as he exited the Town Hall. That’s right. It was the reason why Ark used his shares as collateral to borrow money. It was to secure war funds to recapture Silvana.

‘Galen told me not to worry if I fail to recapture Silvana but..... No! I still have Lancel left after failing but that is no guarantee. And the chance to recapture Silvana won’t come again. My dream for the last 2 years will fail with a single defeat.’

Ark’s heart started pounding at the thought. He had gone through so many hardships in New World. It was probably 3~4 times more than normal users experienced. Sometimes he suffered tremendous damage and if the crisis wasn’t overcome then he would be forced to quit the game. However, Ark had overcome those crises and ended up gaining more money and levels than other users. In other words, a crisis provided him opportunities to grow. A crisis was a chance! That was now Ark’s philosophy in life. But Ark didn’t think it was that simple this time.

“Heavy.....this is the first time the gold feels so heavy.....”

Ark had prepared 18,435 gold! Using his special privilege, he received a loan of 11,000 gold! In total it was 29,435 gold! When converting to cash, it was close to 300 million won! It was Ark’s entire fortune which he had gathered after 2 years of conquering crises. Although it was impossible to feel the weight of the gold in the bag, for the first time in 2 years his bag strap weighed down his shoulder.

‘If possible, I don’t want to make such a risky gamble.’

To be honest, Ark would like to protect the 30,000 gold that he gathered and continue his adventures. But after the Lancel defensive war it became certain that he couldn’t coexist with the Hermes alliance. If he left the Hermes alliance alone then it was just like leaving a ticking bomb in his warehouse.

“.....I have no choice. There is no turning back now!”

Ark muttered like he was reciting a spell. It was a spell to change his anxiety to courage.

It was originally set in the suburbs but thanks to the new town plan, Ark's store was now in the centre of the village so it was thriving. In particular, after gathering the 3 guilds a lot more users had been attracted and gathered around his store. But it would be a problem if he couldn't see any goods to the customers. In order to raise the required war funds, Ark had sold most of the goods in his warehouse. He also didn't have the money to buy new products right now. But they were Ark's long-awaited customers so he couldn't just let them leave. After his stock had disappeared, Ark borrowed from other stores and was carrying out a sale. Of course, they were goods borrowed from other stores so he would only receive a 2~3% profit. But in this situation the profit wasn't an important issue.

'Even if I fill the store up later, I won't be able to bring back guests that I lost. The profit margin doesn't matter as long as the store is still operating.'

Thanks to that Ark's store was still crowded with people even while having no stock. No, instead the goods diversified even more and the customer satisfaction increased. Ark had also settled the other NPC stores' dissatisfaction at having customers monopolized by Ark's store.

'Thankfully Sapjil and Ulmeok are the ones who have to move all the goods..... I also give them a monthly salary. I'll just have to be forced to let the monthly salaries pile up.'

At the sight of Ark's smirk, Sapjil and Ulmeok felt like crying. Once again, it was impossible for them to be freed from Ark. His summons were no exception. While Ark was staying in Lancel, his summons Razak, Radun and Racard were put to work. But the most surprising thing was that his summons were unexpectedly talented at business.

"Now, now, come. Come in. Take your pick, your pick! We have everything!"

Clack clack clack, ttadadak!

Ssak ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Racard who was wearing big glasses and a hat clapped and attracted the users' attention. Razak also helped using his shield while Radun spat up items and juggled them. There was a reason his pets were engaging in business in eagerly.

"You make us fight and now you're even making us engage in business? We also want a short break sometimes. I've never heard of a pet selling things. Master is so mean!"

Racard's complaints piled up as the Lancel defensive war ended and he was shoved into the store. While he could beat them up, he now that wouldn't successfully motivate their labour. After worrying for a bit, Ark offered a suggestion to his summons. Instead of paying salaries, they would earn points based on their performance.

Points Method

10~100 points: x1 snack food can be eaten (points required depends on ingredients and price)

100~200 points: A mistake made in battle will be waived (the required points depend on the mistake).

100~400 points: Winter equipment provision (points required depends on quality).

* 1 point earned for the sale of 1 item. Can be used at any time

. "P-points?"

Racard froze after hearing about the points from Ark. Since they had to eat so much food for growth, the pets were sick of it but sometimes they also craved junk food. But it was impossible for Ark to give away the ingredients he collected. So his pets became frustrated by not being able to eat junk food. Furthermore, his pets were most afraid of failing in battle and receiving a penalty. However, if they collected points then it was possible to eat the junk food or

avoid the penalty! But that wasn't his pets' final goal. If they collected 100 points then it was possible to receive winter equipment. During the last winter, they didn't even have a pair of gloves so it was normal for his pets to tremble. Right now it was late fall but winter was coming, and knowing Ark's nature it was obvious he wouldn't buy them any gloves. Yet if they collected points then they would be able to request winter equipment! So his pets' sales pitches heated up as they started a painful struggle for survival.

'Huhuhu, yes if they want to scramble to collect 100 points then they won't dare betray me. And all I have to do is buy one or two gloves. Furthermore, if I didn't do this then wouldn't they keep on complaining about clothes during the winter? Well, it means I can utilize my pets as shop assistants.'

Ark smirked and went up to the 2nd floor.

"Have you put everything regarding the Lordship in order?"

When he entered the 2nd floor, Roco greeted him like he was a husband returning.

"Yes, to some degree."

".....Now shall we begin already?"

Then an excited voice was heard from behind Ark. Ark looked back to see that Bread was climbing up the stairs behind him. However Bread seemed somewhat strange. His whole body was covered in dust like he had been rolling around on the ground and he seemed to give off a sense of weariness. It was because of Ark that Bread was in such a state. In fact, Ark had struggled with one problem when he became determined to retake Silvana. It was that the beast clans and ex-thieves from Lancel would have to enter the war. Currently he could mobilize 300 people from Lancel. That was half of Lancel's population. If they died then Lancel's population would decrease by that much. Ark honestly didn't want them to participate in the war. In a situation where the troops numbered several thousand, 300 people weren't a big number. Although they were only 300 people, the beast clans had special abilities that could be used strategically. Ark was betting everything on this battle. He feared sacrificing the NPCs but

he needed them in his troops. Anyway, if he was defeated in this battle then wouldn't Lancel be attacked by the Hermes alliance's retaliatory strike? In addition, the NPCs were eager to get revenge on the Hermes alliance that was the source behind Lancel being attacked. So Ark decided to address the troops from Lancel.

"This expedition is more important than ever and it will be a fierce battle. Whether I win or fail, the damage received won't be small. Because of my selfishness, I honestly don't want the residents of Lancel to enter the war. But it is true that I need your help. Thus I decided to do this. You will undergo severe training and if I judge that you have sufficient power then you can participate in the war."

Since then the troops had gone around various hunting grounds and dungeons in the Argus Mountains and started their combat training. And their training instructor for 4 days was Bread.

"How is it? Was there any progress?"

"Obviously. Who am I?"

Bread laughed as he sat down in a chair.

"I can't confirm it directly since I can't see the NPCs' information window, but everyone seemed to have gained 5 levels. The Wolrang and Meow were originally a combat species so their power didn't rise that much, but the ex-thieves who changed to guards has gained a lot in a short time. I can't assure you. It won't be easy if they go against the users."

In fact, Ark wasn't that worried about the beast clans' combat power. The Wolrang and the Meow possessed general strength and agility equivalent to the users. During the siege of Silvana, there was a 50 level difference between the users and the Meow but their amazing agility overwhelmed during a 1-on-1 combat. Ark was worried more about the ex-thieves than the beasts. But if the more experienced Bread was full of confidence then they should've reached a minimum level.

'No matter their level, the raccoons can be strategically used.....'

The core of the Lancel troops was the raccoons. Their cannons had

more range and damage than arrows, not to mention their abilities to dig tunnels, repair buildings and heavy equipment. These characteristics could be used strategically.

‘Although I couldn’t use it in the Lancel defensive war, the raccoons’ secret weapon that they’ve been preparing is ready! Their firepower absolutely won’t be lacking!’

It was the ultimate weapon in which Ark had invested considerable funds! The reason Ark had been in Lancel for 4 days was because he had been waiting for the completion of the weapon being secretly developed. That’s right. The raccoons had a secret research laboratory underneath Lancel. The research was spurred even more after Ark became the Lord and the secret weapon was finally completed yesterday.

‘This means I’ve finished all the preparations in Lancel. Together with the weapons, the number of troops from Lancel number 270 beasts and guards. Only 30 of the guards are staying behind to protect Lancel.....’

The guard divisions from the three guilds were already present in the village so he didn’t have to worry about Lancel’s defense. Ark tapped the table and began to talk.

“Now, let me sum up the situation. There are 270 Lancel troops. Shambala has gathered 1,300 people from the Eastern Nation and Seutandal. There are also 700 applicants from the users in Seutandal. And Redian has managed to gather 1,000 people from Bristania.”

“So there are a total of 3,270 troops?”

Bread nodded and then muttered like he was thinking out loud.

“The Hermes alliance is expected to have at least 5,000 troops. There is a difference of 1,500 people between us. Will we be gathering more troops before moving to Nagaran?”

“Yes.”

“So? How many more will we gather?”

“1,000 more people.”

Bread thought for a moment before giving a heavy sigh. In fact, there was a reason Ark had to rush to retake Silvana. Jewel's face had been shown to the public on TV. Of course, Jewel had withdrawn from Hermes in advance and they had officially denied the alliance's relationship with Jewel through the forums of various sites. However 100% of Jewel's group used to be in Hermes, not just 1~2 people. NPCs wouldn't know but the users couldn't obediently accept Hermes' claim. Shortly after the broadcast of the Lancel defensive war, the Hermes alliance had been extremely criticized by the users. On the other hand Ark, no Dark Wolf was a hero! With such an atmosphere, couldn't Ark gather users to attack Hermes? Whether in reality or the game, people gravitated towards those with a cause. If he took advantage of the current atmosphere towards Hermes then he could attract high level users.

‘On the other hand, the morale of the Hermes alliance would've fallen.’

The morale of the troops in the game was important. No, morale was important to win in the game. If their morale fell in the game, their eagerness to fight would decrease and they would die. Thus the battle was in his favour if the morale was already decreased from the beginning. However, there was no guarantee that the atmosphere would continue forever. If time passed then that atmosphere would disappear. This was the reason why Ark thought it was the proper time to recapture Silvana. As he mentioned earlier, it wasn't a problem collecting reinforcements. The problem wasn't gathering reinforcements but maintaining them. Ark had a good reason. Many users might support Ark. But there were problems if they wanted to participate in the battle. If they participated in the battle then they needed money for consumables and repairs. If they didn't belong to a guild or alliance then there were no benefits for users to participate in a siege. So they had to receive some money for the damages they might incur during the battle. In other words, Ark had to bear the cost for things such as equipment repairs, food and various supplies. The minimum cost for one person was 10 gold. Hiring level 250 users required at least 10 gold. However Ark had

already collected 1,700 users. If he collected 1,000 more then he would have 2,700 users. 10 gold per person meant 27,000 gold. The thousands of people needed in a siege was no joke.

‘I’ve prepared 30,000 gold for the war funds!’

It was an enormous amount but it wasn’t enough to hire thousands of troops. Since Ark had no guild or alliance, he had to bear that cost alone.

“But it has to be enough. It is now or never.”

Ark replied in a firm voice. The reason Ark was able to think that was because of the siege rules. After Ark revealed Alan’s use of the ghost guild, the rules of the siege had changed. Since Sid was currently infiltrating Silvana, Ark was able to hear the new siege rules from him.

“The system now is that guilds at the Shrine of War have a sequential chance to challenge a siege. Since the siege is more large scale than before, it will only occur once every 2 weeks so some people will have to wait months for a chance.”

“Then if a guild registers later then they’ll have to wait?”

“Not really. At the Shrine of War, the guilds can apply for a 100 vs 100 battle separate from the siege. The guild that wins will have their priority increased.

This was the new rules of the siege. Even if Ark collected the troops, if he didn’t have the priority right then he couldn’t participate in the siege. Of course, he could participate in a few battles against guilds but if there were a lot of guilds with higher priority than him then it would eat a lot of his funds. His funds were very tight so there was no possibility of doing that. But he didn’t have to wait this time.

“The rules right now..... In fact, recently there haven’t been a lot of sieges. Since the size of the alliance in Nagaran had become larger and their troops numbered in the thousands, few people were willing to attack them. If they tried a siege and failed then the guild would become incredibly broke so there was none that would try it.”

The Hermes alliance was one of the 5 powers in Nagaran. They were a huge alliance with more than 5,000 people so trying a siege with them would just make them lost the funds. Because of that, there had been no sieges in Silvana for half a year.

‘But in fact, the Hermes alliance is actually struggling financially. If the other influential alliances known this information then they will apply for a siege. No matter how much Hermes tries to hide the information, one day it will leak.’

If someone showed a weak point in Nagaran then it was the end. When the circumstances inside the Hermes alliance were revealed then the other unions would attack Silvana like hyenas.

‘If Silvana is taken away from the Hermes alliance then I will have to fight a new union. Furthermore, they might even collect the remnants of the Hermes alliance. Ark only just had the minimum funds.

It was why he had to recapture Silvana now, even if it meant borrowing money.

“Then there is no other choice? Okay, it’s decided so I’ll depart right away for Silvana. I’ll bring the gathered troops to Silvana.”

Bread shrugged and muttered. The person giddy about the upcoming battle wasn’t just Bread.

“I’ll also do my best to help you.”

Roco was also looking forward to going onto the battlefield with Ark. Then Sapjil who was moving goods on the 2nd floor gasped and looked aghast.

“Eek? Even Manager-nim is going?”

“Of course. Why else have I been taking lessons from Melody?”

“But who will look after the store?”

“You guys will have to do that.”

“Huh? But.....”

Sapjil spoke in a worried voice.

‘Ah, that’s something I hadn’t thought of.’

Ark finally realized a problem he hadn’t considered. Even without Roco, there was still Sapjil and Ulmeok left to look after the store. But he felt anxious at the thought of leaving the store to those two. After a lot of education they had become steadier than before, but there was no guarantee that would continue without Roco there. No, Ark’s store was open 24 hours like a convenience store so he couldn’t possibly trust in the two of them.

‘But Roco’s abilities will play an important role in this battle.’

Ark’s recognition of Roco’s skills had changed 180 degrees after the Lancel defensive war. Not only did Illusion Sonata have fantastic strategic value, Roco’s buffs could also be stacked onto hundreds of users. With both Lariette and Roco as rear support, the power of the buffs applied would be huge.

‘Should I leave the store to Sid during the siege?’

Ark considered this. Then Sid jumped with surprise after he talked about it with him.

“What are you saying? Do you think I’m a person without any work to do? I’m a very busy person. As the manager of the foreign division of the Continental Commerce Firm, how can I be seen in a suburban store like this?”

“S-suburban?”

“You should forget about the idea. I helped you with persuading the merchants’ guild but that is it. You should restrain from asking anything more from me at the moment. Because I am someone who also has a lot of work. I can’t just keep taking care of Ark-nim’s problems. Well, that might change if Ark-nim pays me.”

Sid snorted and muttered. Ark’s face became blank from Sid’s reaction. In the past he couldn’t even yawn without Sid flinching. However, Sid’s insubordination was long scheduled. Now Sid had fully occupied a place in Nagaran. As the foreign division manager of the Continental Commerce Firm which had a great deal of large trades, he had already changed to his 2nd profession. And

he collected a huge amount of money. Now Sid no longer needed to flatter Ark anymore.

‘..... So his head has become really big?’

Ark glared at the cheeky hobbit. But Sid had been capture during his weak point so he was different from the three pigs who had been tamed with violence. He couldn’t squeeze Sid like he could the three pig brothers. Furthermore, Sid could also expose some of his internal affairs to the Hermes alliance. If Sid disclosed the circumstances to the Hermes alliance then Ark would be in trouble. Although Sid knew Ark’s character, he had gained confidence recently after realizing how important he was to Ark. Therefore he had no intention of staying at Ark’s store. Ark felt furious at the thought.

‘Unbelievable. Now he is being rebellious? I have to use some excuse in the future to re-educate him. But I can’t pay attention to Sid now. There are bigger problems so I have no choice but to move on. But who can I trust the store to if Sid won’t stay?’

Ark was sighing with frustration when it happened.

“That..... President-nim, there is a visitor for you.”

Ulmeok suddenly appeared on the stairs and spoke.

“Visitor? Who?”

“It is the first time I’ve seen them.....”

Ulmeok answered in a hesitant tone. In the past, Ulmeok wouldn’t have reported the guest to Roco or Ark. But after being caught by Isyuram, he now sought Ark and Roco out to report straight away.

‘Who could be looking for me?’

Ark scratched his head and descended to the 1st floor. When he went down a teenage girl wearing robes was looking around the store. Ark looked at the girl and tilted his head to one side. It was the first time he had seen the girl. Nevertheless, he couldn’t help feeling like the girl was somewhat familiar. It was definitely the first

time he saw her but what was this feeling? What on earth? At that moment, the girl seemed to feel his gaze and turned her head. And she stared at Ark before laughing.

“Ah, I can tell with just one glance. You’re Hyun-woo. No, are you called Ark here?”

Ark was even more confused by the girl’s words. Hyun-woo? Ark? Didn’t that mean the person knew who he was in reality as well as the game? Furthermore, it wasn’t possible to change genders in New World so the person was definitely a woman. However, the only females Ark knew in reality were Roco and Lariette.

“Excuse me..... Who are you?”

The girl became puzzled by Ark’s question. But then she seemed to have realized something and laughed mischievously.

“Let’s see? Who am I?”

“I don’t feel like playing with you.”

“You’re not friendly at all.”

The girl pouted at Ark’s blunt words.

“Oppa who is it?”

Roco had descended and looked at the girl with curiosity. The girl blinked several times before her smile widened.

“Oh, are you Hye-sun? Hohoho, now I know why Hyun-woo plays the game so much. How interesting. This is good.”

“W-who.... Eh?”

Roco stared at the girl before her eyes suddenly widened. Then she ran like a squirrel and embraced the girl. Ark was even more confused by Roco’s reaction. Then the girl looked at Ark and sighed.

“My daughter in law is 100 times better than my child.”

Ark instantaneously felt like cold water had been poured on him. A

cry escaped from Ark's mouth.

"Eek? It can't be, Mother?"

"Who am I if not your mother?"

The teenage girl swelled like a balloon and retorted.

Gathering in Nagaran

“Mother, what’s with that face?”

Ark grumbled as he gave So-mi a strange glance. That’s right. The female inside the shop was So-mi, Ark’s mother. By the way, it was because of that face that Ark committed the sin of not recognizing his mother. When his mother had used New World’s character creation process, she had transformed into a teenage girl.

“Looking young and pretty is never wrong.”

..... That was his mother’s answer.

“Then you managed to manipulate the game’s character creation process.”

“Was it difficult? Don’t you just have to scan an old photo when the message appeared? Scanner? At any rate, when I scanned the photo my character was programmed automatically. Wait? After thinking about it, my feelings are a little hurt. Even if my face degenerated 25 years, how can my son not recognize me? Mother is sad. Even Roco recognized me.”

“I previously saw the album with Mother in it. You looked so pretty that I had to remember.”

“Oh, Roco is also pretty.”

So-mi stroked her head and Roco acted like a cat. Ark had also thought that So-mi’s face was slightly familiar. But how could he remember it from a photo in an old album shoved into the closet?

“I don’t know. Mother just looks like a high school student. It is like a scam.”

Ark pouted while murmuring. However, So-mi ignored it and turned around.

“Who are the people with you? Your friends?”

“Oh, you are Ark’s mother? My name is Bread.”

Bread laughed boldly and approached.

“It must be tough for a beauty like you to raise a monster like Ark.”

“Your fool, this is from a 25 year old photo.”

“Hmm, this guy is still naive. I don’t want to hear such lousy words. Despite it being 25 years ago, the features can still clearly be seen.”

“You’re a good friend. You are called Bread? Please continue spending time with Ark in the future. Despite him being older, that child still doesn’t know things like that.”

“Hohoho, I’ll teach him.”

Bread laughed and hit his chest. Ark sent him a sour look but the atmosphere had become more harmonious because of Bread. But Sapjil and Ulmeok’s faces had fallen. There was a reason for their expressions. They hadn’t had good experiences with the people associated with Ark. Sapjil still had the memory of being beaten by Isyuram, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. Unlike her outer appearance, Roco also had a personality of steel. Therefore in their heads, ‘acquaintances of Ark= dangerous people.’

‘The person who appeared this time is Ark’s mother. Despite being a woman, I can’t be reassured. Wasn’t she the one who created Ark’s personality? If she gets mad and shows her true personality then she might be much scarier than Ark. It would be nice to have a break from swollen eyes.’

Thus the two of them hid in a corner, not even daring to breathe loudly. While they were trembling, Roco suddenly remembered something and asked So-mi.

“But Mother, wasn’t there something you want to give to me a while ago?”

“Ah, that’s right.”

So-mi then took something out of her bag.

“Winter is coming soon. It is interesting that we can even feel the coldness of winter in a game. Hohoho, at first I thought the room was cold and even checked the temperature of the boiler. But it was on its original settings. So I thought of you guys and prepared this. I actually came here because I wanted to give this to you directly.”

The things which emerged from So-mi’s bag were gloves and scarves. But the gloves and scarves were different from the ones found in general stores. The overall shape was similar but the gloves and scarves had flashy patterns on them. When Ark received it, an information window popped up.

-Wool Gloves (4th class product, Deluxe)

Armour type: Gloves (Clothing)

Defense: –

Durability: 40 /40

Weight: 3

User Restriction: –

Gloves made using high quality wool. The gloves are a relatively plain style but it is possible to feel the skill of the craftsman through the simple needlework and neat finish. The particularly noteworthy part is the hand stitched embroidery on the back of the gloves. The precise pattern of the eagle flying will give courage and compassion to the users.

<Sewing Option (S rank completion): Cold resistance +30%, Style+20>

<Embroidery Option (S rank completion): Courage +20>

-Wool Scarf (4th class product, Deluxe)

Armour type: Scarf (Clothing)

Defense: –

Durability: 40 /40

Weight: 4

User Restriction: –

With the ability to wear it as a hood or a scarf, it is a stylish scarf made of wool. The part which goes around the neck is so fluffy and warm that it is possible to feel the meticulous care the creator put into it. In addition, the small eagle design on the end enhances the style. The eagle embroidery is so close to perfect that the person can wear the scarf with pride and courage.

<Sewing Option (S rank completion): Cold resistance +40%, Style+20>

<Embroidery Option (S rank completion): Courage +30>

‘Huk, what is this?’

Ark’s eyes popped out at the information window. The gloves and scarf Ark received had a 4th class ranking. In addition, the sewing option only appeared when the sewing skill reached intermediate. She had only started the game yet So-mi’s sewing skill had already reached intermediate? That was not the only surprise. Gloves and scarves were naturally cold resistant. That was why users bought them during winter. Style was also an option attached to clothing. However the numerical values this time were no joke. Originally the gloves and scarves had an average cold resistance of 15%. But these ones had 30~40%? The cause of this was due to the S rank completion rate. In fact, sewing was a general purpose skill since it was easier to learn than the special production skills like alchemy. It also had a low failure rate. If created roughly than a completion rate of B would come out. But this part which made this skill special was the fact that it was extremely difficult to get a completion rate above A. In order for users to reach a higher proficiency, they needed to create 100 items with an A rank completion so most of them gave up at the advanced level. Yet this wasn’t an A rank product but an S rank!

‘Hasn’t my mother only been playing the game for 3 months? Furthermore, what is this embroidery option? I’ve never seen anything like it.’

The eagle embroidered on the gloves and scarf was marvellous. He had seen clothing dyed different patterns but this was the first time he had seen directly embroidered clothing. And it was also the first time he saw an additional option attached to clothing. No, he hadn’t even imagined it until he saw it. And the additional option added 20~30 courage!

“Do you like it? I’ve checked it several times but this is the embroidery option that people like the most.”

So-mi spoke casually. But it wasn’t something that could be spoken about that casually. It was natural for users to like the courage option. Not only did courage increase resistance to states like ‘fear,’ it also increase damage and attack speed. So the stat was similar to a joker type which could affect different abilities. However, finding courage attached to clothing was extremely rare! Yet So-mi had no idea how big it was that she attached it to gloves and scarves.

“It’s strange, when I embroider the eagle design I fail one in every three attempts.”

‘Oh my god, then she has a 60% chance of attaching this option?’

If other tailors heard So-mi say that so casually then they would’ve been overcome with depression. However, there was another reason Ark was baffled.

“Uh, Mother, this is.....!”

Roco’s eyes shone like a lantern at the unexpected gift. It was an S rank luxury item so of course Roco liked it. The problem was the design of the gloves and scarf! Ark had received blue clothing with red embroidery. Meanwhile Roco’s items were red with blue embroidery. That’s right. Ark and Roco had received a couple set consisting of gloves and scarves.

“Two people who get along should wear things like this. Oh, is it not in style these days? You don’t like it?”

“D-d-don’t like it? Wah, thank you Mother!”

Roco embraced So-mi tightly while trembling. Ark was inwardly uncomfortable but he couldn’t express that. No, these were presents that his mother put effort into making so he couldn’t find fault with them.

‘Isn’t this a pair of gloves and a scarf created by Mother?’

Ark remembered the times in the past when So-mi created a sweater and a scarf for him. When did it stop? It was probably when the sweater and scarves that had a price tag started to look better and cooler than his mother’s. And when did his mother start buying it from the department store instead of making it for him? How did his mother feel then? He felt a strange feeling in his chest as he looked at the gloves and scarf.

‘And seeing Mother acting like a normal person.....’

When So-mi first started the game, she couldn’t even walk but now she had managed to ride a horse to Lancel. After arriving at the store, she had acted like a healthy person. Although it was in a game, seeing So-mi walk around casually caused unspeakable emotions inside him. In fact, his mother didn’t talk about the game with him. It was probably because she wanted to surprise him with this visit.

“Ah, that’s right!”

Then So-mi seemed to remember something and reached back into her bag.

“Actually I’ve also packed things for other people.”

“Other people?”

“Yes, for Detective Gwon and the other rehabilitation members. And these are for your pets. Since they are children you frequently talk about. Give these to the children. I’ve heard about their sizes from Roco so it should fit.”

“You even made some for my summons?”

Ark looked on with amazement as countless wool clothes emerged. For JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members, she had prepared 11 sets of gloves and scarves. There were also gloves and scarves for Racard, Razak and Radun. So-mi also knew that Radun had different forms.

'It's worked out well. If my summons collect enough points then I can just give them this.'

That was Ark's thought as So-mi also gave some gloves and scarves to Bread and Sid.

"I didn't know you two were here so they aren't personalized to you."

"Eh? We also get some?"

"Please continue getting along with Ark in the future."

"Thank you!"

"Ohh, absolutely thank you!"

Bread and Sid cheered as they also received gloves and scarves. Meanwhile, Sapjil and Ulmeok who were in the corner continuously sent So-mi envious looks.

"What are you doing? I also have some for you two."

"Huh? F-for us?"

"I asked Roco. Didn't you two support Ark a lot in the store? You're Sapjil and Ulmeok aren't you? I've prepared things for you as well."

"Mother, you don't have to bother giving those guys anything."

Ark murmured in a testy tone. Even though the clothes were classified as low price items, it was already late fall. It was the season where gloves and scarves were popular. With these types of options, he could receive 5 gold from them. Aside from JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members, he thought it was fair that such expensive items were given to Bread and Sid for free. But he had to say something when those guys who received a monthly salary were about to receive some. Then So-mi frowned and said.

“Why are you acting so mean? A person shouldn’t act like that. Aren’t they people as well? You should treat the people close to you better.”

So-mi then sighed and spoke in a soft voice towards Sapjil and Ulmeok.

“Don’t mind him. I’ll apologize instead.”

“.....!”

Sapjil and Ulmeok’s eyes widened. Roco, JusticeMan, Isyuram, the rehabilitation members, even Bread and Redian..... All the people surrounding Ark had bad personalities. But So-mi was different. She treated them like humans! Not only was she a pretty girl, despite actually being 25 years older, but she protected the pigs and even prepared handmade gifts for them. Sapjil and Ulmeok shed tears as they received the gloves and scarves.

“Ohhhh, to give such items to us.....!”

“Thank you. Can I call you Mother?”

“No, please let us call you that!”

“Tsk tsk, your feelings seemed to have been damaged in the meantime but don’t worry. I will punish Ark severely.”

“We’ll swear allegiance to Mother!”

Sapjil and Ulmeok cried out without hesitation. Ark sent the two pigs a sour look.

“Sheesh! Those children are really playing around. How dare those pigs call her Mother?”

Then something popped into Ark’s head like lightning. If Roco left the store then it would be in a pinch without a store manager. While So-mi came to visit Ark and Roco in Lancel, she had no thought about roaming around. Then couldn’t she look after the store for a while? So-mi still lacked experience in the game but in reality she was playing in the room next to Ark’s. Her lack of experience wasn’t a problem since she could consult him anytime. Since Ark was the

Lord of Lancel, having her there would be 100 times better than her being in a beginner village. Sapjil and Ulmeok immediately responded to Ark's suggestion.

"Wow, Mother as the manager?"

"Great! Okay! Please accept it!"

So-mi thought for a while before smiling and nodding.

"Well, okay. I can also sell the things I made in the store. Sapjil, Ulmeok, please look after me well."

"Yes!"

The pigs shouted with joy. Just like that the problem of Ark's store manager was solved. Ark explained the basic operations of the store to So-mi. Then he told her proudly that he had become the Lord of Lancel. Although So-mi didn't understand the details about the Lordship, she was satisfied as she confirmed the residents had a good impression of Ark.

"It seems you are doing well so I'm glad. Don't worry about the store and leave it to me."

Ark didn't mention that he was going to lead troops to recapture Silvana. Even if it was a game, his mother wouldn't like the thought of him going to war. Anyway, Ark solved the problem of the store manager with So-mi's appearance and headed towards the square with the group. The troops that finished Bread's hell training had already gathered at the square.

'Okay, now there are no more problems.'

Ark looked around Lancel village. He had controlled all the work he needed to do as the Lord. Ark also left the person he trusted the most in charge of the store. Of course, the most important part of gathering the necessary troops still remained but everything else was finished.

"Okay, let's go!"

Ark shouted as he rode on Radun and pointed to Nagaran. At the

same time, the 1,000 troops from Bristania under the command of Redian and the 2,000 troops under Shambala's command all departed towards Seutandal. Ark's expedition to reclaim Silvana had begun!

".....?"

The old person who looked like a bull blinked his round eyes.

"W-what the, you?"

"What is it? Did you forget? Didn't I just meet you yesterday?"

"No, that's not it..... In just one day..... That is ridiculous!"

The old man waved his hand and shouted. The old man's reaction was natural. The old man had numerous scars from wounds on his face. The old man was actually a retired merchant. From his appearance it was clear that he wasn't an ordinary merchant. He would even deceive a dragon if it meant delivering his package. This old man was called Kuronil. That's right. He was the legendary merchant who would run through dungeons, rampaging monsters or battlefields where there was a shower of arrows if it was for business. He was Kuronil. At the peak of his fame, people would say that 'he would catch a dragon if someone gave him money.' But that was already in the past. After becoming old, Kuronil had retired to the Hamong territory in Nagaran to reminisce on his old life. Even if he retired, he had built a manor with his money and lived without any worries but.....

Despite his brilliant life, Kuronil regretted one thing. As a young man, he had been too busy for a successor. So Kuronil started looking for a successor with experience and knowledge through the merchant's guild. Yesterday evening, one man visited with an introduction from the merchant's guild.

"I have to look at every candidate they send me....."

Kuronil cried out with petulance. Kuronil was looking for a certain type of merchant for my successor. However, the person who

appeared with the letter of introduction had a physique where all his ribs were apparent.

“Why did they send me someone like him? Didn’t I explain the minimum requirements to the merchant’s guild? Did this guy really meet the criteria? Sheesh, it’s obvious that there’s some mistake. But I can’t send him away as he has the letter of recommendation.....”

Kuronil muttered in an irritated voice.

“I won’t speak long words. Do you want to be my heir?”

“Yes.”

“Sheesh, you’re good at answering. Okay. The method to become my successor is easy. You just need to pass one test. There is a small cave near my house. You should find something inside the cave.”

“Eh? It is that simple?”

“Simple?”

Kuronil laughed at the man’s reaction.

‘Bah, you foolish fellow. If it is that simple then I would’ve already found a successor. I spent a great deal of money making the obstacles in that cave. So far dozens of people have tried it but they only ended up reaching halfway. Someone was stuck at the entrance for a month and cried when he came back. You will also come back crying.’

“Ahh, it is simple. Then go and see for yourself.”

Kuronil found it troublesome to explain so he just sent the man to the cave. And he deleted the man from his memory. He didn’t think the man was worth worrying about. But the man he deleted from his memory had returned again.

‘What the, this guy? He’s already given up? He must have no talent to abandon it so quickly.’

“The road to return is there.”

Kuronil didn't even bother talking and just pointed towards the city. The man tilted his head to one side and asked with confusion.

“Huh? Does it just end like this when I pass the test?”

“Pass the test? W-what are you saying?”

“Didn't I bring you the goods?”

“What, what the?”

Kuronil flinched and turned his head. The man flashed the item. It was a piggy bank. No, to be exact the item Kuronil stashed in the cave was the 'Bold Golden Pigs.' Kuronil looked at the gold pig with disbelieving eyes and grabbed the man's collar before shouting.

“H-how did you.....? This guy, what on earth did you do?”

“I just entered the examination room and took it out?”

“You just entered and took it out? Then the tests didn't work?”

“Tests? Did you mean the 3~4 strange wooden dolls? Well, I hit it and it broke. Ah, was I not allowed to do that?”

“It broke when you hit it?”

Kuronil couldn't understand so he ran towards the cave. The man's words were true. The remains of the smashed wooden dolls were scattered around the cave. The even more amazing thing was when the man rummaged through the remains of the doll.

“It's a pretty interesting toy. It was a little short so I feel a bit regretful.....”

The man smacked his lips together with a regretful expression. Kuronil looked at the man blankly before he realized he didn't even know his name.

“W-who are you?”

“Me? I am called Isyuram.”

The man grinned and replied. Yes, that person was Isyuram. Isyuram had received the quest after selling the stolen goods from the branch manager of the merchant's guild. The quest was to meet the legendary merchant Kuronil and become his heir. Isyuram was actually worried about completing the quest.

'Ark said it is likely to be a change profession quest so wouldn't it be really hard? If it is a merchant's profession quest then obviously it will deal with making money.....'

Isyuram was a level 300 merchant but he hadn't really engaged in business yet on his own. The fact that he managed to gain 11,028 gold as profit was just due to luck. If Isyuram had to do something like that again then the quest would be impossible. But fortunately Kuronil's test was simple clearing a dungeon.

'I'm glad it isn't to do with trading but it is impossible for a change profession quest to be simple. Does a monster live in the cave? Sheesh, that won't be good.....'

If the quest required beating a boss monster then it would be too hard. It didn't matter if Isyuram was a level 300 or 400 merchant. It wasn't even easy for him to deal with general monsters alone. But an unexpected message appeared when Isyuram entered the cave.

-You have entered the Cave of Trials

The Cave of Trials is a place where the user's abilities are tested. When a challenger enters the Cave of Trials, all stats will be set at a certain amount and skills will be blocked. All weapons and armour will also be invalidated. You will have to depend on your techniques, senses and reflexes to pass the test. There is no time limit or restrictions on the amount of attempts. But if you die during the test then the death penalty will be applied. If you give up the challenge then your lost abilities will be restored.

* Equipment dismantled, skills are blocked, the level is fixed and consumables are prohibited.

* Strength, Agility, Stamina, Intelligence, Wisdom and Luck are fixed at 100.

‘Eh? What is this?’

If other users saw that message then they would be unwilling. But after reading the information window, Isyuram cheered instead. All stats were fixed at 100 with the equipment and skills blocked. In other words, wasn't this the best conditions for Isyuram? In this condition, the only thing needed was the users' combat capabilities! And it was unnecessary to explain again but Isyuram's occupation was the captain of the police's SWAT team. His combat skills were top class!

‘I don't understand, but if the test is like this then I have confidence!’

Isyuram jumped into the Cave of Trials without any hesitation. There was no need to explain after that. When he entered the pitch black cave, 3~4 wooden dolls instantly began attacking Isyuram. If an ordinary user had entered the cave then they would be turned into a bloody rag. But the opponent was Isyuram. He had experience fighting against dozens of gangsters in the darkness. Obviously he was capable of receiving the attacks in the Cave of Trials. No matter how realistic it was, New World was still a game. Even if he was stabbed with a sword, he wouldn't really die. After experiencing real threats to his life, this degree of difficulty was only like a joke to him. No, it was even easier than when he fought against monsters with a merchant's body.

‘What the? Why do they feel so weak?’

Since Isyuram was a merchant, the monsters wouldn't receive a lot of damage even when he attacked the weak point. However, everybody who challenged the Cave of Trials was in the same state. In other words, Isyuram was able to deal as much damage as a warrior when he hit the wooden dolls. So Isyuram felt like the Cave of Trials was a lot easier than fighting monsters outside. In fact, Isyuram was totally unaware that dozens of merchants had challenged Kuronil's test. But most of them gave up when they couldn't even pass one checkpoint. To be honest, what normal user could pass the test where wooden dolls attacked in the darkness? Additionally, most users who chose a merchant had no experience in

battle. So Kuronil's test was impossible for merchants. That's right. This was the reason why the quest had a difficulty of +A.

'This is a good place to train the children.'

On the other hand, Isyuram was just thinking about the possibility of training there. It was natural. Even if it had a high level of difficulty, what SWAT team member wouldn't be able to pass the test? Thanks to that, Isyuram passed all checkpoints and even destroyed the huge robot at the final checkpoint before grabbing the golden pig.

"Honestly, this test is really difficult for a merchant!"

Kuronil exclaimed after hearing Isyuram's explanation. Then his attitude changed 180 degrees and he grabbed Isyuram's hands.

"I've really despaired of the merchant's these days. The merchants today are mistaken. A merchant is not a weak existence. We have to be strong to defend our property from the warriors. If the merchants are stronger than the warriors then we can maintain our money. That is the way of a real merchant taught to me by my master....."

Kuronil started a heated lecture.

'The way of a real merchant', 'following in the footsteps of the senior merchants', 'must be prepared to do things as a merchant', 'future of a merchant' and so on. He found Kuronil's chattering more difficult than the Cave of Trials. So 30 minutes passed like that.

"..... Now do you understand?"

When Kuronil's lecture was over, an information window appeared in front of Isyuram.

-You have received information from the retired merchant Kuronil about a 'Battle Merchant'.

Therefore you've earned the right to change to the dual profession 'Battle Merchant.'

A dual profession is like a magic warrior or archer who has two attributes at the same time. Having two attributes halves the available skills but it has endless possibilities depending on the way

it is utilized. In other words, it can be a great or incompetent profession depending on how it is raised.

A 'Battle Merchant' has the dual properties of a fighter and merchant. Thanks to the nature of the profession, a bonus won't be applied to any business dealings unless it involves weapons or armour. Instead, it is possible to acquire battle skills unique to a Battle Merchant. When hunting, the penalty to power will be reduced by 50%. However, a penalty of 50% will be applied to the experience received from the trading of goods instead.

Would you like to change your profession?

"Ooh!"

Isyuram felt completely refreshed after the boring lecture. Like Ark said, it was indeed a profession change quest. And it wasn't an ordinary profession but a dual profession! Isyuram's eyes lit up at the description for Battle Merchant. His gaze focused on the part where Isyuram could learn combat skills! In fact, Isyuram had recently been worried about New World.

'Don't the battles become harder as the level increases?'

When the level rose then everything was stronger. It was natural since this was a trick of the game publishers. Anyone who played a game had experienced it. Hunting a level 1 and level 100 was completely different. It was common sense for hunting at level 1 to be more difficult. But in fact, hunting at level 100 was the more difficult experience. That's because the monsters became stronger as the level increased. The reason why users could fight against those monsters was because they received various skills and additional stats. But Isyuram was a merchant so even if his level increased, Isyuram would obtain any additional battle skills or stats. So he felt like he was actually becoming weaker as his level increased. It was the thing he was most doubtful about.

'But now I can learn combat skills and the penalty has decreased by 50%.....!'

Of course, the merchant's ability decreased at the same time but he had no interest in business anyway. It wasn't a problem he had to think about.

"Change! Change!"

After Isyuram changed professions, a new skills list appeared. The combat skills and merchant skills were listed separately. After being in the game for 1 year, he had finally learnt some combat skills. Isyuram was impatient to test out the new skills. Then he suddenly remembered Ark's words.

"That's right! Isn't Ark also coming to Nagaran? Silvana is not that far away. It is good. Testing the combat skills on users is the best. I'll have to visit and tell him to add me to the siege. Huhuhu, just wait!"

So Isyuram ran like the wind towards Silvana.

Dark Eden's Second Coming

[TL Note] I've changed the skill proficiency levels to Beginner-Intermediate- Advanced- High Grade- Master. So the previous Master has been changed to High Grade. I've fixed the ones I found in previous chapters but please let me know if I've missed one.

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

Isyuram ran as quick as lightning when he finished his profession change quest. The place he was running to had 1,000 troops marching. Since there was no flag or insignias, the large variety of people was a troop of users. But there was one person full of individuality. He was a black wolf moving on a large lizard at the head of the group! That's right. It was Ark who had transformed into Dark Wolf.

"You really gathered 1,000 troops in three days....."

Bread said as he looked at Ark.

"You don't understand the circumstances."

"What don't I understand?"

Ark laughed and remembered a few days ago.

"I'm sure a lot of people already know why I came here. This is New World. Like me, everybody is enthusiastic about the game. This is a large continent where you can go around freely and live with NPCs. But now some people are trying to mess up the balance of New World. We have to win against the people who want to steal what belongs to others!"

A few days ago, Ark had transformed himself into Dark Wold and shouted towards hundreds of users in Selebrid square.

“The damage right now might be minimal but if they become stronger than the users would no doubt suffer. I can’t forgive them. As a player in New World, I can’t afford to let the balance break. And that is not possible without your help. Please. Please help me!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

“Dark Wolf is finally moving!”

“Okay, I will enter the war to protect New World’s peace!”

The users gathered in the square cheered at Ark’s speech ended.

‘Huhuhu, it is a success!’

Ark looked at the supporters and laughed. But this reaction wasn’t just because of Ark’s fame. To be precise, it was the result of the work Ark implemented while he was in Lancel. Ark built his plan on gathering 1,000 users from Schudenberg but it wasn’t 100% certain that he would succeed. Ark wasn’t naive enough to think that users would unconditionally support him if he was famous. Of course, he had already secured 1,000 users from Bristania and 700 users from Seutandal. But to be correct, those users weren’t supporting Ark. While they were influenced by Ark’s fame, the users from Bristania gathered because of Bread and Redian while the users from Seutandal followed because of JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members.

‘Redian and JusticeMan were friendly with the users for a long time which is how they were able to gather 1,700 users in a short period. But I’m in a different position. I can’t misunderstand. Dark Wolf might be famous but he has no connections.’

Ark clearly knew that. Besides, this battle was different from the Lancel defensive war. This time the bad guys weren’t attacking first. Therefore it could be considered an unnecessary battle. Even if he was famous, the users wouldn’t like it if he suddenly talked about fighting the Hermes guild. No, it was likely they would get a bad impression of him like they did Alan.

“He thinks he can do anything just because he appeared on TV?”

Ark assumed that he would sometimes hear things like that after becoming famous. This was what Ark was anxious about. Once they became famous, a celebrity would receive followers and jealousy at the same time. It was because of this that Alan was in an unrecoverable position after making one mistake.

‘It’s not as bad as Alan but I’ve reached a dangerous stage. If I use my fame too excessively then I won’t be able to gather enough troops.’

Moreover, the minimum level to fight against the Hermes guild was 250. Ark didn’t have a network of users so it wasn’t easy to gather 1,000 of them. So Ark seeded some plans when he became determined to retake Silvana. It started with the TV.

– (Voice Modulation) Lancel’s NPC: *The bad people attacked the village and my father died. They are really bad people. My father didn’t do anything wrong..... Sob sob sob.*

– (Voice Modulation) User who participated in the Lancel defensive war: *Ah, it really sucks. In fact, I had received a quest from the Haruna campsite. It was at 80% but the bandit group attacked and I ended up failing. From the viewpoint of the person who was played with, I’m furious. But I’m not the only one who suffered from this in the game.*

The Dark Wolf broadcast on the game exclusive news was more like a documentary this time. The title was ‘Wounds left by the Lancel Defensive War.’ Ark went around Lancel and filmed NPCs and users who had been damaged by the war. In particular, the scene of a little NPC girl stirred the users’ compassion. At the end of the broadcast, a scene of Dark Wolf muttering with a pained expression was shown.

“The battle is won but not everything has ended. No amount of compensation can heal the wounds of the residents and users. I can’t forgive them. The ones who attacked the village are in jail but their ringleaders are still watching and laughing. As long as those guys are out there, it can happen to anyone!”

While the broadcast didn’t specifically mention the Hermes guild, all

the users who heard the rumours knew who Ark was referring to. Thus the users started blaming the Hermes alliance for the Lancel defensive war again. It was the reason why Ark produced the documentary. He suddenly became a celebrity so he was bound to receive jealousy. But if Ark gave them a clear enemy to hate then the situation would be different. Since then, the users' anger concentrated on the Hermes guild.

'Now it is an opportunity!'

Ark changed the feelings of jealousy to anger towards the Hermes alliance! Then he concentrated their sympathies on the NPCs in Lancel. It reached the point that merchants travelling to Giran and Selebrid spread rumours that the Hermes alliance was behind the bandit group. Thus the users supported Ark's idea to go and directly punish the Hermes alliance. The Hermes guild was thoroughly branded as evil both offline and online after Ark had increased the atmosphere of indignation.

'But that is not my only goal.'

That's right. There were two reasons why Ark spent all that time and effort. One was to avoid the jealous looks and create an atmosphere where troops can be collected. And the second reason was to isolate the Hermes alliance. Since Ark was gathering troops from Giran, the Hermes alliance would soon discover that Ark was planning to attack Silvana. Naturally the Hermes alliance would prepare its own forces.

'The Hermes alliance is pushed into a corner. They have to gain an overwhelming victory in this battle to show their power. So of course they would scrape into their funds.'

Then the competition of resources would start. No matter how bankrupt they were, the Hermes alliance would have to gather a lot more troops than Ark. Currently Ark had 4,300 users and NPCs. That was the limit. Meanwhile, the Hermes alliance exceeded 5,000 people. He was already inferior. Yet if the Hermes alliance added a few thousand more troops then they could definitely win.

'But this time the Hermes alliance has incurred the users' opposition!'

In such a situation, there were no players that would want to help the Hermes guild. They would be treated as villains if they sided with the Hermes guild. Of course, they could hire NPC mercenaries from Nagaran. While the mercenaries had good skills and abilities that could be taken advantage of in a siege, their employment cost was high compared to users.

‘The Hermes alliance already has serious financial problems. While they could pay users for the help, the NPCs are risking their lives so they need more payment. With the Hermes alliance’s limited funds, they can only hire a few hundred people at most.’

That was Ark’s real purpose. After Ark manipulated the information and changed the users’ jealousy towards anger at the Hermes alliance, he had limited the amount of troops they could hire. That’s right. The siege warfare had already started before he even departed from Lancel village. Bread hadn’t realized that and was really astonished.

“You really are fearful as an enemy.”

“Then you should continue to be my friend.”

“Why does that sound like a threat?”

“It is your imagination.”

Ark showed his teeth and laughed. Then Racard who was sitting on his shoulders picked his nostrils and muttered.

“Che, by the way his is quite a boring place. Before it used to give off the sweet smell of blood while now it only smells like soil.”

“Well, I don’t know if it was good but the atmosphere has certainly changed.”

Ark nodded and looked around. When he came to Nagaran in the past, there were countless battles taking place. But this time he couldn’t even see a single battle. The number of guilds in Nagaran had also decreased. No, to be exact all the small guilds were absorbed into the alliances. In addition, the powers inside Nagaran were settled so there were no more small scale battles. In the past

the Lordships used to change but recently there were almost no fluctuations. Despite there being 12 different castles in Nagaran, some Lordships changed once a month. And the 5 major powers in Nagaran had already occupied their estates for 1 year.

‘And the Hermes alliance is one of those 5 powers. They are an alliance which has maintained the territory for more than 1 year. They might be weakened but they’re not an easy opponent.’

“Can we really win?”

Roco asked anxiously. Ark looked at Roco before replying in a low voice.

“I have to win. No, I will win.”

Then Roco looked at him and laughed.

“Oppa is wonderful in reality but he is even cooler in New World. The form of a wolf also isn’t bad.”

“Saying that all of a sudden.....”

“Hehehe.”

Roco laughed and folded her arms.

“Why are you saying that? There are other people as well.”

“What’s wrong? Bread oppa, are you envious?”

“Yes that’s right, I’m envious. Ah, I really want to see my lady Redian.”

Bread sighed and grumbled.

“Silvana castle!”

Then the voice of a scout could be heard from the hill ahead. Ark raised his head and exclaimed.

“Radun!”

Pa pa pa pa, pa pa pa pa!

Radun rushed forward at tremendous speed. Then a voice filled with emotion flowed out after he climbed the hill.

“Silvana!”

He looked at the territory spread out underneath him. It was Silvana, the estate he had left behind a long time ago! But the Silvana in front of him was different from what Ark remembered. The few buildings which used to be scattered along the farmland was much more diverse and widespread. Thanks to the long-term rule of the Hermes alliance, the territory had become stable. And in the centre of the territory was a huge castle! The size of the castle had doubled since Ark had been the Lord. The walls were much thicker and the various defense facilities couldn't be compared to before. The castle's appearance gave off a dignified feeling these days.

‘The castle changed to a C rating so naturally it would look different.’

Out of the 12 estates in Nagaran, only 5 had been promoted to a C rank. It was the 5 powers who controlled Nagaran. In other words, the alliance had to control the territory for at least 10 months before they could increase the rating. It was probably because they poured enormous amounts of money and time into developing the estate.

“The estate you developed..... I'll soon eat it with this body!”

Ark who had transformed into Dark Wolf murmured in a tone that really sounded like a wolf. Despite the atmosphere, he couldn't seize it first. Since he had gathered the troops faster than expected, there were still several days until the prearranged date of the siege. Bread who had also climbed the hill looked at the surroundings and said.

“The other troops still haven't arrived?”

“They contacted me just then and said they had just passed the border so they should arrive soon. Bread, please wait here and reorganize the troops when the support army arrives. In the meantime I'm going to visit Sid at the Continental Commerce Firm.”

“Huhuhu, you came. Follow me.”

Sid said as he walked forward. In fact Ark really didn't like his

attitude. But he needed the hobbit's help so he had to endure the conceited attitude.

'Damn, he'll see after the siege ends!'

"Ark, welcome!"

Wolkosu and Lorenzo ran up to him as he arrived.

"I received word and was waiting for you. My decision has been made already."

Wolkosu grabbed Ark's hands and said. At one time he was just an NPC of a small store in Cairo and now he was the president of the Continental Commerce Firm in Nagaran. He was clearly promoted a few times more than Sid. However, the arrogance in the hobbit was completely absent from Wolkosu. Unlike a user who could easily change their attitudes, a NPC wouldn't easily change their attitude once there was a high degree of intimacy. Once again, that was the reason why he trusted NPCs more than users. But Ark didn't have time to enjoy the reunion with Wolkosu.

"Are the things I requested ready?"

"Of course, I used the full resources of the Continental Commerce Firm and only selected high quality products."

Wolkosu guided Ark to a warehouse. All the items he had requested were piled up like a mountain in the warehouse. Magic arrows and whetstones, scrolls, dolls etc. It was the necessary supplies for a siege.

"Thank you for the trouble."

Ark nodded as he scanned through the list of items.

"What are you saying? It is because of you that my son and I can live comfortably. I honestly wanted to give you these items for free. But I can't do that so I used my discretion to give you the good stuff."

"That will be enough."

Ark answered with a laugh. There was a reason Ark purchased the military supplies through Wolkosu. In New World, despite being the same price the items could have different performances. A typical example was the potions produced by the Seirun workshop in Ciel. Even though they were the same price, the Seirun potions healed approximately 100~150 more health than normal recovery potions. The same thing applied to the magic arrows and the whetstones. So he had used the vast information network of the Continental Commerce Firm and had them only buy the best goods. Moreover, Ark's store already did some wholesale dealings with the Continental Commerce Firm. When he used the system of trading through the store, it was possible to buy the items for 30% cheaper.

‘But even so.....’

He sighed as he looked at the number at the bottom of the list. The price of the military supplies he ordered was 23,000 gold! 70% of his military funds had disappeared just from buying the military supplies. His heart really felt pained from paying such an astronomical amount.

‘This is only the beginning.’

Once again, this siege was a war for justice. If the siege succeeded then Ark could finally become the Lord of Silvana. If one person profited from the entire battle then there was bound to be complaints. So if the siege succeeded then he would have to pay a participation fee to the users.

‘Well that problem can be left until after I become the Lord.’

His head was already throbbing before he even won. But it didn't matter. He was going to reclaim Silvana even if he had to die. Ark clenched his teeth tightly and paid the price for the military supplies.

“Here.”

“I hope you win.”

Ark received Wolkosu's encouragement and exited the Continental Commerce Firm. After loading the goods onto a rental carriage, he

returned to the campsite where several people ran towards him.

“Hahaha! Ark, hyung-nim has arrived!”

It was JusticeMan and the rehabilitation brothers.

“It’s been a while..... Hasn’t it?”

Redian who had also arrived at a similar time laughed and waved. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members also smiled and waved at Shambala and Redian. They had already greeted each other so there was no need for Ark to introduce each of them. Ark suddenly flinched and looked around. He finally found Lariette among the rehabilitation members.

“Oppa, did your visit go well?”

When he looked at Lariette, Roco instantly ran out and grabbed his arm. Then Lariette looked at the couple scarves around Ark and Roco’s neck and smiled bitter sweetly before looking away. While Ark was puzzled by Lariette’s expression, Roco’s grip on his arm tightened. When he turned around, Roco’s expression seemed like she was close to tears.

‘There’s something wrong!’

Ark intuitively sensed. It was clear that something occurred between the two of them when he wasn’t here. What was it? Ark felt a strange sense of misgiving. In fact, Ark had carefully clarified his feelings before coming here. And his heart had already somewhat settled down. Ark thought his feelings for Lariette were one-sided so he had no problems organizing it. That’s why he thought about having a serious conversation with Lariette when he saw her. He wanted to get along with her so he didn’t want to become a cowardly type of person. If he told his feelings clearly then it could start unravelling and maybe newer, friendly feelings would begin. Ark carefully withdrew the arm that Roco had grabbed. However he didn’t head towards Lariette.

‘Someday..... But now’s not the time!’

Ark drew in a deep breath as he looked at the bottom of the hill. The

3,000 troops from Bristania and Seutandal were gathered underneath the hill. And the users Ark had gathered along with the Lancel troops numbered 1,300 people! That was a total of 4,300 people! That's right. Now wasn't the time to worry about feelings! He had to concentrate all his energies on recapturing Silvana.

"Bread, is the organization of the troops finished?"

"Huh? Ah yes, I've divided the troops according to their specialities. Now all we have to do it register the troops."

Bread replied with surprise as he had noticed the subtle atmosphere.

"Okay, then I'll go finish the registration as quickly as possible."

Despite gathering 4,300 people, they weren't a guild so they could only register as units. In order to register, Ark had divided the troops into 20 units. Now the only thing left was to send a declaration of war to the Hermes guild! Ark headed towards the Shrine of War with a determined expression.

"I have to go....."

Sid approached and suddenly said.

"What are you talking about? You came all the way here and now you want to leave?"

"That's what I said. Like Ark-nim knows, I am a person who runs business deals here. If I participate in the battle and the Hermes alliance wins then it will be difficult for me to do business with them."

"What the, what are you saying?" Wasn't I the one who got you that position?"

"Ah I don't know. I'm a businessman so I have to consider these options. If I can't engage in business here anymore then Ark-nim will also be troubled. It will all be in vain if I have to leave the Continental Commerce Firm."

'This brat really.....!'

Fire burned in Ark's eyes at Sid's words. But was anything Sid said wrong? Ark pouted his lips. He really wanted to beat up that face. However he couldn't say that his words were wrong. During a siege, there was quite a few things for merchants to do including managing the supplies. The reason Ark hadn't recruited any merchants was because he had thought of entrusting the work to Sid. But if he suddenly withdrew then how could he get a merchant to replace him? No, why didn't he mention it before when they were talking about the siege?

'I can't stand it anymore!'

Ark's patience towards Sid's impertinence suddenly broke. Just as he was about to start his mental training.

"Ark!"

When he turned around, someone was running towards the hill at a tremendous speed. Ark's face became astonished as he saw the face of the person rapidly approaching.

"Eh? Teacher?"

"Huk huk huk, I feel like dying. Anyway, I'm glad I'm not too late."

The person who appeared like the wind was Isyuram. Ark looked at him with a bewildered expression and asked.

"What is going on? Weren't you going to Hamong castle? Did you fail?"

Even if the profession change quest is short, it should still take longer than a week. Isyuram had started four days before Ark but he had used the Letter Movement so it should've only taken him two days to reach Hamong. Since there was a magic tower in both cities then it made no sense to walk to Selebrid from Giran. The only thing he could think was that Isyuram had abandoned the quest when he failed and headed towards Silvana. But Isyuram just laughed with a proud expression.

"Fail? Huhuhu, there is no way I can fail. I already finished it."

“Already? Then it wasn’t a profession change quest?”

“It was.”

“Huh? Then you completed a profession change quest in a few days?”

“It took one day in game time so to be exact it was 8 hours.”

Isyuram arrogantly stretched his neck and said.

“Frankly, it was the most interesting quest I’ve done in the entire time I’ve played the game.”

Isyuram proudly tried to explain the quest contents. Then JusticeMan approached and interrupted.

“Ark, who is this? You called him Teacher.....”

“Ah, is this the first time you’ve seen him?”

When Ark tried to explain, Isyuram hurriedly jumped and blocked Ark’s mouth. He studied JusticeMan’s face before whispering in a low voice.

“I-idiot. Have you forgotten that I’ve currently a part of an infiltration investigation?”

“Huh? But.....”

“No. The investigation still hasn’t ended. If a lot of people know my character’s name then how can I investigate later? I’ll explain it to Gwon hyung-nim later so let’s just leave it for the moment.”

Like Isyuram said, it wasn’t a good time to explain everything. Ark nodded and said.

“This person is my teacher from my previous taekwondo school.

“I am called Isyuram.”

Isyuram carefully introduced himself.

“But why did you come here?”

“Oh, you told me that you were heading towards Nagaran for a war. I came to participate.”

“Huh? But you’re a merchant.”

“That’s right. However I’m no longer an ordinary merchant. I’m.....”

Isyuram who was smiling slowly narrowed his eyes. He saw Sid and gazed at him for a while. Sid also tilted his head to one side as he became interested in Isyuram. Then the two people shouted at the same time.

“Ah! You’re the hobbit who cheated me in Giran!”

“Ah! You’re that stupid person who I scammed in Giran..... Hik!”

Sid screamed before he freaked out and shut his mouth. That’s right. Sid and Isyuram had met once a long time ago. Isyuram had saved Sid from some monsters. But Sid forgot the favour and scammed Isyuram before running away. Thanks to that, Isyuram hadn’t been able to sleep well because of his resentment. Isyuram’s face became dark as he remembered the past.

“Huhuhu, to meet an old enemy like this after such a long time. When I think about everything I suffered from your scam.....”

“What are you saying? Do you know Sid?”

“What? You know that hobbit?”

“Huh? That.....”

Ark was about to reply when he noticed the strange atmosphere. Sid who had slowly turned pale looked horror stricken and ran away. No, he tried to run away. Isyuram’s hand shot out and grabbed Sid. He dragged Sid back and said to Ark.

“Let’s talk later after I take care of some business.”

“Hik, Ark-nim, save me!”

Sid struggled and screamed. However Ark just looked at a distant mountain and pretended ignorance.

‘I don’t know what happened but judging from Sid’s expression, he is definitely the one who made the mistake.’

Even if that wasn’t the case, he had just been about to re-educate Sid. There was no reason for him to stop it and help Sid.

“Hey, you.....”

“Leave it. Teacher isn’t the type to do things without a reason. He must’ve been truly wronged by Sid.”

Ark stood in front of the rehabilitation members who had tried to interrupt. Then Sid shouted in a tearful voice.

“I was wrong! I admit it so please save me! I didn’t collect even 1 copper of the money I cheated from him! Do you remember the Unicorn’s Horn? I ended up paying that money to Ark!”

“Let’s see? Do I remember something like that?”

Ark pretended ignorance and turned his back to Sid. Sid opened his mouth to say something else but he was dragged into a dark place. Sid’s ensuing scream of distress echoed throughout the place.

“Aaaaaaack!”

Sid’s screams were like music to the annoyed Ark.

“Ark, are you just going to leave it like this? Well, I don’t know what’s going on.”

JusticeMan murmured in a concerned voice.

“Yes, I suppose I’ll end it here.”

Ark smiled and walked towards the site of the violence. When he entered a place surrounded by thick bushes and rocks, he could see Isyuram instantly. But he couldn’t see Sid at all. Sid had been so beaten up by Isyuram then he resembled a bloody lifeform. When Ark appeared, Sid who had been like a corpse got up and grabbed the hem of his pants.

“Sob sob sob. Ark-nim, save me! That person isn’t human!”

“What? This bastard.....!”

“Hik. S-s-save me!”

Ark looked at Sid and sighed before saying.

“I don’t know what happened but Teacher won’t stop without my orders. Well, it would be different if a merchant who was in charge of the military supplies died. Isn’t that right?”

Sid withered up as he figured out the answer Ark wanted. Then he frantically nodded and replied.

“Yes, yes, I’ll do it! I’ll do whatever you want! I’ll work hard!”

“Damn, it can’t be helped.”

Isyuram glared at Sid lying on the ground and said.

“You seem important to Ark this time so I’ll leave it like this for now. But be wary. If I notice you doing anything else bad then it won’t end like this. I’ll chase you to the end of hell! Do you understand?”

“Yes yes, I’ll keep it in mind!”

Sid trembled while lying on the ground as he replied. Ark thought that Sid’s reaction was slightly exaggerated. Even if he had been hit for 10 minutes, this was just a game. Well, his appearance was so horrible that he looked like a zombie but Sid would only feel the pain as static electricity. Why was he making such a fuss over something like that? But there was something Ark didn’t know about Isyuram. Recently Isyuram started to realize he was different from other users. When Isyuram broke his arm then he really felt it but other users didn’t feel that pain. He just couldn’t understand why there were such differences. Anyway, when dealing with users Isyuram always hit the vital spots since it could still cause them a large pain. If he did that as a member of the SWAT team then people would complain that Isyuram was abusing his power. Humans couldn’t stand the pain of having their vital spots hit, but since the users only felt a static shock then it wasn’t like he was torturing them.

‘Anyway, thanks to him the trouble of re-educating Sid is over.’

Ark smirked as he looked at Sid.

“To go so far……!”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members’ eyes widened as they saw Sid’s state. Thus Isyuram planted an intense impression in the people of Ark’s group.

“Now I’m going to the Shrine of War to apply for the siege.”

Ark headed towards the Shrine of War like nothing was wrong.

“I came to apply for participation in the siege.”

“Then please fill out this information first.”

* Corps: <Dark Eden>
*Corps Leader <Ark>
*Commander: <JusticeMan>
*Number of Personnel: <4,276>

It was the rebirth of Dark Eden. After following the instructions of the priest to enter the information, a new information window popped up.

-You have completed the application for participation in the siege at the Shrine of War.
--

Currently <Dark Eden> is the no.1 applicant for the siege. After your forces has applied for participation in the siege, Nagaran is now declared a neutral zone were the enemy can’t attack you until the siege is over.
--

* Remaining time until the siege starts is 47 hours.
--

“It has been registered.”

The priest nodded and said.

“I’ll confirm it once again. Currently the group which has applied for the siege is Dark Eden. There is a redundancy date of one week before the next siege. If you don’t have the number of forces you applied to the siege for then you can adjust the date once. If all your preparations are finished, are you ready to begin the siege on the next date?”

“I will participate on this date.”

In fact, it was possible to stall the siege schedule. Although he already had 4,000 troops gathered, it wasn’t like that for a lot of guilds. The number of warriors, archers and magicians had to be carefully selected with the appropriate levels so some guilds took a while selecting their troops. However time was money to Ark. Just training the 4,000 people would consume Ark’s money.

‘I can’t afford that now. My remaining money is only 7,000 gold. That is about a week’s worth of meals. If I make them train then it is only 3~4 days. The only possibility is trying the siege in two days.’

Having thousands of troops really wasn’t a joke. Just the cost of the food alone would waste thousands of gold. After he finished the registration and returned to the campsite which was declared a neutral zone, he spoke to his troops.

“I’ve completed the final registration. We will destroy those villains two days later at noon. Until then it is necessary that everyone trains for the siege. Although there isn’t much time left so I know it is difficult, I expect you to listen to the instructions of your unit commander.”

“Understood!”

“Now you know what you’re supposed to be doing. Please give it your all.”

Ark entrusted the training of the reborn Dark Eden to the unit commanders. There wasn’t much time left but under the hands of experienced people like Bread, Redian, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members, he was sure that they could raise the users to a certain level. No, he had to believe that.

“What about you?”

“I’ve got other work to do.”

Ark looked at the huge pile of ingredients at the campsite. Whether it was reality or a game, the portion of food required for a war was the same. In reality hungry soldiers couldn’t exert their strength while in New World, their stats would fall if satiety was low. If they moved a lot then it was natural for satiety to fall quickly. In the end, the food required for 4,000 people after two days would reach the tens of thousands.

‘Thankfully I can get some of it back by selling cheap military provisions at the Shrine of War.’

He had secured enough food already so satiety wasn’t a problem. But the reason Ark bought thousands of ingredients wasn’t just to create food they could eat. There was a meaning to Ark’s food other than raising satiety.

‘From now on I will create survival cooking dishes with these ingredients!’

That’s right. It was his survival cooking which increased stats. In this siege, his numbers and organization abilities of his troops were inferior from the start. While he couldn’t assume that survival cooking would have an absolute effect, wouldn’t it increase their chances? His Survival Cooking skill had reached a High Grade proficiency so he could expect a considerable rise in stats. Of course, actually making the survival cooking dishes wasn’t an easy task. The siege lasted for 24 hours. He would have to provide each person with 3~4 dishes for it to show an effect. 2~3 dishes for 4,000 people meant he needed to cook between 8,000~12,000 dishes. He needed to create 8,000~12,000 dishes in two days!

‘I’ll make it even if I have to stay up all night!’

Ark pulled out his pot with fiery eyes. And the desperate struggle of Ark had begun.

“That Ark bastard.....!”

A man muttered in the darkness. The man with dark circles under his eyes was Raiden the Hermes guild leader. Raiden hadn't been able to sleep properly for the last week. Needless to say the reason was the suicide squad's failure to attack Lancel. The secret society had been organized to resolve the Hermes alliance's serious financial problems. But the organization had been shattered and their faces broadcast on TV, causing the Hermes alliance's crisis to worsen. No matter how much Raiden denied his association with the secret society, it was ineffective. All the previous friendly guilds had turned their backs to the Hermes alliance and thousands of people were writing all kinds of stories about them on the forums. But there was even more. From the beginning the Hermes alliance had hunted together. The Hermes alliance which was one of the 5 powers in Nagaran had suddenly become villains. But the really serious problem was the general users. In fact, only Raiden and a few members knew that he had organized the secret society. The general users hadn't known about it. Yet they were suddenly painted as bad guys overnight when they didn't even do anything. Therefore quite a few members had withdrawn from the alliance.

“I've managed to somehow stop the talk but there is a time limit. If there is a rebellion then I won't be able to hold on. I have to regain the alliance's stability no matter what!”

The trouble wasn't just the troops decreasing from the members withdrawing. While the Hermes alliance was being labelled as villains in the public opinion, their financial struggles were still an internal problem. That was why none of the other powers had challenged them yet. However, if more people withdrew then it would be difficult to conceal the internal affairs. Then they would jump on the Hermes alliance like hyenas. The Hermes alliance that was struggling from financial difficulties would die. That's right. The reason why he invested so much money into the defences of his castle and the number of troops was a desperate measure to avoid a siege. In other words, it was a siege deterrent. He would lose a huge amount of money whether he won or lost the siege.

“I have to prevent that situation no matter what. Those hyenas

absolutely can't know that we are having financial difficulties. If Silvana is taken away then we will lose our only source of income....."

The Hermes alliance would collapse. And the method for Raiden to return the 20,000 gold he borrowed would disappear. The loan sharks would visit his house every day and his wife would take the children back to her parents' house. He would become penniless overnight. The problem of defending Silvana was linked with the problem of defending his home for Raiden.

"I'll have to drink a bit of alcohol with the Silver Gate and Noel guild leaders while asking them to manage their guilds. Since they are the largest guilds in the alliance, if they hold firm then the unrest should stop for the moment. Damn, the people are calling every day for my debts while I have to worry about managing the guild....."

When he thought about it, it really was pitiful.

"Lord-nim!"

Then the doors suddenly opened and one of the alliance members ran in. The member gasped for breath and shouted.

"It is serious!"

"Serious? What? What's going on? Is there another withdrawal?"

"Withdrawal? No, that's not it..... Someone from the Shrine of War just got in touch with us. Somebody has applied for a siege two days later!"

"What? A siege?"

Raiden felt his heart fall.

'Damn, we're already struggling for breath and now someone has applied for a siege? Has our financial difficulties already leaked? I'm screwed. Then I will have to continue paying for sieges in the future.....'

"Who are they? What alliance applied for the siege?"

“It’s not an alliance but an attack corps called Dark Eden.”

“Dark Eden?”

Raiden’s mind flashed white the moment he heard the name Dark Eden.

‘Dark Eden is the name of the attack group Ark organized before..... He finally came!’

As expected, Raiden already knew that Ark was gathering troops. However, he didn’t want to believe that Ark was going to attack Silvana. Indeed, he only knew that Ark had gathered 1,000 users from Giran and Selebrid. Raiden couldn’t possibly know about Ark’s movements in Bristania and Seutandal. However, Ark’s troops had suddenly swelled to 4,000 people when he applied for the siege. Dozens of thoughts passed through Raiden’s head after he heard the number of people in Dark Eden.

“Where did he get the rest of the 3,000 people from? How did this guy who has no union manage to gain enough funds to gather that many troops? No, it doesn’t matter right now. That Ark bastard, he couldn’t even let me catch my breath before cornering me in a difficult situation. Does he want me to be homeless?”

Anger welled up in Raiden’s heart.

“Dammit, I will never hand Silvana over to him!”

Raiden shook the table sharply and shrieked. At that moment Raiden came up with an idea.

“Wait, maybe..... This might actually be a chance.”

It wasn’t necessary to say again but the reason Hermes had become like this was because of Dark Wolf. Now Ark had applied for a siege without even letting the Hermes alliance recover from their troubles. No doubt he was the cause of the Hermes alliance’s crisis! But if the Hermes alliance managed to fend off Ark’s attack then wouldn’t it show their overwhelming power? It was possible to give a good impression of the Hermes alliance to the large number of users watching Silvana. And Ark’s fate would have no choice but

to fall.

“And despite the current situation, all the alliance members have a grudge against Ark. If they join forces to crush Ark’s group then the unity of the alliance will increase again. Yes, this is definitely an opportunity. It’ll be the end if we lose but if we win then it is an opportunity to save the alliance from a crisis!”

Raiden considered it before shouting.

“Give an order for all alliance members to gather! Scrape together all the alliance’s remaining funds!”

Raiden stopped for a moment before speaking in a cold voice.

“Our enemy is.....Ark!”

In the meantime, it was 4 hours until the decisive battle. Soon the battle between Dark Eden and the Hermes alliance would begin, no the siege was a battle where Ark and Raiden’s life was at stake. It was the eve of the decisive battle! An ordinary user would be looking at the castle to renew their determination. But Ark couldn’t afford the time to create a cool atmosphere.

“Ohhhhhh!”

Ark had been rocking his pot like crazy for the past two days without a break. Making sure the meat wasn’t too strong or rare, adding salt and pepper with suitable timing, Ark repeated similar actions thousands of times like a robot to cook some dishes. Now just the smell of food felt like torture to him. Then after a while, an information window suddenly appeared.

-The survival cooking dish ‘Sweet Muko’s Steak’ has been completed.

This Muko steak is a dish made with high quality ingredients. The excellent skill of the chef has ensured that the meat has the golden ratio so it has the final taste.

<For 30 minutes, Strength +20 and maximum health +300>
--

“Huk huk huk, it is done!”

Ark looked at the massive amounts of dishes piled up with a pale face. He hadn't slept for two days while cooking like crazy. After learning survival cooking, this was the first time he had made so many dishes in such a short time period. He had cooked so many dishes that he often had to force his consciousness back after it drifted off. He had a new respect for the Koreans who cooked a feast of food for their relatives every holiday. Anyway, Ark had accomplished his purpose. The number of steaks and pan-fried food piled up was 8,000 dishes!

“Despite the difficulties..... It was worthwhile!”

Now he could distribute two dishes each to each member of his troops. But that wasn't the only good thing from his cooking frenzy. After cooking so many dishes for the last two days, his Survival Cooking skill had risen from High Grade to a Master proficiency.

-After studying the ingredients deeply, the rating of 'Survival Cooking' has risen.

Survival Cooking (Master, Passive): Thanks to your tireless passion, you have finally reached the Master level.

As a master, you have nothing more to learn in this field. After learning all types of styles of cooking and working with different ingredients, no dish is impossible for you anymore. There had been no Masters in New World until now. Thanks to your mastery of survival cooking, you can now cook 'Creative Dishes.'

* Creative Cooking: Even though you have become a Master, it is just the beginning of a new challenge.

With Creative Cooking, there are no wrong combinations of ingredients and combination dishes can be created which never existed before. In this sense, Creative Cooking gives a special effect to normal dishes. Dishes created from Creative Cooking can be said to be 'not just for eating.' In addition, there is a legend on

the continent that Creative Cooking can create the 'ultimate' dish.

<It is possible to use Creative Cooking to cook dishes with mysterious effects>

It was his first skill which reached Master level in New World! After he became a Master, his speed at creating dishes became incredibly fast. That was how he was able to create 8,000 dishes in two days.

"There hasn't been a lot of time to test it thoroughly but the Creative Dishes is also beyond my expectations!"

After testing, Ark determined that Creative Cooking was like making special items. All the dishes created with Creative Cooking had an odd effect and they could also be food that didn't have to be eaten. And it was the food which wouldn't be eaten that Ark was interested in. The reason for this was because he could create dishes with ingredients he couldn't utilize before. And it possessed an effect that couldn't be imagined for normal dishes. For example, there were a few dishes that would cause a dangerous explosion which mixed with other food. When mixed with rotten food, it was possible to create a poisonous mist. He was able to create dishes that was like attack magic potions. The magic potions were useful in battle because they had no cool down time but it was too expensive and bulky for regular users. Ark was the same as well. However he could create a similar effect thanks to Creative Cooking. Of course, Creative Cooking couldn't unleash the same havoc as magic potions. And cooking it required more time and it couldn't possibly be sold at general stores..... No, to be exact strange ingredients were needed for it. But its strong point was that it was 70% cheaper than the magic potions.

"Moreover most users already knew the effects of the magic potion. But Creative Cooking creates effects that were different from the magic potions. Even the users who grasped all the effects of the magic potion would panic from the attacks of the Creative Dishes. I only know about 10 types of dishes at the moment but the recipes will increase and the ways to utilize the dishes will be endless!"

Hard work would be rewarded with growth. That was one of the

ironclad rules of online games.

“That’s it. Now everything is ready!”

Ark put the pot away after finishing with his cooking. When he checked, the remaining time until the siege was 3 hours. There was time for a short break. After struggling to create the mountain of dishes, Ark finally looked at Silvana castle. When he raised his hands in front of him, it was like the light of Silvana was in the palm of his hand.

“After tomorrow you will be mine.”

Ark murmured as he made a tight fist. How much time had passed? Finally the light from the sun started to rise on the horizon. Then there was flashing lights as the troops connected one after the other. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members, Lariette, Roco, Bread, Redian and all the members of Dark Eden were accounted for. When he looked at them, he could sense that they had just woken up. Ark stood up and shouted.

“Let’s go!”

Opening of the Siege

“It looks even more absurd close up.”

Ark had arrived in front of the castle while leading the 4,300 troops. He had thought Silvana castle was great when he saw it from a distance. But it was unbelievable when he saw it close up. The castle walls was so high and thick that it looked like a rock wall and the steel on it made it seem like one giant shield. It was an overwhelming sight.

‘But it isn’t my opponent!’

Ark looked at the soldiers lined up on the wall. That’s right. Ark’s opponent wasn’t the wall. It was the members of the Hermes alliance!

“Racard.”

Ark murmured in a low voice. Then a bat flew out of the sky onto Ark’s shoulder. It was Racard.

“Have you figured out all the movements of the Hermes troops?”

“Huhuhu, nobody can avoid my eyes.”

Racard declared with an arrogant expression and explained.

“Yesterday evening 5,600 troops gathered in the castle. Today at dawn 1,400 people were divided between the left with right Defense Towers, with each one receiving 700 people each. 1,000 people were left in the castle while the remaining 3,200 people were stationed at the front.”

In a siege, the system was that the defending side couldn’t help having the advantage. The reason for that wasn’t just the high walls and Defense Towers. The biggest advantage between the challenger and the defenders was the ‘tactics’ range. When the siege started, as the challenger Dark Eden would have no choice but to gather in

front of the castle. And they could only move the troops after the siege started. Therefore the troops on the walls could see where Dark Eden would move its troops. But the Hermes alliance would've already deployed the troops and with the high walls, there was no way to determined accurately the deployment. So Ark had used Racard to reveal the Hermes alliance's cards. There was no need to explain why. Thus two days ago Ark had ordered Racard to watch the castle using satellite surveillance mode. It was in order to catch the movements of the Hermes alliance.

"Have you confirmed who is commanding the troops outside?"

"Yes I saw it. She is the leader of the Silver Gate guild called Gwen."

Racard replied after recalling his memory. Ark had fought with the Hermes alliance before in the siege. Because of that Racard could remember the main guilds which belonged to the alliance.

'If Gwen is leading the attack then is Raiden hiding inside the castle?'

The siege warfare was a battle to take control of the throne. Obviously the alliance would have some users to protect the throne.

"And the arrangement outside the castle?"

"Look at this."

Racard took out a few memo papers. He had roughly drawn the symbols for 'Ma' and 'Jeon' on it, so the symbols were recorded like they were a code. Racard had used satellite surveillance mode for two days and completely grasped the movements of the troops. 'Ma: 50 ' meant that there were 50 magicians, while 'Jeon: 200 meant there were 200 warriors. Thus Ark was able to 100% identity the complete movements of the Hermes troops.

"Hehehe, didn't I do well? Shouldn't it be sufficient for 200 points?"

Racard murmured as he twisted his hands together.

“This will be worth 150 points.”

“Eh eh? But.....”

“But if you continue to monitor the enemy’s movements and report it to me then I will give you another 150 points.”

“Eh! R-really? Then I can finally.....!”

Racard looked at the scarf and gloves Ark was wearing with longing eyes. Racard had been watching the enemy for two chilly days but he hadn’t complained in order to earn points. Previously his pets had worked so hard to buy the equipment but they had only earned around 100 points by the time they had to leave Lancel. At the time Ark had taken out the gloves and scarves he received from So-mi and said.

“If you reach 400 points then I will give you these winter equipment.”

“Ooh!”

His pets’ eyes popped out. In fact, his summons had thought they would only be given one shabby coat after scraping together 400 points. Yet Ark was showing them gloves and scarves made of the finest wool! In addition, each set also had a different embroidered design of a bat, a skeleton and a snake.

“You guys only have 100 points. You’re also leaving Lancel so you can’t do any business anymore. But the weather is getting colder so if you earn 300 points during the siege then I will 100% give you these high quality equipment.”

That was the reason why Racard wasn’t complaining.

‘Once my pets also have a goal then they listen well.’

Ark looked down at the papers Racard had written on and laughed. Then a horn sounded from the Shrine of War and a NPC’s voice was heard.

“I now declare this the siege area! Aside from the people participating in the siege, nobody can approach this area until the siege ends!”

Ku ku ku ku, kong!

Then a huge hourglass started rotating slowly. It was the hourglass which indicated the 24 hours of the siege. Once all the sand had fallen down, either Ark or Raiden would be the winner.

‘It’s started!’

Ark simultaneously summoned the leaders of his group. JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Shambala, Bread, Redian, Lariette and Roco. The core power of Dark Eden was gathered in one place. However, the result Ark quickly summoned them wasn’t to consult about the strategies. The strategy he had determined to recapture Silvana had replayed in his mind hundreds and thousands of times. There was no reason for him to discuss it now.

‘But it is necessary to change something because of the placement of the Hermes troops.’

“I’ve confirmed that there are 700 people stationed in each Defense Tower.”

JusticeMan scratched his beard and murmured.

“Does that mean they have a surplus of troops?”

“No, they have no intention of having a full-fledged war with us.”

Ark took out Racard’s memos and explained it.

“If you look at their configuration, most of the magicians and archers are placed along the wall as well as the warriors. They will concentrate on defending the wall.”

It was a basic tactic in a siege to place archers and magicians along the walls while the warriors were stationed behind the gate. Depending on the circumstances, they could come out to inflict a counterattack. Suddenly running out of the gates and attacking before running back in was a fairly stressful tactic. However, the Hermes alliance had arranged their warriors along the walls. And there were quite a few troops in the Defense Towers. It meant they intended to defend the walls rather than a full-fledged battle. There

was a reason the Hermes alliance selected this method. The Hermes alliance wanted to avoid the financial cost of a war of attrition. If Hermes concentrated on defending then it would be difficult for Dark Eden to win.

‘The Hermes alliance is using the tactic of hiding behind the castle wall like turtles. If I want to win then I’ll have to either climb over the walls or go through the gate. But our numbers are inferior so we’ll just receive damage if we attack like that.’

In order to break the gate they had to remove a Defense Tower. The Defense Tower raised the defense of the walls and gate and healed their durability. So it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the Defense Tower was the key between victory and defeat. If they couldn’t remove the Defense Towers then not even siege weapons could destroy the gate.

‘Then isn’t it obvious that there are considerable defences around the towers?’

For example, Alan’s method of burying traps and using long ranged attacks was a common tactic. The Hermes alliance would also use the same tactics.

‘In order for a siege to be successfully, I will have to enter the castle within 18 hours. When considering the time it takes to capture the gates, I need to take control of the Defense Towers in 14 hours. But 700 people are deployed there so I will have to send at least 1,000 troops to capture it within 14 hours. That was a total of 2,000 people. If I do that then I’ll only have 2,300 troops left.’

The Hermes alliance had 3,200 troops deployed outside. Since they controlled the castle, it was possible for them to exit and attack the main forces at any time. Looking at their arrangement, the Hermes alliance had no intention of coming out but that would change if Ark only had 2,300 troops left after sending people to capture the Defense Towers. Even the ones inside the castle would come out and attack. Then it would be a battle of 4,200 vs. 2,300 people.

‘It is difficult. There should be at least 3,000 people remaining in the main force. Then I can only send 500 people to the Defense Towers.

With that number I absolutely can't capture the Defense Towers in the time limit.'

In this situation it wasn't possible. They had already run into a wall at the start of the guild. However.....

"It does not matter. Because it isn't necessary for us to smash the Defense Towers."

Ark replied with a wicked grin. JusticeMan also nodded and said.

"That's right."

Like Ark said, the Defense Towers was very important when building a strategy. But he had no intention of removing the Defense Towers. No, it would actually be a problem if the Defense Towers were removed. Ark looked at Bread and Redian before saying.

"Bread, Redian, I want you guys to lead 500 troops to the Defense Towers but do you understand? You can attack the enemy but you can't attack the Defense Towers. You should pretend to attack of course, but concentrating on decreasing their numbers."

"Okay."

So Bread and Redian made their way to the Defense Towers. Ark opened his mouth again after they left.

"You already roughly know my strategy for this siege. Security is the most important thing in this mission. If those guys notice then this plan will 100% fail. Each unit has to move as planned without violating any orders. When leading the unit, don't let them know the contents of the plan until the last moment!"

"Ooh!"

Ark grabbed the hands of the leaders and shouted powerfully. Then he turned his body and shouted towards the soldiers.

"Now, let's begin the attack! 1st siege weapons unit!"

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

At the same time, some catapults moved forward slowly. It was the

catapults Ark had asked the raccoons to make.

“Concentrate all attacks on the gate!”

“Ridiculous.”

On the walls outside Silvana castle. The commander called Gwen snorted as she looked at the catapults.

“They expect to attack a castle protected by C ranked Defense Towers using 10 catapults?”

The siege weapons played a huge role in a siege. It was almost impossible to break the walls and gate of a castle using general weapons. Of course, if they attacked the gate for a while it was bound to break but attacks would also be pouring down from above. They could only break down the gates when they were already close to destruction. Thus a siege weapon was needed. The siege weapons did 200% more damage to the gate than normal attacks. But the siege weapons had a fatal weakness. They couldn't move freely because of their weight. While the siege weapons had a longer range than magic or arrows, the opponents could still attack it from the walls. Therefore 40 catapults were usually needed in a siege. The catapults could be set up in a rotation, with damaged catapults being swapped to repair the damage. But Ark had only prepared 10 catapults. It would be impossible to do much damage to the walls before the catapults were destroyed.

“You fool, you know how important siege weapons are. Is it a lack of money? Anyway, we seem to have overestimated Ark too much. Use full force to intercept the catapults!”

Arrows and magic was fired from the walls after Gwen gave the order. Hundreds of magic and arrow was concentrated on one catapult. No matter the endurance of the catapult, it would be destroyed instantly from the concentrated attacks! But.....

“Huh? What the?”

“What? Aren't those siege weapons far away?”

The soldiers buzzed with confusion. The magic and arrows couldn't reach the catapults and just fell. Hadn't the catapults come into range yet? That was the opponents' thoughts but the catapults were already firing rocks at the gates.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

"What is this? Isn't the range of a catapult similar to magic and arrows? Then how could a catapult that is outside the 10 metres range attack the gate?"

Gwen looked at the catapult with a confused face. The only thing she could think of was that Ark's catapults had a longer range.

"Is that the reason he only mobilized 10 catapults? Good but....."

Gwen smiled and raised her fist. The several soldiers peeled off the tents placed here and there.

"Huhuhu, it's not an accident that we've maintained this estate for 1 year. This Silvana isn't the old Silvana. It is a military fortress!"

Gwen murmured as the massive object hidden by the tent appeared. The thing inside the tent was a catapult! No, they were 10 gun turrets fixed on the walls. The gun turrets were the Hermes alliance's anti-siege weapons! No matter how long the range of Ark's catapults, with the turrets on the walls then the attack had no chance of hitting. And the projectiles shot out by the turrets wasn't simple rocks. They boasted tremendous explosive power!

'The bombs are expensive so I didn't really want to use them but I have no choice.'

"Launch! Attack their siege weapons!"

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Bombs were simultaneously launched by 10 gun turrets. The bombs fell in a big parabola towards enemy lines.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk! Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Suddenly a huge number of fire arrows were shot from the catapults. They flew up hundreds of metres to impact with the bombs, causing them to explode in thin air. Gwen looked at the catapults with stupid eyes. At the same time, two carriages appeared on either side of the catapult. It was a machine with dozens of holes on the top like a honeycomb with smoke gushing out of it.

“What the, that is?”

Gwen muttered in a stupid voice. Then the carriages turned towards Gwen’s direction. At the same time, dozens of flaming arrows went flying out of the hole. They were giant arrows 10 times larger than crossbow arrows.

“Huck! S-scatter!”

Gwen shouted with astonishment as she hid her body behind the wall.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang. The flaming arrows caused a large impact as it crashed into the walls. The alliance members who couldn’t avoid it quickly enough had 40% of their health drained away at once. The magicians who had low health died instantly from the flaming arrows.

“What on earth? I’ve never seen a siege weapon like that!”

“Huhuhu, how do you like my modern weapon?”

Ark chuckled as he soon Gwen who had panicked. While this siege was unexpected for Raiden, Ark had been planning how to win back Silvana for a long time. Thus he had invested in the raccoons and developed the modern weapons in the underground laboratory beneath Lancel. It was this bee hive type carriage. The official name was Fire Barrage Crossbow.

-Fire Barrage Crossbow (Special Manufactured Product)
Weapon Type: Large Weapon
Attack: 100 ~ 150 X 24
Range: 500 metres

Durability: 500/500

Weight: 800

User Restriction: Special craftsmen use only

A large weapon created by the raccoons who had studied for a long time, 24 flaming arrows can be loaded on it and fired. In addition, the range at which it can be launched is 1.5 times more than a crossbow. However, the reload time takes longer than other siege weapons.

<Option: Fire attack +40>

* When used by the raccoon clan, the Firing Speed and accuracy will increase by 20%.

The money which went into developing the Fire Barrage Crossbow was 4,000 gold. It was 10 times the cost of a normal catapult.

‘To be honest, it is slightly regrettable when seeing the results.....’

In fact, Ark had hoped not to use the modern siege weapons. The weapon could fire a barrage of arrows but the additional damage bonus didn’t apply to the buildings. But when he checked a video of a previous siege, he found there was a need to attack the gate with the Fire Barrage Crossbow. A C-grade estate was able to install turrets on the castle. The range and destructiveness of the bombs from the turrets was enormous. If they fell on the soldiers then the damage would be no joke. This was the reason why other alliance avoided attacking C rated territories. If 10 gun turrets attacked and intercepted the siege weapons then the siege would end instantly.

‘Doesn’t that mean I have to use the Fire Barrage Crossbow to intercept the turrets?’

Ark thought that as he watched the video. And he confirmed that the results were good. 48 arrows flying from the two Fire Barrage Crossbows could counter the bombs from the 10 gun turrets.

‘But the Fire Barrage Crossbow has a fatal weakness.’

“Magicians, cool down the Fire Barrage Crossbow.

“Yes!”

At Ark's orders the magicians used ice magic on the Fire Barrage Crossbow. This was the weakness of the Fire Barrage Crossbow. Once the 24 arrows were fired, the overheated crossbow would have to be cooled down using ice magic. In other words, it couldn't be used for a while. On the other hand, the turrets on the walls were similar to the catapults. The bombs were able to be used for continuous attacks.

‘If those guys continue to use the bombs then the Fire Barrage Crossbow will be destroyed but.....’

The Hermes alliance had already witnessed all their bombs being intercepted so they couldn't use it again. The price of one bomb was 50 gold! It would be different if the interception was a fluke, but the Hermes alliance which had financial difficulties couldn't afford to continue using the bombs.

“Huhuhu, fighting a war isn't easy with no money.”

Ark laughed but this actually wasn't a situation where Ark could laugh. After all, the cost of the flaming arrows was expensive for Ark as well. The price of one arrow was 4 gold. The two Fire Barrage Crossbows launched 48 shots at the same time which was 192 gold flying away. He had laughed when they intercepted the bombs a while ago but inwardly he was crying.

“Well, it is necessary but I can't use the weapon recklessly.”

Anyway, now the bombs attack was sealed off. Now Gwen had lost the way to stop Ark's catapult attacks.

“The catapults don't waste any money. Attack!”

Ark's 10 catapults fired a barrage of rocks at the gate. But the gate was still under the protection of the Defense Towers so it didn't receive any damage.

‘Well this is the limitation of having only 10 catapults. I hadn't

expected to penetrate the gate using the catapults. The important thing is to make it look like I intend to penetrate the gate using the catapult. No, to be precise it is to make them think the castle will be penetrated through the gate!’

“The bombs are sealed so shall we begin?”

When Ark turned his body with a pleasant smile, JusticeMan also smiled and nodded. Then he raised his fist and cried out.

“Hmm, is it starting? Good, good. 1st battalion, capture the left castle wall!”

“Wah ah ah!”

JusticeMan led 500 soldiers and rushed towards the castle.

“Huk, t-those guys are.....Are they really trying to capture the castle wall? Stop them!”

The magicians and archers hurled attacks towards the charging battalion. No, as soon as they tried to attack dozens of flaming arrows hit the rampart. It was the support fire from the Fire Barrage Crossbow. The alliance members who tried to attack were hit by the flaming arrows and fell.

“Now! Simultaneously climb the castle wall!”

The soldiers threw hooks up to the rampart and placed ladders against the wall at JusticeMan’s command. The soldiers placed their shields above their heads and started to climb the walls. Of course Gwen wasn’t just going to stand there watching. While the magicians and arrows was attacking non-stop, the warriors also threw stones and logs from the top of the wall.

“All archers and magicians on the wall intercept their magicians and archers!”

“Warriors protect the archers and magicians with your shields!”

“Damn it, smash the hooks and ladders!”

When Dark Eden’s offense truly began, panicked cries emerged all

over the place.

“Warriors stop the hooks and the ladders. Don’t let them enter!”

“Gwen-nim, the enemy’s support of the flaming arrows has started again.”

“Everybody take shelter!”

Gwen and the alliance members simultaneously hid themselves. The support fire from the flaming arrows was still powerful but since the crossbow needed to be cooled down, Gwen could read the timing so it never did as much damage as its initial hit.

“Okay, attack the enemy again!”

After the attack from the Fire Barrage Crossbow was over, the alliance members instantly raised their bodies and counter attacked. There were continuous shouts without any breaks! Various magic and arrows were flying all over the place! The soldiers climbing the wall fell down before more replaced them! It was intense and fierce..... It truly was like a scene from a medieval movie.

‘As expected from JusticeMan ajusshi.’

Ark laughed as he looked at the battlefield. The section of the wall where soldiers were gathered was intense and bloody. No, it just looked intense. Although the soldiers were fighting to climb the walls, they weren’t as eager as they looked. While fire and swords appeared on the walls and a considerable amount of time had passed, almost none of Ark’s users had died. No, a lot of users only had their health go down to 50%.

‘Nevertheless, the atmosphere seems like there are dozens of casualties.’

Despite the atmosphere, there actually weren’t a lot of casualties. There were two reasons why the general soldiers fighting the battle was unaware. One reason was the tactics that JusticeMan was using and the other was that they couldn’t see their opponents’ health. Of course, the ‘Penetrating’ scroll or a similar skill that thieves

had allowed them to see the enemy's health. But on a battlefield where there were 1,000 people fighting, there was no time to use scrolls or skills to check the health of a user. So not even one person could grasp the whole battle situation.

'But it is difficult for Dark Eden which was hastily put together to fight equally with the Hermes alliance. They haven't really worked together long so the weaknesses will gradually show.'

It didn't matter how excellent a commander JusticeMan was as the soldiers were the ones fighting directly. Although they had undergone some discipline training, these movements gradually disappeared as they got distracted by their health running out. While the priests could recover the warriors' health, it would be dangerous for them so they couldn't heal the entire defensive line before retreating.

'If this keeps up then our weak point will be exposed to the Hermes alliance. It is better to stop it here.'

"Send a signal to retreat."

Pepepepeng!

A messenger launched firecrackers into the sky. JusticeMan confirmed the signal and raised his sword before shouting.

"Everybody retreat. Magicians cover them while the warriors protect the priests!"

"1st battalion, join with the main body and recover your health and mana!"

Ark commanded as the 500 soldiers retreated from the castle and left the battlefield. In the combat area they couldn't recover their health and mana. After the 1st battalion left the field, Ark raised his sword and shouted again.

"The 1st battalion concentrated their attack on the left wall. The 2nd battalion will attack the right wall. Fire Barrage Crossbow, cover the 2nd battalion!"

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

The flaming arrows were shot towards the walls. At the same time, 500 soldiers rushed towards the right. The battle for the right wall was just as intense..... No, it only looked intense. When there was a few casualties, Ark had the 2nd battalion retreat, then another battalion attack, retreat, and so on. This pattern of attacks continued so while the fighting continued without any breaks, there were few casualties.

“They’re retreating again!”

Gwen frowned as she received the information from a soldier.

“That Ark, what is he thinking?”

Gwen realized there was something unclear after seeing the same situation repeated so many times. Until now Gwen had thought Ark was using standard tactics. He didn’t have huge war funds so he couldn’t have drink potions like water during the siege. So it was obvious he had the troops retreat once the priest’s mana ran out and they couldn’t heal anymore. The same thing applied to splitting his troops. Some beginners might think that throwing more troops onto the battlefield was better but siege warfare was different. No matter how many troops there were, the actual amount that could fight was limited thanks to the castle walls. If they ran directly into battle then they would just be hit by arrows. In addition, if the troops withdrew when they were too damaged then Gwen could lead an assault group outside the castle to wipe them out. That’s why in a siege the forces were always split.

“Ark’s way of thinking isn’t wrong. But.....”

The number of troops attacking was too low. The Hermes alliance had 3,200 troops deployed outside. Of course, with the walls the amount of troops assigned to each area was limited. But they were able to concentrate 1,000 troops on the side walls. If Ark really intended to control the walls then he needed a minimum of 1,000 people. However, Ark never committed more than 500 people.

“Aside from their first attack, the remaining ones weren’t as

aggressive. I can tell just by looking at the main body of Ark's forces. They've attacked so many times but the troops hasn't decreased that much. It is also the same for us. In the end, he really doesn't intend to control the castle walls. Is he trying to buy time so he can smash the Defense Towers?"

If that was the reason then Ark's passive attacks was understandable. With the Defense Towers destroyed it would certainly be possible to destroy the gate with the 10 catapults and that strange large weapon. Gwen then smiled.

"If you think that then you've already failed!"

Gwen contacted the person in charge of the Defense Towers who said.

-There are only 500 enemies attacking here. They haven't even entered the trap field. You don't have to worry about this place.

In the old days, the Hermes alliance had used a plan to destroy the Defense Towers. After occupying the castle, the Hermes alliance had imitate their strategy and buried traps around the towers while leaving magicians and archers in buried bunkers. Of course, this method had a weak point. If the enemy broke through the minefield then the magicians and archers would easily collapse. However, with 500 troops it was impossible to pass through the mine field while being attacked by 700 archers and magicians. The one method was to use the tunnel plan that Ark had used in the past. However, the Hermes alliance was already aware of this plan. Therefore they had placed steel all over the bottom of the Defense Towers.

"If those guys haven't made it through the minefield yet then there is no way they will occupy the Defense Towers. With the Defense Towers active, there is no way 10 catapults can destroy the gate. Well, it's taken a lot of Ark's time so I'm grateful."

Gwen laughed as she looked at the huge hourglass. While they hadn't suffered any damage, the pointless repetitive battles meant the 16 hours had already passed since the siege began. Typically the castle had to enter the castle within 18 hours in order to win. There was 2 hours left to that time limit but there was no way Ark

could break into the castle during that time.

“Okay, it has been boring but there’s not much time left. Only 8 hours until our victory!”

Gwen encouraged the Hermes alliance members who were tired from Dark Eden’s continuous attacks. Finally the hourglass showed that the 18th hour had passed.

“Now there is no way they can destroy the Defense Towers, the gate and occupy the castle!”

Gwen was sure of their victory.

“That’s it!”

Ark laughed as he looked at the huge hourglass. Now only one quarter of the sand was left in the hourglass. The remaining time until the siege finished was 6 hours. But the Defense Towers were still well and the Hermes alliance’s members had barely decreased. On the other hand, while Dark Eden had tried to preserve their troops 800 of them still died. It was a desperate situation but Ark firmly believed in his victory. Ark stood up and turned around to look at the rehabilitation members.

“Hyung-nims, are you ready?”

“Yes, any time is okay.”

Bul-kkun grinned and nodded.

“Then let’s go. Engineer unit, move the catapults towards the castle!”

The dozens of engineers moved the catapult at Ark’s command. When it entered into range, magic and arrows were instantly aimed towards it. With hundreds of attacks concentrated on it, one of the catapults instantly caught on fire.

“Sheesh. Fire Barrage Crossbow, support the catapults!”

“Yes, target sighted fire!”

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

The two crossbows turned and fired the flaming arrows. Then there were successive explosions along the walls. While the Hermes alliance hid themselves from the flaming arrows, the engineers unit was able to move a catapult to the target point.

“Now!”

Ark got on the catapult and shouted. Following him was Bul-kkun, Ddeok-dae, Hae Gyeol-sa, Yapsab, Jjak-tung and Tazza who were all wearing headbands with ‘Commandos’ on them. Each of them lined up and saluted.

“I’ll meet you in hell!”

Ark confirmed that all the rehabilitation members had were on the catapults and shouted.

“Catapults aim vertically and fire!”

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Seven of the catapults fired simultaneously. At the same time, Ark and the rehabilitation members flew up at a tremendous speed. They flew in a parabola and headed towards the castle walls.

“What? That guys, are they crazy?”

Gwen murmured with an absurd expression. Were they thinking about penetrating the walls by flying on the catapults? Did they think they would be safe after falling dozens of metres? No, even if they managed to survive the fall damage how would they fight against 3,200 people? Did they think this was GI Joe? Those thoughts passed through Gwen’s mind without seconds. She eventually came to the conclusion that Ark became crazy after failing the siege. But in the next moment Gwen witnessed an amazing scene.

“Slime’s Time, NO1!”

A cry emerged from Ark’s mouth just before he hit the ground. At the same time, a yellow viscous liquid covered Ark’s body. It wasn’t just Ark. The yellow liquid covered all of the rehabilitation members’

bodies. Then Ark and the rehabilitation members impacted with the ground.

Ttiyong-ttiyong!

Ark and the rehabilitation members bounced up like rubber balls?

“What the, that is?”

Gwen and the rehabilitation members looked at the bouncing people with an absurd look. But after a brief moment, Gwen raised her voice.

“What are you staring blankly at? This is a great opportunity to get Ark. Attack them!”

“Wah ah ah!”

100 of the alliance members shrieked and rushed up at Gwen’s command. Dozens of swords and arrows attacked Ark! But.....

Ttiyong-ttiyong!

The swords and arrows just bounced off. That’s right. Ark was using the special skill of the Slime’s Immortality Pill, Slime’s Time! Any physical damage or fall damage would be 100% nullified. The other rehabilitation members had also eaten the Slime’s Immortality Pill in Seutandal. Well, it wasn’t the original product so it had the side effect of amplifying pain by 50 times.....

“Keuak!”

“My spirit flew away the moment I hit the ground.”

The rehabilitation members groaned after they hit the ground. But the rehabilitation members were raised in a dark world filled with violence so they instantly raised their body.

“They’re coming! Everybody stay focused!”

“Jjak-tung, Tazza, gather back to back and stop them!”

“Okay, keuak! Damn, that hurts!”

Jjak-tung and Tazza wobbled as the swords and arrows bounced off.

“Get out of the way!”

Meanwhile Bul-kkun, Ddeok-dae and Hae Gyeol-sa ran up to the alliance members and head-butted them. While Slime’s Time made them invincible to physical attacks, they also couldn’t attack with their weapons. Thus the head-butt actually didn’t do any damage. However, their bodies were like rubber so the Hermes alliance members flew back a few metres.

“Hahaha! How is it? Our bodies are now like rubber! Head butt!”

So Ark and the rehabilitation members pushed the alliance members back with a head butt and ran towards the gate.

“What is this? Why are they heading to the gate.....?”

“Are they trying to open the gate?”

But it was impossible to just pull the gate open like an ordinary door. Naturally the equipment to operate the gate was kept separately. Ark used to be the Lord so he should’ve known that as well. Then why was he heading to the gate? Gwen found it impossible to understand.

“I don’t know what he is doing but that guy is like a rat in a bag. Ark is the leader of Dark Eden. If he dies then the siege is over!”

“But these guys are impervious to attacks!”

“Bah! This is a game so no skill is invincible. If physical attacks don’t work then try magic. All magicians attack these guys!”

The magicians started chanting spells at Gwen’s command.

“Anger of the blazing fire, Rage of Fire!”

“Splitting blade of the wind, Wind Cutter!”

“The cold north wind, Ice Spike!”

“Ark, watch out!”

Bul-kkun shouted.

That's right. It was Slime's Time weakness. While it invalidated physical attacks by 100%, it also made them 100% more vulnerable to magic. For 10 minutes there were invincible against warriors but vulnerable to magicians. If they were hit by dozens of magic then they would be broken like tofu. At that moment Ark heard Racard's voice from above him.

"Master, the magicians are attacking from your 3 o'clock and your 11 o'clock!"

"Hyung-nims, this way!"

Ark shouted as he instinctively moved his body. Then he head butted some alliance members. The magic flying towards Ark and the rehabilitation group hit the alliance members instead. Ark had used the alliance members as a shield to stop the magic attacks.

"You fools! Physical attacks won't connect so all warriors retreat!"

Gwen shouted angrily. The hundreds of alliance members surrounding Ark's group disappeared. Then the dozens of magic shots flew back towards Ark and the rehabilitation group. They couldn't use the alliance members as an obstacle anymore!

"Damn, I'll go first!"

Bul-kkun bit his lips and jumped in front of Ark. At the same time, blasts of fire, wind and ice hit Bul-kkun's body.

"Waaaaahhhhh!"

He was 100% vulnerable to magic attacks. The incomplete Slime's Immortality Pill also increased pain by 50 times so Bul-kkun screamed as he really felt like he was being roasted and frozen. He collapsed to the ground and raised his thumb.

".....Go!"

"Ugh, Bul-kkun your sacrifice won't be in vain!"

"The magic is flying!"

“Ohhhhh, it is my turn now!”

This time it was Hae Gyeol-sa who jumped in front of Ark and was burnt.

“H-Hyung-nim.....!”

“Don’t turn around, go! The gate is right around the corner!”

Yapsab grabbed Ark’s shoulder and shouted. Ark looked at Hae Gyeol-sa before turning around. Yes, now wasn’t the time to be flooded with sentiment! The success or failure of the siege depended on this operation. Ark clenched his teeth and ran towards the gate. Magic flew non-stop but Ddeok-dae, Yapsab, Jjak-tung and Tazza blocked Ark with their bodies. But the hundreds of magicians poured down magic on them who had their magic resistance decreased by 100%. In the end, the rehabilitation members could only take a few steps before they collapsed. It hadn’t even been 1 minute until the last of them, Jjak-tung collapsed.

‘Damn, there’s only 10 metres left.....!’

Ark moaned as he looked at the approaching gate. The magicians on the wall were already chanting spells. When the chants were complete then Ark would die.

‘.....Is it going to end here?’

Ark was just thinking that.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

A huge explosion suddenly occurred on the walls. The Fire Barrage Crossbow had finished cooling and had sent more flaming arrows towards the walls. The magicians who had been concentrated on Ark were hit and fell down. The rest of the magicians also received impact from the arrows and had their chants cancelled.

‘Now!’

Ark ran between the falling magicians. Although a few magicians who hadn’t been blown away tried to attack him, they couldn’t aim properly. Ark rolled his body to avoid the magic and finally arrived at

the gate.

“Heh, what’s this? Does he intend to break the gate by himself?”

Gwen snorted and muttered. Ark’s hands flashed as he arrived at the gate. Then he took out a small hourglass from his bag. Ark used the hourglass and a message window appeared.

-You have used the Phantom Hourglass.

<You can turn time back 100 years or accelerate time forward a maximum of 500 years>

That’s right. The item Ark was holding up was the Phantom Hourglass! It was the reason he headed towards the gate.

“Maximum acceleration!”

Then the sand at the top started to fall at a tremendous speed. At the same time, an amazing change started to happen to the castle gate. The gate which had been attacked for 10 hours yet hadn’t even lost 50% durability instantly turned red. The gate also started to be pierced with holes. Since the Phantom Hourglass accelerated time 500 years forward, the steel gate became rusted and battered.

“Now’s the time. Catapults attack the gate!”

Ark shouted through the tattered gate. At the same time, the catapults outside sent their rocks flying.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The already corroded gate which was barely hanging on splintered and broke into two pieces. The gate had been breached despite the Defense Towers still standing. Blood disappeared from Gwen’s face as she looked at the broken gate.

“U-unbelievable..... The gate.....!”

The Hermes alliance also stared with surprise.

“R-repair the gates!”

Gwen shouted when she heard Ark's voice.

"The whole army, charge Silvana!"

Gwen looked outside with surprise.

"Then the reason Ark attacked so roughly until now.....!"

Now Gwen realized Ark's arm. Despite battling for 18 hours, there had been almost no casualties. From the 3,300 Dark Eden troops, around 800 people had died. In other words, there were still 2,500 troops in front of the gates. Of course, the Hermes alliance had received even less damage and only 300 people had died. There still remained 2,900 stationed on the castle walls. But the Hermes alliance was dispersed all around the outside. If Dark Eden broke in and the fighting became confused, the magicians and archers on the walls wouldn't be able to attack properly. There was also the tremendous power of the Fire Barrage Crossbow.

"But we have 1,000 more troops than them."

That was Gwen's thought.

-Gwen, stop those guys from entering!

She suddenly heard Raiden whisper in her ear.

-But.....

-You fool, this is Ark's scheme. I thought it was possible so I contacted the Defense Towers. The Dark Eden troops attacking the Defense Towers retreated 30 minutes ago!

-The troops attacking the Defense Towers have retreated? Then.....!"

Gwen felt like she had been hit on the back of her head with a hammer. The troops attacking the Defense Towers had already retreated 30 minutes ago. Then those guys were coming here. If they joined then there would be 3,500 people! If the Hermes alliance combined their troops from inside the castle then they would have 3,900 people. Of course, the Hermes alliance had the 1,400 troops stationed at the Defense Towers but it would take them 30 minutes if

they left now. She had to rally the troops and hold out until then. But a melee fight inside the walls would be confusing and dangerous. However, if there weren't any extra troops than the 2,900 Hermes members on the walls would be trampled by the 3,500 Dark Eden members!

-Furthermore, the opponent is Ark. If he did all this to break the gate then he would definitely have some ulterior motives. We absolutely can't give the castle to him! But now there is no time to worry about Ark. Stop their entry!

Gwen received Raiden's order and shouted towards the alliance members.

"No. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 assault units! Dispatch those troops immediately! Charge the enemy and destroy the catapults and the large weapons. Maintain formation in front of the gate and stop their entry! The rest of you just restore the gate as much as possible. The Defense Towers are still standing. If the large weapon is destroyed and the gates repaired then it will be possible to endure for the remaining time!"

So Gwen led 1,500 troops to the gate. But Gwen was thinking about it too much. While Ark and the rehabilitation members were trying to break the gate, the rest of Dark Eden was just watching. If Dark Eden attacked the castle during that time then Ark and the rehabilitation members wouldn't have received the magicians' attack so one-sidedly. In addition, Dark Eden wasn't showing large movements even after the gate broke. However, Gwen and Raiden were too hasty and couldn't realize that point. And there was another part Gwen missed. It was why Ark used the risky strategy of jumping inside the castle with the catapult to corrode the castle gate. Ark could've mixed in with Dark Eden while using Slime's Time to access the gate from the outside.

Nevertheless, Ark had used the catapult to corrode the gate from inside the castle. The reason why.....

Grand Strategy, Mackerel Pieces Gamble

“Catch him!”

The cry emerged from the castle. Gwen had led 1,500 troops and ran outside the castle. This was because Ark had destroyed the gate. Ark had avoided the magic of the alliance members and ran away inside the castle grounds. There were still 1,400 members left inside but they had no time to pay attention to Ark. Since there was no time to prepare for the situation, they were preoccupied with repairing the gate. But Ark was the enemy commander and he was an important before who could influence the military situation by himself, so 50 people were chasing after him.

“There is nowhere for you to run away!”

“The skill where our physical attacks don’t connect won’t last much longer!”

The alliance members shouted as they threw arrows and magic at him. The arrows weren’t a problem for Ark thanks to the effect of Slime’s Time. The dangerous thing was the magic. And the number had lessened so the magic was easy to avoid. Ark didn’t worry about the arrows and just focused on avoiding the magic attacks. He used Dark Dance and Sprint to run between walls and have the magic impact with them instead.

‘Huk huk, not long left! I just have to pass this lane!’

Ark once again used a building to avoid the magic and turned the corner.

“Over here!”

Around 20 alliance members appeared before him. They had predicted Ark’s path and moved ahead to block him. Ark became

frightened as three magicians started to chant spells. There were buildings blocking his left and right so he couldn't avoid the damage!

'Damn, I'll just have to break through the front!'

Ark rushed towards the front magician. He used Sprint to collide with the magicians chanting who screamed and fell to the ground.

'That's it, now I can use the warriors to block the attacks from other magicians.....'

Ark thought that and plunged into the crowd of warriors. Suddenly he felt something throb and a huge amount of his health was sucked out.

'Huk, what the?'

Ark reflexively turned and looked at the warriors. The warriors had flames wrapped around their sword. The magicians had used a spell to give magic to the warriors' weapons.

"Kukuku, did you think we would just stay idle?"

"Take this you cocky bastard!"

'They've noticed the weakness in Slime's Time. I'm screwed!'

Ark looked at the flame swords with horror. That's right. The biggest weakness of Slime's Time wasn't magic, but magic enchantment. While the physical damage was invalidated, Ark would still be hurt from the magic damage. Since his magic resistance had decreased by 100%, that amount wasn't small. Moreover, Ark couldn't attack while Slime's Time was still active. It was possible to avoid the magicians' attacks since they took a while to cast but the warriors were more difficult.

"You're dead!"

The warriors cried out as they rushed forward. Meanwhile, the magicians were giving magic enchantments to the other warriors. Once all the warriors had magic swords and the magicians aimed for Ark again, he would be on the defensive. Before he could escape through a gap he created with a head butt but it was suicide to run

towards the warriors holding magic swords. And it wasn't possible to go back. The other 30 alliance members were coming up behind him.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

They started attacking earnestly and his health was drained out. But when he used Slime's Time, his entire body was covered in slime so he couldn't open his bag to use any items like potions. Of course, the items inside Radun weren't affected but his whole body was covered so he couldn't drink the potions anyway.

'If only Slime's Time was over.....'

Ark glared at the small icon in front of him. It was the icon which displayed the time remaining for Slime's Time. Now there was less than two minutes left. Ark reduced the damage using Dark Dance and waited for the icon to disappear. When there was only 1 minute left, he felt something hot behind him. At the same time, he lost a lot of health and fell down.

"There he is!"

The other 30 alliance members chasing him had arrived. But they weren't the problem. Ark only had 5% health left. After being hit by the magic and falling down, he had become completely surrounded. If he was hit with the magic sword then he would definitely die!

"Die!"

A warrior swung his sword with a smile of satisfaction. No, he tried to swing it.

"Master!"

Racard fell from the sky like lightning and crashed into the warrior. Then he grabbed the warrior's ear and started head butting him in the nose. The warrior got a nosebleed and retreated from Racard. Meanwhile Ark rolled his body and escaped from the circle.

"What is that?"

“These guys don’t have to concern you. I’ll rush and smash them!”

Then he rushed towards the dozens of warriors holding magic swords. Ark who was leaning against a wall shouted.

“Summon Demon, Razak, Iron Fire Wall!”

Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

A bony lump rose in front of Ark and formed into Razak. Razak raised his shield and blocked the flames heading for Ark. The wings of flame appeared on both sides of the shield and blocked the soldiers running towards them. It was the special skill of the Blazing Fire Draconian Shield, Iron Fire Wall! It was a skill with a range of 10 metres which invalidated ‘Dash’ and caused ‘Stun’ and flame damage! When the warriors rushed into Razak’s Iron Fire Wall, the soldiers stumbled and were pushed back. So Razak was able to fend off the warriors’ attacks using his shield. Now Ark just had to wait behind Razak for Slime’s Time to finish.

“What is that?”

“It doesn’t matter. He doesn’t have a lot of health left. Focus you magic attacks on him! Even with that skeleton, he won’t be able to endure the magic attacks!”

The magicians circled Ark and Razak and started to simultaneously chant spells.

‘Damn, I just have to hold on for a few seconds.....’

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark had been biting his lip while thinking desperately. Then Radun suddenly moved from Ark’s waist and licked his tongue. Before Ark could say anything, Radun had arrived underneath the magicians’ feet with tremendous speed. At the same time, an explosion occurred underneath the magicians who were chanting spells.

“Ack! What, what the?”

The magicians’ concentration broke from the unexpected shook and their spells were cancelled.

‘Ah, that’s right! Didn’t Radun learn that skill?’

The skill that Radun used was Fire Aura. Radun had learnt this skill only a few days ago. Ark had been leading the troops towards Silvana from Lancel when Radun’s body suddenly heated up and a message window popped up.

-Your summon Radun has digested 50% of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian.

Radun’s body has changed after being influenced by the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. When the Alamone grows to a certain extent, it has the ability to master similar skills which belong to other species. When that power is fully absorbed into the body, it can evolve into a new species. While the secret of an Alamone’s growth is still unknown, its body can grow into something completely different under the influence of other species.

After absorbing the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian, he has begun to evolve into something different from both an Alamone and a Fire Draconian. Every time the absorption of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian reaches a certain level, Radun will learn a new skill.

-Your summon Radun has absorbed the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian and awakened a new skill.

Fire Aura (Beginner, Racial Special Skill): A special skill created by the Alamone after absorbing the power of the Fire Draconians. Fire Aura gives the ability to activate the power of fire. When the ability is used, all enemies within a 20 metre diameter will receive continuous fire damage.

<All enemies within 20 metres will receive 10~20 fire damage.
Mana consumption: 20 mana every second>

The Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian was a material to trigger Radun’s evolution. After reaching 50% absorption, Radun could summon the spirits of fire to deal damage. That was Fire Aura. It was a skill which gave continuous damage like a magician’s wide

area magic. Of course, the damage was only 10~20 but the unexpected shock caused the magicians' spells to fail. It was a method Ark hadn't even considered.

"T-this snake.....!"

The magicians glared at Radun. However, Ark immediately cancelled his summoning and Radun disappeared.

"You did well Racard, Razak and Radun."

Ark who was hiding in the corner smiled and murmured.

"What? That guy's slime has disappeared?"

The alliance members muttered as they looked at Ark again. That's right. Thanks to the help of his summons, Slime's Time had finally disappeared.

"Good, isn't it possible to hit him with our swords now?"

"He is still surrounded. We just have to smash that skeleton!"

The alliance members swung their swords and rushed to attack. But they still hadn't grasped the situation. The reason Ark had run around until the slime was gone was because he could now use 100% of his skills. Ark threw a piece of black meat that he took from his bag. The alliance members who were about to attack suddenly burst out screaming.

"Blazing fire..... Ack! T-this scent, what.....? Cough, cough!"

"Sniper s..... Eh, what? Ugh, my eyes! I-I can't see.....!"

"Huhuhu, how is it? The taste of my creative dishes?"

Ark smirked while holding his nose. That's right. The black meat Ark threw was a food made using Creative Cooking. Ark had named the dish he made 'Hell Bomb!'

-Hell Bomb

A special food made using Creative Cooking. It is created by combining hot peppers, vinegar, rotten meat, horseradish etc. An

extremely bad smell which goes beyond human limits is drifting from this dish. If you pull it out in a public place then you will receive a wild beating.

<Hell Bomb has a range of 5 metres>

It was one of the creative dishes Ark created, Hell Bomb! The smell was horrible enough to make even Ark lose consciousness. In New World, users might only feel a static shock if their limbs were cut off but their sense of smell was 100% real. The Hell Bomb was just like a gas grenade! The food which smelled like it had been rotting for hundreds of years caused the alliance members to panic and block their noses while rolling on the ground.

“Ugh, I made it but it really does smell horrible.”

Even Ark who was outside the range of Hell Bomb felt nauseated.

‘Anyway, the effect of the smell doesn’t last long.’

Hell Bomb wasn’t a food which could cause an abnormal state. While the smell would initially paralyze the user, their noses would eventually adapt to the smell so it was ineffective. In other words, the Hell Bomb would just cause them to panic for 1~2 minutes!

“Racard, Razak, open the path!”

Snap!

Ark threw his body and kneed one of the alliance members in the face. And he jumped over the person who had fallen down.

“T-this bastard..... Cough..... I won’t miss!”

When Ark tried to escape, the warriors rushed to his left and right side. However, they still hadn’t completely recovered from Ark’s bio-terrorism and Racard and Razak used their skills to push them aside and create a path.

“C-catch him!”

After a while, the pursuing members chased Ark to a place blocked

on all sides by walls. Ark stopped running and the voices of the alliance members could be heard behind him.

“Huhuhu, there’s no place for you to run away anymore!”

“You might be like a flea but you won’t be able to escape anymore.”

“That rotten food also won’t work anymore!”

The alliance members muttered while the noses were still runny and they had tears in their eyes. At that moment, Ark turned around and laughed.

“It’s already finished.”

“Heh, are you giving up?”

“No, I’m saying this is my destination.”

“This is your destination? What does that mean.....?”

“This is what it means.”

Ark raised his finger while drinking a recovery potion. It was at that time. Suddenly an earthquake seemed to occur in the area.

“Charge!”

There was a huge dust cloud on the battlefield. It was from Gwen and the 1,500 Hermes members she commanded!

‘There are a lot of engineers in the castle. If I hold on for 10~20 minutes then the gate should be somewhat repaired.’

Of course, such emergency methods can’t be compared to a proper steel gate. It would barely have the form of a gate. However, there were still the Defense Towers. Once the shape of the gate was fixed, it will be able to receive the defense bonus and the automatic durability recovery from the Defense Towers.

‘The problem is that guy’s catapults and his large weapon which looks like a bee hive!’

If those attacks are concentrated on the gate which had been restored using emergency methods then it won't even last a few minutes. They would only be able to endure if they stopped the siege weapons. That was the reason why Gwen hurriedly led the troops outside.

'Besides, this is the last chance we have to attack them!'

Currently, Dark Eden had 2,500 troops remaining. But Ark had flown over the castle walls while 500 troops were attacking one of the side castle walls. In other words, Dark Eden actually had 2,000 troops in front of the castle. But that situation where Dark Eden only had 2,000 troops wouldn't last long. Soon the 500 troops would return from attacking one of the side walls and the 1,000 troops who were attacking the Defense Towers would arrive. When that happened Dark Eden would have 3,500 fighters. Now was the only chance for Gwen to destroy the siege weapons!

'Defending while the siege weapons are still working is suicide! But if they are destroyed then we can maintain a defense formation in front of the gate!'

With the support fire of the 1,400 troops remaining inside the castle, we can slowly defeat Dark Eden's 3,500 people.

'That Ark is also trapped inside the castle grounds. If you prevent their attacks and kill Ark then this siege is over. That Ark thought that he couldn't smash the gates in time so he used a shortcut, but that was his miscalculation. The Hermes alliance didn't maintain Silvana for 1 year through luck!'

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Then the catapult launched a volley of rocks.

"All troops spread out!"

Gwen shouted and the assault unit scattered. The flying rocks only managed to hit a few people. The catapult couldn't show its true strength against moving targets. The Fire Barrage Crossbow was the same. Although the flaming arrows headed towards the approaching troops, most of them missed.

“Huk, run away!”

The raccoons operating the siege weapons screamed as the assault troops came charging forward. Then they quickly disappeared into the ground.

‘What the, those guys?’

Gwen was puzzled as she looked at the holes the raccoons had disappeared through. However, the Dark Eden members were even more confusing than the raccoons. Gwen had showed up in front of the siege weapons but Dark Eden didn’t even move. Only the raccoons escaped while the assault troops reached the catapults and crossbows. The 2,000 Dark Eden troops didn’t move one step or even shoot arrows.

‘Why.....? Aha, that’s right, is Ark dead?’

A smile of satisfaction spread on Gwen’s face after checking Dark Eden’s reactions. Dark Eden wasn’t a guild or alliance. It was an army which Ark had created by hiring soldiers. But their leader Ark had died and now they didn’t know what to do.

‘That Ark is really stupid, everything became even easier because he died. Now these guys are just rubbish. There is no need to think when they are the opponents!’

Gwen amended her plan of destroying the siege weapons and retreating. Currently it was 2,000 against 1,500 with Gwen’s troops having inferior numbers, but the difference of 500 people won’t matter now that they had lost their military leader.

“Assault troops prepare for a 10 minute battle. Units 1 and 2, follow me and attack the siege weapons! Units 3, 4, and 5 will penetrate to the centre of the enemy using the wedge formation!”

Gwen shouted in a huge voice. In an ordinary battle, it was necessary to pay attention to health and mana. If mana ran out then the essential skills couldn’t be used. A 10 minute battle meant they didn’t have to worry about mana and could use as much skills as they liked. Gwen determined that 10 minutes was enough to deal the maximum damage and retreat to the gate before the rest of Dark

Eden arrived.

“Ohhhh, Warrior’s Valour!”

“Triple shot!”

When the battle condition of 10 minutes was announced, the assault troops instantly prepared for battle. They flocked forward and used various skills.

Snap, chi chi chi chi chi.....

Suddenly a brilliant light appeared underneath the siege weapons. It wasn’t just the siege weapons. The light also spread underneath Dark Eden and started burning here and there.

“What the, this is? It can’t be....?”

Gwen flinched and tried to withdraw.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Suddenly a huge explosion occurred in front of her and fire shot up. The members attacking the siege weapons were thrown back several metres. Gwen was also caught by the explosion in front of her and received huge damage before flying back. But she didn’t bother checking her health.

“What, what, what.....?”

Gwen surveyed the area with a blackened face. The area was full of dust and smoke. She saw that the members of the assault troops were scattered all over the place. However, Gwen still couldn’t properly understand the situation. What the hell was going on?

‘That was clearly a trap just now. Then they already knew we would attack the siege weapons and planted some traps? The siege weapons were used as a trap?’

It wasn’t just the siege weapons. The explosion also occurred where the Dark Eden members were. Therefore the assault units who advanced into the main body of Dark Eden also received huge damage. The death toll was 200 people, with most of the casualties

being priests and magicians with lower health. It was as much damage as 18 hours of defending the walls. And the rest of the remaining 1,300 people had their health range from 40% left to 10% left. But that wasn't the truly confusing thing.

"The explosion occurred at the siege weapons and within Dark Eden's camp. We were involved in the explosion but those guys were at the centre of it. They are bound to suffer more damage. Then the 2,000 troops and siege weapons were sacrificed just to deal some damage to us? Furthermore, these traps must've been prepared for a while. What is this nonsense.....?"

It wasn't common sense. Anyway, Gwen thought that all the Dark Eden members would definitely be scattered around the place thanks to the explosion. But when the dust and smoke finally subsided, Gwen witnessed an incredible sight. The 2,000 Dark Eden members who had received the explosion were still standing in the same place and looked completely fine.

"This is..... How could they when they were in the midst of the explosion.....?"

Gwen murmured with a bewildered expression. Suddenly the scene where the detonation hit the Dark Eden members came to her mind. Surprisingly, the explosion penetrated their bodies and just passed through?

Hihihihing!

At the same time, a cry of a horse could be heard from several metres away. She reflexively turned her head and spotted a white horse. With a horn in the middle of its forehead, the white horse was a unicorn. And there was a girl riding the unicorn. The situation was already difficult to understand and suddenly this female appeared! Gwen felt a sudden feeling of unease.

"Catch her! Grab that girl!"

Gwen who was struck by anxiety suddenly shouted. At the same time, hundreds of soldiers rushed towards the girl. However, they were a dozen metres from her when the ground suddenly became

hollow and sank, causing the rushing soldiers to fall.

“Ugh! A trap!”

“Huk, what is this?”

The screaming soldiers fell into the trap. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of the soldiers.

-You have fallen into ‘filth which gives off a bad smell!’

This filth has become stuck to your body. Thanks to the sticky filth, your movement speed has decreased by 30% and your morale has fallen from the terrible smell. The morale of your colleagues will also fall from the stench. This effect will last until you take a bath.

Apart from the creative dishes Ark made, he also dug traps that were filled with stinky filth. It was filth made from the failed products of Survival Cooking and other rotten food..... No, it was fertilizer! The soldiers who fell into the trap had their morale and movement speed decreased. Moreover, the smell was so horrible that the morale of their colleagues also decreased. Then the girl looked at the soldiers who had fallen into a pile of filth and laughed. She stroked the unicorn and said.

“Kikiki, let’s go Unicorn!”

Then the unicorn snorted and farted before running away. It was strange to see the fairy-tale like unicorn do such dirty actions. But despite its personality, a unicorn was a unicorn. When it showed of its movement speed of +1000%, the unicorn and girl disappeared like ghosts. And the unicorn and girl were gone, the 2,000 Dark Eden troops blurred and gradually disappeared.

“An illusion? This was all an illusion?”

Gwen finally figured out the reason for the strange incidents. Gwen had heard that the secret society members who attacked Lancel had acted strange. But the section where the secret society suffered immense damage from the illusions wasn’t broadcasted on TV. It wasn’t a mere illusion, but one that could replicate 1~2 villages

perfectly!

“Then what happened just now.....!”

That’s right. The girl riding the unicorn was Roco. The Dark Eden soldiers were all illusions created by Roco’s Illusion Sonata. However, Gwen was thrown into an even more chaotic state of mind.

“No. Was it truly an illusion? No way. We had been fighting them on the walls. Then we’ve just been fighting against illusions? Impossible.....”

Gwen murmured until she suddenly remembered something.

‘Come to think of it.....It is confirmed that those guys really attacked the castle walls.....’

Yet the same guys never appeared twice!

‘Then..... The reason Ark passively attacked for 18 hours..... Was to hide his troops?’

That’s right. There was a reason Ark had been passive for 18 hours. If he tried to hide all the troops at once, it would be noticeable even with the illusion. But if he attacked the castle with 500 troops and sent them to a recovery place then there would be no suspicion. And Gwen had no reason to pay attention to those 500 people after they left. There was no time for such thoughts when another 500 troops were attacking as long as she confirmed that the main body still had 2,000 people. In fact, the 500 troops which retreated outside of sight didn’t return to the main army. And then Roco filled up the missing 500 spots with Illusion Sonata. It was a trick which took 18 hours! This was the reason Ark had to sneak into the castle to make the gate corrode. Gwen suddenly had a thought which caused goose bumps on her body.

‘Then where did the 2,000 troops disappear to.....?’

Gwen looked back at Silvana castle. If they hid 2,000 troops then this situation where Gwen led 1,500 troops outside was the best timing to attack the castle. Fortunately, there were no traces of Dark

Eden moving. The gate had also recovered to some extent.

‘Why did those guys waste this chance to attack the castle? Did they hide the troops just to lure us into this trap? Or did the gate recover faster than they expected so they missed the timing? I don’t know what happened but I feel assured that the worst situation has been avoided. I have to return to the castle and arrange the defense formation before those other guys arrive!’

“Get up, be on guard and return to the castle. You can recover when we reach the castle!”

Gwen rushed the alliance members and arrived in front of the gate.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kakang, pepepepeng!

The violent sounds of swords impacting could be heard! The noise continued and there were even signs of fighting on the walls. When Gwen raised her head, she saw that the Dark Eden soldiers were fighting against the Hermes members.

‘What the? How did they get in?’

-What’s going on?

Gwen sent a whisper to the leader behind the walls.

-Gwen-nim, it is a surprise attack by the enemy!

-An attack? What does that mean? Where did the enemy come from? Wasn’t the gate blocked up?

-Those fellows didn’t come from the gate. There are 2,500 of them!

-2...2,500? What are you talking about? How could those troops suddenly appear inside the castle grounds?

-I don’t know. Ugh!

-Damn, what the hell is going on? Open the gate at once!

-We can’t open the gate!

-What? Can’t open the gate?

-Right now the gate is..... We're not the ones repairing it!

“What, what the?”

“What is this vibration.....?”

The alliance members looked around stupidly. It was a huge noise like something was getting pushed up. The vibrations gradually approached and one alliance member shouted.

“This vibration is coming from there!”

The alliance member pointed to a temple within Silvana that was behind Ark. That's right. The ground shaking vibrations was coming from within the temple. But the size of the temple was only around 10 metres. What was happening inside the temple that could cause this large vibration? The 50 alliance members looked around with a confused expression.

Ku ku ku ku..... Kwaaaaaaah!

“Ohhhhhh!”

“Silvana castle!”

The vibration seemed more frequent until the doors of the temple seemed to burst open. And a huge number of soldiers started pouring out of the small temple. The alliance members' mouths gaped widely at the sight.

“T-those guys are.....?”

“Dark Eden! They are the troops from Dark Eden!”

“Bingo, kill them.”

Ark laughed and drew his fingers across his neck. Then the soldiers from the temple literally swarmed over the alliance members. It was like seeing a tsunami hit a small boat. Hundreds of soldiers had already poured out of the temple so the alliance members' health quickly ran out. In less than a minute the 50 alliance members had already died.

“Ark, are you okay?”

The voice could be heard from someone leaving the temple. It was JusticeMan, Lariette, Shambala, Isyuram and the four rehabilitation members who didn't participate in the special attack. Ark drank recovery potions and laughed.

“Yes, you came just in time.”

That's right. This was the strategy Ark developed to capture Silvana. Using Roco's Illusion Sonata, he could trick Gwen and smuggle in 2,500 troops. His forces retreating to a place the soldiers on the walls couldn't see wasn't for the sake of recovery. It was to gather them in a secret place hidden in Silvana. This was the reason Ark had been convinced of his victory. He knew about the secret dungeon underneath the Asyeosu temple. Before passing the castle to Raiden, Ark had the raccoons dig a tunnel to the dungeon.

‘That is the no. 1 tunnel! Then I just have to drag the troops through the no. 1 tunnel to infiltrate the castle!’

That's why hundreds of gold was used to trick Gwen, from the 4,000 gold he spent on the Fire Barrage Crossbow to the 50 gold spent on potions that Roco drank to maintain the Illusion Sonata for 18 hours. All that gold invested was to secretly bring 2,500 into Silvana. Anyway, the operation was a great success!

‘But now comes the really important part!’

“There's no time. It is a speed competition now. Advance to the gate!”

“Wah ah ah!”

Ark led his troops towards the gate.

“Racard, use satellite surveillance mode and report on the situation!”

“Yes!”

Racard replied and flew into the sky.

“JusticeMan ajusshi, rehabilitation hyung-nims, if the troops inside

the castle move then the situation will be difficult. Take 800 people and check that the troops inside the castle don't move!"

"Understood."

JusticeMan nodded and led 800 troops towards the castle. Ark moved the remaining 1,700 troops across the grounds and arrived near the gate.

"Hey, what the?"

"How on earth did those guys.....?"

The alliance members around the castle fell into a state of panic. It was natural since the Dark Eden members who were gathered outside the gate suddenly appeared inside. But they were experts which had maintained the territory for 1 year and quickly recovered.

"I don't know the situation but it is too late for it to change!"

"There's no need to panic. We have 1,000 colleagues inside the castle and 1,500 outside the gates!"

"If we endure for a bit then Raiden and Gwen will come to help!"

"These guys don't have a lot of people!"

The alliance members quickly got into a defense formation. Now there was only 50 meters between the 1,700 Dark Eden members and the 1,400 Hermes alliance members. Ark ran forward and raised his voice.

"Eat all your food! Lariette-nim, use your set of 3 attack buffs!"

The Dark Eden members simultaneously took out their dishes at Ark's command. Lariette opened her arms and a white light spread through the area.

"The great warrior's soul..... Soul's Disposition, Warrior's Concentration, Storm Breathing!"

Soul's Disposition raised attack by 10%! Warrior's Concentration increased the probability of a critical hit by 20%! Meanwhile Storm Breathing increased the attack speed of sword related weapons by

10%! When armed with 3 different attack buffs and food, their stats rose quickly.

“Pierce through the enemies! Blade Tempest!”

Ark exploded a magic sword and plunged towards enemy lines. At the same time, Dark Eden and the Hermes alliance members collided. It was 1,400 people against 1,700 people! There was a roaring sound like a thunderbolt when the 3,000 troops collided and a fountain of blood spouted upwards. It was like a situation where two tomatoes held in both hands were smashed together. The pressure from both sides caused bleeding among the soldiers. Shorted after both sides collided, the two groups seemed to stop moving.

Kkukukukukuk!

The warriors raised their shields after both sides collided and it became a contest of strength. The atmosphere was just like before a volcano exploded. The swelling lava caused cracks which seemed like they could break apart at any point. While the warriors were having a standoff, the magicians and archers were using ranged attacks to break through.

“Racard, check the arrangement of the enemy!”

In this standoff, the first enemy who managed to hit the opponent with long-ranged attacks would win. In a conflict like this, it would be difficult to find the location of the archers and magicians to intercept them. But the magicians and archers in Dark Eden were easy to see by the Hermes members on the wall. It was the reason why he sent Racard to the gate beforehand.

“There are 50 archers and 20 magicians on the right side. 50 metres to the rear of the troops in the 3 o’clock direction are 80 archers, 30 magicians. While on the left wall there are 60 archers and 15 magicians.....”

Racard explained the location of the enemy troops to Ark. After Ark heard the reported, he handed the information to the long range attackers in Dark Eden.

“All archers and magicians in Dark Eden, focus your attacks on these coordinates!”

“Burning flames of anger..... Rage of fire!”

“Thunderbolt!”

The magicians simultaneously hurled magic at the coordinates Ark mentioned. The archers also shot arrows towards the magicians who were chanting spells to interrupt them. Thanks to Racard's information, they were able to pinpoint the location and destroy 40% of the enemy's long ranged attacks. With the burden of a long ranged counter attack eased, Dark Eden started to earnestly attack the enemy. The balance had tilted in their direction.

“Now's the time. Take this! Dark Blade!”

Ark plunged into the enemy lines which had started to crumble and shouted. Dozens of people followed Ark recklessly and lost their lives. However, Ark had no time to worry about them. In a fight of 1,700 vs. 1,400, there was no time to look back. Ark had to attack the gate so forcefully to subdue it in time. Ark had invested a lot of gold into this so time was of the essence.

‘If Gwen's assault troops return then Dark Eden's 1,700 troops will quickly crumble!’

That's right. Dark Eden was able to have a numerical advantage because Gwen had led the 1,500 troops out of the castle. Even if there were casualties from the trap, there were still 1,300 troops remaining. If they returned to the castle then Dark Eden wouldn't be able to endure. So he had to penetrate the enemy line no matter how many troops he lost.

‘There are also the 1,000 Hermes troops left in the castle!’

That was the reason why Ark had 800 troops check to see if they moved. If those troops attacked as well then Dark Eden would never win. So his 800 members would block the troops inside the castle for the moment. And.....

“Assault troops, gather your power and charge! Victory or defeat

hangs on this charge! Rush!”

Ark led Dark Eden in a wedge formation. The head of the wedge formation was Ark and Shambala!

“Take this, Dark Blade!”

“Torrential Sword!”

Ark and Shambala used their skills, causing the leaders of the enemy to stumble. Thanks to that, Dark Eden managed to penetrate the enemy.

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

It was the feel of pushing through a hard shell! Once the shield unit of the enemy troops collapsed, Dark Eden quickly managed to reach the gate.

“That’s it. Now take a defense formation on the left and right. Open the path for the engineers!”

The assault troops moved at Ark’s order. They drove the enemy to the left and right side, clearing a path to the gate. Then the raccoon engineers who had been waiting ran through with some big planks. They then placed the boards on the gate and began to nail them in at a quick speed.

“What is going on?”

“Those guys are repairing the gate?”

The enemy said in a confused voice as they stared at the actions of the raccoon engineers. Then an alliance member flinched and shouted.

“They’re not repairing it. A wall! They’re trying to block the gate!”

“T-then the reason they attacked the gate.....?”

“You finally understand?”

Ark laughed as he swung his sword. That’s right. The reason Ark had rushed and sacrificed some troops was for this. It was to seize

the gate and build a barrier before Gwen returned. During the Lancel defensive war, he had the raccoons built the barrier on the spot to save time. Thus the raccoons were carrying a barrier like that as they approached the gate. The pieces were quickly assembled and the gate soon became a wall. Gwen who had returned to the castle after being hit by the traps had run into this barrier.

“Damn, smash it!”

Gwen yelled from outside the gate as she finally figured out the situation.

‘Huhuhu, this barrier is different from the hastily built ones used during the Lancel war. It is a special barrier that I paid 4,000 gold for. It isn’t something that can be broken with swords. And this barrier also receives the protection of the Defense Towers.’

That’s right. This was the reason why Bread and Redian hadn’t attacked the Defense Towers properly. The barrier that the raccoons built had become a part of Silvana’s architecture. Thus the Defense Towers bonuses like increased and auto recovery was applied to it. Now that the barrier has received the protection, without any siege weapons Gwen would take many hours to smash it.

“It’s a success! The mackerel pieces gamble!”

Ark shouted as he looked at the finished barrier. That’s right. The strategy Ark came up with for this siege was the Mackerel pieces gamble. In fact, while preparing for this siege the thing he was most worried about was a full-fledged war. This was because the Hermes alliance was superior to him in numbers and other aspects. If there was a full-fledged war then his chances of winning was only at 30~40%. Even if he used the tunnel no. 1 as a surprise attack, he only had a 50% chance of winning.

‘The odds aren’t favourable. This war was one with my life at stake. I need to increase the odds to at least 80%!’

So he came up with the mackerel pieces gamble. The first part had Ark and the rehabilitation members destroy the gates to draw out Gwen’s troops. This was the first step. Then Ark used tunnel no. 1

to seize the castle gates. But there was one problem with this. It was Raiden and his 1,000 troops waiting inside the castle.

‘However, Raiden won’t move!’

The reason Ark thought like that was simple. At this point, Ark and the 2,500 Dark Eden members had already broken in. If he left the castle and joined the Hermes troops outside to make it 2,400 then it would be risky since the enemy could enter the castle. Therefore Raiden decided to wait until Gwen came back. Raiden never imagined that Ark would block the gates. Raiden and Gwen were unable to expect Ark’s plan. Ark had taken advantage of that to separate the Hermes alliance’s head, body and tail. It was like a mackerel which had been cut into pieces! And Ark’s strategy was a success. But the strategy didn’t have a 100% chance of succeeding.

‘If the castle forces joined the troops on the grounds before Gwen entered then everything is screwed!’

That’s right. The mackerel pieces gamble would encounter a big problem if the head, Raiden and his 1,000 troops, joined with the tail, the 1,400 troops on the castle grounds. The important thing was the body, Gwen and her 1,300 troops. If the head, body and tail joined up then the plan would surely fail.

‘How will the desperate Raiden combine with the body now?’

Ark’s eyes flashed.

“Oh my god.....!”

Ark looked over towards the castle. Raiden was watching the gate from the castle with confusion.

“What did it start to go wrong?”

Raiden said as he couldn’t understand the situation. When the siege started it was 4,300 against 5,600. No matter how they looked at it, the Hermes alliance had the overwhelming strength. The Hermes alliance also had the Defense Towers and the walls. With this much

advantage, it should've been easy. Nevertheless, Raiden didn't feel relieved.

'The opponent is Ark. That fellow has managed to turn a sure-fire defeat around before. He has a strange amount of luck in decisive moments.'

It was unnecessary to say but Raiden had a lot of pride. Ark was a strong guy with a lot of luck when it came to decisive moments. When thinking about the past, he couldn't feel at ease even if his forces were clearly dominant. That's why Raiden stayed inside the castle. Ark knew that he was at a disadvantage when applying for the siege! If he moved outside then he feared he was just playing into Ark's scheme. If he just stayed inside and defended like a turtle then Ark's schemes would be no use. And everything had progressed as Raiden expected until now.

"But what is this?"

Raiden shouted as he punched the wall. How could Dark Eden enter the castle grounds when the gate was tightly closed? Raiden didn't know about the existence of the no. 1 tunnel so he couldn't understand the situation. No, in fact he hadn't thought it was necessary to understand. Dark Eden only had 2,500 troops. On the other hand, Raiden believed that he had 3,900 troops. When Gwen's troops returned to the castle, they could just surround Dark Eden and crush them. But that judgement was Raiden's worst mistake. If he had taken the risk and moved his 1,000 troops then Ark wouldn't have the chance to block the gate. But Raiden never imagined that the gate would be blocked and chose the 'safe victory' path. That had given Ark the time he needed to control the gate. When Gwen's troops confirmed outside the castle, Raiden was now unable to move outside the castle.

'That Ark bastard.....!'

Raiden's blood pressure soared again because of Ark. However, he took a deep breath and pushed down the anger.

"I have to maintain a steady state of mind. If I become mad then I'll just keep getting played by Ark. Yes, I have to be calm. Ark is used

to playing cheap tricks but if I think about it carefully, nothing is really disadvantageous for us. Even if the troops on the castle grounds are wiped out, we still have a lot more.”

Raiden calmed down and thought about the situation. The Hermes alliance was certainly at a disadvantage when fighting on the castle grounds. However, they were one of the 5 powers in Nagaran. Dark Eden also has quite a lot of casualties. In addition, they’ve dispersed their troops so Dark Eden actually only has 1,700 people.

“Even if they wipe out the 1,400 troops, Dark Eden will still receive significant damage. When the battle outside ends, they should only have around 2,000 people left. Combined with those guys who retreated from the Defense Towers, that is 3,000 people.”

However, there were 1,000 troops inside the castle along with Gwen’s 1,400 troops. When combined with the 1,400 troops at the Defense Towers, that was 3,800 members. While they had been forced on the defensive from the unexpected attack, the Hermes alliance still had 800~1000 more troops.

“The problem is that is separating the troops. But if we join together then we will win. Besides, there’s only 3~4 hours left so if I maintain the castle then it will be my victory!”

And Raiden knew how to gather the troops. Even if Ark had blocked the gate, it was just a temporary shield. The only reason Gwen couldn’t smash it was because of the protection from the Defense Towers.

“.....If so, the answer is simple.”

Raiden used a Feather of Whispering on the leader of the troops in the Defense Towers.

-When you receive this command, destroy the Defense Towers immediately and return to the castle!

-Huh? What are you saying.....?

-Gwen will explain it when you arrive at the gate.

This was the method Raiden selected. There were two reasons Gwen was stuck in front of the gates. One reason was the Defense Towers protection while the other was that Gwen's troops were mainly composed of warriors. While there were 1,300 troops outside the gate, it was a limited area so only 100 people could actually attack the gate. However, the troops from the Defense Towers were mainly archers and magicians. If the 1,400 troops from the Defense Towers attack the barrier with magic and arrows then it would only last 30 minutes.

"Then it will certainly be our victory!"

In fact, Raiden was confident that he could maintain the castle with the 1,000 troops for the remaining 3~4 hours. It's because he had invested a lot of money into the defences of the castle. But this time Ark had managed to unexpectedly hit him in the back of the head.

"I won't repeat the same mistakes. That Ark bastard, this time I'll definitely step on him!"

Raiden's eyes started to shine with an eerie light.

Impregnable Fortress

“Heh, it’s not even near the end and those guys have already run away.”

An archer laughed as he looked outside the window. The place he was looking out from was a bunker installed in front of the Defense Tower. The Hermes alliance had used the same method Alan chose in the past to protect the Defense Towers. In other words, it was the strategy to build bunkers in front of the tower while magicians and archers attacked those navigating a minefield of traps. No, this strategy was a common strategy that must territories used. It was a classic strategy to protect the Defense Towers. Of course, Ark had previously broken that strategy in 12 hours. However, it was only possible thanks to his raccoons digging tunnels underneath. One year had passed since then and nobody had succeeded in smashing the Defense Towers in less than 15 hours.

“To be honest I was a little nervous at this time.”

“This is the same strategy to protect the Defense Towers which Ark broke in 12 hours. Furthermore, the users commanding the units are the pioneers Bread and Redian so I was expecting a fierce battle.”

The unit attacking this Defense Tower consisted of Bread, the Wolrang and some of the Eastern Nation. They knew that Bread possessed a reckless character and tremendous attack power. However, Bread had retreated after entering the mine field and failing a few times.

“Heh, even the last pioneer can’t do anything? Even if they have 2,000 people, it will be impossible for them penetrate the huge number of traps we laid in time. They only brought 500 people so of course they can’t occupy the Defense Towers.”

“That’s right. Instead of Bread, isn’t Ark who ordered this the pathetic one?”

“Yes. After all, he only experienced the siege once a year ago. At that time the siege only had 2,000 people at most. And Ark was only commanding 83 people.”

“That standard is just child’s play.”

The alliance members relaxed in the bunkers and continued chattering. Then the garrison chief of the Defense Tower suddenly heard Raiden’s desperate voice in his ear.

-When you receive this command, destroy the Defense Towers immediately and return to the castle!

“He wants us to destroy this perfect Defense Tower and return to the castle? What is he saying?”

“I don’t understand the details either, but.....”

The garrison chief frowned and answered the questions of his men. The defenders breaking their own Defense Towers had never been heard of before. However, the garrison chief could tell from Raiden’s desperate voice that something serious had happened.

“It must be because of those guys who retreated..... Anyway, clearly there was a serious problem at the castle. It might be too late if we question it, so let’s hurry up!”

“Damn, let’s break the Defense Tower.”

The troops exited the bunkers and headed towards the Defense Tower. Then they fired arrows and magic towards the tower.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Suddenly an explosion occurred hundreds of metres away from them.

“What, what the? What is that?”

“Isn’t that place the mine field? The traps? Did the traps explode?”

“Don’t tell me those guys returned?”

The garrison chief flinched and turned his head. His idea was

correct. Bread and the Dark Eden members who he thought had returned to the main body ages ago were walking through the mine field. The garrison chief was even more confused than when he received Raiden's order.

"What is that? If they walk through the mine field like that then they should've been wiped out long before they reached here.....huk, did they increase their troops? No, the numbers seem the same. Are they just pushing through now that there's not a lot of time left?"

"Captain-nim, look over there! Those guys in front.....!"

Then a soldier pointed to where the trap had exploded and shouted. It wasn't an enemy that was activating the traps. Hundreds of animals that looked like rabbits were moving and activating the traps.

"What, what the? Where on earth did those animals come from?"

The garrison chief murmured with a puzzled expression. This was a siege battlefield. Once the siege began, no users as well as animals could enter. Yet a herd of animals had suddenly showed up? And despite their colleagues being caught by traps, why did they just continue walking forward? Were they animals that had been trained for mass suicide?

"Huhuhu, I have to admit Ark really thought of a shrewd plan."

The animals which had the garrison chief confused weren't really animals but stuffed dolls. That's right. The hundreds of rabbits which rushed onto the battlefield was an animal doll.

-Poco Poco Doll (General)

A deluxe doll which resembles the famous Poco Poco of the northern mountains. The texture of the Poco Poco feels very wonderful. In addition, there is a magic equipment inside which will allow the Poco Poco to make sounds and move. It also contains a crystal to record your voice. It is best given as a gift.

It was the Poco Poco doll that Ark had bought from Paradox! In fact,

Ark already knew before the siege that the Hermes alliance would use traps and bunkers to protect the towers. Despite knowing that, Ark had only sent 500 troops to each Defense Tower.

'The traps react to moving objects. In other words it doesn't matter if a user, NPC or doll is the one to activate it!'

Ark thought that and bought 2,000 Poco Poco dolls from the continent. However, it wasn't important to destroy the Defense Towers. Rather, he actually wanted to protect the Defense Towers.

"If the Defense Towers are destroyed then it would be a problem."

Bread laughed as he put down the Poco Poco doll.

"Poco Poco, aren't you named well?"

"Poco Poco, now you're all screwed."

The Poco Poco doll toddled into the minefield and spat out curses. In fact, Bread had quite a bit of stress piled up since the siege started. It wasn't necessary to say, but from the beginning Bread's purpose wasn't to destroy the Defense Tower. He was finally participating in the long awaited siege only to be stuck at the boring mine field. So he had to listen to the Hermes members call him and Ark names like coward, etc. Thanks to that, Bread and the Wolrang's rage went up to 120%. So he had recorded angry messages into the Poco Poco doll before sending them into the mine field.

"U-unbelievable.....!"

The garrison chief belatedly realized the situation and screamed.

"Everybody get back into the bunker! We have to stop them!"

The garrison chief commanded as the archers and magicians ran back to the bunkers.

"It is already too late. These foolish bastards!"

Keuaaaaang!

At the same time, hundreds of shadows flew from Bread's back. It was the Wolrang who had their fury build for the last 20 hours! After

releasing the 1,000 Poco Poco dolls, the Wolrang and Eastern Nation rushed towards an enemy at a tremendous rate. Then they attacked the magicians and archers escaping to the bunker. The troops at the Defense Towers consisted 90% of archers and magicians. If there were traps and they hid in the bunkers then there would be sufficient power to wipe out the enemy. However, the mine field had already been destroyed. And the troops had exited the bunker. Without the protection of the traps and bunkers, the archers and magicians only lasted a few minutes. It was more like a one-sided slaughter than a battle.

“Now you’ll see why I’m called the last pioneer!”

Bread murmured as he broke the joints of an enemy.

Bread and Redian had earnestly started the plan to capture the Defense Towers. The battle between Dark Eden and the Hermes alliance at the gate was also finishing.

“The raccoon clan will focus on repairing the barrier. The defense unit will stay there and protect the raccoons and barrier. The rest of the troops wipe out the enemy on the walls!”

The hundreds of soldiers gathered at the gate moved following Ark’s command. Magic and arrows flew towards the raccoons but they were protected by the shields of the defense unit. When magic and arrows didn’t work, the enemy warriors tried ‘Rush.’ ‘Rush’ was a skill which allowed warriors to pierce through shields. But Ark just thought it was ludicrous and snorted.

“Razak, show them who they’re messing with!”

Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Pepepepeng, hwarrrrruk!

When Razak used Iron Fire Wall, the soldiers rushing were caught by the flames and were thrown back. Racard also wasn’t playing around.

“More warriors are rushing from 10 metres away at your 3 o’clock, magicians are chanting spells at 5 o’clock and some archers are trying to climb the right corner wall to snipe people.”

Racard reported the movements of the troops in real time. Then he listened to the report and passed it on to Shambala, Dark Eden and the Eastern Nation.

Ssak ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun also plunged onto the battlefield and used Fire Aura. When there were thousands of people on the battlefield, it wasn’t easy to spot something underneath their feet. Radun also had Protective Colouration so he could go around and use Fire Aura as well as pick up items.

‘Huhuhu, the three pets that I raised well are better than 100 users!’

His heart was once again satisfied as he looked at his familiars playing an active part. Meanwhile, the enemy who was concentrating on maintaining their attacks became even more violent. Now high ground was the most strategic place to attack the barrier. The most important thing to the alliance was to attack the barrier. And the most important thing to Ark was that the raccoons repair the gate. Therefore the Hermes alliance concentrated their attacks on the raccoons and the barrier. No matter how much Ark and the 800 members of the defense unit tried to protect them, the raccoons had their health slowly drain away.

‘But these attacks are like fighting against the ocean!’

Ark watched the raccoons’ health using Eyes of the Cat and shouted.

“Great Sacrifice!”

His bag automatically opened and 50 potions rose into the sky. The potions formed into a huge jar before scattering around the battlefield.

‘Ahhhhh, my 1,400 gold.....!’

Ark shed tears like a waterfall as he looked at the scattering potions and all the money that was gone. Despite wasting money, the result was good. All the raccoons repairing the gates and the soldiers protecting them had their health increase.

-An intermediate recovery effect from the 50 intermediate recovery potions is applied to all allies within 100 metres.

<All allies will recover 600~800 health>

It was the special power of Nursing, Great Sacrifice. In fact, Ark had purchased potions and distributed it to the soldiers. Drinking an intermediate recover potion would heal 500 health. But when he used Great Sacrifice, all allies within a 100 metre area would recover 600~800 health. So Ark had purchased and separated them inside Radun in groups of 50 or 100 in case of emergencies which required Great Sacrifice. It also had the effect of stopping the warriors from overusing their recovery potions.

“U-unbelievable.....!”

The Hermes alliance members muttered as they saw Dark Eden’s health recover. The battle had already lasted for 1 hour so most of the high priority priests were already dead. Now health couldn’t be expected to recover any more and they would have to survive with their remaining health. But after seeing the troops in front of the gates recovering in such a way, the alliance members felt their motivation decrease.

“This is the chance to win the battle on the castle grounds.

Ark smiled as he looked around the surroundings. In fact, Ark had predicted that the battle would go like this. Dark Eden had a lot of troops thanks to the mackerel pieces strategy but Ark’s main priority was to protect the barrier. Therefore he had left the 500 members of the defense unit at the gate to protect the raccoons and the barrier. In the end, there was only a 200 difference between the numbers of Dark Eden and the Hermes alliance. Furthermore, the hastily put together Dark Eden had less experience than the Hermes members. It wasn’t a favourable situation. But in the actual battle,

Dark Eden had one-sidedly pushed the Hermes alliance. The reason Ark placed the defense unit at the barrier was because the Hermes alliance would also concentrate their attacks on the barrier. And the second reason was that Dark Eden's weapons and defense was stronger.

"What? Why are level 250 users so strong?"

The Hermes members were confused after colliding with Dark Eden. It was natural. In fact, the weapons and equipment Dark Eden were using was the cursed japtem from Seutandal. After absorbing the demonic energy, the cursed japtem was 2~3 times stronger. There was the penalty of having low durability but that didn't matter in the short term. So Ark gave all the soldiers who participated in the battle on castle grounds the cursed japtem. Thus Dark Eden could dominate the battle early on.

'Moreover, there are two people who have a large effect.'

One person was Shambala who was capturing the walls with the Eastern Nation. The other one was Isyuram.

'Teacher playing such a huge part is completely unexpected.'

Ark looked away from Shambala towards Isyuram. In fact, Ark hadn't expected Isyuram to play a huge role. In reality, Isyuram was a strong man in Korea's police force. But in the game he was just a merchant. He might've changed professions but he was still a merchant. A merchant participating in battle would die straight away. However, Isyuram displayed just as much combat power as Ark and Shambala when the battle began. The reason for that were 2 skills that he received when he changed professions.

-Stat? Buy it with money! (Beginner, Passive, Profession exclusive skill): A skill of Kuronil's which gives a merchant the abilities of a warrior.

When the merchant who has this skill pays a certain amount of money to the 'Brave Gold Pig', an artifact of a Battle Merchant then they can switch one stat for another one for 1 hour. The amount of stats that can be converted depends on the amount of gold paid.

However, the stat conversion can exceed 80%.

<You can change 10 stats for every gold paid for 1 hour>

As a merchant, most of Isyuram's stats were concentrated on intelligence, wisdom and luck. Even if he changed to a dual profession, it was meaningless if his stats were the same. Stat? Buy it with money! was a skill to fix that weak point. When the battle began, Isyuram had used hundreds of gold to convert his intelligence, wisdom and luck to strength, stamina and agility. Well, even if he switched stats then it was still equivalent to a warrior's stats. No even if he used hundreds of gold and switched 80% of his stats, it was still less than a warrior's. That was the limitation of having a dual profession. But that increase in stats made all the difference to Isyuram. When just comparing combat ability, his was obviously superior to everybody participating in the siege.

'If the stats are at a similar level than almost no users can match Teacher.'

However, not even Ark realized that Isyuram had another skill which had a significant impact.

-Can't live with a loss! (Beginner, Passive, Profession exclusive skill): A skill born from a merchant's spirit which cannot stand the loss of money.

When a user under the effect of 'Can't live with a loss' is attacked by an enemy, there is a 50% chance to absorb the damage and reflect 10% of the shock back to the enemy.

<50% chance to reflect 10% of the damage to the enemy>

The skill 'Can't live with a loss!' was created to help merchants in battle. It wouldn't show a big effect for other users.

'50% chance to reflect 10% of the damage is a pretty decent skill.'

Ark thought as he confirmed the skill information. However, there were secrets that even Ark was unaware of hidden in this skill.

“Ugh, what the, what is this? Aaaagh!”

A user who attacked Isyuram suddenly clutched his chest and screamed. The reason for that was ‘Can’t live with a loss! It was a skill where the user received some of the shock back. Despite reading the information window, ‘Can’t live with a loss!’ wasn’t simple a skill which reflected damage. The pain which Isyuram felt when he was hit was reflected back to the enemy. The problem was that Isyuram felt 100% of the pain. In other words, Isyuram would really feel the pain if he was cut by a sword. Isyuram only reflected back 10% of the pain so it was 1/10th what he felt. But this was a game so the users who experienced pain for the first time screamed and rolled across the ground. Then they became too terrified to attack again.

“What the, this guy?”

But Ark was unaware of Isyuram’s settings so he couldn’t understand the reaction of the users. Anyway, thanks to Stat? Buy it with money!’ and ‘Can’t live with a loss!’ Isyuram was able to go deep into enemy lines without really being bothered. So Isyuram and Shambala pierced through and scattered the enemy lines.

-Ark, we’ve occupied the Defense Towers. The rest is up to you. Make sure you finish it cleanly.

Suddenly Bread’s voice flowed into Ark’s ear.

“That’s it. I’ve finally grasped the 2 Defense Towers!”

Ark was now sure of his victory in the siege.

‘The hardest part is over. With the Defense Towers in my hand, Gwen will never be able to smash the barrier in the remaining time. Now I just have to finish the last part of the mackerel strategy.’

That’s right. The mackerel pieces strategy couldn’t be completed if the Defense Towers were still occupied by the Hermes guild. No matter how much the raccoons repaired the barrier, it wouldn’t last for several hours if the Defense Towers were destroyed. Of course, if it received a concentrated attack then it couldn’t endure for a long time even with the protection of the Defense Towers.

‘But after overpowering the troops on the castle grounds, the barrier will be able to withstand Gwen’s attack for 3 hours.’

That’s right. It hadn’t been necessary to use 18 hours for the tunnel strategy. But this was the reason why he only started the strategy after 18 hours despite his troops taking damage. The siege finished after 24 hours. Even if he managed to capture the throne, if Gwen’s troops pierced through the barrier before the siege ended and attacked the weakened Dark Eden then the result would be unpredictable. However, now there were only 2 and a half hours remaining. With the Defense Towers controlled, Gwen wouldn’t be able to enter the castle before the siege ended. He didn’t have to worry about that anymore and could concentrate on capturing the castle.

“The Defense Towers are now controlled by us! Annihilate all of them!”

“Waaahhhhhhhh!”

The spirited Dark Eden shouted and rushed towards the Hermes alliance. After a while, Dark Eden finally controlled the castle grounds and occupied the walls.

“The enemy has been completely destroyed!”

“770 people have been killed!”

1,400 alliance members dying compared to 770 Dark Eden members was quite good. This meant he had 770 troops remaining. When added to the troops keeping an eye on the castle, it was 1,730 people.

‘The raccoons still have to repair the barrier due to Gwen’s attacks so I should leave 400 troops here. That leaves 1,330 people. It should be enough to control the castle in 2 hours!’

“Now it is the final battle. Head to the castle!”

There was no reason to delay any longer. Ark led 530 troops to join with the ones at the castle. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members rushed towards him when he arrived at the castle.

“Ark, has everything on the castle grounds been cleaned up?”

“Yes, Bread and Redian have occupied the Defense Towers.”

“Then this is the only thing remaining.”

JusticeMan looked at the castle and nodded. A battle was still occurring in front of the castle. JusticeMan and the 800 troops had been shooting arrows at the windows while the Hermes members inside also shot arrows and magic at them. Despite fighting so much while Ark was controlling the outside, there were almost no casualties. The reason was the structure of the castle. In fact, the actual castle was more difficult to capture than the grounds. The castle was completely covered from the ground all the way up to the roof. The windows were the only place which connected it with the grounds. Just like the walls outside, troops could be placed at the windows to attack. Yes, the castle was a strong defense just like the walls and the courtyard. In addition, the defense of the castle was better than the walls. Usually attackers could enter the castle after the Defense Towers were destroyed. But this time the Defense Towers were perfectly fine. And Dark Eden didn't have any siege weapons.

‘It is the same situation as Gwen who is stuck outside the gate.’

Unlike Gwen, Ark absolutely had to capture the castle to win. While Gwen needed 2 hours to break the barrier, presently Dark Eden required triple that time enter the castle. It would take at least 6 hours.

‘But.....’

Ark smiled and opened his bag. The item he took out was the Phantom Hourglass which he had used to break the gate! The reason said he could capture the castle in 2 hours was because of this Phantom Hourglass.

“Now shall I get started?” Shield troops, advance and raise your shields!”

Magic flew from the windows of the castle but the attack wasn't enough to be a problem. They could only attack outside using the

windows, so even with 1,000 troops only 50~60 people could actually attack. Ark blocked the attack of the enemy using the shield unit and arrived at the castle door. When he used the Phantom Hourglass, the door instantly became tattered.

“Now, hit the door with your blunt weapons!”

Then the shield unit took out their maces and warhammers. And they battered the rotted door.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kakang, kakang, kakang!

But why was there only a metallic sound as the mace and hammer bounced off?

“What the, this is? How.....?”

The confused question emerged from Ark’s mouth. After all the rotted parts had fallen off, another huge iron door seemed to appear behind it. The Phantom Hourglass had influenced the target. Then the wall behind it had also been influenced. Yet the iron door looked just like it had been newly made despite the 500 years acceleration.

‘What on earth is going on?’

Ark made a confused face.

“T-this....? M-mithril. The entire door is made of Mithril!”

A dwarf warrior cried out. Ark instantly felt like the dwarf had hit him in the head with his warhammer. Mithril..... Anyone who was interested in fantasy knew about mithril. Mithril was a magic metal that only a dwarf could smelt. It was a dozen times stronger than steel and had high magic resistance, so it was widely regarded as a deluxe material. But mithril’s best feature was that no matter how much time passed, it wouldn’t rust and would actually become stronger. In other words, using the Time Acceleration of Phantom Hourglass had actually caused the door to become stronger.

“Oh my god.....!”

Ark’s mood became dark at the thought. Ark had given up the siege weapons and wasted 18 hours because he had confidence that the

Phantom Hourglass could get rid of the door. But who would've imagined that the Phantom Hourglass would affect the impervious mithril door? Mithril was an expensive material where one ingot would cost 10 gold. He could get at least 2,000 gold with just a bit of the door. In other words, it was a 20,000 gold door. He honestly thought it was madness. But that madness had caught Ark's ankle and held him tight.

'Of course I can destroy it if I concentrate attacks on it.....'

The problem was time. Ark had calculated the time required to maintain the barrier and wasted 18 hours. He had spent 3 hours occupying the grounds so now the remaining time was 2 and a half hours. Furthermore, he had believed in the Phantom Hourglass and blew the siege weapons up. Without the help of the siege weapons, it would be impossible to destroy the mithril doors in a couple of hours. The door even received the protection from the Defense Tower. Even if he destroyed the Defense Towers, Gwen would break through the weakened gate before Ark could enter the castle. If that happened then Dark Eden would become surrounded. Ark looked at JusticeMan with a soulless expression.

"If we enter the castle by the windows....."

"Impossible."

JusticeMan sighed and shook his head.

"Before you came, there was an attempt to plunge through the window. But the windows of the castle are all blocked on the inside with iron bars. Their arrows and magic can get through but people can't enter through the window. It's probably because you previously used the window."

That's right. Raiden had built the defences of the castle based on his past siege experience with Alan. At that time, Ark had jumped through a window with Alan which allowed Raiden to seize the throne. Thus Raiden installed 'Crime Prevention' windows in case something like that might happen again. Thanks to the security window, it was impossible to climb the wall and enter through the window. Even if the windows weren't blocked, only a few people

could enter at a time and they would just be attacked by the troops inside. As soon as they tried, they would be thrown out the window as hedgehogs.

“There are siege weapons on the walls. Gwen used the bomb catapults. If we use that.....

Shambala considered for a bit before pointing at the outer walls and speaking. In fact Ark had thought about that as well. With the engineers, they could seize the catapults after a certain amount of time and use it. If they used the 10 turrets then it would be possible to break the door in time. However, the turrets were on the walls and it wouldn't reach the castle door. JusticeMan grinded his teeth together.

“Did we come all the way here just to do nothing as we lose?”

“It isn't possible to do that!”

“Maybe we should just start attacking the door.”

“No, that would be ineffective. Breaking the castle walls would be quicker than attacking the mithril gate.”

Ark shook his head and muttered. It was true. While the door was thinner than the castle wall, it was made of a metal dozens of times stronger than steel. It would be better to penetrate through the walls than the door. Well, even if they attacked for 10 hours they would barely manage to make a hole.

‘Wait? Create a hole in the wall?’

It was at that time. A desperate idea entered his head.

‘Aren't the castle walls made using rock? And can't a hole be bored into the rock?’

Ark suddenly recalled some old memories. It wasn't impossible to create a hole in rock.

‘According to my memory.....’

“There is a way!”

“A way? What is it?”

The eyes of JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Shambala, Isyuram and Lariette all focused on Ark. But there was no room for Ark to explain it to them.

“I have no time to explain now.”

“Understood. Just tell us the necessary things.”

JusticeMan nodded and said.

“I need JusticeMan ajusshi and the rehabilitation hyung-nims to attack the castle like before so they won’t suspect anything. Meanwhile I will lead 500 troops to the secret dungeon. Racard, Razak, you guys come with me as well. Now it is a fight against time.”

They would only be able to win if they entered the castle. The problem was whether he could enter the castle during the time limit.

“.....Understood. We’ll believe in you!”

JusticeMan ordered the troops and they shot a shower of arrows at the castle. The alliance members who were stretching their necks to observe Dark Eden quickly hid their bodies behind the windows. In the meantime, Ark led the 500 troops somewhere else.

“Don’t waste your firepower unnecessarily. Wait until they peer through the window!”

“The warriors will attack the castle door!”

The voices of JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members could be heard. Thanks to the constant arrows from JusticeMan’s troops, the enemy were unaware that Ark had led 500 troops elsewhere. Dark Eden only had 830 people left around the castle. The Hermes alliance would definitely win if it continued like this so they wouldn’t leave the castle to attack Dark Eden.

‘Well, it’s not like we’re hitting the enemy.....’

JusticeMan looked at the castle and sighed. Despite all their attacks, the castle didn't have one scratch on it. Swords and arrows couldn't do any damage to the walls while the maces barely dealt any damage to the mithril doors. Of course, if they concentrated their attacks on one point then it would be damaged but if the attacks were delayed then it would just be repaired. While Ark used the raccoons to repair the barrier, the Hermes alliance also had engineers inside repairing the door.

'What is Ark going to do that can penetrate the walls?'

Frankly, JusticeMan had already 90% given up. 1 and a half hours had already passed since Ark disappeared. Now there was 1 hour left to penetrate the walls but what could Ark do in 1 hour? They also had to fight the 1,000 troops in the castle.

"It is a big deal. That Ark, he put everything he had into this siege....."

JusticeMan murmured with a pained expression.

"JusticeMan ajusshi!"

Ark's voice was suddenly heard from behind him. When he turned around, he saw that Ark and the troops were returning. But the state of the soldiers wasn't ordinary. During the one and a half hours the soldiers had disappeared, their faces had turned completely white.

"What have you been doing? How are you going to penetrate the castle walls?"

"It's over here."

Ark smiled and pointed towards where the soldiers were gathered. JusticeMan's eyes widened as he saw what Ark was indicating to. The soldiers were tightly packed together so he couldn't see it at first but then something started wriggling on the ground.

"This is.....?"

"Do you remember?"

“.....That’s it! I get it now!”

JusticeMan finally understood the situation. But then he spoke with a dark expression.

“Yes, I had completely forgotten about that. No, I never imagined that you would use this method. However, it is too late. There’s only 50 minutes left until the siege ends. Even if we penetrate the wall, defeating 1,000 troops and capturing the throne in 50 minutes is.....

“We won’t have to fight the 1,000 members.”

Ark grinned and described the plan. Then JusticeMan’s expression brightened.

“Ohhh, I see. Then it won’t be necessary to penetrate through the walls.”

“These guys can’t be allowed to notice or it will be a problem.”

“Leave that to me!”

JusticeMan hit his chest and shouted.

“From now on we’re changing the way we attack. We will split into 3 units. One unit will attack the window continuously. While unit 1 is attacking, units 2 and 3 will wait. When the attacks of unit 1 ends, unit 2 will attack while unit 2 is on standby. It will be a rotation attack!”

It was the time difference attack that Napoleon had used before. When one unit finished pouring their arrows and magic, the next unit could immediately attack without there being any breaks. With 15 troops divided like that and attacking, the alliance members won’t be able to protrude their heads outside the window.

“Now! Follow me!”

Then Shambala and 100 of the Eastern Nation started climbing the walls. Shambala had recently changed his profession to God Killer and the Eastern Nation were former assassins. They quickly climbed up the walls like ninja. They climbed a 5 storey building in less than 10 minutes. After Shambala arrived on the roof, they hung dozens of

strands of rope.

“Now, let’s go!”

Ark tied something to the rope. Then he sent a signal to the Eastern Nation who pulled it up to the roof. After 6 of those packages were pulled upwards, Ark and 300 selected troops also used the ropes to climb to the roof. Thus Ark, Shambala, JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Isyuram, Lariette and 400 soldiers gathered on the roof.

“But can we really hit them with 400 people? There’s only 50 minutes left and those guys already think they’ve won so they’re not even bothering to look out the window. If we take a few more troops then those guys won’t notice.”

“This is the limit to the number of personnel that can plunge into the castle using this method. There’s also no more time to move more troops. Although there are 1,000 troops inside, only around 200 will be on the 5th floor while the rest will be on the 1st floor. We should only need 300 people to capture the throne.”

“I see. Then let’s get started.”

“Yes.”

Ark nodded and sent a wireless communication towards Racard.

‘Racard, let’s get started.’

“Yes! Hey, Skeleton. Master said to start.”

Chiii, chiii.

At the same time, the things which were dead..... The big piles of maggots started wriggling and spilling a yellow liquid from their mouths. The roof started to smoke and melt.

‘As expected from the Grub Acid!’

Ark looked at the melting roof with a satisfied smile. That’s right. The reason Ark led the soldiers to the secret dungeon was to obtain this acid. No, it was to catch the maggots which possessed this acid poison. In the old days, Ark had led the rehabilitation group and the

Meow into the secret dungeon and captured up to the 5th floor. During that time, Ark had particular trouble with the 3rd floor because of these maggots. These maggots were the monsters on the level and every time they sprayed their acid, the equipment would lose 10% durability. It also melted the walls and the ground.

‘If I have enough maggots then it is possible to melt the castle walls!’

That was what popped into his head. So Ark had instantly led the 500 troops to the secret dungeon. One year ago it had taken him five days to reach the 3rd floor, but he was more than double the level now. Besides, this time he entered with 500 level 250 users! Ark quickly reached the 3rd floor and started to hunt maggots. Then he would make Razak use Death’s Equations! That’s right. Ark brought the maggots outside and made Razak use Death’s Equations. Death’s Equations was a skill which could resurrect corpses as zombies in exchange for Razak’s bones! The maggots belonged to the A rank so he had to sacrifice 18 ribs to resurrect 6 maggots. After hearing Racard’s command, Razak ordered the maggots to move. This strategy was only possible thanks to the secrets in Silvana. But like JusticeMan said, there was only 40 minutes left. That was insufficient time to melt the walls and defeat 1,000 troops.

‘But my goal is to capture the throne on the top floor. So there is no reason to fight the enemy on the 1st floor and then go up. It is better to descend from above!’

That’s right. Penetrating through the wall or the roof was the same thing. If he made a hole in the roof then he could capture the throne immediately.

‘40 minutes is sufficient to melt through the roof and capture the throne!’

“That’s it!”

Ark exclaimed as 6 holes around 2 metres wide were created on the roof. The Hermes alliance was completely unaware that Dark Eden was above their heads.

“Let’s turn on the heat!”

Ark shouted as he threw an object similar to a bee hive through the holes.

-Pepper Beehives

A honeycomb filled with black pepper made with Creative Cooking. When the beehive explodes from a shock, it was scatter black pepper around.

<The black pepper will cause any user within a 10 metre area to cough and have stinging eyes>

It was a pepper beehive created with Creative Cooking! When he threw 2 each down the 6 holes for a total of 12 beehives, the area was completely filled with black pepper. The cries of distress from the Hermes members could be heard through the holes.

“What, what the? This powder is?”

“This smell.....pepper? Where did it come from.....ack!”

“Ugh, it got into my eyes. It stings!”

“Now’s the time. Fall!”

Ark and his selected troops descended to the ground below. Thanks to the stinging pepper, the Hermes alliance didn’t notice until the 400 troops had descended. Then an alliance member rubbed his eyes and screamed.

“Huck! These guys, how did they.....?”

“Your reaction is too slow!”

JusticeMan grinned and grabbed the alliance member. Then he swung around and the alliance member fell in a parabola shape until he hit the ground. The alliance member who struck the ground had his health drain away. But that wasn’t the end. JusticeMan grabbed the torso of the member who had fallen. It was the top mount position often seen in MMA fighting games.

“Now, let’s see if you can avoid this!”

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom!

JusticeMan’s fist struck the alliance member’s face like a missile. A large portion of the person’s health disappeared with every hit. It was the end once caught by JusticeMan’s High Class Jujitsu. Meanwhile, other alliance members were running towards JusticeMan when Bu Dong-san threw some nails and shouted.

“This is the revenge for Bul-kkun and the others!”

Throwing nails was his speciality after changing to Guardian. Shambala and Isyuram also helped JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. And last but not least.....

“Blade Tempest!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Ark cornered some alliance members and exploded a magic sword. As Ark predicted, there were only 200 members on the top floor. With Ark and the 400 troops he picked, they managed to wipe out the 200 enemies in 20 minutes.

“That’s it. JusticeMan ajusshi, mobilize some troops to block the stairs.....”

Ark suddenly stopped and jumped.

‘No!’

The ‘Throne of Rule’ wasn’t in the room on the top floor!

‘Why? The Hall of Glory should obviously contain the throne.....’

Then something popped into Ark’s head. That’s right. When Ark was the Lord, the throne was on the top floor. But Ark had forgotten one important fact. When Ark had been the Lord, there were only 4 floors. The 5th floor was built after Silvana increased from D to C rank.

‘Then the throne is downstairs? Oh my god, I’m screwed!’

Ark realized a little too late and shouted.

“JusticeMan ajusshi, go down to the 4th floor and seal the stairs to the 3rd floor instantly!”

“Understood. Hurry!”

JusticeMan rushed downstairs with his troops. Ark also descended the stairs and entered the room. JusticeMan and the Dark Eden members who descended first had stopped moving towards the stairs. Just looking at JusticeMan’s dark face confirmed Ark’s fears.

“You really are very persistent.”

A voice laughed from within the depths of the 4th floor. The scene was the worst situation Ark encountered today.

‘No wonder it was strange!’

Ark thought as he glared at Raiden. They had been fighting for 20 minutes on the 5th floor. Yet not one person sent a whisper to Raiden. Even after the battle was over, no alliance members went up to the 5th floor. Why? It was obvious when standing on the 4th floor. Raiden was sitting on the Throne of Rule. And the 800 alliance members were spread out in a perfect defense formation in the Hall of Glory. That’s right. It was why the alliance members didn’t climb to the 5th floor. Raiden had been organizing all his troops on the 4th floor. Now there was only 20 minutes left until the siege finished. There was no need for Raiden to fight Ark and Dark Eden. If Ark caught him moving troops halfway then it would cause problems. So Raiden had used those 20 minutes to move troops to the Hall of Glory and now ark was in complete despair. Raiden opened both arms widely with an arrogant look and said.

“Good work getting here. I recognize your efforts. Coming here with 4,000 hastily constructed troops, you definitely are a strong fellow. But there is no meaning if you can’t control the throne. Now I’ll give you a chance. You have 20 minutes to try and snatch it from me!”

‘That bastard……!’

Ark grinded his teeth together as he glared at Raiden. But this battle

couldn't be won with anger. Raiden had 800 people while Ark only had half that number. And unlike the 5th floor, the Hall of Glory had strong defensive lines which were difficult to slip through. It was impossible to break the defensive lines and reach the throne in 20 minutes. Even if he gathered the remaining troops and brought them inside through the roof, they wouldn't be able to defeat all 800 people in 20 minutes.

'I can use Area Declaration and the Divine Skill.....'

But the range of Area Declaration was 100 metres. The Hall of Glory was around 150~200 metres long. Even if he used it at the start of the defense line, it wouldn't reach towards the throne. Furthermore, Hermes was a top alliance so there would definitely be 4~5 people who changed to a 2nd stage profession. If they used Area Declaration then his would disappear.

'Even if I use Descent of the Fire Draconian and defeat 800 people, it will be impossible to reach Raiden. It isn't possible to penetrate the lines and sit down on the throne.'

He was stopped at the very last moment.

"What happened? The guy who is always running wild is now quiet. 5 minutes have already passed so you only have 15 minutes left. Won't it take some time to reach here?"

Raiden smirked and taunted.

'That bastard's face.....no, wait? Right now I only have 330 people?'

Then Ark suddenly felt a flash in his head. Ark looked at the enemy's defense and smiled coldly.

'That's right. There is that method!'

Ark suddenly had a brilliant idea in this desperate situation.

'But that method requires several prerequisites. One is to gather the enemy troops in one place. The problem is we'll also take some damage. If the operation 100% succeeded then he could wipe out the enemy. In order to succeed, our troops have to enter!'

Ark's eyes brightened as he turned his head and whispered towards JusticeMan.

"JusticeMan, please gather the troops outside and bring them to the roof."

"What? But there are only 15 minutes remaining. We'll only be able to get several hundred people on the roof at most during the time limit. In addition, we need to fight the 800 troops as well....."

"It doesn't matter."

Ark laughed confidently. JusticeMan looked at Ark and nodded.

"I can tell by your expression that you have a plan. I understand."

Then JusticeMan sent a whisper to the soldiers outside and moved troops to the roof. Anyway, all the alliance members were gathered on the 4th floor so there was no problem moving the troops.

'Now I have to tell Racard.....'

Ark contacted Racard and earnestly started his plan. No, he was about to start. If this operation succeeded then he could capture the throne. Then why was there something weighing on his mind?

'Wait..... Currently we're in the middle of a siege. I was able to move all the Dark Eden troops to the roof because the Hermes members are gathered on the 4th floor. Nobody is interested in the castle door anymore. Maybe..... 'This is a chance!'

Ark had a sudden idea to make some money. Then he raised his head and communicated with Racard.

'Racard, tell Razak to move the maggots when I tell him to.'

After relaying the plan to Razak through Racard, Ark released and then resummoned Racard to the castle. And he gave some special directions to Racard and Radun. Those instructions were.....

"Kikikiki. As expected of Master."

Racard giggled and kicked the maggot.

“Now you stupid maggot. Quickly get started!”

Racard was standing in front of the castle door. Then the maggots started to crawl to the door. And they started to rub the hinges of the door connecting it to the wall with the acid. Even the hinges were made of mithril but the acid of the maggot melted it instantly. After a few moments, all the hinges had melted and the door shook. Then it fell to the ground with a loud noise. Although it fended off hundreds of attacks, with the hinges melted it was just a chunk of metal. Racard had managed to remove the door in just a few minutes. However, the door had nothing to do with winning the siege. There was no need to get rid of the door because Dark Eden's troops had already moved to the roof. Then why was Racard removing the gate?

“Now it's your turn. Radun.”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Racard withdrew from the door. Radun licked his tongue and approached the gate. Then he opened his mouth and started to swallow the whole door.

That's right. These were the special instructions Ark gave to Racard and Radun. Ark's purpose wasn't to get past the door but the door itself. Ark had devised a strategy where he could definitely obtain the throne. Then he had thought of this while relaying the necessary instructions. It was an enormous treasure which no one would've thought of obtaining. It was a mithril door worth 20,000 gold.

‘A mithril door worth 20,000 gold is a huge treasure. It is a waste to have such a huge treasure defending the castle! If he won the siege then he would be the Lord, but he wouldn't be able to remove the door even if he became the Lord. But if it is lost in the midst of the siege.....!’

That was Ark's thought.

‘If I sell the mithril door then I can get back the money I borrowed from Lancel village! And no one from the Hermes alliance or Dark

Eden is paying attention to the door. It is the perfect chance to steal the mithril door. I can't miss this opportunity!'

The ending of the siege was a serious situation. Even in such circumstances, Ark was still thinking about earning money from selling the mithril door. Anyway, all the Hermes members were on the 4th floor so there was no one to interfere with Racard. After coming up with the idea, Ark had Racard take one maggot and move to the 1st floor. And the maggot was used to melt the hinges. So he obtained the 100% pure mithril door. The size of the door didn't matter to Radun.

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

Radun flicked his tongue and quickly swallowed the door. So Ark's assets increased by 20,000 gold. Moreover, this money was an income that no one but Ark knew about.

"Master, it was eaten!"

'Okay, all of you have achieved 400 points!'

Ark smiled and rewarded his summons. Thanks to his pets' covert operation, Ark had obtained the treasure of the mithril door. It was a 20,000 gold treasure.

'Now there's only 8 minutes left. I've collected the door and the preparations are finished so shall I capture the throne?'

Ark took one step forward and glared at Raiden.

"Bah, you chatter too much."

"Are you still going to do something?"

"That's right. And there's no way you can stop me."

".....Nonsense!"

"You think I'm talking nonsense?"

Ark smiled and stretched out his hand.

“I’ll pull you down from that spot within the next 5 minutes!”

Raiden started to become nervous after hearing Ark’s confident tone. Raiden knew Ark was someone who managed to come up with brilliant ideas in decisive moments. Of course, he was completely sure there was no win for Ark to win. But his uneasiness couldn’t help increasing.

‘That reminds me, he has a skill to evade other people. That’s right, he’ll probably use that skill in this situation. He probably intends to pierce through the defense lines and sit on the throne just before the siege ends.’

“Gather close together! Don’t let even a needle slip through any gaps!”

The alliance members formed into one large group in front of Raiden in the Hall of Glory. Ark hid his smile and shouted.

“Now’s the time. Dark Eden, charge!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

They all plunged towards the alliance members. Noisy cries and the sound of metal clashing sounded throughout the Hall of Glory.

Raiden’s face became slightly tense at the assault. However, within a few minutes that tension changed to a complacent smile. Despite being attacked, the defense formation of the alliance was unshaken. Now there was only 3~4 minutes left, so even if Dark Eden had thousands of troops they wouldn’t be able to penetrate the 800 strong defense formation.

“Kukuku, this must be their last desperate struggle.”

Raiden looked at the land outside the window and laughed. Then he looked back towards Ark as he wanted to see it change to despair.

“What, what the?”

A baffled exclamation fell from Raiden’s mouth. He was certain that Ark had no chance to win in this situation. But rather than despair, Ark actually had a confident smile on his face? After seeing Ark’s

face, he felt a strange sense of misgiving. Then that sense of misgiving became a reality.

“Now!”

Ark shouted as he rushed towards the alliance members. The NPCs within Dark Eden swiftly withdrew while the users surrounded the alliance members in a circle with their shields. What were they trying to do? Raiden looked at the scene with an expression that indicated he couldn't understand.

Tengkong, ku ku ku ku, ku ku, ku ku..... Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a weird sound and something suddenly fell from above them. It caused a tremendous shock and impact which shook the castle! The Hall of Glory quickly filled with dust which blurred everybody's vision. After the dust finally sank, Raiden gaped with his mouth wide open. It was impossible. The crowd of 800 alliance members and 200 Dark Eden members had disappeared. And 500 different Dark Eden soldiers had taken their place.

“If you're wondering where they came from.....”

JusticeMan smiled at Raiden and pointed towards the sky. Now Raiden started to understand what happened. The ceiling was open. At the moment Raiden was on the 4th floor. Instead of seeing the 5th floor when he looked up, all he saw was the night sky. There was no ceiling in the Hall of Glory. That's right. This was the plan Ark came up with.

Ark had already used 6 maggots on the roof so he used them to scrape through the 5th floor, which was the roof for the Hall of Glory. As a result, the 5th floor and roof had fallen into the Hall of Glory. The alliance members and Dark Eden members who were fighting below were all buried under tons of rock. While they were packed tightly together, at least 70 alliance members had survived. However, there were now 500 Dark Eden members in the Hall of Glory. While the NPCs retreated since they would disappear once dead, the users in Dark Eden had dropped down when the roof fell. So the 800 vs. 330 battle changed to 70 vs. 500.

“U-unbelievable.....!”

Raiden stuttered with a stupid expression. The circumstances were clear. But Raiden still couldn't understand everything. The dropped ceiling had fallen on friends and foes but it wasn't a problem since more Dark Eden members dropped down as well.

‘But why did that Ark.....?’

The point Raiden couldn't understand was that one of the bodies buried under the ceiling was Ark. Of course, Raiden could guess why Ark didn't flee at the end. If Ark retreated then Raiden would definitely know something was happening. But Ark had remained and was hit by the absurd attack. In the end, Ark was still crushed by the ceiling. Ark's plan had proceeded as planned and Raiden lost 730 troops. When it was 70 against 500, Dark Eden would certainly capture the throne. It was the worst situation! But....!

“Hu.....hu, huhuhuhu!”

Uncontrollable laughter emerged from Raiden's mouth. He finally stopped laughing and said in a cold tone.

“You fools, it is the end. Even if you kill me and everybody in the Hermes alliance, it is still your defeat!”

“What? What is that nonsense?”

Shambala frowned at Raiden's words. Then Raiden answered arrogantly.

“You still don't understand? Dark Eden is just one attack group. Your leader has died so there is no one left to capture the throne!”

That's right. That's why Raiden was convinced of his victory after seeing Ark die. The only ones who had the right to sit down on the throne was a guild leader or leader of an attack group. In the case of the Hermes alliance, if Raiden died then the right would pass to Gwen who was the leader of the Silver Gate guild. The problem was Dark Eden wasn't an alliance of several guilds but one group. Because of that, only Ark had the right to sit on the Throne of Rule. But now Ark had died. Even if Dark Eden destroyed the

Hermes alliance completely, it wasn't possible for them to occupy the castle. Raiden might be dead but the victory of the siege would go to the Hermes alliance. A pleased smile spread over Raiden's face at the idea.

"Heh, too bad. It is pitiful. Because your stupid leader went and died, there is no one to capture the throne even though you were so close."

"Thank you but I don't think there's any need for sympathy from you."

At that time, someone's voice could be heard among the rubble. Raiden's face stiffened at the sight. The voice which came from the rubble.....

Ttuduk, ttuduk.

Then somebody slowly raised their body from among the corpses.

"Heok! Y-you.. .. How are you....?"

Raiden jumped like a shocked frog. The identity of the zombie like figure was Ark! Ark had been turned into a bloody rice cake among with the Hermes members by the falling ceiling. Raiden looked at Ark's face and shrieked like a crazy person.

"N-no way! Y-you're dead! I clearly saw it! You died! So why is a dead guy getting up? It's a scam! It can't be allowed!"

What are you saying?"

Ark swept dust from his head and smiled.

"Are you saying that a user's skill is breaking the law?"

That's right. It was impossible for someone in New World to be resurrected in the same place. But sometimes a skill would jump over that law. Razak's Pledge of Death skill acted like that. When Razak used Pledge of Death, his life was exchanged for his master's and Ark would immediately resurrect. When Razak died all the maggots also died but fortunately the maggots weren't needed any longer.

“Dammit!”

When Ark revived, two Hermes members cursed and ran towards him. However, it was impossible for the 70 members to break through the 500 Dark Eden members. While Dark Eden was fighting the Hermes alliance, Ark casually approached the throne.

“Wah.... Wah.... Waaaaah.....!”

Raiden seemed to have become insane from the situation. Ark placed his hand on Raiden’s shoulder and said.

“There’s no time. Will you just get off? Or do you want me to beat you and pull you off?”

“Wah, wah! Uwahhhh.....!”

Raiden grabbed the throne and shook his head from side to side.

“I need you to get off.”

Ark smiled and looked at Shambala. Shambala looked at Ark with irritated eyes before complaining.

“Damn, why do I always have this role? Area Declaration, River of Blood!”

“Hiik, Area Declaration Abarasuk!”

When Shambala used his Area Declaration, Raiden instantly panicked and used his to make it disappear. Then Ark nodded and exclaimed.

“Well done. Now it’s my turn? Area Declaration, Glory of the Night! Divine skill, Descent of the Fire Draconian!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The Fire Draconian flew up into the night sky and descended into Ark’s body.

-You have used the Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!
The <Immortal Fire Draconian> effect will be applied for 10

minutes.

- * 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.

- * Attack speed, Movement speed and Reaction rate will increase by 50%.

- * All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.

- * Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.

- * When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

..... Raiden turned into a barbecue. Afterwards JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Shambala, Isyuram, Lariette and Dark Eden surrounded the throne while Ark sat down on it. The remaining time was only 1 minute. Ark closed his eyes and counted down the remaining time in his head.

'30, 20, 10.....3, 2, 1!'

Ark's eyes flashed open. There was a magnificent drumming sound and a message window appeared.

-The time limit of the siege is over.

The person who occupied the Throne of Rule is the leader of Dark Eden, Ark. According to the rules of the siege, Ark had become the Lord of Silvana. One of the special skills of the Lord is to 'banish' all remaining enemies within the castle.

<You have acquired the territory of Silvana. Fame +6,000>

"Now all of you remaining in my home, Banish!"

Ark's voice rang out through Silvana.

Lord

“Eh?”

The doctor exclaimed as he looked at the chart. He confirmed the name on the chart again and muttered.

“This is amazing.”

“Is there a problem?”

“No, it’s just.....”

Hyun-woo became tense and braced himself for bad news from the doctor. Hyun-woo was currently at the hospital to check the results from his mother’s latest general check-up. It had been two months since his mother’s last check-up and nothing had happened on that occasion. But this time the situation was different. It was the first medical examination since his mother started New World. He had asked for the advice of the doctor and scoured the internet before buying the game unit but he was still worried. On the other hand, he also had some sense of expectations.

‘My mother visited Lancel using her own strength.’

In fact, Hyun-woo had planned to visit the beginner village after settling the problems in Lancel. However his mother ended up finding him in Lancel by herself. She walked on her own feet. Hyun-woo hadn’t expressed it in front of his mother but he had been deeply impressed and surprised. Of course, it was a game so even people who didn’t have legs in reality could run around. Even so, seeing his mother who had been lying in bed for 6 years walking really felt special. Anyway, his mother was living like a normal person inside the game. Hyun-woo hoped that some of that would transfer to reality. Then the doctor pushed up his glasses and laughed.

“The test results are good. Far beyond the expected range. In particular, the results of the neural response tests were wonderful.

There is a 30% improvement compared to two months ago. The 30% number is similar to how much she had improved in two years.”

“Then it’s good?”

The doctor looked puzzled by his question. Hyun-woo blushed and scratched his head before asking.

“But my mother said that she didn’t feel much different.....”

“Somebody who only knows their body when it is sick won’t be able to tell when it improves.”

While a person could check their status through their health in New World, it was difficult in reality. Wasn’t that why people paid a lot of money for a comprehensive check-up? A patient couldn’t confirm the status of their own body so they had to see a doctor.

“Just by looking at the results of this examination, it appears that playing the virtual reality game has a positive effect on Park So-mi. In Park So-mi’s case, the thought of ‘being able to move freely’ is important in her improvement. That positive thinking which stimulates the nerves is the best type of medicine for patients like Park So-mi.”

Hyun-woo had also seen similar information when searching the internet. He had prayed for such a miracle to happen to his mother but now he didn’t pray for that anymore. In fact, it wasn’t just her improvement in health that was good about his mother starting New World. It was the atmosphere around her that really made him happy.

While his mother had lived in the hospital for the last 6 years, she had always shown Hyun-woo a smiling face. Of course, it wasn’t a real smile. Hyun-woo could always feel a shadow behind her smile. But that shadow had gone away after his mother started New World. Now his mother glowed whenever she laughed. As her character, she was able to go around and meet lots of new people which caused her stress to disappear. Hyun-woo felt like the miracle had already occurred.

“In this state, you don’t have to worry that much. The patient also looks quite good after I had an interview with her. However, she

shouldn't play the game too excessively. The virtual reality game is good but it only has an influence on the nervous system. Even if her nervous system recovers 100%, it will be a problem if she has weakened muscles. She must practice walking in reality.

"Of course, I understand."

Hyun-woo nodded and exited the examination room.

"Ah, Hyun-woo. What did the doctor say?"

When he approached the hospital entrance, Gwon Hwa-rang approached while pushing a wheelchair. He was pushing Hyun-woo's mother who had finished her physical therapy and rehabilitation exercises.

"It was good."

Hyun-woo smiled and explained what the doctor said. Gwon Hwa-rang laughed warmly and nodded.

"I'm glad it is more good news."

"More good news?"

"Yesterday Hyun-woo became the Lord of Silvana."

"Huh? But Hyun-woo is already the Lord of Lancel."

"He'll hold both posts concurrently."

His mother looked at Hyun-woo with concerned eyes after hearing Gwon Hwa-rang's words.

"I asked Galen about what is involved in being a Lord, so wouldn't becoming the Lord of another territory be a lot more work? I think it's better not to be too greedy....."

"It's okay. At first I might be a bit busy but after a while I can leave it to the secretary."

Hyun-woo smiled wryly and replied. He had gone to all that trouble to become the Lord and now his mother was acting like he should leave it to someone else. It was reasonable. Although his mother

had adapted to the game, she was still a beginner so she had no idea about the benefits of having a Lordship.

In fact, Hyun-woo still hadn't explained to his mother the details of the siege. The siege wasn't a simple thing. 30,000 gold had gone into it. That was around 300 million in cash. He had used such a huge sum of money to capture Silvana because it would give him even more money. When it was this much, the game was more like a business. There were no parents who wouldn't worry if their son poured his entire fortune into a business. His mother was still getting her health back so he didn't want to worry her unnecessarily.

"Anyway, now the siege is over....."

Gwon Hwa-rang said with a sparkle in his eyes.

"What's wrong? Why are your eyes looking at me like that?"

"I heard from Hye-sun. She told me about So-mi ssi's character."

"My character? What about my character....."

Then his mother's face abruptly turned red. Gwon Hwa-rang grinned and muttered.

"Huhuhu, So-mi ssi's character is from an old scanned photo? Now I can see how So-mi ssi looks like in high school. No, not just seeing....."

Gwon Hwa-rang had been quite excited when he heard from Jung Hye-sun about So-mi's character. His mother had never shown Gwon Hwa-rang any old photos of her because she had been embarrassed. But now he could see it in 3D view and even go on a date with her! Gwon Hwa-rang snorted and looked at Hyun-woo's mother with creepy eyes at the thought.

"Bah, why should she deal with a smelly old man like you?"

His mother blushed and turned her head.

"Please pretend not to know me in New World. You also shouldn't visit Lancel."

“Eek? W-why?” Do you know how long I have waited for the day I could meet So-mi ssi in New World?”

“It’s not exactly my high school days. Anyway, all men only like young women.....”

“T-that’s not true. You’re mistaken. I want to see what So-mi looks like in her childhood, not the form of a young woman.”

“Then why did ajusshi’s eyes look so expectant just then?”

“It’s a trap. Hyun-woo, you’re talking too much nonsense. Am I a shameless guy?”

“Absolutely.”

“Is that so? I should’ve known.”

“.....I knew it as soon as I saw that creepy look in your eyes.”

“H-Hyun-woo.....!”

Gwon Hwa-rang became frustrated at Hyun-woo’s words.

Hyun-woo and his mother looked at each other and laughed.

“Are you going to give him a chance?”

“Well, I don’t know. I’ll have to see from now on. By the way, I’m feeling thirsty after sweating so much.”

Hyun-woo looked at Gwon Hwa-rang at his mother’s words. But Gwon Hwa-rang was just looking away absent-mindedly.

‘He didn’t notice.....’

There was a reason his mother was complaining about Gwon Hwa-rang. It was to give the man a chance! When a woman grumbled, it was a chance for the man to heap affection on her and her confidence would soar. But Gwon Hwa-rang’s senses were dull and he didn’t notice. Hyun-woo clicked his tongue and looked at him with pitying eyes. Gwon Hwa-rang finally noticed the situation and spoke quickly.

“I-I will go. Bottled water? Juice?”

“Well, I just want a drink but if you’re offering then buy me bottled water.”

His mother answered with a mock pout. Hmm, as expected of a mother. She managed to make him buy bottled water from a vending machine without any grumbling. Wasn’t Gwon Hwa-rang being educated without even knowing? The only thing a child could do was help his mother!

“Ajusshi, a caramel macchiato as well please.”

“Eh? Ca..... What? Is it a food?”

“Caramel macchiato. The coffee shop on the opposite side of the street should sell it. Isn’t that quite close?”

Hyun-woo laughed while Gwon Hwa-rang’s face distorted.

“Eh? Why are you frowning? You don’t want to?”

“W-who is frowning? I’m going!”

Gwon Hwa-rang stared at Hyun-woo before turning around. Then his mother muttered softly.

“I like a man who does things like this for me.”

Gwon Hwa-rang flinched before sprinting off at full speed. Hyun-woo looked at Gwon Hwa-rang’s retreating back and said.

“His leg seems perfectly fine now.”

“Yes, isn’t it good?”

“Mother will also be like that soon. Then I can see Mother walking into your wedding ceremony on your own foot. Well, ajusshi might need a little more mental education before then.”

“What is this child suddenly saying.....”

His mother blushed and gave him a sharp sidelong glance.

“Just things you need to hear.”

“T-that.... Wait? You’re acting just like your dad. You’re really serious just like him. Staying in the same corner of the room every day will just age you quickly. How is it? Do you often meet these days?”

“Meet? With who?”

“Hye-sun.”

“That.....”

Hyun-woo scratched his head and hesitated. Then his mother looked at Hyun-woo with a serious expression and said.

“.....You don’t like Hye-sun?”

“That’s not it, but.....”

“You don’t have to say anything else.”

His mother interrupted Hyun-woo’s words and said.

“Don’t you know Hye-sun’s heart? It isn’t easy for a woman to express her feelings. Of course, you shouldn’t reply if you’re uncertain. But you also shouldn’t let a woman wait too long. Do you understand?”

Hyun-woo nodded without saying anything. His mother say that he had been avoiding the situation. But Hyun-woo already knew what his mother was saying. Hyun-woo also thought the situation was difficult. He didn’t dislike Jung Hye-sun. No, in the beginning he only though of her as a sister but he recognized that his feelings had changed. The reason Hyun-woo couldn’t say a word to Hye-sun was because of Kang Mi-su, or Lariette. He often talked with Kang Mi-su on the phone. Every time he talked to her, Hyun-woo felt a mysterious emotion. Until he could confirm the true identity of that feeling, he couldn’t say a word to Jung Hye-sun about their relationship. It might just be an excuse but he thought it was cowardly to enter into a relationship with someone when he might have feelings for someone else. That was the reason he couldn’t hand over the Poco Poco doll to Jung Hye-sun. He had decided to leave the situation until after the siege ended.

‘But.....’

Things became even more complicated when the siege was over. So he once again pushed the problem of Jung Hye-sun and Kang Mi-su back.

“What did you want to discuss?”

A while later, they had returned to Hyun-woo’s house and Gwon Hwa-rang sat opposite him.

“It’s about Silvana.”

“What’s the problem?”

“It’s not a problem right now but a potential one.”

“I’m not smart. Just tell me simply.”

“Defending Silvana castle.”

That’s right. This was the problem Hyun-woo was worried about. Unlike Lancel, Silvana was a territory that could be taken away by another alliance.

‘I can be relieved for one month.....’

After Hyun-woo’s experience, the siege rules in Nagaran had been changed. In the past, the siege only had approximately 1,000 people and now approximately 4,000~5,000 people took part. The biggest problem was the war funds needed to pay the personnel who took part in the siege. Since the number of troops had increased, he needed a huge amount of war funds for the siege. But that wasn’t the biggest problem. There was a lot of time to prepare after someone applied for a siege. But defending was the problem. An alliance could challenge a siege every fortnight. If an alliance had a steady income from the castle then they would someone be able to hold it. The problem was when someone like Hyun-woo became the Lord. He had spent a huge amount of money in order to win this siege. Thanks to the new siege rules, a new Lord had the right to refuse any siege challenge for one month after he was instated.

‘But the problem isn’t just the military funds.’

It was that he had no troops to protect Silvana. The only way to keep the territory was to continue winning sieges. But presently Hyun-woo had no troops to maintain the estate. The Dark Eden troops this time had only been convened for this siege. They then disbanded after the siege ended.

‘Until now I didn’t need any troops, but if I’m going to possess the territory then I need the minimum number of people to defend it.’

It was natural but Hyun-woo had no intention of permanently residing at the estate.

‘This is the last time. If Silvana is taken away then I won’t get another chance. I have to gain enough power in one month to protect Silvana.’

This wasn’t a choice, it was something essential. Yet another problem arose because of this. Even if there wasn’t a siege, he needed money to gather the troops. The reason was simple. When an estate belonged to a guild, the members wouldn’t receive any payment for participating in the siege. Instead the Lord would divide the profit of the estate among the guild. It was common sense. If there was no benefit to maintaining the estate then what reason did a guild have to occupy it? So the issue of troops wasn’t a problem for all Lords. If there was a lot of troops then they could keep the estate. On the other hand, a lot more money was needed to maintain them. So the castle always had the minimum number of troops needed to defend it.

Raiden might seem like he had a lot of money after maintaining a C rated estate for 1 year. But thanks to the income for 5,000 people, he actually only received an income of several hundred gold. Hyun-woo had already thought of some plans to solve that problem.

‘For the moment 4,000 people should be suitable to defend Silvana.’

Hyun-woo limited the number of troops to 4,000 people. Currently, most sieges in Nagaran only took place with 4,000~5,000 people. First, some of his forces would be filled with troops from Lancel and the Eastern Nation. In fact, Hyun-woo’s strategy in this siege also focused on minimizing the loss of NPCs.

He entrusted the Wolrang and Meow to Bread and Redian and sent them to the relatively stable Defense Towers. Then he had entrusted the Lancel troops to JusticeMan as rear support. Thanks to Hyun-woo's use of Great Sacrifice, hardly any raccoons died. Therefore of the 1,600 NPCs who participated in the siege, only 100 actually died. Ark was reluctant to let the remaining 1,500 NPCs leave Silvana. He had already talked about the matter with Galen. If he wanted the NPC troops to reside at Lancel then he needed to pay them as well. NPC's also needed money to live. If he wanted to borrow the Eastern Nation and Baran clan in particular then he would have to pay a certain amount every month. And if a warrior was killed in action then he would have to provide compensation to their families. But it would still be cheaper than hiring users.

'However, I have no choice but to fill the remaining 2,500 spots with users.'

In the end, he would have to create a guild.

"I want you to be a guild leader for me."

"Me?"

Gwon Hwa-rang said with surprise.

"Yes. Ajusshi managed to employ thousands of troops from Seutandal. I think ajusshi will be better as a guild leader than someone like me who wanders around alone."

"That might be so but....."

Gwon Hwa-rang spoke ambiguous words as he hesitated. There were two reasons Hyun-woo wanted to make Gwon Hwa-rang the guild leader. One reason was that it was too complicated.

Hyun-woo had tried making guilds in other online games. But there were lots of difficulties after he became the guild leader. Whenever there was a small problem in the guild it was up to the guild leader to solve it. Some issues were okay but he would get a lot of headaches whenever there was an emotional quarrel between guild members.

If the guild had less than 100 members then he would be also be constantly bombarded with whispers while hunting. But it was

unnecessary to explain when the guild had more than 2,000 members. He was already the Lord of Lancel and Silvana so he didn't want to become a guild leader as well.

‘But Hwa-rang ajusshi likes things like that.’

He had taken charge of rehabilitating some ex-criminals so Gwon Hwa-rang was an expert at addressing complaints. He liked such things. So Gwon Hwa-rang would be the best choice as guild leader. There were also the 700 users who followed Gwon Hwa-rang from Seutandal to Silvana.

‘And if Hwa-rang ajusshi becomes the guild leader then the burden of the maintenance costs would reduce.’

This was the second reason why he wanted Gwon Hwa-rang to be the guild leader. Once again, the money which entered the estate belonged to the estate. While he wasn't the Lord, the guild leader was the same. But it was different if the Lord was a guild leader. The Lord would have to worry about the guild members who helped him obtain the estate. Any Lord of a territory would have to pay a certain amount of money to the troops as maintenance fees. It depended on the size of the guild, but the maintenance cost was around 70% of what territories controlled by a Lord who was a guild leader needed to pay. In other words, Hyun-woo could reduce the maintenance costs of his troops by 30% if he made Gwon Hwa-rang the guild leader instead of Hyun-woo.

“Well, it does sound good. Hyun-woo is the one who invested all the funds in this siege. As colleagues who suffered together to occupy the castle, we can't just give it to other guilds in the area. If we suffered all that only to lose the estate to another guild alliance then there would be a lot of complaints.

Gwon Hwa-rang nodded after listening to the explanation. However, he revealed his worries with his next words.

“But.... I..... That.... So-mi ssi.....”

That was the reason why Gwon Hwa-rang couldn't easily accept. Now the siege was over. He had planned to date Hyun-

woo's mother who had turned into a school girl. Hyun-woo laughed like it was ridiculous and asked.

"You really think it is possible to date my mother if you don't accept my request?"

"Eh? Are you really going to act that petty?"

"No, it's just a joke. Even if you are the guild leader, you don't have to be stuck at Silvana. The guild will only convene at Silvana when there is a siege. The siege only occurs every fortnight. Plus....."

Hyun-woo approached and whispered in a sly voice.

"If you become the guild leader then you will have 2,500 subordinates. Won't that be quite impressive when my mother sees it?"

"Ohhhh, that's right....."

Gwon Hwa-rang was completely caught by Hyun-woo's small talk.

"Well, come to think of it there is no one else who can take the position. I will become the guild leader as you requested and leave Lariette in charge of the Seutandal forces."

"You've thought well."

"By the way, where will you obtain the 2,500 people from to form the guild? Do you think it will be easy?"

"Where? From the people who will soon resurrect at the estate."

Hyun-woo smiled and replied. Hyun-woo thought to form the guild from 2,500 Dark Eden users. Once again, Hyun-woo had a month free without any sieges. The Hermes alliance used to be one of the 5 powers within Nagaran, so with the Lord changed the other alliances would be sensing prey. After the month ended, there would definitely be guilds applying for a siege.

'So I should compose the guild from people who have experience with sieges.'

However, finding users with experience in sieges wasn't that

easy. Most people with experience had already joined a guild. Of course, there were some who participated as hired soldiers but the numbers wouldn't be enough. However, the troops in Dark Eden had undergone special training and also had experience in a siege. Where else could he secure 2,500 people at once?

"I like that idea too. Because it is better to join a guild which already has a territory."

It wasn't easy for general users to join a guild that had already occupied a castle. Furthermore, the current Lord of Silvana was Dark Wolf who had appeared on TV! If he made a guild proposal then they would welcome it with open arms. If they accepted then it would be good for everyone.

"Okay, then I'll take care of that."

Gwon Hwa-rang replied.

'Now I've settled the problem with the troops.....'

But the next issue was one which really caused him a headache.

'As expected, the final problem is money?'

In fact, Hyun-woo was currently being squeezed for a lot of money. One of them was the fee he promised to the users who participated in the siege. 2,700 users participated in the siege. He had promised them around 300~500 gold to each unit if the siege succeeded. There were around 25 units consisting of 100 people so he needed to pay between 7,500~12,500 gold. That was the siege success fee. He honestly thought that amount was unreasonable but he had been willing to do anything to win. So paying the troops was a desperate measure.

"Well, 5,000 gold still remains from my war funds for the siege and if Buksil sells the Immortality Pill in Paradon then that should be several thousand more gold. Although it will take some time to dispose of the mithril door, that is 20,000 gold so if I'm conservative than 15,000 gold will remain. But in the future I need more money."

Hyun-woo sighed and muttered. Once again, there was a reason

why Hyun-woo had invested 30,000 gold into recapturing Silvana. It was to complete his triangular trade route between Seutandal, Silvana and Lancel. And recapturing Silvana had been the toughest challenge. Now his wallet was in a bad state from recapturing Silvana.

“The last time I checked, the price of the trading office was 100,000 gold! I need that much money. Carriages and ships are also necessary to establish the triangular trade. A merchant fleet requires 30,000 gold, carriages needed 10,000 gold and the amount needed for daily operations is 10,000~20,000 gold. So in the end I needed around 150,000 gold to truly set it up.”

This was currently Hyun-woo’s largest worry. Of course, trading was still possible even if he didn’t buy a trading office, merchant fleet or carriages. But he wouldn’t have spent 30,000 gold to obtain Silvana if he was satisfied with such a triangular route. He had decided to establish a trading firm like the one in Silvana on Seutandal.

“If the triangular trade route truly connected, I could get 100,000 gold in a month. It will be a 100% jackpot!”

He was already earning some money from the small scale triangular route with Ark’s store in the centre. In other words, he had a lot of experience. After acquiring the qualification to establish a trading office from Isabel, he could make tremendous profit. It would be a jackpot business with a success rate of 100%! Plus he had accomplished regaining Silvana. But he didn’t have the funds needed for the business.

“Damn, it will be a jackpot only if I have that money.....”

After regaining Silvana, Hyun-woo could make the rest move forward slowly. But since Silvana was in his hand he was irritated about not being able to immediately start. He had 2 territories but he didn’t know how long it would take to save 150,000 gold.

“Is there a way to gain that much money?”

But 100 and 200 gold is different from 150,000 gold. Most users couldn’t even imagine gaining that much money.

“Even if it takes several years, is the only way to gradually save money?”

Hyun-woo couldn't stop sighing. Suddenly, he heard the news coming from the TV in the living room. Hyun-woo listened to the announcer's words without really thinking when he had a sudden flash in his head.

“Yes, that's the way!”

Hyun-woo yelled as he figured out a method to obtain the business funds.

Dreams Come True

“It’s an honour to serve you again.”

The estate’s secretaries were never present whenever there was a siege. The person who greeted him with a friendly smile was Berami, the secretary in charge of managing the territory, legal counsel and the budget. The money he had freely scattered before leaving Silvana was still displaying an effect. That money didn’t just have an effect on Berami.

“The residents are also glad that you became the Lord again. After hearing that Ark-nim had applied for a siege, quite of lot of people went to the Shrine of War to pray for your victory. Everybody still remembers your actions while you were the Lord.”

‘It’s more like they remember the gold.’

Anyway, being liked by the estate’s residents wasn’t an unpleasant feeling.

“Did the former Lord have a bad reputation?”

“It wasn’t bad but it wasn’t good either. He was just a normal Lord.”

Berami pushed up his glasses and laughed.

His cynical character hadn’t changed even after 1 year. But he always showed the proper manners to Ark.

That was the power of money.

Anyway, he truly felt like he had recaptured Silvana after seeing Berami’s face.

“Please stay the Lord for a long time.”

“That’s what I intend.”

Ark replied with a smile.

“Would you like to know how the territory changed since you were last here?”

“Of course.”

The competent secretary instantly handed him some files. After he took the papers, an information window appeared.

Currently Owned Territory Information Window <Lancel (Silvana)>			
【Territory】	Silvana	【Current Lord】	Ark
【Rating】	C	【Classification】	Small Territory
【Number of Residents in Territory】	13,040 people	【Residents' Bond】	980 (+98)
【Residents' Loyalty】	530 (+53)	【Territory's Gross Income】	387,000 Gold every 10 days.
【Territory's Current Assets】	120,300 gold	【Value of the Current Territory】	615,250
【Territory's Fame】	499,400	【Development】	46,650
【Development Speed】	45,950 (▽ Falling)	【Commerce】	67,570
【Civilization】	53,360	【Armament】	31,500 (+945)
* Current effects applied to the territory			
【Shrine of War】 Armament +30%, 'Maintenance of Peace' effect			
【Cathedral's Support】 Resident's loyalty +10%, Resident's Bond +10%			
【Mercenary's Office】The number of mercenaries that can be hired by the estate increases. In addition, if the estate hires mercenaries from the Mercenary's Office then the costs will be reduced based on the rating (Current rating: A)			
* Current situation of the territory			
-Peace is being maintained without any problems. (△ Rising)			

<p>-The income of the harvest and the estate is increasing. (△ Rising)</p> <p>-Preparations for farmland expansion, reservoir expansion in case of a flood, various facilities expansion, Silver River Bridge construction and various other public works are on stand-by.</p>
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‘Huhuhuhu.’

He laughed as he saw the information window. When he first became the Lord of Silvana he had no idea how to manage the territory. And he had already decided to sell it to Raiden so he had no interest. But now the situation was different. In order to prepare for being the Lord, he had meticulously read all the information about it. And he had recently become the Lord of Lancel so when he saw the information window about Silvana, he could grasp the situation with just one glance.

‘Silvana is on a completely different level from Lancel.’

It was a territory with 15 villages and a population of 13,040 people! When compared to Lancel’s 732 residents, it was a huge estate 20 times Lancel’s size. However, the enormous difference was the income of the estate. It was a surprising income of 387,000 gold for one month, or 10 days in reality! That was 40 times the income from Lancel. It was also a larger income than other territories in Nagaran. While Silvana had a good location, it was most impacted by the Continental Commerce Firm. The sales from the Continental Commerce Firm accounted for 30% of Silvana’s income.

‘The estate’s income is approximately 400,000 gold while the assets is 120,000 gold.....’

In other words, it was hard for Raiden to manage the estate. If he invested the income into various projects then it would increase the value of the territory. That’s why the value of the territory was more than 600,000. But Raiden was only resourceful up to there. While the estate was growing steadily, he hadn’t done anything impressive like Ark with the Continental Commerce Firm. That’s why Berami had called him a ‘normal’ Lord.

“Still, the various numerical figures are quite good. However.....”

“Are you asking about the development speed?”

Berami questioned quickly.

That’s right. Silvana’s current development speed was 45,590. It wasn’t low. The problem was that the development speed was currently falling.

“Is there a particular reason?”

“Well, I don’t know the details but the Lord has had no time to properly care for the rate of development. After learning about the territory, he had unexpectedly built that Mercenary’s Office and invested a lot of money into it.”

‘Aha, was it something like that?’

Ark was able to grasp the situation from Berami’s description. Thanks to the Seutandal conquest war and the lawless port, Raiden hadn’t cared about the management of the estate. Apart from the politics, he left Berami to manage the rest of it. However, it was less efficient than when a Lord managed it so the speed fell. Building the Mercenary’s Office which had no relation to development or production of the estate was also a problem.

In fact, there had been something Ark was doubtful about before the siege. In Nagaran, NPCs could be hired as mercenaries. The mercenaries could be hired for a siege. However, most territories only hired 200~300 of them. Although they had good skills, the cost of hiring them was quite expensive. Ark had applied for the siege two days before it started. He had wondered how Raiden could hire 600 mercenaries despite his financial difficulties.

‘It was due to the Mercenary’s Office.’

When he created the Mercenary’s Office, the number of mercenaries that could be hired increased. Furthermore, when the Lord hired mercenaries then the rating of the office would increase, stronger mercenaries would gather and the degree of loyalty increased. Even the hiring costs were less expensive. For wandering

mercenaries, this office was like a token of appreciation. The reason Raiden built the Mercenary's Office was obvious.

'It was probably to hire mercenaries who he would send to Seutandal at a cheaper price.'

Despite the money piled up in the estate, that money wasn't the Lord's personal funds. The money spent hiring the mercenaries was from Raiden's pockets. In other words, building the office on the estate and hiring mercenaries was to reduce the burden on his wallet.

'It was thanks to this that he was able to hire 600 mercenaries despite the lack of time and money.'

Anyway, Ark found the information about the estate quite satisfactory. He was especially satisfied with the rating of the estate.

"As you already know, the total income of the territory is 450,000 gold. When the value, income and fame of the estate increases above 600,000, you will be able to apply to the kings of the Three Kingdoms for a promotion."

That was Berami's explanation. Thanks to the Continental Commerce Firm, Silvana's value had already gone over 600,000. He needed 150,000 more income and 100,000 more fame before the territory could be promoted to a B class estate. And a huge bonus was given if the rating of the territory increased. The castle would become more durable and the armoury would also increase. The effects of the Defense Towers during a siege would also be greater. And finally, the Lord's salary would increase when the estate was promoted. The monthly salary of a Lord was 2% of the territory's income. However, that salary was applied every time the territory's rating increased.

In other words, if the estate's current income was 400,000 gold then that was what the Lord's salary would be based on when promoted to a C class estate. With the 2% of the income rule, the monthly salary of a D class estate was 3,000 gold and the Lord would receive 6,000 gold when promoted to a C class estate. And the Lord of a B class estate would receive 9,000 gold. In other words, in

one month he could receive a salary of 18,000 gold.

‘All that effort for 1 year and he had the territory taken away when a B rank promotion was right around the corner.....’

Raiden must be sitting on the floor of his room and crying right now. While he thought about Raiden, the idea of sympathizing with him never even crossed Ark’s mind.

“Okay. Repair the ceiling and areas that were damaged in the siege. Don’t pay attention to the budget and just restore it to its best possible state. Since there will be no sieges for a month, all projects on stand-by should begin. Our target is to reach a B rating in 3 months.”

“Huh?”

Berami’s eyes opened wide at Ark’s order.

“As you can see, the current assets are only worth 120,300 gold.”

“So?”

“Have you forgotten? We have to pay 30% of the territory’s total income as a tax to the Three Kingdoms. That is 116,100 gold. So the territory’s assets is actually only 4,200 gold. That is enough to maintain the estate. The income for the next month will be barely enough for the repairs but you want us to continue with the projects as well?

“There’s no need to worry about money for a while.”

Ark replied with a wicked grin. Ark had a reason for saying that. It was because of the ‘double ledgers’ he previously created. Ark had handed Wolkosu the ‘double ledgers’ and he had diverted some of the earning from the Continental Commerce Firm into it. When he checked with Wolkosu before the siege, the amount had surprisingly reached 1 million gold. Of course, Ark couldn’t embezzle this money directly. The reason Ark had made the ‘double ledgers’ was to prepare for when he regained Silvana again. And when the estate was promoted, the monthly salary of the Lord would increase. In the end, Ark would be the one profiting.

'If I pour that 1 million gold into the estate then it will grow in a month!'

Opportunity would always come to those who are prepared. But Berami didn't know those details so he still looked uneasy.

"Is there really a way to have that type of money? If a problem occurs and we can't offer the tax to the Three Kingdoms....."

"I told you not to worry. If I wanted then I could have that money by the end of the day."

"I understand. Then I'll believe in the Lord and order the materials required for the repairs as well as give the command for the projects to resume. At the end of 3 months then it might be possible to promote the estate. No, it will be promoted."

"If there are any other projects required for the estate's development then tell me."

"Yes, I will."

Berami replied with a cheerful expression.

"As expected, the estate becomes lively once Ark-nim returns."

"I'm thankful for those words. I thought you might complain since there is a lot of work."

"That's impossible."

Berami laughed and was about to walk away when he remembered something.

"Ah, I just remembered. You have visitors from the Schudenberg Kingdom."

"The Schudenberg Kingdom? What do they want?"

Berami grinned and answered Ark's question.

"It is better to ask them directly. Shall I summon them?"

"Yes, let's meet them."

After a while, three people entered the office. Two of them were knights while the last person was a middle-aged aristocrat in the uniform of the palace.

“First, congratulations on becoming the Lord of Silvana.”

“Thank you. But what brings representatives of the Schudenberg Kingdom here.....?”

“Yesterday we heard from the Shrine of War that after a lot of bravery and wisdom, you managed to win the siege and become the Lord of Silvana. His Majesty is very pleased that you’ve raised the fame of Schudenberg Kingdom. After your achievements, he had decided to promote Ark-nim to a Baron.

‘A Baron?’

Ark looked astonished by the aristocrat’s words. Not long ago, Ark had become an aristocrat in Schudenberg Kingdom. Once becoming an aristocrat, a user who did more achievements (e.g. killing famous thieves, killing strong monsters that had been troubling the kingdom or gaining a lot of fame) had a chance to be promoted again. Nagaran was an area managed by all three Kingdoms on the continent. So those who became a Lord in Nagaran were granted a temporary title from all Three Kingdoms. However, Ark had become a nobleman in Schudenberg Kingdom before being Silvana’s Lord. Therefore, the King of Schudenberg could be smug in front of the Kings of Bristania and the Sinius Principality. Being granted a barony was his repayment.

“Take this.”

The aristocrat politely handed up a letter from the King. After he received the scroll, there were some heroic sound effects and the information window appeared.

-You have acquired the ‘Peerage Bestowment Certificate.’
--

After received the certificate, you have become a Baron.
--

While you are the Lord of Silvana, you have a noble title from the Schudenberg Kingdom. After raising Schudenberg’s fame through
--

your achievements, you have been promoted to a higher status. A nobleman should always been a distinguished role model that can be respected by others. As a noble, people will always be observing your behaviour. You will also have the ear of Schudenberg's King and other aristocrats. If your behaviour is just and honourable then you will have a chance to reach a higher status. But if they are dishonourable then you can be stripped of your title.

* As a noble title bonus, all stats will increase by 10.

* Reputation will increase by 7,500.

* When completing a quest given by an NPC with a noble title, your status (Honour Knight: 500 people) will allow you to receive the support of the guards.

* Owning 2 territories has granted you the title of 'Lord.'

-You have learnt a new Lord's skill.

The title of Lord is given to a person who possessed two or more territories. Once you possess two or more territories, you have the qualification to apply for an audience with the King. You will also have a stronger voice among the upper class citizens.

This skill will be useful when meeting many upper class residents and aristocrats.

+ Political Power (Lord Skill): This skill will allow you to take part in nobility meetings about the Kingdom as well as participate in politics.

When your political power increases, your comments will become more convincing to the King and nobles. Of you manage to persuade a certain amount of nobles and the King, you can even change the laws of Schudenberg Kingdom. In some cases, your opinion will be considered when giving quests to regular users. When your political power increases, your degree of intimacy with nobles will also increase.

<Political Power +500>

It was an unexpected bonus. He received a bonus of +10 to all stats and 7,500 fame when he became a Baron. It was a higher bonus than when he became a baronet. However, Ark was most interested in the new Political Power skill.

‘I can engage in the politics of Schudenberg Kingdom?’

When he thought about it carefully, it really was an enormous privilege.

It was possible to participate in politics and propose new laws or change an existing law. That is to say, wasn't it the same privileges as a congressman in real life? Korean politicians were adept at proposing laws and amendments which were favourable to them. As an example, let's consider Ark's triangular trade route. Ark could lower the customs fee, increase the security around movement of goods, lower the tax rates etc. There were many ways to use his status to his benefit. Of course, it wouldn't be easy persuading the King and nobles to agree to his proposals. It would probably take some time and more advancement in upper class society.

‘Huhuhu, this will have huge benefits.’

“Ah, I also have a message from Lord Jackson.”

At that moment, the aristocrat started talking again.

“Lord Jackson? What is it?”

“The bandit group who were arrested a while ago with Ark's help have broken out of jail.”

“J-jailbreak?”

“Yes, according to Lord Jackson's words they received help from outside troops to escape from jail. A group of guards has been dispatched to chase them but they haven't been caught yet. Those criminals have a grudge against Ark-nim so Lord Jackson asked you to be careful.”

“Tell him I am thankful for his worries.”

“I understand. I’ll be going now.”

The middle aged aristocrat said before leaving the office. The joyful news about becoming a Baron was soured by Jewel’s jailbreak.

‘Hmm, so escaping from jail is possible in New World? Well, if it is possible to attack a NPC village then there is no reason a jailbreak should be impossible. But they must have quite a lot of numbers to escape from Jackson jail.....

Raiden’s group must be the one who helped them escape. That Raiden guy is still trying to annoy me even after losing the Lordship? But it doesn’t really matter that much.’

Ark just laughed and shook it off. Raiden breaking Jewel out of jail wasn’t a problem now that he lost Silvana. Raiden had lost Silvana and was already branded as a villain. His circumstances are similar to Alan’s in the past. Just like Alan, the alliance was also disgruntled with Raiden and left him. The Hermes alliance was scheduled for a collapse. Raiden who was deprived of Silvana and Jewel who was a fugitive were no threat to Ark.

‘I can’t afford to be concerned about those guys. Right now it is important to gain funds for my business.’

Ark laughed and headed towards the main meeting room in the castle. He had changed into Dark Wolf before entering the meeting room.

Buzz, chatter.

Dozens of users were gathered inside the meeting room. There were the commanders of the 20 Dark Eden units as well as JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Isyuram, Lariette, Roco, Shambala, Bread and Redian. After 24 hours, all users who had died in the siege were revived at the castle. And Ark had gathered them together for a meeting.

“Now, please pay attention.”

When Ark walked onto the podium, the room instantly became quiet. Ark stared at the users one by one and then lowered his head.

“I first wanted to say thank you. It is thanks to your efforts that we’ve defeated the villains and took control of Silvana. It was only possible with everybody’s help. Everybody did really well so thank you.”

Ark then raised his head and said.

“But I didn’t gather you here just to convey my thanks. It also isn’t to give the fee I promise you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Surely he’s not talking about the fee he promised if the siege was a success?”

Ark tapped a table and focused the attention on him again.

“Please be quiet for a while. I’ll tell you first, it isn’t that I don’t intend to give the success fee. I just want to make an offer first.”

“Offer?”

“This suggestion is a token of appreciation for helping me.”

Ark raised one finger and continued talking.

“First of all, you will all unit as a coalition guild.”

“What? A coalition guild?”

The unit leaders started fussing again at Ark’s declaration.

“What is he saying?”

“Well, belong to a guild which has a territory is better than another guild....”

“If we join a guild with a territory then it will be difficult to go around freely.”

“That’s right, it is a bit too much for me.....”

Looking at the atmosphere, it seemed like 50% was for the suggestion and 50% against. Some people liked it because it was difficult to join a guild which already had a territory. However, some

users didn't like that it would restrict their freedom. After chattering noisily for a while, one of the leaders raised his hands and asked.

"As you know, joining a guild with a territory is different from joining a general guild. It might be infrequent, but we would have to return every time there is a siege and if we die then we will lose our equipment. So the Lord normally gives some of the proceeds to the guild members. I would like to know how much of the proceeds we would get before joining the guild."

".....There is no distribution of the proceeds from the territory."

Ark bluntly replied. In fact, when he first discussed it with JusticeMan he had intended to give them 60% of the proceeds from the estate. But now that idea had changed.

"What? You're not going to give us any money?"

"Is that what you call gratitude?"

The users clamoured with shock.

'Huhuhu, they've started to nibble the bait. Now time for the lure!'

"Please listen a bit more!"

Ark surveyed the atmosphere of the room with a small smile before shouting. Then he deliberately changed his expression 180 degrees and sighed.

"In fact, I've been lying to you. I spoke about justice when I requested your help in striking the Hermes alliance. Of course, it is true. However that wasn't my only purpose. My real purpose in defeating the Hermes alliance was to obtain Silvana castle."

"Well, it is natural to desire a territory....."

The users murmured as they heard his words. That's right. In fact, the users weren't that naive as to completely believe Ark's words about 'justice.' If the Hermes alliance was defeated then someone would have to become Silvana's Lord. Of course the priority would go to Ark who was the leader. Everybody knew that the Lord received considerable benefits. Then Ark looked at one of the

leaders and muttered.

“Then why do you think users are so eager to obtain a territory?”

“Huh? Isn’t it to become famous and obtain the Lord’s fixed salary?”

“Any normal person would think this.”

“Do you have a different reason?”

“Sid, explain.”

“Yes Lord-nim.”

Sid nodded and waddled to the table. And he unfolded a large scroll onto the table. The scroll was a map of New World. On the map, there was big triangle drawn with lines connecting Schudenberg, Nagaran and Seutandal. That’s right. This map showed Ark’s dream of a triangular trade route. Sid pointed to the three corners of the triangle and said.

“Everybody please pay attention. If you look at the corners of the triangle then you might see why it is important. Yes, this place is Silvana castle where you are right now. And this is Lancel village located in the Argus Mountains. And finally this is Seutandal who surfaced a few months ago. These three areas are essential to what I will now explain.”

Sid finally began to describe Ark’s grand plan.

Currently Ark was already managing a store in Lancel. He also had the qualification to set up a trading place in Seutandal. After winning the siege and becoming the Lord of Silvana, he possessed the Continental Commerce Firm. The stores and commerce of those areas were all in Ark’s hands.

“Dark Wolf-nim’s final purpose is to monopolize the trade in these three areas. And it’s not an exaggeration to say that his goal is already achieved. Can you imagine? The profits which will be obtained when the trade is monopolized in these three areas?”

“Oh my god!”

“I-is this really possible?”

“If it is possible then the profit would be in the tens of thousands.....
No, it would approach the hundred thousand.”

“Can a person really monopolize the markets in three areas.....?”

The leaders were struck dumb. Then they all looked at Ark with new eyes. If Ark really proceeded with this business plan then the obtained profit would transcend imagination. If he succeeded then he would become a game tycoon. The idea made the leaders send him mixed looks of envy and jealousy. Then Ark walked over to the table and said to them.

“I would like to share that revenue with you.”

“Hik! W-what?”

“You’ll really share the proceeds of this business with us?”

Lights started shining in the users’ eyes. Ark nodded and said.

“You might know this already from Sid’s explanation but the Continental Commerce Firm is the centre of this business. Maintaining Silvana is required for the stable operation of the Continental Commerce Firm. And I became the Lord with everybody’s help. Therefore I want to give you guys the chance to invest in this business.”

“Invest?”

“That’s right. You will become a shareholder in the business. When the business becomes profitable, you will receive a dividend of the proceeds every 10 days. But considering the equity of the investment, I’ll have to limit it to 50 gold per person.”

This was the plan Ark came up with to secure the business funds. While Ark had been troubled by the financing problem, he had heard about attracting foreign investors on the TV. At the moment, Ark had 2,700 users at the castle. He needed 150,000 gold to proceed with the business. It was an amount that was impossible for Ark who lived in a rented house. But it was different if there were a

lot of investors. If 2,700 people invested 50 gold each then it would be 135,000 gold. It seemed like a huge amount of money but each user would only have to pay 50 gold. Of course, Ark's income would decrease if users invested in the business. However.....

'It is important to start the business. If I'm providing the funds along then there is no guarantee that I can obtain the required amount in several years. However, I don't want to borrow money from loan sharks.'

There was a time when Ark had suffered after borrowing money to pay for his mother's hospital bills. It had an annual interest of 70%! If he borrowed 1 billion won then the annual interest was 700 million won. Furthermore, he wouldn't be able to receive a lot of profit when the business first began. Even when the business became stable, it would take several months to even think about paying back the interest. And if he showed weakness then the interest would go up to 100% and then 200%.

'I can't do such a dangerous thing. It would be safer to have users invest than to pay interest. If I receive the users' investment then a stable income will be maintained even if business is difficult.'

Users who invested would receive an income. However, Ark had earmarked 40% of the business for himself. In other words, Ark would receive 40% of the profits. The business wouldn't exist without Ark so nobody would protest. And the remaining 60% was for the investors. Of course, even if there was tens of thousands gold profits it wouldn't all go to the users. If there was 50,000 gold profit then only 30,000 would be returned. When divided by 2,700 people, each person would only receive 10 gold. However, the dividend was steadily provided every 10 days. If it was 30 gold for 1 month then they would receive 360 in 1 year. They would be able to receive back 6 times the investment in one year. The unit leaders also realized that.

"Isn't that quite good?"

"If I invest 50 gold then I can receive a stable income....."

"Can't we invest more than 50 gold?"

One leader asked as he looked at Ark with expectant eyes.

“Unfortunately, the shares are limited which is why I have to restrict it to 50 gold per person. Well, if there is someone in your unit who doesn’t want to invest then that chance will go to other people.”

Ark replied. That’s right. This was the most important part in securing the investment. In fact, if Ark didn’t even pay 1 copper and received 40% shares then of course the users would be dissatisfied. But Ark never gave the impression that their money was needed to start the business. On the surface he gave the users a chance to invest in the business as thanks for their help. So the leaders thought it was natural that Ark received a 40% share.

‘And having investors will bring three benefits.’

Ark inwardly smiled wickedly.

First, they would all join the guild. Belonging to a guild which had a territory wasn’t simple, but most people would join after the promise of an income. Secondly, he didn’t have to pay a separate fee and could just pay them the dividends from the investments. Usually when a guild possessed 2,700 people, the Lord would have to pay them 60% of the territory’s income. But the dividends would increase if the business was successful so the guild members would be satisfied with the dividends. He could monopolize the 9,000 gold monthly salary. And the third reason was actually the most important.

When investing in the business, all the guild members would become shareholders. Their profits depended on the business. So they would be willing to submit to damage to defend Silvana during the siege. By drawing in investors Ark managed to get his business fund, reducing the troops maintenance fee and reinforcing the stability of Silvana. It was a huge benefit even if he had to share 60% of the proceeds.

‘It is better to start the business rather than trying to obtain the business funds alone.’

This business was Ark’s final goal. Raising the 150,000 gold required

to start his business would require 1~2 years. But if he used the guild then he could start the business immediately. If he collected the shares for 1~2 years then he could make the business stabilize. That was Ark's plan! Ark was a genius at collecting money.

"I'll consult with the unit immediately."

The leaders hurried out of the meeting room. After a while, they came back holding money bags. 135,000 gold was stacked on the table like a mountain! After receiving Ark's proposal, 2,700 people had agreed. The users trusted Ark thanks to Dark Wolf's fame.

"Thank you for your trust. Sid, draw up the contract."

"Yes!"

Sid quickly started to draw up the contracts.

-A Merchant's Agreement.

<Contractor: Dark Wolf= Silvana's Coalition Guild>

Dark Wolf will pay the investors 60% of the proceeds every 10 days as a dividend. The dividend is 0.022% per 50 gold.

So Ark secured his business funds. And the investors joined JusticeMan's guild 'Justice Division.'

"I admit, you really are good at tricks like this."

Shambala muttered as the unit commanders left.

"What? This is benefiting them as well. And you've also invested....."

Ark replied with a shrewd expression. Then JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members tapped Ark on the shoulder and said.

"We don't know the details. But we believed in you and invested so we want to be certain it will succeed."

"Eh? I've already received your gold."

"If the business fails....."

“Hyung-nims shouldn’t say that or I’ll have a heart attack in front of you.”

Ark jokingly replied. That’s right. Before Ark had raised the funds for the business, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members had already invested. If the business succeeded then there was no way he could leave them out. So they had gathered 10,000 gold. Thus Ark had promised them a 10% dividend. That was dozens of times the dividend of the guild members. Ark’s stake was reduced to 30% but it wasn’t a waste.

“I understand. Just wait a few months and you will definitely receive a profit.”

‘Now I’ve gathered the funds for the business. Shall I begin?’

He received 135,000 gold from the investors. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members gave 10,000 gold. He also earned 25,000 gold from disposing of the mithril door. So Ark had secured 170,000 gold to start his business. Ark used the Letter Movement and flew away to Seutandal.

“I heard from Shambala-nim. Congratulations on becoming the Lord.”

Isabel laughed and welcomed him. It was a reunion after a long time but Ark had no time to chat.

“Thank you. I’m here to buy the trading office.”

Ark paid 100,000 gold and bought the trading office.

It was the only trading firm in the centre of Seutandal. So he now monopolized Seutandal’s trade. All transactions which took place at the trading office could be manage directly.

‘Finally……!’

Ark looked at the trading certificate with thrilled eyes.

‘All that’s left is the merchant fleet and carriages.’

Ark flew back to Schudenberg and bought a large sailboat. At first he thought about purchasing a small boat but he had abundant funds

so there was no reason not to buy a large one. Ark bought an A grade merchant boat with 6 sails. And he also bought 8 carriages. All that added up to 150,000 gold. Even when all the preparations were finished, he still had 20,000 gold left.

“I did it. I’ve finished the preparations for the triangular trade!”

He felt his heart leap after finishing the preparations. Soon the ship and carriages would bring gold back to Ark. Ark placed the carriages on the ship and returned to Silvana. Silvana’s location made it a good place to trade. Silvana had direct access to the ocean through the river so ships could easily enter.

“Sid, you will be the chief officer responsible for Ark’s Corporation.”

Even though he created Ark’s Corporation, he didn’t intend to run the business himself. He wasn’t a merchant so trading wouldn’t be useful for him. And Sid was reformed after Isyuram’s mental education so Ark could trust him with it.

“Huh? R-really?”

Sid stuttered after hearing Ark’s words. Sid was a merchant so he knew what a big scale this business was. It would be a dozen times more profitable than when he was the foreign chief director of the Continental Commerce Firm. And it would have a great deal of large transactions for a merchant. If Sid was in charge of this business then he had the chance to become the best merchant in New World. Sid grasped Ark’s hand and shook it with tears in his eyes.

“Thank you. I will work hard.”

“Huhuhu, please do that. Because Teacher, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members all invested in this business.”

Ark replied with a wicked grin. Sid became pale but accepted the position of chief officer. Sid couldn’t miss this opportunity.

“Then let’s depart!”

Sid saluted and left on the merchant ship. Gold Dream. The name of the merchant ship blatantly showed Ark’s desire to the world. It was

a merchant ship that could carry up to 100,000 gold and was protected by Seutandal's navy. The boat was also A ranked with 24 cannons each. When Sid boarded Gold Dream, all 6 sails opened and the merchant ship departed towards the ocean. It wasn't simple a merchant ship. It was Ark's dream.

'Now New World's gold is mine!'

That was what Ark believed. A dream come true! That's right. The dream was accomplished. But it wasn't finished yet. Ark looked at the ship that was becoming more distant.

"Now that part is finished. What now.....?"

He heard Bul-kkun ask from behind him. Ark replied with a wicked grin.

"Naturally hell training with the coalition members."

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members' faces turned dark.

Into the Abyss

“Units 1, 2, 3 and 4, disturb him from the rear! Archers and magicians should cover the assault troops. Priests should heal the warriors without stopping!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

The guild cried out at Ark’s command and moved. While the leading warriors blocked with their shields, arrows and magic shot towards the enemy.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, pepepeng!

The explosion of different types of magic lit up the dim environment like it was daylight. A huge presence was revealed by the light. It was a 20 metre monster with 8 arms. It was a middle ranked boss monster called Dark Hunter Baldwin. Baldwin was receiving hundreds of attacks. He didn’t care about the magic and arrows hitting his body and just ran forward while using his 8 arms to attack. There was a roaring sound and the warriors’ defense quickly collapsed.

“Units 5, 6, 7 and 8, use your skills to grab its attention. Meanwhile units 1, 2, 3 and 4 will retreat. Get out of its range and focus on recovery.”

The units attacked it from behind. Baldwin initially ignored it but after being hit by 100 warriors using Taunt, he couldn’t endure the anger anymore and eventually turned his body around. He revealed his thick fangs and roared loudly. The whole space shook from the roar! The warriors who saw the scene turned pale in horror. However, Ark just felt excited after listening.’

‘This is it, this is great! It is exactly what I wanted!’

Ark’s face lit up with joy. There was a reason Ark couldn’t suppress his happiness after seeing Baldwin.

“Ohh, it is suffocating!”

It started a few days ago. After regaining Silvana, he had earnestly started his dream business. It was unnecessary to explain but Ark had actually been under a lot of stress.

“L-level.... Stats..... Loot.....!”

The reason for Ark's stress was his character. It had been approximately one month since the Lancel defensive war started. In other words, Ark hadn't been able to hunt for one month. For a user, the number 1 priority was raising their level. He had been experiencing serious withdrawal symptoms which were the reason for Ark's stress.

“But now all the work has been settled. Gold Dream has successfully departed so I just have to wait for it to return.....”

There was no need to go to other areas to hunt. He could gain experience in Silvana thanks to the secret dungeon. The Cradle of Ancient Evil! It was a dungeon where rare, elite monsters roamed.

“This is an opportunity to raise my level!”

While he wanted to level up, he also wanted to uncover the secret in the lowest floor of the dungeon.

“The last time I was the Lord, I only reached the 5th floor with JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. But according to the information, the secret dungeon is many times deeper.

And the levels of the monsters become higher the more we go down, so getting experience when I'm level 383 won't be a problem. This is a monster infested dungeon and the last floor might have a hidden boss.” That idea stimulated Ark's adventurous spirit even further. He also had another reason to hunt in the dungeon. Even though the Hermes alliance lost Silvana, there would definitely be a siege challenge once the one month was over. Even if he had regained Silvana, the abilities of the 'Justice Division' still paled compared to the other alliances in Nagaran. So Ark needed to raise the level and ability to fight together of the Justice Division. Fighting against elite monsters should be good practice.

After getting the idea, Ark led the troops stationed in Silvana to the secret dungeon. That's right. Ark was currently in the Cradle of Ancient Evil. His stress had unravelled after enthusiastically fighting the monsters. In the old days, Ark entered the dungeon with 80 people and took a week to capture up to the 5th floor. But now the situation was different from before. Ark's level was twice what it previously was. With the addition of the Lancel troops, the Eastern Nation and the Justice Division, they had a total of 3,800 people. Thanks to that, they managed to reach the 24th floor in just 3 days. And Baldwin was the middle ranked boss that appeared every time after a certain number of floors.

'As expected from a middle ranked, elite boss.'

Baldwin didn't easily collapse from the attacks of the Justice Division. As a level 600 elite boss, his attack and defense combined surpassed imagination. But that was something else that caused difficulty for the Justice Division.

-Ugh, you conceited humans. The guards of hell will ripe your meat and heart from you. They'll eat the flesh of the group foolish enough to come here!

After being hit on both sides, Baldwin punched the ground and shouted. Then the ground split and a group of 100 dogs with red eyes came crawling out. They were the guards of hell, monsters called Hell dogs. Although they were only level 300, they were still elite monsters. They were so strong that 4~5 people were required to deal with one.

"Sheesh, these guys, don't just turn pale. The previous units, form a circle around the Hell dogs and gather them in one place!"

"Magicians, use Fire Wall around the Hell dogs."

"Archers, shoot to contain the Hell dogs."

"Warriors, lure Baldwin to the outskirts!"

Ark issued some orders and the leaders instantly directed their units. Despite their fear, the units began to execute the strategies in an orderly manner.

‘It was worth the running around and dying.’

This secret dungeon had a huge harvest. During the siege, Ark had issued detailed instructions but the leader often couldn't understand the aims and hesitated to obey. But after hunting in the secret dungeon for a few days, they had completely changed. Now the Justice Division started to understand how to move in any situation. The troops soon required 80% of Ark's tricks in battle. With 3,800 troops invading the dungeon, the battles wouldn't be a battle at all. Even if they were elite monsters, they were easy to deal with when there were a lot of people. So when dealing with a middle ranked boss like now, he divided the troops into units consisting of 500 people. Then they went around the dungeon and lured any visible monsters. The battle only started when a minimum of 100 monsters were gathered. If the battle wasn't difficult then it wouldn't be training. And only one unit participated in the battle. So there were quite a few casualties but the troops were able to learn the tricks of battle quickly. And by dividing into troops of 500 people, the time it took to clear the dungeon was considerably shortened. That's how they were able to reach the 24th floor in three days.

“Ark-nim, we've collected all the Hell dogs in one place!”

“Good. Racard, Radun, now it is your turn.”

“Okay, leave it to me!”

Racard grabbed Radun and flew into the sky. When they arrived at the place the Hell dogs were gathered, Radun opened his mouth.

Ssak ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

At the same time, a large number of bee hives fell from Radun's mouth.

It was the pepper beehives Ark made using Creative Cooking! In fact, Ark didn't keep a lot of dishes inside Radun. Unlike other items, Radun would digest dishes when it was placed inside him. In addition, Creative Cooking could create poisonous dishes. There was no guarantee what would happen if Radun digested the dishes.

But if Radun threw it up immediately then he didn't have to worry about it being digested. Anyway, the Hell dogs shrieked when dozens of pepper beehives flowed out. It was the impact of the pepper beehives created by Creative Coking. The Hell dogs had a keen sense of smell so it was impossible for them not to be affected.

"Now's the time. Exterminate them!"

"Assault troops, charge and step on them!"

"These guys are weak against Holy Power. All priests add holy power to the warriors' weapon!"

"Magicians and archers will use their wide area skills to assist the warriors!"

The soldiers let out loud cries and obeyed their unit leader's orders. Thanks to the holy power, the Hell dogs quickly had their health drained after being hit by the swords. When the Hell dogs that were in a critical condition tried to escape, the magicians and arrows used precision attacks to kill them. Thus the Hell dogs were completely destroyed 10 minutes after they appeared.

-Kuuuuuh, these guys.....!

Baldwin murmured angrily as all the Hell dogs were wiped out. Then he opened his mouth and prepared to breath out fire. It was Baldwin's special move, Fire Breath. Baldwin's Fire Breath was a powerful skill which turned a 20 metre area into a sea of fire. But Ark just snorted and laughed.

"Heh, now you've run out of chances. Magicians, wait for the command!"

All the magicians concentrated and waited for the next command. Ark saw Baldwin's mouth open wide and shouted.

"Now's the time. All magicians aim their ice magic into its mouth!"

"Wind from the frozen north seas..... Freezing Wind!"

At the same time, hundreds of deep blue rays shot from the

magicians' hands. It was the most extreme ice magic that could even freeze seawater.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When the frost magic hit Baldwin's mouth, it conflicted with the fire and a huge explosion took place. Steam rose from Baldwin as he screamed. The ensuing explosion had destroyed his eyeballs and his facial muscles were ripped to shreds. And his health was reduced by 30% because the magic damaged the interior of his body. He only had 5% health left.

"Everybody all together! An all-out attack!"

"Waaaaahhhhh!"

The assault troops swarmed around Baldwin. Baldwin swung his 8 arms like crazy but it didn't have the same power as before. Thanks to his eyeballs being destroyed, he was in a 'blind state.' While a few arms hit the users, normally it just hit thin air. The arms were also unable to block any attacks properly. And it was thousands of troops attacking.

-Kuaaack! How regrettable..... But..... This place..... Hell.....

In the end, Baldwin collapsed as a bloody mess while talking nonsense. Then he gasped for breath a few times before he finally died. At the same time, 3~4 items fell on the ground.

-Your level has risen.

The message window popped in front of Ark after Baldwin died.

"Yes!"

Ark's eyes brightened as he shouted.

"Character information window!"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
	Good		

Alignment	+500	Nobility Title	Baron
Fame	21,485 (+500)	Level	391
Profession		Dark Soul	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero	
Health	7,325 (+475)	Mana	7,515(+225)
Spiritual Power	956	Strength	754 (+58)
Agility	1,009 (+90)	Stamina	1,249 (+45)
Wisdom	185 (+10)	Intelligence	1,327 (+5)
Luck	179 (+60)	Flexibility	262
Art of Communication	79	Affection	117 (+10)
Resilience	479	Dark Fog	68
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		173	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople (Armour): Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available			
*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina			

+20, Defense +40

Promised Sword(Two-handed Sword): Strength +20, Stamina +10

Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3

Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance + 100%, Agility +20, 'Magic Protection' is automatically activated when health is less than 50%.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense.

'Isn't this like swimming on land?'

Ark's eyes lit up at the sight of the information window. It had only

been 3 day since thy entered the secret dungeon. During that time he had gained 8 levels. This was because only elite monsters appeared in the secret dungeon. Of course, 3,800 people had entered the dungeon. Even if they were split into units of 500, the experience was still being divided by 500. However, Ark was the leader of the 3,800 attack group. In New World, the commander of a group received bonus experience. In other words, he didn't have to share that experience with 3,800 people. Naturally, his troops also grew during those 3 days. The hunting speed of the troops was also quite quick so they sped through the dungeon at an absurd speed. After hunting so many monsters, they now received no penalty on the amount of experience gained. Thanks to that, the troops managed to gain an average of 5 people by the 3rd day.

‘But having a lot of troops isn’t always a good thing.’

“Ark-nim, we’ve collected all the loot.

Then a unit leader approached and said.

“Two magic armour and one rare weapon dropped.”

This was the only thing Ark didn't like. Since all the monsters in the secret dungeon were elite monsters, there was a high chance of dropping magic and rare items. Sometimes 3~4 magic items would drop after fighting a middle ranked boss. Normally he would just run wild with joy but this situation was different. Thousands of people were capturing the dungeon. Furthermore, they were all Silvana's defense troops as well as his shareholders. It wasn't possible to be greedy for the loot and ruin the growing bond between them.

‘When Ark's Corporation is working properly, 1~2 rare items would just be a joke. Then I should show a nonchalant attitude when distributing items.’

But there was one item that only Ark collected.

-Black Stone SculptureAn unidentified stone found in the Cradle of Ancient Evil.
--

<170 Knowledge of Ancient Relics is needed to confirm the item>

It was a strange, sculpture with an uneven form. Ark had found the sculpture for the first time after defeating the middle ranked boss on the 6th floor. A middle ranked boss would appear every 6th floor and would drop a sculpture with a different shape. The first sculpture required 150 Knowledge of Ancient Ruins, the second one 160 and finally the sculpture dropped by Baldwin required 170 Knowledge of Ancient Relics to identify it.

‘But I’m thankful whenever it appears.’

In fact, Ark only had 153 Knowledge of Ancient Relics when he entered the dungeon. However, he gained 10 points every time he identified a sculpture so he currently had 173 points. While the requirements for the sculpture increased with every boss, it wasn’t a problem for Ark as his Knowledge of Ancient Relics also increased. Since it increased when investigating ancient relics, he actually welcomed it when this item dropped. And Ark was the only one who could identify the sculptures so wasn’t it right that Ark monopolized it?

‘In other words, isn’t it an item that only I can grab?’

When Ark grabbed the sculpture, it vibrated and a new message window occurred.

-The Black Stone Sculpture has been identified using Knowledge of Ancient Relics.

<Knowledge of Ancient Relics +10, Intelligence +10, Luck +5 and Fame increased by 50>

-Stone Sculpture containing the Secrets of the Abyss (Level: 3)

An unknown dark power can be felt from this unrefined stone sculpture. While the sculpture looks rough at first, looking closely you can tell that it has been carefully trimmed. A weird shape is depicted on the surface but it cannot be clearly determined. The purpose of this sculpture is still unknown.

“I don’t understand at all.”

Even after confirming the sculpture, he couldn't understand the information at all. The information stated that there was something drawn on the surface. But all Ark could see was a few black lines drawn roughly on the surface.

"But clearly this is a clue to unravel the secret of the secret dungeon."

So far Ark had succeeded in capturing dozens of dungeons. Among those were dungeons where a mystery had to be solved to clear the dungeon. Thanks to that prior experience, Ark was sure that the sculptures were the clues to this secret dungeon.

"But clearly this is a clue to unravel the secret of the secret dungeon."

"But what is this level three that appeared this time? There must be a few more sculptures. If all the pieces are found then it will probably merge into one piece."

Ark packed the sculpture away while deep in thought. Then he looked at the scattered soldiers who were taking a break.

"I guess I need to rearrange the formation."

While they've managed to capture up to the 24th floor, it wasn't without a lot of damage. The monsters' levels were higher and they also had special skills. So the Justice Division received quite a bit of damage. Of course they could re-join after 24 hours but by the time they reached the 20th floor, more people were dying than re-joining. Ark gathered the leaders together and said.

"From the next floor onwards, we'll be advancing in units composed of 700 people. Reorganize your troops."

"Huh? We're already continuing?"

"Already? Did we come all the way here just to leave?"

"That's not it..... Hasn't it already been 20 hours since we started invading this dungeon?"

"So?"

“No, it’s just the time is already 4 a.m. I’m a student.....”

“Take a vacation.”

Ark sounded like he didn’t know what the problem was. The rehabilitation members who were watching from the sidelines just sighed and got up.

“It is useless.”

“Didn’t you previously ask why Ark’s level was so high? Do you understand now?”

“Well, that guy is like this once he starts.”

“It’s better to just go along without any useless remarks.”

That’s right. There was a reason why the rehabilitation group looked agonized when Ark mentioned the dungeon invasion. They had experience invading dungeons with Ark before. So JusticeMan used the excuse of meeting with So-mi and escaped to Lancel village with Roco. Bread and Redian used the excuse of challenging the dungeon they failed to capture when Seutandal rose in order to escape. With both JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members gone, there was no one to lead the autonomous group so Lariette and Shambala managed to stealthily escape. However, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members didn’t have an excuse so they were forced to accompany Ark on this death march.

“Now, now! The leaders should tell their troops to get up. Hurry!”

“Ooooooh....”

“The break was only for 10 minutes.....”

“Is this the reason our group leader is so strong?”

“It is already the third day. I haven’t seen sunlight for three days.”

“Today I dreamed that wandering the dungeon was a dream.”

“Should I purposely die so I can rest a little bit?”

“Knock it off. That man will even measure the time until the dead

person returns. You will die in vain, come in again and want to die even more. It can't be helped. Let's just go down a few more layers. And pray that it finishes soon."

The rehabilitation members said as they stood up. So under Ark's instructions, the troops were divided into 700 people and they entered the next floor.

"Let's go. To receive fighting experience and loot!"

Ark's voice rang out loudly in the dark space. This death march would continue until the bottom floor of the dungeon could be seen.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Not far from the Sinus Principality's northeast coast. A violent shaking started to occur in the sea. The waves vibrated so much that it seemed like a tsunami was going to occur. Eventually the ocean parted like Moses' miracle and a huge object rose up. The object was a clear dome with its size reaching hundreds of kilometres. It was two instead of one. After the huge vibration and storm settled, a huge object was floating on the ocean. After it completely emerged from the ocean. Cracks started to form on the transparent dome and it broke. Surprisingly, what appeared inside was a continent. It was a continent with mountains, plains, rivers and even flying beasts. Two continents had abruptly appeared in the huge ocean. The continents which rose from the ocean formed one continent which made contact with Sinus' coast.

Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap!

It was at that moment. Suddenly an intense spark occurred in the space above the continent. The atmosphere seemed to be split apart and showed a huge shape. What emerged from the torn space was a skyray dozens of kilometres long! The most surprising thing was on the back of the skyray. A huge castle had been erected on its back. Even in New World, this skyray was one of a kind. It was the legendary aerial fortress Rwigenberg!

"How is it? Seeing a torn continent becomes one again?"

The voice came from the top floor of the castle on Rwigenberg's back. The man with red hair flying in the wind asked as he looked at the continent. Then a man with black hair answered in a cynical voice.

"It is decent. It's not a scene which stirs up my feelings."

The man with dark hair frowned.

"Rather, I remember a difficult memory after seeing it so I feel troubled instead."

The man with red hair and the one with black hair looked down on the continent from the Rwigenberg. They were the Red Man and Alan. And there was a reason they were looking at the continent. It was because they were the ones to pull the two continents up from the other dimension. That's right. These two continents had risen from a lower dimension. Those continents were Scale and Underworld! Thanks to the ultimate magic the Dark Lord used at the end of the Dark Century, many parts of the continent sank to a lower dimension. However, the Red Man and Alan had resurrected their World Trees which caused the land to rise up to middle earth.

"You should enjoy the outcome. You had quite a lot of troubles there but doesn't it look quite pleasant now?"

The Red Man looked down with pleased eyes. The two dimensions looked different from when they first arrived. Now a blue light covered the mountains and the plains couldn't be seen. In the bright daylight, an unidentified black aura was spreading through the continent. In addition, there were any common wild animals or birds. They were suspicious looking creatures with black auras.

"From now on this will be our home."

"Hmm, our home is an unpleasant place. It makes us look evil."

"Evil?"

The Red Man's eyes narrowed and he briefly looked at Alan. After a while he muttered in a low voice.

“That’s impossible..... We are the true definition of justice.”

“Does that type of talk make you feel uncomfortable?”

“It can’t be helped. It is the truth.”

The Red Man answered in a rough voice and turned around.

“Then let’s get started. Shouldn’t we inform the citizens that we have returned to this world?”

“That’s right. It is why we returned.”

“Rwigenberg, let’s plant fear in the ignorant public!”

The Red Man smiled before shouting.

Ohhhhh!

When Rwigenberg flapped its wings, a storm occurred and it started to move at a quick pace. The place Rwigenberg headed to was the Sinus Principality. Rwigenberg appeared in the sky above the Sinus Principality in an instant. And it showered the land with black objects.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

The object which fell and lodged into the ground was an obelisk with a dark aura. When the black obelisk was driven into the ground, its effects instantly started to spread. The ground blackened by the obelisk started to crawl with hundreds and thousands of bizarre creatures.

“Come! All you demons called gamers, it is time to collect the price for your sins!”

The Red Man’s eyes became distorted with anger. This was the turbulent start to the period where New World’s history was changed.

“Team Chief-nim!”

At the same time in the Planning Department of Global Exos. Kim

Gwon-tae's scream resounded through the quiet office. Ho Myung-hwan who had been dozing at his desk jumped up with surprise.

"Hik! K-Kim Gwon-tae? Why are you suddenly calling for the Team Chief of the Planning Department?"

"Bring him here right now!"

"Huh? What do you need....?"

"I don't have time to explain! Hurry!"

Kim Gwon-tae spat out urgently and Ho Myung-hwan rushed towards an office. After a while, Ha Myung-woo approached Kim Gwon-tae.

"What the, what is it? What's going on?"

"I-I'm not sure. A few minutes ago the system started to go out of control."

Kim Gwon-tae replied while frantically tapping on the keyboard. An incomprehensible phenomenon was occurring in front of them. While there were many phenomena involving New World's systems that they didn't understand, this time it was on a completely different level. Kim Gwon-tae typed in a huge amount of commands on the monitor at a tremendous speed. Kim Gwon-tae and Ha Myung-woo had never encountered this before.

"Event? Did an event start?"

"No, this is not an event."

Kim Gwon-tae answered like he was in a trance as he continued staring at the data on the monitor.

A few minutes ago, the A level security of New World had been released. At the same time, dozens of processes had been unlocked. The only thing they could think was that this wasn't an event, but something affecting the system.

"If this continues....."

"Continues? What on earth?"

Ha Myung-woo shouted nervously. Kim Gwon-tae then muttered with a pale, stricken face.

“It is impossible for the main system to process all these operations at once. If it continues then the main server would overheat and blow up.”

The computing power of New World’s main server was enough that it could search New World’s entire population in 10 minutes. It was a monster like machine. But the data occurring in front of Kim Gwon-tae was enough that not even that monster system could handle it. It was like a nuclear bomb had been dropped..... It was like a bomb of data had hit the system.

“What, what the? Explode? What are you saying?”

“No, an explosion might be better. If the defense systems of the main server malfunctions and the enormous amount of data flows back into the units.....”

Ha Myung-woo’s face stiffened at Kim Gwon-tae’s words. Even the dirt on the side of the road in New World required an absurd amount of data. If that absurd data flowed back into the user’s brain then the result was obvious. The explosion of data would go beyond the brain’s tolerance and the brains would be smashed like tofu. Ha Myung-woo grabbed Kim Gwon-tae’s shirt and yelled.

“Stop it! Do whatever it takes! Stop it even if you have to break the server!”

“B-but.....It is already too late..... The amount of data is already beyond the tolerance limit.....”

Kim Gwon-tae yanked at his hair with a hopeless expression. Pak! All of a sudden there was a blackout as the power was turned off in the Planning Department. After 0.1 seconds, the power supply turned back on.

“Eh? What is this?”

The various staff throughout the Planning Department were puzzled. The phenomenon which occurred on Kim Gwon-tae’s

monitor had spread to dozens of other monitors in the Planning Department. The staff looked bewildered by the phenomenon. But only one person was making a different expression.

“I-it is impossible.....!”

Kim Gwon-tae hurriedly connected his laptop to the main computer. But the same phenomenon occurred to his laptop as soon as it was connected. Kim Gwon-tae’s face turned pale with fear.

“U-unbelievable.....!”

“What? What’s going on?”

“The main system of New World has hacked into the computer network.

“Hacking?”

“Yes. The computer handling the main system judged it couldn’t handle the data alone so it dispersed it to other computers on the network. All the computers at headquarters as well as the Planning Department are probably in the same situation. Maybe even to servers of different games. This is.....This is.....It’s not a monster but a devil! Even if all the hackers in the world are collected, such a thing is impossible!”

Kim Gwon-tae spoke with a lot of fear. Ha Myung-woo felt a little relieved after hearing Kim Gwon-tae’s words.

“Anyway, now the chance of the data flowing back into the unit is blocked. However.....”

Ha Myung-woo looked at the data on the monitor with unsure eyes. He couldn’t help exclaiming.

“.....What the hell is going on?”

“Rururu, lalala~!”

While other situations were progressing here and there. Sid was on the deck of a boat and humming while feeling the cool sea breezes.

“Huhuhu, this is fantastic.”

The goods on the item were changed for items in Seutandal's warehouse. After trading in Seutandal, those goods were now being transported to Reuben Harbour in Schudenberg. The reason Sid could trade so quickly was because Ark was the owner of the trading office in Seutandal. So there was no reason to bargain about the price. By trading goods at one place, they could move it to another place where the goods weren't as common and receive a profit for it. If the goods were moved along then he could triple the profit.

“I've earned 6,000 gold just by changing the goods in Seutandal.”

That profit also showed up as experience for Sid so he quickly levelled up. And he would be able to gain experience like this for a while.

“Now my troubles have ended and it is time to be happy! Let's go, Gold Dream!”

Sid jumped and shouted after felling the overwhelming emotions. It was at that moment. The ocean in front of him suddenly turned white.

“Eh? What the?”

Bugul bugul, bugul bugul.

When he concentrated his eyes, bubbles were rising from under the ocean.

“What's this? What is boiling underneath the water?”

Sid said without any traces of his former joy. At first only 1~2 air bubbles appeared. But after a while, there were an absurd number of bubbles and the ocean looked like it was boiling. Another a moment, something huge appeared from under the ocean.

Chwaaaaak!

“Eh eh eh? Eh eh eh eh? Eh eh eh eh?”

Sid raised his head with a bemused expression. Then he continuously looked the object up and down before screaming. After a while, the movements of the huge object suddenly stopped. It was huge! No, even the word huge was insufficient. Compared to the size of the huge object, the huge boat with 6 sails looked like a toy. Then a circular object in the centre started moving. Eyes! That's right. It was the eyes of a huge object. And the enormous object which rose from the ocean was.....!

Roaaaaar!

The lower part of the monster's mouth opened. At the same time, sea water was swept in to the monster's mouth as the merchant ship approached it.

“Waaaaah.....!”

Sid screamed like crazy. That was the only piece of resistance Sid could do.

Abyss

“Gram, gram, mahogram!”

Dudududu, dudududu!

A group of monsters ran across the swamp. Their overall appearance looked like a lizard. But it wasn't an ordinary lizard. It was a lizard double the size of a human and wearing armour with weapons.

“A rush? Razak!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak rushed forward at Ark's command. He lifted his shield powerfully and slammed it into the ground while flames emerged from both sides of the shield. The flames formed into wings which the lizards ran into.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwang, pepepepeng, hwarrrrruk!

With a tremendous roar, the lizards were engulfed in flames and stumbled. It was the special skill Iron Fire Wall from Razak's shield made from the skull of the Fire Draconian. Around 100 lizards were caught by the Iron Fire Wall and their 'rush' was cancelled and they became stunned. In this state it was possible to counterattack and deal massive damage to them! However, Ark didn't dare counterattack.

“Karak, maram! Gram, gram, mahogram!”

A rough voice was audible from behind the lizards. Then the lizards wrapped in flames rushed again along with an extra 100 lizards. When the lizards approached with their swords brandished, Ark bit his lip and shouted.

“Damn, it's started again, Razak, fall back! Dark Eden, prepare your defense formation!”

“Defense formation!”

100 warriors repeated the command. The ones at the front of the battle formation was the shield unit. They placed their shields down and lifted their spears at an angle. It was a formation designed to strike the enemy while defending against their charge. This defensive formation and the speed at which the warriors formed it was a result of their suffering in the secret dungeon.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

There was a roaring sound as the lizards impacted with the defense troops. The defense formation was formed with 100 people. On the other hand, there were hundreds of lizards which rushed at it. Nevertheless, the defense formation didn't crumble. Most of the shock from the impact was absorbed into the shield and dispersed into the ground. The lizards who blindly rushed forward were also hit by the spears and fell down. While the defense of this formation was the best, it also had a fatal weakness. Since they required a sitting posture to prevent the enemy's charge, they were almost defenceless after that. In addition, the size of the monsters was 2~3 metres.

If they attacked from above then there was no way for the shield troops to respond. As expected, when the rush was obstructed the lizards immediately lifted their weapons. If they took an attack in that position then the damage to the shield troops would be devastating. Of course, Ark wasn't the only one who realized this when looking at the situation.

“Archers and magicians, stop those lizards!”

“Horizontal Fire, Precision Fire!”

“Ray of light which pierces the darkness, Ray!”

A huge number of arrows and magic flew towards the lizards. The reason the warriors crouched down wasn't simple to raise their defense against the charge. It was to raise the attack of the archers and magicians. The magicians and archers played an important role in battle. Warriors could only attack when close to the enemy. In

other words, if they attacked the enemy then the enemy could attack back. So for warriors a battle was like a war of attrition.

However, archers and magicians were different. They could attack enemies from a distance without receiving any damage at all. When fighting a huge enemy like a dragon, it was difficult for more than a few dozen warriors to attack one monster because of space limitations. However, hundreds or thousands of archers and magicians could concentrate their attacks on one enemy. There were no distance restrictions. So it was possible to reduce the enemy one at a time. Thus archers and magicians were an indispensable presence in fights. However, in practice the archers and magicians' abilities were limited on a large scale. The reason was their allies who weren't enemies.

Archers and magicians had low health so they couldn't be on the front lines. Their role was support at the back. In other words, there were always allies between them and the enemy. The attacks from magicians and archers flew in a parabola in order to hit the enemy. So there was always the chance of hitting their allies first. That's why the archers and magicians were positioned so their curved attacks didn't hit their allies. To users in New World it was common sense. Naturally, Ark had also used that method until now. But he got to know the archers and magicians better after invading the secret dungeon and his thoughts had changed.

'That method is too inefficient.'

The reason Ark thought that was because of how archers and magicians used their skills. Archers and magicians had numerous skills and they were divided into two main types, a straight or curved attack. So if there wasn't an obstacle between the enemies then they could attack directly and if there was then they could use the curved attack. Of course, the horizontal attacks were more powerful. It was similar to when throwing a stone. One thrown in a straight line would be more powerful than one thrown in a curve. The damage and accuracy of a horizontal attack was 1.5 times better than a curved attack! In addition, there were several limitations to using a curved attack. When soloing the most effective skills for archers were 'Precision Fire', 'Rapid Fire', 'Piercing Shot' etc. In the

case of magicians, it was skills which had a short incantation speed and power like 'Ray' etc.

But those skills were horizontal attacks and couldn't be utilized properly in a group battle. Of course, the wide area skills had a lot of power in a large scale battle but some of them had cool down time of 2~3 hours. When considering those points, the archers and magicians only showed 50% of their actual abilities on a large scale.

'Is there a way for an archer and magician to wreak havoc in a group?'

Ark had been thinking that since he started invading the secret dungeon. Then he found a surprisingly simple answer. It was the formation where the warriors crouched down and defended. When the warriors at the front crouched down, they exposed the enemies to the archers and magicians. All the obstacles blocking the archers and magicians had disappeared! The archers and magicians immediately changed the way they attacked and hurled horizontal attacks like a machine gun. The arrows and magic flew straight forward like a clothesline and wreaked havoc! Both the power and accuracy was incomparable to the curved attacks.

Kwa kwang, tu tu tu tung!

The precision shooting attacked the vital spots! The arrows accurately stuck from the joints of the lizards. Thanks to the arrows stuck in elbows and shoulders, the lizards couldn't attack without flinching. That was why he wasn't worried about the counterattack when the troops crouched down. When the magician's attack 'Ray' hit the knees, the lizards immediately stumbled. Once the movements were disrupted, an ally would take care of the enemy. With this simple idea, the archers and magicians could use 100% of their abilities in a large scale battle.

"Now's the time. Shield troops, push against those fellows and advance!"

"Ohhhhhh!"

The warriors seemed to bounce up and brandished their shields

simultaneously. There was a rough metallic sound and the lizards were pushed back. After they struck, the shield troops immediately sat down again and allowed the magic and arrows to fly.

“Okay, it is a little hard but if we continue pushing like this.....”

Just as Ark was about to push against the lizards again.

“Master, those lizards are preparing for a huge rush again!”

Racard’s voice could be heard from above.

“Gram, gram, mahogram!”

At the same time, there was a loud roar from behind enemy lines. Then the lizards at the front split to the sides and 100 lizards rushed forward in a wedge formation.

“Bah, it is impossible! Defend!”

Once again the warriors used their shields and spears to build a barrier. Then just before the rushing lizards collided!

“Karakin, baram, noramuda!”

A commanding voice rang out and the rushing lizards simultaneously jumped like frogs. Ark’s heart also simultaneously jumped like a frog. Ark had used that tactic several times so the lizards had already found a countermeasure for it. Just jump over the warriors who were crouching and break through! Ark hadn’t realized that the lizards would think like that and hurriedly shouted.

“Archers and magicians, stop those lizards!”

The arrows and magic blew into the crowd of jumping lizards. The lizards were almost defenceless when they jumped. Once intercepted by arrows and magic, those guys fell into the swamp. However, he hadn’t expected the move so his reaction was delayed. Around half the lizards managed to break through.

“T-this....is serious!”

Panic spread on Ark’s face. Currently all the warriors in Dark Eden were posted at the front. Because the lizards had suddenly jumped

over, they couldn't immediately respond to the situation. Moreover, the lizards still at the front started attacking. If they turned around to attack the lizards who intruded then they would be attacked by the enemy in front. Meanwhile, the dozens of lizards who intruded rushed at the magicians and archers.

"Huck! S-scatter!"

"Keuahahak!"

This intrusion and confused fighting was the situation magicians feared most! The magicians and archers who had lost their protective screens couldn't properly oppose the enemy. Furthermore, the lizards were mixed in with allies so they couldn't fire arrows and magic blindly.

'Dammit, this is the worst situation!'

Ark's breath felt clogged as he heard screams from everywhere. Of course, only a few lizards had broken in so the magicians and archers could take care of them. But the warriors were tied up with the lizards so the magicians and archers received quite a lot of damage.

'Yet it isn't possible to let the magicians and archers retreat.'

If the magicians and archers retreated then the warriors would be left isolated with the lizards. The 100 soldiers would be surrounded by the lizards without any support. In that situation, the warriors would be wiped out within a few minutes. Wiped out!

"Damn, if only I had more troops....."

Ark muttered while biting his lips. In fact, Ark had known about the weak point when he made the warriors crouch down and form a defensive stance. When crouching, the switch between defense and offense was slow and there was a high chance of intrusion if the enemy was willing to take damage. However, no enemy had ever broken through until now. When facing hundreds of large monsters, it wasn't difficult to drive them off. But the defense formation he used now wasn't complete. The original formation Ark used was double the size with two layers. The warriors in front would prepare for a

charge. And he arranged another unit of warriors 1 metre behind to defend against any intruding enemies. But the current defense formation only had one layer. Despite knowing the risks, he was forced to use it because of insufficient troops. Currently Dark Eden only had 300 people.

“In this state where the troops aren’t replenished, isn’t it impossible to capture the dungeon to the end?”

A frustrated sigh emerged from Ark’s mouth. In this desperate situation, he recalled the hardships experienced over the past few days.

“Kuaaaa!”

A huge monster yanked its hair and screamed painfully. With a dark aura wrapped around numerous dead bodies like a veil, the one holding the wand commanding them was the dark conjurer ‘Surka.’ He was a middle ranked level 650 boss who they met on the 50th floor of the secret dungeon. Just like the alias Dark Conjurer, Surka was a powerful middle ranked boss who could conjure hundreds of undead as his subordinates using dark magic.

“But.....”

Ark smiled and muttered. It had been 10 days since Ark started the dungeon. The number of monsters Dark Eden killed to get him numbered in the hundred thousand. All those monsters were experience for Dark Eden. It wasn’t simply just raising their level. Of course, raising level was good but the even more important thing was gaining experience fighting against monsters. This was known as ‘combat experience.’.....Put simply, Ark’s dungeon invasion during the last 10 days could be classified as ‘insanity.’

An average of 4 hours sleep. Ark invested the remaining time into attacking the dungeon. He didn’t just invest simply into capturing the dungeon, he invested ‘terribly.’ Normally after an intense battle, most players would take a few hours break. Even if they were just lying down in the unit, a battle lasting several hours required high levels of

concentration. But that common sense didn't apply to Ark.

"All of the enemies have been finished."

"Really? Then let's move to the next place right away!"

"Huh? Didn't the battle just end?"

"So what? Hasn't your health and mana already recovered?"

"That is true however....."

"Then why do you want to rest?"

Ark couldn't understand the users who wanted a break. In the secret dungeon, experience and loot were swarming everywhere. Since they troops travelled in a large crowd, the health and mana consumption wasn't large. In other words, there was a chance of gaining serious experience around the clock without any breaks. Honestly, even the time Ark took to sleep was valuable.

"There are no limits on your stamina. Stop talking and move! Go, go!"

"It isn't our stamina but our hunger....."

The users of Dark Eden muttered as Ark spouted some words from an 80's movie. When the atmosphere became like this, the rehabilitation members instantly interrupted.

"Yes, it's not like the monsters are running away."

"Well, we're not trying to be difficult."

"Their talk is becoming concerning."

The rehabilitation members had already experienced hunting with Ark so they were already prepared to die before entering the secret dungeon. But they were finally couldn't endure suffering so much under a younger brother. Now that the users were expressing their dissatisfaction, they used that chance to try and convince Ark.

"Why would you want to rest when you can raise your level? You can rest anytime but this is a big chance to gain a lot of levels! If other

people hunt then you're hunting and if other people are resting then you're hunting. This is the secret to gaining more levels than other people! Isn't it like that?"

"No, what we're saying is....."

The rehabilitation members sighed and opened their mouths again.

"That is correct! These days people don't have any guts. Complaining after only hunting a few days.....how can you defend the territory like this? Raise your spirits and become stronger. Advance, advance!"

The person speaking was none other than Isyuram. As part of Isyuram's police duties, there were many days without sleep due to undercover investigations, stake outs or emergency standby. So Ark's reckless hunting was no problem for Isyuram. Besides, it was the first time he could hunt like normal users so he found it quite interesting.

"Damn, are they even humans?"

But the rehabilitation members didn't know Isyuram's true identity so they didn't know why he was a monster like Ark. Anyway, Dark Eden continued hunting thanks to Isyuram's enthusiastic support. There was another reason for Ark's quick hunting speed. There was a deeper idea....

'Capturing the secret dungeon isn't just to raise Dark Eden's level. It is more important to ensure that Dark Eden gains battle experience.'

Even if Dark Eden was an attack corps, the troops were used to playing alone. During the siege, they still hadn't been used to fighting in their units. They were able to win the siege thanks to Ark's strategy but their organization ability couldn't be compared to the Hermes alliance. So it was imperative to raise Dark Eden's ability to fight in units before the next siege. In order to increase that, comradery was necessary.

'The monsters in the secret dungeon are elite creatures. But remembering battle tricks is different from fighting in an organized group. So their comradery needs to increase. That is the decisive

difference between the Hermes alliance and Dark Eden.'

The Hermes alliance had been created for two years. While there was a sense of solidarity from winning the siege, it wouldn't be enough against an established guild alliance. If the alliances fighting were at a similar level, this would be the difference between victory and defeat. While the commander could give instructions to the units, it wasn't possible to direct each soldier's movements on the battlefield. So it was important for soldiers to move together on the field. Thanks to Ark's relationship with his summons, he knew how important a sense of solidarity was on a battle. When Ark was executing an operation with his summons, the success rate was completely different when there was a sense of solidarity compared to when there wasn't. Ark had managed to instill an 'All for one, one for all' mentality in his summons.

'If I use conventional methods then it will be impossible to instill the same sense of comradery as the other guild alliances in just one month. But with this method it is possible.'

After experiencing difficulties in a place like this, their comradery would become strong! In fact, the person who tipped him off to this approach was his passionate supporter Isyuram. The secret to developing solidarity was a method used in the army. Only a person who experienced it would understand. But that method often formed a closer relationship with someone in a month than with a person you've worked with for one year.

It was a sense of pride for overcoming difficult times together.

That was the reason Ark used an extreme situation to push the Dark Eden users. After overcoming difficulties together, the sense of accomplishment would change to solidarity between allies. So the soldiers came together just like a real battlefield.

However, Ark's plan was a success in a slightly different way.

"Damn, I'll never hunt with the leader again."

"Quickly escape from the dungeon so we can leave the leader's grasp!"

The soldiers of Dark Eden were all united in that goal. Everyone united to escape from Ark quickly.....Anyway, one everyone united in one idea the soldiers immediately changed.

“Huck! D-dangerous!”

“Avoid it, ugh!”

A magician was hit by the sword of an undead and collapsed. The magician next to him killed the undead instead. It didn't matter if the undead had 100% health, it couldn't stand up to the organized attack from the magicians. It was because the intentions between colleagues had become mutual. Thanks to that, Dark Eden's organizational abilities in a group became solidified with every day that passed. And they managed to advance to the 50th floor quicker than expected. The boss monster Surka which appeared on the 50th floor was even stronger than the previous bosses that they had met. But thanks to the rise in organizational ability and strategy execution, this boss felt like an easier opponent for Dark Eden.

No, to be exact the troops had found the previous bosses harder. Thanks to the rise in solidarity, the level 650 middle ranked boss wasn't an even opponent for Dark Eden anymore. While Surka summoned many undead and used various curse spells, his health reached rock bottom after 20 minutes of being surrounded by Dark Eden.

“Kuaaaa!”

Surka's health ran out and a piece of flesh fell off him. The rest of the skin collapsed to reveal thin bones.

[-Your level has risen.]

A wonderful message floated in front of him after Surka died. Ark also noticed cross marks above more than half of Dark Eden's heads.

‘Huhuhu, experience really is rushing in from monsters in this place.’

Ark giggled and opened his character information window.

=====

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +500	Nobility Title	Baron
Fame	21,785 (+500)	Level	403
Profession		Dark Soul	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero	
Health	7,625 (+475)	Mana	7,815(+225)
Spiritual Power	956	Strength	784 (+58)
Agility	1,029 (+90)	Stamina	1,269 (+45)
Wisdom	205 (+10)	Intelligence	1,417 (+5)
Luck	209 (+60)	Flexibility	268
Art of Communication	79	Affection	129 (+10)
Resilience	483	Dark Fog	74
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		233	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople (Armour): Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available			

*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20, Defense +40

Promised Sword(Two-handed Sword): Strength +20, Stamina +10

Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3

Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance + 100%, Agility +20, 'Magic Protection' is automatically activated when health is less than 50%.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense.

‘It is an average of 2 levels in one day.’

Ark smiled warmly as he looked at the information window. When he first entered the secret dungeon he had been level 383. He had gained 20 levels in 10 days to reach 403. This level up speed was unthinkable in other hunting grounds. It wasn't just Ark. Although there was an individual difference, the soldiers of Dark Eden had gained an average of 10~15 levels.

‘I don't know why they're dissatisfied when their level increased by this much.’

Once again Ark thought it was a good idea to capture the dungeon.

‘Instead of ten days, even spending several months in this dungeon is okay!’

However, Ark's happy mood only lasted until the 50th floor. After defeating Surka and descending to the 51st floor, an unimaginable scene stretched out in front of him. Although it was unnecessary to say again, the secret dungeon was similar to an underground temple. It was complex but it didn't differ significantly from normal dungeons. However, this completely changed around the 50th level. No, it was more accurate to say that the ‘Cradle of Ancient Evil’ actually ended on the 50th floor. Below was a completely different dungeon. It was an underground cave which seemed to continue endlessly. Once he reached the 51st floor a new information window appeared.

-Abyss (Special)

You've discovered a strange cave at the bottom of a labyrinth. This cave hasn't seen any light in hundreds of years. This deep space is so dark and dangerous that it seems like hell. You can sense a huge, evil presence which surpasses a human's cognitive abilities from the entrance. That evil presence has noticed that the underground labyrinth was being cleared.

Now you can choose between two options. Either turn away and escape or prepare for a huge sacrifice and head deeper to where the devil lies. Make your choice now.

<Explorer's Knowledge: New dungeon discovered bonus (Skill points: 20>

'Abyss? This is the abyss? We're already a few hundred metres underground and now there is the abyss. But the dungeon connected is different from the other dungeon.....'

It was something he had never even thought of. Furthermore, the information in the window wasn't ordinary. Usually it was possible to grasp the dungeon difficulty by looking at the information window. Since the information window only had dire threats, the dungeon seemed to be unfathomably difficult. However Ark wasn't going to let that intimidate him. No, he felt even more excited by the threats.

'I've never seen a warning message like this!'

Then the monsters here must be even stronger than those in the underground temple. In other words, wasn't it possible to get more experience and loot? Dark Eden had also changed 180 degrees from when they first entered the dungeon. It was to the extent that he thought the underground temple was too easy. A dungeon with higher difficulty was welcome.

"There's no need to be concerned. Advance forward!"

Ark ignored the threat and entered the cave. Not long after he entered, Ark started to understand the contents of the letter. They had been advancing in the cave for a while when a warning message suddenly flashed in front of Dark Eden.

-You have entered the 'Asmodian' sphere of influence.'

In New World, there are a common race of monsters called Asmodians that are discriminated against. The Asmodians are a species which belong to a hell space and their existence will warp the space itself. When entering the presence of a strong Asmodian, the space will distort powerfully and an 'Asmodian sphere of influence' will form.

The demonic monsters are those who have been deformed by this influence. When the Asmodian influence permeates the air, the area

will also change to a hell space.

<The abilities of all players within the sphere of influence will decrease by 10%. On the other hand, all monsters that have been changed by the Asmodian influence will have their stats increase by 10%>

‘Asmodian? Demonic? Perhaps.....’

Ark flinched as he verified the information window. Hearing the word ‘Asmodian’ was alarming. The Dark Lord who invaded New World a long time ago belonged to a family of Asmodians. And they covered the continent with their power. When the Dark Lord disappeared, the Asmodians disappeared.

‘In other words, a family member of the Dark Lord is hiding somewhere in this cave?’

It was unexpected but when thinking about it, it wasn’t that strange. The official name of the secret dungeon was the Cradle of Ancient Evil. If it was called an ancient evil in New World then wouldn’t it be related to the Dark Lord?

‘And monsters until the Asmodian influence will be mutated.....’

Just as Ark was thinking that.

“Grrrr!”

Suddenly hundreds of red lights appeared in the darkness. They were intense and vivid eyes burning with anger.

“The enemy! Prepare to defend!”

Ark’s voice cried out in the darkness as he saw the hundreds of monsters. At the same time, the members of Dark Eden screamed.

“Huk! What, what the? Those are?”

“Ack! D-disgusting.....”

The monsters that appeared in the darkness had terrible forms. They were similar to the Goats and lesser demons he met in

the underground temple. However the monsters seemed like they had been joined together before it suddenly stopped halfway. The whole body was covered with some form of viscera and something which looked like a baby's end sprouted from the skin. It was more disgusting then scary.....no, it was disturbing and grotesque. Even the confident Ark felt disgusted by the sight of the monsters. Some users even became nauseous.

'They've been mutated?'

"Kuwaaaaah!"

Then they shrieked and ran forward.

"Steady! This isn't the time to be put off by an unpleasant sight!"

Thus the battle between Dark Eden and those influenced by the Asmodians started. The way they attacked was odd. The creepy monsters squirted pus all over the place. When affected by the pus, it would cause the 'plague' status and health would be continuously lost. They even become confused and would attack their allies. The baby hands sprouting from the body also squirted acid venom. Thus the health of Dark Eden members quickly decreased. It was an abnormal look and abnormal attacks. Dark Eden became surprised and panicked. 100 soldiers quickly collapsed.

"Damn, push them back and keep your distance. Jjak-tung, please use your skill to grasp their alignment and specialities!"

"U-understood.'Knowing onself and one's opponent'!"

When Jjak-tung used the skill, a ray of light shot out from his eyes and hit the body of a monster. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Jjak-tung.

-Name: Corrupted Agurin
Level: 400 (Elite)
Health: 7,000
Description: Agurin that has been mutated (Asmodian). Abilities have been increased by 10%.

Characteristics: Blunt weapons resistance +50%, Resistance to blades -20%.

Specialty: <Capture> Hundreds of small hands growing from the body will squirt acid poison and deal continuous damage.

<Horror> A weird sound will emerge from its mouth and everybody with a weak resistance will be affected by 'fear.'

<Frenzy> When its health falls below 50%, it will be enveloped in insanity and have its attack increased by 50%. However, its defense will fall by 50% when affected by 'Frenzy.'

It was the special skill of the Guardian= Strategist, 'knowing oneself and one's opponent!' When Jjak-tung used the skill, information about the monster instantly appeared. Ark's 'Skill Penetration' could only confirm information about the skill just used. With Jjak-tung's 'knowing oneself and one's opponent,' it was possible to get information about all the monster's skills. Jjak-tung continuously informed Ark about the level and skills of the monsters. If he knew about the skills the monsters possessed then he could come up with an idea to deal with it.

For example, if the Agurin tried to use 'Capture' or 'Fear,' he could just have the archers and magicians attack from a distance. After they've been caught by the long distance attacks, the warriors could then attack Ark used the rehabilitation members who had changed to Guardian=strategist to place a type of token above the head of a monster.

The monsters for warriors to take care off had a sword token. The monsters for magicians and archers had an arrow mark. A wand shape indicated a monster vulnerable to magic while the skull mark indicated a dangerous monster.....He had used this classification system during the underground temple. Once sorted like this, the soldiers would know what to do despite the confused fighting. After the monsters were classified, the Dark Eden members who had fallen into confusion regained themselves and started fighting.

"Don't be confused by their appearance!"

“No matter how strange it looks, it is still a monster!”

“Unit 1, keep your distance from those with a skull mark. They use wide area skills!”

“The ones that look like a caterpillar are resistant to blunt attacks. Use your swords!”

Dark Eden had experienced a variety of situations in the underground temple. After the unexpected situation occurred, there was no reason for them to be surprised again. Once the situation was arranged, they started methodically attacking the monsters. After a few monsters were driven to a critical condition, an abrupt message window appeared in front of Ark.

-The Corrupted Agurin's health has fallen below 3% and you can extract the demonic aura.
--

“My guess is correct!”

The monsters which were influenced by the Asmodians had been changed. So Ark was quite happy that the opponents had a demonic attribute. Thanks to Eternal Soul, every time a demonic monster appeared his attack power increased by 20% and his resistance to that attribute increased by 30%. Furthermore, when the demonic attribute appeared didn't it mean he could produce the cursed japtem? Of course, creating the cursed japtem wasn't necessary. The standards of the cursed japtem could at most be used for Blade Tempest.

“But the important thing is the process of creating the cursed japtem.”

That's right. When he used Demonic Seal, he received a bonus of 20~30% experience. After ten days of wandering around the dungeon, his stockpile of cursed japtem had decreased. If he could build up that pile again and receive 20~30% bonus experience then he wouldn't lost any money.

“Okay, the guys with 3% health don't kill and just gather them to this side! I'll suck every last bit of experience. Demonic Seal! Demonic

Seal! Demonic Seal!”

Ark was the type to get even 1% more if it meant he could get more leather, meat, experience etc. Ark just continuously fired Demonic Seal whenever the message window appeared. After 20 minutes, all the monsters had been changed into cursed japtem.

“Huhuhu, this is actually quite decent?”

Ark made a pleased smile after confirming how much experience he got. He had honestly been a bit concerned after seeing the warnings in the information window about the dungeon. But when he came in, wasn't the experience actually quite good? Although his abilities were decreased by 10% thanks to the Asmodian influence, if the monsters were similar to this then he was confident.

“The monsters of this standard aren't difficult.”

Furthermore, it was possible to receive an additional 20~30% experience! Thanks to that, Ark now saw the Abyss as a field of experience.

“Okay, let's go! I'll eat up all the experience here!”

.....At this point, Ark couldn't imagine what would happen in the future. No, Ark was mistaken. When the warning message about the Abyss first appeared, Ark thought it was referring to the monsters. But the danger of the warning message wasn't referring to the monsters. Ark hadn't thought it was necessary to confirm the real risk. Tuduk, tuduk, tuduk tuduk. After the first successful battle, they advanced through a stone bridge. Suddenly out of nowhere, there was the sound of chopped wood. The first person who heard the sound was the warriors at the front.

“Eh? That sound wasn't audible before?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Let's see? It sounds like something cracking?”

“I don't hear it? Aren't your nerves just too keen because of the Abyss?”

“Is that so?”

The lead warrior scratched his head with an embarrassed expression.

Kwa kwa kwang, puhwaaaak!

There was a sudden loud roar and the warrior scratching his head disappeared. The user who was just talking to the warrior couldn't understand what happened. Then he saw blood on the ground and shouted.

“F-f-falling rocks!”

That's right. The warrior had been hit by a huge stone pillar which fell from the ceiling and disappeared in an instant. That was just the beginning. Who could blame their colleagues who witnessed the scene to run away in panic? The sound continued and enormous stones started to fall from the ceiling like hail.

“Stone pillars are falling”

“A-avoid it!”

The interior of the cave became a mess of confusion in an instant. However it was already too late. The soldiers crumpled from the merciless hail of stones. But there was even more. While the stone pillars were falling from the ceiling, the ground started to shake. The stone bridge was unable to tolerate the shock and collapsed.

“The bridge is breaking!”

“Run! If you fall in then it's the end!”

The stones were falling and then the stone bridge collapsed! In this situation, level and organizational abilities didn't help at all. While screaming and avoiding the stones, the bridge collapsed and they fell to the bottom..... It was like a scene of misfortune from a movie. While some barely escaped from the place, at least 400 soldiers had died.

“What is this nonsense.....?”

Ark murmured as he looked at the stone bridge which disappeared.

“Phew, I thought I would really die this time.”

A soldier sighed as he leaned on a rock. At that time, there was an audible noise from the rock he was leaning on. The soldier felt a strange feeling and flinched as he stood up. Suddenly, the soldier was pulled into the rock by an absurd sucking force.

“What? R-rock? The rock.....is alive! Waaaahhhh!”

Soldiers who were leaning on rocks were sucked in. The soldiers' flesh and bones were turned into rock as they were sucked into the rock. Then blood seemed to pour like oil from the bottom of the rocks. They were rocks which sucked in people and ate them!

“Everybody get away from the rocks!”

Ark hurriedly exclaimed as he belatedly realized the situation. But 100 soldiers had already been sucked into the rocks. The other soldiers were trying to tug on their arms but it was ineffective. They could only save a few soldiers after the warriors crushed the rocks. Just minutes after losing 400 soldiers, another 100 had died in vain. They had died from the hail of stones and the people eating rocks. But that was just the start. On a narrow road lava surged like a tidal and there were also areas where poison would spout from the ground like a geyser. They weren't traps but a natural phenomenon. Thanks to that, the scouts couldn't predict where one could occur.

“This is the danger from the information window.....”

The warning wasn't about the changed monsters or the reduction in stats. It was pointing to the dungeon itself! Just like the monsters, the dungeon was also changed by the Asmodian influence. It had been changed to a hell place. It wasn't so strange that this place had turned into a hell. By the time they reached the next layer down, 700 people had died without even swinging their weapons. In the end, Ark had to make an important decision.

‘I can't be assured of what will happen if we continue into the dungeon. It is different from fighting with monsters. No matter how I

handle it, there is no choice but to suffer damage. Well, its okay if the users are hit but the NPCs are the problem.'

No matter how distressing the death, the user would revive again after 24 hours passed. Unfortunately the NPCs weren't immortal. If they died once it was the end. So after coming here, Ark always arranged the NPCs in the safest place. Therefore only 20 NPCs had died by the time they reached the 21st floor. But the risk in the Abyss was incomparable to that of the underground temple. This was a place where hundreds of people could be completely destroyed with only one mistake.

'The important goal of capturing this dungeon is to raise Dark Eden's level and cooperative play. However, there is no point raising that if the NPC troops die. I can't bring the NPC troops to such a dangerous place. Just having the NPCs in the dungeon is dangerous. If we go further down there might not be a chance to return.'

Ark made the decision to send the NPC troops from Seutandal and Lancel back before it was too late. And he also told the users who had resurrected not to enter anymore. It had already been 10 days since they started capturing the dungeon. Some monsters would've already revived in the upper layers. Therefore many users would die if they just blindly entered the dungeon. Of course, if they entered in units then it was possible to fight the monsters but it would take considerable time to descend.

'There are natural traps everywhere. Even if the troops are arranged and down, the risks will still be the same. I can't gather any information about this place so no matter how many troops there are, there is a chance that a lot of them will be wiped out before managing to join up.

While users could be resurrected, if they died then they would lose levels and stats.

"There are no more troops and ingredients. If all the remaining troops are destroyed then the dungeon invasion is a failure!"

Since then, Ark's method of invading the dungeon changed 180 degrees. When he invaded the underground temple, he just pushed

the troops through like a bulldozer. But now he couldn't expect any more troops or ingredients. Thanks to that, his priority was to preserve the troops rather than how quick he could clear the dungeon. Ark organized the soldiers who had various scouting skills to observe before moving the troops. If they discovered a group of monsters, they wouldn't attack without reason and would lure the monsters to a 100% safe place to fight. They also avoided as much monsters as possible while marching. The purpose of the dungeon expedition had changed from reaching the last floor to survival. Thanks to that, they took 6~7 hours to travel a distance that would've normally taken 3~4 hours. Nevertheless, they kept on facing unique situations and the troops kept on decreasing. After 4 days had passed since Dark Eden entered the Abyss, there were only 300 people left.

"But without a doubt, the 300 people who survived are the elite of Dark Eden. Their combat power and crisis management skills are the best. In such a situation, it might be better to move with elite troops rather than a lot of people."

Ark's judgment was correct. The cave after that continued to be dangerous but the number of casualties had decreased. That's because the soldiers who were still alive had the skills needed to survive. In addition, the troops had decreased so much that they were easy to command.

"Okay, if these troops are maintained then we can even defeat the final boss!"

Ark who had previously thought about giving up halfway had now placed his hopes on the 300 elite troops. However, that hope faded away as soon as he reached the 60th floor. When he finally arrived at the 60th floor, it seemed to be made entirely of ravines and swamps. Dark Eden carefully crossed the ravine and entered the swamp. An armoured monster 2~3 metres big had appeared in front of them. A red warning message floated in front of Ark at the same time.

-The medium ranked chief of the Abyss Demonic Troops 'Vega' has appeared!

“A middle ranked boss monster!”

Ark flinched and immediately used Eyes of the Cat for information. However an unexpected result appeared. So far he had been dealing with level 500~650 boss monsters. But the boss monster Vega who appeared on the 60th floor was only level 450.

“Why is the boss monster in a deeper place lower levelled? Does it have a special skill or something?”

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted.

“Kurak, kurak, haradura kurak!”

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Vega who had discovered Dark Eden shouted in a strange language. As a result, an absurd number of monsters appeared from the swamp behind Vega. They were around 1,000 lizard type monsters that were level 400! Even if he had 2,000 troops, he would barely be able to defeat the 1,000 level 400 monsters. However, currently Dark Eden only had 300 people.

“We’re screwed!”

Ark’s expression instantly became dark.

Dungeon of the Blind

[TL] I've made a minor change to the previous chapter. For those who read it before I changed it, it is *'Ark made the decision to send the NPC troops from Seutandal and Lancel back before it was too late. And he also told the users who had resurrected not to enter anymore.'* So none of the 300 remaining troops are NPCs.

"Forget the 1,000 monsters and just focus on the one middle ranked boss!"

Ark shouted as he stared at Vega giving orders from hundreds of metres away. That was the best thing Ark could think of in this desperate situation. Of course, the lizards weren't Vega's summons so there would still be 1,000 of them even after the boss died. With only 300 people, it was inevitable that they would be wiped out by the lizards.

"Even if we die, we won't just die like this!"

Anyway, Vega was the current boss of the 60th floor. If they defeated him then wouldn't they collect a lot of experience and loot? With any luck, they might be able to run away after dealing with Vega. Using that glimmer of hope, Ark started a bloody battle against the lizards. As expected from the 300 elite soldiers who survived the Abyss, they managed to execute the plan perfectly and lasted for 10 minutes against the advancing lizards. However, as expected the lack of troops was fatal.

While the warriors crouched down and built shields, the magicians and archers intercepted the lizards. After they impacted with the barrier, the warriors could get up and push the lizards back. But thanks to the crouching down position, it was possible for the enemies to break through by jumping over the barriers. But he had no choice thanks to the lack of troops. After the situation repeated

many times, the lizards noticed the weakness and jumped through. It wasn't possible for them to face this situation.

“Waaaaahhhh!”

Screams were everywhere as dozens of lizards broke into the camp. The long range attackers had no chance against level 400 elite melee monsters. The archers and magicians instantly lost 20~30% health. Furthermore, the lizards were mixed with their allies so it was difficult to attack properly. However, he also couldn't call the warriors back to deal with them. Thanks to the lizards inside their camp, the lizards at the front had their attacks strengthened. If the warriors turned around to attack their allies then they would be attacked from behind in an instant. Of course, only dozens of lizards had broken through. The problem was how much damage the archers and magicians would receive before the lizards were killed. Now that the weak point was found, it wasn't possible to use the crouching down defense formation anymore. The method to get to Vega was lost.

“.....Is it going to end here?”

Ark moaned as he thought about the situation. One lizard smashed the head of a magician and rushed towards Ark. Ark who was looking at another place wasn't able to respond properly and could only flinch before withdrawing a step.

“You idiot, where did your spirit go?”

Then Isyuram's voice was suddenly heard from behind him. At the same time, Isyuram jumped over Ark's shoulder and kicked the lizard. The lizard who was hit in his jaw stumbled and retreated. By the time it recovered its centre, Isyuram was already right in front of the lizard.

“This is a big lizard.....shall I see how good its endurance is?”

Isyuram smiled and soared through the air.

Pepepepeng!

It was subsequently followed by continuous roars. At the same time, several clear fist marks were seen on the lizard's armour. Then it

was hit in the jaw, the nose, the forehead.....It was Isyuram's deadly attacks which aimed for the vital spots. If a person was beaten like that then they would have to go to the hospital.....no, the attacks were enough to put someone into a mortuary! The lizard kneeled down after receiving the successive critical hits.

"Disappear you stupid lizards!"

At the same time, Isyuram's knee sprang up and hit the jaw of the lizards. The head was forced backwards and Isyuram then kicked the neck. With a huge roar the lizard flew away and became stuck in the swamp. It was an amazing combat ability! Once again Ark realized Isyuram's skills.

"Ark, have you already forgotten what I taught you? Do you want me to teach you again?"

Isyuram muttered as he turned his gaze from the lizard to Ark. Ark recalled the words Isyuram taught him in the police agency's gym.

"Never give up!"

"I know that."

Ark raised his voice angrily and Isyuram just laughed.

"But even if you know, it is different if you can't put it into practice. You foolish student."

"I'm aware of that."

Ark said before hitting his face with his palm. That's right. It wasn't Ark's style to give up no matter how hopeless the situation was. He didn't have the manners to accept defeat and die politely. Ark's style was to grab their ankles and hold on dirtily until the very end!

"I'll fight until the end! Take this, Dark Blade!"

Ark ran towards a lizard and twisted his sword. The sword which had darkness assimilated into it pierced through the flank of the lizard. A violent blow rang out and the lizard retreated. Ark narrowed the distance between him and the lizard. He threw his body like Isyuram and subsequently kicked the vital spots. Then another lizard

close by threw a spear.

“Not a chance. Dark Dance!”

Ark used Dark Dance and avoided the spear. Then he did a roundhouse kick and knocked the lizard’s sword down.

“Hmm, not bad. But you still have a long way to go! Adadadada!”

Isyuram continuously plunged between the lizards.

“We’re also here!”

“Gather the lizards to one spot!”

The rehabilitation members also plunged into the fray. The lizards that had been scattered around the camp started to gather in one place from the combined attacks of Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members. The archers and magicians who had scattered from the lizards’ attacks were now free to attack.

“As expected from the coalition’s leader and unit chiefs.”

“It’s really not a joke when you look at them.”

“How long do I need to practice to fight like that?”

“Now’s not the time for this. Even the leader and chiefs can’t deal with all of them!”

That’s right. Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were all accustomed to fighting. Thanks to that, no users in Dark Eden could match their combat power. However this was a game. The rules of the game applied in the game. Even if they had strong combat power, there was a limit to how many level 400 elite monsters they could take care of. While they managed to limit the damage by gathering the lizards in one place, there were still dozens of them. Meanwhile Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were only 12 people. Despite pushing the lizards to one place, they were numerically disadvantaged.

“We have to help them!”

Fortunately, the magicians and archers regrouped and started

attacking. Once the attacks were focused on the lizards, they couldn't endure anymore and collapsed.

'That's it. The urgent fire has been put out!'

Ark sighed with relief. Suddenly he heard Racard's urgent voice.

"Master, your 3 o'clock, 3 o'clock!"

Ark turned his head and stiffened. Since the magicians and archers couldn't cover them, some warriors couldn't endure anymore and collapsed. Once some warriors fell, they continued falling like dominoes until the defense formation was completely destroyed.

"Kura, kura, bekinohun!"

The lizards stepped on the warriors and intruded the camp at Vega's command. There were 200 of them! The camp was already a mess from the dozens of lizards who intruded, so if 200 broke in then Dark Eden would be destroyed in seconds! Ark jumped towards the incoming lizards and immediately exploded a sword.

"Blade Tempest!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When hitting a monster with the demonic attribute, the cursed sword did a couple times more damage! When the power of the cursed sword was enhanced, it seemed like a bomb had exploded. And hundreds and thousands of fragments swirled around the lizards like a hurricane. The skin and armour of the lizards became torn in an instant. Blade Tempest, it was a storm of swords.

"Teacher, hyung-nims!"

"Oh, let's just die today!"

Isyuram and the rehabilitation group also rushed towards the lizards. And they acted like a literal clot. They couldn't allow the lizards to intrude or Dark Eden would be destroyed. Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members fired various skills without a break and prevented the lizards' penetration. Meanwhile the archers and magicians focused all their attacks on the lizards. But once it started

collapsing, it was impossible to stop it. The lizards didn't have high attack or agility. But their defense and stamina was at a considerable standard.

It took a considerable amount of time to kill just one. So Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members could only stop 10 lizards from entering. Meanwhile the other lizards broke into the camp. Once the lizards' intrusion was permitted, there was no possibility of enduring. The warriors had barely managed to get a barrier up again to prevent more lizards from entering. But waves after waves of lizards attacked and some parts of the barrier collapsed again. Once it became like that, the warriors were unable to maintain the barrier at all. It was the worse situation.

"Dammit!"

Profanities burst from Ark's mouth. The 200 allies and 1,000 lizards were completely mixed up together now. When this occurred, the soldiers had no choice but to fight 1 against 3 lizards. Even Ark was confronting at least 5 lizards attacking him with spears. Ark had no chance to counter the attacks coming from all directions.

"Damn, Dark Blade....ugh!"

Ark was about to swing his sword when he received a spear in the chest. And another lizard swiped Ark with its tail and he flew back several metres. While he avoided falling into the swamp, he was blown towards a place where dozens of lizards were gathered. The lizards simultaneously attacked him when Ark fell on his side. A hopeless light started to appear in Ark's eyes.

'It is the end if I'm surrounded!'

Then some rocks that were a few metres away caught his eyes. At the moment, thoughts started spinning quickly in Ark's head. If he entered a gap between the rocks then it was possible to avoid being surrounded by the lizards. And he could deal with incoming opponents 1 on 1. It was a common tactic to use a narrow place to limit the number of enemies.

"Dark Dance!"

Ark used Dark Dance and slipped through the gap in the rock like a ghost. Then he turned his body and faced the lizards. However, Ark witnessed an incomprehensible situation.

As expected, one lizard had followed him to the rocks. Although it thrust a spear.....it unexpectedly thrust several metres away from Ark. At first he thought it was a mistake but then it happened again. It would attack, strike a rock, attack and so on. Despite Ark standing in front of it, it missed and struck the rock a few times before running off back to the battlefield. Ark forgot about counterattacking because of the abnormal behaviour and looked on in dumb surprise.

‘What’s this?’

There must be a reason for its strange behaviour. After realizing there was something wrong, he started watching the lizard’s behaviour closely. Right now there was a violent battle occurring. It seemed to look no different from a normal battlefield. However.....

‘Something is different. There is something strange about the lizard’s behaviour. What is it?’

Ark watched the scene for a while. No one in Dark Eden seemed to sense it but Ark was sure there was something questionable about the lizards’ behaviour. After a while, Ark finally had some idea of what it was.

‘Perhaps.....don’t tell me.....is it really like that? No, it is the best explanation for that situation I experienced before. And if my guess is correct.....’

Ark instantly ran out from between the rocks. After searching the swamp for a bit, Ark was able to find the body of a dead lizard. After examining the dead body, Ark’s guess was 100% confirmed. Ark instantly had a spark go through his head. The questionable behaviour of the lizards, the terrain of the battle, Vega’s response.....all of it flashed through Ark’s eyes.

‘.....I can win this fight!’

“All Dark Eden troops immediately retreat back to the ravine!”

Ark's shout exploded like a bomb from his mouth. But the soldiers didn't move immediately.

"What? Back to the ravine?"

"But that place.....?"

The reaction of the soldiers was natural. There was a swamp a lot deeper behind the ravine. The sticky swamp would reach up to their waist and it would be even more difficult to fight. Meanwhile the enemy was a lizard. There were a species which lived in the swamp so they could move more freely than Dark Eden. Of course, if they fought here the chances of winning were only 1% but they couldn't understand the reason for moving to an even more disadvantageous terrain. However Ark was convinced he could reverse the momentum in that place.

"There's no time to explain! If you have strength left then move!"

"I don't know why....."

"The coalition leader must've thought of something."

"Okay! Let's retreat like the leader said!"

Although they couldn't sleep and complained about him, Ark was the leader that they had absolute faith in. The strategies used in the siege and even the secret dungeon, they had overcome many difficulties thanks to Ark. If Ark wasn't the leader then Dark Eden probably would've been wiped out a long time ago. The soldiers abandoned the battlefield and escaped to the ravine at Ark's command. But the soldiers were sure they were about to die so there were in a gloomy mood. There were only 120 soldiers who managed to escape from the lizards. 180 soldiers died in between.

'But if this plan succeeds then 120 soldiers can survive!'

"What's going on? Why did you tell us to retreat to this difficult place?"

Isyuram and the rehabilitation members asked as they sunk up to their waists in the swamp.

“.....It is to lure Vega....”

“Vega? Vega the lizard captain?”

Their eyes looked dubious at Ark’s answer. It was a natural reaction. Vega always stayed hundreds of metres away while giving out orders. So why would Vega suddenly enter this place? Ark just answered with a confident expression.

“There is no doubt that he will enter here. But those lizards will arrive soon so I don’t have time to explain. Just believe in me.”

“What?”

“For now all members should hide their bodies in a suitable place.”

“You want us to hide here?”

“Anywhere suitable is fine. And.....”

Ark explained what the Dark Eden members needed to do from now on. The soldiers couldn’t understand Ark’s direction but scattered and hid themselves as directed. Well, there weren’t that many places to hide themselves so around half of the troops couldn’t find a hiding spot. But Ark already had a method to solve that problem. Ark looked at Jjak-tung who nodded and shouted.

“Understood. I don’t know if there will be much effect but....Feng Shui!”

-The effects of Feng Shui have been applied to the attack corps.

Feng Shui is the unique skill of the Guardian=Strategist.’ Using Feng Shui will increase resistance to all environmental and terrain effects. Bonus damage will be added when attacking an enemy from a high place and conversely a penalty will be applied when attacking from a low place. In addition, you can hide your body using the darkness and terrain features to avoid detection by enemies.

<Decrease the probability of the enemy suspecting you by 30%>

It was ‘Feng Shui,’ the special skill of Jjak-tung who had changed to

a Guardian=Strategist! When the effects of Feng Shui were applied, the soldiers instantly became blurred. If they didn't move and blended into the environment, there Feng Shui would decrease their chances of being found. Of course, it was different from 'Stealth' and the person could be discovered if looked at closely enough.

"What will we do?"

"Just hide in this area with me."

Ark replied to Isyuram and the rehabilitation members.

"Master, the lizards are gathering."

Racard whispered in his ear after spying with satellite mode. Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members quickly hid themselves. Immediately afterwards, he could hear splashes as several hundred lizards gathered at the entrance of the swamp. Then they started looking all over the place for the Dark Eden members. The soldiers became tense at the lizard's behaviour. Although they hid themselves, it wasn't as good as stealth so the lizards could spot them if they looked closely enough. Since the soldiers were scattered all over the place, if spotted they wouldn't be able to get away unscathed.

But soon the soldiers became aware of something strange about the lizards. Despite such sloppy hiding, they couldn't find them at all. Sometimes they would push their face right where a soldier was hiding and still couldn't spot them. In the end, the lizards couldn't find the soldiers and just started swinging their spears randomly. Since it was swung randomly, sometimes the spears would pass close to the soldiers. In such a shaky situation the soldiers didn't even dare breathe. Ark had emphasized many times before hiding to 'not move or cry out!' After there were no reactions to their spears, the lizards stopped moving. And.....

"Master, that guy! The big lizard is heading inside!"

Then he heard Racard's voice again. After receiving Racard's information, Ark craned his neck and looked at a corner of the ravine. There was a yell and Vega who was surrounded by 30

lizards approached the place where the Dark Eden members were hiding. Currently Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were hiding in the swamp near the entrance of the ravine. Naturally Vega moved straight towards the place where Ark's group was hiding. After checking where Vega was, Ark quickly submerged his head in the swamp again.

'From their movement speed and distance, that fellow should arrive in 1 minute. Now to countdown. 60, 59, 58, 57.....'

Ark calmly counted down the numbers in his head. He finally stood up after 1 minute passed. When he raised his body, the huge figure of Vega could be seen 3~4 metres in front of him.

"Dark Blade!"

Dark Blade split through the space and pierced Vega's chest. Isyuram and the rehabilitation members also simultaneously attacked Vega.

"Kura? Baratura, abera....."

Vega seemed at a loss and made upset sounds at the sudden attacks. The moment he tried to rattle orders....

"I won't allow you. Teacher!"

"Right!"

At Ark's command, Isyuram joined both hands together and made a foothold for Ark. Ark put his foot on it and jumped towards Vega. Then he took out a piece of food from his bag and shoved it into Vega's mouth. His knee then kicked the chin and closed Vega's mouth forcibly.

"Kuaaaa!"

Vega grabbed his face and let out a cry of distress.

"Huhuhu, how do you like the taste of my specially created Creative Cooking? Is it hot?"

That's right. Ark had shoved a Creative Cooking dish into Vega's

mouth.

-Fiery Sausage

A special food made using Creative Cooking. Pig intestines, pepper, mustard, wasabi and 30 other spicy ingredients were used in this sausage. The combination of spicy ingredients will cause a violent explosion in the mouth. The spicy taste of the Fiery Sausage is far beyond the limit for most ordinary people. Those who eat it will be in extravagant pain and won't be able to talk for a while.

<There will be a 'Berserk' and 'Silence' effect for 10 minutes>

It was the unique and burning taste of the Fiery Sausage! It was a horrible food which caused 'Berserk' and 'Silence' for 10 minutes. But Ark had another reason for feeding the Fiery Sausage to Vega.

"Kuah.....kuah.....kuah....."

Vega groaned painfully as his lips and tongue swelled like a balloon. Due to the various spicy ingredients exploding in the mouth, he couldn't speak anymore. This was the effect Ark wanted when he used the Fiery Sausage.

"Now. Plan A!"

Ark withdrew after feeding Vega the bomb and shouted. At the same time, 120 soldiers stood up from their hiding spot and shouted. Then an amazing thing happened. Previously while attacking Vega, they had been surrounded by lizards. So why did the lizards disperse in different directions away from Ark's group after hearing the soldier's shouts? A satisfied smile appeared on Ark's face.

'As I expected!'

Ark had discovered the weakness of the lizards. He had noticed the lizard's strange behaviour of futilely attacking the rocks where Ark was hiding. After watching that behaviour, Ark could only think of one answer.

'Perhaps those guys are blind?'

It was the only explanation for the lizard's strange behaviour. Then how could the lizards fight so far? And how had they managed to fight Ark just then? He had those sorts of questions. But the answer wasn't that difficult to discover. The lizards were commanded by Vega. That's right. Vega acted as the eyes for the lizards. This was the reason why Vega couldn't directly participate in the battle. He became the eyes for the lizards and conducted them in battle. Since blind people had their other senses develop, the lizards depending on their hearing and Vega's orders to fight. That was why Ark felt a strange uneasiness during the battle. He often thought it was strange that the lizards ignored injured soldiers at the front and ran to an unexpected place. He forgot about it during the heat of the fight but once he started watching from the rocks it was really obvious.

'Those guys can't see. They depend on Vega's commands and instincts to fight. So even if they are directly in front of me, if I don't make any noise then they won't notice. And they will instinctively run to the area where they hear a loud noise!'

That was the reason why Ark searched for the corpse of a lizard. The first thing he did was check their eyes and mouth. He figured out why the lizards didn't really defend. Since they relied on hearing for location of the enemy, the only thing they could do was attack. In other words, they had no choice but to give up defending and just indiscriminately attack! It was why Ark made Dark Eden retreat to the ravine. Vega couldn't see inside the ravine. The soldiers were hiding so the lizards couldn't find them. In the end, Vega had to come inside the ravine in order to understand the situation and direct them. That's why Ark hid at the entrance and fed Vega the Fiery Sausage. Vega couldn't give anymore commands inside the ravine. In other words, the eyes of the lizards had vanished!

'It doesn't matter if it is 120 against 1,000 when the opponents are blind!'

Ark's plan for dealing with the lizards was divided into two. There was plan A where Ark's group preventing Vega from interfering and the soldiers scattered the lizards by making noises. And plan B.....

"Over here. You stupid lizards!"

“Try and catch me!”

All of a sudden some soldiers on one side spat out insults. The lizards that were scattered everywhere started to run up to them. Then the soldiers shut their mouths and another group of soldiers on the other side started shouting.

“You’re so slow that it is impossible to catch me!”

“Hey, lizard! No, are you a water lizard? Over here!”

So the lizards rushed back and forth between the shouting soldiers. The lizard’s IQ was in the single digits.

‘Wasn’t that guy their eyes and heads?’

Ark smiled and looked at Vega. Vega had tried to give commands many times after seeing the lizards rush to and fro. However, the strength of the Fiery Sausage was no joke.

“Kasi....ku.....ka.....”

Thanks to the swollen lips and tongues, all he could do was make strange noises.

“Now I can fight you directly like the other bosses. Dark Blade!”

Ark brandished his sword and ran towards Vega. Isyuram and the rehabilitation group also simultaneously attacked Vega with their skills. Vega’s health quickly fell to 20% from the shower of attacks. This was another reason why Vega didn’t participate in battles. Vega was the eyes and head of the lizards so he was like an advisor. Despite his inflated level, he was a boring boss who couldn’t do anything alone. Vega didn’t even carry any weapons.

“Ku.....ku.....ku.....”

Vega just continued making strange sounds as he waved his hands and struggled. Ark assumed it was supposed to be an attack. But none of them would be hit by an attack of that standard. They quickly avoided Vega’s attacks and continued using him as a punching bag.

After 10 minutes.

“Ku.....!”

Vega let out one last cry and collapsed.

“Okay, we’ve dealt with the middle ranked boss!”

Ark quickly turned his body and looked at the lizards. The lizards were still being fooled by the soldiers while their leader was being killed. In other words.....It was slightly pitiful looking at them. However that pity quickly passed.

“Shall we clean this up?”

Ark laughed as he looked at the lizards. With Vega handled, dealing with the lizards wasn’t hard. Ark organized his troops into groups of 70 people. They would separate and lure around 20 lizards away. The bigger the noise the more lizards there were in the area. By splitting into units, they could lure the lizards to another area and attack. Then lure again and attack. They repeated that dozens of times and took care of all the lizards.

“W-we did it!”

“We really killed all the lizards!”

The Dark Eden members murmured to themselves. It was reasonable. Who would’ve imagined that 120 people could win against 1,000 elite monsters and a boss? Nobody would believe it. Anyway, Ark and Dark Eden had accomplished their task. They also received a huge amount of experience thanks to their incredible work. Ark went up 6 levels. And the other soldiers gained an average of 4~5 levels. That wasn’t all.

“We’ve obtained 178 general and 42 magic items from the lizards.”

“We also got 3 magic items from Vega.”

The loot was enormous due to the numerous lizards. After entering the Abyss, their priority was to survive so they had avoided battle wherever possible. So there was a feeling of no loot but this battle quickly made up for that. The most valuable things were the 3 magic

items dropped by Vega. Despite his abilities, Vega was still a boss.

“Do you want them?”

“All right. I’ll pack them in my bag.”

Ark clicked his tongue and murmured. After entering the secret dungeon, they had fought tens of thousands of monsters. So they also received a huge pile of loot. About 30% of them were magic items while 10 rare items dropped. The combined value of the items would reach thousands of gold. But they were split among the troops so each person only received dozens of gold at the most. So Ark didn’t even hesitate to accept the loot.

‘That is the problem with capturing a dungeon with the coalition forces. However, I wouldn’t have been able to descend more than 2~3 floors alone.....’

That’s what Ark was thinking. Then he suddenly felt a pain as both his wrists throbbed.

“Eh? This pain is?”

Ark was familiar with the pain so he pulled up his sleeves and checked his wrist. As expected, light was coming from both his tattoos. When particular conditions were satisfied, another seal of Eternal Soul would be released! The tattoos there were enveloped in light cracked and seemed to break. Then the tattoo sank into his skin and the information window appeared.

-A seal of ‘Eternal Soul’ has been released and you’ve acquired a new profession-specific skill.
--

-[Demonic Response III]: Eternal Soul stage 5 (Passive)

‘Demonic Response’ is a necessary stage to learn if they want to reach the enlightenment needed for Eternal Soul. When you find a demonic response, you will deal 30% additional damage against demonic monsters and the probability of resisting the demonic attribute will increase by 40%. In addition, you will be able to detect hidden demonic power within the bodies of monsters.

<When sensing a demonic attribute, you will deal +30% damage against demonic monsters and gain +40% resistance to the demonic attribute>

-[Demonic Manifestations]: Eternal Soul stage 6 (Active)

‘Demonic Manifestations’ is a skill which corresponds to the intermediate level of Eternal Soul. While Demonic Seal and Demonic Response were basic techniques, this skill is an intermediate level skill to prepare for war against the demonic monsters.

Magic Manifestations is a technique used to give special powers to your allies. 5 items created with Demonic Seal are automatically sacrificed when Demonic Manifestation is used. The manifested effect depends on the type of equipment offered. In addition, the effect will change depending on the combination of equipment offered. It will be possible to know the active effect by looking at your allies. However, the sacrificed items will be destroyed when the effect disappears.

<Items created with Demonic Seal are automatically sacrificed and an effect triggered. Spiritual Power consumption: 100>

He hadn’t considered that Eternal Soul would awaken. But it wasn’t strange since the Abyss monsters had the demonic attribute. The problem was he couldn’t see why the soul was released.

‘Vega wasn’t the first demonic boss I met in the Abyss. The 53rd floor? Wasn’t there a boss with the demonic attribute? So why is the seal released now and not at that time?’

At first he thought it was unsealed when he fought bosses with the demonic attribute. But that wasn’t the case this time.

‘Oh that reminds me, doesn’t the explanation for Demonic Response say that certain conditions had to be met for Eternal Soul to be unsealed? Then I must’ve met that condition while fighting Vega.....’

Ark read the information window for a while and was soon able to

discover the answer. The new skill was equivalent to Eternal Soul reaching an intermediate level. And the intermediate skill was to prepare for a war against the demonic forces.

‘Then I needed to kill a certain number of demonic monsters to unlock this?’

When thinking about it, the reason for the unsealing was clear. The boss on the 53rd floor also had subordinates but there were only 50 of them. The subordinates also weren’t of the demonic attribute. However Vega had led the 1,000 lizards. The number was enough to be called an attack corps.

‘The intermediate process for Eternal Soul is to fight against the demonic corps. Then how many will I have to kill to unlock the other seals? It is become increasingly more difficult.’

He knew learning Hero Maban’s legacy wouldn’t be easy. But fighting against an army of demonic monsters was quite a difficult condition. Frankly, he had no idea where to find another corps after clearing the secret dungeon.

‘Well, finding the demonic corps isn’t the only difficult part. Won’t I also need an attack group if I have to fight against an army? If I think about it, it really is a difficult condition. Well, leaving that problem for the future.....Demonic Manifestations.....the cursed items will be automatically offered and a special effect granted?’

While Demonic Seal would be used to created cursed japtem, he never really used Demonic Response. But according to the information window, Eternal Soul had reached an intermediate level. In other words, Demonic Seal was a skill that should be used in conjunction with Demonic Manifestations.

‘A fairly useable skill has appeared now that Eternal Soul has reached intermediate.....although it does consume 5 equipment. I don’t know what kind of effect it gives but I’ll have to try it. Well, a time to test it will appear.’

Ark thought before dismissing thoughts of Eternal Soul. Right now it was important to finish capturing the secret dungeon. After the battle

with Vega only 120 troops remained. Honestly, he couldn't guarantee how many would survive if they had to go down even more floors. But he had no intention of just leaving after reaching this point.

'I have to go as far as possible!'

Hell Door

“Now the rest is over so start looking for the stairs to the next floor!”

The soldiers scattered at Ark's command and started searching. Unlike the upper layers of the secret dungeon, the Abyss was a natural cave. Therefore the structure was very complicated and it wasn't easy to find the way to the next area. Sometimes they had to wander for 10 hours before finding the path to the next floor. While the 60th floor had swamps and a ravine, it wasn't complicated like a maze. Looking for the way wouldn't be difficult. However.....

“There's no path on this side!”

“It also isn't on this side!”

The soldiers scattered all over the place shook their heads as they reported back.

“What? What did you say? There's nothing?”

“Is this the last floor of the secret dungeon?”

The soldiers asked with a look of expectation. It had already been a fortnight since they entered the dungeon. They were already sick of wandering around and being in danger. But Ark just shook his head.

“No, that's not it. Vega was just a middle ranked boss. There should still be another boss in this dungeon. So there will definitely be a passage somewhere.”

That's right. That was the reason why Ark thought the 60th floor wasn't the lowest one. Only middle ranked bosses had appeared so the secret dungeon wasn't cleared yet. He had also obtained another stone sculpture from Vega. The sculptures had dropped from bosses so there was no doubt it would be used in the dungeon somewhere.

“It is clear there is still a secret in this dungeon. If there isn't a route

to go down then it must be something else. If there is nothing then we'll have to go back to the labyrinth and search carefully. Look through every corner of this floor. If there is no route then look for something strange."

"That's true. Hey, search in every corner more carefully!"

The soldiers considered Ark's words and shouted. The monsters weren't the problem in the Abyss. The dungeon itself was one enormous trap. Who knew how dangerous the Abyss would become if they had to search a few more days? They would rather go downstairs and die then have to go through that labyrinth again. After Ark's threat, the frightened soldiers used magic to create light and searched the 60th floor again. After a while, the soldiers who were investigating the side the lizards came from came running towards Ark.

"Ark, I found something suspicious!"

The soldier had found a small cave. On the outside it just seemed like a crack in the wall but it was actually quite a wide cave after entering. But the deep cave wasn't a passage. It was just a room with a wide space. Yet there was something strange on the opposite wall of the cave.

"What the, this is?"

Ark looked at the wall and tilted his head to one side. Unlike the other walls, this one was carved 10 cm inwards. The size was about 3 metres high and 1 metre wide. Although he looked carefully, there was no other device. Just the rectangular structure which had been carved into the wall. And more walls.

"Something like this can't be naturally created. In other words, someone must've made it. Obviously there must be a secret hidden here. Eh? What's this?"

While touching the wall with his fingertips, he felt something strange. When he removed the surrounding earth, he felt a small iron plate. Small letters were carved into the iron plate. The carved letters were in unintelligible characters. However Ark knew how to decipher those

characters. It was with Knowledge of Ancient Relics! As expected, where he touched the characters there was a shallow light and the deciphered contents appeared.

The beast who was born in darkness and lives by eating.

But uncertain people won't be aware of his presence.

If you have firm belief then inscribe his image here.

But keep something in mind. This existence will cause you endless despair.

‘Beast? Inscribe the image of a beast on the wall?’

Ark was even more confused by the contents of the iron plate. Why was it suddenly telling him to inscribe the image of an animal on the wall?

‘Inscribe on the wall? Then I have to draw an image inside this rectangle? But how do I know what beast to draw? Was there a hint somewhere in the dungeon? Like a mural or something drawn somewhere.....’

It was a serious problem. Ark was presently on the 60th floor of the secret dungeon. In the meantime he had explored dozens of kilometres. If he didn't find a clue on the 60th floor then didn't it mean he would have to search from the beginning again? It was unreasonable to even think it. In addition, the soldiers in Dark Eden wouldn't easily obey.

‘Wait.....mural? A mural? Come to think of it.....’

Ark tilted his head and looked at the wall for a while. A thought came to his head after remembering the word mural. The recessed wall was in the shape of a rectangle. It was as if someone had taken a mural off the wall.

‘Then there was originally something here. But why did someone take off the mural? That's right, the iron plate didn't say I needed to draw it. I misunderstood the words. Don't I just have to return the original mural here?’

After thinking that, something flashed through Ark's head. The ten stone sculptures in the form of slabs that he collected! When investigating the slab, he had seen something carved on the surface but he couldn't identify its shape.

"Perhaps?"

Ark quickly pulled out the slabs and placed them in the rectangular recess. That's right. The slabs were the murals that had been taken away from this wall. Once he knew that, the steps afterwards were simple. Ark placed the slabs back in like a jigsaw puzzle. A large image started to form on the wall. But Ark felt more confused after he managed to insert the 10 slabs.

"What, what the? Am I short one slab?"

Even though all ten slabs were inserted, an empty space was left in the centre.

"What the? I need more slabs? Is there another middle ranked boss? No, I can't even defeat the boss on the next floor if I can't solve this puzzle? Nevertheless, the lack of a slab.....is there a boss that is hiding?"

Ark looked at the nearly completed wall mural and scratched his head. Suddenly he felt something strange when looking at the mural. The empty space had an overall triangle shape. The shape and size was similar to something he had seen before. But where? He stared at the wall mural and searched through his memory. After staring for a while, Ark finally remembered what he forgot.

"Wait? This form is....that's right, I'm sure of it! Radun, the Bloody Slate!"

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun spat out a slate onto the floor. It was a slate with a deep red colour that seemed to drip blood. This slate hadn't been obtained in the secret dungeon. Lumines had handed him this slate after freeing the Draconians from Magura's subordinates. But he had needed 200 Knowledge of Ancient Relics to confirm it so he had forgotten about

it. Surprisingly, the Bloody Slate seemed to fit perfectly into the mural.

“Looking at the shape, I’m positive this is right!”

Ark grabbed the slate, causing it to vibrate and a new message window rose.

-You have identified the Bloody Slate using Knowledge of Ancient Relics.

<Knowledge of Ancient Relics +10, Intelligence +10, Luck +5, Fame has increased by 50>

-Bloody Slate containing the secret of the Abyss (Level: 0)

An unknown dark power can be felt from this unrefined stone slate. While the slate looks rough at first, looking closely you can tell that it has been carefully trimmed. A weird shape is depicted on the surface but it cannot be clearly determined. The purpose of this slate is still unknown.

‘Yes!’

Ark inwardly cheered as he checked the information window. After the name was different, the description was the same as the other 10 sculptures he got. In other words, the Bloody Slate was part of the mural.

‘For the slate Lumines gave me to be a part of this mural.....’

Then wouldn’t the dungeon boss be related to Magura who disappeared hundreds of years ago? He had suddenly obtained hidden information about the Lore quest. No, the boss hiding in the lowest layer of the Abyss might even be Magura himself. According to Lumines’ words, Magura was an evil which existed before the Dark Lord. It was obvious after considering the name of the dungeon, Cradle of Ancient Evil.

“Well what matters is that I’ve found the last key!”

Ark placed the Bloody Slate into the empty space. Finally the image of the beast which the iron plate mentioned had been completed. It was the shape of a huge wild dog with black fur. A black wild dog was often considered an omen of bad luck in the old days. When the Bloody Slate was inserted, it formed the red eyes of the dog. So the image of the beast was finally completed.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

The cave started to shake violently. Rocks fell down from the ceiling like hail.

“What, what the?”

“The cave is collapsing!”

Ark and the soldiers quickly rushed outside the cave. The cave fell almost at the same time.

“What is this? A passage wasn’t created and it just collapsed.....”

Ark looked at the collapsed cave with an absurd expression. Although the cave collapsed, the huge wall mural which was still standing started to crack. Then an enormous rock fell down and a strange shape was shown. Door.....it was a door. An enormous door which reached dozens of metres. But it wasn’t an ordinary door. The door was made from humans. Thousands of humans with looks of suffering on their faces made up the grotesque doors! The soldiers were at a loss of words after seeing the eerie doors.

“Hell door.....”

Someone groaned and muttered. That’s right. It was just like the Hell door described in Dante’s work. The soldiers of Dark Eden were overwhelmed by the terrible door. Even Ark was a bit lost when he thought about it. Only Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were the exception.

“A hell door at the end of the Abyss.....isn’t this pretty fun?”

Isyuram laughed gleefully and approached the hell door. Jjak-tung

also laughed and nodded.

“Then hell will be behind this? Good. I always wanted to see it.”

Bul-kkun also giggled and muttered.

“Although it is abrupt.....you would see it sooner or later.”

“What? That is slander.”

“Then you know that you’ll go to heaven?”

“Of course. Do you know how much I’ve donated to the church?”

“Donation? Isn’t that just money laundering?”

“Don’t talk boring nonsense. If other people here it the will think it is true.”

Jjak-tung freaked out and quickly blocked Bul-kkun’s mouth. While it was unsure if Jjak-tung actually did money laundering, Isyuram’s and the rehabilitation members’ words caused the soldiers to relax a bit. But that only lasted a few minutes. The moment Ark entered the huge Hell door, he witnessed an absurd scene. The other side of the Hell door was an extremely bizarre sight. Dark water stretched out beyond the threshold of the door. It stretched into the horizon! It was already weird for there to be a huge ocean underground. But the even more astonishing thing was the ‘thing.’

Kuoooooh, aaaaaaaah!

Humans and beasts, monsters.....transparent beings were entangled everywhere in the ocean. Whenever the waves hit the strange forms, a cry would emerge. It was a literal hell.

“Do we have to get pass here?”

Ark looked at the wide ocean with absurd eyes before trying to touch it. Then a black shape popped up and wound around his arm. His health was sucked out at an enormous pace at the same time a warning message appeared.

-You have touched the Hell River.

<The Hell River contains the cursed spirits who have a deep-seated grudge. If you touch it then you will lose 100 health per second>

Ark freaked out and removed his arm. Fortunately he didn't lose a lot of health but.....

"How are we going to pass this place?"

"Ark!"

Then Isyuram who had been looking around suddenly shouted.

"Can't we ride this?"

Isyuram pointed towards a small boat that was on the side of the hell door. Although it was a small boat, it would still float on the Hell River. They had no choice but to use the boat if they wanted to pass through the river. But there was one serious problem. The size of the boat was so small that only fifteen people could fit at most. In other words, the people who could enter this place were limited.

'Then only 15 people can pass through?'

Even when they moved with hundreds of people, there was always a life and death situation. But now only 15 people could go to a place where there was a boss? It was a ridiculous situation. But.....

'This is a game.'

That's right. Once again this was a game. Although this might be an incredibly difficult dungeon with strong monsters, it was a game so it was ultimately designed to be defeated by users. Then the Hell River and small boat must've been purposely designed. And the purpose was to restrict the number of people.

'Well I don't know if my guess is correct. There are currently 120 soldiers remaining. In such a situation, if another 1,000 enemies appeared then the odds aren't in my favour. But there's no need to worry about since the number of personnel is restricted. It means I can face the enemy with fewer troops. Besides.....

Anyway, this was still the last boss of the secret dungeon. In other

words, the best loot would drop. If he caught that boss with all his troops then he would've had to divide the loot into 3,800 parts. No matter how good the loot was, Ark would only get a few gold. Yet how much would he get if only a dozen people entered? Of course, he would still have to share the loot with the coalition members that entered. And the people who were entering were Isyuram and the rehabilitation members. He couldn't monopolize it but he would be able to get the yolk of the egg!

'Huhuhu, this is an opportunity!'

There was a greedy smile on Ark's face as he came up with an idea.

"Does anyone want to travel through hell?"

The soldiers shook their heads and stepped backwards. There were no humans who would want to visit hell. Of course, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were the exception. So the group ended up being Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members.

"Now, shall we do a bit of sightseeing through hell?"

Isyuram put his foot up on the side of the boat and said. The boat then slid smoothly through the water.

"What the, that is?"

The boat had been floating for 5 minutes. The horribly distorted and wriggling shape of the landscape was enough to cause motion sickness. Then finally Ark's group arrived close to the destination. But the final destination was an unimaginable place.

"Black.....crystal temple?"

A bizarre island had appeared on the Hell River. A huge temple was located on the centre. The temple looked different from others. The walls, roof and even the floor of the temple was made of a black crystal. The temple was extremely beautiful but also terrifying as it felt like his soul was being sucked in. After landing, Isyuram looked at a crystal pillar and said.

“This temple is beautiful but it feels unpleasant.”

“Is it because it is in hell?”

“My mood was refreshed the moment I entered the hell so it is still strange.”

Isyuram muttered. The mysterious atmosphere of the crystal temple was enough to make Isyuram tense.

“Stay alert. There is a high possibility that the boss is here.”

“Don’t worry. I can enter battle mode when it is necessary.”

Isyuram answered and entered the temple. It was more enormous than it looked on the outside. The structure of the temple looked just like a building in ancient Rome. The sides were lined with thick pillars holding up the incredible weight of the triangular roof. And everything was made of the black crystal. It was like there were floating in a dark space.

“This funny feeling.....”

Isyuram kicked the floor and flinched. He stared at the dark temple with a pensive expression and breathed out lightly.

“.....Ark, do you understand?”

“.....How can I know understand that there is a strange atmosphere?”

Ark gulped and swallowed his saliva. Isyuram’s reaction was natural. There was a strange smell coming from the darkness. It was the unpleasant scent of rotting flesh and blood. The smell stimulated his nerves and caused an eerie feeling! It was impossible for someone like Ark and Isyuram not to sense the hostility present. After Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members sensed the aura, they instantly changed into battle mode. But despite waiting 1 minute, there was no reaction from the inside.

“It has no intention of coming out. Is it making us come there instead?”

“The monster sees no need to come out.....”

“We’ve come all the way here to kill it and now we have to search for it?”

“I’ll go first.”

Ark stepped forward and said. While Isyuram and the rehabilitation members had strong combat skills, in New World Ark was still the strongest among them. When considering level and defense, Ark was the only possible choice to lead. With sharpened nerves, Ark carefully stepped forward. How far did they enter? Once the party arrived at a large hall, they witnessed an unimaginable scene. A huge beast 20 metres in size was lying in the hall. The monster was a black wild dog. It looked exactly like the one shown in the mural. But this black dog had its body ripped to shreds. The lower part of the body was so torn apart that its internal organs were flowing out. The terrible smell of blood drifted about the interior of the hall. Ark looked at the dog’s body and asked with a puzzled expression.

“What on earth happened to it?”

Since it looked exactly the same as the mural, Ark was convinced that this dog was the final boss of the Abyss. But why was there a horrifying body before the battle had even begun?

‘Did another user enter before us and took care of the monster?’

He thought that for a bit. He had often experienced such things when roaming around dungeons. General monsters were a lot more common than boss monsters. After taking care of the general monsters, he went to the location of the boss only to find that another user had taken care of it. But Ark soon shook his head.

‘No. I sealed this dungeon up one year ago. Furthermore, the hell door needed to be opened to arrive here. While they could obtain the other slates, it was impossible for other users to open the door without the Bloody Slate. In that case.....’

“What? It can’t be that we came here in vain?”

“I’m going crazy.”

A rehabilitation member said with an exhausted expression.

“Damn! I can’t even eat fried dog.”

Isyuram loved eating dogs so he complained after seeing the huge, dead dog.

-Kuoh....ku ku ku ku

Suddenly groaning sounds emerged from the beast’s mouth which almost sounded like a laugh.

“What, what the? That bastard is still alive?”

Isyuram exclaimed as he jumped from the shock. It wasn’t just Isyuram. Ark and the rehabilitation members were also staring at the beast with amazed eyes. Then the beast’s eyelids opened and red eyes were revealed.

-.....Humans!

He spoke in a delighted voice. The red eyes scanned the party before he said.

-I need to ask.....my subordinates had it.....the key.....you can’t come to this place without it.....only one key remains.....where did you find it?

‘The last key? Is it talking about the Bloody Slate?’

“From the Fire Draconians I saved in Hwaryong Mountain.”

Ark wavered before answering. He had visited this place yet the boss was already like a corpse. Well, he wasn’t dead but he still wasn’t in a normal condition. Ark was interested in why the boss of the secret dungeon was in such a state. The boss might even lead to a different event. The beast wasn’t able to fight in this state so did it really matter if he knew? The beast’s eyes narrowed at Ark’s answer.

-It was like that.....so it was there.

“Are you Magura?”

-I....you know.....there was a survivor from the Fire Draconians?

“Yes, I heard about you from them. I don’t know why you look like this but expect me to spare you.”

Ark declared in a cold voice. It wasn’t to get revenge for the Fire Draconians that Ark said this. Despite his looks, Magura was still alive. So couldn’t he get loot from him when Magura ran out of breath? In the worst case scenario, he might not get any loot but he could complete the quest. Magura frowned at Ark’s words. After a moment, the upper part of his body started shaking from laughter.

-Hahahaha! Spare me.....? You....me?

“Judging from your current state, you’ll die even if I don’t touch you.”

-Those words....this body is dying....is that what you think?

“You’re saying it isn’t true? Are you trying to make me laugh?”

-You.....your current situation.....you still don’t understand.

“My current situation?”

-For hundreds of years I.....for you guys.....I’ve been waiting.

What nonsense was he saying? He had been waiting hundreds of years for Ark and his companions? Ark muttered with an absurd expression.

-It isn’t possible to understand.....it is natural.....but you’ll soon discover why.....the reason I said I’ve been waiting hundreds of years.....!

Chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa!

It was at that moment. Magura’s body started convulsing and the internal organs on the ground flew in every direction. They wrapped around the pillars in the temple pulled Magura’s body upwards. A cobweb like structure appeared in the centre above Magura’s upper body. A red warning message then appeared in front of Ark.

[-The boss monster Hands of the Devil 'Magura' has appeared!]

"T-this is.....!"

"Hik! M-Master! Above!"

At that moment Racard's scream was heard from behind him. Ark lifted his head with surprise. The internal organs.....the internal organs were wriggling like a snake and fell towards him.

"Dark Dance!"

Ark quickly moved his feet and withdrew dozens of metres. At the same time, there was a loud banging as dozens of strands of internal organs impacted with the place where Ark was. If he hadn't instinctively avoided it then he would've been crushed to death. But there was no time to even sigh with relief.

Syu syu syu syuk.

After Ark avoided it, the dozens of internal organs tentacle stems flew towards him at a tremendous speed.

"Ugh! What is this.....?"

Tentacles? Anyway, they were still heading towards him even after he avoided it. But he couldn't closely examine the tentacles because he had to keep on running away from them. He had looked away for one second and a tentacle had closed around his leg. He lost his balance and stumbled, causing dozens of tentacles to repeatedly hit him.

Pepepepeng!

He became dizzy and also lost 10% of his health. But he couldn't afford to become flustered.

"Dark Blade!"

Ark struck the tentacle that was wrapped around his leg. And he rolled across the floor to escape the rest of the tentacles. After Ark had fended off that attack, he had time to look around the room.

‘Oh my god.....!’

The tentacles hadn’t only attacked Ark. Magura had a large number of tentacles attached to his body, the pillars and floor to ceiling. The hundreds of tentacles were also attacking Isyuram and the rehabilitation members. Fortunately Isyuram was using quick footwork to avoid the attacks from the tentacles while the rehabilitation members had only lost 20~30% health.

“Hik, hik! Intestines, intestines! I flew into intestines!”

Racard was also flying between the pillars and avoiding the tentacles.

“D-dammit!”

“Ack! It’s coming from all directions.....”

All of this had happened in less than one minute.

‘If we’re careless then we’ll be wiped out in an instant!’

Then Bul-kkun and Tazza got snagged by the tentacles and fell down. Dozens of tentacles then focused on those two. Ark threw the Saw blade and shouted.

“Transformation off! Iron Fire Wall!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

The Saw blade quickly turned into Razak and stood in front of the two with his shield. Wings of flames poured out and pushed back the tentacles. Meanwhile Ark used Sprint and cut the tentacles wound around Bul-kkun and Tazza.

“Teacher, hyung-nims! Gather around me!”

“Ugh, understood!”

Isyuram and the rehabilitation members gathered around Ark. Then they formed a back to back circular formation. It was a method designed to limit the directions the tentacles could attack from. Even if dozens of tentacles flew towards them, with their backs protected it was possible to avoid receiving a concentrated attack like before.

“What on earth, that guy? Wasn’t it supposed to be dead?”

Isyuram muttered as he continued attacking the tentacles.

“If we hit it then it’ll die.”

“What?”

“That guy.....only has 15% health left.”

Ark stared at Magura with gold eyes. Shortly after the attack had started, Ark had used Eyes of the Cat to check Magura’s information. He confirmed that Magura was a level 500 elite boss. In a normal fight there was no way 12 people would be able to defeat him. But Ark had discovered why the number of people allowed in the shrine was restricted. He didn’t know the reason yet but Magura’s body was ripped to shreds and it only had 15% health left.

‘That beast only has half his body and 15% health left.’

Ark also only lost 10% health when hit by the tentacles. He had thought Magura would be incredibly strong but he was mistaken. While losing 10% health with one blow was a tremendous attack power, Ark had actually been hit by dozens of tentacles. He had received dozens of hits from a level 500 elite boss yet his health had only been reduced by 10%. In other words, Magura’s stats had also been decreased like his health. On the other hand Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members had received various buffs from the priests and magicians so they were in great shape. Of course, Magura still wasn’t an insignificant opponent.

‘But Magura could only properly move his head and one paw. Therefore he can probably only attack with the tentacles.’

And they could somehow stop the tentacle attacks thanks to the circular formation. But there was no meaning in stopping the tentacles if they couldn’t damage Magura.

“Teacher, hyung-nims, maintain the formation while I approach that guy!”

Ark struck a tentacle and approached Magura with the circular

formation still maintained. The problem was that there were also tentacles hanging above Magura's body like a spider web.

"Razak, transform!"

After approaching Magura, Ark commanded Razak to transform. Then he grabbed the Saw Blade and swung it towards the tentacles. The whip swept past dozens of tentacles at once. At the same time, Magura's body which had been hanging in the air descended.

"This is an opportunity, Demonic Detection!"

It was the skill which originated from Hero Maban! He used the 5th stage skill of Eternal Soul. Ark's eyes instantly turned white and the scenery changed like he was looking through infrared goggles. Then something which looked like black blood was drawn around Magura's body. It was the demonic energy in Magura which had been drawn out using Demonic Detection! Ark swung the Saw blade towards the area where the black blood was thickest.

"Dark Blade!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When he cut the black blood, it caused a change explosion within Magura's body. The burst blood vessel had spread. When attacking the demonic energy discovered with Demonic detection, he could deal between 100~1,000 additional damage. In addition, cutting the blood vessel also temporarily decreased defense. It was indeed a skill for dealing with Demonic monsters.

-Kuuohh....you dare.....foolish human.....!

Maura growled after receiving considerable damage. At the same time, dozens of tentacles sprouted like an arrow from the skin.

"Bah, how do you expect to get past out protection?"

Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were like a barrier protecting Ark from the tentacles.

'Okay, if this keeps up then I can win!'

But he couldn't be too hasty. Magura was still a boss monster. If there was the slightest slip then the situation could change in an instant.

‘Slowly, I have to slowly decrease that fellow’s health!’

Ark maintained the circular formation and blocked the attacks of the tentacles while grasping the timing to attack Magura. Ark never dealt continuous attacks and focused on attacking and defending with Isyuram and the rehabilitation members. So they slowly cut down Magura’s health. On the other hand, Magura had lost 5% health from the attacks.

-Impertinent bastards!

Magura gave a strange yell and his body shook. Something unthinkable then occurred. The tentacles flying all over the place gathered and changed to a huge hammer. The huge hammer hung over all of their heads.

“Huck! S-scatter!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a tremendous roar as Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members flew all over the place. Then the tentacles dispersed again and attacked the party. The situation was like when they were first attacked. Bul-kkun and Hae Gyeol-sa were already wrapped in dozens of tentacles.

“Hyung-nims!”

Ark swung his Saw blade and cut the tentacles wound around Bul-kkun’s arms. Just as he was turning towards Hae Gyeol-sa.....

Magura’s neck started to bulge like a balloon and a huge object popped out of his mouth. The huge tongue like object extended like jelly and instantly covered Hae Gyeol-sa’s body. Then the object along with Hae Gyeol-sa was drawn back inside Magura’s mouth.

“W-what, that guy! Surely not.....?”

Crunch, crunch, crunch!

Magura's jaw moved and a horrifying sound was heard. Then blood emerged from the fangs.....He was chewing. Magura had chewed and swallowed Hae Gyeol-sa! But the truly horrifying scene occurred afterwards.

"U-unbelievable.....!"

A groaned flowed from Ark's mouth as he looked at Magura. A blissful expression appeared on Magura's face after he swallowed Hae Gyeol-sa. Then his chest area started twitching and expanding. Fur also grew out from the missing skin on the left, front paw. At the same time, 8% of Magura's health was restored. He had used Hae Gyeol-sa to revive and restore his health.

-Kukukuku, for hundreds of years.....I finally regained it.

"Regained it?"

Ark used Eyes of the Cat as well as Skill Penetration and the information window appeared.

-Characteristics of Magura's skill: Piece of Flesh

Magura is the immortal existence known as the Hands of the Devil.

Even if Magura's flesh has been completely destroyed, he can restore his body. But Magura can't just remake his body. Magura uses 'Piece of Flesh' in order to absorb living flesh. When Magura uses 'Piece of Flesh,' he can restore his body and abilities.

-Kukukuku.....do you understand now?

Magura shook his paw which had been restored.

-Yes, the slate you found isn't a key.....it is to brand the living sacrifices.

'Living sacrifices? Brand?'

Then Ark recalled the warning message that appeared when entering the Abyss. It had warned about a huge sacrifice! And Magura's body was destroyed. He had confirmed the information

about Piece of Flesh after using Skill Penetration. So they were sacrificial offerings for Magura! Magura had spread complex information in order for some sacrifices to come here.

“Don’t tell me.....for hundreds of years.....?”

-You noticed.....it is my plan.

Magura laughed and muttered. The worst case scenario instantly rose in Ark’s head.

-I.....I’ve been in this dead body for hundreds of years since the end of the Dark Century.....but I was born in the darkness itself.....I am an immortal existence.....My soul has been waiting in this body for a good opportunity to restore my flesh..... Yet no matter how immortal I am.....I can’t restore my body without absorbing a human’s flesh.....so I prepared something just in case.

“The Bloody slate containing the secrets of the Abyss!”

-Yes.....kukukuku. Humans are simple.....just slip them some bait about a hidden secret and they will enter.....if I just sit here calmly then the sacrifices will come to me.....warriors and soldiers are strong.....but too much time passed this time.....the bait I cast disappeared before humans could come here.....and after hundreds of years.....I had mostly given up but thankfully you guys came here.....

Ark now started to untangle the secrets of the Bloody Slate.

-Now you know.....the meaning to I’ve been waiting for you for hundreds of years.....?

It was simple. In order to eat. And that was the main reason why the number of people allowed in the crystal shrine was limited. In Magura’s condition he couldn’t afford to meet a lot of users. This meant Magura had limited the numbers to an amount he could eat.

That’s right. The dungeon, slates, hell door.....the whole thing was a trap!

Magura's Stone

Kuoooooh.

The crystal temple was locked in a bizarre silence. Ark and the rehabilitation group even forgot that they were fighting. The secret behind the slabs was shocking. No, such a thing didn't matter. The problem was that Magura's health and stats had been restored. When slowly chipping away 5% of Magura's health, Ark's group had lost an average of 30% health. It was the inevitable result when facing an elite level 600 boss with 12 people. But it was enough in a battle where Magura only had 15% health left. However Magura had recovered his health after eating Hae Gyeol-sa. Wasn't it comparable to Dragon ball where a person managed to transform themselves to quickly increase their power?

"Damn, this dog wants to eat us?"

Isyuram rushed towards Magura angrily.

"Teacher! W-wait a minute.....!"

-You fool.....it is too already too late.....keuaaang!

Magura opened his mouth and roared. There was a sudden huge storm and Isyuram was thrown back. Isyuram immediately impacted with the ground. Hundreds of tentacles then wound around him.

"Teacher! Dark Blade!"

Ark attacked the tentacles wound around Isyuram. But hundreds of tentacles once again emerged from Magura's body and formed a barrier. Dark Blade was blocked by the barrier and Isyuram was sucked in Magura's mouth. The eerie sound of crunching flesh and bones followed. This time Magura managed to restore 10% of his health. Magura's original health was 15%. His stats were also only at 15%. Now after eating Hae Gyeol-sa and Isyuram, his health and stats increased by 18%. In other words, he had recovered 33% of

his abilities.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

The effect showed straight away. Hundreds of tentacles crossed the space at an incredible speed. The speed and power couldn't be compared to before. Moreover, 'Howling' which was used on Isyuram was used again so Ark and the rehabilitation members couldn't maintain their balance and stumbled. When in that state, the tentacles were certain to deal damage.

"Ugh!"

Ark quickly lost 20% health from the continuous attacks of 'Howling' and the tentacles. The rehabilitation members also lost 30% health and some of them were on the verge of death. It was truly overwhelming!

'If this is what Magura is capable of at 33%, imagine 100%.....!'

Ark had forgotten Magura's true identity. Yes, Magura was the legendary devil who devastated the Jackson region and drove the Fire Draconians to their extinction. If he recovered 100% then his power would transcend imagination! No, even reaching 100% wasn't necessary. Ark and the rehabilitation members couldn't even deal with Magura when he was 33% recovered.

'Did I travel all this way just to become that guy's meal?'

Anger immediately surged at the idea. The important thing wasn't if he died here or not. The reason Magura hid here was because he couldn't heal his body. This meant that he wouldn't stay here once his flesh was perfectly recovered. The legendary devil which devastated Jackson hundreds of years ago would once again be set free in the world. The world would become an ocean of fire wherever Magura walked.

'Of course, I really don't care that much if the world becomes an ocean of fire.....'

The problem was the entrance to the dungeon was on Silvana. So the first place Magura would turn to ashes was Silvana. Right now

Silvana was rapidly developing in order to be promoted to a B ranked estate. In addition, Silvana was also the core place in his triangular trade route. If it was turned in an ocean of fire then Ark would lose everything. He had to stop Maura from resurrecting.

“Ark, do something!”

He heard Bul-kkun’s voice from behind him. When he raised his head, dozens of tentacles had surrounded the party. Ark freaked out and swung his sword wildly. At the same time, there was a huge pressure on his sword and Ark was thrown into a wall. The tentacles had become as strong as a hammer after Magura recovered 33% percent.

‘Oh my god! How can I win?’

The current odds of winning were only 1%. As more time passed, the chances were slowly reaching 0%.

‘Dammit, I can’t just give up like this!’

Ark spat out blood and raised his body. The battle with Magura wasn’t just a life or death situation anymore. If Ark’s group died here then Silvana would be at risk. Even if he wanted to, it wasn’t possible for him to give up. Ark bit his lip and got up.

Chiing!

A sharp sound resonated from behind him. The crystal wall had cracked where Ark’s sword had hit it and a small splinter had fallen down.

‘What the? Why is the crystal.....?’

Ark looked at the crack in the wall with stupid eyes. The strength of the crystal in the temple was close to steel. It didn’t even crack when hit by one of Magura’s tentacles. Then why did a fragment fall off when his sword touched it?

‘Wait? That reminds me, the crystal.....?’

Ark recalled the situation from a moment ago and had an idea. After carefully looking at the structure of the temple, Ark sent a whisper to

Tazza.

-Tazza, I have a request!

-What? Now?

-Yes, right now!

Ark shouted in an urgent voice. He explained the plan that he had just come up with. Tazza made a strange expression before smiling and nodding.

-Ohhh, that's brilliant?

-Is it possible?

-It's possible, no I will make it possible. But the situation is difficult since he already had two people. If you guys die before I'm finished.....

-I'll somehow hold out until your preparations are finished.

-I understand. I'll do as you ask!

Tazza rolled and escaped from the tentacles before suddenly running away. When Tazza ran away, dozens of tentacles instantly aimed for his back. But Ark had expected Magura's behaviour and spun his sword like a windmill to block the tentacles.

"Everyone gather around me!"

Ark explained his plan when the rehabilitation members gathered.

"From now on don't drink potions. It is better to have less health now. Don't attack the tentacles unless they wind around you."

"What? What are you saying?"

"I don't have time to explain. Just do as I say and you'll soon understand."

"Damn! What is this.....?"

The tentacles flew towards where Ark's group was gathered. Ark

and the rehabilitation members scattered in different directions. Ark ignored the flying tentacles and only attacked the ones that wound around him. Their health decreased and all the rehabilitation members were instantly in a critical condition.

“Eh, I don’t know. Just kill me!”

-Uh?

Suddenly Magura’s movements changed. Yapsab only had 2% health left when the tentacles suddenly flew sharply towards him.

‘Huhuhu, indeed.....he’s been waiting hundreds of years so he can’t just let his prey be killed.’

Yes, that was the reason Ark told them not to care about health. Magura’s tentacles were made from intestines and other internal organs. Magura’s goal was to devour Ark and the rehabilitation member. With ‘Piece of Flesh,’ he could eat humans and restore his body. Naturally the tentacles aimed to restrict their movements so that Ark and the rehabilitation members could be swallowed. But Ark and the rehabilitation members just kept running and ignored the tentacle attacks so they couldn’t grasp the timing to wind around them.

-T-these guys.....!

After the situation was repeated, Magura started to realize Ark’s goal.

-For sacrifices to act so daringly.....playing cheap tricks.....

Chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa!

At that moment, hundreds of tentacles intersected and seemed to form a huge net. The net was cast out and thrown over Yapsab and Ddeok-dae.

“D-damn!”

Yapsab and Ddeok-dae became puzzled and quickly stepped on it. But once caught by the net, the tentacles just became even more intertwined. Ark and the other rehabilitation members tried to tear

the tentacles but more just appeared. In the end, Yapsab and Ddeok-dae were dragged like fish in a net into Magura's mouth. At the same time, Magura's health recovered by 14% and his left side and hind legs healed. Magura's stats had recovered close to 50%.

-Kukukuku. You guys....postponing it is useless!

Magura once again made a net with the tentacles. Then he heard Tazza's voice from the back.

"Ark, it's done!"

Ark's eyes flashed and he shouted.

"Everybody run out of the temple!"

"Okay!"

-You fools.....you can't get away!

Hundreds of tentacles wound around the pillar pursued them. The hundreds of outstretched tentacles was like a scene from a horror movie. Ark who had escaped to a corridor smiled and said.

"Tazza hyung, now!"

At the same time, Tazza took out a large hammer and shield. Then he struck it and the sound of a gong seemed to resonate through the temple. And the whole temple started to buzz and vibrate. The crystal was a material which reflected sound well. But here was another reason the whole temple vibrated. It was due to the effect of what Tazza did. That was.....

Pejik, pejjijik, jjejjjaejjaek!

The humming continued resonating through the temple and the crystal pillars the tentacles were wrapped around started cracking. At first it was just a small crack until it suddenly accelerated and spread at an incredible speed.

-What is this.....why.....?

Magura looked at the cracking pillars with confusion. Ark who had

escaped into the corridor turned around and laughed.

“Crystal is just like glass.”

-Glass?

“Yes, glass. You’re a dog so you might not understand but it is a substance weak to vibration.”

-Vibration?

Magura looked like he couldn’t understand anything Ark was saying. He then belatedly became aware of the small objects lodged in the bottom of the pillars. It was a bent metal in a U shape. That’s right. This was the core part of the plan Ark had Tazza prepare. The reason there was a small crack in the crystal wall when Ark’s sword hit it was because it was a material weak to vibration. He hadn’t felt it at the time but when Ark was slammed into the wall, the attack had caused his sword to vibrate and crack the crystal. Ark had devised the plan after recalling a simple law of physics.

‘Then can’t I deliver a stronger vibration towards the pillars in the temple?’

Couldn’t he break the entire pillar? The problem was how to focus a strong and continuous vibration on the pillar. Then he thought of the U shaped metal lodged in the pillar. Once there was a resonance, it would continue vibrating continuously. So he had Tazza who changed to a Guardian=Engineer to create the bent pieces of metal. While Ark and the rehabilitation members were running around, he had lodged it in the crystal pillars. Then the gong was hit and the intense sound wave rang out through the temple. The sound struck the metal which changed it to a vibration which passed into the crystal pillar. The result was what happened. The cracks spread over the crystals as they were weak to vibration. Once the cracks spread, it couldn’t be stopped. When the cracks spread on the pillar, it couldn’t withstand the heavy weight of the ceiling and started crumbling.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Magura looked up with puzzled eyes after hearing a roaring sound.

-Ugh! U-unbelievable.....!

Magura wound his tentacles around a pillar close to Ark. The tentacles on the pillars in the rear unwound and Magura's body flew towards Ark. A huge monster was flying towards him! But Ark just laughed and raised his sword. Then he lightly hit the pillar that the tentacles were wound around. A clean sound rang out and there was a smashing sound. The metal lodged in the pillar vibrated even stronger. With the tentacles coiled around it, the cracks spread even quicker. The tentacles fell from the pillar and Magura who was flying towards him was forced to the ground.

-Kuaaaak!

"Now get ready to become flattened like a rice cake."

Kang, kang, kang, kang!

Ark turned around and ran around the temple knocking the pillars with his sword. More cracks spread until they couldn't resist the weight of the ceiling and the pillars collapsed. With so many pillars collapsed, the weight of the ceiling was a burden on the other pillars in the temple. The pillars were broken like a chain of dominoes while would soon lead to the collapse of the entire temple. It was the end once cracks started to spread on the solid crystal temple. The temple would shatter into thousands of sharp fragments. There was no chance Magura could survive that.

'With the pillars broken, Magura can't use the tentacles to move. The rehabilitation hyung-nims have taken shelter outside the temple so I should escape soon!'

Ark used Sprint and ran down the corridor. At this point, the temple was already started to collapse as some debris fell from the ceiling. Even just a graze from a crystal splinter decreased his health by 200~300. Being hit by a large crystal would be instant death! While only small splinters had fallen so far, if he looked at the ceiling then he could predict when a large chunk would fall. However, if he ran while checking the ceiling then he wouldn't escape the temple in time.

“Racard, time to do your job!”

“Understood. I’m so lucky to have such a cool Master!”

Racard who had been busy avoided Magura’s tentacles during the fight landed on Ark’s shoulder. Then he kept an eye on the crystal ceiling.

“Hik! 3 o’clock, there is a large crack in the ceiling! A huge crystal will fall 4 metres from here!”

Ark quickly avoided the crystal thanks to Racard’s words. So Ark ran down the corridor with Racard and avoided the crystals. After a while, he arrived at the entrance to the temple and saw the rehabilitation members who had escaped first.

‘That’s it! Now we just have to wait and it is out victory when the temple collapses!’

Ark was inwardly convinced of his victory.

“Ark, behind you, behind!”

Tazza pointed to something behind Ark. Ark’s face stiffened as he turned his head. A bloody Magura was quickly approaching Magura. Although Magura had recovered 50%, his lower body was still injured. He was also bleeding heavily from following ark through the falling crystals. Since he couldn’t use the pillars to move himself with the tentacles, he was dragging his body along using his paws. It really was a dreadful scene.

‘Damn! At that speed.....’

Even though Magura was significantly injured, he would be able to escape from the temple before it collapsed. And presently Ark and the rehabilitation members only had 5% health left. They wouldn’t survive if Magura escaped from the temple.

‘I have to stop him here!’

Ark turned around and ran towards Magura.

“Racard, take the Saw blade and go outside the temple!”

“Understood!”

He handed the Saw blade to Racard who picked it up and flew out of the temple. Racard never even considered saying something like ‘No, I won’t leave Master!’

-Kuaaaaah, disappear!

After Ark blocked him, Magura tied the tentacles into a bundle and attacked him. Ark had no time to worry about the collapsing temple. Just as the bunch of tentacles was about to strike Ark’s body. Ark smiled and shouted.

“Area Declaration, Glory of the Night! Divine skill, Descent of the Fire Draconian!”

It was the only way for Ark to stop Magura’s rush. The dark spirit rose from the ground when he used the skill. At the same time the area was wrapped in darkness. But then flames burst upwards after a short time. The flames formed a Fire Draconian! The Fire Draconian flew upwards before falling like a lightning bolt towards Ark’s head. Ark was wrapped in the flames.

-You have used the Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!

The <Immortal Fire Draconian> effect will be applied for 10 minutes.

* 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.

* Attack speed, Movement speed and Reaction rate will increase by 50%.

* All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.

* Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members’ fire resistance will increase to 100%.

* When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user’s health will be restored.

-D-dragon warrior!

Magura was astounded after seeing the Fire Draconian wound around Ark. Magura was the one who caused the extinction of the Fire Draconians years ago. Naturally he knew the techniques that the Fire Draconians used.

“This is the revenge of the Fire Draconians! Jump!”

Ark kicked the ground and flew towards Magura like a bullet. A line of flames followed Ark as he shot forward. Magura hurriedly used hundreds of tentacles as a shield.

“Not a chance. Dark Blade! Adol!”

It was the chain attack using Jump and Dark Blade, Adol! It was Ark’s skill with the strongest breakthrough power. Magura’s tentacles were unable to withstand it and broke. At the same time, the sword wrapped with the flames of the Fire Draconians pierced through Magura’s chest. Magura let out a tremendous roar and was pushed back 10 metres.

-You won’t be able to defeat me even if you become a Dragon Warrior!

“Of course I know I can’t kill you with just Descent of the Fire Draconian. But it is possible to catch your ankle using it.”

Ark muttered while blowing flames out. That’s right. If Ark had used Descent of the Fire Draconian from the beginning then the battle against Magura might’ve been easier. But he was still a level 600 boss so Descent of the Fire Draconian wouldn’t be able to deal decisive damage. So he had planned to decrease Magura’s health to less than 5% before using Descent of the Fire Draconian. But Magura managed to recover his health and stats using ‘Piece of Flesh’ so Ark had lost the timing to use it.

-Kuaaaaaah! Get out of my way!

“What will you do if I said no?”

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

Magura wildly swung his tentacles and attacked. Even if Ark used

Descent of the Fire Draconian, in a 1 on 1 fight against Magura he was instantly driven into a corner. However Ark's purpose was to stop Magura from escaping. Thanks to the 50% increase in movement speed and reaction rate, Ark avoided the tentacles and concentrated his attacks on Magura's ankle. After a while, a huge crystal dropped from the unstable ceiling and blocked the entrance.

"Now it's over."

Ark smiled and muttered. At the same time, there was a large split in the ceiling above his head. The crystals fell like hail and Ark immediately died.

"....."

The rehabilitation members who had escaped the temple looked at the wreckage with surprised eyes. The huge crystal temple had been changed to a ruin with dozens of bent iron.

".....Is it over?"

Tazza breathed out slowly.

"To be honest I never expected to survive that."

"But Ark is buried together with it."

"Well, it was a beautiful sacrifice."

The rehabilitation members nodded with a deliberately solemn expression. Racard picked his nose and murmured.

"It's okay, he will just appear again like nothing happened after several days."

"What? Aren't you Ark's summon?"

"Che, that's right. Don't forget that."

Racard indicated the temple with one wing and said.

"That dog would've dropped loot when he died. Master will be more

thankful if you collect the loot than if you mourn him.”

That was correct. The time Ark took to feed and raise his pets wasn't in vain.

“Well, you're not wrong. Ark might've even dropped equipment as well.”

“At any rate, let's search the ruins.”

The rehabilitation group sighed and approached the ruins of the temple. But the rehabilitation members had forgotten one important fact. 7 people had survived the battle against Magura. In other words, 7 people had defeated a level 600 elite boss. In normal circumstances, the rehabilitation members would've received a windfall of experience and levelled up like crazy. Even so, the experience hadn't been given yet.....

Tuduk, tuduk, ku ku ku ku!

It was at that moment. The crystals among the ruins started vibrating and a huge presence rose. The rehabilitation members exclaimed with surprise.

“Huk! What, what the, that guy?”

A huge bloody shape had appeared among the crystals. The presence was so torn and bloody that it was difficult to recognize.

“Don't tell me.....Magura?”

Yes, the blood smeared shape was Magura who had been buried underneath the rubble of the temple. Despite being buried, amazingly he was still alive. Magura looked at the depressed form of the rehabilitation members and laughed.

-Kukukuku, inferior humans.....this body is immortal.....this much.....

After being buried by the crystals, Magura only had 2% health left. However, the rehabilitation members only had between 1~3% health. That's because they had deliberately lowered their health in order to limit Magura's attacks. But it was a serious problem now

that Magura hadn't died.

"T-this monster!"

-This much....give me your flesh and blood....it is your fate.

Magura dragged his body and the internal organs towards the rehabilitation members. Creepy tentacles wriggled here and there between pieces of skin. Magura brandished the tentacles and was about to hit the rehabilitation members.

"That's not it. Your fate is to die."

A voice was audible from behind Magura. Both the rehabilitation group and Magura flinched and turned their heads.

"Ark!"

"Huhuhu, did you think I committed suicide or something?"

Yes, the person behind Magura was Ark. Ark had been crushed by the crystals when the temple collapsed so how was he still alive? The answer was simple. Razak's Pledge of Death. It was the reason Ark had Racard escape with the Saw Blade. It was in order to be able to use Razak's Pledge of Death. If the sword was still inside the temple then Razak would also be crushed to death and he wouldn't be able to use Pledge of Death. So he had intrusted the Saw blade to Racard and sent them out of the temple. The reason Ark had prepared for the resurrection in advance was simple.

'Magura is a level 600 elite boss. If 7~8 people kill it then they will get enormous experience. But that won't be applied if I die. In order to receive the experience after Magura dies, I need to use Pledge of Death!'

It was the reason he had deliberately ran into the temple and died from the crystals. Anyway, if he was alive when Magura died then he could get the experience. So he had resurrected after being buried by the crystals.

'I didn't receive the experience so Magura is still alive! Was his defense that high after recovering 50% of his stats?'

Anyway, he really was a tenacious monster. Well, Ark had also revived so he couldn't really say anything.

-T.....this bastard!

Magura angrily muttered and moved his tentacles. But Ark just laughed and shook his head. Magura definitely was a strong monster. Currently Ark and the rehabilitation members only had 2% health left. Fighting an opponent in that state wouldn't be easy.

'But I don't have to fight with Magura.'

"Demonic Seal!"

An intense light shot out from Ark's hands and hit Magura's body. Yes, Magura had less than 3% health so Demonic Seal could be used on him! It didn't matter if Magura had 1,000 or 10,000 health remaining. The only thing that matter was that it had less than 3% health.

-Kuak! What? This is....!

Magura yelled and shook his body as a chain of light coiled around him. But that just made the chain of light tighten even more. After a while, a black jelly like lump rolled out from Magura's mouth. It was his soul.

-You have succeeded in extracting the demonic aura. Please select a destination for the seal.

"Hyung-nims, I'll make something good so take out some equipment!"

Tazza listened to Ark and took out a piece of armour.

"Now, you're screwed! Demonic Seal!"

Ark moved the chain of light towards the armour. Then the demonic energy which had been changed to a piece of jelly shrieked.

-Kuuuack! What, what the? This power.....I can't resist.....!

"It is natural. This is the technique that Hero Maban devoted his life

developing to kill guys like you. It is impossible for you to escape once caught!”

-H-Hero Maban? T-then you are.....!

“Oh, you know about Hero Maban? Well, usually what happens now if that you begin to tell boring stories about your previous encounters with Hero Maban.....I don’t have time for that. Just hurry and be sealed!”

Ark twisted his hand and the jelly was sucked into the armour.

“That’s it. I did it!”

Ark clenched his fist and exclaimed. Suddenly the armour that had absorbed Magura began shaking. Then there was a roaring sound and it split open. A black spirit flowed from the shattered armour.

“What, what the?”

-Kukukuku.....this body’s power.....you think it can be locked up in something like that?

Ark realized what had gone wrong. When a demonic monster had their health below 3%, he could seal them in an item. But Demonic Seal had its own requirements. Demonic energy could only be sealed in items that could handle the energy. If he forcibly shoved the soul of a high ranking demonic monster into a shabby item then it wouldn’t be able to handle it. It was the reason why the durability of a cursed item was extremely weak.

Until now, his success rate for Demonic Seal had reached 80~90%. However, the failure rate would increase when the difference between the level of the item and the monster became more than 100. When it was more than 100 levels difference, the chance of Demonic Seal failing was almost 100%. In other words, he needed an item with a minimum level of 500 to be able to successfully deal the level 600 Magura. However Ark and the rehabilitation members had no equipment that was level 500. It meant he couldn’t use Demonic Seal!

‘Dammit! I failed....but it’s not too late. When the soul tries to re-join

with the main body, he'll have 2% health left. I've resurrected from the dead so I can use Descent of the Fire Draconian again.

Ark glared at Magura's main body and prepared to use Descent of the Fire Draconian. Then Magura's soul seemed to explode and began to be sucked in by the island.

"W-what?"

-Kukukuku.....I said it before.....this body is immortal.....and this is my resurrection place.....as long as I'm here I can remake my body as I want.....it'll take me hundreds of years to gather the strength to remake my body but.....I will eventually come back after hundreds of years.

"Wait! You're running away?"

-Kukukuku, hahahaha.....! I'll see you hundreds of years later.....you youngling!

The whole island seemed to shake with Magura's laughter. Magura's soul had already been integrated into the island. Ark felt like all his power had left him. They had lost thousands of soldiers coming down to this floor and Isyuram, Hae Gyeol-sa, Yapsab and Ddeok-dae were even eaten by Magura. Yet Magura didn't even give them one useable item or even experience. Now that Magura was integrated into the island, there was no way for Ark to catch him. In the end, they would have to return without any loot or experience. In a game it was just like being defeated.

"That damn dog....."

It was at that moment. Ark had been staring at the ground with annoyance when something flashed through his head.

'Wait? Magura is now a part of the island itself? In the end, it is like the earth has absorbed Magura's power. Then perhaps?'

After thinking for a bit, Ark took out a bunch of small stones from his bag. He used Excavation all over the place and buried the empty Hearthstones into the holes. That's right. That idea which came to his head was to use the Hearthstones. According to what Magura

had yelled, he had returned to the earth. And the Hearthstones had the power to absorb the surrounding power. Then wouldn't it be possible to suck Magura's soul into the Hearthstones? Furthermore, there was no level restriction on the Hearthstones. It could be used to make rare or unique hearthstones. It was a crazy idea.

'It's absurd but I have no other choice. This is the only way!'

Ark finished burying the Hearthstones and took out the Phantom Hourglass. After choosing the maximum amount of Time Acceleration, the sand quickly began to fall. After half of the sand had disappeared.

-Ack! What.....why is my power being dragged into the stone.....

The island vibrated and confusion seemed to emanate from it. It was Magura's voice. The moment he heard Magura's voice, a smug smile spread on Ark's face. Didn't Magura's confusion mean that Ark's idea was correct?

"Huhuhu, I've now got my hands on the devil so it's not possible for you to escape!"

-What the.....? This bastard, what did you do.....?

"Stop talking nonsense and enter the stone!"

-No....you can't do this.....I am immortal....wahhhhh!

Magura let out a cry of distress as the last of the sand fell down in the Phantom Hourglass.

-The number of uses is finished and the Phantom Hourglass has been broken.
--

At the same time, several message windows appeared in front of Ark.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

As expected, he received a huge amount of experience after defeating Magura. Ark gained 7 levels while the rehabilitation members gained the maximum 9 levels. Well, the experience was an inevitable result.....Ark quickly dug out the Hearthstones and checked them. He had buried around 70 Hearthstones 30 of them had shattered while the remaining 40 had turned black. When he checked the name had changed to 'Hell Stone.' When embedded on an armour or shield then it had the effect of increasing demonic resistance by 10%. But one of the Hearthstones was emanating a huge amount of energy and seemed different from the others. He grabbed the Hearthstone and the information window appeared.

-Magura's Stone (Legendary Hearthstone)

The soul of an ancient devil Magura has been sealed into this Hearthstone.

In the past, Magura was an ancient existence which caused the destruction of many species. The ancient history books called him the Guardian of Hell and his power and wickedness was compared to the strongest devils. While Magura was deprived of a lot of power when sealed, the power of this Hearthstone is incomparable to others. But since Magura's curse is also in this stone, a person with no resistance to the demonic element won't be able to use it.

<Used in socket (Weapon exclusive use): When the Hearthstone is inserted into a weapon, there is a 20% chance of manifested Magura's power and dealing 1~1,000 damage to enemies in front of you.

* Additional skill (Summon Magura): For 5 minutes you can call upon the spirit of Magura.

Magura's intense anger will display a continuous 'Taunt' effect which will lure in the enemy. Magura is so obsessed with his anger that he will attack all enemies regardless of friend or foe. But Magura's soul is deprived of his power so he will only show an ability equivalent to a level 300 elite monster. When Magura's soul is summoned, the special effect of the stone can't be used.

<Spiritual Power consumption: 500

Cool down time: 24 hours>

‘A legendary Hearthstone!’

Ark read the information window with wide eyes. It was the first time he had seen a legendary item. Well, it was a natural result since Magura was the devil who caused the Fire Draconians’ extinction. It had a 20% chance of dealing 1~1,000 extra damage! Well, there was a chance to deal 1 damage but there was also the possibility of dealing the maximum amount of damage.

And Magura’s Stone even had an additional skill attached. It was the ability to summon the sealed Magura! The power was equivalent to a level 300 elite monster. Well, Magura would attack everyone regardless of friend or foe but it would still be quite useful.

“Ark, look over there!”

Jjak-tung pointed towards the hollow shell of Magura’s body. It had started to rot as soon as Magura had been sealed. It finally completed melted and changed to a dark liquid with some items on top. It was the loot that Magura had dropped. Magura had dropped 5 items. There was one unique, one rare item and the remaining three were magic items.

-Hell’s Shoulder Blades (Unique)

Armour type: Leather Shoulder Blades

Defense: 45 (+10)

Durability: 35/70

Weight: 60

User Restriction: Level 450 and more

The Hell’s Shoulder Blades made from the interior of Magura’s body. It possesses the strength of hell. The equipment contained the spirit of hell can deal fatal damage to any enemy’s defense.

The Hell's Shoulder Blades is made from a material stronger than steel. While it has powerful defense, it can also be used as a weapon in emergency situations.

<Option: Defense +10, Strength +10, Stamina +20>

<Special Option: When the enemy attacks or you use a head-butt, the horns on the shoulder blades will pop out and you will deal 100 addition damage. There is only a 30% chance of inflicting a 'curse.'

-Eyes of Chaos (Rare)

Item type: Staff

Attack: 45~50

Durability: 56/100

Weight: 45

User Restrictions: Level 400 Warlock

A staff that Magura took from a powerful warlock a long time ago. The Eyes of Chaos is a staff inlaid with the eyes of an ancient hell monster 'Balmaradon.' When the opponent stares into it, the eyes will cause fear and hallucinations.

<Option: Intelligence +30, Mana +500, Dark magic attack +20%>

<Special Option: 10% chance of causing the 'Fear' and 'Hallucinations' state when attacking with the Eyes of Chaos>

"Isn't this awesome?"

Ark's mouth dropped as he confirmed the information on the loot. The staff was quite creepy as it was covered in black hair with a large eyeball stuck in it. The items were the 'Hell's Shoulder Blades' and 'Eyes of Chaos.'

The Hell's Shoulder Blades was a unique item with 45 defense. It seemed like a low number, but it was quite high when considering that most shoulder blades had defense below 30. In addition, it

gave 10 extra defense as an option so it was quite good for leather armour. There was also the probability of dealing additional damage or causing an abnormal state when attacking with the shoulder blades. It was very good for Ark who preferred close combat.

‘That option is 100 times better than having to keep on activating a special skill.’

But when looking at the performance, the rare Eyes of Chaos seemed better than the unique Hell’s Shoulder Blades. The option to give +20% dark magic attack power was a rare option. The warlocks would go crazy for it in the auction room.

“Can I take these leather shoulder blades?”

Ark grabbed the Hell’s Shoulder Blades and asked.

“It’s your choice.”

The rehabilitation members just nodded. Ark was hunting with the rehabilitation members so he couldn’t just take the items. But if a leather item appeared then the rehabilitation members knew to concede it to him. It was the reason why Ark liked hunting with JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. Of course, Ark still wasn’t able to monopolize all the items.

“The Eyes of Chaos and the magic items will be sold in the auction room and the profits divided.”

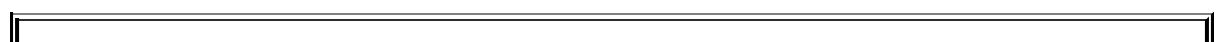
That was how he decided to distribute the loot. So Ark packed all the loot into his bag.

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Then Ark felt Radun’s tail touch his leg. When he looked down, there was a book underneath a crystal. He had discovered the item and tried to swallow it and failed, so Radun had asked for help from Ark.

“A book? Wait? Come to think of it.....”

Ark was reminded of something and quickly picked up the book. Once again an information window appeared.



-Immortal Book (Special)

An ancient book that had been housed in the shrine of the Fire Draconians. But Magura wanted the secret to immortality and ended up stealing the book from Dragonian. However, so far no one had discovered the secret of the Immortal Book. According to legend, only those who don't desire immortality will be allowed to access the book.

"This is the Immortal Book that Lumines mentioned."

Ark also wandered about the contents of the book which contained the secret to eternal life. But like the information window said, the book was sealed and he couldn't open it.

"Hmm, what do I do with this? Lumines has already died so I probably won't receive anything but the book as compensation. Well, I got the book through an important quest so I will probably be able to use it somewhere."

Ark put the book away. There was a ringing sound and the quest information window appeared.

-The Lore quest <Devil Magura> has been completed.

You have gained ☆ 3 in the character information window. ☆ is a reward provided to players who had achieved a great historical achievement which can influence New World.

The player who receives a ☆ would become a legend in that area. In addition, the accumulation of a certain number of ☆'s would receive a chance to gain a very special reward.

Currently owned ☆: (10)

After the information window appeared. Ark's head was enveloped in a bright light which shot towards the sky. The light exploded and dispersed, forming 10 stars. It was the stars awarded by the lore quest. The stars revolved around Ark's head before they suddenly disappeared. After that the quest information window was updated.

-Witness the Legend

10 ☆'s are only conferred upon a hero who has changed history through the Lore quests.

You have uncovered ancient history that ordinary people will never know or understand. However, a historian from a great prophet clan in ancient times knows about your work. According to the ancient prophecy, a brave warrior will be selected to gain the power to fight against an evil power.

<Difficulty: –

Quest Restriction: 10 ☆'s acquired>

* This quest can only be performed once.

“Eh? Quest?”

Ark's eyes popped out the information window. In fact, Ark hadn't really paid attention to the stars received after completing a lore quest. He had simply regarded it as a medal of merit. But he never imagined he would get a quest from it. After reading the contents, didn't it seem like it would give enormous compensation? Ark quickly opened his mouth after receiving the quest. The red dot pointed towards an area near the border of the Sinus Principality.

‘I can't possibly postpone this quest.’

Ark had determined his next destination. It was to finally collect the reward for his stars. Anyway, he had managed to 100% clear the dungeon after a fortnight. Now he just had to worry about getting back from the 60th floor.

Emergency Situation

“Hah, that was a really eventful adventure.”

Hyun-woo muttered as he stretched out on a bus seat. Capturing the secret dungeon was really no joke. After a fortnight of repeated fierce battles, he had defeated Magura and finally cleared the secret dungeon. Then he had to climb back all the way from the 60th floor to the ground floor. Fortunately there weren't that many monsters in the Abyss after the destruction of the temple so it was easier to climb back up. Luckily there weren't any serious situation in the upper levels of the secret dungeon. Four days after clearing the dungeon, he finally managed to return to the castle. And all the people who participated in the dungeon capture instantly disconnected. They had no intention of connecting to New World for the next two days.....

It was reasonable. They had played the game around the clock with barely any sleep and only eating rice. Hyun-woo had mastered these abilities since the start of playing New World. Nevertheless, he also felt extremely tired after returning to the castle from the secret dungeon. The original goal had been training and raised his troops' levels, but then it became a fierce battle for survival. He also felt like disconnecting like the coalition members.

“But.....”

He had to endure it for a bit. This time the dungeon was even difficult for Ark. But he had obtained so much benefits that the suffering was worth it. As the leader of hundreds of troops, he had received 20~30% more experience than the coalition members. He had gained an average of 2 levels a day. When he arrived at the 60th floor, he had gained 34 levels. After defeating Magura, that increased by a further 7 levels. That meant he raised his level by 41 in a fortnight. In addition, he had gained two more levels while returning to the castle. When he finally arrived at the castle, he was level 426! But was that all? He also obtained a Legendary

Hearthstone and unique shoulder blades. That was worth not sleeping for 18 days. And there was an additional unexpected benefit from clearing the dungeon.

There had been one doubtful part while Hyun-woo had been managing Silvana. Silvana was an ideal territory with a lake, river and fertile lands. It was the most suitable place to develop commerce and industry. If he just invested a little bit then it would develop faster than other territories. But compared to that, agriculture development wasn't as good. The crops harvested from Silvana were only 60% of what other territories produced. After clearing the secret dungeon, he confirmed that the harvest rate had quickly increased.

"In fact, Silvana's soil quality isn't that good. In the words of an expert, the microorganisms in the earth affect the soil and Silvana has quite a few mutated microorganisms. But a few days ago, the microorganisms in the farmland changed by 180 degrees. If this continues then we can expect a lot of profit from the next harvest."

Berami explained after Hyun-woo asked him. After hearing Berami's words, Hyun-woo understood the situation. The farmland wasn't that fertile because of the secret dungeon underneath Silvana.....no, to be accurate it was because of Magura. Magura was a strong devil who completely changed the Abyss thanks to his influence. The farmlands were also affected by that influence so the crops couldn't grow properly.

'But after I defeated Magura, the Hell door was sealed and his influence disappeared. Thanks to that, Silvana's impoverished farmlands had their power restored!'

If the present state was maintained then Silvana's agriculture income would improve by 30%. That meant that Silvana's finances would improve. But the land change didn't just affect the income.

'New World is a game set in medieval times so the NPCs require lots of things to survive. If the land becomes more fertile.....'

It would also have a huge impact on the value and fame of the estate.

‘If the value keeps on steadily increasing like this then the territory will be promoted to B rank in no time! When the present state is maintained, it is possible to reduce the time for promotion by half!’

Moreover, the secret dungeon was now just a secret dungeon. The elite monsters would gradually resurrect over time. In other words, he could have Dark Eden continuously invade the dungeon in order to train and obtain steady loot.

‘Now I don’t have to hunt in the dungeon so seriously. They can hunt comfortably in the underground labyrinth to raise their levels. If I send 100~200 users together than the NPCs can also safely raise their level.’

After the weary coalition members returned, Hyun-woo intended to send them in with the NPCs to use the dungeon as a training centre. The only reason he had the NPCs retreat was thanks to the distortion of the Abyss thanks to the Asmodian influence. There was no worry about that anymore. But Hyun-woo had other things to do.

‘Now, my remaining work.....I’ve completed the <Devil Magura> quest so now I need to finish the <Witness the Legend> quest. There’s 12 days left until the next siege. That’s plenty of time to go to the Sinus Principality.’

<Witness the Legend> was a compensation quest. There was no reason for him to wait to complete it. He was also really interested in what the compensation would be. Hyun-woo would fly towards the Sinus Principality as soon as he connected to the game today. But he had a phone call moments before he was about to enter the unit.

“There is an important matter so please visit the headquarters.”

He heard Ho Myung-hwan’s desperate voice as soon as he picked up the receiver.

“Why is Global Exos calling me in the morning?”

He had just been about to start the game so it didn’t feel good to be interrupted. But it couldn’t be helped since Hyun-woo received a salary from Global Exos every month. If his employer told him to go to headquarters then what could he do? While thinking this, Hyun-

woo's bus arrived at his destination. It had been 2 years since he first visited Global Exos for the interview. Back then he put on clothes which didn't match and looked around like a village chicken but it was different now. He had bet the candidates with a good academic background and became a rank 'O' candidate, one of the 'Special Management Target.' However, Hyun-woo hesitated at the entrance.

'If I see her face then what should I say?'

Hyun-woo was hesitant because of Lariette, or Kang Mi-su. Kang Mi-su worked at the reception desk in Global Exos. If he entered the building then he would inevitably have to encounter her. The problem was the recent relationship between Hyun-woo and Kang Mi-su.

'It's been a fortnight since we've had any contact.'

In fact, Hyun-woo tried to keep in contact with Kang Mi-su once or twice a week. But during the past fortnight, he hadn't made any contact or received any phone calls. Not just because he had been too busy capturing the secret dungeon but also because Lariette and Roco had a conversation during the siege that he didn't know the contents of.

'I don't know what they talked about but Kang Mi-su's expression was strange. So it is a little difficult trying to contact her.....'

Hyun-woo had recently been thinking that he needed to make clear his relationship with Kang Mi-su. He also had to think about Jung Hye-sun. Hyun-woo had known Jung Hye-sun's heart for a long time. But he didn't have a clear answer so he had been cowardly avoiding answering her feelings. And he couldn't give Jung Hye-sun a definite answer before he talked with Kang Mi-su. Thus it was necessary to talk to both of them.

'But to see her face so suddenly.....'

Hyun-woo sighed and just stood there. On the other hand, he thought that he was being slightly dramatic.

'Yes, what's the problem? I'm friends with Mi-su ssi now. I can just say hi if I see her so there's no need to think about it seriously.'

Hyun-woo let out a large breath and opened the door. Then he swallowed as the reception desk caught his eye. However, he was worried for nothing because Kang Mi-su wasn't at the desk. Then Hyun-woo remembered that Kang Mi-su only worked afternoons.

"What? Didn't I just worry for nothing?"

Hyun-woo sighed and muttered. The staff at the reception desk sent him a strange look because of his strange behaviour as Hyun-woo approached the desk.

"How can I help you?"

"Huh? Oh, someone called Ho Myung-hwan asked me to come."

"Can I have your name?"

"I am Kim Hyun-woo."

The staff member contacted the Planning Department before smiling and said.

"Take the elevator to the 5th floor and sit in the resting room."

"Thank you."

Hyun-woo bowed and headed to the 5th floor. The atmosphere on the 5th floor when he arrived was somewhat strange. There were continuous ringing from the phones and the staff were running around with papers.

'Is the office of a big business always so crazy?'

Well, Hyun-woo hadn't worked in any big business so he didn't know if it was normal or not. While the staff were busy running around, he sat down by himself in a large waiting room and started to feel uncomfortable.

'What the? If they're so busy then why did that person call me here?'

Hyun-woo looked around uncomfortably.

"Ark-nim, have you been waiting long?"

Ho Myung-hwan called out as he walked down the hallway. Hyun-woo felt uncomfortable so he spoke in a curt voice.

“Yes, I’ve waited for a long time.”

“Huh? Ah, yes.....I’m sorry. We’ve been a little busy.”

“Shouldn’t you have considered that before making me take two buses?”

“Hahaha, that is.....”

Ho Myung-hwan laughed awkwardly.

“Forget it. Why did you call me here?”

“Yes, I’ll tell you the details in the meeting room.”

Ho Myung-hwan guided Hyun-woo to a meeting room. Hyun-woo looked around the Planning Department as he was ushered inside the meeting room.

“Everyone seems very busy. Is it always like this?”

“That.....”

Ho Myung-hwan scratched his head and sighed. Ho Myung-hwan also had dark circles under his eyes like someone who hadn’t had enough sleep in days. Ho Myung-hwan loosened his tie and said.

“Over the past few days, the Planning Department.....no, Global Exos has been in an emergency situation.”

“Emergency? Why?”

Ho Myung-hwan looked astonished at Hyun-woo’s question.

“Why? Ark-nim doesn’t use the internet?”

“Internet? What does that have to do with it?”

“Ha, where have you been for the past few days?”

It had been more than a fortnight since he entered seclusion. He had been killing monsters inside the secluded area. It had been 18 days

since he entered the secret dungeon and he had only crept out of seclusion at dawn today. The whole time he had been capturing the dungeon, he had barely eaten or slept and just stayed inside the dark cave. So he hadn't even checked the internet or even the TV. Ho Myung-hwan sent him a pale look at that explanation.

"But didn't you see the whole system message which appeared in New World a few days ago?"

"Whole system message? Was it about the episode update?"

Hyun-woo remembered something from a few days ago. He didn't have any concept of time before there was no sunlight in the secret dungeon, but it had occurred when Ark was capturing the 57th floor. He had been in the midst of fighting the monsters when a message window stating <Episode V: Hidden Legend> appeared in front of him. And less than 10 minutes afterwards, another message window stating <Episode VII: The Complete Continent>. Hyun-woo looked at the messages doubtfully. Hyun-woo remembered that the <Episode III: Emergence of a New Continent> appeared when Seutandal rose. Yet two messages <Episode V: Hidden Legend> and <Episode VII: The Complete Continent> had appeared within 10 minutes of each other. So Hyun-woo had thought the message was because of a system error and ignored it.

"Now you know. That is the reason why the Planning Department and PR Department has been so busy. There have been questions and protests on the home page, various forums and even over the phone."

"Then it wasn't a system problem?"

"It would've been great if that was the case."

Ho Myung-hwan sighed and shook his head.

"That problem is why we called Ark-nim here."

"Huh? I don't understand at all. What does this have to do with me?"

Why would they consult with Hyun-woo about a system problem? Did they think he was a genius programmer or something?

Hyun-woo made a confused expression and Ho Myung-hwan took out a cigarette and said.

“I’ll tell you this first. Everything that we discuss from now on has to be a secret. You can’t talk about it anywhere else. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“Yes, that is.....”

“Based on our conclusions, I believe the message isn’t a system error.”

“It’s not an error? But.....”

“Wait a moment. I know what you’re going to say. Of course it isn’t normal for two episodes to update at the same time and to skip an episode. Yes, that’s right. The current system of New World isn’t normal.”

“It’s not an error but the system isn’t normal?”

What did they call him so early in the morning for? He wanted to have an angry tantrum but it seemed like they weren’t joking with him based on Ho Myung-hwan’s expression.

“I know it is difficult to understand. But my words are correct. This isn’t a normal error. If it a little difficult but I’ll try to explain. Two continents actually appeared at the same time the episodes were activated. It had been a while since a new episode occurred.”

“Huh? Then the episodes randomly occurred? No that’s not right. The episodes occur when certain conditions are met. It is common for these conditions to be difficult, for example no one can enter the area, so there is a problem with the restrictions?”

“That’s right. It’s why I said it’s not an error but it also isn’t normal.”

Ho Myung-hwan replied.

“But that’s just the start of the emergency situation.”

“The start?”

“I can’t explain in detail but things have started running out of control

ever since the new episodes started. If things progress like this then there is no guarantee a new episode won't be triggered again. And all the data related to the episodes is focused on the Sinus Principality in the northeast of the continent."

Ho Myung-hwan entered recall mode as he said this.

Global Exos had been flipped upside down four days ago. The computers in headquarters being hacked was just a precursor to <Episode V: Hidden Legend> and <Episode VII: The Complete Continent>. While New World's system could handle one episode update, the activation of 2 had caused the system to overload and the other computers to be hacked. But that disturbance was just the beginning of an incident which got bigger.

It wasn't possible for an episode update to run out of control like that. But since the worst situation the programmer Kim Gwon-tae had talked about, data flowing back into the gamers' brains, the Planning Department could breathe a sigh of relief. However, confusion spread over Kim Gwon-tae's face again within minutes.

"W-wait a minute. There's something wrong. The hacking of the computers in headquarters has stopped but the system calculations are still running. The calculations are still in progress even when an A ranked seal has been loosened."

"What are you saying? There are more operations continuing?"

"I don't know. Just....."

"Just?"

"The data is concentrated on the Sinus Principality."

Kim Gwon-tae had been working on the computer for 10 minutes and that was the only information he found out. But Kim Gwon-tae's efforts were in vain as the Planning Department was able to identify that in real time. Shortly after the episodes were triggered, the monitors of the Planning Department showed a huge dark energy centred on the Sinus Principality and identified monsters raiding NPC

villages. While it wasn't as serious as the Sinius Principality, there were also some reports of unidentified monsters in the Schudenberg Kingdom. It was these monsters and not the episodes update that caused users to complain and make inquiries on the website and through the telephone.

"What on earth? What is happening?"

Ha Myung-woo exclaimed loudly. But nobody in the Planning Department could answer Ha Myung-woo's question. They also couldn't understand or guess what was happening.

"Presently everything is unclear. Just....."

Kim Gwon-tae thought for a bit before replying.

"This situation must be related to the thing we're looking for."

"What we're looking for? Perhaps.....?"

"Yes, the master code."

Ha Myung-woo flinched at Kim Gwon-tae's words.

"Did someone get their hands on the master code? Did someone get their hands on the master code and is discriminately destroying the system?"

"No, that isn't the case."

Kim Gwon-tae shook his head and explained.

"If someone got their hands on the master code then they would've contacted out company first. Anyone with even a little bit of brains would realize the value of the master code."

"But what if the master code is in the hands of a child who doesn't know anything?"

"It isn't that easy to find the master code easy and it also isn't easy knowing how to manipulate it. The series of events might seem completely random but it has its own rules. Look at the hidden continents that just appeared."

“What is it then?”

“Park Woo-seong hid the master code so it must be protected by several layers of protections. This is just an idea.....but my guess is that someone is trying to destroy the shields around the master code. It is possible that these series of events will spread as more shields are unlocked. This is what I’ve grasped from the data. If the master code which controls all the systems is triggered then it wouldn’t be like this.”

“Someone is trying to forcibly access the master code?”

Ha Myung-woo’s expression became even more serious at Kim Gwon-tae’s explanation.

“Until now we haven’t even defined what the master code is. But if someone is trying to approach the master code then they must know something about the master code.”

“.....It is like that.”

“They will forcibly penetrate the shields until they get their hands on the master code. That person must have considerable knowledge and the power to act on it. ”

“That’s right. The episodes running out of control isn’t something to do with the operating data. Yet the master code didn’t interfere. So someone must’ve met the criteria to trigger the episode. Furthermore, two was triggered at once so there must be two users involved. And they have the same purpose.”

“I have to ask. Is there any chance that it is just a coincidence?”

“The chances are 1/10 million.”

“.....Then there is only one answer.”

Ha Myung-woo bit his lip and muttered. If there was that kind of knowledge and organizational skills then a group had to be involved. The conclusion he came to was that a rival company had obtained information about the master code and was trying to obtain it.

‘If they get their hands on the master code.....’

Global Exos would be destroyed in a day. Anyone who got their hands on the master code was the god of New World. What would they do if they could access all the systems? If they wanted, they could delete all the users’ information or reset the system to the beginning. Only the company who made the game would have the master code. If their competitors found the master code then they could claim legal rights. But what if the competitor made the data flow backwards into the users’ brains to cause brain death? The problem wouldn’t be solved by discontinuing New World. The thought made cold sweat drip down Ha Myung-woo’s back.

“I can’t allow the master code to go somewhere else!”

Ha Myung-woo exclaimed and instantly called for a meeting. Fortunately, nobody had obtained the master code yet. In addition, the Planning Department could guess the location of the master code thanks to this incident. It was highly likely that the master code was located in the Sinus Principality. The problem was how to find the master code from there.

‘Dammit, in this situation I might need to arrange an army in New World.....’

He hadn’t expected this situation. But Ha Myung-woo couldn’t just throw up his hands and give up. It was different from an army but he had his own secret organization. It was the 2,000 candidates who were top-class in New World. He could rally the candidates to investigate the Sinus Principality and the shields protecting the master code.

“Call the candidates immediately! Focus their attention on the Sinus Principality!”

.....So Hyun-woo was summoned to Global Exos through such a process. Of course, the company couldn’t confess the real situation about the master code to the candidates. They had to hide the information while moving the candidates as they wanted. That was

the basic policy of the Planning Department. After recalling all that had happened, Ho Myung-hwan started to talk again.

“So we can’t assume that this is an error but it might be because of a bug. It seems like some users are deliberately exploiting this bug to cause problems.”

“Then shouldn’t you investigate the users’ account information and take action?”

Hyun-woo couldn’t understand what the problem was. In fact, most online games had security programs to hunt down users abusing bugs and track their accounts. This was also clearly stated in the terms and conditions for New World. Ho Myung-hwan quickly misdirected him.

“T-that is.....I can’t go into detail about some of our internal problems. Anyway, I called Ark-nim because I wanted to consult about the problem.”

“You wanted to consult with me about the problem?”

“Because it can only be solved by users.”

“Huh?”

“I told you, this is because of a bug in the game. The problem is that it isn’t a common bug. To be exact, I’m referring to ‘Code Black items.’

“Code black items? W-what is that?”

“You might know this already but designing and creating a game isn’t easy work. Thousands of experts and many trial and errors were required over many years before the game was born. And there had been dozens of beta versions. During the process of testing the beta versions, many items had been disposed of because of a balance problem. The code black items are those that have been discarded during the testing process.”

This was the excuse that Ha Myung-woo had come up with. Despite the situation, they couldn’t possibly give the candidates’ information

about the master code. But they couldn't just tell the candidates to go somewhere without giving any information. They also had to give a light explanation or else the candidates might not be able to solve it. So they had come up with the code black items.

"Currently the programmers have searched the data and confirmed that the code black items hadn't been deleted. But thousands of items were discarded in the beta versions so there is no guarantee that we can find all the items in a few months."

"So there are several thousand code black items in New World....."

"Yes, but we've managed to narrow down the search criteria. In order to quickly solve the problem, the Planning Department has decided to send several candidates to the Sinus Principality to gather information. And the same information is been delivered to all the candidates. But the detailed information is only told to special management targets like Ark-nim."

"I just need to check the information of the code black items?"

"No, you will have to pick up that item."

"Why don't you just dispose of it after receiving confirmation?"

"That's not possible. In this situation, the user didn't get the item through normal gameplay but through something like jacking. So it is different from a users' private property. Even if it is obtained in the normal way, it is still an illegal item. So the company can delete it no matter what. But if the user ends up being deleted....."

This wasn't really a problem. But Ho Myung-hwan just coughed and continued talking with a crafty look.

"Well, it's hard to say anything more because of my position. I think that you already understand the situation. I hope the candidates will realize the urgency of this situation and agree to help solve the situation."

There was a variety of methods used to get the candidates to agree. Ho Myung-hwan looked at Hyun-woo with an expression that seemed to say 'Please? Won't you help?' But Hyun-woo's reaction

was just ‘Ah, really?’ In fact, he didn’t have any reason to agree. Hyun-woo had started playing New World in order to get a job at Global Exos. But that was back in the days when he was cold and hungry. Of course, he still wasn’t rich but he had invested 150,000 into the triangular trade. As the chairman of that business, he could earn tens of thousands of gold in a month. If the business was successful then his dream of being a game tycoon was a dream anymore. So why did he have to worry about a job with an annual salary smaller annual salary? No, he would rather pay more attention to his business than to do a job like this.

‘I have to remain a candidate to receive the monthly salary. But I can’t pretend to do as he asked because Ho Myung-hwan is watching my videos.’

Anyway, there was no reason for Hyun-woo to accept. But Ho Myung-hwan didn’t even flinch at his expression.

“If the situation becomes even worst because of the black code items then we might even have to suspend service.”

“Hik! W-what?”

“Of course, that’s just the worst case situation. That is why we have to request this from the candidates.”

While Hyun-woo took it seriously, in fact it was just a bluff. Millions of users played the game so how could they suspend it for a few months? If that happened then Global Exos would have to pay damage compensation and would suffer astronomical losses. It wasn’t just that. Their external reliability would fall, causing their stocks to plunge. If that happened to a large company then it would have serious ripple effects on the economy. If the person listening was calm then they would realize it wasn’t such an easy thing. However, Hyun-woo’s heart wasn’t calm so he couldn’t question it closely. He had finally gathered all the funds and started his business. Hyun-woo had poured a lot of money into it. But if the game service stopped for several months then Hyun-woo wouldn’t see a single penny. He also wouldn’t be able to obtain money to pay for the costs of living if he couldn’t play the game. So Hyun-woo started to think that this problem also involved him.

‘Now he understands the situation.’

When Hyun-woo’s face stiffened, Ho Myung-hwan realized that he had accepted the situation and smiled before speaking.

“Global Exos is making a collective effort to make sure that situation doesn’t occur. But the solution absolutely requires the help of Ark-nim and the other candidates. We’ll also help so Ark-nim should try your best.”

Hyun-woo exited the meeting room with complex thoughts. He also had some doubts. He understood Ho Myung-hwan’s words. But he wasn’t completely convinced. Global Exos was a large business known worldwide. Even if they couldn’t control what happened in the game, why did they have to ask for help from the candidates? In addition, was it so bad that they would have to suspend service? When considering that Global Exos would receive tremendous damage if service was suspended, it was difficult to completely accept the talk. Ho Myung-hwan said it was a normal item so the game publishers couldn’t get involved. But wasn’t that nonsense in a situation where the company could lose billions of won? Global Exos wouldn’t be that law abiding.

‘It is clearly a situation that can’t be told outside the company.’

.....It was natural to reach this conclusion. But there was a problem more important to Hyun-woo. The most worrisome thing was that New World might be temporarily suspended.

‘I can earn hundreds of thousands of gold in a few months.’

In other words, Hyun-woo would lose that much gold during those few months of suspension. Hyun-woo had invested everything into the business. That’s because he thought he would get back the profit after the triangular trade route was established. But that money was tied to New World so if service was suspended then he wouldn’t even get living expenses. And if such a situation persisted for a few months.....

‘It will become quite difficult. But.....’

Hyun-woo had thought it was serious when he was called by Ho Myung-hwan. He had entered the meeting room calmly but it had progressed in a direction he hadn't expected. Global Exos said that if they couldn't solve the problem then they would even discontinue service.

'And they want me to go to the Sinius Principality.'

In fact, Ark already intended to go to the Sinius Principality because of the <Witness the Legend> quest. Now Hyun-woo had another purpose after hearing Ho Myung-hwan's words.

'This situation is because of the black code items. These items have the power to disrupt the balance of New World. I don't know what type of item it is and what power it has, but I need to figure out the information!'

This was another reason to fly to the Sinius Principality. If candidates other than Hyun-woo headed to the Sinius Principality then they might be able to solve the problem. If the black code items could affect the balance of the continent then couldn't he get a lot of money for the information? Then it was better to get his hands on the black code items.

'From their words, the company can't forcibly take away the black code items. That means I can bargain with the company. I don't care about the entrance examination anymore so I can extort money from them for the information.'

The gap between the company and Hyun-woo was growing increasingly larger. Anyway, Hyun-woo headed down to the 1st floor in a daze. When he first arrived at the building, his head had been full of Kang Mi-su. Now all he could think about was the previous discussion. He was only thinking about how to make money from the situation that he forgot about Kang Mi-su. Hyun-woo was just thinking to himself as he crossed the lobby. Then he heard someone yelling as he passed in front of the desk.

"It is a request!"

"No.....I mean.....it is difficult....."

‘Huh? This voice is Kang Mi-su’s?’

Hyun-woo stopped and turned towards the voices. As expected, the person at the desk was Kang Mi-su. And the one making a loud noise was a man in his twenties. The man was squeezing his head and kept on sighing.

‘What’s going on?’

Hyun-woo couldn’t intrude recklessly so he stopped and observed the situation. Then the man made a pleading expression and tried to ask Kang Mi-su again.

“It’s a request. Just tell me the telephone number. That will do.”

“I’ve already told you. Do I have to say it again? I don’t know information about specific users and even I did, it isn’t possible for me to tell someone else.”

“I understand. I really do. But it is an emergency. If I don’t have that information then millions, no several hundred million won would fly away.”

“I’m really sorry. I can’t help you.”

Kang Mi-su sighed and shook her head. Hyun-woo was able to guess the general situation from listening.

‘What the? Why is he creating a disturbance to ask for another user’s information?’

It was natural for the game publisher not to hand out information about their users. If someone had a grudge in the game then they were so made that they would do something in reality. That was the sort of problems that would occur if the company freely gave out the users’ information. Hyun-woo had experienced this with Andel.

‘I don’t know what’s happening but clearly it isn’t the usual problem. Well, it is unrelated to me and I shouldn’t try to talk to Kang Mi-su with this atmosphere.’

Hyun-woo once again delayed the chance to talk to her. Suddenly the man started to cry and begged.

“I really might die if I don’t get my hands on that person. Please, just that one person. I went to the broadcasting station for that person’s number and was kicked out. This is the only place left.....eh? W-wait?”

The man rubbed his eyes with his sleeves and opened it widely.

“I thought you looked vaguely familiar.....are you Lariette-nim?”

“Huh? You know me?”

“It really is you? No, there’s no doubt!”

The man grabbed Kang Mi-su’s hands and shouted.

“It’s me. I’m Sid. You saw me not long ago in Silvana.”

“S-Sid? The hobbit merchant Sid?”

“Yes, I am that small, cute hobbit Sid!”

Both Hyun-woo and Kang Mi-su’s opened widely. This man was really Sid?

‘Sid? That man is Sid?’

Hyun-woo stared at Sid’s face. Sid spoke with an urgent voice.

“Ah, I can’t believe I met Lariette-nim in a place like this. Thank god! Lariette-nim is familiar with Ark-nim so you can give me his phone number.”

“Ark-nim?”

“Yes, does Lariette-nim know? Ark started the triangular trade not long ago. However the Gold Dream that I left with has flown away! I need to quickly tell Ark-nim! Please give me Ark-nim’s number! I gave my phone number to Ark-nim but I don’t know his.”

“Gold Dream has flown away? What does that mean.....?”

Lariette asked with confusion.

“Wait, explain what you said just now!”

A loud shout rang out across the lobby. Kang Mi-su and the man turned around with surprise and saw Hyun-woo.

“.....Ark-nim?”

“Huck! He is Ark-nim?”

Sid flinched and braced himself. After nodding towards Kang Mi-su in greeting, Hyun-woo grabbed Sid’s shoulder tightly and said.

“Yes, I am Ark-nim. What did you say? What happened to Gold Dream?”

Sid stared blankly at Ark’s face. Then tears tripped down his face again and he cried out.

“Ark-nim.....help me!

Sea Monster Extermination

“I’m really going crazy.”

A sigh naturally flowed out. The reason for Ark’s distress was Sid’s SOS.

“What? You dare say that now?”

Some time ago Ark’s voice had rattled through the lobby of Global Exos. He couldn’t help yelling.

“H-hik! L-Lariette-nim!”

Sid stuttered with panic and hid behind Lariette. The people in the lobby sent them looks as they wondered what was happening. But Ark didn’t see the eyes of those people. The news that Sid told him was too shocking. It was about the disappearance of Ark’s Gold Dream. Two days ago, he had completed his successful first deal in Seutandal and was heading back to Rueben Harbour when it had been eaten by an unidentified sea monster. All of Ark’s hopes and dreams were placed on Gold Dream.

Naturally he bought the fastest ships, and coating the hull with various types of magic protections in order to ensure safe and quick trade. All those expenses cost at least 40,000 gold. It was also loaded with tens of millions of gold worth of trade products from Seutandal. All that had become a meal for a sea monster. The news Ark had heard out of nowhere made no sense. Sid trembled from behind Lariette who looked puzzled but said.

“Calm down. It is not Sid-nim’s fault.”

“Yes, but.....”

Ark tried to say something else with an angry expression but then just sighed and nodded. That’s right. Like Lariette said, he couldn’t blame Sid. He had been sailing with no problems when a monster

appeared and swallowed the ship. Although Sid knew that monsters appeared in that area, until now he had never had of monsters showing up on that route. So Sid couldn't be blamed for the problem.

'There's no time to wonder about whose fault it is right now.'

Wasn't there a small bit of luck? Fortunately, there was still some time before Ark's Gold Dream would be finished. According to Sid, the monster was so huge that it swallowed Gold Dream in one bite. Therefore it was likely that Gold Dream had arrived in the monster's stomach in a perfect state. He had invested a lot of money on the magic coating so it should survive for a while in the stomach.

'In this situation, there is still a chance to take back Gold Dream!'

Of course, there was a limit to how long the magic coating could last in the monster's stomach. If Gold Dream was digested then that was 40,000 gold flying away. Sid had managed to survive but he had no method to contact Ark so he had to go all the way to Global Exos.

"I have to find it before my dream becomes that monster's excrements!"

He didn't pay any attention to Sid and Lariette anymore. Ark returned to his house immediately and entered the unit. While the exact identity was unknown, the sea monster that swallowed Gold Dream was huge. The place was also the middle of the ocean. No matter how urgent it was, how could he deal with it after swimming there? Ark needed to make his own preparations before facing the opponent. The moment he heard sea monster, the Seutandal navy came to mind.

The Seutandal navy had a lot of experience fighting against pirates. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were the leaders of the autonomous group so he could ask them for help. So Ark went to Isabel and asked for the help of the Seutandal navy. But a problem he hadn't thought about occurred. The water that the sea monster appeared around was in Schudenberg. If the Seutandal navy entered those waters then a serious diplomatic problem could develop. So

he flew to Reuben port and asked for a direct conversation with the Lord to solve the problem. Since he was also a nobleman, he was able to meet with the Lord straight away. But.....

“I’ve heard about Sir Ark’s reputation. Although I manage areas concerning the sea, I am really sorry. I would like to help you. But I’m not able to judge your request. The only person who can agree to allow foreign troops in these waters is His Majesty the King.”

“Then could you ask the King for me?”

“Of course I can do that. But it is better not to expect too much. These days the political situation both domestically and abroad isn’t very calm. It would be difficult to accept foreign troops in territorial waters in this situation. Even if it is accepted, it has to be decided at a meeting between aristocrats and could take more than a week.”

Ark instantly became gloomy after hearing Reuben’s answer. No matter how much magic coating he placed on Gold Dream, it was impossible to endure the monster’s stomach for more than one week. It had already been two days in reality so didn’t he only have a few days left? Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the result would be positive. Ark was worried for a while before he made a suggestion.

“Then what about the troops from Reuben? As the Lord in charge of nearby waters, wouldn’t you also have a navy? The sea monster is within a dozen nautical miles (1,852 metres) of Reuben so there is no guarantee that it won’t attack the harbour.”

“Of course we will fight if that happens. But.....”

The Lord of Reuben placed a weary finger on his forehead and replied.

“Based on the news, this problem isn’t just occurring at sea. After the black obelisks appeared on the continent, unidentified monsters have been infested Schudenberg. A lot of villages and people have received serious damage. We’ve stopped the damage from sea monsters for the moment but that isn’t the case on the land. So most of the Reuben troops have been dispatched to the attacked

villages.”

The black obelisks and unidentified monsters that the Reuben Lord talked about had also been mentioned by Ho Myung-hwan. Once again he realized that the bug had a huge impact on New World. Anyway, the continent being overturned wasn't important to him at the moment. The most important thing for Ark was to recover his Gold Dream before it was too late.

“Do I have no choice but to let go?”

Ark thought with despair as he exited the Lord's castle.

-Ark, how was it? Is it done?

He had arrived at Reuben with Isyuram, and he received a whisper from him after Isyuram finished disposing of the japtem from the secret dungeon at the merchant's guild.

-No. There's been a little problem.

-Really? I thought so. Based on what I heard from the merchant's guild, the continent isn't ordinary these days. I thought it wouldn't be easy to allow the Seutandal navy into these waters or to borrow troops from the harbour. But there's no need to do that.

-Huh? There's no need?

-It is difficult to describe so just come to the merchant's guild for the moment.

Ark listened to Isyuram's words and visited the merchant's guild. After Seutandal rose, Reuben became the centre of trade so there was an especially large merchant's guild. The building of the merchant's guild was several times bigger than the warrior's guild and the Magic Institute next to it. But when he arrived at the merchant's guild, there were strangely a lot of warriors and magicians gathered in front of the building like a cloud.

“Ark, you came?”

Isyuram pushed through the crowd and waved his hand.

“Yes, but why are there so many people? And what do you mean by there is no need to request help from the navy?”

“If you look at that then you’ll understand.”

Isyuram pointed towards a bulletin board in front of the merchant’s guild. It was the bulletin board the merchant’s guild used to give information about the current prices of surrounding areas. But now a completely different type of notice was stuck on it.

-Commission to investigate the disappearance in the Uldun Mountain Range.

Two days ago, there was a report that a guild leader Berdin disappeared in the Uldun Mountain Range. Based on the report of the inspector dispatched to the mountain, several unidentified monsters had appeared and seem to be raiding several places. Therefore the merchant’s guild Midus is hiring mercenaries to investigate this incident.

* Hunters with tracking and detection skills as well as thieves have top priority.

Difficulty: ???

Number of Personnel to be Recruited: 60 people (Currently 52 applicants)

Pay: 30 gold (Successfully kill the boss +10 gold)

-Commission to investigate the transportation fleet that disappeared.

Yesterday a transportation fleet from the Midus guild left Bristania only to disappear at 85 degrees latitude in the north. Currently no information related to the disappearance of the fleet has been confirmed. The merchant’s guild determined that it is likely seized by pirates. So headquarters is organizing an armed fleet to investigate the disappearance and wipe out the pirates if necessary. Recruiting warriors to help the merchant’s guild.

* Seamanship or the knowledge to steer ships is a plus.

Difficulty: ???

Number of Personnel to be Recruited: 800 (Currently 785 applicants)

Pay: 40 gold (Success +15 gold)

‘I see!’

Ark’s eyes flashed as he confirmed the mercenary recruitment. Ark had overlooked an important part of the confusion caused by unidentified monsters suddenly appearing throughout Schudenberg and around Reuben. The one who would receive the most damage was the merchant’s guild that operated in various places on the continent. The surprise attack from monsters came out of nowhere so most villages only had the minimum defences. And the fleets also had no protection. Thanks to the appearance of the monsters, various fleets and carriages related to the merchant’s guild disappeared. Normally the Lords of the related territory would’ve been petitioned and they would’ve taken care of it. But currently the Lord were preoccupied with the subjugation the monsters attacking the villages. The merchant’s guild would lose a lot of money so they hired mercenaries to solve the case. And Ark noticed the <Commission to investigate the transportation fleet that disappeared> on the bulletin board.

‘85 degrees latitude to the north is near the place where the sea monster attacked Sid!’

The merchant’s guild seemed to think they lost contact with the transportation fleet because of pirates. But after hearing Sid, Ark was convinced that the disappearance of the transportation fleet was related to the sea monster. No, such a thing didn’t even matter. If he participated as a mercenary in the armed fleet then couldn’t he strike against the sea monster?

‘Besides, they’ve already gathered 785 applicants. They’ll probably leave after a few more minutes!’

Ark immediately visited the NPC in charge and asked for an

application form. After the NPC checked the submitted application form, the NPC stared at Ark with surprised eyes.

“A-A nobleman?”

“Yes?”

“Why is nobleman doing the work of a mercenary.....?”

The NPC looked at him with confused eyes. This was a game but the situation would've been absurd in real life.

‘What the? Is there a penalty when applying for something like this as a nobleman?’

Ark was anxious about this so he explained.

“Actually a ship I own went missing from near here. I’ve asked for help from Reuben’s navy but at the moment they can’t promise me anything. So I’ve decided to apply after seeing the merchant’s guild recruitment advertisement.”

“Ah, I see. Um.....please come with me.”

The NPC said after thinking for a while.

“Then I’ll go.”

“Yes, be sure to find it.”

Ark then parted from Isyuram. Isyuram had wanted to go with Ark but he had promised to meet the criminal organization who was meeting again. Ark separated from Isyuram and followed the NPC towards the dock dedicated to the merchant’s guild.

‘Amazing!’

Ark’s mouth opened absent-mindedly as he saw the dock. Eight battleships were anchored at the dock. But the eight battleships were a completely different standard from the ones Ark had seen so far.

“This is the new armed fleet of the merchant’s guild. It is 1.5 times bigger than ordinary battleships and the endurance is 30% more.

The exterior walls are also made of padded steel sheets so it won't even be scratched by weak attacks. When just sailing normally, it won't even get a scratch. The ships also have a separate magic engine that can be used in emergencies."

The NPC looked at the battleships with pride filled eyes. Then the voice of another NPC could be heard from the back.

"Hey hey. You will continue exposing all the secrets if you keep on chattering like that."

A youth wearing a flashy badge on his armour approached. Then the NPC coughed and introduced the person.

"Ah, this is the admiral of the fleet Wagner-nim."

Then he approached Wagner, pointed towards Ark and whispered something. Wagner looked at Ark and smiled pleasantly.

"Ah, you are an aristocrat of Schudenberg kingdom. Well, then there is no problem if you know confidential information about the armed fleet."

"Confidential?"

Ark couldn't understand what the person was saying. Wagner just laughed and explained.

"Actually, this battleship is a joint project between the Schudenberg navy and the merchant's guild. These battleships took several years to make."

That's right. Then battleships in the dock were Schudenberg's next generation battleships. No matter how much influence the merchant's guild had on the continent, they weren't powerful enough to build such strong battleships. Anyway, the battleships anchored at the dock had been completed not long ago. Now the only thing left was to test out the performance of the battleship. Then the incident with the missing transportation fleet occurred. So the Schudenberg navy decided to test the performance through this search operation. That was why an aristocrat of Schudenberg was the admiral. But several problems had occurred at this point. The ships were newly built so

there was a lack of sailors. So they had to hire mercenaries to solve the problem and the captain of the battleships was responsible for them. So not anyone could be the captain.

“Normally the merchant vessels will have someone from the merchant’s guild in charge of them. But entrusting the battleships to merchants is a little worrisome. Now we don’t have time to find a qualified person.”

Wagner sent the NPC an arrogant look and muttered. Then he moved his eyes back to Ark and the arrogant expression faded away.

“Shouldn’t an aristocrat of Schudenberg have the honour of such an important task? You became an aristocrat through your military exploits so please take control of the battleships.”

“Huh? Me?”

“An aristocrat has the obligation to maintain the glory of the nobility. So how can a Schudenberg aristocrat possibly work like a common mercenary?”

Wagner was a human who believed that status was everything. Frankly, Ark disliked that type of personality whether they were users or NPCs. But now wasn’t the time to question it closely. Ark’s purpose in participating was to rescue his Gold Dream and the shipment. It was the reason he flew to Reuben.

‘If I participate as a simple hired soldier then it will be difficult to get an opportunity to recover the ship.’

That was the part Ark was worried about. But that wasn’t a problem if he was captain of a battleship.

“If you believe in me then I will do my best to return your expectations. Wagner-nim!”

Ark grasped Wagner’s hand and replied. There was a ringing sound and the information window appeared.

-You have accepted the request from Admiral Wagner to become
--

the temporary captain of a ship.

As a captain, you have decisive power over the corresponding battleship. All soldiers on the battleship will be automatically added to Ark-nim's attack party. In addition, as captain of the battleship you have a variety of skills able to be used.

<If you become captain and complete the request successfully then 200% of the fee will be paid>

'Okay, things are being arranged better than I thought!'

He was delighted about being able to become captain thanks to his barony.

"Hahahaha! Are you worried about suddenly becoming a captain? There's no need to worry. You just have to obey my orders. The pirates are called losers of the sea so defeating them is as easy as peeling off a woman's underwear in bed."

Wagner laughed roughly and struck Ark's shoulder.....Ark suddenly felt like beating him up.

'I'm really going crazy.'

A sigh flowed from Ark's mouth as he sat on the dock. As Ark expected, the remaining mercenaries were quickly gathered. With so many gathered then the fleet could also depart early. After distributing the troops between each battleship and arranging the necessary supplies, they finally departed. Until now there had been no problem. The actual problem was the bat sitting on Ark's shoulder.

".....Hahahaha, this is so great I want to die. You are an aristocrat of Schudenberg. No matter what kind of situation it is, you must not despair and fight with honour. After all, your life is trivial when compared to an aristocrat's honour. No matter how injured your body gets, you must not defile the honour of the nobility when righting pirates.....hey, are you listening?"

“Ah, yes yes. I’m listening.”

‘Damn! This is complete torture!’

Ark scratched his head with irritation. But who could he blame? This whole situation started from one mistake.....

The bat sitting on his shoulder and making noise wasn’t Racard. The existence of the bat occurred while Ark was invading the secret dungeon. Ark had found a lot of magic ingredients that he had never seen before. At that time, he had needed Racard’s help with scouting more than Razak or Radun. Therefore he had concentrated on making food for Racard. Thanks to that, Racard’s stats reached an equivalent of level 380.

-Your summon Racard has manifested a new vampire ability.

Racard has absorbed Karakul’s strength and abilities and has been reborn as a high ranking vampire. However, Racard lacks the ability to properly absorb Karakul’s blood flowing through his veins. When this blood is perfectly absorbed then Racard will obtain all of Karakul’s power and knowledge.

Once Racard reaches a certain level, he is able to awaken some of Karakul’s abilities.

+ Summon Stud: The vampire is able to summon his blood relatives who made a contract with him.

<A high ranking vampire is able to make a stud contract with relatives who have inferior rank. The blood relatives who sign a stud contract can be summoned anywhere when the vampire calls. In addition, a summoned relative will be able to display 100% of their power.

Spiritual Power Consumption: 50 per summon>

Once Racard’s abilities reached a certain level then he would absorb more of Karakul’s blood and sometimes a new skill would occur. Then skill that occurred was random and depended on certain conditions. There was a reason Racard developed the Summon Stud

skill. In fact, during the secret dungeon invasion Racard had been the busiest person. Reconnaissance and contacting the different troops scattered around had been entrusted to Racard. So Racard had really been busy flying all over the dungeon. Naturally Racard was dissatisfied so he had created the Stud Contract skill. The Summon Stud skill allowed a high ranking vampire to summon lower ranking vampires from their territory. All of Racard's lower ranking relatives signed the contract and were summoned into the cave.

'What is this? The bats are only level 20 so what use will they be? Furthermore, summoning just one costs 50 Spiritual Power? Doesn't that mean I can only summon 15? Is this a joke?'

It was so pitiful that Ark couldn't even laugh about it when the skill first occurred. However the summoned bats were surprisingly useful.

"Count!"

"One, two, three, four....fifteen!"

"Okay, now everyone move to your positions and stay faithful to your role. Go!"

"Yes Lord-nim!"

The bats scattered all over the dungeon at Racard's command. Ark had thought they were useless just by looking at their levels but the bats had their own specialties. It was the remote communication. Even if they were far away, the bats were able to communicate with each other through something like ultrasound waves. If Ark placed the bats with the leaders of each unit then he didn't need to use Feather of Whispering to communicate. The bat with Ark could communicate with the bats near the unit leaders. They were like living mobile phones!

This had been weighing on Ark's mind with the armed fleet departed. Currently communicating between ships required using flag signals or voice amplification magic. However, the flag signals couldn't give detailed information. In addition, voice amplification magic wasn't really audible over cannon fire and if the ships were really far away. The movements of the fleet would have to slow

down. This wasn't a big problem if the opponents were ordinary pirates. However, wouldn't fighting sea monsters be difficult with a slow response?

"Using the Feather of Whispering would solve that problem but I can't give one to every person. It also can't be used with NPCs."

Ark was the only user that was a captain so he couldn't communicate with the other ships via Feather of Whispering. That's when he remembered Racard's Stud contract. So Ark had placed on bat with the captains of each ship. Of course, Ark had to ask Admiral Wagner first. In fact, Ark hadn't thought that Wagner would easily accept his proposal. But surprisingly Wagner had easily accepted.

'I should've noticed then.....'

At the time, Ark had thought that Wagner was just a person who listened to people's opinions. It was a huge mistake. Wagner had accepted Ark's suggestion for another reason.

"In the end I broke the necks of all the pirates and returned grandly. Can you believe it? I cleaned up 500 pirates with just 100 people. It would be impossible for people other than me. The King even honoured me with the title 'Conqueror of the Sea' and put me in charge of building the next generation of battleships with the merchants. Ah, I've done the work of fifteen people. I was also a knight candidate....."

The reason Wagner accepted Ark's suggestion was to brag to someone. Wagner's self-praise was really endless. Wagner didn't stop talking in the 24 hours since they left Reuben harbour, which was like three days in the game. He heard about Wagner facing several hundred people by himself, challenging a dragon, the many times he became a hero in Schudenberg and Bristania, etc.

'Did he solve all the problems in the world by himself?'

Hyun-woo thought as a huge lump rose in his throat. But Wagner was the Admiral of the fleet and he would be in charge of all decisions in a battle. He couldn't afford to anger Wagner. There

were other reasons why Ark had no choice but to accept Wagner's nonsense.

"I still haven't seen any signs. Maybe I should....."

Wagner finally muttered after chattering for ages. Ark suddenly asked him through the bat.

"Ah, I heard about your exploits defeating some pirates. After hearing your earlier talk, can I ask a question?"

"Uh? Alas, that saga. Hahahaha, good. Educating yourself is only an aristocrat's important mission. An aristocrat who has a lot of achievements like me will be a good role model. You may ask me anything you like."

Wagner yelled after praising himself. The reason he was doing this was because Ark still hadn't found the sea monsters. Sid had been eaten by the sea monster which was how Ark knew there were some in this area. However, Wagner still thought the transportation fleet had disappeared due to pirates. Therefore he just moved to other areas to search when he couldn't find any traces of pirates. If that happened then Ark's reason to come here might disappear. Therefore Ark desperately made an effort to listen to Wagner's bragging and desperately tried to turn his attention to other matters. Meanwhile Racard had been using satellite surveillance mode to look for signs of a sea monster.

'Damn! How long do I need to listen to this guy talk? Racard!'

"I haven't seen it yet."

But he couldn't find any signs of the sea monster.

'I'm really going crazy. It will be difficult to keep Wagner talking. I have 10~15 minutes at most before moving to another place.....'

He really couldn't think. Ark had thought the sea monster will show up when he neared it. But contrary to what he thought, the sea monster didn't appear.

'Do I have to enter the ocean to look for it?'

That was Ark's thought after enduring for so long. Using the Mermaid Scale and looking under the water was 100 times better than listening to Wagner's bragging any longer. But if he did that then things would become more complicated. Under like areas, the waters here were so dark it seemed black. It didn't matter how large the sea monster was if he couldn't distinguish it in the water. He had no choice but to hope the sea monster appeared first.

'I have to find it before Wagner moves the fleet.....'

Ark thought impatiently as he bit his lip.

"Eh? What's that?"

Racard suddenly wondered while flying through the sky. A brilliant object was shining in the dark water. Racard thought it might be an object from the missing transportation fleet so he flew closer.

"What? Is that a fish?"

Racard confirmed the object with a disappointed look. The shiny object in the ocean was the scales of a fish.

"It is so shiny even after it died....it looks strangely delicious."

Racard laughed as he looked at the fish. The sight of the fish floating in the ocean had stimulated his appetite. Racard was hungry after hours of searching with satellite surveillance mode.

"Shall I eat it in one bite? I'll eat well!"

Snap!

Racard drove his teeth into the fish. Suddenly the ocean started to shake. It was just a light ripple at first before it gradually grew to huge waves.

"What, what the? What happened?"

Racard avoided the wave with a puzzle expression and flew into the sky. All of a sudden the fish started to rise into the sky. Then a giant pillar of water soared up. The water then fell back into the ocean like a snake shedding its skin. It wasn't just a pillar of water.

“M-Master!”

Racard cried out after looking at an object in the ocean. But Ark and the sailors in the fleet were already looking at the object.

“W-what is going on?”

“Huge.....snake?”

That’s right. The pillar of water which rose up was an enormous snake. It was a sea snake 20 metres thick. When the huge snake craned its neck and looked at the dark water, Ark had an eerie feeling. It was just the beginning.

Chwa, chwa, chwa, chwa!

At that moment another 4 pillars appeared around the snake. After the water poured down, four more identical snakes had appeared. Five huge sea snakes had risen from the ocean! A red warning message appeared in front of Ark.

[-The boss monster, Devil of the Sea ‘Leviathan’ has appeared!]

Conqueror of the Sea

‘It appeared!’

Ark looked at the sea snakes with bright eyes. The sea monsters had appeared! The armed fleet scattered around were forced into a position where they had to fight the sea monsters.

“Master, it’s moving!”

Chwa chwa chwa chwa, chwa chwa chwa chwa!

The five sea snakes had started moving their bodies when he heard Racard’s voice. They opened their mouths and something dark bubbled inside.

‘An attack!’

His instincts warned him. Ark turned his head and looked at Wagner on the flagship. When the Leviathans started moving, the armed fleet was plunged into a combat situation. And the current admiral of the fleet was Wagner. The captains of the other ships had fallen into a state of panic and contacted Wagner for orders. But when Ark looked at Wagner’s face, it looked somewhat strange.

“Waaahhhh.....”

The sound continuously emerged from the bat phone. Wagner had collapsed on the deck of the flagship and was moaning. He looked pitiful to Ark. Wasn’t he just telling Ark about how he cleaned up thousands of pirates and rescued the kingdom from a hopeless crisis? Of course, Ark knew it was a pile of nonsense after talking to the captains of the other ships. The captain and crew from the merchant’s guild knew that Wagner had received the position of being in charge of the next generation battleships through his family background. But no matter what, he was still the admiral. If Wagner who was the Admiral of the armed fleet shook with fear then the crew would also panic.

‘That fool!’

Curses rose in his throat. Before the curses could emerge from his mouth, something similar to an arrow shot from the Leviathan’s mouths.

Syu syuk, syu syuk, syu syuk, syu syuk, syu syuk!

There was an intense explosion sound. Something like a black line had shot from their mouths. The result couldn’t be ignored. When the black line hit, the outer wall of a battleship was smashed like tofu. It also pierced through the hull that it touched. It was to the extent that the steel which padded the hull was cut in half.

“What on earth?”

The soldiers stared with shock. Ark used Skill Penetration and the information rose in front of him.

-Leviathan’s skill: Water Pressure Gun

The Leviathan draws in a huge amount of water. Using its long body, it is able to create a high pressure spray. The enormous pressure turns the water into a sharp sword.

‘Water Pressure Gun!’

Ark now figured out the identity of the Leviathan’s black line attack. That line wasn’t an arrow or an explosive. It was simple saltwater. The problem was the enormous pressure that the Leviathan had placed on the saltwater. When spraying water with thousands of tons of pressure on it, it was like a laser. The high pressure of the water was enough to cut steel. Anyway, the Leviathan’s Water Pressure Gun was no joke. It was rare for any equipment in New World to have more than 500 durability. Even the metal armour of warriors only had around 200~300 durability. However, the Water Pressure Gun had a 100% cutting effect which decrease durability by 500. If either a user or NPC was hit by the Water Pressure Gun then they would have severed arms or legs. The ship was also the same. There was little damage thanks to the hardness of the steel plates but the Water Pressure Guns still cut the sails and other parts

of the ship. The sails of five battleships and dozens of sailors were severed.

“What is this type of ridiculous attack.....?”

But what was the point of complaining about the monster?

-Grrrrr!

Then the Leviathans cried out and raised their body. The bottom was swollen like a balloon and that swollen part was gradually being pushed up. In order to use Water Pressure Gun, they needed to pull a lot of water into their mouths. The battleships that had been hit directly by the Water Pressure Gun were defenseless so another hit would destroy it.

“Battleship magic engine! Quickly use the power to escape!”

Ark shouted into the ears of the bat.

“Did you hear? Deploy the magic engine!”

The captains of the ships repeated the order to their sailors. In fact, the captains and crew of the ships didn't like listening to Wagner. Now Admiral Wagner had fallen into a state of panic from the Leviathans' attacks. Since Admiral Wagner couldn't perform his duties, the captain and crews of the ships couldn't do anything when they were being attacked. When Ark gave an order, the captains of each ship instantly gave him the authority of 2nd commander. The evidence was that they obeyed his order and used the magic engine. Anyway, five Water Pressure Guns roughly flew out at the same time. The high pressure jets of water crossed the ocean. It tore through the ocean like a laser and rushed towards the battleships.

“Quickly use the magic engine to avoid it!”

It was at that moment. There was a mechanical sound as the mast was folded automatically and disappeared into the deck. Then something that looked like a long tube popped out on both sides of the hull. At the same time, there was a roaring sound and the battleships raced through the ocean like a speedboat.

“Huk, what is this?”

The users on the deck stumbled from the quick acceleration. That’s right. This was the magic engine of the next generation battleships. When the magic engine was used, the battleships moved at a ship that couldn’t be compared to when there was wind in the sails. The speed was like riding a motorcycle on the ocean!

“The Water Pressure Guns are coming! Battleship starboard, all sailors prepare for the impact.

Ark commanded as the battleship suddenly turned. When the huge battleship turned sharply, a large amount of water was sprayed. Some of the sailors lost their balance and fell into the ocean. Even with that evasive movement, the ships couldn’t completely avoid the pursuit of the Water Pressure Guns. The Leviathans could control the Water Pressure Guns by simply moving their heads.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The Water Pressure Gun skimmed past the stern of the ship. At the same time, the part of the deck that had been hit fell off. However, that wasn’t the end of the Water Pressure Gun’s attack. The Leviathan that was attacking Ark’s ship once again turned its head and the Water Pressure Gun started heading towards the centre of the ship.

“It’s the end if we get hit by that!”

Ark felt a sense of urgency. Only a part of the stern had fallen so it didn’t really matter. But the ship would be destroyed if the Water Pressure Gun hit the centre. Of course, the exterior walls of the battleship were padded with iron so it wouldn’t break in half. However, the wooden deck would have no choice but to be cut in half. Even the magic engine below the deck was likely to receive damage.

“But it isn’t possible to avoid the attack. Then.....!”

Ark clenched his teeth tightly and shouted.

“Keep moving forward at full speed away from the Water Pressure

Gun!”

“Huh? It is aiming for the centre of the ship.....”

“Does the captain have to explain the reason for all his commands?”

“Ah, no. Full speed ahead!”

The magic engine let out a roar and increased its speed. The Water Pressure Gun was approaching! Even if the Water Pressure Gun only passed through the deck for a few seconds, the magic engine would be severed. When the Water Pressure Gun was halfway to the ship...Ark opened his bag and shouted.

“Demonic Manifestations!”

After he used the skill, an information window appeared.

-You have used Demonic Manifestations.Please select an offering to extract the demonic energy.
--

“Shield. Shield. Shield. Shield. Shield!”

Shields soared out from the bag at Ark’s scream. 5 shields flew into the sky. Black sparks flew from the shields and formed a pentagram in the sky. Then the shields exploded and a massive shield insignia appeared on the battleship.

-Demonic energy has been extracted from the offerings (Shield, shield, shield, shield, shield).

The effect exercised by this combination is ‘Physical Shield.’
--

[Physical Shield]: When Physical Shield is exercised, the centre of a 100 metre space will have its defense increased by 500. The defense shield will have a durability of 1,000. The effect of the shield lasts for 10 minutes or until the 1,000 durability is consumed. However, the defense shield doesn’t move. It also isn’t possible to make the same effect overlap.
--

It was the new skill he learnt after a seal of Eternal Soul was released. Ark had learnt the secrets behind Demonic Manifestations

while hunting the monsters while climbing back up the secret dungeon. It was a new skill so he wanted to test it immediately. He realised that Demonic Manifestations was different from the other skills learnt from Eternal Soul.

When Demonic Manifestations was triggered, the effect depending on the type of equipment sacrificed. The first combination Ark tried was 'sword, sword, sword, sword, and sword.' It gave the effect 'Braid Blade' which increased attack by +20%. If only shoes were sacrificed then it increased movement speed while gloves increased attack speed.

.....That was the simplest example of such a combination. Sometimes the different combinations of 'swords, shields, armour, shoes or gloves' didn't even give an effect. The good point about Demonic Manifestations was that it had a wide effect. The accessories offered automatically flew over everyone and a strong special effect was applied to his allies. Anyway, Physical shield now made a transparent shield around the battleship.

"Everybody prepare for impact!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

At almost the same time, the Water Pressure Gun hit the centre of the ship. To be exact, it hit the surface of the transparent shield. There was a huge impact and the shield had its durability drained.

-The durability of the 'Physical Shield' fell to 900.
-The durability of the 'Physical Shield' fell to 800.....

The durability of the Physical Shield fell to 500 in seconds. If this continues the Water Pressure Gun will pierce through and hit the ship. But because Ark had already ordered for the ship to move forward at full speed, they already managed to get out of range of the attack.

'Even the Physical Shield won't be able to hold up for 30 seconds.....'

It really was enormous damage. After avoiding the Leviathan's attacks twice, the attacks stopped. With the amount of water the Leviathan can hold, the Water Pressure Gun could only be used 2~3 times. However, those 2~3 attacks were enough to cause the armed fleet to be in total chaos. Since the attacks only grazed the ships thanks to the magic engine, there were ships with railings and sterns split apart while some players had fallen into the ocean. The armed fleet had been seriously damaged with just one blow.

‘But there is a way to defeat them!’

Ark looked at the Leviathans floating on the ocean. The Leviathan's attacks caused immense havoc. However Ark had discovered a weakness in the Leviathan's attack. Once the Leviathans' Water Pressure Gun was used, it took a long time to inhale the required amount of water. And when the Water Pressure Gun was used, it couldn't be stopped until the water ran out.

‘I don't know why but the Leviathans haven't moved from the spot where they first appeared. If the Leviathans had moved then the battleships would be completely devastated right now. Something must be keeping it immobile.’

They couldn't move. In other words, they were a good target to attack.

‘In addition, the Water Pressure Gun follows the movement of their mouth. If they just turn their head lightly then the Water Pressure Gun can chase after the battleship that has moved dozens of metres. It is impossible for the speed of the battleships to escape from the gun. It is an attack that is 100% impossible to escape. Then.....

“Battleships use your magic engines to stabilize the hull!”

“What? What does that mean?”

The captains of the battleships asked Ark in an amazed voice. They had seen the incredibly power of the Water Pressure Gun so all they wanted to do was run away. If they didn't then wouldn't the next attack by the Water Pressure Gun smash the ships to pieces? Then

Ark answered through the bat phone.

“If we use the magic engine then the hull won’t shake and we can directly counterattack.”

“Of course. But if we can’t avoid the attack then how will we counterattack.....?”

“This plan will allow us to counterattack.”

Ark smiled and explained the way he devised to defeat the Leviathans. The Leviathans inflated their bodies to suck in seawater and condense it to a high pressure.

“This is the only way to stop their onslaught. Believe in me and follow my commands.”

“.....Understood. There is no other way since the Admiral is currently soulless.”

“All battleships, use the magic engine to stabilize the hull!”

“Prepare the cannons for precise shooting!”

The armed fleet finished all their preparations according to Ark’s commands. The Leviathans had also finished condensing the water and opened their mouths.

“Now. Shoot precisely!”

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

At the same time, the armed fleet fire simultaneously after hearing Ark’s order. It was the basic ‘Salvo’ of an ordinary naval battle. The attacks would be concentrated on one opponent in order to decrease the enemies and the damage. So the basic tactics was to concentrate all attacks on point and use the maximum amount of attacks in a short time. However, Ark had chosen the opposite strategy. The eight battleships attacked all five Leviathans. Furthermore, not all the cannons were mobilized. It was separated into two or three attacks at a time. The reason why.....

-Kiaaaack!

-Kueeeeeeh!

The shells crossed the space and hit the Leviathans' heads. Thus the attack from the Water Pressure Guns flew into the sky. The shot flew a few kilometres into the air before falling back to the sea with all its power lost. That's right. It was the reason why Ark chose this method. The Water Pressure Gun was an attack while flew like a laser from the mouth of the Leviathan. Thus their heads became Ark's target. Instead of running away, couldn't he use this method to make them waste the water guns?

'If we keep this up for 2~3 minutes then the Water Pressure Guns will be used up during that time!'

That was Ark's thought. It didn't matter how big the sea snake was. In addition, the long body stretched over the sea.

It was easy for dozens of shells to hit such a large target. If they hit the target then it was enough to change the direction of the Leviathans' jaw. So there was no worry about the Water Pressure Gun hitting the battleships! Ark used the magic engines to stabilize the hull and the cannons for a precise bombardment.

"It is a success. Their attacks have been blocked!"

Ark's operation was a great success. The battleships continuously attacked the Leviathans using 2~3 shots at a time. It was only 2~3 attacks but the health of the Leviathans decreased little by little.

"The battle is in progress and it is only a matter of time until we beat them. But....."

Ark looked at the Leviathan and tilted his head to one side. Ark was certain that this area was where Gold Dream had been swallowed by a sea monster. And the message window said that the Leviathan was the boss monster of this area so there couldn't be another one. But he couldn't imagine that the Leviathans were the ones that swallowed Gold Dream. The Leviathan was huge but it was only 20 metres in diameter. There was no way they could swallow Gold Dream. Ark's question was soon settled within a few minutes.

"Keep on attacking!"

“Continue hitting those guys!”

“There’s no time for a break. Reload as quickly as possible after the artillery is launched!”

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

-Kuaaaa!

The cannons continually fired with no breaks and one Leviathan shrieked before shrinking.

“We did it!”

“We defeated a sea monster!”

“Okay, concentrate the attacks on the other four!”

The morale of the sailors increased even more after a Leviathan fell. They once again concentrated the precision shooting on the remaining Leviathans.

“Hahaha! The huge opponent is no match for my strategy! Okay, continue attacking like I commanded. Victory will be ours!”

Wagner’s laughter flowed from the bat on Ark’s shoulder. The Admiral who had fallen into a panic when the Leviathans first appeared now showed his face when the situation seemed to improve. He was a shameless person. The crew were stunned but fortunately they concentrated on firing the cannons.....a Leviathan had just been knocked down.

“Don’t worry about it and continue to attack!”

“We can’t be careless! Don’t give them any room!”

The captains of the battleships ignored Wagner and just kept attacking. It continued for another 10 minutes. Under the continuous bombardment, another two Leviathans sank under the water. Four of them had fallen and now there was only one left.

“Now, it’s almost finished. Concentrate all the attacks!”

Kwaaaaaaah-!

Then the water underneath the Leviathan started to become unstable. The water shook like an earthquake was happening. Then the sea suddenly divided and a huge sleeping form could be seen.

“Huk! What the, that is?”

“Wait? That.....that huge sea snake.....”

“Such a thing! It isn’t five sea snakes.....”

The sailors who had been preparing for the bombardment suddenly opened their mouths absent-mindedly. The form underneath the Leviathan was a huge monster which exceeded several kilometres. It was a huge monster resembling a fish! Ark finally answered his question after seeing the huge fish. Ark and all the sailors had thought there were five Leviathans. They were mistaken. This was the reason why the Leviathans didn’t move at all. It was because the sea snakes were attached to the giant fish underneath. No, to be exact the sea snakes were attached to the Leviathan but seemed to be the Leviathan’s tentacles. The Leviathan’s true identity was a giant fish several kilometres long. It had been impossible to discover in the black ocean. In the end, the attacks of the armed fleet hadn’t dealt any damage to the Leviathan.

“Fish! That is the fish I tried to eat!”

Racard shouted as he pointed to a part of the Leviathan’s body. The Leviathan had something growing like hair on its forehead. And various things were dangling from the hair. There was the fish that Racard had discovered, a small box, the corpse of a mermaid and even a human body. Ark noticed all that with one glance. Lure.....yes! The Leviathans used the lures on its forehead to draw in food to eat. And a huge mouth that could completely swallow the battleship was right underneath the lures. Its mouth opened and the surrounding seawater seemed to drag everybody in.

“I-it is trying to swallow the battleship!”

“Deploy the magic engine!”

Screams rose from the ships as the battleships were being dragged. But the Leviathan didn’t seem to want to swallow the

battleships. The crew sighed with relief when they realized this but they were consumed by fear again in one second.

“Hik, what is that?”

“Something is coming out of that guy’s mouth?”

“Huck! It’s different from the Water Pressure Gun!”

“M-monsters! Thousands of monsters are emerging!”

A sailor said in a trembling voice as he checked it with the telescope. After a while, the other sailors were able to confirm the identities of the things spilling from the mouth.

-Kuruk, kuruk, kuruk!

The things which emerged from the Leviathan’s mouth looked like black worms. The size was approximately 2~3 metres. It was a level 300 monster called ‘Parasite.’ A level 300 opponent wasn’t difficult when considering the average level of the users who participated in the armed fleet. The problem was the numbers! There were tens of thousands of Parasites that exited from the Leviathan! It was to the extent that a few kilometres of the ocean was covered by them.

“Unbelievable.....!”

Ark also felt overwhelmed by the huge number of monsters. But Ark had no choice.

“Battleships, maintain a horizontal battle formation and attack!”

“Everybody brace themselves!”

The battleships started to steadily line up after Ark’s command. The ships lined up and simultaneously fired. Hundreds of shells flew towards the monster! However, hundreds of pillars of water soared up and the Parasites overturned the ship. The Parasites had used human wave tactics to cause a tidal wave like surge. They instantly surrounded the battleships and crawled onto the deck. Dozens of Parasites also crept onto the deck of Ark’s no. 8 battleship.

“Ugh, dammit! Dark Blade!”

Ark wielded his sword tirelessly while holding onto a rope hanging from the sails. The Parasites were sea monsters so they were quick while swimming but extremely slow on land. But they had a lot of defense. Despite Ark's continuous attacks, the Parasite only lost 20% health.

"Don't kill them, just push them back into the sea!"

They couldn't endure the number of monsters creeping onto the ship so Ark changed strategies. The crew of the battleship ran around the outskirts and pushed them back into the water.

"That's it, now! Drop a bomb!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When the bomb exploded, there was a pillar of flames in the vicinity of the battleship. A number of Parasites were engulfed by the flames and fell into the water. Although the explosion occurred on the ship, the steel acted as a barrier and the battleship only received a little damage. Anyway, now wasn't the time to worry about the damage to the battleship.

If the thousands of Parasites attacked at once then the armed fleet would be smashed to pieces. The other battleships also used the same bomb tactic as Ark on the Parasites. After an intense 3~4 minute battle, the area was covered in black corpses. Then a black line suddenly crossed the sea. It was the Water Pressure Gun from the mouth of the remaining sea snake. It quickly tore through the no. 5 battleship. The two ships had already received considerable damage from the bombs so it collapsed like tofu and the sailors fell into the sea. The Parasites then swarmed around the sailors like cockroaches.

"P-Parasites!"

"Ugh! Help!"

The mercenaries and sailors screamed as they fell into the water. It was impossible to properly fight the level 300 Parasites in the water. Sailors who fell into the water were encircled by hundreds of Parasites and eaten. The sailors on the armed fleet could only watch

in horror. There was pure silence on the deck of the armed fleet. The fear they imagined was occurring in reality.

“Hiiiiik! It’s the end! They don’t stop no matter how many times we step on them. It’s either being swallowed in one bite by that big fish or be eaten slowly by those worms. Kuaaak!”

Wagner’s voice came from the mouth of the bat. He already withdrew with fear when the sea snakes appeared and left the command to Ark, and now he was decreasing the morale of the sailors?

“Damn! Racard, shut that guy up!”

“Got it!”

At Ark’s command, Racard shot down like a lightning bolt and struck the back of Wagner’s head. Wagner had a huge lump on the back of his head but unfortunately he didn’t faint.

“Ack! I can see stars.....is this guy’s head made of stone?”

Racard staggered back and Wagner turned his head. Then he turned and rushed at Racard.

“What, what the? This guy. Do you want to try me?”

“Yes, I do! Please make me faint!”

Wagner shouted towards Racard.

“I’ll rather be stunned than eaten by those guys!”

“W-wait a minute! Uwak!”

Pakak, pakak, pakak, pakak.

Wagner then repeatedly slammed his forehead into Racard. After a while, both Wagner and Racard were covered in large lumps. However, the one who fainted wasn’t Wagner but Racard. When Racard fainted, Wagner screamed before crashing into the mast. He had completely gone crazy from fear. Anyway, slamming against the mast worked this time as Wagner got a nosebleed and fainted. However, no one cared about Wagner

anymore.

“Ugh, damn! That stupid snake.....!”

Ark glared at the sea snake.

“They’re preventing the cannon attacks!”

“It can’t be. Those worms are blocking the muzzle of the cannons and we can’t fire!”

“What?”

Ark ran to the railing and looked down. Like the sailors said, the Parasites were blocking the muzzle of the cannons. If the cannons were just fired like this then it would damage the battleship.

“Captain-nim, the Water Pressure Gun is heading towards our battleship!”

Ark heard the voice from behind him and turned his head. The Water Pressure Gun was flying in a straight line towards the no. 8 battleship. With the Parasites blocking the ship, they couldn’t even use the magic engine!

“Ah, no.....Demonic.....”

Ark hastily used Demonic Manifestations to form the Physical Shield. But the Water Pressure Gun was quicker and hit the centre of a battleship. The deck split apart like it was cut by a knife. The Water Pressure Gun didn’t completely pull the hull apart. But more than 2/3rds of the hull was cut, throwing off the balance of the battleship and it gradually began to sink into the ocean.

“If this sinks then it is dangerous. Jump into the sea!”

In the end, Ark was forced to escape from the battleship.

-You have entered the ‘Demonic’ sphere of influence.

<The abilities of all players within the sphere of influence will decrease by 10%. On the other hand, all monsters with the Demonic attribute will have their stats increase by 10%>

That warning message appeared when he fell into the sea. That's right. The water had turned black thanks to the demonic influence of the Leviathan. The Leviathan was a sea monster so its effect was limited to the water. But Ark still didn't give up on the battle. If he gave him then his Gold Dream which was worth 40,000 gold would just become excrement.

'The Water Pressure Gun only comes from the Leviathan's tentacle. If we deal with the sea snake then we can somehow deal with the Leviathan!'

Of course, the thousands of Parasites are still a problem.....

"I have no choice but to try!"

Ark blew the Flute of the Merpeople and called dozens of dolphins. Ark and the other sailors got on the back of the dolphins and headed towards the Parasites that were blocking the no 2, 4 and 7 battleship.

"Okay, defeat the Parasites blocking the flagship and the other battleships! It should then be possible to handle the remaining sea snake!"

However, penetrating through thousands of Parasites on the dolphins wasn't easy. The Parasites had flocked around the sailors after they fell into the only so only Ark and less than one hundreds users were trying to penetrate the Parasites.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Meanwhile another two ships were hit by the Water Pressure Gun and split in half.

"Damn, is it going to end here.....?"

Despair entered Ark's eyes. There were only two battleships left. Even if they wiped out the Parasite, they wouldn't have the power to deal with the Leviathan. Even if the remaining tentacle was destroyed, decreasing the enormous life of the Leviathan with two ships was nonsense! Even with the Admiral unconscious, the

remaining sailors on the two ships determined that there was no hope left.

“Ack! Then it is time for a plan of desperation! Let’s show our commitment as we go to hell!”

The captains of the ship commanded as they dropped bombs. A chain explosion occurred on the exterior wall of the hull and the attached Parasites were engulfed in flames. It was damage the battleship couldn’t recovery from but luckily several cannons survived. The captains of the two ships chose to throw away their battleships to fire artillery at the Parasites.

“Aim the muzzle of the gun, fire!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a ringing sound and the sea started shaking.

“Eh?”

Ara?”

Both Ark and the crew of the no. 2 battleship looked confused. The ringing sound didn’t come from the cannons. The cannons of the no. 2 battleship hadn’t been launched yet. The rocking and ringing sound was coming from underneath the water. After a while, an explosion occurred and several hundred columns of water shot upwards. The Parasites that were at the site of the explosion were blown away.

“W-what is this.....?”

“M-Master! Over there!”

Racard who had recovered pointed to one side.

Chwa chwa chwa chwa! Chwa chwa chwa chwa!

When he turned around, there was a spray of water coming from the sea. At first it was just a small spray but it gradually became larger as it approached. After a while, a huge object comparable to the size of the Leviathan appeared.

“M-monster.....it is another monster.....!”

“Hahaha! I’m not even afraid anymore.”

“Damn, I never expected to see two of these monsters.....”

The crew of the flagship and the no. 2 ship murmured to each other. But only Ark’s eyes sparkled as he looked at the new sea monster.

“Surely that is.....there’s no doubt! It is definitely Gallic!”

That’s right. It was a giant sea monster. The monster was the patron guardian of the merpeople that Ark had met a long time ago. It was the white whale Gallic.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Gallic crossed the water and rammed into Leviathan. The Leviathan who was about to use the Water Pressure Gun on the no. 2 battleship wobbled and was pushed back several metres. When the two bodies collided, it seemed like a tsunami had occurred.

“How did Gallic get here? No, why is Gallic here?”

Pepepepeng, pepepepeng!

Then dozens of water pillars shot up again. The Parasites that were blocking the ship turned white.

“Go down....something is helping us at the bottom of the sea!”

Ark commanded and quickly dove into the water. The water was dark so it was difficult to see anything underwater. But after looking for a long time, he started to distinguish vague shapes. They looked like shadows at first. But the shadows started to increase to a huge number around Ark.

Ark’s eyes then widened.

“That.....the merpeople!”

That’s right. The shadows approaching underwater were the merpeople. Thousands of them were approaching. The whole group of merpeople swam to where Ark was located. There were thousands of merpeople warriors! And leading them was the

Mermaid Queen wearing splendid armour.

“Brave warriors of the sea, exterminate the parasites that are dirtying these waters!”

The Mermaid Queen shouted as she raised a jewel encrusted stick. It was a trident like weapon with three prongs. When she moved it, a shock wave emerged from the trident and shot towards the Parasites. An explosion instantly occurred around Ark. Then 1,000 merpeople attack the Parasites around Ark.

“Q-queen?”

Ark stared at the reinforcements with a stupid expression. Then the Mermaid Queen laughed and greeted him.

“Fortunately we made it in time.”

“Why are you here? Didn’t you leave for another ocean?”

“We can talk about the details later.”

The Mermaid Queen muttered as she looked at the Leviathan.

“Anyway, I’ll now take care of the devil in the water.”

-Kuruk, kuruk, kuruk!

The Parasites started to be pushed back. The Mermaid Queen looked around with cold eyes and brandished her trident.

“Bah, filthy parasites! Great sea goddess.....wave!”

The environment suddenly became dark and the shape of a giant goddess floated in the air. The beautiful goddess was wrapped in a shiny veil. But the goddess looked angry and the sea started to vibrate. In the next moment, dozens of tornados appeared at sea and swept up the Parasites.

“Enemies of the clan, kill all of the Leviathan’s followers!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

The merpeople also wielded their tridents and cornered the

Parasites.

“Okay. This is a chance. Let’s get revenge along with the merpeople!”

Ark led the dolphin unit and began attacking the Parasites. With thousands of merpeople and Ark’s group violently attacking, the number of Parasites quickly reduced. The wide area magic of the Mermaid Queen reduced dozens of Parasites to a critical condition. With the merpeople lending their help, the situation quickly tilted to their advantage.

Meanwhile, there was an unimaginable battle occurring several hundred metres away.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang! Ku ku ku ku! Kwa kwa kwa kwa!

It was the fight between Leviathan and Gallic! When the two ocean monsters collided, constant tidal waves occurred. Whirlpools would also appear here and there every time a wave occurred. But in the battle, Gallic was slightly losing. Leviathan was a combat monster while Gallic was just an NPC. Furthermore, Gallic didn’t have any weapons like the Leviathan’s Water Pressure Gun. Therefore he had many bleeding wounds after the long battle.

‘But if this continues then we can beat the Leviathan!’

Ark stopped attacking the Parasites and looked around at the situation. Gallic might be losing to Leviathan but the merpeople were dominating the Parasites. If this kept up for 20~30 minutes then all the Parasites would be wiped out. With only two battleships left, it wouldn’t be difficult to defeat the Leviathan.

‘But my purpose isn’t to kill the Leviathan.’

That’s right. Ark’s goal was to recover the Gold Dream that Leviathan swallowed.

‘The problem is that it will be difficult to rescue Gold Dream if the Leviathan is killed. Judging from previous experience.....’

When the monster was killed, the body would just become chunks of flesh. It would be impossible to obtain anything except for the loot

the monster dropped. There was a high chance that Gold Dream would be destroyed when Leviathan was killed. So Ark made a separate plan to rescue Gold Dream. But that plan would be insignificant if the Leviathan was killed in the middle of it.

‘This is my last chance to execute the plan!’

If the battle proceeded then the Leviathan would disappear in 20~30 minutes. In other words, he only had 20~30 minutes to rescue Gold Dream.

“Mermaid Queen, please listen to my request!”

Ark explained his decision to the Mermaid Queen. He requested what was needed to rescue Gold Dream. The Mermaid Queen couldn’t understand Ark’s request but she just nodded and accepted.

“I don’t understand but if it is a favour for Ark-nim.....”

The Mermaid Queen nodded and closed her eyes. It was in order to mentally communicate with Gallic. Gallic avoided Leviathan’s attack and swung his tail. Leviathan who had been trying to bite Gallic shrieked. The open mouth was inundated with spray from the water. That was the moment Ark aimed for.

“That’s it, let’s go!”

Ark shouted after seeing the chance. Then the dolphin carrying Ark rushed through the sea at an enormous pace.

“Huh? This.....?”

The Mermaid Queen, merpeople and sailors were all confused at Ark’s action. Ark had rushed into Leviathan’s open mouth.

When he rushed in the mouth was like a huge cave with a horrible smell. Ark avoided the fangs as he entered the mouth. By the time he arrived at the enormous tongue, Leviathan’s mouth had started closing. Ark stepped on the back of the dolphin, pushed off and threw his body.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang! Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

There was a roaring sound and the huge mouth closed. At the same

time, Ark was sucked down Leviathan's oesophagus along with the saltwater.

Eat until you throw up!

[TL Notes] I've made a small change to a previous chapter. So Gold Dream is one huge ship with 6 sails instead of six boats.

I also wanted to clarify something as I felt it wasn't clearly explained. Sid was swallowed by the Leviathan along with Gold Dream so that's why he had to contact Ark in reality instead of inside the game.

"Puak!"

Ark spat out some seawater. Ark was currently inside the Leviathan.

"Being inside here feels dirty."

Ark muttered as he looked around with an uncomfortable expression. Ark had entered a huge sea creature, Gallic, before. It wasn't a good feeling but Leviathan felt even more unpleasant. The oesophagus had reddish black walls while the absurdly thick blood vessels had a black liquid like waste water flowing through it. But the thing that dampened Ark's mood the most was the dirty smell. It was difficult to express in words but it smelt like a food rubbish bin in the middle of summer. However he had no time to think unpleasant thoughts. There were constant booms and the space vibrated. It was the impact from Gallic and the merpeoples' attacks. The intervals between the vibrations became shorter as the battle became more intense. It was troublesome for Ark because if Leviathan died then it would be difficult to find Gold Dream.

"Damn! I wanted to go straight to the stomach....."

Ark had entered the oesophagus along with a lot of seawater. So Ark had thought he would be swept straight to the stomach along with the seawater. But Ark had become stuck in a mud puddle along the way.

“I’ve still gone quite far riding the seawater. There’s only a bit left until the stomach.”

Ark stepped out of the mud puddle continued. No, he was about to dive. Just as he stepped out of the mud puddle, the space started to shake. Then the blood vessels entangled like a spider web pulsed and something floated in the black blood. It was a monster with sharp teeth and a long body, the Parasite. After discovering Ark, the Parasite tore through the blood vessel with its teeth and popped out. It wasn’t just one. 10 Parasites had popped out of the blood vessel!

“I didn’t expect to find them here.”

Ark hadn’t expected this situation when he entered Leviathan.

“Summon Demon, Razak. Summon Demon, Racard!”

His pets appeared on either side of Ark after he called them. Racard on his right, Razak on his left and Radun wrapped around his waist.

‘Hasn’t it been a while?’

Ark smiled as he looked at his summons. Summoning his pets wasn’t a new phenomenon. But during the last month he had been busy commanding users and NPCs, so it hadn’t really felt like he had been fighting with his pets. He only sent Razak to support the assault troops while Racard was used as a scout. Racard and Razak also held similar thoughts.

“Hmm, doesn’t this remind you of the old days?”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak laughed and nodded his head like he also agreed.

“Then shall we do this after such a long time? A-1 plan!”

Ark drew his sword and shouted. Racard and Razak split to the left and right and rushed at the Parasites. The A-1 plan was to attack the enemy from the front and sides! Unlike the past, his pets’ abilities to carry out the strategy had greatly improved. Racard had recently raised his stats to level 380 while Razak had also reached level 350. After so much combat training with Ark, they weren’t inferior to other

users. Ark was the same as well. After training in Dragonian and the secret dungeon, Ark was now level 426. He had been so busy commanding the troops that he couldn't really fight properly. So he felt lively at the long awaited chance to wield his sword. Besides, the 50% dark attribute bonus was also applied! Even if there was a 10% penalty from the demonic influence of the Leviathan, it didn't really matter.

"Dark Dance, Dark Blade!"

Pepepepeng, pepepepeng!

Ark moved between the Parasites like a ghost and swung his sword. He didn't have to worry with his summons there.

-Chiiiiik!

The Parasites showed their poisonous fangs and rushed towards him.

Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack! Ttang kang!

Razak had swung his shield and blocked the Parasite before it attacked Ark. Meanwhile Racard flew over their heads and cursed, luring three or four Parasites. Ark attacked, Razak defended and Racard took care of crowd control. This was Ark's true battle style. Then Radun suddenly dropped down from his waist. As soon as his body touched the ground, it became red hot as he crawled towards the Parasites. Then flames appeared around the Parasites and drained their health. It was the Fire Aura skill Radun received after digesting 50% of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. The Parasites who were in a critical condition died after being hit by Fire Aura. Radun's eyes sparkled as he looked at Ark after taking care of the Parasites. His look seemed to be asking Ark if he was useful.

"Yes, you were excellent. As expected of our mascot Radun!"

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun waved his body with pleasure at Ark's words. With the help of his summons, Ark managed to take care of the 10 Parasites within 3 minutes. But that was just the beginning of the Parasites'

attacks. After he finished taking care of the original Parasites that appeared, dozens of them once again popped out of the blood vessel. When he took care of those ones, more Parasites appeared. In addition, the Parasites inside Leviathan had special skills which the ones outside didn't have. When they fell into a critical condition, they could bite the wall or the ground to recover. As the name suggested, they really were like parasites. If he gave them even a bit of space then they would recover and counterattack.

'A level 300 monster isn't really a problem. But no matter how many of them I kill, they keep on appearing from the blood vessels. I have to stop them before Leviathan dies.'

Yes, the reason Ark entered Leviathan was to reclaim Gold Dream. He had approximately 25 minutes to rescue Gold Dream. 3 minutes had already passed so he had approximately 22 minutes left.

'I don't have time to play around.'

"Radun, return. Razak, Racard, let's breakthrough straight to the stomach!"

Ark opened his bag and shouted.

"Demonic Manifestations. Spear, spear, spear, mace, mace!"

When he used Demonic Manifestations the equipment sprang out of the bag. It then formed the shape of a mace. The mace then broke apart and was absorbed inside Ark and his summons.

-Demonic energy has been extracted from the offerings (Spear, spear, spear, mace and mace).

The effect exercised by this combination is <Power Charge>.

Power Charge: The users will gain the effect of 'Power Charge' for 10 minutes. When Power Charge is in effect, assault speed will increase by 50% and there is a chance of pushing the opponent back 5 metres. However, this effect only applies to the enemy in front.

It was the Power Charge that he discovered accidentally! 50% increase in assault speed and a chance to push enemies back by 5 metres seemed simple but it could wreck tremendous havoc. Ark had discovered this skill during the four days he took climbing back up the secret dungeon from the 60th floor.

“Let’s go!”

When Ark went rushing towards the stomach, the parasites instantly ran up to him. But Ark swung his sword and three or four Parasites were caught in an explosion and blown back. It was the same with Racard and Razak. The moment they used Shield Stroke or Dark Dash, the Parasites were blown away. It was no use no matter how many of them were camped in front. There was no way to stop Ark when a swing of the sword would just blow them away. But Power Charge had a side effect.

-Chiiiik!

-Chiiiik!

Dozens of Parasites were blown back every time he moved. But Ark had to keep moving forward with Power Charge, so the Parasites behind him could just get back up. Thus there were 150 Parasites chasing behind him. In addition, this place was inside Leviathan’s so there was no place to escape. Of course, Ark’s current level was 426. With the dark attribute bonus, he reached level 639. That was enough when fighting 150 level 300 monsters. But even if he was level 639, handling those many numbers was time consuming. It was too stressful for Ark who only had a time limit of 20 minutes left.

“But.....”

After a short time he entered the vicinity of the stomach. Ark confirmed that no more Parasites appeared in front of him so he turned around. Meanwhile the number of Parasites had increased to 200. Seeing the gathering of 200 Parasites really caused goose bumps to rise.

“Now it’s your turn. Summon Magura!”

Ark lifted his sword and yelled. One of the four Hearthstones on the

sword emitted a black smoke. Just like a genie emerging from a lamp in a fairy tale, the smoke from the Hearthstones changed to a black dog. It was the summoning of the legendary devil Magura! In fact, a condition was required in order to summon Magura. It was only possible to summon Magura in a place filled with demonic energy. Leviathan was a demonic monster so naturally its interior was filled with abundant demonic energy.

-Ooooooh!

Magura who had escaped from the Hearthstone cried out. It was Magura's wide area skill 'Howling!' The Parasites that were approaching were blown away.

"Now, shall I leave?"

In the meantime, Ark and his summons left. Magura who was confined to the Hearthstone had no memory. When he was summoned, he would attack indiscriminately regardless if it was Ark or a monster. Therefore Ark quickly ran away.

'Anyway, the Parasite was only level 300 so I can't get experience or loot even if they die. It is better to leave them to Magura.'

Therefore Ark escaped the parasites and rushed towards the stomach. Magura attacked everything around him for 5 minutes. It might not be enough to kill all of them but it should be sufficient to block the Parasites And Magura also continuously used Taunt thanks to his endless rage. So the Parasites naturally gathered around Magura and a fierce battle began.

-Kuaaaang!

Magura roared and attacked the Parasites. Magura was level 300. The Parasites were also level 300. But Magura was a level 300 elite monster. Magura wasn't pushed at all by the 200 Parasites. Well, Ark had already escaped so he didn't care whether Magura or the Parasites won.....

Anyway, Ark left the Parasites to Magura and ran through the oesophagus. How much time passed?

“Gold dream!”

Ark stopped moving and shouted. At the end of the cave was a huge underground lake. On the outskirts of the lake was the ship Gold Dream.

“.....Damn, that stupid Leviathan!”

Anger welled up at the sight of Gold Dream. Once again, this place was Leviathan's stomach. And the underground lake was probably made of seawater and gastric juices. Gold Dream had been floating in the lake of gastric juices for three days in real time. It was impossible no matter how much money he spent on magic coating. The sails were full of small holes while the paint of the merchant ship was peeling.

‘I guess I have to pay for repairs.’

Ark sighed and mumbled. It was a new merchant ship and he already had to pay for repairs.....well, it was 100 times better than buying a new boat.

‘By the way, those boats?’

Ark looked at the other boats on the underground lake. Gold Dream wasn't the only ship inside Leviathan. There were an additional five ships scattered around. It was immediately obvious that the ships belong to Midus, the merchant's guild. That's right. It was transportation fleet that had disappeared near this area. The transportation fleet had also been swallowed by Leviathan.

‘Aha, I see. Is this why Leviathan didn't swallow the armed fleet when it appeared?’

Ark struck his palm with his fist as he confirmed something and muttered. He finally understood why Leviathan didn't appear when the armed fleet showed up. And also the reason why it didn't swallow the battleships after it appeared. It was because of Gold Dream and the transportation fleet on the lake. Leviathan hadn't digested the six ships yet so it didn't want to swallow any more.

‘Anyway, let's go look at Gold Dream for the moment.’

In addition to the ships, wine kegs and small planks were also floating on the underground lake. Ark stepped on the planks and kegs and climbed onto the deck of Gold Dream. It felt like he was standing on the deck of a ghost ship. The deck was corroded here and there while the sails and ropes were decaying. He also couldn't find any of the NPCs he employed to manage Gold Dream. All he found was splatters of blood left on the deck. Perhaps they were attacked by the Parasites after being swallowed. He didn't see the sailors on the other merchant ships so he assumed the same thing happened to them.

'How on earth did Sid survive in this place?'

Ark felt doubtful after seeing the terrible sight. But the question was easily solved.

"Sid!"

Ark found Sid after entering the captain's room. Something underneath the table moved. It was Sid. But Ark flinched as he moved closer and confirmed Sid's appearance. Sid looked like someone who had encountered disaster in the Himalayas. Ark couldn't even recognize him properly. He just trembled and clutched three scrolls tightly. The scroll was the reason why Sid could live.

"[Safe Travel] scroll....."

That's right. Sid was able to survive in a place like that because of the scrolls. The [Safe Travel] scroll meant that monsters couldn't attack for 2 hours. When the Parasites attacked, Sid quickly used the [Safe Travel] scroll and continued to renew it every two hours. But now he only had three scrolls remaining. He was afraid that the Parasites would catch him after the next six hours which was why he kept on trembling.

"Hey, Sid! Wake up!"

Ark tapped him and Sid opened his eyes with a dim expression.

"Ah, Ark-nim!"

Sid looked around stupidly for a while before shouting. He then

hurriedly looked around and said.

“Huk! You’ve come. Have we already exited? Is this the outside?”

But then he belatedly confirmed that he was still in the stomach and Sid’s face stiffened. He weakly sat down and started shedding tears.

“Kuak, I made a mistake. We’re screwed!”

“What are you going on about?”

“What am I saying? Didn’t Ark-nim also get swallowed by the sea monster? I’ve been waiting for 3 horrible days for Ark-nim to rescue me, and now Ark-nim has been eaten as well.....ohh, it’s over. I’ll be eaten by those worms!”

“What nonsense are you talking? Why will we be eaten by monsters?”

Sid lifted a tearful face at Ark’s words.

“We’ll either be digested or eaten by the monsters.”

“This is different. I came in on my own.”

“Came in on your own?”

“Yes, so that I can rescue Gold Dream.”

“Rescue Gold Dream?” Is there a way to get out of here?”

“Of course. Do you think I came in here to become excrement?”

“H-how?”

“That.....”

Ark smiled and explained the method. Then he suddenly saw the merchant ships through the window. Ark had an uncomfortable feeling the moment he saw the ships.

‘What the?This feeling? I feel like I’ve forgotten something very important.....’

Ark frowned and remained locked in thought.

‘I see! That’s what I forgot!’

“Wait here a moment!”

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

Sid freaked out as Ark jumped off Gold Dream and headed towards the other ships.

‘According to the information obtained by the merchants’ guild, the ships that disappeared in these waters are carrying imports towards Bristania.....’

Ark jumped onto the deck with a large smile on his face. Spices and silk, porcelain objects etc.....it was a huge amount of piled goods! That thought weighed on Ark’s mind.

‘This is equivalent to 15,000 gold!’

And there were 5 ships carrying such goods. That was equivalent to 75,000 gold. It was truly a treasure. Before entering Leviathan, Ark had already been equipped with a number of plans to rescue Gold Dream. But he didn’t know that the merchant’s fleet was associated with Leviathan. Of course, Ark’s plan wouldn’t fail if the merchant ships were there. There was another reason why he felt uncomfortable when seeing the ships. No, to be exact it was the 75,000 gold worth of goods.

‘If my plan succeeds then I can also rescue the merchant ships from Leviathan.’

Therefore Ark would’ve recovered 75,000 gold worth of assets for the merchant’s guild. But there would be no profit for Ark if he did that. Of course, if he returned the missing fleet then his intimacy with the merchant’s guild would soar and the commission considered successful. However the fee was only 15 gold. Even if he received an additional 200% as the captain, it would only be 45 gold.

‘I found 75,000 gold and can only receive 45 gold?’

What on earth? Wasn’t it a very unpleasant feeling? Of course, Ark

never expected to find the merchant's fleet in the first place. But the sight made his heart ache. It would be regrettable if he had to politely return the goods to the merchant's guild after seeing such a huge amount.

‘Moreover, there are no surviving sailors.’

Since Ark found the transportation fleet, he could lay claim to it. When stolen goods were taken away by pirates and the pirate's ship was wrecked at sea, the person who discovered or salvaged the ship would claim ownership of it. It was similar to how Seutandal seized the stolen goods from the lawless port. But now the situation was different. The armed fleet had been dispatched to recover the transportation fleet. Ark was also a member of that armed fleet. So Ark was currently contracted to return the recovered assets to the merchant's guild. Even if Ark found the transportation fleet, the ownership would automatically shift to the merchant's guild. He couldn't think of a way to embezzle the goods.

“In the end, do I have to let go of that huge amount?”

Ark clicked his tongue and murmured with a regretful expression. All of a sudden he felt a flash of lightning in his head.

“Wait? Wouldn't the transportation fleet be prepared for pirates? Then perhaps.....?”

Ark started to search the ships for something. A satisfied smile spread on Ark's face after he found what he was looking for.

“Huhuhu, the heavens are truly on my side.”

“Attack its flank!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

While Ark was progressing with his plan, the merpeople, Gallic and the two battleships had combined forces to attack Leviathan. While Gallic blocked the Leviathan's movements, the merpeople combined to take care of the Parasites. Meanwhile, the two battleships kept a

sufficient distance and supported them with cannon fire. Leviathan couldn't endure against the combined forces. Blood streamed from its countless wounds as the Leviathan only had 4% health left. If the battle progressed like this then it would continue for only a few more minutes.

“But Ark-nim.....?”

The Mermaid Queen murmured with a worried expression. Ark hadn't returned from inside the Leviathan yet. If Leviathan died like this then Ark was bound to be in danger. Ark was certain to be somewhere in the oesophagus, stomach or other internal organs. If Leviathan died then they would shrivel up. Ark would be pushed by the internal organs shrinking and die. But they also couldn't slow down their attacks until Ark returned. If Leviathan managed to run away then the situation would become more complicated. The Mermaid Queen was thinking that when something interrupted.

-Kuaaaaah! Kua.....Kuaaak!

The Leviathan suddenly flinched. Then it suddenly gave a weird shriek. After a short time, it coughed and suddenly opened its mouth. And.....

Chwaaaaaaah, kwarururuk!

A huge amount of discharge flowed out of the Leviathan's mouth. Leviathan's vomit covered several kilometres of the sea.

“T-this damn evil bastard.....”

The Mermaid Queen glared at the Leviathan after seeing the vomit covered waters. Then Leviathan vomited a few more times. The gastric juices flowed out like a waterfall and really made everyone feel like throwing up. Suddenly huge objects fell into the waters along with the gastric juices.

“W-what is going on?”

“A merchant ship!”

The armed crew watching from a far distance murmured with

surprise. It wasn't just one or two ships, but six. Then loud laughter was heard from one of the merchant ships.

“Hahaha, we're out! It's a success!”

“T-That person.....!”

“It is Ark-nim, the captain of the no. 8 battleship!”

A sailor confirmed after looking through a telescope. That's right. The person who laughed from the merchant ships vomited out was Ark.

“Huhuhu, the effect is really no joke.”

Ark laughed as he looked at the nauseous Leviathan. Leviathan was still vomiting! In fact, this was the plan Ark used developed to rescue Gold Dream. Once again, Gold Dream would be buried at sea if Leviathan died. If he was still in the stomach then he would also die from the shrinking of the stomach and intestines.

‘I have to take it out while the monster is still alive.....it is impossible to make that guy spit it out. Then the only way is to make it vomit!’

He naturally thought of one type of food.

-Nausea Syrup

A syrup made from the matured flesh of one of the worst smelling fruits on the continent. A person can't help vomiting whenever they eat this syrup.

<Causes somebody to vomit. Thanks to the 'vomit' state, all food and potion effects will disappear>

Ark made the food using Creative Cooking. While sailing, Ark who was inspired continually used Creative Cooking to make the Nausea Syrup. He had cooked 200 of the dishes. Ark had carried these foods while entering Leviathan. He threw all of it into the stomach. Yet there was an unexpected issue raised with this part.

‘Leviathan is far more enormous than I imagined. Furthermore, it has

an extreme swallowing ability since it managed to swallow all those ships at once!’

Gold Dream and the transportation fleet also survived in the stomach for several days. Leviathan had indigestion after eating too ignorantly. Fortunately Gold Dream and the merchant ships were still safe but the indigestion was a problem. The Nausea Syrup won’t be able to show its true power.

‘Is there a way to make its stomach more active?’

Then Ark thought of his experiences in Gallic. When fighting with the boss Adelaine, he had used the strategy of luring her into the stomach and melting her with gastric fluid! The impact on the stomach had made the gastric juices overflow. Of course, if he used a similar method to irritate the stomach then Gold Dream and the transportation fleet would suffer a fatal blow. But wasn’t it better than being stuck in the stomach of the dying Leviathan?

“Yes, it’s a cannon! I can shake its stomach using the cannon!”

Ark went around with his summons and loaded all the cannons on Gold Dream. When he launched it, there was a loud roar and the stomach started becoming unstable. When the shells hit the stomach wall, an explosion occurred and a huge amount of gastric juices flowed out like a waterfall. When the concentration of gastric juices in the stomach increased, the floating kegs and planks started to melt. Gold Dream was also the same. Gold Dream had already been tattered after being left for three days so the high concentration of gastric juices started to melt the outer walls.

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

Sid looked uneasily at the exterior walls. But Ark wasn’t done yet.

‘I just have to hope the Nausea syrup shows an effect before Gold Dream melts…….’

Kullong, kullong, kullong.

It was at that moment. The stomach started to twist and the gastric juices formed waves. It was the stomach just before vomiting would

occur!

“That’s it! Sid, Razak, Racard, hold on tight!”

The gastric juices started to flow along the oesophagus at a tremendous pace. The effect of Nausea Syrup was activated and Leviathan began to vomit. The gastric juices flowed along the oesophagus like the rapids of a river. If he made a mistake and the already tattered Gold Dream ran into a wall then it would break.

“Okay, Demonic Manifestations!”

Ark used Physical Shield to regulate and protect the boat while Gold Dream flowed back up the oesophagus.

“It is visible! Everybody prepare for the impact!”

After a while, the black sea could be seen between the open mouth. And.....

Weeeeeek! Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Gold Dream managed to escape from Leviathan after 3 days. The five merchant ships also followed.

“Ek! That is.....!”

“The transportation fleet that disappeared!”

“All five ships have appeared!”

The NPCs associated with the merchant’s guild cheered as they saw the ships. But confusion spread on their faces in the next moment. The merchant ships fell to one side and started to sink.

“N-no!”

“The trade goods on the transportation ship.....”

The NPCs rolled around the deck with despair. But what could they do about the sinking ships? Besides, the sinking ships weren’t valuable now.

“Ah, that monster is attacking Captain Ark!”

Leviathan shrieked and ran up to Gold Dream. It understood that he was the reason for it vomiting. Meanwhile, Gold Dream that had just exited was right in front of Leviathan. The masts were also broken so it couldn't sail. But Leviathan couldn't imagine it.

"Are you trying to eat my ship twice?"

Ark murmured with an expression full of confidence. He raised his finger before lowering it.

"This is the end. You stupid fish!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

At the same time, an amazing scene developed. Leviathan had been moving towards him. Yet Leviathan's body suddenly exploded in various places. Gills, fins, tail, stomach.....a blast occurred in all those areas and Leviathan instantly turned bloody.

-Grr.....grr.....grrrrr!

Leviathan let out a pained moan and wobbled. It had nearly reached Gold Dream. Suddenly an absurd ringing sound occurred in the vicinity of Leviathan's head. Leviathan's eyes trembled like it was having a spasm and it slowly sank under the water.

"The effect is amazing!"

Ark laughed and muttered. This was obviously Ark's work. Ark had finally exited Leviathan but he hadn't done it politely. Just before throwing the Nausea Syrup, Ark had considered a way to inflict damage. Then he recalled the scene where the Parasites moved along the blood vessels. Ark remembered that scene and piled up the bombs from the merchant ships into the blood vessels. He had adjusted the length of the fuse so that it would explode after Gold Dream escaped. The bombs had followed the blood vessels to areas such as the brain, lungs heart etc.....so the explosions occurred all over the body. No matter how powerful the monster was, it wouldn't be able to withstand that type of attack. What could survive gunpowder exploding at the heart or the brain? Therefore the Leviathan received tremendous damage and instantaneously died.

Bugul bugul, bugul bugul.

Leviathan's mouth gaped open and it sank back into the black sea.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

The welcome message windows appeared in rapid succession.

"Hehehe, this is really great."

Ark giggled as he shook a thick purse. Shortly after Leviathan died, Ark had returned to Reuben harbour with the armed fleet. He earned a total of 85 gold for the successful commission. It was considerable income for 5~6 hours of mercenary work. But Ark's current purse held more than 300 gold. That money had come from the pockets of Admiral Wagner.

"Can we talk for a moment?"

Wagner had approached the instant he returned to the battleship after Leviathan died.

"Hmm hmm, the fact that you knocked down Leviathan.....wasn't it possible because of my instructions? You won't be sorry if you do this favour for me."

He coughed and it was obvious what he was proposing. Wagner's reaction wasn't that surprising. Wagner had been placed in charge of the new battleships that were collaboration between the Schudenberg kingdom and the merchant's guild. But out of the eight battleships, six had been destroyed. Of course, it was just lucky that they managed to defeat Leviathan in the first place. Although the transportation fleet was discovered, none of the trade goods were reclaimed. After the merchant fleet sank, 20~50% of the goods were floating around in the sea. Fortunately, 40% of it was recovered. It wasn't a bad outcome of the battle against Leviathan.

But the problem was Wagner's disgraceful behaviour during the battle. Wagner didn't know what to do about the disgraceful behaviour he showed during the battle. If it was reported to a higher ranking person then it was clear what would happen. So Wagner devised a plan to get some 'achievements.' In fact, the method used to knock down Leviathan wasn't normal. It was thanks to Ark that they were successful. The merpeople helped because of Ark and he also discovered the transportation fleet. Yet now Wagner was saying that Ark's behaviour was a result of his instructions? Wagner was trying to evade criticism and raise his fame?

'This guy, is that how he raised his achievements so far?'

Ark looked at Wagner with a blank expression. But when he thought about it, it wasn't a bad suggestion. Anyway, this was just a simple mercenary request. He wouldn't receive that much additional compensation no matter his achievements. And he had no thoughts about becoming famous. Then it was better to get something out of it.

"I accept."

After thinking for a bit, Ark readily accepted the suggestion. So Ark's achievement was sold for 300 gold. That was a total of 385 gold obtained. And he gained 6 levels from killing Leviathan. The original number of people in the armed fleet was 1,500 people yet only 400 remained after the battle with Leviathan.

"Earning 6 levels and 385 gold isn't a small amount for 6 hours of work."

However, this was nothing compared to the real income that Ark obtained. After receiving the compensation from the merchant's guild and withdrawing as a mercenary, Ark headed straight for the port. He walked along and explored the ships docked until he came across a familiar one. It was Gold Dream, the ship owned by Ark.

"You've arrived?"

Sid welcomed him after Ark boarded the deck. Ark looked around restlessly and whispered in a secretive voice.

“Well, did you check the price?”

“Yes, I’ve grasped the current market price.”

“How much?”

“42,800 gold.”

Ark smiled gleefully at Sid’s reply. Ark’s real income was the 42,800 gold that Sid mentioned. Where on earth did Ark obtain that type of income? The answer was simple. It was from the goods of the merchant ships that had sunk underwater. The transportation fleet had sunk as soon as it exited Leviathan. Thanks to that, the armed fleet was only able to recover 40% but the merchant’s guild thought that was lucky considering the situation.

.....However, there was a secret hidden here.

‘Huhuhu, the operation was a success!’

In fact, the merchant ships were in better condition than Gold Dream when Ark arrived at Leviathan’s stomach. The performance of the ships was similar but the transportation fleet had been swallowed later. Even so, the transportation fleet sank....no, to be exact the merchant ships were forcibly sunk. It was Ark’s ploy. He had sent bombs into Leviathan. Before Ark took the transportation ship outside, he also left some bombs at the bottom of the merchant ships. The reason he did this was to snatch the trade goods.

‘If the transportation fleet remains intact then I won’t even receive 10 won.’

That would be Ark’s greatest regret. Although his main purpose was Gold Dream, he accepted the commission to save the transportation fleet and he wouldn’t even receive 10 won for it? However, the situation would be different if the transportation fleet sunk. If the ships sank then the merchant’s guild had no way to reclaim all the goods. Even in reality submarines couldn’t find everything floating within several hundred metres of the seabed. New World was still in the medieval ages so how could they possibly recover all the goods? Yet Ark had a simple way to fix that problem.

‘The merpeople!’

That’s right. The merpeople would have no problem recovering the goods. After he rallied the merpeople, he managed to recover 60% of the trade goods. He also used Sid’s name to sell it to the merchant’s guild so he was technically faultless.

‘If the merpeople hadn’t appeared at that moment then I would’ve lost Gold Dream and the profit.’

There was a reason the merpeople had appeared. Before returning to Reuben, Ark had used the Mermaid Queen for the reason. Then the Mermaid Queen explained the reason why they appeared.

“The devil Leviathan was a sea monster that roamed around during the Dark Century and corrupted the waters. At that time, the merpeople sacrificed a lot of people in order to defeat the devil. Recently we’ve heard news that the devil was resurrected. So we instantly stopped our travels and returned. Then we heard Ark using the Flute of the Merpeople. We instinctively sensed that Ark had something to do with the Leviathan and hurriedly rushed towards your location.”

It was the good think about having high intimacy with NPCs. Who would’ve imagined that it would’ve helped in the middle of the sea? Well, it all worked out with a bit of luck. The Mermaid Queen also readily agreed when Ark asked her to recover the goods from the ships.

‘Of course I also have to give a fee to the merpeople…….’

The problem was settled surprisingly easily.

“Several thousand years ago, Leviathan devoured numerous guardians of the sea in order to raise its abilities. The sea snake attached to it was actually one of the guardians of the west sea.”

The Mermaid Queen proposed. The Leviathan was a devil that had the ability to absorb the powers of other beings. Depending on the type of power it absorbed, it also appeared in the form of a huge turtle, shark or even sea dragon.

“So the flesh of the Leviathan will contain the absorbed powers. It doesn't matter to other races but the merpeople can process Leviathan's body to make wonderful equipment. If Ark-nim allows us possession of the body then we will happily help recover the goods.”

“I understand.”

Ark replied without even thinking about it. Honestly, the flesh of the Leviathan was a great ingredient but Ark couldn't claim ownership of its body which stretched over several kilometres. In addition, Leviathan's body had sunk to the bottom of the sea so only the merpeople could harvest it. He thought it was worth trading the Leviathan's body for the trade goods. So Ark was able to request the merpeoples' help in exchange for Leviathan. But he didn't get all the money. He spent 16,000 gold to repair Gold Dream.

‘If I take 16,000 gold from 43,800 then my final profit will be 26,800 gold.’

He had managed to embezzle 26,800 gold after just a few hours work. In addition, a lot of armed fleet members died so he managed to obtain most of the loot from Leviathan.

-Leviathan's Shield (Unique)

Item type: Leather Shield

Defense: 400

Durability: 256/400

Weight: 45

User Restriction: Level 500 and more

Leviathan is a legendary sea monster. While sailors frequently associate Leviathan with a sea snake, but it is just the tentacles attached to Leviathan. The attached tentacles will often all off. Because of that, the shield is able to show the ability of the tentacles.

<Option: Strength +50, Stamina +30, Underwater penalty decreased by 50%>

<Special Option (Water Pressure Gun): A small hole in the shield will launch a high pressure stream which deals 1~500 damage. It can also penetrate through 10 people standing in a line and deal 1~200 damage. However, some charging time in water is required to use the Water Pressure Gun. 1 hours of charging will allow the Water Pressure Gun to fire 15 shots>

It was a unique shield resembling Leviathan! The leather 500 shield only had 400 defense but its options were no joke. Strength +50, Stamina +30 and a 50% reduction in underwater penalty! But the real value of this shield was the special option. It was able to use Leviathan's special skill the Water Pressure Gun. Of course, it wasn't on the same level as the Water Pressure Gun Leviathan used. If Leviathan's was like a laser, the Water Pressure Guns stored in the shield was more like arrows. Furthermore, it dealt 1~500 damage.

It also possessed a little of the 'Cutting' attribute that Leviathan's Water Pressure Gun had. When 10 people were standing in a line, it was able to deal 1~200 damage. Furthermore, the Water Pressure Gun from Leviathan's Shield didn't have a cool down time and it didn't consume any mana. This type of long range attack was very useful in battle so any warrior would desire this shield. Leviathan also dropped an additional two magic items. But the standard meant he would only receive 50 gold for it.

'The problem is.....'

Ark looked at a few fist sized black beads.

-Parasite's Egg Sacs

The egg sacs of the Parasites living inside Leviathan. It will hatch once placed underwater.

'What is this?'

Ark scratched his head as he looked at the black beads. The Parasite's Eggs Sacs were discovered while Ark was searching in

the vicinity of Leviathan's body. There were thousands of small eggs inside one egg sac. Thousands of Parasites would probably hatch from one egg sac. Although he collected it, he didn't know what it could be used for. What could hatching Parasites be used for?

'But it might be useful in the future. Even dog poo can be used as a medicine.'

So Ark collected the Egg Sacs and placed it inside his bag.

'Where should I go now?'

There were no sailors on Gold Dream so Sid had to stay in Reuben Harbour for a while. There was no reason for Ark to stay inside the harbour so he left. But he struggled with deciding where to go.

"Excuse me."

Suddenly some men in formal clothes approached. Ark turned to them and they asked.

"Are you Baron Ark-nim?"

"Who are you?"

"We are messengers dispatched by the kingdom. We went to Silvana first but quickly rushed here after we discovered your location. Please receive this."

A messenger extended a sealed letter.

-Convening of all Schudenberg aristocrats

All aristocrats are summoned in order to deal with the recent crisis facing the kingdom. All members of the nobility who receive this order must attend.

"All the nobility in Schudenberg Kingdom is being summoned? What on earth?"

Ark scanned the letter with a perplexed expression.

Lobbyist

“It is confirmed that there have been 273 obelisks in Schudenberg Kingdom. We haven’t discovered the identity of the obelisks but it is certain that the mystery monsters are caused by it. They’re far stronger and aggressive than normal monsters so the surrounding villages have received considerable damage.”

“How do we deal with it?”

“The main instruction provided to the Lords of each territory is to protect the citizens and destroy the obelisks. Therefore each territory has received insignificant additional damage and the number of obelisks has decrease by 1/3rd. Yet the overall situation with the obelisks hasn’t had any large results.....”

They were in Selebrid’s royal castle. Various affairs dealing with the kingdom were reported in a serious manner. One of the contents on the list was regarding the black obelisks. The black obelisks had simultaneously appeared in various kingdoms on the same day. The problem wasn’t the black obelisks but the unidentified monsters. The even more disturbing thing was that the monsters from the obelisks resembled monsters from that region’s folklores that had been passed down.

Leviathan was also the same. The monster Leviathan was known among sailors as the ‘monster that tells the end of the world.’ Ark hadn’t understood it when he disposed of Leviathan but when recovering the goods, a black obelisk had been found underwater. The Mermaid Queen said that Leviathan had disappeared a long time ago so the obelisk was probably the reason why it resurrected. The Mermaid Queen also mentioned that the events on the continent were also occurring underwater. Anyway, these events had turned the Schudenberg Kingdom upside down.

Of course, the kingdom always had numerous monsters. But the monsters from the obelisks were different. Furthermore, the

monsters over level 100 had high aggressiveness and tended to flock together to attack territories. The balance of the game had completely collapsed. Meanwhile the troops dispatched to each territory and village in the territory had destroyed the obelisk and additional damage was stopped. But not long afterwards, there was a new obelisk so it just led to a vicious cycle. Therefore public sentiment had reached a state of confusion. So an urgent meeting was called to develop a way to calm the turmoil.

“It is unnecessary to say but the people are shaking in fear. It is essential to show a firm attitude to offset that fear. His Majesty the King has declared martial law and regular troops will be sent to take control of all roads and towns.”

“Emergency martial law.....”

The King stroked his beard and sighed. If he declared martial law then the entire kingdom would be prepared to fight. In other words, the areas unrelated to battle would come to a standstill. Declaring martial law would decrease the damage of the obelisks but the backlash couldn't be ignored.

“Does this situation really require martial law?”

A nobleman asked. The person in charge of state affairs stated in a resolute voice.

“Many people don't know this yet but the damage to the western region of Schudenberg is beyond imagination. Especially thanks to the monster called Doppelganger that can eat their victims and then change into their shape. The only way to minimize the damage is to declare martial law and use the checkpoints between each village.”

“But the damage of martial law to the economy.....”

“We have to concentrate on reducing today's damage before worrying about tomorrow's damage.”

“I understand. I will entrust the authority to you.”

The King nodded towards the government official in charge of state affairs. Ark's face hardened at the same time.

‘I’m screwed!’

After receiving the summoning order, he had quickly moved to Selebrid using the Letter Movement. Of course, it wasn’t because of loyalty to the King that he flew so quickly. The central subject of this meeting was the martial law. No, to be exact it was the problem of provisions when martial law was declared.

Martial Law Section 5: The borders will be blocked under martial law. With the checkpoints closed, movement between territories (see exceptions) is strictly prohibited.

The border and territory checkpoints will be closed and movement between territories prohibited! In other words, all types of trade within the kingdom would be forbidden. It was a natural measure when considering the unnatural monsters.....

‘I’ve just recovered Gold Dream and now what is this?’

Ark wasn’t happy. He was the Chairman of a business with hundreds of staff (Sailors on Gold Dream, employees of the trading post, etc.) It wasn’t easy to lead a business. If there was a standstill then the business would undoubtedly suffer and receive tremendous losses. He still had to pay the monthly salary to the staff as well as rent for the warehouses. Was that all? If he missed the timing of the sale then he would lose tens of thousands of gold. The business would undoubtedly suffer a deficit. Now all trade was blocked in Schudenberg Kingdom. Ark was like a horse that had just started learning to walk only to die.

‘I haven’t even made 1 gold profit from Gold Dream yet. First it had been swallowed by a monster and I had to pay the costs of repairs and now trade is banned?’

It was to the extent that Ark thought he was cursed.

‘I didn’t realize the situation was so serious when hearing about it from Global Exos the other day.....’

It wasn’t just talk any more. No, now Ark’s life was at stake. If this continued then there was no guarantee when the martial law would end. It couldn’t be simply resolved by finding the obelisks and

destroying them. The reason was that.....

“What is the true identity of the obelisks?”

Somebody asked and a court magician replied.

“We still can’t determine anything about the obelisk’s identity. Our guess is that it is some kind of curse.”

“A curse?”

“That’s right. The cursed obelisk pollutes the surrounding environment and causes ‘illusions’ and ‘memories’ of the evil in this world to be amplified.”

“Illusions or memories? What do you mean?”

“The monsters don’t exist. They are a virtual image created through the excessive fear of the population. This is the part where the curse becomes tricky. In this case, the fear that the people feel are so amplified that the monsters actually become real. And this curse isn’t simply settled by destroying the object.”

“But didn’t the monsters stop appearing when the obelisk was broken?”

“It is a temporary phenomenon. The obelisk is just the vehicle for the curse. Unless the source is destroyed, the obelisks will just be reformed in the future. Well, using a strong artifact with the power of a god will completely destroy the obelisk but that isn’t a viable solution.”

“What should we do then?”

An aristocrat asked with a pain expression. Then the court magician pointed to a northern area of the continent on a map.

“From our advance reports, the source of this originated in the Sinus Principality. Schudenberg has 273 black obelisks. Bristania has a similar number but surprisingly the Sinus Principality has 700 of them. There are so many obelisks in the whole kingdom that it won’t be able to easily be resolved. And.....”

The court magician laid a memory crystal onto the table. A light was emitted from the crystal and a hologram appeared. A heavy moan emerged from the mouth of the aristocrats and the King. The image which appeared was a city immersed in darkness. It wasn't night time. But the entire city was covered in something like a black fog. The city covered by darkness was being attacked by a huge number of monsters. The guards swung their weapons to block but the attacks were relentless. In the end, the monsters invaded the city causing flames to rise and a slaughter to occur everywhere in the city. It was a hell like scene.

"This is the current situation of the Sinius Principality. It's only been a few days and the deformed monsters had already taken over 60% of the Sinius Principality. The areas taken by the monsters are covered in a black fog and the environment is rotting. Our studies showed us that the black fog is the root of the curse produced by the black obelisk. The problem is that the black fog is expanding and pushing close to the borders of the Schudenberg and Bristania kingdoms."

"What the hell is going on? I've lived for 60 years and I've never seen or heard of such a thing!"

A nobleman exclaimed with a confused expression. The court magician looked at the King and seemed to ask something with his eyes. The King nodded and the court magician took a deep breath before opening his mouth.

"No, this is not the first time this happened. It occurred a long time ago but there remains a record of this phenomenon. Hundreds of years ago.....when the Dark Lord descended to earth."

"W-what?"

The nobles burst out with surprise. Their faces were enveloped with shock. After a moment, a nobleman asked carefully.

".....D-did you say the Dark Lord?"

"That's right."

The court magician replied calmly.

“Are you saying that the Dark Lord has been resurrected?”

“That’s not it. If the Dark Lord was resurrected then the situation wouldn’t end here. The darkness would’ve already spread across the whole continent. Just like in the past when the continent was seized by darkness. We’ve checked and that isn’t happening. Judging from the current situation, this is just the precursor to the Dark Lord’s resurrection. In other words, someone is trying to revive the Dark Lord.”

Fear appeared in the eyes of the nobility. None of the nobility here had experienced the Dark Century. Yet the people of the continent grew up hearing about the Dark Century. The Dark Lord was like an existence of fear to them. After he finished all that he had to say, the court magician stepped back. Then the King opened his mouth again.

“Now you’ve realized the seriousness of the problem. If this situation isn’t settled then it would become even worse. If the Dark Lord is resurrected.....”

The King let out a heavy sigh.

“.....The current domestic situation is serious enough to declare an emergency martial law. If the Dark Lord is resurrected then this situation will worsen. This is a life and death situation for the whole continent so I quickly made contact with the King of Bristania and reached a swift agreement. We will send an expedition to the Sinus Principality.”

“Expedition? From both the Schudenberg and Bristania kingdoms?”

“Yes. The primary objective is to stop the darkness pressing against both kingdoms. And the second objective is to solve the problem attacking the Sinus Principality. I think there is no one who will oppose this decision.”

All the nobles nodded along with the King. It concerned the fate of the continent so how could they object?

‘That’s right. Isn’t this the corresponding scenario that Ho Myung-hwan talked about?’

When Ark first heard about the situation at Global Exos, Ho Myung-hwan told him that New World would respond to the situation with more scenarios. NPCs dispatching an expeditionary army were also part of that scenario.

‘But what if the expedition fails?’

In fact, Ark had thought Ho Myung-hwan’s ‘in the worst case scenario there is a possibility of service being suspended’ was just an exaggeration. Why would they stop a game that millions of users played because of a few bugs? However, he now knew it wasn’t an exaggeration after participating in the meeting. If the expedition failed then the continent would be covered in darkness like the Sinus Principality. Many cities and villages would be captured by monsters. If that happened then users won’t be able to play the game normally anymore. They wouldn’t be able to receive quest or even rest at a village. Furthermore, level 200~300 monsters appeared in a level 100 area so they couldn’t even hunt properly. Wasn’t it natural that New World’s service would have to be suspended?

‘Then what about all the money I invested in Ark’s Corporation?’

The NPC villages would disappear and he wouldn’t be able to trade. If the Dark Lord was resurrected then Ark’s investment of 150,000 gold would fly away.

‘I don’t know whether the Dark Lord is a devil or not but I can’t leave it alone!’

If his business which he suffered so much to build was destroyed then wasn’t the devil his adversary? It was absolutely unacceptable. Saving the continent? He would’ve left it to the ones who wanted to become heroes. But if it was to keep his own property? He had to absolutely obstruct the Dark Lord’s resurrection in order to defend his business. Ark’s head instantly recognized the Dark Lord as his biggest and worst enemy. Then the King opened his mouth again.

“I have two reasons for holding this meeting. The first reason was to gain your consent for the martial law and the other reason is to

appoint a commander to lead the expedition.”

The aristocrats started buzzing after hearing the King’s words. After a long period of discussion, the candidates were narrowed down to 3 nobles. The 1st was an old general known for his military exploits in Nagaran, Kuran. The other person was Earl Ballen in charge of the royal guard. And to Ark’s surprise, the last candidate was Viscount Haverstein, the Lord of Jackson.

“The previous Lord of Jackson was a war hero with various achievements in the Continent War. Viscount Haverstein who succeeded him has managed to sweep up a large number of monsters in his territory as well as subjugating the band of thieves that had been causing a headache for ages, and various other military achievements. This situation is also unprecedented for our generation. I think it would be better to have an unconventional young Commander than a stereotype.”

Marquise Halben spoke skillfully and eloquently.

‘Lord Jackson is even recognized by other nobles.’

Ark looked at Haverstein after hearing Marquis Halben speak. But Haverstein was just making a bitter expression.

“Hmm Lord Kuran, Ballen and Haverstein.....all of them are great knights. But it isn’t possible to have 3 wonderful knights as commanders. Fortunately, there is still time before the expedition sets off so we can discuss the matter two days later. The nobles can discuss it during the intervening days and make a decision before the meeting.”

The King finished before getting up and leaving. The aristocrats immediately separated and began to discuss the contents of the meeting. As expected, Lord Haverstein was surrounded by 10 nobles the moment the meeting ended.

“Lord-nim.”

“Oh, Ark. You came as well. You left for an adventure so I thought you wouldn’t come.....”

“I received a notification and hurried here. An important affair is happening in the kingdom so I can’t pretend ignorance.”

To be exact, he wanted to prevent the martial law which would involve trade being banned. But the martial law wasn’t something Ark could stop. He was discouraged thinking about the huge loss that would occur in the future but now he had to think about the expedition. Ark dimly thought that the expedition was a way to solve his problem. When Ark approached, Lord Haverstein excused himself from the other nobles and exited the group.

“Did Jackson receive any damage?”

“Fortunately the damage isn’t as serious as other territories.”

A fast response. As expected, he truly had the qualifications necessary to be the commander of the expedition forces.

“By the way, I truly hadn’t expected that you would be nominated as a candidate.”

“Is that so?”

Lord Haverstein replied lightly. Ark had a reason for thinking that.

‘He still seems young to me.’

Haverstein had only been 15 years old when Ark first encountered him. It had been 2 years since then. Time sped 3 times faster for NPCs than users so 6 years had passed. Haverstein was already a youth in his twenties. His physique was sturdy and his body had become bigger than Ark’s. But Ark still had the memory of his childlike appearance and kept on thinking of Haverstein as a child.

“Congratulations. To be nominated as a candidate for the commander position at such a young age, doesn’t that mean that the kingdom is recognizing your abilities?”

“That’s not necessarily the answer.”

Just like when he was first nominated, Haverstein gave a bitter smile as he replied.

“I’ve been nominated as a candidate because there are a lot of civil servants in Marquis Halben’s faction. Although they are dissatisfied because I don’t have as much battlefield experience, they have no other choice.”

“Huh? Marquis Halben’s faction?”

“Hmm, of course you wouldn’t know about it.”

Haverstein thought for a bit before saying.

“It is better that you know this. The Schudenberg aristocrats are actually split into 3 factions. The head of one faction, Duke Sarkin was the one who recommended Kuran while the one who recommended Ballen was Marquis Daltin and I was recommended by Marquis Halben.”

In modern times, a faction was like a political party. Unlike modern congressmen who could withdraw from their political party, it was almost permanent once a Lord entered a faction. No, it was ordinary for the next generation to be raised in the same faction. Because the most important virtues of an aristocrat were honour and trust. An aristocrat in Schudenberg kingdom who didn’t belong to a faction would find it difficult to exert any power.

“The three factions are always politically opposed but if a danger appears that risks the Royal Palace then they will unit. That is the reason why the factions didn’t oppose the martial law or the expedition force. But the problem of the commander candidate is different.”

The fate of the Schudenberg kingdom depended on the expedition force. If the expedition failed then everything was over. But if the expedition achieved their goal and saved the kingdom and continent then the commander would undeniably a hero. That was the reason why each faction nominated a different candidate. If that hero belonged to their faction then they would have a political advantage.

‘Whether a game or reality, all politicians are the same.’

Ark looked around at the aristocrats. The factions were fighting while there was a chance the continent could perish? Wasn’t it similar to

the politicians who kept on arguing during the IMF crisis that Korea suffered? Well, Ark had more reason to be worried about the crisis than the nobles.....

“I’m just a mere decoration for them to arrange.”

It was the reason why Haverstein smiled bitterly when he was nominated. However, Ark shook his head and spoke firmly.

“That’s not right. I’ve known Lord-nim since you were young so I know better than anyone. I don’t know what kind of person Kuran and Ballen are, but I think Lord-nim is the right person for this position. I will definitely be supporting Lord-nim.”

“I’m thankful for your words.”

Haverstein then looked at Ark with serious eyes.

“Despite my sense of humiliation, I also desire the spot of commander. This is a chance to make my family shine. It will certainly not be easy. But if you are near me to help then I have confidence that I can accomplish it. Just like you know me, I also know what a great warrior you are.”

“If you are the commander then of course I will risk my life to help.”

Ark answered. There was nothing Ark wanted more. This expedition was a collective effort of the Schudenberg troops. The King ordered this mission directly so there would be various quests and rewards associated with it. Then wasn’t it best to have a high intimacy with the NPC Commander of the expedition? Wouldn’t Ark be given more opportunities than other people?

‘But that isn’t the important thing!’

There was a chance that Ark’s Corporation would become bankrupt. However, if Haverstein became the commander of the military expedition then there was a way to solve that problem. Ark got the idea after hearing about the expedition force.

‘For the sake of Ark’s Corporation, I have to ask Haverstein to become the commander no matter what! I have to become his

cheering squad.....'

Ark was thinking that when he was interrupted.

"I'm thankful but it is highly unlikely that I will become the commander."

"Huh? Why is that?"

"Haven't you noticed? You're strangely innocent in some matters. In fact, today's meeting was a type of play. 3 candidates were nominated but everybody already knows who will be the commander will be Lord Kuran. The reason is simple. It is because the forces that support Duke Sarkin are the largest. Lord Kuran also has no blemishes so there is no reason for him not to win."

Ark finally understood the general situation after hearing Haverstein's words. Despite the factions nominating 3 factions, the winner had already been decided. So the King ended the meeting and allowed more time to give the appearance that Marquise Daltin and Halben's opinions were being considered.

'Damn! What the? It's like that?'

Ark bit his lips. If that happened then wasn't it the end for Ark's plan? While Ark was busy thinking, Haverstein pointed towards Kuran.

"But I am a little anxious. Duke Sarkin....um, I shouldn't say this but.....he already controls most of the power in the kingdom so if his candidate becomes the commander and succeeds....."

Haverstein looked at Marquis Halben having a conversation with other nobles and sighed.

"The only way is to have Marquis Daltin withdraw his candidate Lord Ballen and push the one Marquis Halben recommended. But it won't be easy."

Ark's eyes lit up at that moment. In fact, this was the first time he had encountered the factions. But now he could imagine the ratio of the factions.

'If Marquis Daltin pushes Marquis Halben's candidate then they can prevent Duke Sarking from winning. Based on what I heard, I can conclude that Marquis Halben's faction consisted of 30%, Marquis Daltin 30% and Duke Sarkin 40%. Either Lord Halben could give up and push Daltin's candidate or vice versa. So there is a chance Haverstein can become the commander!'

Of course, like Haverstein said it wasn't easy. The relations between the political factions were deeper and more complicated than it seemed. It would be difficult for the factions to give up their own candidates in order to unite. Ark who had just become an aristocrat couldn't understand the secret strife between factions which continued for hundreds of years but he could profit off it.

'I don't understand but there is still something I can try!'

The fate of who would become the expedition commander depended on this. Ark started to desperately think of a plan.

"Are you Baron Ark?"

Daltin looked at Ark with an arrogant expression. Ark paid a visit to Marquis Daltin's mansion the evening before the aristocrat meeting would occur again.

"I've heard about some of your actions. But why did you happen to visit?"

"I know that I am a novice aristocrat who has just been knighted. There haven't been any chances in the meantime but now that I'm in Selebrid, I can finally visit the high ranking nobility and greet them. If you're not busy then can we talk for a bit?"

"Hmmm.....greetings?"

Daltin carefully looked at Ark. His eyes suddenly moved to a female nearby and he asked.

"We can talk. But who is this lady next to you?"

"My mother."

“Mother?”

“You might be tricked by her overly young appearance but she is actually an ahjumma (female version of ajusshi i.e. aunt).....ouch!”

So-mi pinched Ark’s side because of his playful introduction. After her appearance changed to that of a teenage, her behaviour had seemed to become increasingly more childish. Anyway, Daltin seemed to lose his wariness after seeing that actions between mother and child.

“I’ve heard that foreigners don’t age but I am once again amazed after seeing your mother. The grown up son looked older than the mother. If some secret to becoming younger exists then I will offer my entire fortune to learn it.”

“Becoming younger?”

“Not for me but for my wife.”

“You must love your wife very much.”

“I’m not ashamed to openly admit it.”

Daltin replied without hesitation. So-mi’s eyes sparkled with admiration and she said.

“So Marquis-nim is a romantic. How wonderful. The one who receives the Marquis’ love never needs to worry. Is there a chance I can meet her?”

“I’ve been waiting for that. In fact, one of my pleasures is to boast about my wife to guests.”

Marquis Daltin smiled softly and ordered a servant to bring his wife. After a while.....

‘T-this is the same as a thief!’

Those words rose in his throat. Judging from his appearance, Daltin was approximately 50~60 years old. But the Marchioness who appeared with the servant was only 17~18 years old. If he guessed correctly, there was at least a 30~40 year age gap.

‘No wonder why he wants to become younger.’

“Please tell me. I want to meet a husband who loves me as much as yours does.”

“You have to find a good man.”

Daltin winked lightly towards So-mi. Daltin was an old man with the personality of a Casanova. Despite that minor issue, his overall impression was quite good. He seemed to have a great sense of humour after seeing his reactions to So-mi. But that was just his superficial appearance. Daltin was the leader of one of the factions in Schudenberg Kingdom. He wasn't an insignificant rival.

“Since you came all the way here, did you have some business?”

As expected, Daltin's atmosphere completely changed when the two of them moved to the adjoining room. He changed from a neighbour's grandfather to a politician.

“I previously mentioned that I already heard your name. Well, it is the first time a foreigner has been appointed as an aristocrat in Schudenberg so many people are curious. And they also know the decisive person who allowed you to become an aristocrat. Vicsount Haverstein.”

Daltin mentioned in a quiet tone.

“If you know Viscount Haverstein then why would you come to the head of a different faction?”

“I'm still not a part of a faction.”

Ark answered lightly and Daltin's eyes turned cold as ice.

“I hate ungrateful humans the most.”

If Haverstein was the one who made him a noble then of course he should join the same faction. Despite being the head of another faction, he was still dissatisfied with that behaviour. Ark answered with a laugh.

“That makes sense. And I'm not that type of person either. If I

receive a benefit then I should repay that person. That is why I decided to visit the Marquis.”

“I understand the general principles.”

Daltin laughed. He finally understood why Ark visited based on his answer.

“Your answer is honestly not satisfying. But if you came to my faction then it would be a few times more unpleasant. Yes. It’s not bad. I’ll listen to your talk.”

Daltin nodded and lifted his cup of tea. He closed his eyes to relish the fragrance of the tea before asking.

“Yes, what can you give to me?”

If he wanted Daltin to push Haverstein as a candidate then a price needed to be paid. Ark was aware of that but the timing made him nervous. Daltin’s voice was really casual. What did he expect? Well, it turned out like this so there was no reason for Ark to hesitate.

“What do you want?”

“100,000 gold right now.”

Ark’s face hardened at Daltin’s words. Once again, the problem of whether Haverstein became the commander or not had his corporation at stake. No, it might be possible to get more benefits than expected as well as save his business from the crisis.

‘There is 20,000 gold left in the investment fund and I’ve obtained 25,000 gold the other day. I have to accomplish it even if I have to use all the 45,000 gold!’

Ark had been prepared for that much before visiting Daltin. Yet Daltin had requested more than twice that money. After starting his business, there was no way Ark had that type of money. When Ark couldn’t answer, Daltin laughed and added.

“Before you visited, a messenger for Duke Sarkin arrived and gave me a letter. It said that he would give me 100,000 gold if I supported him. If it continues like this than Kuran will become the expedition

commander. Duke Sarkin only negotiated with me to gain the majority and show off his power. So your opponent is someone who offered 100,000 gold."

".....Did you accept?"

"I refused."

Ark was relieved at his words. If Daltin joined Sarkin then there was nothing he could do anymore. On the other hand, he wondered why Daltin refused.

"Why?"

"The government affairs aren't that simple right now. Right now it isn't important to get things immediately. If I move too lightly then the chance would be lost and misfortune might even occur. You're a person who obtained a territory with your own hands so you should understand my words."

Ark couldn't understand all of Daltin's words. But one thing was evident.

".....So you can't accept my request."

"It is like that."

Daltin nodded.

"But I don't dislike you. Although Lord Haverstein belongs to the faction of Marquis Halben, he is the paragon of a noble youth. He isn't the type to compel someone to pay back a favour. So he isn't the one to send you here. Did you decide this by yourself without telling your friend?"

"That is correct."

"You must think highly of him to come all the way here. Aside from you, a lot of people also really covet Haverstein. I don't think it is bad that you have a close friendship with him. If the situation wasn't like this then I would help you."

"Don't say that now."

Ark laughed bitterly and muttered. Despite his praise of Ark and Haverstein, Daltin had no intention of pushing another candidate. Ark was sighing when he suddenly remembered something.

"I've met Marquis Daltin and learnt a lot. Can I ask one more question?"

"Just say it."

"How do I persuade a stubborn person?"

"Hahaha, you're asking me? You really aren't ordinary. Okay, I'll tell you. How to persuade a person. You have to gather the maximum amount of information about your opponent first. Once you've grasped the weak point of the opponent then they can't refuse. You can then begin 'negotiations' after that."

"The weakness of the opponent.....? Isn't that slightly cowardly?"

When Ark made a bothered expression, Daltin shook his head and smiled.

"Unlike the battlefield, using those methods in a negotiation isn't cowardly. You have to use every method possible to persuade the person. This is the definition of negotiation."

"So if someone discovered your weak point then you wouldn't condemn them? You won't get angry and called them cowardly?"

Daltin firmly answered Ark's question.

"Angry? If a person really drove me into a difficult situation then I would praise them."

At that moment Ark's eyes lit up. It was the answer Ark wanted to hear from Daltin.

"Then I'll have another cup of tea."

Ark smiled and lifted his cup. Daltin looked puzzled for a moment. But Daltin had fallen into a trap that he couldn't escape. 10 minutes passed like that. The door suddenly opened and the Marchioness ran in.

“Honey, it is a request!”

When his wife approached, Daltin’s firm face instantly changed. Daltin seemed to have forgotten that Ark was looking and nodded absent-mindedly.

“Oh, what is it? I’ll do whatever I can to fulfil your request.”

“Please recommend Viscount Haverstein as the commander of the military expedition!”

“Hohoho, I got it. I shall do as you want....ack! W-what?”

“Recommend Viscount Haverstein as the commander. It shouldn’t be too difficult for you.”

“T-that.....”

Daltin stuttered and turned his eyes towards Ark. They seemed to be saying ‘what the hell did you do?’ The Marchioness didn’t know anything about politics. Daltin also never talked politics with her. Yet she suddenly wanted Daltin to recommend Haverstein as the commander after Ark’s visit. It couldn’t just be a coincidence.

‘Huhuhu, you’re the one who said you didn’t care about an attack.’

Ark ignored Daltin’s eyes and looked into the distance. That’s right. Ark was the reason why the Marchioness requested such a thing from Daltin. It was his idea in order to achieve a negotiation. Ark had acted like he wanted to convince Daltin. That was in order to earn time for So-mi’s operation. How did So-mi convince the Marchioness in such a short time?

‘Marquis Daltin, you’ve now been trapped.’

He had to either persuade Daltin or Sarkin in order to make Haverstein the commander. And there was a reason why Ark selected Daltin. It wasn’t just because Duke Sarkin’s candidate was the one most likely to win.

‘Unlike Duke Sarkin, Marquis Daltin has an obvious weakness!’

The Marchioness nagging Daltin right now was his weakness.

According to his research, Daltin was a respected noble. The only time he lost his sense of reason was when it related to his wife. Then wouldn't it be 100 times easier to capture his wife? So Ark had turned his investigation from Daltin to his wife. And this morning he realized that the Marchioness had a princess like personality. Not just her behaviour but thousands of gold were spent on clothes, jewellery and all kind of items to decorate her rooms.

‘Clothes and decor.....’

So-mi instantly floated into Ark's head at that time. So-mi had been steadily selling the costumes she made at Ark's Store. The goods she created with ‘Embroidery’ hadn't been seen before in New World so they flew off the shelves. There was a backlog of orders for a least a few months!

‘This is it!’

There was no way he could give her jewels or precious metals that she didn't have before. But So-mi's clothes are things that the Marchioness had never seen. He could attract the Marchioness' attention using this material.

“Omo, this room is very pretty.”

“Is that so? It took me 1 year to decorate this room.”

The Marchioness immediately puffed up when So-mi complimented the room. Then So-mi pretended to contemplate for a moment before saying.

“But it's too bad.”

“Huh? What is?”

“The chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, the tables, furniture and beds are really wonderful and full of dignity.”

“Indeed. I spent 100,000 gold decorating this place.”

“But.....the curtains and table cloths.....”

“Aren't they all top grade items?”

“I’m aware of that. But the Marchioness should know that just because it is expensive doesn’t mean that it is good. The design and colour doesn’t emit the full dignity. I’m also interested in this area.....ah, do you want to look at this?”

So-mi took out some fabrics from her bag. She compared the fabrics against the bed and table before speaking again.

“How is it? Doesn’t this fabric look a lot better?”

The Marchioness was caught the moment So-mi showed her the fabric samples. It was an inevitable result. So-mi acted like it was a simple fabric but it was actually a special material that Ark spent thousands of gold on. Various rare materials he found in dungeons like the ‘Golden Spider Web’ and the ‘Unicorn’s Mane’ he requested from Roco were used as embroidery materials. That alone already made it a rare decoration. But was that all? So-mi had looked through various embroidery books and created an amazing design on the material. Currently all the items in the room were decorated with the image of a god. But So-mi’s embroidery had a simple yet stunning contemporary design. It was a pretty and rare decoration so of course the Marchioness’ heart would be captured.

“T-this is the first time I’ve seen something like this. Where did you buy something like this?”

“I didn’t buy it.”

“You didn’t buy it?”

“This is something I created.”

“Really? Then could you possible make me curtains and other decorations that suit my room? It doesn’t matter how much money it costs. This might be rude but please.”

“I don’t think it’s rude. Since it is my hobby then I would also like to decorate your room. I’ve been allowed to see a room as nice as this so I would like to make you the best products. But.....”

So-mi sighed with a pained expression.

"I'm not an expert in decorating rooms. In order to create a design that best suits the room, I will have to stay here and work. Otherwise I won't be able to create my best products. But I have to leave for a different region soon."

"T-that....."

The Marchioness had a disappointed expression on her face. She was so frustrated that she even felt like crying.

"Can't you somehow stay here and create it for me? You will have a lot of fun with me. You can also teach me some embroidery."

"I would really like that too. But the reason I came here today is because my son wanted to ask your husband to support Viscount Haverstein in becoming the commander of the expedition. So if he fails then we will move to another place....."

"Commander of the expedition?"

At that moment, the eyes of the Marchioness gleamed. Then she covered her mouth politely and laughed loudly.

"Hohoho, what is that? Was that the problem? Just leave it to me. I will talk to me Honey. If my Honey agrees then it won't be a problem! If Viscount Haverstein becomes the expedition commander then will unni accept my request?"

So.....the Marchioness stuck to Daltin.

"I promised already. Does Honey want to make me a liar?"

"N-no, that's not.....government affairs.....my guest....."

"I don't know! If you don't agree then I'll die!"

"Don't even joke about that. I'll think positively about it."

"You're trying to trick me again by using ambiguous words!"

"That's not it. I'll think about it but I need to finish talking to my guest first."

"Are you sure? You promise?"

The Marchioness kissed Daltin and exited the room. Daltin wiped off the kiss mark and stared at Ark.

“You.....what did you do to my wife?”

“Didn’t you say you would never get angry?”

Ark smiled and replied. Daltin finally perceived that he had fallen into a trap. Everything had been planned from the beginning. Drawing Daltin to another room while leaving So-mi along with his wife, everything was Ark’s plan.....

Obviously Daltin was angry. Daltin had been tricked by Ark and was the opponent in his negotiations. He was furious but he couldn’t say anything after the words he previously said. It would hurt his pride to admit it. Daltin muttered in a deep voice.

“The person I thought was innocent is actually a snake.”

“I’ve often heard that.”

“Okay. Then I’ll ask again. What can you give me?”

Daltin asked with a disgusted expression and Ark laughed impudently. It was the same question but it was different from before. He didn’t accept before but this time there was no choice but to accept. So he could negotiate directly.

“My gratitude and respect.”

“What?”

Daltin’s face hardened. But after a short moment, he abruptly laughed and said.

“Hahaha, your gratitude and respect is worth more than 100,000 gold?”

“That’s correct. There’s no doubt.”

“Well.....I really can’t hate a guy like you.”

Then a message window appeared in front of Ark.

||_____||

||* Art of Communication has increased by 20.||

-Political Power: Political Power has increased by 100.

<Political Power increases when you persuade an aristocrat or settle a political problem. If Political Power increases then you will have a stronger voice among the aristocrats. It will increase your chances of successfully persuading an aristocrat>

The message appearing was a sign that Daltin raised the white flag.

Buzz.

The next day the conference room was in a state of chaos. It was because Daltin had withdrawn his candidate and supported Haverstein.

“All 20 aristocrats who follow me will recommend Viscount Haverstein as the expedition commander!”

Confusion spread on all the faces of the nobles in attendance. Even the King couldn't hide his feelings. If Daltin who had 30% of the support backed Haverstein then the outcome was obvious. 60% of the nobles would be supporting Haverstein as a candidate.

“Your Majesty, do you have anything to say?”

Daltin tilted his head to one side and asked quietly. The King shook his head.

“Ah, no. Good. If the majority of the nobles recommend it then I can entrust the position of expedition commander to Lord Haverstein. Come here and receive your appointment.”

“Huh? Ah, yes!”

While Haverstein was being appointed by the King, the others were chatting amongst themselves. Anyway, Haverstein was now the commander of the expedition force. At the same time, he received the authority to decide everything that related to the expedition. Ark immediately headed towards Haverstein with a large grin after the

appointment was finished.

“Congratulations.”

“W-what is happening.....?”

“It’s simple. Marquis Daltin recognized that you are the right person for the position.”

Ark said. At that moment, Marquis Daltin approached while accompanied by Marquis Halben who was in charge of Haverstein’s faction. Haverstein immediately spoke to Daltin.

“Marquis Daltin, your recommendation.....”

“Yes. I’ve already discussed with Marquis Halben about the problem.”

“Huh? What does that mean.....?”

Haverstein looked at Marquis Halben who immediately answered.

“It’s not important. Lord Daltin was just making a recommendation about the merchant who will be in charge of munitions supply for this expedition. I am thankful for his recommendation and agreed. That’s all.”

Haverstein frowned at Marquis Halben’s answer. Haverstein was upright and honourable so it was difficult for him to accept a backroom deal like this.

“Marquis Halben.”

Haverstein sent Halben a heavy look. Then Halben waved his hand and said.

“Just listen. The person Lord Daltin recommending to be in charge of munitions supply is Lord Ark.”

“Huh? Ark? Lord Ark?”

Haverstein looked at Ark with perplexed eyes. That’s right. This was the reason why he wanted to make Haverstein the expedition commander. Currently Schudenberg Kingdom was under martial law

so trade was impossible. If the war went on for a long time and it wasn't possible to trade then Ark's business would become bankrupt. But there was one way he could still trade. It was to supply the military goods for the expedition. The expedition from the Schudenberg Kingdom would be on a massive scale. What would happen if he had a monopoly on all the goods the expedition needed? He would obtain a huge income. And the authority to appoint the goods supplier belonged to the expedition commander. So Ark wanted to make Haverstein the commander and obtain the monopoly contract. But while he was persuading Marquis Daltin, Ark realized that he had overlooked one thing. It was Haverstein's personality.

'Haverstein is an upright man. If he was working along then of course he would give the exclusive contract to me. But it is different if it related to the Kingdom. Even if I present a lower price than the other candidates, he has a personal relation to me so he can't easily accept.'

In fact, there was one way Ark could win over the other candidates. Ark had the craftsmen from the raccoon clan. Naturally they didn't make things for free. However Ark could obtain the items with a 20~30% discount. Since the military supplies would have a huge volume, the large order meant he could get a 30~40% discount. It would be expensive but still cheaper than other suppliers. Yet there was the chance that the strong-minded Haverstein wouldn't accept because of his close friendship with Ark. Duke Sarkin and his candidate Lord Kuran had already made some arrangements with the merchant's guild in Selebrid.

'But it will still be no use if Haverstein becomes the commander.....'

Ark worried for a while before deciding to use Daltin. Thus Daltin recommended Ark for the position. Then the personal friendship with Haverstein wouldn't matter. Because the recommendation came from Daltin. If that reason disappeared then there was no reason for Haverstein to not nominate Ark as the supplier. Haverstein also sensed a bit of this situation. Haverstein smiled subtly and nodded.

"I understand. Lord Ark, prepare the necessary data and see me at

the base tomorrow.”

“Here it is.”

Ark immediately handed him a thick form. There were dozens of raccoon villages in the Underground World. He also had goods from the Baran clan in Seutandal. And he planned to use the triangular trade route of Seutandal, Silvana and Lancel to circulate the goods. There was also a price list of the required goods. Haverstein could only laugh after he was handed the documents.

“There really is no one who is a match for you.”

“I want to help the expedition both physically and mentally.”

“It really feels like you are a thousand man army.”

Shortly afterwards, Haverstein formally gave Ark the official rights as the munitions supplier.

-Schudenberg Royal Contract

<Contractor: The Expedition Commander Viscount Haverstein= Ark, the representative of Ark's Corporation>

The supplying of the necessary war materials for the expedition army that is leaving for the Sinus Principality will be entrusted to Ark.

“That's it, I did it!”

Ark cheered as he grabbed the gold coloured agreement. Now Ark's Corporation was the official supplier of the expedition army. Like he always said, a crisis was an opportunity. It was only a few days ago that Ark had been on the verge of bankruptcy. But Ark had used various creative tricks to turn the crisis to his benefit. If the expedition force achieved its aim then Ark's Corporation would be a unique existence in the Schudenberg Kingdom.

“I will be rich as long as I stop the Dark Lord!”

And the next day in Schudenberg Kingdom no there was an

announcement throughout the Kingdom.

-The Expedition Army's Crusade

Currently the Sinius Principality is being threatened by unidentified monsters. If this evil is allowed to gain more power than the continent will suffer a terrible fact, just like a long time ago. Therefore the Schudenberg King along with the Bristania King will be rallying an expedition to fight against this evil.

.....All brave warriors!

Join this crusade to protect our world and become brave heroes! All warriors who participate in this expedition will be paid special compensation according to their achievement.

'Recruitment applicants.'

So the crusade was declared with New World's fate at stake.

Crusade and Money

Buzz, buzz, the whole street and squares erupted with noise. From the north, south, east and west, it occurred all over the continent. Places where users gathered all over the continent were stirring.

“Dammit, I really feel like cursing. Are they playing a joke right now?”

“That’s right, this is really ridiculous. We’ve been hunting level 200 monsters when suddenly level 300 elite monsters appeared around town? I lost 50% of my health with one hit!”

“If I hunt then I’m dead. How can I leave the village when I die as soon as I exit?”

“I’ve already died three times from the monsters camped in front of the village. My stats decreased by 18 points and I had to spend 50 gold on repairs. I could also only play the game for 20 minutes within three days.”

“I’d rather die a few times. I spent three days suffering on this quest only to find out that the NPC has died so I can’t complete it. Damn, I heard the quest gave good armour so I stayed all night for several days to complete it. I did all that work for nothing!”

The users gathered on the street and clamoured away. The cause of this was because of the appearance of the black obelisk. It was an unidentified object which caused fear in the NPCs of New World. However the obelisk didn’t only have an effect on the NPCs. No, in a sense the users were in an even more unbearable situation than the NPCs. Despite a virtual reality game having a high degree of freedom, the users still had to sequentially attack the enemy relative to their level. It was like a novice user starting the game with a rusted dagger only to encounter a level 999 boss outside of town. How could they kill it? It was like treading on something before it could sprout! But this absurd situation occurred in New World thanks to the appearance of the obelisks. Mobs of level 100 users

appeared around novice villages and attacked, making a mess of the hunting grounds and the village. Several villages that had been raided by monsters became ruins.

The situation calmed down a bit when troops from the Lord of each region arrived. The troops protected the villages and even destroyed the scattered obelisks as they approached. Fortunately, the situation that had suddenly deteriorated calmed to a certain extent..... The users problem started then. The obelisks near the villages were destroyed but the fundamental problem wasn't resolved. The power of the curse had already permeated deeply into the earth so the obelisks were just restored and the suspicious monsters didn't really decrease.

In this situation, the most important thing to the NPCs was protecting their territory. It was the area the NPCs lived in. In other words, the users area was different. The obelisk appeared in the hunting ground so the monsters became a lot stronger. As soon as the users left the village, it really felt like they met a level 999 boss monster. Naturally the users' dissatisfaction would run out of control. And all of the users' complaints were aimed towards Global Exos.

"What on earth are the operators doing?"

"I paused my part time job for a few days only to keep dying!"

"We can't even go outside at the moment!"

"Are you trying to make us stop playing the game?"

"I don't even get any replies to my emails."

"This is a tyranny!"

"If it continues then I'll launch legal action against Global Exos!"

It was why their customer service and New World's home page was paralyzed. Since they had to wait to lodge their complaints, the users' dissatisfaction amplified even more. Just as the dissatisfaction reached a boiling point and the users were about to become an angry mob, a new variable appeared. An unexpected information window appeared in front of all the users.

-The Expedition Army's Crusade (Event Quest)

Suddenly enigmatic black obelisks and unidentified monsters have appeared around the continent. A black fog and dark existences have covered the Sinus Principality.....

Currently this unlucky and confusing situation is continuing on the continent. However, this is merely the tip of the iceberg. Many prophets have warned that this is only the start of the incidents and if this continues then the worse situation will cover the continent. So the leaders of this society has decided on a crusade to defend the truth and peace.

This is a message sent to all species on the continent. It doesn't matter whether you are brave warriors with hearts of steel or saints who preach the divine will! Join the crusade and protect the future of the continent!

<Difficulty: S++ Quest Restriction: Level 250 or more>

"The Expedition army's crusade?"

The entire continent was enveloped in silence. While the users were still understanding the situation.

"Hey, look at the TV!"

"Global Exos is making an official announcement about this event!"

The users focused their eyes on a press conference that Global Exos was holding. Five days after the situation started, Ha Myung-woo appeared on the TV.

"First I wanted to apologize for the inconvenience to the users."

Ha Myung-woo started eloquently. Then a moderator asked questions to make the interview proceed.

"Many users are asking for clarification about the situation that occurred in New World five days ago. Can we understand the reason why it took so long?"

“I’m also sorry about that point. We didn’t mean to ignore the users but we couldn’t explain until now. It is in order to provide a more interesting game for the users.”

“A more interesting game.....?”

“This situation is a top secret project that our company has been planning for a long time. As you already know, it has been two years since New World started so we believe that new events are essential for the players that love New World. This is the event we came up with, where the users would join forces with the NPCs to save the continent. This event will be an opportunity for users to fall in love with New World even more.”

“Instead of solving quests they received through listening to a NPC’s concerns, it has evolved into resolving the issues of NPCs experiencing hardship.”

“That’s right.”

Ha Myung-woo answered with a confident expression.

“I can’t explain in detail but users who have checked the quest contents will probably understand the general outline. Since this concerns the fate of the whole continent, the compensation for this quest can’t be compared to others. However, this event is intended to reward users for the support they have given so Global Exos has also prepared some unprecedented prizes.”

“That sounds quite interesting? What type of prizes will they be?”

“First, this quest is huge with the expedition forces from Schudenberg and Bristania heading towards the Sinus Principality. The two users who occupy the no. 1 ranking in achievements from both forces will each be paid 500 million won.”

“5-500 million won?”

“Yes, and the two who get 2nd place will receive 300 million won and 3rd place will receive 100 million won. In addition, 4th place to 100th place will receive a cash prize of 20 million won. Users from the ranks 101~200 will be able to play New World for free for one year.

Users up to the 1000th place will have a souvenir sent to them. The total prize money for this event is 10 billion won.”

“It is a truly unprecedented event. If you achieve the number 1 ranking in public achievements during the game then the rewards would be more than expected. But doesn’t that mean it is more advantageous for users with a high level? High level users will definitely have the chance to get more achievements.”

“Of course we’ve also talked about that. And we’ve decided to have a separate prize regardless of ranking or achievement.”

“Regardless of rank or achievement.....?”

“In fact, we’re looking at the ‘impact’ of the event on New World. That ‘something’ is the core of this event. The target of this event is the user who obtains that ‘something.’ The person who receives this prize will get 1 billion won and the position of Global Exos honorary advisor. That ‘something’ might be a monster or something belonging to a user working with the enemy. In other words, it 100% depends on luck.

“Amazing. But aren’t only users higher than level 250 allowed to participate in this event? New World started more than 2 years ago but there aren’t many users over level 250. Won’t users who aren’t over level 250 feel deprived because they can’t participate in the event?”

“Other online games might have events for all users but we think slightly differently. New users are important but ignoring those who have given a lot to New World isn’t possible.”

“The marketing of online games really is different these days.”

“Oh, please don’t misunderstand. It isn’t our intention to disregard new users. While the event is proceeding, the users with levels lower than 250 will still experience some problems. So when this event ends, we also planned a new event for users less than level 250.”

This was the response that Global Exos came up with. In fact, Global Exos had only come up with this plan a few hours ago. A large number of programmers and candidates had been mobilized to

solve this problem but it was still an inner problem. It wasn't something that could be announced to the public. Therefore the users had been on the verge of exploding. Then an unexpected Event Quest was triggered. Ha Myung-woo thought fiercely and combined all the circumstances with the event quest. This situation was presented as a project for the users. In addition, it was a chance to naturally get their hands on the master code. Anyway, Ha Myung-woo's plan succeeded. The users didn't know about the inner problems and just believed Ha Myung-woo's words.

"I see, it was somewhat strange!"

"This atmosphere was created to arrange the event."

"If I get first place in achievements then apart from the quest compensation, I can also get 500 million won!"

"If we find the hidden 'something' then we can get 1 billion won!"

Since they could gather equipment and cash in reality at the same time, the users flocked to join the expedition force. In just one day, 40,000 users joined the Schudenberg Kingdom's expedition. There were also the 20,000 elite knights from the Schudenberg Kingdom! An expedition army of 60,000 troops were suddenly made. And there was one person behind them who was smiling complacently.....

The person with money in his eyes was Ark. Ark knew about the expedition before the event quest was triggered. It was 100% but he also knew details about the compensation thanks to participating in the meeting. The quest was ranked S++ difficult so the compensation wasn't a joke. The top ranking achievements received a rare title, a higher rank if they were already nobility and unique equipment. But was that all? Apart from the in game rewards, there was also a separate cash prize in reality. Normally Ark would've jumped on the opportunity. However this time was different. It wasn't the event quest rewards or Global Exos' prizes that was reflected in his eyes. The reason is that Ark was already in the expedition and he had secured the biggest rights.

'Now all the NPCs and users in the expedition are my customers!'

That's right. Ark had managed to secure the exclusive right to provide munitions for the expedition force. That was 60,000 customers!

'Even if each person pays 5 gold, that is at least 300,000 gold!'

300,000 gold! When calculating into money, it was the huge amount of 3 billion won. Rather than beating thousands of people to get the number 1 ranking, it was better to obtain the more exclusive trading rights. Wasn't it natural that the quest compensation and event cash prize wasn't reflected in his eyes?

'I've finally hit the jackpot! 3 billion won..... No, it didn't even matter if it was 1.5 billion won. To receive this kind of money..... I can buy a house, a car and put extra money into the deposit so I can live and eat!'

Ark had a rosy dream for his future like someone who won the lottery.

'Hahaha, war is indeed money!'

However, there were also a part that Ark was a little worried about. Ark had managed to obtain the exclusive rights to the supplies from Haverstein, but it was thanks to the arrangement between Marquis Halben and Marquis Daltin. So it was like Ark was supported by 60% of the nobles, but the 40% belonging to Duke Sarkin were different. Anyway, the King had already chosen Haverstein as the commander. Therefore Duke Sarkin couldn't say anything else about it. But Duke Sarkin could rally his faction to oppose Ark's appointment as the exclusive supplier of the munitions. There was no way he could leave the military supplies to Ark who wasn't even a professional merchant.

'Well, I'm being supported by Marquis Halben and Marquis Daltin so hopefully a problem won't occur.....'

When considering Duke Sarkin's power, it was impossible to not be anxious. Moreover, the monopoly supply didn't just have a few silvers hanging on it. It was an ideal chance to earn hundreds of thousands of gold in the next few months! If any issues appeared.....

So Ark was keenly aware of the movement of Duke Sarkin's faction. But the problem came from a direction he never expected.

"Lord Ark."

After organizing the troops in the expedition, Viscount Haverstein had visited Ark.

"I've been so busy with the applicants that we haven't had a chance to talk properly. Are your preparations going well? If it's you then I think it will be fine."

'My work? Did I have to do something? Is he just asking if I've prepared well?'

Ark formed a hasty conclusion and answered without thinking.

"Yes, there aren't any problems. Everything is ready for when the expedition leaves."

"I thought so."

Haverstein nodded. Then he spoke with a slightly embarrassed expression.

"I was a little worried since this is the first time you've been in charge of munitions supply..... This is also the first time I've organized troops on such a large scale. So I'm relieved that you're well prepared."

Haverstein thought for a while before speaking again.

"In fact, the one normally in charge of the military's munitions supply is the famous Nadin. Moreover, he is a person under Duke Sarkin's influence."

"Duke Sarkin?"

Wariness crept into Ark's eyes. Then Haverstein added like he wasn't worried.

"But Nadin isn't the person with the position. If you've processed the goods without any trouble then it won't be bad. You can go discuss with Nadin about any future work regarding munitions."

“.....I understand.”

Ark parted from Haverstein with an uncomfortable feeling. He had an ominous feeling after hearing Haverstein's words. In this world there were many people whose unlucky premonitions had a high chance of coming true.

“Are you Sir Ark who is in charge of munitions supply to the expedition army?”

A testy old voice spoke as he entered the office. Old people were some of the most stubborn people. Yet in the future he would have to deal with this old man regarding hundred thousands of gold. Ark pasted the smile he developed for business and greeted politely.

“Yes, I am Ark. Greetings and sorry for the delay.....”

“I don't care about your greetings.”

Nadin interrupted coldly and threw him a scroll.

‘What the? This scroll..... Heok!’

Ark's mouth open absent-mindedly as he read the scroll.

-Expedition Army's Order of Munitions (Client: Viscount Nadin)
Leather: 4,000 pieces
Food: 100 tons
Steel Ingots: 200 tons
Wrought Iron Ingots: 200 tons
Wood: 200 tons.....

The scroll was the purchase order for the munitions. Ark wasn't surprised by receiving the order. However, the problem was the quantities! It was natural considering the 60,000 people in the expedition army but the quantities were a lot more than Ark expected.

“The expedition army was formed faster than expected so the time has accelerated and I need it within the next 3 days. Then please deliver the resources written there immediately.

Nadin said and gestured for him to leave.

“B-but.....”

“What is it?”

“To supply these amounts in three days.....”

Ark stuttered with a puzzled expression. Nadine looked at his nervous form, frowned and declared sharply.

“You can’t do it?”

“No, it’s not that.....”

“Okay, then I will speak honestly. I’m not very happy with your appointment. I don’t like how you got the exclusive trading rights because Lord Haverstein was appointed commander. But my dislike is separate from your abilities. If you have the ability to supply that amount then I won’t say anything.”

Nadin narrowed his eyes and continued.

“Then I’ll go back to the general principles. Do you have the necessary skills required to be in charge of the military supplies? It is simple. You need to be ready with the necessary military supplies at any time. That’s it. You’ll be able to receive quite a bit of profit. In other words, if you want to obtain profit then you need to have at least the minimum prepared. Do you think a person who isn’t prepared has any right to obtain a profit?”

Nadin’s words made sense. Of course, the one hiding behind him was Duke Sarkin. The military expedition had 60,000 people so he could roughly guess the amount of supplies required. Yet Nadin required the order within 3 days. It was a way of protesting Haverstein’s appointment of Ark to the position. If Ark didn’t supply it then it was the same as admitting that he had no ability.

That’s right. Nadin was trying to make Ark fail. But Ark couldn’t say

anything to Nadin. Nadin's aim was clearly Ark's failure. Of course, after receiving the rights Ark had made a plan to secure the resources. But while dreaming of his lottery win, he hadn't considered two things. The first was that the expedition would gather 60,000 people so quickly. And the second was that the initial resources needed for the early stages was different than what he thought. So he hadn't secured the necessary basic military supplies.

'This is due to my lack of experience but I can't tell anyone else.'

If he admitted his lack of experience then he would lose the exclusive trading rights.

".....I understand. I will quickly secure the maximum quantities."

Ark had no choice but to say this and leave Nadin's office.

'This is only the first order and I have to supply those required amounts. If I'm deprived of the rights then it will likely be changed to another business with the required supplies. That is probably Nadin's purpose. But if I succeed then I will definitely have the exclusive rights to supply the munitions. Yes, this might actually be an opportunity!'

Ark decided to think about it positively. In fact, Ark had prepared some subcontractors to supply him with the necessary goods. Weapons, armours, necessary materials and tools were contracted from the raccoons in the Underground World while the Baran clan in Seutandal provided food and various other supplies. Ark used the Sacred Branch from the world trees to check the situation in those places and he was able to get the goods for a cheaper price.

'I have to scrape as much items as possible from those two places!'

Ark immediately contacted the Underground World and Seutandal using the Sacred Branch. And he confirmed the amount of resources in the store. But even if he scraped all the resources, he could only gather 60% of the required amounts. Even if he made the production lines operate at full strength for the next three days, he would only be able to fill 70%. His concerns were becoming a reality.

"It's really crazy, if I had 10 days then I could secure the required

amount..... But I can't tell the expedition that they need to wait for their supplies....."

Ark scratched his head and sighed before muttering.

".....Is that the only way?"

In fact, Ark had a solution to this problem from the beginning. Ark still had 20,000 gold from his investment funds and combined with the 25,000 gold worth of goods he embezzled from the merchant's guild, he had 45,000 gold. He could use those funds to buy the remaining 30% from other stores throughout the kingdom. However, Ark couldn't make that decision easily.

"With my exclusive subcontractors I can receive the goods for 70% of the price....."

.....That was the problem. Ark's top priority was to obtain the necessary military supplies. There was no room to consider other problems. It wasn't just Ark aiming for the exclusive rights to supply the expedition. Several aristocrats associated with Sarkin, Daltin and Halben were also aiming for it. They weren't any competition because they couldn't supply it at a cheaper price than Ark. It was a price at 70% of the market price.

"Since it is mainly products from the raccoon clan, I can purchase the items with a 30~40% discount. So even if I supply the goods to the expedition force with a 30% discount, I can still get a 5% profit. With this amount of supplies, a 5% profit is still a huge amount."

That was Ark's calculations. But if he bought the goods from other places, he would have to buy it at 100% of the price and deliver the goods at 70% of the price. It meant there would be a 30% loss from the remaining 30% goods. So Ark would get a 5% profit from 70% of the goods while he would receive a 30% loss from the remaining 30% of the supplies. If that happened then he would get a deficit of 5.5%.

"If the supplies cost 700,000 gold and there is a 5.5% deficit then doesn't that mean 38,500 gold is lost?"

Ark's face darkened at the thought. 38,500 gold! It was an

enormous amount of money that would be taken away before he even started engaging in business. Even if he maintained the monopoly on military supplies from now on, there was no guarantee that he could recoup the loss. If the war lengthened and a lot of military supplies were needed then he could. But if the war ended quickly then he wouldn't be able to recoup the loss.

However.....Anyway, he had to pay the price for the amount of supplies he gathered from Seutandal and the Underground World. Even if he lost thousands of gold, he still needed the exclusive trading rights. If he lost the right then he would be ruined either way. Whether it was rice or porridge, he had no choice but to go to the end..... Still, to just lose close to 40,000 gold.....!

Ark sighed and squeezed his head.

“Ark-nim!”

Suddenly the door opened and Sid came running in.

“What? Can't you see I'm busy now?”

Ark's nerves were sensitive so he became annoyed easily. Then Sid murmured with a despondent look.

“But it is an urgent matter.....”

“What is it?”

“The goods we earlier salvaged from the sea. Then martial law was declared so I left it in a rented warehouse in Reuben.”

“What about it?”

“The owner of that warehouse contacted me just now. He raised the warehouse rent by 50%.....”

“What is that?”

Ark jumped and shouted. He already foresaw a loss of approximately 40,000 gold so his nerves were stretched thin. Sid was shocked and responded in a timid voice.

“That is..... You know that trade is impossible these days thanks to

the martial law. In such a situation, it is also impossible to buy things from stores. Hunting isn't comfortable anymore so users aren't buying or selling things. So a lot of merchants are depositing goods in warehouses, causing the rent to rise....."

"Damn! This is the thanks I get for using that guy's warehouse? That fellow really....."

Ark shouted until he abruptly shut his mouth.

'Wait? Trade is prohibited so there are a lot of goods in the warehouse?'

Those words stuck in his head. After thinking for a while, Ark's face brightened.

"Well done Sid! Follow me!"

"Huh? Huh?"

Sid was pulled along by Ark with a bewildered expression.

'Huhuhu, as I expected.'

Ark smiled as he looked around the tavern. Ark was currently in the tavern 'Gold Mountain' in the merchant city of Giran. Gold Mountain had cheap and delicious food so there were usually a lot of guests. However, over the last few days it had more guests than usual. The seats were tightly packed together and some people were even standing and eating. The reason that tavern was bustling could easily be guessed from the conversation of the guests.

"This is really ridiculous!"

"If commercial trade is banned then what will happen to the merchants?"

"What is with that ridiculous law?"

The merchants gathered in groups of two or three and muttered resentfully into their wine cups. The reason they were indignant was because of the martial law declared not long ago.

-The Schudenberg King's Emergency Martial Law!

Thanks to the unsavoury events occurring in the Schudenberg Kingdom, the King and aristocrats have declared an emergency martial law. The martial law for Schudenberg Kingdom will last until the cause is determined and resolved.

- * Under the martial law, all checkpoints are temporarily closed.
- * Under the martial law, all quests and mission requests will be stopped.
- * Under the martial law, permission from the government offices is required in order to trade.
- * Under the martial law, acts of hostility are prohibited outside hunting grounds.

The laws which prohibited all foreign activities had been decided in the aristocrat meeting. Well, the NPCs easily accepted those laws but the users' complaints continued infinitely. They couldn't do anything even if they connected to the game. In particular, the ones that suffered a fatal blow from the martial law were the merchants. Although the checkpoints were closed, it was still possible to go outside and hunt. Even if some of them wanted to participate in the expedition, their levels were too low. However, trade was prohibited so there was nothing the merchants could do. In other words, thousands of New World's merchants were unemployed because of the martial law.

"I spent quite a bit on goods from the production district but now it isn't possible to sell it....."

"Even with running a street stall, I can barely sell any potions."

"I only sold one scroll today."

The merchants sighed and complained. Most merchants bought things from another region and then sold it to general stores or the merchant's guild. Yet they couldn't do anything about those goods because of the martial law. Usually they could see to the users but

thanks to the black obelisks, the number of people hunting had decreased. Furthermore, the warriors in the expedition force were quite high levelled so there was no reason for them to spend money on consumables. Therefore several unfavourable news piled on top of each other on the merchants. Thus the unemployed merchants gathered at the tavern to express their dissatisfaction.

“Ohhh, it’s the end for me after a couple of days!”

One trade muttered with his head in his hands.

“I was trying to grab a share of the iron ores so I collected a 1,000 gold credit note from the merchant’s guild. The atmosphere had been restless these days so I thought the price of weaponry would increase. However, now there is a martial law? If I can’t obtain 1,000 gold by the time the credit note is due in two days then I’m bankrupt!”

“It is the same for me. The monsters are weird these days so I got a credit note for a bunch of potions.”

.....That was the problem. When commercial activities were banned under the martial law, the NPCs would discontinue buying and selling goods. So the merchants in the tavern who suffered the most damage were the ones with credit notes. If a merchant with a small capital wanted to obtain the maximum profit from long distance trade, they would often obtain a credit note from the merchant’s guild. But now they couldn’t dispose of the items they bought.

Credit collection by moneylenders were horrifying whether it was in the game or reality! Under the martial law, they wouldn’t be able to pay back the credit note in time. A merchant who had a bad credit rating would receive a huge penalty and have their stats decreased. So merchants feared credit collection the most. And because of the martial law, those merchants had a lot of goods piled up in their warehouses.

“Ah, is there anybody here who would like to buy my goods?”

The cornered merchants desperately asked for someone’s help. Suddenly, somebody appeared like a ray of light to help them.....

“I need several of those things. I will purchase these items if the price is right.”

The person who said that was Ark. All of the merchant's in the tavern focused their eyes on Ark.

“Huh? You want to buy some goods?”

“Uh, what kind of things do you want to buy?”

“Well, a few things. Steel ingots, wrought iron ingots, sheet metal, wood, paper, blade sharpener, etc..... If you have any of this things then I will purchase regardless of the quantity.”

The merchant's lit up at Ark's words. But the bright faces of the merchants soon turned dark again.

“However, the purchase price has to be 60% of the average market price.”

“6-60%?”

“Are you crazy?”

“We used a variety of skills to travel to the mountains to buy the goods are 75% of the market price. So if we sell to you then won't we receive a 15% loss?”

The merchants muttered with an absurd expression. Ark just lifted an eyebrow and placed a bulging pouch of money on the table before speaking.

“You can tell me to go. I won't force you to sell it to me. I will only purchase these items for 60% of the market price.”

Ark folded his arms and closed his eyes like he had no interest in the merchants' reactions. The merchants closed their mouths and studied each other's faces.

‘Huhuhu, they can't sell it and they can't hold on to it.’

Ark inwardly smiled as he noticed the atmosphere. A lot of merchants with goods in the warehouse would choose to wait until the martial law ended. But the merchants who lacked the capital

needed to pay back their loan needed someone to buy their things. Their entire fortune was poured into the goods so they wouldn't be able to pay the rental fee for the warehouse or be able to pay off their loan. If they didn't pay their loan in a timely matter then there would be an extravagant penalty and they would become bankrupt.

'Right now those merchants don't need a lot of profit but to pay off their credit note.' Just like what happened to Sid previously, it became much harder to make a profit from gold if they were bankrupt. The higher the level, the harder it became. If they couldn't pay off the loan then they would receive thousands of gold in damages. But it wasn't easy to sell the goods right now. 'Shall I give it a slight push?'

Ark then sighed and stood up.

"I guess no one wants to trade. Then....."

As expected, the merchants flinched and hurriedly opened their mouths.

"W-wait a minute!"

"Huh? Why?"

"You're really going to act this way? A deal like this..... We need to get other opinions first....."

"I'm sorry but I don't have a lot of time. I need to meet other people as well..... If I manage to purchase it from different merchants then I won't need these things anymore."

Ark answered. But deep down his heart was anxious. The martial law was announced around the same time as the <Expedition Army's Crusade> was. In other words, they were still coping with the situation. The situation was so sudden that most users didn't understand correctly. If this situation continued for several more days then users would gradually start to cope with it.

'The people who move quickly will benefit the most.'

That's right. A lot of merchants were gathered in the tavern to

complain. The ones who engaged in business with a credit note were in a difficult situation. However, the targets with some funding ability were different. Just like Ark, they used this situation to purchase goods from the merchants cheaply and then they would receive a lot of profit when the martial law ended. No, some users were already starting this type of business in Selebrid.

‘My purpose is to buy things for 30% cheaper than the market price. But if another person like that appears then it will become a price competition. This is the only chance I have to get it for 70% of the market price!’

So Ark needed to somehow negotiate with the merchants. Of course he couldn’t act too quickly.

“If it is 60%, our losses..... It should be a minimum of 70%.....”

Fortunately, the merchants were increasingly following Ark’s pace.

‘I did it!’

Ark inwardly laughed as he heard the merchant’s words. Ark was contracted to supply the expedition force at 70% of the market price. He wouldn’t receive any damages.

“Sheesh, I’m going to stop. That guy’s goal is obvious. He wants to buy things now and then sell it for a more expensive price when the martial law is over. I’d rather word hard to pay off my debt then sell it to someone like him!”

A merchant suddenly said and spat on the floor.

‘T-that bastard.....!’

Ark felt his heart fall at the merchant’s words. Atmosphere was important in business like this. So the merchant’s words made his anxious. The atmosphere that he had spent a while creating was broken. The merchants who were prepared to sell for 70% studied each other and backed off.

‘Damn, what do I do? Do I have to compromise with 75%?’

Ark became more impatient now that the atmosphere was

broken. But if he showed a weak point then his deal would be ruined. A merchant was still a merchant. If he showed weakness then the merchants would become aware and raise the price.

‘Should I abandon this one and try again at another tavern?’

Just as Ark was thinking this.

“Wait a minute!”

A small merchant wearing a hood exclaimed from a corner of the tavern. He hesitated for a while before sighing and speaking.

“Did you say 60%? It is difficult but my situation is urgent. However, 65% is the lowest I can sell my goods for.”

“Eh?”

The other merchants were shocked by those words. Then the merchant shook his head with an irritated expression.

“Damn, do I have to give up my pride? I need 3,000 gold by tomorrow. Even if the martial law is stopped, it is no use if I have no credit and become bankrupt. Even if I have to sell it at a loss, 1 gold is better than nothing. It is 100 times better than paying the penalty.”

The merchant spoke in an angry voice before approaching Ark.

“You said you wanted steel ingots? I have about 10 tons.”

Ark nodded after hearing the merchant’s words.

“10 tons? That is quite a lot. If it is that much then I don’t need any more steel ingots. You’re willing to sell it for 65% of the market price? Since you’re selling me that much volume, I will raise it to 67%.”

“Thank you, but honestly 67% doesn’t make me feel better. However it can’t be helped. It will be too late if I sell it later.”

The small merchant sighed. But the other merchants became even more desperate. The small merchant possessed steel ingots. Since the small merchant took the initiative first, they were deprived at the chance to sell for 65%. And the other merchants were sensitive to

the atmosphere. The fact that Ark bought the whole quantity meant there were less items he required. If they missed the opportunity then they would be unable to pay off the credit note, would receive a penalty and then become bankrupt. Furthermore, the small merchant also left a bold impression. The emotional merchants who were on the brink of collapse quickly rushed over.

“You said you needed wrought iron ingots? I have 1 ton!”

“I have 70 pieces of leather!”

“We have 10 tons of sheet metal altogether so will you also give us 67%?”

Therefore Ark could buy all the items from the merchants at 65% of the market price.

“Huhuhu, merchants are so simple.....”

After a while, Ark laughed as he exited the tavern. Then someone popped out from the alley near the tavern. It was the small merchant from the tavern.

“Ark-nim, did I do okay?”

The small merchant took off his hood and his face was revealed. A hobbit merchant..... He was Sid who Ark had infiltrate the tavern in advance.

“Huhuhu, you did well.”

Ark grinned and nodded. That’s right. Everything that happened in the tavern was according to Ark’s plan. It was difficult for a person to sell if it meant a loss, even if they had difficult circumstance. But if they saw someone suffer a loss first then the situation would change. It was human nature to follow along with others once someone did something first. So Ark had Sid infiltrate the tavern beforehand to play this role.

“Good. Now I’ve received approximately 80% of the quantity. I have to go to all the taverns in Giran before the rumours spread!”

“You will give me the separate 1% fee as promised?”

“I will give it once I get all 100%.”

“Then I will trust you.”

So the two con artists started looking for another tavern. After visiting 5 taverns, he was finally able to obtain the necessary amount of goods. And the purchase price was 65% of the market price. He was handing it to the expedition for 70% of the price so he could get a 5% profit.

Meanwhile, the merchants in Giran were shedding tears of blood.....

“Hrrm, you did it. You’ve obtained the required resources in three days. Frankly, I had been a little dissatisfied about Haverstein appointing you for this position..... You have the ability. Okay, I look forward to working with you in the future.”

Since Ark unexpectedly finished the job, Nadin couldn’t say anything else. Nadine reluctantly settled the bill for the military supplies. The price for all the materials delivered was 700,000 gold! Ark received 5% of the profit so that was 35,000 gold in one transaction. However, the bill for the military supplies wasn’t paid in cash. It was military currency..... It was a type of war credit that the kingdom issued in this emergency situation. It couldn’t be turned into cash but the raccoons and Baran clan were satisfied with the military currency so it wasn’t a big problem.

‘Anyway, I had a difficult time because of this but I also learnt a few things.’

Ark realized something thanks to Nadine and the Duke’s plan. Supplying munitions wasn’t just buying and providing goods. In order to accomplish his role as the exclusive supplier, he always needed to have abundant goods and a secure route to move them.

“A huge amount of military supplies is required that will cost at least tens of thousands of gold. If the goods are stolen by monsters on the way then it won’t just be a monetary loss. There is a possibility that Ark’s Corporation will be ruined.”

That's right. Currently there was an exclusive contract between the Schudenberg Kingdom and Ark's Corporation. If he couldn't supply the goods by the due date and damage was caused to the expedition then he would have to pay a huge fine for the breach of contract. In addition, Nadine and Duke Sarkin might cause more problems. Duke Sarkin might even obstruct his operations.

"Even without Duke Sarkin's interference, there are the black obelisks everywhere. I need to secure a safe method to move supplies from now on! In retrospect, it is lucky that there is a martial law right now."

Thanks to the martial law, there was no sieges in Nagaran at the moment. Since siege warfare was discontinued, there was no reason to keep the coalition forces at Silvana. Therefore Ark mobilized 2,000 members of Dark Eden along with JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members to escort the military supplies from Seutandal and the Underground World. Despite having 3,800 people, he only mobilized 2,000 to rotate the guards.

"Many alliances are participating in this expedition as it is an opportunity to gain a lot of levels. If I mobilize all the troops in Dark Eden for the escort task then the difference with other alliance might become even bigger after the war ends. So while some people are doing the escort task, the other will train in the secret dungeon to raise their levels."

It was something he decided after thinking carefully. Despite the benefits from the war, he also had to think about protecting Silvana. So Ark made the remaining 1,800 troops remain as the guard unit for the residents of Silvana. Despite previously clearing the dungeon, the NPCs in the coalition were still relatively low levelled. Since Ark had reduced the monsters in the secret dungeon, he directed the NPCs to raise their level. Since the levels of the NPCs were important to the coalition, the users would have to protect the NPCs while raising their levels together.

"Now I've arranged the situation."

One full day had passed while he was arranging everything. Securing and moving the goods from the Underground

World and Seutandal, dealing with the contract, assigning the guards from the coalition forces, sharing revenue, etc..... He needed to keep a close eye on the negotiations in order to determine if he received a profit or a loss. Since he caught the small problems, the situation was naturally arranged. Thus the 60,000 strong expedition force along with Ark started to march towards the Sinus Principality.

“Throw your chests out and walk proudly! We’re the soldiers on a crusade to save the continent!”

“Oohhhhh!”

At Haverstein’s words, the 60,000 soldiers lifted their swords and shouted. But to Ark the soldiers were just lumps of money.

‘Huhuhu, lumps of money! Yes, fight and give me more money!’

This wasn’t a crusade but a war of money for Ark.

While Ark was busy with various arrangements..... A large number of people had gathered in the backstreets of Giran. They were the merchant’s that had sold the goods to Ark for a loss in the tavern. Instead of shedding tears of blood, the merchants were smirking and laughing. The reason why was a small merchant standing in front of them.

“Now now! Collect the money.”

The merchants gathered around Sid who was holding a bag of money.

“2,000 gold.”

“Hmm, the fee is 3% so that is 60 gold. Thanks for the trouble.”

“Hehehe. Thank you, Sid-nim. Feel free to contact me anytime.”

The merchants collected the gold coins and left. Sid..... That’s right. Sid was the one holding the money bag in front of the merchants. But why was Sid giving money to the merchants? In order to solve that mystery, we need to go back a few days.

Ark who had participated in the meeting knew that martial law was going to be declared in Schudenberg. Ark thought he knew this information before most users but he miscalculated. Sid also received the information through Ark. While Ark was busy trying to secure the rights to the exclusive trading contract, Sid was making his own moves.

‘When martial law is proclaimed, trade will be stopped and merchants will have an overflow of goods that they can’t sell. If I persuade those merchants well then I’ll be able to buy those goods for half the price. If I buy it and leave it in a warehouse then I can get considerable profit later!’

That’s right. Sid had already devised that plan long before Ark did. While serving as the foreign division manager of the Continental Commerce Firm, he had accumulated a large number of staff in other areas.

‘Huhuhu. I am a merchant. I can get the same information 100 times faster than Ark.’

As soon as martial law was declared, Sid had bought the goods from the panicked merchants for 50% of the price. By the time Ark received the information in Selebrid, Sid had already bought the items from the merchants. However, a problem then occurred.

‘Damn, what is this? Isn’t this situation more serious than I expected?’

It was good that he had bought the items. But he soon realized that the war wasn’t going to be resolved in a matter of days. The longer the war went on, the less profit Sid would receive and he might even receive a loss instead. The reason was the rent for the warehouses. If the war dragged on then the goods would have to stay in the warehouses for a longer time. After a certain period of time, the cost of the rent would exceed the profit margin.

‘The rent also went up by 50% a while ago.’

It was why Sid was upset about the increase in rental fee. Apart from Ark’s warehouse, in this situation Sid’s warehouse was the one

that would suffer a loss.

‘I will be bankrupt after 1 month!’

Sid screamed as he saw the warehouse bill. Then Ark consulted with Sid about a plan to secure the necessary amount of munitions. A idea sparked in Sid’s head.

‘This is great! I can sell my items to this guy!’

But if he disclosed the situation to Ark that he would clearly buy the items for 50% of the price. So Sid had the crazy idea to hire merchants and arrange them around the taverns in order to sell his goods to Ark. That’s right. Ark thought he had used Sid to deceive the merchants when in fact Sid had used the merchants to deceive Ark.

‘Therefore the goods that I got for 50~60% of the price, I managed to sell to Ark for 65%. Even after giving the 5,000 gold fee to the merchants I hired, it is a profit of 10,000 gold! Moreover, there is separate 1% fee that I will get from Ark.....’

Sid laughed and muttered as he mentally calculated the profit.

“War is definitely money.”

Sid was becoming more and more wicked like Ark.

Pabiun Fortress

“Steel Knights, go around the right side of the valley and attack!”

“Blackbird Knights, go around the left side of the valley and attack!”

“Units 2, 3 and 4 will break through the canyon from the front!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

The soldiers pulled out swords and spears and charged forward. They breathed roughly as they sank up to their knees in the snow before entering the huge canyon which looked like a scene from hell.

-You have entered the sphere of influence of the ‘Jinn Demons!’

The Jinn clan are one of the rulers of hell and their presence has distorted the area. The distortion of this space thanks to the ‘demonic’ influence has corrupted the environment and turned it into a hell space. Naturally the demons are a lot stronger inside this distorted space.

<The abilities of all players within the Jinn Demons’ sphere of influence will decrease by 20%. On the other hand, all demonic monsters will have their stats increase by 10%>

It was the identity of the black fog covering the Sinus Principality. Any soldiers that entered the black mist would instantly be surrounded by thousands of monsters. Their red eyes shone with greed and malice! They were the hellish demons that appeared out of the darkness. It was a chimera like monster with the upper body of a human, the lower body of a lion and the head of a bull. Some monsters also had 5 heads or 8 arms.....

It was similar to a monster exhibition hall. These weren’t ordinary monsters but ones that had been deformed by the demonic

influence. When the soldiers entered their line of sight, the monsters licked their exposed fangs with their tongues.

-Kuraka, kuraka, nohun! Arkra mojaham!

The thousands of monsters cried out and flocked simultaneously. The large number of monsters caused the ground to shake! The leaders of each unit immediately ordered their troops.

“Leading warriors, use Rush!”

“Wahhhhh!”

The soldiers at the head of the unit raised their shields and simultaneously rushed forward. There was an intense sound as the two groups pressed against each other. But after a while, the enormous monsters pushed the soldiers onto the ground from above and trampled them.

“Priests, concentrate your holy power on the leading unit!”

“The great god Ares, let the power of your light help their willpower! Holy Sword!”

“Gracious Goddess of the Earth, breathe life into your children.....Revival!”

The thousands of priests in the back used their holy magic. Thanks to the thousands of holy magic, there were bursts of intense light. The intense light caused the dark presences to moan after being blinded by the light and they hesitated.

“Now send them back into the darkness!”

The soldiers who had their health restored with holy power instantly poured a shower of violent attacks on the monsters. The monsters shrieked and ran forward. The sound of iron clashing spread through the area. Dozens of warriors ran up to the monsters over 10 metres and defeated them. But before they could even sigh with relief, they were stepped on by other giant monsters and became a bloody rice cake. The constant slaughter on the snowfield was like pouring red paint onto a white surface.

“Kuaaaa.....!”

A warrior in the middle of the battlefield moaned with distress. He was the 3rd assault captain of the 1st unit, James. He had charged in bravely with his troops when the battle began before becoming isolated after a while. Since it was the end of a long battle, his equipment had become ragged and his potions had disappeared. In this situation, he couldn't expect any help from the priests or the main forces!

“.....Is it going to end here?”

James looked around at his surroundings. In the nearby area there were only 10 people and they were surrounded by dozens of monsters.

“If I can get a few supplies..... But it is impossible in this situation. Damn, if it's like this then I just have to kill some more before dying! It is the desperate resolution of the 3rd assault captain.....!”

It was at that moment. A loud sound could be heard in the area. When James turned around, he saw one man approaching like a storm. His whole body was protected by a thick fur.

“Who are you?”

“A supply warrior!”

“Supply warrior? Shouldn't you be in a supply unit? Don't tell me you came here alone?”

“Yes, I'm busy so I'll give you the detailed explanation later. Did you send a supply request a while ago? What do you need? Was it a repair tool box, recovery potions and food?”

“Yes.”

“I have 50 remaining of each item. Radun.”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

The snake around the man's waist opened its mouth and spat out 50 repair tool boxes, potions and military provisions each. James stared

with shocked eyes as the man pushed something close to his face.

“Now, sign here to indicate that you’ve received supplies from me.”

“Sign? In such a situation?”

“Hurry. Shouldn’t you recover before the monsters attack?”

“U-understood.”

Once James signed the form, the man grabbed his hand and said.

“It’s hard but hold on a little more. The expedition army is currently entering the canyon. The main body has seen the signal flare that James sent a short time ago so assistance should be coming soon. It should take around 10 minutes so you have to hold on until then.”

-Roaaaaaar!

Then some monsters suddenly shrieked and charged towards the man. The man turned around and shouted.

“Flash!”

The man moved around the monster like a flash of lightning. When the ray of light swept past dozens of monsters, they quickly lost 15% health. The man who showed such extreme power pulled down his scarf and laughed.

“This is a service. And I’m quite busy. Moonlight Illusion!”

A light wrapped around the man and three clones were made. When the three bodies fled, the monster shrieked and chased after it. Meanwhile, the man used Sprint and escaped to another battlefield.

“T-that person is.....”

James who had received the supplies looked at the man’s back with stupid eyes. Then someone in his unit who was also looking at the man said.

“Captain-nim, isn’t he ‘that person’ from the rumours?”

“That person?”

“What, you haven’t heard about it? Whenever a person surrounded by monsters requests supplies, that person will show up and deliver the supplies before leaving. He is called a moving shop.....”

“Then it wasn’t just a rumour?”

James’s expression turned even more amazed.

‘Hihihi, one more person!’

After delivering the supplies to James, the man ran through the battlefield while avoiding monsters. He would show up like the wind whenever there was a supplies request, a moving shop! That’s right. This person was Ark.

There was a reason Ark was moving around the battlefield and delivering supplies. Ark participated in the expedition as the military supplier but there was nothing for him to do once the war actually started. The raccoons and Baran clan were the ones producing the munitions. JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and Dark Eden were in charge of moving the troops while Sid was a merchant so it was more efficient for him to handle any documents related problems. With all his staff taking care of the work, there was nothing for the president to do.

‘Then should I rake in some achievements on the battlefield?’

While he didn’t care because of the exclusive trade rights, Ark had also accepted the <Expedition Army’s Crusade> quest. Since Ark didn’t have to worry about the munitions supply then he should aim for the question compensation. And he participated in the battle. As the battle went on, more troops were being isolated. Those people couldn’t get support from the main army and needed supplies above anything else. However, it was realistically impossible for the supply unit to help all of them. Then Ark suddenly heard the voice of a commander in his ear.

“Damn, one of the search units has been cornered on the western mountain ridge! There are too many monsters so the supply unit can’t approach. Anyone is fine. Is there any soldier willing to deliver

the supplies to the soldiers for the supply unit?”

“I’ll do it!”

Ark was searching for suitable work so he immediately delivered the supplies to the troops. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-Your mission to deliver supplies to the isolated unit has been accomplished.

Thanks to accomplishing your duty, the survival rate of your allies has improved.

<Achievement +300>

‘300 achievement!’

Ark’s eyes widened at the message. On the battlefield, killing monsters only gave 5~15 achievement depending on the level. Since so many soldiers gathered and attacked the same monster, most the time he could only get 1~5 achievement points. Yet he received 300 achievement points just from handing supplies to an isolated unit. Since many people needed supplies on the battlefield, it felt like a huge windfall for Ark. Anyway, Ark thought quickly after receiving the 300 achievements.

‘Wait? If it is this easy to get achievements then what am I going around the battlefield for? I can just give supplies to the isolated troops. Then.....?’

Ark went to meet the supply office Nadin and said.

“A lot of soldiers are losing their lives in vain because supplies can’t get there in time.”

“Dammit! I already know that! But the supply unit isn’t enough. In addition, the supply unit can’t enter the deep places of the battlefield. If the supply unit encounters monsters will moving to the isolated troops then there will just be even more damage. I’m going crazy!”

Nadin shouted nervously. Then Ark smiled and made a suggestion.

“That’s why I suggest having just one person spread supplies to the isolated unit. The places the supply unit can move on the battlefield are limited but if I’m alone then the restrictions will disappear. Well, it might be more dangerous.....but I’m willing if it is for the expedition force.”

“Are you really sincere?”

“Of course. However there is one condition. Apart from the military supplies, I’ve also joined the expedition force. If you want me to spread the supplies to the unit then I need 120% of the market price for the supplies.”

“What? Isn’t that 50% more than the price you delivered it to us?”

“My life is important as well. Think of it as a danger allowance. On a battlefield, supplies are like the life of the soldiers. Even if money is important, is it more important than the lives of the soldiers fighting?”

.....Ark was shamelessly trying to profit from the lives of the soldiers. But Nadin wouldn’t receive that much damages. The value of an item was determined by the need. On a battlefield it was even more important. If the supplies weren’t delivered in time then they wouldn’t even be worth 1 copper. If the supplies were delivered on time then 120% wasn’t that expensive.

“Okay. Make sure that the unit commander signs that the supplies were received or else you won’t get even 1 copper.”

“Of course. Isn’t building up trust in documents the basics of business?”

Thus Ark changed from a soldier to a supplier of goods. As a supply warrior, he received quite a bit of profit. Not only did he raise his contributions more quickly than others, he was also able to receive 50% profit from the goods he handed over to the soldiers. And.....

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun who was flicking his tongue around suddenly struck. A message window appeared in front of Ark after Radun entered the snow.

[-Radun has obtained 'Kalkin's Spear!']

This was another benefit he could get as a supplier. The place where the expedition and monsters were fighting was a snowfield that went up to the knee. In the confused fighting, there were quite a few places where loot was buried in the snow so soldiers couldn't spot them. While Ark was fighting along with the soldiers, he didn't have much opportunity to collect these loot. But that changed after he became a supplier. Radun could use Stalking to find items buried in the snow. It was indeed killing two birds with one stone!

"Okay. Well done Radun!"

Ark praised Radun and stroked his head after he returned.

"Master, there is a supplies request signal 500 metres away at your 3 o'clock! And another request at your 8 o'clock."

Racard suddenly communicated to him.

"Which side is more urgent?"

"Although the signal appeared later, the 8 o'clock direction is more serious. There are a lot of soldiers who survived but their weapons are so tattered that it will break any minute. Some of them are already weaponless and only have their shields left."

"I understand. I'll move in the 8 o'clock direction. Direct me!"

"The right side has reinforcements on both sides so the battle is extremely crowded. There is a gap in the rocks with a path to escape approximately 200 metres from where you are. If you go around where the monsters have already been taken care of then you can get there within 3~4 minutes."

"Okay, tell me if there are any changes!"

Ark ran across the battlefield while receiving Racard's real time traffic reports. This contributed to how he could be a supplier by himself. Racard had a panoramic view of the battlefield and he could also use satellite surveillance mode to catch the supply requests quickly. His directions also allowed Ark to move to the troops quickly

and safely, so his mobility couldn't be compared to the supply unit. Sometimes he even delivered the supplies faster than the supply unit who were right beside him.

'I have to arrive first in order to receive 120% of the price!'

So he focused on mobility but that wasn't everything.

'It is also important that the soldiers survive. I can't delay at all!'

So Ark had to go a little bit faster even if there was more danger. It wasn't just because fellowship between soldiers were common in war movies. All the soldiers in the expedition were Ark's customers. If his customers decreased then wouldn't his income also decrease? The soldiers had to survive and fight for a long time in order to gain the maximum profit. Of course, the expedition's ultimate premise was to save the continent. If the expedition forces were destroyed then Schudenberg Kingdom would be in danger.

'The survival of the soldiers is important to me!'

"Thank you. The 4th unit is moving here so just hold on for a bit."

Ark once again explained the war situation after delivering the supplies. This was an effort to raise the survival rate of the soldiers. Just as he was turning around to go fulfil another supply request.....

"Gripper! The Gripper unit has appeared!"

The shout came from their military camp. He turned his head and saw some enormous shadows appearing in the canyon.

Clink, clink, clink.....

The giant shadows were over 20 metres big and dragged chains which made a metallic sound. With their eyes and mouths sewn shut and chains wrapped around the body, the monster called Gripper appeared carrying huge stone pillars. As soon as they showed up, the allied camp fell into a state of chaos.

"Block them! Stop those guys before they get here!"

“Concentrate all large weapons on the Grippers!”

“Simultaneously fire flames and electricity to stop the Grippers!”

Hwiiiiing, tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

At the same time, several shots of flames were fired from something which looked like a beehive in the allied camp. It was the weapons that the raccoons had developed. Naturally Ark had sold the next generation of weapons to the expedition force. Numerous catapults as well as Fire Barrage Crossbows were sold. The stones from the catapults flew across the space and slammed into the Grippers.

-Kuaaaa!

When hit by dozens of projectiles, a Gripper made a strange sound and knelt.

-Bakuram, bakuram, puraibata, bakuram!

When the Gripper fell, the armoured unit and calvary unit gathered around it. Of course the rest of the expedition army didn't just sit and watch. All the troops marched forward and created a barrier consisted of several layers of the armoured unit to prevent the onslaught from monsters.

“Armoured unit, attack without stopping! Do whatever it takes to stop those guys!”

The commanders shouted again while the large weapons fired a volley of projectiles. Two Grippers collapsed from the tremendous firepower. In the meantime, several troops were destroyed by the violent attacks from the monsters. After three consecutive attacks, the Grippers managed to arrive at the place where the troops were.

-Kuaaaa!

A Gripper raised the stone pillar and swung it down vertically. The 10 metres long stone pillar became stuck in the ground. Then the Gripper who planted the stone pillar in the ground scraped the skin of its chest with its claws and tore out its heart. The Gripper howled into the sky before its body was blown apart like a bomb. Ark, the

soldiers and even the monsters were hit by the shock wave. When he raised his head, an information window was floating in front of him.

-The Gripper has invoked the 'Earth Blast!'

The Gripper has sacrificed its life and used the huge stone pillar to spread the impact of the curse through the earth. Those who receive the impact will be deprived of their power and won't be able to oppose any more evil spirits. Those who receive the impact will take 24 hours to recover their power. Meanwhile, the evil curse will strengthen the demonic influence within 2 kilometres and the monsters will become stronger.

<NPCs and users will have their abilities decreased by 50%.
Monsters with the demonic influence will have their abilities increased by 50%.

Duration: 24 hours>

"Ack, again.....!"

"It is vexing but there's no more hope!"

The commanders moaned as Earth Blast was used. All allies had their stats decreased by 50% while the monsters had it increased by 50%. In other words, there was now a huge difference between the soldiers and the monsters. Fighting in these circumstances was suicide. The expedition army had only one choice left.

"Retreat! All troops retreat!"

The Schudenberg expedition was forced to retreat. Deep inside the canyon they retreated from was a huge fortress engulfed in darkness.

"Dammit!"

Haverstein yelled as he slammed his fist onto the table. After the Earth Blast from the Grippers, the expedition force had immediately

retreated from the canyon. But retreating from the battlefield wasn't as easy as it sounded. Thanks to the Earth Blast, there was an incredible gap between the abilities of the soldiers and the monsters. Around 1,000 people were killed before they could retreat out of the range of the demonic influence.

"How many more soldiers do we have to sacrifice?"

Haverstein bit his lips as he stared at the commanders gathered in the tent. The question wasn't directed towards them but towards himself. In order to understand why Haverstein was made, the situation needed to be explained.

After 10 days ago, the Schudenberg expedition had finished all their preparations and departed towards the Sinius Principality. While marching and destroying the obelisks, they finally arrived at the Schudenberg border after a week. Although they hadn't initially planned for such a quick march, the darkness had encroached on the continent quicker than expected. When the expedition force left Selebrid, they heard information that the darkness was pushing against the border region. When they arrived, the darkness was already encroaching on the northern region of Schudenberg. They could no longer blindly enter the Sinius Principality. Haverstein's response was to divide the expedition army into several troops.

"If the expedition army enters the Sinius Principality then the troops protecting Schudenberg will vanish. So 30,000 troops will use this place as a base point and destroy all the obelisks in the northeast and northwest to prevent the darkness from spreading. The rest of the 30,000 troops will enter the Sinius Principality and meet up with the Bristania expedition at the promised location."

So the war between the expedition forces and the dark army began. But there was one difficult part about this. The border region between the Schudenberg and Sinius Principality was filled with mountains. The mountain range was famous for its steepness so only a certain number of troops could travel through it. The only possible way to lead the troops across the border was through Pabiun Canyon. Since the relations between Schudenberg and the Sinius Principality had been hostile for a long time, they had built an

impregnable fortress in the Pabiun Canyon. It was Pabiun Fortress that was annoying Haverstein right now.

“For mere monsters to occupy and use Pabiun Fortress.....!”

At first Haverstein had thought there were no officers in charge of the monsters. However Haverstein belatedly realized his mistake after entering the canyon.

‘I’ve never seen so many monsters emerging from the fortress in waves.’

Previously the monsters haven’t used strategic fighting. The monsters must be stationed at Pabiun Fortress in order to stop the Schudenberg expedition.

“They’re obviously under someone’s control.”

“Yes, the battlefield looks chaotic at first but important moves are actually being made. It is impossible for the battle to progress like that without someone commanding them.”

Someone said with a concerned expression.

“Then someone has emerged from the darkness to take control? To be able to control so many different types of monsters.....Don’t tell me the Dark Lord has been resurrected?”

The unit commanders’ faces turned pale as they heard the words ‘Dark Lord.’ Dark Lord was a word which had a type of destructive power to the NPCs of New World. Of course, there were also NPCs with common sense who didn’t suffer from those words.

“The situation would be a lot worse if the Dark Lord was revived.

The Dark Lord wouldn’t be concerned with stopping us here and there are still the black obelisks.”

Haverstein unrolled a map and pointed a finger towards Pabiun Fortress. Dozens of triangle shapes were drawn in the spot he indicated. The main difficulty in capturing Pabiun Fortress was the ‘Black Obelisk Forest.’ The person who discovered the Black Obelisk Forest was Ark. The expedition army had killed 20,000

monsters during the week they spent here.....it was similar to the number of monsters confirmed at the fortress. But as the battle continued, the number of monsters was the same as before. Haverstein had thought it was strange and had scouts infiltrate many times but they couldn't find any information. However, Ark had accidentally stumbled upon the reason when using Racard to survey the terrain.

Several kilometres on the other side of the fortress was a huge number of black obelisks. It was the Black Obelisk Forest. That's right. There were 50 obelisks on the other side of the fortress. The black obelisks had the function to resurrect monsters like the Quartermaster for users. It was why the numbers didn't decrease no matter how many monsters were killed. In order to capture Pabiun Fortress, they needed to destroy the black obelisks. But they had to pass through the fortress in order to get to the black obelisks. Then the only remaining method was to wipe out the monsters before they could resurrect again.

Haverstein had used various strategies to capture the fortress during the week but it was useless. The Grippers would appear whenever there was a crucial moment. And the duration of Earth Blast was 24 hours. While the expedition retreated and waited for the skill to finish, the monsters would be restored. So despite fighting without breaks for one week, the result was just a standstill.

"Should we recall the 30,000 troops that we sent to the other areas?"

A leader expressed this opinion but Haverstein shook his head.

"Pabiun Canyon is a long and narrow terrain. Even if there were more troops, the number of soldiers that can actually engage with the enemy is limited. In addition, the monsters can be spawned in other areas covered in darkness and we can be attacked from behind. It's because we can't predict where the black obelisk will appear."

The leaders once again started worrying at Haverstein's words.

'It doesn't matter to me.....'

Ark was the only exception. No, the current situation for the expedition force was Ark's ideal circumstances. Unless they captured Pabiun Fortress, the expedition force couldn't enter the Sinius Principality. The war would have to continue. And war was just a battle of attrition. The number of military supplies that Ark could sell would grow.

'Moreover, the battle over Pabiun Fortress is just a skirmish. From the expedition leaders' point of view, it was unreasonable to risk the expedition on a skirmish. So to reduce as much damage as possible, they would have to invest more in potions and supplies.'

But there was even more. This battlefield wasn't in Schudenberg Kingdom. After the expedition force entered the Sinius Principality, the supply lines would become longer and more risky. But Ark had a somewhat secure way to transport supplies. In other words, he could provide a lot of munitions supply safely. If the route was short then he could reduce the expenses.

'If this state is maintained for a few months then my business can become a conglomerate!'

In fact, Ark had initially wished for a quick resolution to this situation. If the martial law was over then his triangular trade route could resume. But after observing the situation for a week, he had changed his mind. Every time the expedition fought against the monsters at Pabiun Canyon, Ark received an income of at least 2,000 gold. This level of profit was higher than what he would receive from the triangular trade that was just beginning.

'Well, I want the war to continue as long as possible but.....'

Ark was eating up money from the Schudenberg treasury.

'Although the kingdom might be lacking a bit of money, this much won't make it go bankrupt.'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

"Commander-nim, I just received an urgent report!"

A messenger plunged into the tent with a desperate expression.

“What is going on?”

“Yesterday evening, the Bristania expedition arrived at the southwest border of the Sinus Principality. The monsters were caught off guard by a surprise plan and they successfully defeated them in the Sumire Mountains. Now they are advancing to meet us at the Silrinad area!”

“Already?”

“Is that true?”

The leaders looked surprised by the messenger’s report.

“Yes, the Bristania expedition has 80,000 people. That’s why they departed later than us. And they also have the foreigners who spearheaded the surprise attack, the warrior Bread and the female magician Redian.”

“.....That is a problem.”

Haverstein and Ark both muttered as they received the information. Despite saying the same words, Ark had a different meaning from Haverstein. The reason Haverstein said it was trouble was because the expedition was a joint initiative between the two kingdoms. They had left first yet the Schudenberg army was still stuck at the border. But as soon as they entered the war, the Bristania forces were already advancing to the Silrinad area beyond the border.

This in itself wasn’t bad news for the Schudenberg expedition. The two kingdoms decided to meet at Silrinad because it was a strategically important area. If the Bristania expedition occupied the area then they could attack behind Pabiun and destroy the Black Obelisk Forest. Then the Schudenberg expedition could enter Pabiun Fortress with minimal damage. But it wasn’t good to receive help from Bristania at such an early stage. When the war in the Sinus Principality was over, then Schudenberg kingdom would have to give a large amount of the compensation to Bristania. The biggest goal of the expedition was to repel the dark forces so they had poured huge amounts of money into it. Since Haverstein was the commander, he had to pay attention to that part. But Ark was worried about a

different problem.

'I assumed that Bread and Redian were in the expedition after they didn't contact me for a while. Damn! They got in the way.....'

Ark muttered inwardly as he bit his lip. Once again, Ark would continue to receive a huge benefit if this current state continued. But that balance was broken with the entry of the Bristania forces into the war. It was impossible for him to be happy about it. Ark was simply greedy. But after that his thoughts were the same as Haverstein's.

'We can't stay at the border forever. I can only change the military currency to cash after the war ends. But if the war persisted then the Schudenberg Kingdom has to set the tone for the war.'

It was important that Haverstein and the expedition force takes leadership in the war. The two expeditions would eventually join together.

'If the Bristania expedition takes leadership then the Schudenberg forces might not get the chance to come forward. In the worst case scenario, the Bristania might use their supply unit to spread goods!'

This was the part Ark was worried about. Both kingdoms were going to get significant gains from entering the Sinus Principality. The expedition force that had more achievements would be able to request more compensation. If the Bristania expedition took leadership then they wouldn't give as much chances to gain achievements to the Schudenberg army. They would intentionally remove them from important battles.

'If the Schudenberg forces don't fight fiercely then how much supplies will they consume? If the chances to fight decreases.....'

It would mean less consumption of supplies. That meant his income would decrease. Ark had gone through all that trouble to secure supplies from the Underground World and Seutandal. He even set up 24 hour production lines to secure a significant amount of goods. So far the consumption had been perfectly balanced with the production. What would happen if the consumption suddenly

plummeted? And the war ended before he disposed of all his stock? In the worst case scenario, Ark would have goods worth thousands of gold to dispose of.

‘A-absolutely not! If all my funds are tied up in the goods when the war ends then it would take a long time to resume the triangular trade!’

But the problem didn’t end there.

“There.....and a command has also been sent.”

The messenger hesitated as he looked at Haverstein.

“What is it?”

“If the Bristania expedition arrives at Silrinad first and takes away the leadership then the nobles will have to appoint someone else to replace you as commander.”

Ark felt his heart drop at the words. Replacement commander? What kind of talk was that?

‘It must be Duke Sarkin who planted the idea. Marquis Halben and Daltin recommended Haverstein so it is impossible for them to mention replacing him. If Haverstein is replaced then it would be with Duke Sarkin’s candidate. Then.....’

The reason Ark could receive the exclusive trading contract was because Haverstein was the commander. If Haverstein was replaced then Ark would also be replaced as well. Duke Sarkin was the one who tried to make Ark fail before the expedition departed. Wouldn’t Duke Sarkin have one of his subordinates replace Ark? Then it wouldn’t simply be the problem of selling his remaining stock. Currently Ark had goods worth hundreds of thousands of gold piled up and if he couldn’t sell them then Ark’s Corporation would become broke. That was Ark’s thoughts.

“Even this will be taken away.”

Haverstein muttered with a bitter smile. Then the leader of the 1st unit said with a dissatisfied look.

“It’s really frustrating. They don’t know about the battlefield conditions. The Bristania border is completely different from ours. Their mountains have a gentle slope so they can easily move a large army. The black obelisks are also easier to destroy then. They only see the results yet they still want to replace the commander.....”

“It is ineffective even if we say that.”

Haverstein spoke in a calming voice.

“We can’t worry about the decision from the meeting now. The biggest purpose of this fight is to repel the dark forces. But repelling the forces is only 50% of our work. Like His Majesty said, this battle doesn’t just involve the Schudenberg Kingdom but the continent as well. If Bristania grabs the early initiative then we have to cooperate with them.”

“That is true however.....”

“Although the Bristania army crossed the border, it will take them 5 days to reach the Silrinad area. We’ll just have to capture Pabiun Fortress in a few days. So our problem is to think of a way to capture Pabiun.”

But it was impossible for that to happen. In the end, the leaders could only sigh as they left the meeting. The expedition army couldn’t enter the canyon until the effects of Earth Blast wore off the next morning.

‘Is there another way?’

“Hey, why does your face look so down?”

He suddenly heard a familiar voice from somewhere. When he raised his head, he saw with surprise that it was Shambala.

“Eh? Shambala? Why are you here?”

“Eh? What is with that ‘eh?’ Aren’t you the one that called me?”

“Me? Ah, that’s right!”

Ark made a stupid expression before belatedly nodding his head. He had forgotten that he summoned Shambala thanks to this incident. Ark had called Shambala not long ago. After becoming a supplier, Ark knew how much profit there was in supplying goods to soldiers on the battlefield. And he came up with an idea to maximize the profits.

Not everyone could become a supplier like Ark. They had to be able to evade thousands of monsters while running around the battlefield. So a certain level and capability was needed. The person who came to Ark's head at the time was Shambala. Shambala was a user who had the same extraordinary skills as Ark. He could go around the battlefield and sell supplies like Ark. Ark immediately contacted Shambala after coming up with the idea. However Shambala's personality wasn't the type to willingly go along with Ark.

"You eat too much."

Shambala had refused as expected. But Ark had one way to get Shambala to agree.

"Hmm, is that so? Then I will use the '1 time Shambala use' coupon. Surely you won't break your oath in front of Isabel?"

".....You bastard!"

Shambala regretted it but it was already too late. Ark had received a '1 time Shambala use' coupon. Shambala has issued this coupon to Ark because of Seutandal. While the black obelisks had appeared on the continent, they still hadn't showed up in Seutandal. But it wasn't completely free from the threat of the black obelisk. There were various black obelisks in the neighbouring waters so sea monsters had begun attacking Seutandal. That was a serious problem for Ark as well.

"We would like to produce the munitions and industrial material that Ark-nim requested. But the sea monsters are invading continuously so there is no time to make them."

Isabel said when Ark visited with the contract for munitions. But the production capacity of the Baran clan was indispensable to Ark's

plan. Yet it wasn't possible to produce the goods because of the sea monsters.

'Is there a way to stop the sea monsters?'

Ark was busy contemplating when an item entered his head.

-Parasite's Egg Sacs

The egg sacs of the Parasites living inside Leviathan. They will hatch once placed underwater.

He had been unsure about where to use such an item. Even if they were hatched, they were still monsters. Wouldn't he also have to raise their levels after they hatched? But this item was unexpectedly useful when combined with the special ability of the Baran clan. The 'monster taming' ability of the Baran clan! That's right. Couldn't the hatched parasites be trained by the Baran clan to be used in the military? Plus, the Parasites were just hatched so they would be easy to train. Then the thousands of Parasites could join the Seutandal navy. No, one egg sac could hatch thousands of eggs so the navy could have tens of thousands of trained monsters.

'The number of Parasites hatched could deal with the sea monsters. Then the Baran clan will be able to concentrate on their production.'

So Ark made a bargain with Isabel as soon he made the plan. As expected, there really were no useless items in the game. Ark would provide a method for Seutandal to deal with the sea monsters and the price for the war materials would be 65% of the market price. Shambala who had been watching Ark snorted and muttered.

"You really are an unpleasant fellow."

But his words dug his own grave. Ark immediately added another condition.

"65 percent of market price for the military supplies.....and a '1 time Shambala use' coupon in exchange for the Parasite eggs."

“What? Am I a thing?”

Shambala jumped with surprise but he inevitably agreed once Isabel looked at him.

“Kikiki, be careful in the future.”

Ark laughed at Shambala who looked like he wanted to kill Ark.

He had carelessly forgotten about the coupon being used so Shambala frowned and shouted.

“Ah, that’s right? Are you playing with me now?”

“Shut up, I’ve been busy so I forgot for a moment. I can’t afford to quarrel with you now. Damn, the slightest slip and the military supplies.....”

“What’s the matter?”

Then a woman walked out from behind Shambala.

“The problem? Nothing. Just.....eh? L-Lariette-nim?”

Ark flinched and closed his mouth. The woman who had appeared from behind Shambala was Lariette. Shambala saw Ark’s face and instantly smiled.

“Oh, didn’t I tell you? We left together after you contacted me. Well, it is good. Since you have women assisting you everywhere. How about it? Aren’t you thankful?”

‘This guy.....!’

Ark glared at Shambala. In fact, the situation between Ark and Lariette was quite stressful these days. Many times he had thought about having a serious talk but he had been too busy. And Lariette had also noticed Ark’s thoughts. So it had become increasingly awkward whenever they met. The fact that Shambala took her along.....

His intention was clearly to discomfort Ark.

“Is it a problem that I came?”

Lariette noticed their expressions and said. Well, it was a problem. A large one. But how could he say those words in front of a woman?

“Is there such a thing? I’m just happy since it’s been so long since we’ve met.”

Ark answered with an obviously awkward expression. Therefore the atmosphere quickly cooled. Shambala was trying to hold back his laugh that he was close to tears. Since the atmosphere was quite uncomfortable, Lariette quickly changed the subject.

“But what we you saying before?”

“Before? Ah, that’s right. Actually.....”

Ark remembered and quickly explained the situation with the expedition. Shambala erased his playful expression and spoke in a serious voice.

“Hmm, it doesn’t seem to be going as well as I thought.”

“It’s not going well. Haverstein will lose his position after a few more days. Then I will lose my exclusive trading contract. This isn’t a situation where you can also stay calm. If I go bankrupt then Isabel will have to bear the costs of the stockpiled materials as well.”

“If that happens then my sword will always be aimed at your back.”

Shambala raised an eyebrow and spoke in a bloody voice.

“Are you really going to act like that? When your friend might be going bankrupt?”

“Can I really call you my friend after those words?”

Ark and Shambala started to argue with each other. Lariette who seemed to be pondering something carefully suddenly asked.

“That.....if you can’t attack the fortress from the front then how about striking from behind?”

Lariette’s words stopped Ark and Shambala’s argument. Then they both sighed and shook their heads.

“That..... If it was possible then we wouldn’t be worrying.”

“If you look then you’ll understand. The mountains are blocking the border between the Schudenberg and Sinus kingdoms.

The only way is to pass through Pabiun Canyon.”

“Isn’t there another route that crosses through the north of Pabiun Canyon?”

Lariette asked. She looked through her memories before explaining.

“I don’t remember correctly since it was in the early days when I started the game. Um.....While I was playing with some other candidates, I received a quest to find a hidden dungeon in the Sinus Principality.”

She avoided mentioning names but it was the days that she played with Alan. But in those days it was impossible for users to cross the border checkpoint. So Alan had paid a considerable amount of money to a minstrel in a tavern for information on how to cross the border. It was a secret route which bypassed the Pabiun Fortress.

“Therefore it was possible for me to enter the Sinus Principality with my colleagues.”

“Please explain more!”

Ark said as he suddenly grabbed her hands. But he quickly became surprised and removed his hands.

“I-I’m sorry.”

“Ah, no.”

Lariette blushed at Ark’s reaction and avoided his eyes. After seeing the atmosphere between the two people, Shambala smiled and whistled.

“It was worth bringing Lariette along intentionally.”

Smuggler's Pass

Hwiiiiing!

Cold wind raged around the valley like a piece of ice. Snow was piled up from a snowstorm that ended a while ago but the wind blew it everywhere like a storm. In the midst of this white storm was a black wolf.

“Phew…….”

The black wolf, also known as Ark, sighed.

“I expected it but this really is no joke.”

Ark said as he looked at the area where he had to cross. Ark was currently in a deep valley halfway up a mountain. He was also grabbing protruding stones on a cliff like someone rock climbing. It wasn't just Ark stuck on the cliff. Shambala, Lariette and 200 chosen people from the expedition force wearing thick fur followed Ark. All of them were using gear to grab the protruding rocks. But recently those protruding rocks couldn't be seen at all.

“We can't move this way anymore.”

Ark examined his map and the surrounding terrain before shaking his head. Then he turned his eyes to a cliff opposite him that was dozens of metres away.

“Racard, check the cliff on the other side.”

“Okay.”

Racard emerged from Ark's thick fur from changing into Dark Wolf. He flapped his wings and flew to the other cliff before returning after a while.

“I checked it. There is a way to move down on the opposite cliff.”

“I'm glad. I was worried we would have to turn back. Shambala.”

Ark turned around and grabbed the rope that Shambala pulled out of his bag. Ark then tied the rope firmly to a stone nearby and gave the other end to Racard.

“Find a suitable rock on the other side and tie it firmly.”

“I understand.”

Racard flew to the other cliff while holding the rope. The snowstorm was intense and he couldn't check it fully but the rope stretching between the two cliffs seemed to tighten. And Racard immediately flew back.

“That's it. I tied it firmly so it won't come loose.”

Ark pulled the rope several times and confirmed the weight that could be safely held by the rope. There was a loud roar in the distance. The winds that blew in the valley were so rough that anything would shake. No, if it was already a different rope then it would've probably already been broken. However, the rope Shambala carried was a magic item with high durability so it didn't break that easily.

“It is windy so only 1 person should move at a time. I'll move to the other side first to check it out.”

“Yes, please be careful.”

Larriette blew out a white breath as she replied. Ark nodded before using the rope to move to the other cliff.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

It happened when he was 2/3rd of the way there. All of a sudden the entire mountain seemed to shake.

“Again! Everybody stick closely to the cliff!”

Shambala shouted as he clung to the cliff. In fact, this was a snow covered mountain and light earthquakes occurred a few times. But even a light earthquake was a tremendous threat to the people on the cliff. Small stones falling from the cliff above them could deal huge damage. Dozens of people without any rope had previously

been hit on the head and lost their lives. But fortunately that unhappy accident didn't occur this time.

"Phew, we survived that one."

Ark holding onto the rope as well as Shambala, Lariette and the 200 troops sighed with relief. However, this time the problem wasn't the rocks falling from the cliff.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

"What the? There's no shaking so where is this sound coming from?"

Ark tilted his head to one side and looked at the cliff. Shambala who was surveying the area paled and cried out with a stricken look.

"Ark, the valley!"

Ark reflexively looked and he also paled like Shambala. A huge tidal wave was pushing through the valley at tremendous speed towards Ark. The huge tidal wave consisted of snow and rock! That's right. The snow piled up on the upper reaches of the valley had collapsed, causing an avalanche. Ark who confirmed the avalanche quickly moved his eyes to the other side of the valley. It would take at least 3~4 minutes to reach the other side of the valley. That was enough time for Ark to be turned into finely minced meat.

"Damn, it's already late! Everybody climb up as much as possible before the avalanche hits!"

Shambala shouted and the soldiers quickly ascended the precipice with their gear. However, Ark who was dangling from the middle of the rope stared blankly.

"Oh my god, the destination is right in front of my nose.....!"

A voice filled with exhaustion flowed from Ark's mouth. Ark thought back to yesterday evening when he had received the information from Lariette.

"Please explain more!"

The scene had returned to yesterday evening when Ark had grasped Lariette's hand. Ark quickly dropped his hands and the two people blushed.....

Anyway, Lariette explained the secret passage in detail.

"The minstrel called it Smuggler's Pass."

"Smuggler's Pass?"

"Originally smugglers use this pass to move items between Schudenberg and the Sinius Principality. So it was called Smuggler's Pass."

"Anyway, it is possible to go beyond Pabiun Fortress using this passage?"

"Yes. I guess but....."

Lariette sighed as she looked through her memory and shook her head.

"I said that but I don't remember too well."

"You don't remember? What?"

"It's been two years since I've gone through that path so I don't remember the whole way. It was also summer when I went through there. The path is also quite steep so at least 20 of my colleagues had died. The minstrel said that Smuggler's Path is a dangerous place where the smuggler had to risk their lives. I don't know what it will be like in winter....."

"That isn't a problem."

Ark said with flames in his eyes. If the Bristania expedition took the leadership then Haverstein would be replaced as commander. Then Ark's monopoly rights would fly away. Ark would have a huge amount of stock and go bankrupt. It wasn't simply the game that he would become bankrupt in. He would also become bankrupt in reality. It was a problem with his life at stake! He had to do everything possible to pass through Pabiun Fortress. He couldn't hesitate in the game just because there was a risk of dying.

“I’ll take care of the rest so Lariette-nim should just tell me what you remember.”

Ark listened to Lariette’s expression and indicated the location on the map of the Albana Mountains. Ark was able to figure out the approximate route of Smuggler’s Pass.

‘But I can’t just go there blindly with only Lariette-nim’s words. I have to gather information about the surrounding terrain.’

“Summon Demon, Racard!”

Ark gave the map to Racard and said.

“Check the terrain carefully and mark any difficult spots on the map.”

“What? You want me to fly around the freezing snowy mountains?”

“If you complete this well then I’ll give you one holiday whenever you want.”

“Really?”

“This is important.”

“Understood!”

Racard flew towards the mountains with an expression filled with desire for a holiday. Ark’s life was valuable so he needed to check the route meticulously. If Ark died several times then he could recover the stats lost. But if he incurred a debt and became bankrupt then he wouldn’t be able to recover. That’s why Ark meticulously checked everything despite not having much time. It was quicker than having to turn back several times. Once again, Ark would become bankrupt if the Bristania expedition was in charge. And the time remaining was 6~7 days. If the Schudenberg expedition captured Pabiun Fortress in 2~3 days then they would take a few days to move to the Silrinad.

‘The expedition could use the Smuggler’s Pass to capture Pabiun Fortress. The problem is that there are only four days left. If a problem occurred on Smuggler’s Pass then everything would be finished. There is only one chance. Despite the urgency in my heart,

I have to collect as much information as possible to increase the chances of success.'

This was Ark's judgement. So he impatiently waited for Racard to return. After 12 hours had passed, Racard tearfully returned with a runny nose.

"Ohh.....c-cold, everything seems to be frozen."

"Did you examine it?"

"I-I checked it. There is a lot of snow piled up but Master should somehow be able to move to the other side of the mountain. Well, that's by my standards. The places that I saw are indicated separately."

Racard replied as he handed back the map. He opened the map and saw the new route that Racard drew. The parts that Lariette couldn't remember and had been left blank were connected with dots.

'Okay. I've secured the necessary information!'

Ark immediately visited Haverstein with the information.

"Viscount-nim, I have a way to solve this!"

"A way? What are you suddenly saying?"

Haverstein asked. He was still worrying about the news that Bristania was marching towards Silrinad.

"A way to capture Pabiun Fortress."

"Capture Pabiun Fortress? What is it?"

Haverstein hurriedly asked. Ark opened the map on the table and summarized Lariette and Racard's information. Haverstein frowned at the map before he looked towards Ark.

"This is.....smugglers? Smuggler's Pass?"

"Did you know about it?"

Haverstein stared at Ark with an astonished expression before

shaking his head and saying.

“No, I’ve heard of it before. That there was a secret route smugglers used to travel between Schudenberg and the Sinius Principality somewhere in the Albana Mountains. The border guards searched for a few years but they couldn’t find anything so I thought it was just a rumour.....it really exists? Where did you get this information?”

Should he say that a minstrel in a tavern gave the information? Judging by Haverstein’s anxious expression, he couldn’t joke around at a time like this.

“I got my hands on it accidentally.”

“The route drawn on this map is really Smuggler’s Pass?”

“Yes. The person who told me is reliable and I confirmed the information using my pet.”

“If you say so then I’ll have to trust you.....”

Haverstein sighed as he looked at the map again and muttered.

“Like I said, the border guards investigated for a long time before dismissing it as rumours. That’s because the Albana Mountains are so steep that it is impossible to think there is another route other than Pabiun Canyon. Moreover, winter is when the Albana Mountains is the most dangerous. It will be impossible to move 30,000 troops through Smuggler’s Pass.”

“Moving 30,000 troops isn’t necessary.”

Ark answered bluntly.

“What do you mean? There are tens of thousands of monsters stationed at the fortress. In order to fight against them.....”

Haverstein spoke before suddenly closing his mouth. It was because of Ark’s response. His expression cleared and he nodded.

“The method you mentioned.....”

“Yes. Currently the expedition can’t penetrate Pabiun Fortress because of the monsters stationed there. But to be precise, it isn’t

because of the ‘monsters.’ The problem is that the Black Obelisk Forest would resurrect the killed monsters.”

That’s right. The monsters from Pabiun Fortress had received considerable damage from the expedition’s attacks. But the reason it didn’t fall was that the black obelisks restored the monsters after a period of time. The effects of Earth Blast lasted 24 hours so the monsters could be restored in time. Even if the Gripper died while using Earth Blast, they would just be restored so the situation repeated again and again. It might seem weak but it was a successful defense tactic. There was no doubt that someone was controlling the monsters.

‘The Black Obelisk Forest had deliberately been placed to the rear of the fortress so it isn’t possible to stop the resurrection. It’s also impossible for the users to go behind the fortress. It isn’t perfect but the movements could be controlled to some extent.’

It was unthinkable. But Ark had already heard from Global Exos that users were involved with the enemy. Then wouldn’t it be a user controlling the monsters in Pabiun Fortress?

‘But a user wouldn’t know about Smuggler’s Pass.’

Ark moved his finger along the line drawn on the map and smiled. He could use it to bypass the fortress and move to the Black Obelisk Forest.

“If we blow up the Black Obelisk Forest then the problem will be easily solved.”

Ark had thought of a plan the moment he received information about Smuggler’s Pass. Of course the black obelisks would just be restored. However, the time it took for the black obelisks to be restored was incomparable to the resurrection time of monsters. The court magicians determined that it took about a week to ten days to appear again after it was destroyed. They could wipe out the monsters and capture Pabiun Fortress in that time. Once they occupied the fortress than the resurrection of the obelisks wouldn’t be a problem anymore.

“But there will be quite a few monsters at the Black Obelisk Forest.....”

“Draw them out.”

Ark pointed to Pabiun Fortress on the map and said.

“Those who died in the battle yesterday will be restored by now. As you know, the number of monsters for each black obelisk is fixed. In other words, if those guys don’t die again then no more monsters will emerge from the Black Obelisk Forest. If the expedition force rallies all the troops and attacks Pabiun Fortress then all the resurrected monsters will attack.”

“You want us to attack the fortress until all the monsters leave the Black Obelisk Forest?”

“Yes. The Black Obelisk Forest is approximately 1 kilometre away from the fortress. You can just arrange the siege weapons and stay behind them to minimize the damage while attacking the monsters.”

“Certainly.....”

Haverstein murmured in a cheery voice. So a plan was developed to capture the impregnable fortress. But the success of the operation depended on one important prerequisite.

“In the end, the issue has returned to the starting point. If there are fewer troops then it will be easier to make it through Smuggler’s Pass. It will also take a minimum of one day to capture Pabiun Fortress after the obelisks were destroyed. In order to reach Silrinad before the Bristania expedition, you’ll have to get through Smuggler’s Pass and destroy the obelisks within three days.”

“It is possible. No, I’ll make it possible.”

“Then you will go?”

“If there is a warrior more reliable than me in the expedition then I will concede it to them.”

“.....Isn’t that impossible?”

Haverstein smiled and murmured. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-The Expedition's Commander has accepted Ark-nim's strategy.

* Art of Communication increased by 30.

* Political Power increased by 20.

* Achievements increased by 500.

-The Expedition Army's Crusade (Event Quest)

+ Sub Quest: Blow up the 'Black Obelisk Forest' operation

The Schudenberg expedition has been blocked by monsters and is unable to cross the border to the Sinus Principality. Ark-nim has proposed a new operation and the Expedition Commander Haverstein accepted.

Operation Overview: Use the secret route that smugglers use to travel between Schudenberg and the Sinus Principality to bypass Pabiun Fortress and destroy the Black Obelisk Forest before the monsters can be restored. While the special attack corps is approaching the Black Obelisk Forest, the expedition army will attack Pabiun Fortress to draw the attention of the monsters.

<Difficulty: A+>

Once Haverstein accepted Ark's proposal, it was immediately registered as a sub quest. Of course, this mission wasn't one that Ark could do alone. So Haverstein summoned the unit leaders and explained Ark's plan. However, Haverstein's decision was received with backlash from the leaders.

"You're leaving such an important mission to the one in charge of supplies? It is ridiculous!"

"Even if he is the one who came up with the plan, this is too excessive!"

"Yes, a warrior should take over this mission!"

When the strategy was explained and Ark was designated the one in charge, the leaders immediately made a disturbance. The users also opposed it. This was a huge mission concerning the fate of the expedition. If the operation leader completed it successfully then they could get enormous achievement points. The users couldn't give up such a chance. But Haverstein asked the room with a fierce expression.

"Do you really think Ark doesn't deserve the mission?"

"Of course!"

The leaders answered simultaneously.

"Look again and answer. Do you really think there is anyone better than Ark?"

The unit leaders started at Ark after hearing the same question. In the next moment..... Their eyes widened with shock.

"Of course since he is a merchant.....heok, what, what the?"

"T-that was Lord Ark.....then Lord Ark is....."

The leaders stuttered with a stunned expression. They looked at the place Ark was standing just now. But Ark wasn't visible when they looked again. He had changed into a wolf with black fur. From Schudenberg to Seutandal, there were no users in New World who didn't know the name Dark Wolf after he defended Lancel from the bandit group.

"He is Dark Wolf."

Haverstein smiled and replied. The users' doubts were also calmed after Dark Wold's true identity was revealed.

"The ones that played a key role in the Bristania expedition were Bread and the magician Redian. But Schudenberg also has a warrior comparable to them. That person is Dark Wolf. Do you think there is anyone more qualified than him?"

The leaders all closed their mouths. After that the establishment of the special forces was quickly conducted. There was significant

achievement points involved so there were many eager applicants.

‘But there is a time limit so it isn’t possible to take a lot of troops. 300 people should be suitable. We also have to quickly go through Smuggler’s Pass so the users should be at least level 300.’

Ark carefully looked around the troops and selected 300 people to share the quest with. It was a situation which emphasized speed so they also couldn’t bring many supplies. Equipment and food necessary for hiking was required. But there was one essential item that couldn’t be omitted.

-Starlight Bomb (Special)

A special bomb developed by the Magic Institute with Holy Power inscribed on it. It particularly exerts a strong power over enemies with the demonic attribute. The development isn’t perfect so it will take a significant amount of time for the bomb to blow up. But it has a strong explosive force that is capable to destroying the black obelisks. So it can be utilized to destroy the black obelisks.

<Once trigger, it will take 10 minutes to explode and will deal 5000 damage to all obelisks in a 1 metre area. When used on demonic monsters, it is possible to inflict 200 damage>

“The fate of Schudenberg expedition lies with you.”

Haverstein said after handing over the Starlight Bombs to Ark. But the destiny of the Schudenberg expedition had never been on Ark’s mind.

‘I’m only interested in protecting the money! I can’t forgive any monsters that interfere in my business! I will blow all of them up!’

A motivated fire was kindled in Ark’s eyes.

After that it was like a documentary on human victory. Ark’s kindled motivation quickly disappeared in the snow covered mountains. Even the smugglers avoided these mountains during winter. The place was

more dangerous than Ark expected. The piles of snow created an illusion of the ground only to discover there was a crevasse. There were also occasional earthquakes which caused falling rocks to smash the head of the special forces. 10 hours after entering Smuggler's Pass, the 300 members had been reduced to 200. Without Lariette's information and Racard's scouting, the 200 hundred remaining members probably would've been killed.

'This operation has to succeed no matter the cost!'

Ark reiterated again with clenched fists. And they finally reached the last checkpoint of Smuggler's Pass after all that suffering.....

'Did I come all this way just to die so absurdly?'

Ku ku ku ku, ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Ark stared at the huge grey monster of snow. The problem wasn't dying. If Ark died here then the strategy would fail. In summer, this valley was a place where the road below could be used. But the accumulated snow meant that they had to use a rope to move between cliffs. If Ark died here then the rope would snap and the method to move to the other side would disappear. Racard would also disappear when Ark died so he couldn't retrieve the rope. The operation would be halted. In the end Haverstein would have his Commander position taken away. And Ark would have too much stock and would become bankrupt. If he had no money then his mother couldn't even go to the hospital anymore.

'No. I can't let that happen! I can't die like this!'

Desperation ignited in Ark's eyes.

'What.....there must be some way!'

Ark considered all the possible measures. Was there a quick way to return to the cliff and avoid the avalanche? He couldn't be swept away from the avalanche. Should he grab the hand glider from Radun to run away?

.....There must be some way to escape the avalanche.

Should he grab the rope tightly and pray?

.....As long as the rope wasn't swept away by an avalanche.

Every possible suggestion ended in him being buried by the avalanche.

'Is there really no way?'

Ark worried like crazy. Then sparks flew in Ark's head as he clenched the rope firmly.

'Wait? Yes, that's the way.....!'

Now wasn't the time to worry about whether it was possible or impossible. As soon as Ark came up with the idea, he took out his sword and started cutting the rope. The rope had a durability bonus so it didn't break easily. But the rope finally snapped after a few more attempts. When the rope snapped, Ark was swung towards the other cliff. If Ark crashed into the cliff then he would be squashed like a ripe tomato!

"Now's the time. Riposte!"

Ark used Riposte the moment he was about to hit the cliff. Riposte pushed the enemy back 10 metres. However, it was impossible to force the rock wall back. Instead, the force of the rope's swing and Ark's body caused him to stop moving. Then the avalanche was almost upon him. Ark was still clinging to the rope!

"If I stay here I'll die! Sprint!"

Ark grinded his teeth together and shouted. He turned his body and used Sprint to run up the cliff. Ark hung onto the rope while running up the cliff. That's right. That was the method Ark came up with. It was a technique to use run up the cliff while hanging onto the rope!

"Damn, it's still lacking a bit!"

The speed of the avalanche was faster than Ark's Sprint. The avalanche rumbled and got closer to Ark. The size of the avalanche was also larger than Ark imagined. Despite using Sprint and running with the rope, the height of the avalanche was still higher. Just

before Ark was about to be swept away by the avalanche, a skill popped into his head.

“That’s right, Jump!”

Ark stepped on a stone and shouted. The power surged into his thighs and he jumped up 10 metres. Ark grabbed a protruding stone close to him as the avalanche passed right underneath him. Sweat flooded down his back like a waterfall.

“I-I lived.....”

“Damn, that guy really has a long life.”

Shambala laughed and muttered from the cliff opposite to Ark. Anyway, Ark had managed to avoid being killed by the avalanche. After the crisis was over, Ark connected the rope again and Shambala, Lariette and the other members climbed over. After that there were no more problems. Once they moved to the cliff, the path was not a relatively gentle slope. When they walked a little further along the slope, a message window appeared in front of them.

-You have exited the Albana Mountains.

-You have entered the Pabiun Canyon area.

“Finally.....!”

“We’ve gone through Smuggler’s Pass!”

The tired soldiers cheered as they saw the message. Shambala rolled his stiffened shoulders and muttered.

“The only thing left is to find the Black Obelisk Forest.”

“Not yet.”

“What? Not yet?”

“There’s one place I have to visit prior to that.”

Ark smiled and moved forward. Shambala, Lariette and the other special forces followed him. Then the snow on the ground suddenly

moved and an eyeball popped out. It was similar to the eyeball stuck to Ark. The eyeball looked in the direction that the special forces had disappeared.

Alan's Resurrection

“Indeed.....”

Ark stared at the ruins in front of him and sighed. Then Shambala and Lariette looked at him with doubtful eyes.

“What one earth? What are we doing here?”

“Did this use to be a village?”

“.....Nuran village.”

Ark responded like he was thinking out loud. Ark had two purposes when he started this mission. The first one was to blow up the Black Obelisk Forest in order to help the Schudenberg army. The other reason was to visit a village related to the <Witness the Legend> quest that was located on the other side of the Albana Mountains. That's right. The destination of the <Witness the Legend> quest was a village on the border of the Sinus Principality. It was the Lore quest he received after collecting 10 ☆'s. If he completed it then a big prize would be waiting! But after he arrived at the destination, the whole village along with the NPCs had disappeared. However, Ark didn't look hopeless as he looked around the devastated village.

“It has been more than 10 days since the darkness started spreading.....”

In fact, Ark had already guessed that it would reach here. The Sinus Principality was flooded with darkness and monsters had attacked every village and city. Only a few fortified cities managed to barely stop the monsters' attacks. A small mountain village in the mountains wouldn't be able to survive it. The destruction of Nuran village was expected. Yet the reason he came here was that this wasn't the final destination of Ark's quest.

‘In order to meet the prophet clan to complete the <Witness the

Legend> quest, I have to meet with some NPCs on the outside first. Since the prophets live in a hidden village.'

But detailed information about Nuran village was written on the information and it was even marked on the map of the Sinus Principality. In other words, the sequence was 'Nuran village= Prophet Clan.' Then the answer was that he could get information about the prophet clan from Nuran village.

'I need to get information from Nuran village so there might be a way even if it is in ruins. There might even be NPCs who survived the attack from the monsters.'

It was the reason why Ark looked for this location despite his busy schedule. If the Schudenberg expedition moved on after capturing Pabiun Fortress then he would have to go with them. That meant this was his only chance to explore Nuran village. And Ark had 200 expert users as his subordinates. He could also have the users search for him. If there was a clue remaining then it wouldn't be difficult to find.

'Fortunately it hasn't been a long time since the village was attacked.'

"Everybody concentrate! From now on everyone should search through the ruins.

This task is very important so notify me immediately if there are any survivors."

The soldiers scattered at Ark's order and looked through the rubble. Then Shambala looked at him with suspicious eyes.

"This task is very important? Really?"

"Are you questioning your leader?"

"Master!"

Ark had retorted in a sharp voice. Then Racard who had been scouting the area hurriedly flew back while shouting.

"What? Monsters?"

“N-no, a monster is a monster..... That guy! It’s him!”

“That guy? What do you mean?”

“A-A-A.....”

Racard stuttered breathlessly. Then Shambala flinched and spat out a string of curses.

“Uh? Holy shit! Ark, we’re surrounded!”

“Surrounded? What.....”

Ark looked around with a confused expression. Hundreds of monsters were surrounding the ruins where the special forces were? Monsters with the body of a human and a lion and the head of a bull.....there were 800 of the demonic monsters!

‘Damn! How did we get surrounded by so many monsters?’

Ark made a puzzled expression.

“I’m glad that I found you.”

Ark turned his head as he heard a voice from behind him.

Ttukuk, ttukuk..... Somebody slowly emerged from among the monsters. It was a knight wearing bony black armour while riding a skeletal horse. When the knight lifted his helmet, Ark and Shambala shouted at the same time.

“Alan!”

“I’m also glad that you haven’t forgotten my name.”

Alan who was inside the black armour muttered.

‘What the hell? How did he appear in a place like this? Didn’t he quit the game? No, what’s with the monsters? Alan is travelling around with monsters? In addition, it looks like Alan is the one commanding them. A user is controlling that many monsters? Such a thing is impossible. Although it is impossible.....’

Ark looked at Alan and had a thought pop into his head.

‘Ah, is it that?’

Ark narrowed his eyes and nodded.

“This type of situation can’t be considered an error but it more like a type of bug in the system. Several users seem to be intentionally abusing this bug.”

That was what he heard when he visited Global Exos not long ago. Users were exploiting the bug!

‘Then Alan is one of those users?’

If Alan was controlling the monsters than that explained their strategic movements at Pabiun Fortress. Then Alan led a squad of monsters and appeared here.....

“What business do you have with me?”

“What do you think?”

Alan asked as he stared at Ark. Although his voice was calm, anger was obvious in every line of his body. It was natural. Ark was the person who stepped on Alan in the past. It was a situation that couldn’t be helped but Alan received enormous damage from Ark. Silvana was taken away and his guild disbanded. He also became a criminal in the eyes of every user. He had been buried in New World. It was a grudge that was impossible to forget in 1 year.

‘It’s not an exaggeration to say that we’re mortal enemies.

Neither one of us can endure each other.’ But Ark didn’t know the reason behind Alan’s biggest grudge against him.

“Ah, Alan-nim?”

Lariette who had been observing the atmosphere between the two people said carefully. At the same time, Alan shouted in a rough voice.

“Shut up!”

Lariette paled and retreated after hearing Alan’s shout. But Lariette wasn’t the only one surprised. Ark was also shocked by Alan’s

violent reaction. Ark had thought that Alan and Lariette were still lovers. Thanks to the misunderstanding, they had intentionally avoided mentioning Alan's name to each other. Despite examining his feelings for Lariette many times, he was still blocked by the presence of Alan. A meeting between Lariette and Alan had weighed on his mind. But that idea quickly shattered after Ark saw Alan's reaction.

'What the, this reaction is? Well, anyone would be angry if their girlfriend was with the enemy but isn't this reaction too severe? Does that guy have an abnormal character? Or.....'

Had he been misunderstanding the relationship between Lariette and Alan? It was the first time Ark had that thought in 1 year. But Ark had no more time to continue that thought.

"It's starting now. Ark, Lariette and Shambala! I'll make you realize what a big mistake you made antagonizing me. I'll pay you back one hundred, no one thousand times!"

Alan stared at Lariette before raising his sword and shouting.

"Step on all of them! Don't let even one person escape!"

Kuaaaa! Awoooooo!

The hundreds of monsters yelled and rushed forward. Therefore Ark no longer had any time to think about various situations. Currently 800 monsters were surrounding them. There was a reason the special forces couldn't die. Did they have to fight if the odds weren't in their favour?

'I have to find some way to escape!'

"Damn, defense formation!"

The users in the special forces were specially chosen from 30,000 troops. They were warriors with excellent levels and skills. Rather than falling into a panic, the soldiers neatly formed the defense formation at Ark's command. The warriors used their large shields to form a circle with the archers and magicians in the middle. A perfect circular camp had been formed in seconds.

“Lariette-nim, your buffs!”

“Warrior’s Soul, Shining Sword, Light of Vitality!”

-The Innocence Knight has used the Warrior’s Soul.
--

<The strength and stamina of all allies within a 100 metre radius will increase by 30>
--

-The Innocence Knight has used Shining Sword.

<The sword attack power of all allies within a 100 metre radius will increase by 20%>

-The Innocence Knight has used Light of Vitality.

<All allies within a 100 metre radius will have their health recover by 5 every 10 seconds>

The set of three buffs were scattered around the circular camp. Thanks to the three buffs being piled off, the combat power of the soldiers increased by 20%. Just before the soldiers collided with the monsters, Ark threw the Saw blade and shouted.

“Summon Demon, Razak. Sword transformation release. Iron Fire Wall!”

Ttadak, ttadadadak, tadadak!

The Saw blade flew through the air and transformed into Razak. Razak raised his shield as soon as he transformed. It was the Blazing Fire Draconian Shield.

Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Kwa kwa kwang, hwarrrruk!

Razak roared (?) and slammed the shield into the ground using his strength. Giant wings of fire opened on both sides of the shield like a Firebird. The wings fluttered and hit 100 monsters that approached. At the same time, the flames from the wings jumped to the monsters’ bodies. It was the special skill of the Blazing Fire

Draconian Shield, Iron Fire Wall! The 100 monsters that blindly rushed in were enveloped in flames and became 'stunned.' It was a great opportunity! Ark's eyes flashed and he shouted.

"Now! Archers and magicians, use your wide area skills!"

The wide area skill did less damage than general skills but could attack all enemies in range. But the wide area skill couldn't designate the target. So it could be used in the midst of confused fighting where friends and foes were mixed together. That's why Ark lured the monsters first and then stunned them using the Iron Fire Wall.

"The dead sea, unleash the storm of your power..... Tornado!"

"Arrow shower!"

The wide area skills concentrated on the stunned monsters. Tornados tore through the area, hail poured down like a blizzard and there was a shower of arrows! Dozens of wide area skills were concentrated on one area. It was a death space! The monsters confined in that space lost 50% of their health instantly.

"Move to a battle formation and kill the monsters that already have their health decreased!"

"Ohhhhhh!"

The soldiers rushed at Ark's command while maintaining the circular formation. Currently they were surrounded by 800 monsters. If they broke their formation in such a situation then the soldiers would probably be driven back into a defensive position. With the numbers overwhelming superior to them, it would certainly be instant defeat.

'I should maintain a 7:3 ratio of defense and attack and reduce the number of enemies.'

But as expected, it was just a temporary solution. The special forces only had 200 people while the monsters were 4 times that with 800 of them. Of course the special forces consisted of elite users with most of them over level 350. But the monsters Alan brought with him had an average level of 400. Furthermore, the demonic sphere of influence meant the special forces had their stats decreased by 20%

and the monsters increased by 20%.

‘It is impossible to win in this state. Even if we can win, the special forces will be almost wiped out. But as long as one person has the Starlight Bomb, they can succeed in blowing up the 50 black obelisks. In that case, we just have to fight and look for an opportunity to run away. But the problem is.....’

The soldiers had successfully taken care of the first wave of monsters. That.....

“Ark, behind you!”

Then he heard Shambala’s voice. Ark flinched and turned around, seeing a sword aimed at his back. Alan had charge forward on his skeletal horse and swung his sword. Ark reflexively lifted his sword and blocked it. He hadn’t expected it and lost his balance, rolling across the snowfield. Then Alan’s sword fell vertically again. Ark tried to kick the ground to get up but his foot slipped on the ice and he fell again. The sword aimed towards the crown of Ark’s head. No, it was about to split him in half.

Syu syu syu syuk, ka ka ka kak, chaeng!

Three or four daggers flew through the space and hit the sword. The orbit of the sword was changed and it passed by Ark’s head. Alan tried to attack again when his first one failed but he moved back with an irritated look as daggers kept on flying at him. Ark finally got up and regained his posture. Then Shambala who had thrown the daggers appeared next to him.

“I hope you haven’t forgotten that your friends are here.”

“You’re a good friend so take as much as you want.”

“I have to respectfully decline.”

“Really?”

Ark smiled and looked at Alan.

‘This is a chance!’

Ark's current goal was to minimize the loss of troops and to run away. And the biggest obstacle wasn't the monsters but Alan. Currently Ark was in the complicated Pabiun Canyon. It would be easy to use the terrain to defeat the monsters following them. However it wouldn't be that simple if the opponent was a user. A user wasn't stupid so they wouldn't be tricked easily. Moreover, the person commanding the monsters was Alan. If he ran away without a plan then it was possible the situation would worsen. Ark had to deal with Alan first before they could escape.

'I was really concerned that Alan would hide in the rear behind all the monsters. Then it would be harder to find an opportunity to catch him. Yet he appeared right in front of me.....'

Perhaps it was because of his Alan's grudge and pride.

'Your grudge will be your fatal mistake!'

Ark quickly glanced at Shambala. Shambala lifted a corner of his mouth and nodded. Attack Alan using the pincer movement. That arrangement was decided with one look. Fair and square? There was no need for something like that. Whether it was reality or a game, he had to do whatever it took to win. How could he worry about fairness when he was close to bankruptcy? It was important to deal with Alan and escape here quickly.

"I'll take the right side and you'll take the left!"

Ark and Shambala rushed towards Alan from different sides. Alan turned his body without any hesitation towards Ark.

"Sheesh, wasn't Ark more scary then this? I'll show you true power. Arrow!"

Just as Shambala was about to drive his dagger into Alan.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

Dozens of arrows suddenly shot towards Shambala. Shambala hurriedly twisted his dagger but one arrow still lodged in his shoulder. Shambala withdrew and glared at the space where the arrow was shot from.

“Stealth?”

While Shambala was glaring at that space, a woman appeared. The woman with black skin and pointy ears was a Dark Elf. Shambala pulled out the arrow in his shoulder and asked in a cold voice.

“What, you are?”

“What are you going to do? Ask for a date?”

“You think I want to date a girl like you who shoots arrows randomly?”

“I’m glad, I also have no interest in weak guys.”

“I’m weak?”

Shambala curled his lip as he looked at the dark elf. No, the moment he looked he flew towards the Dark Elf like a projectile. It was Shambala’s high speed skill, Blink! Shambala swung his dagger with an exaggerated movement and the snow flew forward like a wave. It was a momentum which seemed to tear the sky apart. But the Dark Elf was already gone.

“Kalkalkal, a woman can run away like a wild boar!”

“Dammit. Torrential Sword!”

When he heard the Dark Elf’s voice from behind him, Shambala cursed and rotated his body while instantly using a skill. Hundreds of daggers sprung from a dark area and covered the entire space. The Dark Elf just used a fire arrow and snorted.

“Shall we see if quantity beats quality? Explosion Arrow!”

The arrow she fired exploded and the daggers caught by the shock wave fell to the ground. Shambala was also caught by the explosion. The Dark Elf shot an arrow that flew through the sky.

“Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!”

Beondduk!

The arrow flew at a speed that couldn’t be avoided. It was the light speed! Shambala couldn’t even move a finger as the arrow pierced

his chest. No, it seemed to pierce him. Shambala's body blurred and disappeared.

"What, what the? Alter ego?"

"The joke is over. You stupid woman!"

Shambala appeared behind the baffled Dark Elf. The surprised Dark Elf rolled along the ground and successively shot some arrows. Since she was rolling on the ground, the arrows flew in all directions and Shambala smirked.

"Heh, I never thought I would have to fight seriously against a woman....."

"Are you really qualified to say that? Matanyi Shooter no. 2, Devil's Chasing Arrow!"

The Dark Elf shouted as she got up. Then the arrows flying all over the place turned around and headed towards Shambala like a guided missile.

"What, what the?"

Shambala hurriedly moved his body but the arrows followed him.

"Sun, Gae, Yeol, Seom!"

In the end, Shambala had to use 100% of his assassination footwork to outrun the arrows. From then on the real battle between Shambala and the Dark Elf began in earnest. However, the fight between the two of them was different from a fight between warriors. While a warrior's fight was a battle of strength and stamina, the two of them used deception and agility to counterattack against each other. So it was difficult to anticipate who would win in the battle.

'To be able to fight Shambala to this extent, who on earth is that Dark Elf?'

Ark stared with an open mouth at the fight between Shambala and the Dark Elf. Fights in New World were 60% level and 40% skills. Levels and abilities were important but the actual movement

ability was also significant. Even Ark admitted that Shambala was an expert at kung fu. But the Dark Elf wasn't pushed by Shambala's movements.

"Where are you looking?"

At that time Alan charged towards him on the skeletal horse. His sword swept up from the ground! Ark hurriedly turned his body and defended. His whole body shook from the impact and he was pushed back several metres. The impact felt like he had been hit by a truck.

'Ugh! What on earth, this impact is?'

Ark groaned as he barely maintained his balance. In fact, Ark had been contemptuous of Alan until now. When Ark met him for the first time, he felt like Alan was a wall which couldn't be crossed. But after a lot of experiences, his skills had become equal to Alan's. Then Alan lost everything and remained hidden in New World for a while. At this point Ark already thought that Alan wasn't a worthy rival anymore. Even with Alan in front of him, Ark thought he could deal with him easily. However, it turned out that Alan was a tougher opponent than Ark thought. No, they were almost equal if he was judging by the impact he felt.

'What on earth is going on?'

Their power being equal meant they had comparable stats. Ark's current level was 432 and with the dark attribute bonus it was 648. Even if he hunted 24 hours for the last year, it was impossible for Alan to reach level 648.

'How did he get this power? Damn, I'll check his information window.....'

Ark used Eyes of the Cat to determine Alan's information. But the information window just blurred when he tried to look at it. The only time the information couldn't be seen was when a scroll or a special skill like Shambala's was used. It also happened when there was a difference of 100 levels. But he didn't feel a lot of difference so it couldn't be a special skill or scroll.

‘There can’t be a 100 level difference between me and that guy. Then did he receive stat bonuses like my dark attribute bonus?’

That’s right. Alan was able to show abilities equal to Ark because of a bonus. Alan’s bonus depended on his Hate stat.

-Hatred (+ 10): The most powerful emotion a human can have is hate. A

t the height of your ruin, you didn’t stop hating your opponent. It is the most appropriate power for revenge.

<Hatred is only generated for those with a chaotic alignment. The user will receive a 0.1% stat bonus for every 1 point of chaotic value. In addition, all skills will be amplified by 0.1%. However, any stats which oppose Hatred will be deleted>

This was the ability Alan received when he changed to a Ruin Knight. The Hate stat meant he received a 0.1% stat bonus for every chaotic point he gained. To put it simply, if he had 100 Hate and 100 Chaotic points then he would get 10 bonus stats. In fact, this stat wasn’t useful when it was first created. But Alan had commanded monsters and indiscriminately killed NPCs in the Sinus Principality so his chaotic value was in the tens of thousands. Therefore Alan had thousands of bonus stats applied.

“Sheesh! That skeletal horse is annoying.”

Ark spat on the ground and murmured. He didn’t understand the reason but their abilities were similar. Anyway, Ark had confidence that he could defeat Alan. Ark had experienced a lot in order to reach this level. Yet Ark was struggling because of the skeletal horse. The main method of attack for a cavalry soldier was to charge, attack and then retreat. It was very simple but different for an infantry soldier to counter. Besides, Alan was someone who had ridden horses from the beginning because it was stylish. He was accustomed to fighting on horseback.

‘First I have to draw him down from the horse.’

“Is that it?”

Alan laughed and rushed again. Ark raised his sword like a baseball player about to strike the ball and shouted.

“Summon release, Racard. Summon Demon, Racard!”

“Ack, what, what the?”

Racard who had been using satellite surveillance mode to report the movements of the monsters to Lariette was summoned in front of Ark. At the same time, Ark hit Racard sharply in the bum with his sword.

“Go, Bat Missile!”

“Kuaaaaack! What the, Master I will die!”

Racard screamed as he flew forward like a bullet. Ark had aimed at Alan’s face. However Alan just sneered and hit Racard with his arm, sending him flying.

‘Damn, is it a failure? Useless bat!’

Ark clicked his tongue and muttered. After suddenly being hit by the sword and then Alan, the sniffling Racard with a runny nose flew back towards Alan’s face. Alan reflexively closed his eyes.

“This is a chance!”

Ark wasn’t the type to miss this opportunity. The moment Alan’s eyes closed, Ark ran towards the skeletal horse. He stepped on the skeletal body and jumped up, slamming into Alan’s jaw with his knee.

“Cough!”

Alan’s head shot backwards as his jaw was hit and he fell off the horse. Ark aimed his sword at Alan’s chest while they were falling. Alan opened his eyes and shouted.

“Ugh, this bastard..... Evil Insight!”

Deep red rays shot from Alan’s eyes. Before Ark could react to the attack, the light had penetrated his shoulder. At that moment, the landscape jumbled up and he suddenly became busy. Alan’s face seemed to multiply dozens of times and became distorted.

‘What, what the? What just happened?’

Ark wobbled backwards and used Skill Penetration.

-Gore Knight skill: The Gore Knights are demons living in basements of old buildings.

Those fellows hide in the darkness and use Evil Insight to draw travellers into a world of hallucinations. While the travellers are caught by the hallucinations, they would be devoured by the Gore Knight.

<A ‘hallucination’ situation will be created for 1 minute>

‘Gore Knight skill?’

Ark was stunned after verifying the information. The Gore Knight was a monster Ark had encountered several times in dungeons. So he was familiar with the effects of Evil Insight. The problem was how Alan managed to use Evil Insight. And that was just the beginning.

“You thought it would be better if you got me off the horse?”

Alan smirked as he ran up to Ark. Thanks to Evil Insight, it seemed like hundreds of copies of Alan were running from every direction. The confused Ark swung his sword wildly around him. But his sword never struck Alan. Alan avoided Ark’s sword and yelled.

“Devil’s Breath!”

This time smoke spewed from Alan’s mouth. Ark’s skin turned black the moment the smoke touched it and a message window appeared.

-You’ve become addicted to the Devil’s Breath.

<You will lose 50 health every 10 seconds. It will continue until an intermediate antidote is taken>

‘Oh my god! This time ‘Devil’s Breath’ as well?’

Ark couldn’t grasp the situation. Devil’s Breath was a poisonous skill

used by the Lamias. It was a deadly poison then continued until without a time limit and was one that users feared most. But the problem wasn't the Devil's Breath. Ark was concerned about how Alan was able to use the skill of a Gore Knight and a Lamia.

'What on earth is going on?' How is this guy able to use the abilities of monsters?'

"Huhuhu, this was worth changing to a Ruin Knight."

Alan smiled and muttered as Ark was poisoned by the Devil's Breath. That's right. The Ruin Knight was a unique profession in New World and its true power was the ability to use the skills of monsters. The name was 'Predator of Demons.' This ability combined with the Devil's Jewel meant that he could freely use the skills of monsters. Alan had absorbed abilities from 60 different types of monsters in order to get revenge on Ark. But Ark couldn't understand those circumstances.

'Damn, I don't know what's happening but I should keep my distance and observe.'

Ark instinctively sensed the crisis and withdrew. He couldn't find blindly when the opponent could use any type of skill.

"Not a chance. Inferno!"

Alan blew fire from his mouth towards Ark.

'This time it is fire? It is too strange. There's something strange about this guy!'

Ark used Dark Dance to remove himself from Alan's range. Alan had the basic attributes of a knight. He wore metal armour so his movements were slower than Ark's. If Ark gave up on attacking and just used Dark Dance then Alan wouldn't be able to catch him. That was Ark's idea.

"It really is very pitiful. It is impossible for you."

Alan frowned as Ark continued to run away. Then he touched his closed fist to his chest and shouted.

“Hate aura!”

When his fist touched his chest, a strange aura appeared around it. The black aura crawled over Alan’s body like a living organism. It would around his arms, legs and body like a snake and hardened into a sort of armour. Ark used Skill Penetration and the information window floated in front of him.

-Set Equipment Option Skill: [Hate Set] Hate Aura

The Hate Set are cursed equipment with the souls of angry warriors lodged inside. The vengeful spirits are normally sleeping within the set equipment. When gathered together, the Hate Set has a fearful power.

Once all of the set is gathered, the users can amplify the power of the vengeful spirits and aim their hatred at the real world. When triggered, the defense of the Hate Set will decrease by 50% for 24 hours.

* Hate Aura can only be used by someone with the Hate stat.

<Attack and movement power will be increased by 30% for 30 minutes>

‘Set equipment effect!’

Ark stared at Alan with astonishment. Alan looked different from before. The Hate Aura from his equipment was wrapped around Alan’s whole body. It caused a sinister atmosphere around him.

“This is my favourite.”

Alan smirked and approached Ark. Yet Alan seemed to explosively burst towards Ark at a tremendous speed. Ark hurriedly used Dark Dance to retreat. When he previously used Dark Dance, he could avoid the attacks and maintain a distance. But this time Alan had no trouble catching up and attacking.

“Huk! What, what the? This speed? Is this really 30% increase?”

When he looked at the information for Hate Aura, 30% didn’t feel

that large. But when they were already in similar conditions, the 30% increase made a huge difference.

‘Damn, now I can’t even escape?’

“Okay, let’s see who dies first!”

Ark clenched his teeth tightly and swung his sword. Ark instantly narrowed the distance and started fighting in earnest. “Dark Blade!”

“The Devil’s Fang!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The two swords clashed and caused a loud ringing sound. There was only 50 centimetres between Ark and Alan. They stood facing each other without backing down. The snowstorm whirled around them and blocked the battle from outside view. After a few minutes.....

Ka ka ka kak, cha chaeng, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Somebody was suddenly pushed out of the snowstorm.

“Dammit.....!”

The person who was pushed was none other than Ark.

“I seem to have overestimated you.”

Alan muttered as he stepped out of the snowstorm. Anger swelled up inside Ark at the sight of that arrogant expression. Ark had played the game eagerly and he had confidence in himself. Yet he had been pushed by Alan who had been a figure of his past.

‘All my struggles to get this far.....’

It was an exhausting thought. However Ark soon clenched his teeth and shook his head.

‘No, my level and skills are still superior. I’m being pushed back by his strange monster skills and the set item effect.’

That’s right. Ark wasn’t pushed back using skills. If Alan hadn’t used

the Hate Aura then Ark would have a 6:4 advantage. Thanks to the Hate Aura and strange skills, this had been flipped to 4:6.

‘Damn, to think I was the ones who sold him those.....’

Anger exploded at the sight of the metal gloves that Alan was wearing. Alan was using the ‘Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred’ that Ark had sold in the auction. He was only able to use Hate Aura because he had gathered the Hate Set. In the end Ark brought this on himself by selling Alan the gloves. It was really a situation for cursing. But now wasn’t the time for regrets.

‘The odds aren’t in my favour.’

The only way to win was to use Area Declaration and Descent of the Fire Draconian. But Alan must have a 2nd stage profession judging from his abilities so it would be useless.

‘Is there really no way?’

Ark got up and checked the surroundings. Ark wasn’t the only one in a bad position. The special forces were surrounded by hundreds of monsters and more than 50 people had already died. Area Declarations couldn’t be overlapped so teammates in the same area with a 2nd stage profession were rotating the uses. However, the health of the special forces had almost reached their limits. If a dozen more users fell then the rest would quickly be killed like dominoes.

‘Even Shambala can’t help.....’

Shambala was still playing tag with the Dark Elf.

‘Damn! I made a mistake!’

Ark’s initial plan was to deal with Alan before running into the canyon and misleading the monsters. But that was under the premise that he could defeat Alan. That condition had failed so it was now the worst situation. While the special forces had killed 300 monsters with 50 of them killed, their health and mana were really low. Ark also only had 20% health and mana left. In this situation it would’ve been better if he had escaped from the beginning.

‘Should I stay here? Or do I run away?’

The answer to this question was a no-brainer.

If they continued fighting then the special forces would 100% be wiped out. But if they ran away then at least 1% was likely to survive. Ark’s purpose of ‘killing Alan and escaping’ changed. However, it wasn’t an easy thing.

‘Alan is faster than me right now. I also only have 20% health left. If I can stop Alan from moving for a short time.....’

The rubble of the ruins suddenly caught Ark’s eyes. At that moment a similar situation from the Evil Silrion rose in Ark’s head.

‘Maybe.....!’

Ark immediately used Feather of Whispering to contact Shambala.

-Shambala, let’s swap!

-What?

-There’s no time to explain. Please run to the designated place when I count to three.

-What are you suddenly saying? Hey, hey!

Shambala screamed but Ark had already stopped the whisper. Alan then ran towards Ark with his sword raised.

“What are you talking so secretly about?”

“How to hurt you!”

Ark rolled on the ground and ran towards the rubble he spotted before. Shambala also used Torrential Sword on the Dark Elf and ran towards the same place. After 10 seconds, they reached the area where a plank was acting like a seesaw in the middle of the rubble. It was the plank that had caught Ark’s eyes.

“Shambala, go up the plank!”

Shambala instantly noticed Ark’s intention. Shambala smiled and

used Blink to go on the plank. Ark sprinted towards the other side of the plank. Shambala who was waiting on the seesaw flew into the air after Ark jumped on the plank.

“What, what the?”

Alan who had been chasing after Ark followed Shambala’s trajectory with puzzled eyes. He belatedly noticed and raised his sword too late!

“Petrification of Blood!”

Shambala rotated his body in the air and used the skill Petrification of Blood was a skill which increase defense by 500% for 20 seconds but made the target unable to move! Alan looked like a stone statue with his sword raised.

“Alan!”

The Dark Elf shouted as she noticed Alan’s situation.

“I am your opponent. Jump! Dark Blade!”

Ark used Jump to fly towards the Dark Elf and then used Dark Blade. It was the Jump and Dark Blade chain skill ‘Adol!’ While the Dark Elf had tremendous agility equal to Shambala, the attack was unexpected and she fell down.

“Do you understand now? This is called teamwork!”

Ark taunted the frozen Alan and joined the special forces. While he wanted to attack Alan, that state would only last 20 seconds.

“Ark-nim, Shambala-nim!”

Larriette shouted tearfully as Ark and Shambala joined her. The special forces were tired from fighting the monsters.

“Rush towards the canyon while Alan and the Dark Elf are immobile!”

Ark’s pride didn’t allow him to say that it was running away. Anyway, Ark pulled some Creative Cooking dishes from his bag and threw them at the monsters. The Hell Bomb, Pepper Beehives, etc.....the monsters were in a state of chaos from the explosion of Creative

Cooking dishes.

“Everybody rush using the wedge formation!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

The special forces ran forward at Ark’s command. The magicians and archers were fragile so the warriors made a path using their shields. However, it wasn’t an easy task breaking through the monsters while they had low health. Some warriors, magicians and archers died from the monsters’ counterattacks.

“H-help!”

The soldiers who were in a critical condition murmured as they were dragged back by monsters. But if they delayed even a few seconds then the special forces would be wiped out.

‘Damn, if I had some cursed maces then I could break through the siege easily.....’

Ark thought painfully after hearing the cries from the soldiers. If he had maces then he could use Demonic Manifestations for the ‘Power Charge’ effect which increased charging speed by 50% and blew away enemies. However it required three spears and two maces to use Power Charge. He had quite a lot of spears but only one mace so he couldn’t trigger Power Charge. It was because he had reduced the number of cursed japtm collected while testing out various combinations.

‘Damn, I ran out of cursed japtm just when I need it.’

He had to just hope that the soldiers could endure.

“Don’t turn around! Give up on any stragglers! Rush forward blindly!”

While there were 30 stragglers, the remaining special forces members managed to escape the siege of monsters.

“Demonic Manifestations, shoes, shoes, shoes, shoes, shoes!”

-Demonic energy has been extracted from the offerings (Shoes, shoes, shoes, shoes, shoes)

The effect exercised by this combination is 'Wind Dash.'

Wind Dash: All allies within 100 metres will have their movement speed increased by 50% for 5 minutes.

However the same effect can't be stacked.

When he triggered Wind Dash, the soldiers now moved incredibly fast. Therefore they were able to safely escape the monsters and entered the canyon.

Inventor Wormer

There was a reason Ark had escaped to the canyon. Before leaving for Smuggler's Pass, he had investigated Pabiun Canyon and determined that it was full of dozens of complicated passages. If he entered then he could use the terrain to somehow outrun the monsters.

'The problem is Alan.'

Normally an ordinary monster would give up after a certain distance and time had passed and their battle states would disappear. But if Alan was controlling the monsters then they wouldn't give up. They would follow until the end.

'If Alan continues chasing after me then it will be impossible to destroy the Black Obelisk Forest. Damn, I need to figure out a way to run away from Alan.....But now there's no choice. I have to somehow lose Alan using the terrain of the canyon and then go to the Black Obelisk Forest.....'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

Syuuuuuu, pepepeng!

Suddenly a flash crossed through the sky. The flash came from the village where the special forces were just at.

'What is that flash? Did Alan shot it? Then is it a signal flare? Perhaps.....?'

Ark intuitively felt uneasy when he saw the flash.

"Master, it's serious! Herds of monsters from all over the place.....!"

Racard screamed from above him. Ark's misgivings became a reality. A huge number of monsters were moving from every corner of the canyon.

‘Oh my god, there are so many monsters gathered in this canyon!’

“Ah, Ark-nim, what should we do?”

Lariette asked with uneasy eyes. But Ark couldn't think of a good idea to escape. According to Racard's report, monsters were in all the passages that exited the canyon. Of course, if the special forces battled desperately then they might be able to escape in one of those passages. However Alan and hundreds of monsters were chasing behind them. If they engaged with the monsters then Alan would catch up.

‘Is it going to end here?’

Ark sighed and felt like he was about to collapse. Suddenly there was the sound of the wind and a message floated in front of him.

-Wormer-nim has applied for a whisper using [Secure Communication].

‘Huh? Wormer? What is this?’

Ark accepted the whisper with a bewildered expression. Then a voice violently shook his eardrums.

-There's no time to explain. You guys, do you have food?

-Food?

-Do you, do you?

-I have enough for several days.....

-Good. Are you guys in danger now? I'll help you. Do you see that narrow passage at your 3 o'clock direction? Run to that spot immediately. I'll tell you in advance that I can't help you if the group of monsters follow you. So hurry before the monsters spot you.

The user called Wormer then cut off the communication. Ark's head was full of complicated thoughts. He didn't know who Wormer was and his reason for whispering to him. And what was with those words about food? But Ark didn't think for long. Even if Wormer had

malicious intentions, he had no other options.

“Everybody head to the passage visible in the 3 o’clock direction!”

Ark led the special forces to the place Wormer indicated. However, they were forced to stop 3 minutes after entering the passage.

“What is this? Isn’t this a dead end?”

There was a cliff in front of him. Ark made a confused face.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Then the whole area started to vibrate. And the ground they were standing on suddenly flipped over. It was like a pot lid being turned upside down. Ark and the special forces vanished in an instant. And the floor returned back to normal.

“Did we miss them?”

The Dark Elf complained with pouted lips.

“No, all of passages exiting the canyon are blocked. There’s no way out.”

Alan answered in a firm voice. Alan, the Dark Elf and the monsters they were leading had arrived at the canyon just after Ark disappeared underground. But the floor had returned to normal so they could find no traces of Ark and the special forces anywhere. Alan and the Dark Elf couldn’t think of a reason why they had suddenly disappeared.

“There’s nowhere for them to go. If it was just one or two people then they could hide but it is impossible with more than 100 people. They can’t just sprout wings and fly into the sky.”

“This has happened once before. It was also in this area.”

There were actually two reasons why Alan was in this canyon. One reason was to control the monsters stopping the Schudenberg expedition and the other was to find ‘something’ the Red Man needed to accelerate his plans. Not long ago he had chased the

people related to that 'something' to this area only to have them disappear. They had been running away and vanished just like in this instance.

'The same thing occurring twice can't be an accident. I'm missing something.'

Alan suddenly dug out his own eye with a finger. The Dark Elf frowned at his distorted features.

"Yuck, doesn't that feel really awful?"

Alan didn't answer as he just removed his eyeball. And the eyeball started to float in front of him. It was Buksil's technique, Vampire's Eye! Alan had used the 'Predator of Demons' ability to acquire the Vampire's Eye skill. That's right. The eyeball which popped out of the snow when the special forces passed through Smuggler's Pass belonged to Alan. Alan hadn't known that Ark would find out about the Smuggler's Pass. He expected that the Schudenberg expedition would use the Smuggler's Pass so he had hidden one eyeball there beforehand. Then he discovered Ark and had hastily gathered monsters together to cause him to Nuran village.

'I had a separate plan to ruin that guy but I can't let him go now that he has entered my sight. That guy and Lariette has wounded me. I can't forget it. I'll let him know what it feels like.'

Alan turned as his eyeball returned without anything.

"They're obviously hiding somewhere here. The canyon has been blocked for several days even before they appeared. This is our number one priority. Inform all you colleagues."

All the monsters surrounding Alan bowed and left. Then the Dark Elf frowned.

"It doesn't matter if we leave Pabiun Fortress to the monsters but we still haven't made any progress with 'that.' The Red Man said 'that' is our priority....."

"It is impossible for the demonic monsters to capture 'that' now that it has changed to a defense formation. Andel is also having a difficult

time. So I've already requested support from the Rwigenberg. That problem can be set aside since the most important thing for me is to catch that guy."

Alan answered without even having to think about it.

"Okay. I only joined you because I like you."

The Dark Elf played with her sharp ears and nodded. Alan quickly folded his arms and said.

"I have no interest in another woman. Got it?"

"Are you joking right now?"

"Do I look like I'm joking?"

The Dark Elf pouted at his words. Alan unfolded his arms and looked at the Dark Elf with an uncomfortable expression.

"What, what the?"

"What on earth is going on?"

"Who? Where is the light?"

"Ah, sorry. The stone was turned off."

A voice rang out in the darkness. The special forces were all piled on top of each other like a pile of trash thanks to the floor flipping. Luckily the height of the floor wasn't enough to deal damage but it the special forces were crushed under the weight of their members. Ark also felt the strenuous weight of everyone on top of him.

'Damn, it feels like my internal organs are going to pour out of my mouth.'

Ark grabbed his throbbing ribs and crawled out of the human pyramid. Then both of his wrists started to throb.

'Eh? What? Why.....?'

Ark looked at his wrists with a baffled expression. Sure enough? The tattoos that needed a special criterion to unseal for Eternal Soul had lights around it. The light spread like a crack and then broke. Then an information window appeared.

-A seal of 'Eternal Soul' has been released and you've acquired a new profession-specific skill.

-[Demonic Response VI]: Eternal Soul stage 7 (Passive)

'Demonic Response' is a necessary stage to learn if they want to reach the enlightenment needed for Eternal Soul. When fighting against a monster with the demonic attribute, you will deal additional 40% damage and resistance to the demonic attribute will increase by 50%. In addition, you will be able to detect hidden demonic power within the bodies of monsters.

<When sensing a demonic attribute, you will deal +40% damage against demonic monsters and gain +50% resistance to the demonic attribute>

-[Magi distortion]: Eternal Soul Stage 8 (Active)

Demonic Distortion will release the demonic energy sealed in the cursed equipment and this will make the space distort. The user can control the flow of demonic energy to distort the space, and it is possible to change the position of friends and foes in a 500 metre range. The amount depends on the level of demonic energy sealed in the equipment.

The equipment with a higher level will emit stronger demonic energy which can move more enemies. Typically one equipment can exchange 10~30 people. This skill can be used to help besieged allies or to strategically attack an enemy camp. You also can't exchange friends and foes if there is an obstacle in the way.

<Equipment will release demonic energy which distorts the space and changes the location of friend and foe. Spiritual Power Consumption: 200>

He never thought that Eternal Soul would awaken. Why? Why did Eternal Seal awaken all of a sudden. The quest was on Ark's mind as he read the information for Demonic Distortion.

'It can help any allies that have been surrounded by enemies to escape.....'

Eternal Soul needed different conditions and situations to awaken the skills. In other words, it wasn't possible to awaken Eternal Soul without experiencing the required situation. There had to be a reason Eternal Soul was unsealed this time.

'Did it awaken due to being surrounded by so many monsters and almost dying?'

Well, it wasn't a comfortable awakening.

'But..... Isn't Demonic Distortion quite useful?'

Ark read the information window with shining eyes. He could use Demonic Distortion to exchange the position of enemies and allies. It didn't deal any damage to the enemy so it seemed useless, but it could be utilized to great effect in various situations. If something like the previous situation occurred when they were surrounded by enemies then it was possible to use it to escape. It was a skill that could be used for offense and defense.

'The problem is that Demonic Distortion requires equipment sealed with demonic energy.'

When he first started using Demonic Seal, he didn't have to worry about the number of equipment he had. But the situation changed now that 5 equipment was needed every time he used Demonic Manifestations. And Demonic Distortion was also a skill which consumed demonic sealed equipment. According to the level of the equipment, each one moved 10~30 people. In other words, didn't he have to sacrifice 4~10 equipment just to move 100 people. Equipment was money so always needing to have cursed equipment prepared was quite a burden.

'Having both Demonic Manifestations and Demonic Distortion will be useful. But now I don't have that many left..... Damn, I have to use

Demonic Seal every chance I have from now on. If I run out of equipment then I won't be able to use the skills.'

Then he heard Shambala's voice after he escaped from the human pyramid.

"When did you crawl out?"

"A while ago. Were you just playing under there?"

".....Ark-nim."

Lariette approached with a worried expression and pointed to one side. Ark turned around and reflexively narrowed his eyes.

'Who are these people?'

The human pyramid was currently in an underground square. And there were 60~70 gathered around the underground square while gawking at the special forces with worried looks. While some were ordinary NPCs, most of them weren't. Many of them were covered with white fur with black streaks. With tails emerging from their hips, the NPCs looked like human shaped tigers.

'Beast clan!'

That's right. Without a doubt these people were a beast clan.

'Why are members of a beast clan and general NPCs gathered in this place?'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

"Huhuhu, search as much as you like. You won't be able to find this secret base."

He heard someone's voice near him. A big ball could be seen. Ark looked for a while and realized it was the person's butt. Next to the special forces was a guy with the body of a balloon peering into a machine and muttering.

'This voice belongs to Wormer who sent me a whisper!'

"Excuse me....."

The man refused to turn around when Ark approached.

“Please wait. They’re still on top.”

‘Still on top?’

Ark tilted his head to one side and peeked at the machine the man was looking at. The machine looked like the radars often found on submarine. The radar was a round clock shape with a needle slowly spinning. When the needle passed, a series of small dots flashed. But the amazing thing was the small letters floating next to the dots. Alan, Timosi, Tallon A, Tallon B, Tallon C.....

‘Alan? Then the dots on the machine are indicating the people outside?’

Ark looked at the machine with astonished eyes. Ark was currently underneath the canyon. Yet now he could figure out the outside circumstances from underground? It had the correct number and movement, and even their names?

“Okay. That’s it!”

The man laughed as he looked at the machine and stood up. Ark was now able to confirm the man’s appearance. He was a bearded dwarf wearing work overalls instead of armour. Ark wondered why a dwarf and beast clan members were gathered in the underground square. But he was even more curious about the machine.

“This machine allows you to know the situation outside?”

“Ah, you saw it? That’s right, I invented a life detection radar. It searches for any life forms within a 200 metre radius and even the name shows up on the machine. I figured out your name from the radar which is how I was able to send you the whisper.”

“Invented?”

“Yes, I am the Inventor Wormer. And this place is my base.”

Wormer smacked his protruding belly and laughed.

“So those people are.....?”

“Ah, those people?”

Wormer looked at the NPCs and answered Ark’s question.

“They’re residents of a nearby village called Nuran.”

‘Nuran village?’

Ark felt refreshed by Wormer’s words. Nuran was the name of the village that Ark had been searching a short time ago. The inhabitants of Nuran village had information for his <Witness the Legend> quest!

‘I thought it was too late after encountering Alan but they’re survivors from Nuran village! That means I really don’t have to give up the <Witness the Legend> quest?’

The situation might still be bad but one problem was gone.

“How did people from Nuran village get here?”

“That is.....”

Wormer scratched his head. Wormer’s profession was ‘Inventor’ and he was a dwarf from the Sinus Principality. Just like the name, Inventor was a profession which created different machines and objects. Therefore Wormer started looking for a quiet place where he could concentrate. He discovered the underground square and converted it into an underground base. He bought various supplies from Nuran village and spent each day happily. 10 days ago, Wormer had been in Nuran village buying necessary supplies when the sky was suddenly covered in black fog and a huge number of monsters appeared. Wormer sensed the situation wasn’t ordinary and urgently fled to the underground base with the residents.

“At first I thought the problem would be settled immediately because we’re near Pabiun Fortress. But 10 days passed and the monsters are still there. No, they actually kept increasing. And I learnt about what was happening in New world from the internet.”

“So the beast clan are NPCs from Nuran village?”

“Beast clan? Ah, those guys that look like tigers? No. I hid them after those guys were chased by monsters a few days ago. But they

haven't talked to me so I don't know why they came to a place like that. The beasts seemed to be acquaintances with the residents of Nuran village but they don't talk to them either."

'What does that mean?'

Ark stared at the beast clan. Then Wormer scratched his head and muttered.

"Anyway it is troublesome. I was put into an extremely difficult situation because of those people."

"A difficult situation?"

"Can't you understand by looking at my thin stomach?"

Wormer indicated his stomach and shouted angrily. At the same time Ark, Shambala, Lariette and the special forces looked at Wormer's stomach with astonishment. He was saying that when his stomach was so big it looked like he was pregnant with twins? But Wormer wasn't concerned about their gazes and just continued talking.

"Rice, rice! My stomach is so hungry!"

Naturally Wormer had a large amount of food stockpiled in his underground base. It was obvious by looking at his size that Wormer ate a lot. So he had arranged enough food for himself. But there were now 70 people staying in his home so the food had run out by the 10th day. It wasn't possible to exit to buy food with the monsters everywhere when Wormer discovered Ark's group.

'So that's why he whispered if I have food. No matter how much he had stockpiled, it would be difficult to feed 70 people for 10 days.'

"Uhh, I had forgotten for a moment but I'm hungry. Hungry! I'm hungry! I'm so hungry that I can't think! But my machines can't make rice! Rice, I want rice! Didn't you say you had food?"

"Ah, yes. Here it is."

"Ooh, rice! Rice!"

Wormer immediately shrieked and ran up to Ark when he pulled out

some food. He frantically grabbed the food and shoved it into his mouth. He was starving but couldn't a user find food in reality? The reason was that users felt a sense of hunger despite it being a game. No matter how much a user ate in reality, it wouldn't fill their stomach in the game. So users had no choice but to eat food in the game to lose the feeling of hunger. Anyway, the village residents and beast clan watched Wormer eating with desire in his eyes. They were also starving.

"I'll leave the minimal amounts of food and hand out the rest. These supplies actually belong to the military expedition but I'll pay them when I return."

Ark smiled as he looked at them and said. Then Shambala frowned like he was swallowing phosphoric acid.

"You still want to engage in business when these people are in such a situation?"

"Business? What are you saying?"

"It's not business? Then what is the reason you're giving them food?"

"What? You're so strange. What do you see me as?"

"Stingy, conman, thief..... Do you want me to say anymore?"

Well, those words actually suited him. That's right. Ark wasn't the type to help people for free. Yet he just paid for food that would feed 70 refugees out of his own pocket. The reason why Ark acted like these was because they were residents from Nuran village and a beast clan. The beast clans were associated with Hero Maban so he didn't know what type of help he could get from them. And the Nuran villagers had information about the <Witness the Legend> quest. So it was necessary to increase his intimacy with them.

'If they're suffering from hunger then the easiest way to raise intimacy is to give them food.'

It was why his behaviour was different from usual. Of course, Ark's current most important goal was the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> quest. But he couldn't be too impatient. There were still two

days left so he should watch the movements of Alan and the monsters. If he watched carefully then a chance would certainly come. As expected, the looks on the refugees' faces instantly turned favourable when he gave them food. Ark waited until they finished eating before speaking to an old man who looked like the village mayor.

"I want to ask you something."

"What is it?"

"Does the prophet clan live nearby?"

"Prophet clan?"

The village mayor flinched and sent him a wary look. There was something there. And the wary look said that he didn't intend to tell Ark. But Ark was already qualified as he received the <Witness the Legend> quest. If they knew the circumstances then they would definitely give him information about the prophet clan.

'The question is how to explain the stars to the NPCs.....'

While Ark was thinking, he suddenly noticed something strange. The village mayor was looking at the beast clan after Ark's question.

'What's with this reaction? Is the prophet clan somehow related to the beasts?'

When Ark had asked the question, the village mayor had become surprised and looked at the beasts. The beast clan nodded which seemed to indicate that it was okay to talk to Ark.

"What is the reason that you're looking of the prophet clan?"

"I received the revelation of the stars."

Ark answered after briefly thinking. The beasts and Nuran residents looked at Ark with shocked eyes. The beast clan seemed to carry on a conversation with their eyes before one of them asked Ark.

"The revelation of the stars? What is your name?"

"I am Ark."

Then the beast clan member jumped up and shouted.

“Ark! You are Hero Maban’s chosen descendant, Ark?”

“You know about me?”

This time Ark was the one surprised. Ark’s eyes widened as a beast grabbed his hand and said.

“We know! We’ve learnt all about the things you’ve done through the Hero Stars.”

“Hero Stars?”

“You mentioned the revelation of the stars. We call it the Hero Stars.”

A beast clan member replied. Before Ark received the <Witness the Legend> quest, 10 stars had emerged from his body and disappeared somewhere. It must be the Hero Stars that the beast clan mentioned. They said that they were aware of Ark’s existence through the stars. Then information about Ark must be in the stars. If the beast clan knew that information then they were.....?

“Do you belong to the prophet clan?”

Ark asked with an expectant voice but the beasts shook their heads.

“No, we’re the White Tiger clan and we are the guardians of the prophet clan.”

“Why are the guardians of the prophet clan in a place like this?”

“That.....”

A white tiger sighed and the Nuran residents lowered their heads. The white tiger looked at them before continuing.

“In the past some residents of Nuran have been born with the power of prophecy. The prophet clan gathers those children.”

In other words, the Nuran residents had a kindred relationship with the prophet clan. But then the prophet clan discovered that the Sinus Principality was going to be attacked by the dark forces. So the

White Tiger clan was dispatched to rescue the Nuran clan and bring them back to the land of the prophets, Shangri La before the darkness attacked. However, the darkness attacked quicker than expected and Nuran was already in ruins by the time the White Tiger clan arrived. The White Tiger clan was also attacked by monsters and rescued by Wormer.

“Shangri-La!”

They had been listening to the circumstances of the White Tiger clan. Then Lariette shouted with a surprised expression after hearing that the Prophet’s clan lived in Shangri-La.

“What’s wrong? Do you know that place?”

“No, that is..... Become coming here, I received.....”

Lariette was able to say something when she noticed everybody’s eyes on her and she immediately shook her head.

“It’s nothing. I’ll tell you later.”

Ark was interested in Lariette’s reaction but he had no time to think about it now. Ark thought for a moment before saying.

“You wanted to evacuate the Nuran residents there so Shangri-La is still safe. So they must have a way to stop the attacks of the demonic monsters. Then it is imperative that the Nuran residents are moved to Shangri-La. But how can we do that when the canyon is sealed off by monsters?”

“It is already too late.”

“Too late?”

“The land of the prophets has a defense system.”

“Defense system?”

“Shangri-La is always prepared for the dark forces so they have several protection devices. Once the defense system is activated, it is completely blocked off from the outside world.”

“Blocked? But you haven’t returned yet.”

“We’ve been outside of Shangri-La for more than 10 days already. And this whole area is occupied by demons. The prophet clan would’ve judged that we failed in our mission.”

“Isn’t it called the prophet clan? Shouldn’t they know that you’re still alive?”

“The prophets can’t see everything in the future. They can only predict events that have an impact on the history of the continent. In fact, even the prophet clan couldn’t foresee the emergence of this darkness. This means the history of the continent has already become twisted. They can’t predict anything anymore. And it will be the same even if they find out that we’re alive. If the entire Sinus Principality is engulfed in darkness then the first place they will attack is the prophet clan. That is why they can’t possibly slow down or turn off their defense system.”

‘Eh? Isn’t something strange?’

Ark noticed something strange in the white tiger’s words. Just like the name, the prophet clan was one that predicted the future. Well, they could probably only predict when a new episode would be activated.....Anyway, it was natural for a clan with such power to be attacked by dark forces. But the prophet clan couldn’t predict this dark event. It meant they could no longer foresee what would happen in the future. It was natural. This incident happened because of a bug so of course the NPCs couldn’t predict it. Despite that, why would the prophet clan still be the dark forces’ highest priority? When he asked that question, the white tiger sighed and replied.

“The reason they’re targeting Shangri-La is due to the Ark of the Covenant.”

“Ark of the Covenant?”

“Yes, a long time ago an artifact was found and placed in the ark. The person who gets their hands on this ark will receive a strong power. It is the biggest threat to the dark forces so they want to attack Shangri-La to obtain it themselves. But their purpose isn’t to simply destroy the ark.”

“What does that mean?”

“Despite being filled with light, the Ark of the Covenant can also be filled with darkness. If an evil person obtains it then the attribute will change to darkness. The darkness will become even more powerful.”

The white tiger closed his eyes and talked about a past event.

“In fact, a long time ago the 7 heroes entrusted the Ark of the Covenant to the prophet clan and gathered their power to install strong protection wards. And Hero Maban asked our clan to protect Shangri-La.”

Ark now understood the situation. There was another reason other than the terrain as to why the Bristania expedition had an easier time crossing the border. It was because there were more demonic monsters gathered at Pabiun Fortress. Ark had been thinking that the strategic movements of the monsters was incomprehensible.

‘What if there is a reason the demonic monsters are here?’

And that reason was the prophet clan. If the Schudenberg expedition continued crossing into Sinus Principality then they would encounter the prophet clan. If the Schudenberg expedition got their hands on the power of the ark then they would be a big threat to the demonic monsters.

‘Then the reason Alan is here.....’

It was obvious that Alan was somehow linked to this. Alan’s purpose for coming to this place was to seize the Ark of Covenant.

‘Then the list of things I have to do has increased by one. I have to succeed in the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> task to ensure that the Schudenberg expedition captures Pabiun Fortress. Then there is visiting the prophet’s clan to complete the <Witness the Legend> quest. And finally I have to prevent Alan getting the Ark of Covenant.’

It was becoming an increasingly higher mountain. If this war ended with the victory of the demonic monsters then Ark would become a

beggar. He had to do everything possible to win the war.

‘Well if the Schudenberg expedition manages to capture Pabiun Fortress and kills the demonic monsters then the remaining problems will be easily solved. I can’t receive the help of the prophet clan because Shangri-La is locked but the White Tiger clan can help.’

He could also meet the prophet clan if Pabiun Fortress was captured. He just had to complete one task and the rest would melt away. While Ark was busy thinking, Wormer rubbed his stomach and muttered.

“I have a way to go to Shangri-La.”

“What?”

“Hihihi, I actually made an amazing invention a few months ago. I assure you. If you use that invention then it will be possible to go to Shangri-La.”

“Really?”

“Really. But there’s one problem. The invention requires strong magic to power it. It is a machine which requires an absurd amount of magic energy.”

“Magic energy?”

Ark asked and Wormer took out a small crystal ball.

“This contains the magic energy. It is used like a battery. My hidden secret weapons requires at least 5,000 MG of magic energy to work. Charging that type of energy will take at least one month.”

Wormer explained as he picked his nostril with his finger.

‘Is he teasing me?’

Ark’s face hardened at Wormer’s words. One month? Was he joking? Even excluding the other problems, the special forces only had enough food o last 2~3 days. If they stayed here for a month then they would all die. Then Wormer scratched his head and murmured.

“There is a way to charge the energy within a short time.....”

“Within a short time?”

“I can extract magic energy from magic items. The magic items won't be useable anymore but it is a solution to the problem. There are other methods but that is the easiest way. Like I said, if I gather the necessary MG then it won't be a problem to go to Shangri-La.”

The faces of the white tigers brightened at Wormer's face.

“If there is such a method then it is necessary to use it. We ask you. The Nuran residents are the blood relations of the prophet clan. It is our obligation to protect them and bring them back to Shangri-La. If it requires magic items to charge the MG then we willingly given you all the magic items we have. Will you also help us?”

The White Tiger clan asked Ark. Of course, Ark also had a reason to go to Shangri-La. The problem was Alan.

‘Alan won't give up easily. We also disappeared so suddenly that he is still looking around. Apart from the required MG, it will be difficult to use Wormer's invention to go to Shangri-La while avoiding detection. Somehow I have to stop Alan from following me.....’

Ark thought frantically. Then he came up with an idea.

‘Wait? There is a high chance that Alan is abusing the bug. Then That's right, there is that method! If I use that then I can bury Alan!’

“I understand. I'll be happy to somehow take you to Shangri-La.”

Ark grabbed the hand of a white tiger and said. Dududung, a quest information window popped up.

-Shangri-La!

You have met the Nuran residents and the White Tiger clan on the outskirts of Pabiun Canyon. They are in an isolated situation after running away from the forces of darkness. Currently the only safe place from the darkness is Shangri-La.

Find a way to escape the canyon filled with monsters and escort

them to Shangri-La.

<Difficulty: A+ Quest Restriction: None>

Catch Alan!

‘That Alan, he dared appear out of nowhere? Okay. Then it is war!’

Hyun-woo exited the unit. Then he called Ho Myung-hwan for a meeting and explained the situation in detail. Ho Myung-hwan’s eyes widened.

“Alan?”

Are you talking about Holy Knight Alan?”

“Yes, that Alan.”

Hyun-woo nodded with a serious face.

“I confirmed it with my own eyes. The one controlling the creatures in the Sinius Principality is Alan. The fact that he is controlling the obelisk created monsters must mean that Alan is using a black code item to make trouble or he is closely related to it.”

“Alan.....!”

Ho Myung-hwan muttered the name with a groan. He took out a cigarette and considered something before talking again.

“It that is true then good job. In fact, other special management targets like Ark-nim who are investigating also mentioned that they saw a user controlling the monsters. But they couldn’t confirm the ID or appearance so it wasn’t helpful.”

It was that part that pained Global Exos. Like Ho Myung-hwan said, Global Exos had commissioned the candidates to investigate this incident. The candidates participated in the Schudenberg and Bristania expeditions and reported in from time to time. They saw the user controlling the monsters many times. But that was all they knew. A user seemed to be controlling the monsters.....Just like when Hyun-woo’s Eyes of the Cat didn’t work, Alan’s information couldn’t be confirmed.

‘Other users could use a thief’s skill like ‘Penetration’ or a scroll to check the opponent’s information. Alan might be using a skill like Shambala’s ‘Camouflage’ to hide his information window. The Red Man might also be hiding his information window. When I first met the Red Man, I couldn’t confirm his information so I thought there was at least a 100 level difference between us.....’

Hyun-woo couldn’t imagine that Alan or the Dark Elf was more than 100 levels higher than him. All three of them must be using a skill or an undisclosed item to conceal their information. Hyun-woo guessed that the undisclosed item might be a black code item.

‘Alan and the Dark Elf are hiding their true identities for a reason.’

They knew they were doing something dangerous so they hid their identities. Despite that, Alan still intentionally lifted his helmet in front of Hyun-woo. Alan’s skills and abilities were different so Hyun-woo wouldn’t have known it was him if he hadn’t revealed his face. It was all to get revenge on Hyun-woo.

‘You fool. That is your mistake.’

It was unnecessary to say again but Global Exos was doing everything possible to solve this situation carefully. It had to be carefully handled to avoid a huge loss. He had a clue on how to handle Alan from that. Alan was still a Global Exos candidate. They could figure out Alan’s details with just the press of one button.

“What will happen to Alan now?”

“I can’t say. It is unclear where he is a key conspirator or is simply assisting others. But if he is a principle offender then he can’t be let off easily. He will be punished.”

“What kind of punishment.....?”

Hyun-woo asked in a sly voice. Ho Myung-hwan scratched his head and replied.

“Let’s see.... I don’t know the details either. As I said before, if the user obtained the item in a normal way in the game then it will be difficult to impose legal sanctions on them. But when considering the

damages received this time, headquarters can't just leave it alone. If he is at least a co-conspirator then it will be severe enough to seize his accounts."

"I see."

Hyun-woo replied calmly but inwardly he was singing with delight. It was the reason Hyun-woo had disconnected while in the underground base and contacted Global Exos. Hyun-woo had no interest in the legal consequences. The important thing was that Global Exos knew that Alan was complicit in this incident. Once again, Global Exos could settle it within 1 minute. But they couldn't because they didn't have the required information. Now they had the information about Alan. Naturally Global Exos could determine all the details about Alan. They could isolate him in solitary confinement and interrogate him or other methods.

'No matter what they do Alan won't be able to play the game.'

That was Hyun-woo's aim. If Alan couldn't play anymore then he would disappear from the game. And Alan was controlling the demonic monsters in Pabiun Canyon. They would go away and ordinary monsters would appear in the canyon again. Even if they only had 120 people, the elite troops could kill those monsters. In other words, it was a strategy to capture Alan in real life. And the operation was a great success! Global Exos would quickly carry out an operation to capture Alan. What happened to Alan after that was no concern to Hyun-woo. However, Hyun-woo made a regretful expression and said.

"Alan is a user that I am acquaintances with. I don't know what kind of situation he is in but I feel slightly uncomfortable at the thought of having Alan's account seized."

"Don't say that."

Ho Myung-hwan said.

"You know this already but hundreds of thousands of users are suffering from this incident. Global Exos used the excuse of an event but there are still a few users accusing us. It isn't a simple problem

anymore.”

“I still don’t feel entirely comfortable. Can you contact me after you decide what action you will take against Alan?”

“Of course, I’ll contact you right away.”

“Then I’ll go now.”

Hyun-woo finished and returned home. He brought his telephone in front of the unit and waited for someone to contact him. He wanted to receive the notification that Alan was caught and then connect to the game immediately.

‘Judging by Ho Myung-hwan’s words, he should be taking action against Alan quite carefully.....’

Global Exos was suffering an enormous loss from this event. Even if they were legally faultless, a big business like Global Exos wouldn’t receive that kind of damage easily. As a big business, Global Exos would definitely do something to punish Alan. Global Exos was unaware of any other users except Alan thanks to Hyun-woo’s information. His actions in New World was like terrorism. If Alan was the primary offender who brought suffering to millions of people in New World then he would be punished in reality.

.....The probability was really high when looking at the present situation.

‘Although it is a little intense..... If he is the principal offender then he will be caught. And there is no way for him to appear in front of me anymore. Huhuhu, Alan. I’m sorry but the fight between us can’t be concluded. Because I’ll never see you in New World anymore.’

Hyun-woo laughed inside the dark room as he imagined it. However, after 1 hour, 2 hours.....he felt something was strange when 5 hours passed.

‘What the? Didn’t Global Exos lose hundreds of millions of won from this situation? They should move immediately after receiving a clue. But why haven’t they contacted me yet?’

He started to feel more and more anxious.

Diririri, diririri.

Hyun-woo finally heard the phone ringing and he picked up the receiver.

“It is Ho Myung-hwan.”

“I’ve been waiting for your call. What happened?”

“Ah, well…….”

He could easily hear Ho Myung-hwan’s sigh over the phone. His misgivings was starting to turn into a reality.

“What’s wrong?”

“Actually, I handed over the information to the Security Department the moment Ark-nim left. The Security Department immediately found Alan’s registered address and visited him. However Alan wasn’t home.”

“He’s not playing the game at home?”

“I heard that Alan had already departed overseas one month ago.”

“O-overseas? Then Alan in the game……?”

“It seems that he is accessing it from overseas.”

Hyun-woo made a stupid expression at Ho Myung-hwan’s answer. It had been 10 days since Alan attacked and the White Tiger clan took refuge in the underground base. Alan had been playing the game from 10 days ago. In other words, Alan didn’t go overseas for sightseeing. Moreover, this event started a fortnight ago. Yet he already left for overseas a month ago. Didn’t that mean he had expected this?

“It is clear that Alan isn’t a simple participant.”

Ho Myung-hwan had the same thought as Hyun-woo. If Alan left that early then he had clearly been a part of the planning stage!

‘But why?’

Hyun-woo couldn't understand Alan's intentions. Hyun-woo was certain that Alan was one of the primary offenders in this incident. It was a state he couldn't recover from. Yet.....

‘Alan is a smart guy. He should know how serious this incident is. No, he must know which is why he escaped overseas to play the game. It means he would have no troubles playing the game. But what will happen after that?’

Hyun-woo couldn't understand. This situation wasn't a simple joke. Global Exos had already received tens of billions of won worth of losses. It was possible they could sue Alan and there would be a huge scandal. Alan had planned this a month ago so it was impossible for him not to predict the reactions. Yet he still escaped abroad to play the game. Therefore he could continue playing even if his identity was recovered.

‘Isn't it a problem if his identity was noticed in the game? Wouldn't it make the issue larger? What on earth? What is he thinking? Is he trying to strike against Global Exos?’

Hyun-woo thought Alan was involved because he wanted to get revenge on Hyun-woo. But he couldn't think the situation was that simple anymore. Of course, he might've started with that intention. But did he really have to cause such a large incident to get revenge on Hyun-woo?

‘Even a bullet in the head is more likely.’

If his purpose was mere revenge than Alan would've approached Hyun-woo earlier. But Alan didn't move. He only coincidentally encountered Hyun-woo when he was going to capture Shangri-La.

‘Alan has a purpose other than revenge. He is involved in a big problem that has something to do with New World. This incident might not be as simple as I thought. What's the? What is Alan trying to do that is worth the cost?’

The more Hyun-woo contemplated it, the more complicated his thoughts became. In the end Hyun-woo shook his head and asked.

“What now?”

“Anyway, Alan escaping overseas means that he is one of the ringleaders of this incident. He is clearly trying to endanger and cause confusion in New World. We have no jurisdiction overseas but we will continue chasing Alan.”

“Then there is no way to stop Alan at the moment.”

Hyun-woo muttered in a disappointed voice.

“That’s right.....”

Ho Myung-hwan thought for a moment before speaking again.

“We are utilizing all possible methods to catch him.”

He didn’t show it but Ho Myung-hwan was also deeply concerned. The current situation was many more times complicated than Ho Myung-hwan had told Hyun-woo. Ho Myung-hwan used the term ‘visit’ but it was more like a ‘raid’ on Alan’s home by the Security Department. Global Exos thought that this event was because someone was trying to get their hands on the master code. And the master code had the destructive power to take down New World and Global Exos. The company was at stake so how could they knock and visit politely? But Alan had already escaped overseas. Therefore Global Exos was at a complete loss.

“It is certain that Alan is aiming for the master code. He probably thinks that if he gets the master code then he can negotiate his way out of this situation!”

It was natural to think like that. They had to stop Alan no matter what, even if they had to hire assassins. They concentrated all their power on finding Alan’s location but it wasn’t that easy. Therefore Global Exos became increasingly restless.

“If only we could connect to the main system.....”

If it was a normal online game then it would be simple to determine where the users are connecting from. Of course it was illegal to check the personal information but the company was willing to break

the law in such a situation. However, currently Global Exos couldn't use such an easy method. The game designer Park Woo-seong had put locks all over the main system. The only way to crack it was with the master code! And the master code was guarded by high walls.

"Is there a way to find Alan's location?"

The Security Department thought frantically.

"Do you know where Alan went?"

Someone in the Planning Department asked.

"I just know that he left for Hong Kong."

"Hong Kong..... Is there a more accurate position?"

"Not at the moment....."

"Hmm, then it won't be easy."

"What do you mean?"

"Please wait a moment. Ah, here it is."

Kim Gwon-tae typed on the keyboard for a while before pointing to the monitor.

"There have been 30,000 New World units sold in Hong Kong. When considering Alan's personality and removing the game arcades, that is 20,000 units."

"You want us to go around and check every house where we sold the 20,000 units?"

"No."

Kim Gwon-tae smiled and shook his head.

"Currently we can't access the main system because of Park Woo-seong's locks. However, the middle circuit connecting to the system is unaffected."

"Middle circuit?"

“Yes, think of it simply as a telephone and a telephone wire.”

Kim Gwon-tae indicated the telephone in the corner of the Planning Department and explained.

“Let’s pretend that New World’s main system is a telephone. That telephone is placed inside an iron case and we have no way to access it. But if we hack the phone wire then we can get the information.”

“T-that is possible?”

“It’s hard to explain the technical parts but it is possible. Of course, New World isn’t a telephone so it won’t be easy hacking the connected circuits. It would be impossible to find Alan if he was playing in Korea. But Hong Kong only has 20,000 personal units. Including the game rooms it is 30,000. If I search the connections related to Hong Kong then it might be possible to find Alan.”

Kim Gwon-tae looked at the monitor and smiled.

“When playing an online game like New World, all the information moves through the circuits connecting to the main system. It means that once I find the Alan’s connection, I can use the circuit to keep track of what Alan is doing and anyone he makes contact with in the game. In other words, we can grasp everything related to this incident.”

“Tell me what you need.”

Ha Myung-woo said. Kim Gwon-tae tapped the monitor and said.

“100 competent hackers and a 100 terabytes computer.”

“Begin immediately.”

From then on, the Planning Department started to attack Hong Kong’s connection server. Ho Myung-hwan had been so busy considering these preparations that he had contacted Hyun-woo late. But there were two reasons why Ho Myung-hwan couldn’t explain this to Hyun-woo. The first reason was that Hong Kong’s servers belonged to Global Exos but hacking was still illegal. The

second reason was he would have to explain that they lost control of New World's main system to explain the hacking.

"We are doing our best so Ark-nim should also continue watching carefully."

"I understand. Please contact me if you make any progress."

Hyun-woo sighed and hung up. Anyway, Global Exos was busy with their own preparations after hearing Hyun-woo's information. But that didn't solve Hyun-woo's problem. Whether this problem was resolved or not didn't matter to Hyun-woo. Hyun-woo had only told Global Exos about Alan because he wanted to stop Alan from playing the game for a few days. But wasn't it all in vain?

'What now.....?'

Hyun-woo couldn't take one step out of the underground base. And the remaining time left was only one day.

'I can complete the <Witness the Legend> and <Shangri-La> quests at any time but.....'

The <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> only had one day left. If he didn't succeed in one day then the Bristania expedition would reach Silrinad first. Haverstein would be replaced and Hyun-woo would lose the exclusive trade contract.

'It is difficult to exit the canyon thanks to Alan. The group will be completely wiped out by Alan and the monsters. Damn! It is more like I'm trapped in the underground base than hiding there.'

Hyun-woo grabbed his head and sighed.

'Wait? Trapped? I'm stuck there? Then..... That's right, there is a way!'

He suddenly came up with an idea.

"There is no time left. I have no choice but to try it!"

Canyon Escape Operation

The climate of the Pabiun Canyon was similar to that of the Albana Mountains. There were points where the wind would cause a snowstorm while intermittent earthquakes would occur and cause chunks of falling ice.

“It really is horrible.”

“The environment here was never comfortable but it never reached this degree before. It’s been like this since the darkness covered the Sinius Principality. Apart from the unidentified monsters, the climate also seems to be affected by the darkness. Why did this thing happen.....?”

The Nuran village mayor looked at the black sky as he blew out a white breath. He suddenly had his village taken away from him so it was appealing to an old man to complain. There was a possibility that Ark could lose everything as well so he could understand the feeling of the village mayor.

“I’m going crazy because of these effects!”

Racard’s voice shook Ark’s eardrum. Ark looked at the black sky with astonishment and shouted.

“What, what the? Why did you suddenly shout into my ears?”

“Damn, I’ll rather have my eardrums torn. I have no senses left..... Hiiiiik, uwaaaah, I’m freezing. Ohhh, why do I have to suffer like this.....?”

Racard complained in a trembling voice. Racard’s complaints weren’t for nothing. The current temperature was so cold it felt like they were being cut with a knife every time the wind blew. Racard was flying dozens of metres in the air and being battered by the snowstorm. Despite equipping the scarf and gloves So-mi made, it still wasn’t enough to protect him from the cold.

‘It’s not just Racard.’

Ark sent a look to the special forces marching. Then he tightened his collar as the icy wind hit him.

-Due to the cold your body temperature has fallen by 10%!
<If your body temperature falls below 50% then various stats will rapidly decrease>

It was the cold penalty that applied once the temperature fell below a certain level! The White Tiger clan and the Nuran residents weren’t greatly affected but the special forces had their body temperature gradually fall. Ark had already prepared the appropriate protective equipment to pass through the Albana Mountains, the ‘Purified Water’ tablets were barely maintaining their body temperature.

‘There is a limit to how much they can endure with the winter equipment and Purified Water.’

There was a reason Ark exited the base despite such bad weather. It had been two days since they crossed the Albana Mountains, encountered Alan and hid in the underground base. The <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> quest had a time limit of three days. In other words, there was less than one day left. If Ark didn’t destroy the Black Obelisk Forest within the time limit then it was over for him.

‘I no longer have any choice. If this strategy fails then everything is finished. Alan can’t notice.....’

Ark felt frustrated as he thought of his plan.

“Ah! Master, I found it!”

“Where?”

“At the end of the road at your 3 o’clock.”

“Are any monsters around?”

“Not much. Around 150 or so?”

“That is enough to handle within 10 minutes. You said the passage on the right side?”

“Yes, there are no monsters until you reach your destination. By the way Master, I’m so cold.....”

“Understood. Keep an eye on the situation and contact me immediately if something occurs.”

Ark thought about Racard’s words and looked at his group. It included Ark, Shambala, Lariette, the 120 special forces and the 60 White Tiger clan and Nuran residents. And the self-proclaimed genius inventor Wormer. They were the NPCs and users following Ark.

“Residents and special forces will fall back while the White Tiger Clan will lead the way.”

Ark organized the formation and headed towards the path that Racard indicated. Thanks to Racard’s instructions, they were able to navigate the complicated canyon within a short time and appeared at an empty lot the size of a football field. A stone pillar was lodged in the centre of the empty lot. It was a black stone pillar with a black aura around it! It was the black obelisk which caused chaos on the continent. It was unnecessary to say but the power of the curse depending on the size of the obelisk. A larger obelisk meant that larger and more powerful monsters would appear. But the obelisk that Racard found was only 5 metres at most. Usually an obelisk would be dozens of metres so this one was quite small. Therefore the monsters gathered around the obelisk weren’t that strong. The 150 Tallons were only level 250~270 at most. Ark surveyed them using Eyes of the Cat.

“We have to wipe them out quickly and retreat.”

The special forces and White Tiger clan nodded and pulled out their weapons. Presently a huge number of monsters were scattered around the Pabiun Canyon. The Tallon were at least 100 levels lower than the special forces but their numbers was inferior. And there was also Alan. If they were caught by Alan then Ark’s group would be wiped out.

“Lariette-nim, 3 piece offensive buff set please!”

“The great warrior’s soul.....Hero’s Spirit, Warrior’s Concentration, Storm Breathing!”

Hero’s Spirit increased health by 10%! Warrior’s Concentration increased the probability of a critical hit by 20%! Meanwhile, Storm Breathing increased the attack speed of the weapons by 10%! Lariette’s buffs spread among the troops and the abilities of the soldiers quickly ascended. The special forces then ran up to the Tallon wandering around the obelisk and attacked.

-Kakao, kakao, marimudo!

“We should finish this quickly but the troops can’t take more damage. First form a defense formation to stop their attacks.....”

Ark gave the order to the warriors in the front. The warriors created a barrier with their shields while a white shadow passed over their heads. The shadow that flew over the warriors was the White Tiger clan.

Grrrrrr.....keuaaang!

The White Tiger clan completely changed from what he saw inside the underground base. Although they resembled a tiger, the White Tiger clan covered in fur looked quite cute. However their atmosphere changed 180 degrees after meeting the enemy. Their thick fangs protruded between the lips and they looked like beasts placed in front of their prey. And their sharp claws increased by 10 centimetres. They were the type to transform after encountering a monster.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The White Tiger clan quickly narrowed the distance and collided with the Tallon. The combat power of the White Tiger clan exceeded Ark’s imagination. The Tallon that were head-butted by the White Tiger clan went flying like a bowling pin. Their claws and fangs easily tore through the monsters that had fallen to the ground.

“What the, this is?”

Ark felt his jaw drop as he stared at the White Tigers fighting. In fact, Ark had expected that the White Tigers would be quite strong. He knew that the Meow, merpeople, raccoon clan and the Wolrang were stronger than normal monsters with the same level. But actually seeing them fight was beyond imagination.

‘This degree of damage is equivalent to a level 400 user. And their movements are faster than the Meow and Wolrang. No wonder why Hero Maban asked them to protect the prophet clan.’

It was natural that the White Tiger clan would be strong among the beast clans. The tiger was king of the cats so of course they would be stronger than a normal cat and a wolf. Anyway, the White Tiger clan were stronger than he thought so he didn’t need to be careful with his troops. Ark drew his sword and shouted as he ran towards the Tallon.

“Okay. These guys have scattered. Attack and exterminate them!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

“Follow behind the White Tiger clan!”

The soldiers cried out and ran forward. Above all, warriors were required to have strong power. Until now they had just been trembling in the cold and hiding from monsters so their morale had fallen. But now their fighting power rose after seeing the White Tiger clan.

“Go. Heroic Strike!”

“Arrow which pierces through the enemy, Piercing Arrow!”

“Flame, swallow the enemies! Fire Storm!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Swords, arrows and magic washed over the Tallons like a tidal wave. There were deafening sounds and flashes and the health of the Tallon quickly fell. Meanwhile Ark used Dark Dance and approached the black obelisk in the centre of the vacant lot. Then he took out a piece of iron the size of a soccer ball. It was the Starlight

Bomb associated with the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> quest.

‘It will take 20~30 minutes to destroy the black obelisk even if we wipe out all the Tallons.’

An information window instantly appeared as Ark neared the obelisk.

-Black Obelisk (Special)

A magic structure created by the dark curse magic.

When it is driven in to the ground, the magic of the powerful curse will automatically be invoked and it will call ancient demons into this world. Even if the obelisk is destroyed, as long as the land is still contaminated then there is no way to get rid of the obelisk completely and it will eventually be restored. The black obelisk will invalidate all magic and sword attacks by 90%.

<Durability: 2,000>

Once again, the durability of the obelisk was no joke. Even if hundreds of people attacked it, the power of the curse invalidated most sword and magic so it would take at least 20~30 minutes to destroy. If it took 10 minutes to kill the Tallons then they total time required was 30~40 minutes. Alan was watching the canyon so he couldn't stay in one spot for 30~40 minutes.

‘But if install the Starlight Bomb in advance then we can kill the Tallons while it is charging!’

The Starlight Bomb was the expedition's secret weapon which could deal 5,000 damage to the black obelisks. It took 10 minutes to explode. Killing the Tallons would also take 10 minutes. So Ark came up with the ‘Starlight Bomb operation’ where he would install the Starlight Bomb at the commencement of the battle.

[-<There is 9 minutes and 59 seconds remaining until an explosion>]

That message popped up with Ark installed the Starlight Bomb. The Tallons instinctively sensed the crisis and gathered around Ark.

“Heh, you really think I can’t defeat you? Flash!”

Ark snorted and flashed through the Tallons. When he moved in a zigzag pattern like a lightning bolt, the Tallons that were pierced instantly lost health. And that was just the beginning.

“I can finally get a small taste of fighting. Torrential Sword Cyclone!”

Shambala immediately plunged in after Ark used Flash. Hundreds of daggers swirled like a cyclone around Shambala. The concentrated attacks on the Tallons dyed the snow blood red. After Ark and Shambala’s attacks, the number of Tallons was noticeably reduced. With the White Tiger clan running wild and Lariette using her buffs, it was a one sided battle as the Tallons were stepped on. But the special forces didn’t kill them.

“Don’t touch the Tallons when they have less than 3% health. Demonic Seal! Demonic Seal! Demonic Seal!”

Ark jumped around all over the place and used Demonic Seal to clear up the situation. Ark was currently almost out of cursed japtem. If he could’ve used Demonic Manifestations against Alan then the situation would’ve turned out a bit better. When considering the future, the replenishment of the cursed japtem was indispensable. So Ark had everyone give them the japtem they had before leaving the underground base.

-Demonic Seal was successful.

<Thanks to the Demonic Seal, the attribute of the item has changed>

After 10 minutes the last Tallon was finally sucked into an item.

“Any casualties?”

“3 warriors died.”

“.....Remind them to pay attention to their health.....”

Ark said as he frowned. He only had 120 special forces remaining. Every soldier was important in order to escape the canyon and

destroy the Black Obelisk Forest. But in this situation casualties had appeared. When Ark had started this mission, the ratio of the troops was meticulously selected but quite a few priests had died in the Albana Mountains. So there were presently only 15 priests remaining. It was impossible for them to heal all of the 120 special forces.

“It can’t be helped. We don’t know what is going to happen. Tell them to concentrate on their health and mana recovery.”

“I understand.”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

It was when one of the soldiers replied. A huge flash occurred in the centre of the vacant land. The Starlight Bomb Ark planted had exploded. When the Starlight Bomb exploded, light started to wind around the black obelisk. Thick cracks spread on the surface of the black obelisk and it collapsed like broken glass. The fragments changed into small particles like sand.

“Ohhhh! Fuel, it is fuel!”

Wormer’s huge frame ran over. Wormer looked at the pile of black sand with shining eyes and pulled out a machine from his bag. He opened a magic stone that looked like a diamond at the bottom of the machine and poured in the black sand.

Chelkong, chelkong, chelkong, tturururu!

The machine started to emit smoke like a kettle. The kettle was a machine Wormer created to use the power of the black obelisk to charge the magic energy. But this machine wasn’t exclusively for the black obelisk. The original use was to dissolve magic items to obtain the magic energy which would be changed to MG. In other words, it was intended to be operated with equipment. But the problem was that the item would be destroyed if used in that way. In addition, one magic item would only give 5~10 MG. Wormer’s invention required 5,000 MG so it would take 500~1,000 magic items to charge it.

“What is this impractical invention?”

Ark murmured with outrage after he saw the results. Then Wormer retorted.

“Are you making fun of my invention? Do you think it is easy to extract the magic energy in equipment which destroying it? When the power is extracted, it is subjected to the law of entropy.....”

“That’s it. Stop!”

Ark shouted as thoughts swirled in his head. He was to blame for trusting the dwarf.

‘What kind of invention requires at least 500 magic equipment to move?’

Ark thought with amazement after calculating it in his head. He didn’t know what to expect for Wormer’s inventions. But no matter how wonderful the invention, Ark had no intention of wasting 500 magic equipment. No, his heart had no intention of sacrificing it. ‘Wouldn’t all the special forces have to be stripped of their equipment?’ None of them would be willing to give up equipment for a quest. Ark was the same. He couldn’t even think about giving up magic items when he was already on the verge of bankruptcy. Of course, compared to the cost of failing this quest then giving up equipment would be cheaper. But what if they didn’t succeed even after giving up the equipment?

‘Wait? Magic items? Then perhaps.....?’

That’s when Ark recalled what he heard the court magician said not long ago.

‘Didn’t the court magician say the obelisk was powered by curse magic? And curse magic is still magic energy. Couldn’t Wormer invent a machine that extracts energy from that?’

A formula appeared in Ark’s mind in that moment.

‘Magic of the black obelisk=fuel’ was the formula. Ark spoke to Wormer after coming up with the idea. Then Wormer’s eyes glittered and nodded.

“Ah, that’s right. The black obelisks use magic to summon the monsters. Then it is possible to absorb the magic from the obelisk.”

Wormer started frantically muttering to himself and making something. It was the kettle that Wormer was holding now. So Ark risked danger and entered the canyon. ‘I need to somehow gather MG.....’ If MG couldn’t be extracted from the black obelisk then everything was finished. After the smoke appeared, there was a beeping sound and the message window appeared.

-The Magic Converter’s job has been completed.

You have succeeded in extracting the magic from the remains of the black obelisk and converting it to MG. The MG extracted will be stored in the magic battery.

<Currently magic energy stored in the battery: 200 MG>

“It is a success! As expected. I’m a genius!”

Wormer jumped with excitement and bragged after he checked the message window. Ark sighed with relief but his expression didn’t look that bright.

‘I’m glad but we haven’t gathered as much as I thought.....’

Ark looked around and sighed again. There were quite a number of black obelisks lodged in the canyon. If he wandered around and broke the black obelisk then it would be somehow possible to collect the necessary amount of MG. These 5 metres obelisk gave 200 MG so larger obelisks means it should be gathered faster. But including the White Tigers and excluding the residents, Ark only had 130 people that could fight. A large obelisk would have a huge number of monsters.

‘It will take one day if I only capture small obelisks.....’

As expected, the problem was Alan. Alan had yet to track down Ark’s whereabouts in the canyon. In fact, there was a reason why Ark would wander around the canyon somewhat freely. Alan judged that Ark was hiding somewhere in the canyon so he moved many

monsters to block the 5 exits. So there were fewer monsters inside the canyon and it was possible to go after small obelisks. But Alan still had a troop of monsters and was going around the canyon. The amount of obelisks he could destroy before being found by Alan was limited. Ark's group would be wiped out the moment Alan found him.

"Fortunately Alan wasn't visible after leaving the underground base....."

Ark sighed and mumbled.

"Master, I've discovered another black obelisk."

Racard said through the wireless communication.

'Despite what could happen, there is no other way. I have to try it. I have to fill the MG before Alan strikes.....'

"Let's go. Thieves and magicians should erase traces of any fighting."

Ark then moved through the canyon to find another black obelisk.

"I've found him!"

Ark smiled and murmured in the darkness.

"That fool, he's been caught."

2 video screens floated in front of Alan. One screen showed the Dark Elf Timosi and the monsters gathered in front of him. And the other one showed approximately 200 people marching through the canyon. That's right. The people visible on the other screen were Ark, the special forces, the White Tiger clan and the Nuran residents. Alan could see them despite being far away thanks to the Vampire's Eye. The Vampire's Eye was the special ability of vampires which allowed them to freely control their eyeballs.

'They are definitely somewhere in the canyon.'

Alan was convinced that Ark was hiding somewhere in the canyon. But he couldn't find any traces of Ark despite sweeping through the

canyon for a day. So Alan had devised a plan.

‘If I come out directly then I won’t be able to find him.’

So Alan discontinued the canyon search and hid himself. He also dispersed the monsters inside the canyon. If Ark was hiding somewhere here then he would definitely be watching for an opportunity to escape. If Alan wasn’t visible then Ark would try to escape. Not long after Alan hid himself, Ark was spotted on using the Vampire’s Eye.

‘I don’t know why he is destroying the black obelisk instead of escaping but it is over now that he has appeared!’

“He showed up? Then we should quickly go beat him up!”

Timosi fussed next to him. However, Alan just shook his head with a relaxed attitude and replied.

“There’s no need to worry. There is nowhere for that guy to run away.”

Alan raised his body and laughed.

“Now, shall I start the hunt?”

Flames shot from Alan’s hand towards the sky.

“Master, look there!”

Ark raised his head after hearing Racard’s voice.

Syuuuuk, pepepepeng!

At the same time, an intense light from a flare lit up the darkness. It wasn’t just one. Several more flares continuously followed the first one. Ark felt his heart drop at the sight.

‘Alan!’

There was no way that the monsters were smart enough to shoot flares. Such methods could only be used by players and NPCs. If

flares were launched then the only possible cause was Alan. Ark understood the current situation intuitively.

'I thought it was strange that Alan and his monster troop suddenly disappeared from the canyon.....' As expected, Alan hid himself in order to lure me out.'

Ark had expected something like this. But there was less than 24 hours left for his mission. No, the Schudenberg expedition still had to wipe out the monsters and capture the fortress after Ark blew up the Black Obelisk Forest.

.....Ark didn't have a lot of choices.

'If I hide in the underground base then the situation will still be the same.'

Alan was firmly watching the canyon so there was no chance for Ark to escape back into the underground base. He only had a few hours left before the mission was 100% failed. But it was impossible to escape like this.

'Dammit, what is another method?'

Ark bit his lip and started thinking.

"M-Master, the monsters are coming! 3 o'clock, 4, 6, 9, 11 o'clock..... They've blocked everything up tight!"

Racard shouted urgently as he looked around the surroundings. The exits were sealed and the monsters were surrounding Ark's group. It meant Alan clearly knew Ark's location. Ark thought for a while before asking urgently.

"Is the entrance to the underground base clear?"

"There is.....the monsters haven't reached the corner yet."

'Do I have no other choice?'

Ark sighed and shook his head. Fortunately it was possible to return to the underground base but if they returned now then the mission would fail. But Ark didn't have many options now. If they were

surrounded by monsters then they would die. Even if he gave up on the mission, is he survived then couldn't he still complete the <Witness the Legend> and <Shangri-La> quest?

'There has to be a strategy where we can survive!'

"Everybody return to the underground base! Racard, keep on reporting the movement of the monsters."

In the end Ark chose to survive.

"Okay, monsters are closing in from the 3 o'clock and 4 o'clock direction!"

"This way!"

Ark listened to Racard's real time traffic information and ran across the canyon. After a short time, Ark's group was luckily able to reach the dead end entrance of the underground base without conflicting with any monsters.

"Hurry! If those guys find the location of the underground base then we won't be able to hide from them!"

"U-understood. Wait a minute!"

Wormer took out the device that would open the entrance.

"That's far enough. You rat bastard!"

A cold voice was suddenly heard from behind him. Cold sweat flowed down Ark's temple as he turned around.

"Alan.....!"

What on earth? Behind Ark was Alan, Timosi and 500 monsters blocking the exit. That's right. Alan realized that there was only one place where Ark could run away. The place Ark had disappeared before. Alan still didn't know about the underground base but he realized that Ark would run to this corner. While the monsters moved and narrowed the siege, Alan had waited in this area for Ark.

"There is no way you can kill all the monsters and run away."

Alan muttered as he looked at Ark with sharp eyes. Ark felt his last hope disappear. Now he could no longer hide in the underground base. If he hid in the underground base then Alan would know the location. Alan would do everything possible to capture the entrance to the underground base. Ark and his group would be trapped in the underground base and they wouldn't be able to move a muscle as the entrance was destroyed. His neck had been perfectly caught by Alan. However.....

"I've won this game."

Aran muttered with an arrogant look.

"You think you've won this game? You never thought that I lured you into a trap?"

Ark asked in a sly voice.

"What?"

"It's true. You're the one who fell into the trap."

Ark smiled and shouted.

"Demonic Distortion! 40 offerings!"

Cheolkeok, tung, tung, tung, tung!

At the same time, Ark's bag automatically opened and various equipment started quickly flying into the sky. Gloves, sword, spear, armour.....it was dozens of cursed black japtem. The japtem which flew from the bag formed a pentagon between the special forces and the monsters. It was a pentagon made of cursed japtem! Alan belatedly realized that something was wrong and exclaimed.

"T-this bastard, what are you planning.....? Charge! Step on all of them!"

"It's too late. You've already fallen into the trap."

Ark said with a smirk. At that moment, the cursed pentagon floating in the air exploded simultaneously. The huge explosion caused the whole space to warp. At the same time, a message window

appeared in front of Ark.

-You have used Demonic Distortion.

The released demonic energy from the equipment will distort the space, changing the location of allies and enemies.

Please designate an enemy target when changing locations.

“The user and monster 100 metres ahead and within a 200 metres area! Activate!”

Ark indicated Alan, Timosi and the 500 monsters while shouting. The space warped by the explosion started to rotate at a quick speed. The energy instantly turned into a giant vortex. It spun fiercely and swallowed up the monsters and special forces.

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

“What? Why is leader’s skill attacking us as well?”

The special forces couldn’t understand what was going on and burst out. However, they couldn’t move even one finger once they entered the vortex. They could only endure the sensation of the vortex rotated at a quick speed. After rotating hundreds of times within a few seconds, the confused special forces emerged on the snowfield.

“Ack!”

“What, what the? Where are we?”

“What on earth is going on? Our health doesn’t seem to have decreased? Eh?”

“Here.....isn’t this where we were before?”

The soldiers murmured with an absurd expression. Dozens of cursed japtem had exploded! They thought it was an emergency and checked their health after exiting the vortex but there were no changes. Their health and mana was the same. After exiting the vortex, they were just standing 300~400 metres away from their previous location. But the problem was the place they moved to.

“Eh? How did they get there.....?”

The special forces looked at Alan and the monsters with amazed eyes. The special forces had been gathered in a dead end corner of the canyon. And Alan and the monsters had blocked the passage. But suddenly a vortex appeared and the positions of the two parties had changed. Alan and the monsters were at the cliff while the special forces were at the exit. The special forces were at the location where the monsters were and vice versa.....

That's right. This was the effect of Demonic Distortion! It was a skill of Eternal Soul which exploded the sealed equipment and reversed the spaces on either side! Ark smiled after changing his position with Demonic Distortion and said to Alan.

“Didn't I tell you? You're the ones who fell into the trap.”

“Do you think the situation has changed just because we've swapped locations? You fool, even if you somehow escape here the monsters have blocked all the passages in the canyon. You'll never get away!”

Alan's words were true. Ark had sacrificed 40 items and all it did was swap their locations. The monsters might've panicked and felt anxious but that was all. Neither their health nor combat abilities were decreased. If a battle against the monster begun then the special forces would be killed. Of course, Ark could now escape from the dead end by changing locations. However, Alan and the monsters were only 300~400 metres away from him. The distance wasn't enough to avoid their attacks. But Ark still had an unconcerned expression.

“Do you think I would waste 40 equipment for a skill that changed nothing?”

That's right. No matter how much he was pushed in a corner, Ark wouldn't lightly waste 40 equipment. The reason Ark used Demonic Distortion in this situation.....

“Wormer.”

“Damn, I worked so hard to make that underground base.....”

Ark glared at him and Wormer sighed. He looked at Ark and the monsters with an irritated expression and pushed a button on the remote control.

Ku ku ku ku, cheoldong!

It was at that moment. The space underneath Alan and the monsters suddenly vibrated and a mechanical sound could be heard. In the next moment, the ground flipped and Alan and the monsters were swallowed up.

“What, what the?”

“Huhuhu, cool your heads in there for a while.”

Ark laughed and waved his hand towards Alan who disappeared into the darkness. That’s right. This was the plan Ark came up with to tie up Alan’s feet. Currently Ark had three quests to completing that required Alan to not interfere. The odds weren’t in his favour if Alan and his group of monsters showed up. So Ark had come up with a way to ‘trap’ Alan.

‘I knew your scheme from the beginning.’

He knew that Alan had hid himself in order to lure Ark.

‘But I need him to think that I’ve been completely trapped. You idiot, you were the target.’

That’s right. Ark had to time it perfectly in order to catch Alan. The reason Ark came up of the base despite knowing about the trap wasn’t to collect MG. It was in order to gain the necessary japtem to use Demonic Distortion. And then lead Alan here. Ark had always planned to switch locations and the trap them in the underground base. As it could be seen, the plan was a great success!

“Wormer, are you sure the equipment inside is broken?”

“I’m sure.”

Wormer looked at the underground base with a regretful expression. Before leaving the base, Ark had naturally destroyed all the equipment that could open the entrance from inside. The only

thing that could open the entrance was the remote control that Wormer held.

‘Huhuhu, the entrance is quite durable so it should take at least an hour to destroy even with 500 monsters attacking it. That is plenty of time to escape from the canyon.’

“Come on, let’s hurry! It is time to escape from the canyon!”

Ark turned around and ordered Racard.

“Racard, search for the shortest route to escape from the canyon!”

“Looking.....looking.....complete. If you turn to the 5 o’clock direction and take the right side then you can escape from the canyon. But there are 600 monsters in the middle part.”

“Okay. Let’s go there!”

Ark instantly ran across that canyon after hearing Racard’s explanation. After moving for 10 minutes, hundreds of monsters appeared in front of them. It was 600 level 350 monsters! There were 200 people but only 130 of them had combat abilities so it would be quite tough to defeat all the monsters. However.....

“Demonic Distortion! The target location is in front of those monsters!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, hwiriririri!

Ark used Demonic Distortion as he ran. The 40 japtan exploded again and changed the location of the monsters and the special forces. The monsters hesitated as it was the first time they experienced the vortex. However, the special forces were already used to Demonic Distortion and ran straight for the exit. Once a certain distance was exceeded, the monsters couldn’t determine their location anymore thanks to the complicated gorge. Without Alan grasping their location and giving the orders, the demonic monsters were just like ordinary monsters and lost Ark’s position. Just as they cleared the obstacles and almost escaped the canyon.... Shambala suddenly thought of something and said.

“Wait? Will we be able to collect the necessary MG if we leave the canyon?”

“.....Are you stupid?”

Ark looked at Shambala with disgusted eyes.

“Hey, do you remember why we came here in the first place?”

“Why we came? That.....”

Shambala was about to answer when he stopped and closed his mouth. They had almost escaped Pabiun Canyon so a huge number of black obelisks caught his eye. That's right. The black obelisks were the reason Ark and the special forces had come to this place. The Black Obelisk Forest was 1 kilometres away from Pabiun Fortress.

“We can charge the MG even without the canyon.”

Ark laughed as he looked at the Black Obelisk Forest. There were 50 obelisks in the Black Obelisk Forest! Their size also exceeded 10 metres. If he used the Starlight Bomb then he could easily charge between 5,000~10,000 MG.

‘Just like when I investigated earlier, there are no monsters in the Black Obelisk Forest!’

All the monsters had moved to Pabiun Fortress. Pabiun Fortress was completely sealed so no one would've expected that the obelisks would be attacked. Besides, the monsters were just running back and forth now that Alan had disappeared. Now there was no longer anything blocking Ark and the special forces.

‘I can destroy the Black Obelisk Forest, collect the needed MG and allow the expedition to capture Pabiun Fortress!’

“Now let's exit the canyon and install the Starlight Bomb!”

Ark shouted and was about to leave the canyon when he heard a sound.

Kurwarwarwarwa!

Something shrieked from the sky and a huge shadow fell and blocked the exit. The huge presence shrieking and blocking the exit was.....

“W-what is going on?”

“D-Dragon? A skeletal dragon?”

The special forces stared with surprise. The huge body blocking the exit was a skeletal dragon. Ark also panicked at the sight of the unexpected monster.

“Fortunately I arrived in time.”

Then someone’s voice was heard from the dragon’s neck. Ark flinched at the face he saw.

“Damn, it is like running into a goby after escaping a grey mullet.....it is Andel this time?”

That’s right. The person who was riding on the dragon’s neck was Andel. He had thought it was strange that Andel wasn’t with Alan. Sure enough? Of course he showed up. And it had to be in a desperate situation like this.

“Goby? You can confirm whether I am a goby or not.”

Andel snorted and murmured. A red warning message floated in front of Ark at the same time.

[-The elite boss monster, Bone Dragon ‘Chromatin’ has appeared.]

Death Lord

‘Perhaps.....?’

After confirming that it was Andel, Ark hurriedly looked around at his surroundings. He confirmed that there were no other monsters except for the dragon.

‘Then Andel isn’t capable of controlling the monsters like Alan.’

Ark had thought it was the worst situation because he met Andel. The reason Ark trapped Alan underground was because he could order the monsters around. If other users appeared who could control monsters then it would be a huge problem.

‘Obviously Andel is also involved in this event but fortunately he doesn’t have the same power as Alan. If he had authority then a serious problem would occur. This means that Andel can only control the dragon.’

Alan had probably urgently contacted him after being confined in the underground base. But the situation wasn’t good no matter how he thought about it.

‘I can’t use Demonic Distortion in this situation.’

The reason Ark was able to use Demonic Distortion to outrun the monsters in the canyon was because Alan wasn’t there. If Alan knew Ark’s movements and controlled the monsters then there was no possibility of escaping even with Demonic Distortion. But Alan was trapped in the underground base and now this guy appeared with a monster.

‘There is no point using Demonic Distortion on this dragon. Andel can just use the dragon to catch up with me. No, the destination is the Black Obelisk Forest so there is no way I can escape Andel and the dragon.’

In the end, he had to get rid of Andel and the dragon in order to destroy the Black Obelisk Forest. However, Andel had appeared with a level 500 elite dragon boss!

‘It isn’t an opponent I can beat with 130 people. Furthermore, I only have 35 minutes left.’

Alan wouldn’t be trapped forever. Wormer said the door would endure for 1 hour and they had already consumed 15 minutes exiting the canyon. And the Starlight Bomb took 10 minutes to explode so he needed to deal with Andel and the Chromatin before Alan caught him. It was probably Alan’s aim behind calling Andel.

‘Damn, I have to defeat a level 500 elite boss with 130 people?’

Despite his worries, there was nothing he could do.

‘I have no other choice! The residents might disturb the fight so I’ll have them sneak out of the battle area. The rest depends on power.....!’

Ark lifted his sword and was about to give an order to charge. Andel laughed, tapped the neck of Chromatin and shouted.

“These boring guys, go Chromatin!”

Oduduk, oduduk, odududuk!

The body of Chromatin started changing. Just like when Razak reformed into the Saw Blade, the several thousand bones disjoined and reassembled to form what looked like a scorpion. But the problem was the bones which formed the tail of the scorpion. The bones split into hundreds of sharp piece.

“What, what the? What is with the huge number of bones?”

“Huhuhu, receive the attacks of my pet monster Chromatin!”

“Heok, everyone prepare to defend!”

Ark hurriedly burst out and lifted his sword. The hundreds of bones from the Chromatin’s tail simultaneously headed towards the special forces.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

They then exploded once they reached the special forces. After a while, the snowstorm which was stirred by the confusion stopped and Ark was shocked. The bombing of the bones had inflicted horrible damage on the special forces. The shields weren't able to stop the bones. Warriors flew dozens of metres away and ended up upside down in the snow while the archers and magicians were dripping blood. Ark had lost 15% health with one attack. Chromatin's attack dealt tremendous damage.

"Ack! What a ridiculous cheat skill.....!"

"Hahaha, look at you now!"

Andel laughed with an arrogant expression from Chromatin's neck after Ark stumbled.

"I'd like to see you act cool now."

"This bastard.....!"

"That's right. I'll make sure you taste torment."

Kurwarwarwarwa!

Chromatin began to attack in earnest. The soldiers couldn't block the hundreds of bones attacking from different directions. If they tried to block the bones flying from the front then some would come attacking from the side. The hundreds of bones could move freely like a living snake!

"Hahaha! How is it? Chromatin's Power?"

'Damn, the special forces can't even attack.....!'

Ark glared at Andel. But it wasn't just the special forces. Thanks to the narrow canyon, the White Tigers couldn't avoid the bones as well as attack Chromatin.

'I have to find a way to breakthrough!'

Ark turned to avoid the flying bone and looked at Shambala. Shambala seemed to think the same thing as well because he nodded his head silently. In this situation, they had no time to rest because they had to avoid the relentless bone attacks. The only way to inflict a counterattack was to stop the momentum of the bones. The only person who could keep up with Ark and attack Chromatin was Shambala.

“I’ll go first. Sun, Gae, Yeol, Seom!”

Shambala combined his footwork with Blink and it seemed like he split into dozens of forms. Shambala crossed through the space as he avoided the bones.

“Flash.”

He also had a technique similar to Shambala’s afterimage skill. A flash of light split through the space. There was an intense ringing sound and Chromatin stumbled. The movement of the bombs attacking the soldiers also became disordered.

‘Okay. It has an effect!’

“Dark Dance!”

Ark continuously used Dark Dance. When Ark approached, 10 bone stems emerged from different directions. Ark maintained an 80% completion rate for Dark Dance and the bone stems narrowly passed by him.

“Okay. Let’s give him a taste! Radun, a demonic sealed sword!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun opened his mouth and spat out a black sword.

“Blade Tempe.....”

Ark rushed up underneath the Chromatin’s jaw and was about to use Blade Tempest. Andel just watched from Chromatin’s neck and laughed.

“Kukukuku, throw your body as much as you like. Chromatin, land

mines!”

Kurwarwarwarwa, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Chromatin shrieked and slammed down a huge paw. At the same time, black sparks spread through the ground. When the black sparks touched his foot, it felt like his foot had been turned into a block of wood.

“Heok, what, what the?”

-You have encountered a land mine.

<You will enter a Paralysis state for 3 minutes>

He had become paralyzed by Chromatin’s attack. Chromatin grasped the chance while Ark couldn’t attack to aim the 10 bone stems at him. He couldn’t move to avoid the attacks and received some critical hits. Therefore Ark lost 30% of his health and also starting ‘bleeding.’ Ark wasn’t the only one in this situation.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

The land mines had spread through the whole passage so the soldiers also became paralyzed and fell victim to the bone attacks. Although they didn’t receive the concentrated attack like Ark, the soldiers still received a lot of damage.

‘This is ridiculous!’

Ark wobbled to one side and kneeled down as he looked up at the giant Chromatin. The hundreds of bones had the ability to move freely and the soldiers couldn’t even attack it properly when they were in their best condition. So how could they avoid it now that they were paralyzed? Wasn’t this too severe even for a boss monster?

‘The land mine isn’t troublesome by itself.’

The Land mine only became a problem when Chromatin used it in conjunction with the hundreds of bones. Ark already knew a way to deal with Land mine. Land mine was a technique which sent a shock wave through the ground. Land mine caused sparks to move across

the ground so if he got the timing right then he could easily jump and avoid it.

‘But I use Dark Dance and Shambala uses Blink. Both skills require the foot to be on the ground. If I jump to avoid the land mine then the skill would be cancelled. Then I wouldn’t be able to avoid the attacks from the bone stems. Dammit! There has to be another way.....’

“You idiot, where did your thoughts wander off to?”

He heard Shambala’s cry from nearby.

“What?”

“Master! Above, above you!”

Ark looked up at Racard’s words and his face turned as pale as a sheet of white paper. Dozens of bones were covering the sky and falling towards Ark? Ark panicked and tried to use Dark Dance.

“Land mine.”

Chromatin’s paw hit the ground again at Andel’s command. Ark had used Dark Dance but then he reflexively jumped to avoid Land mine. But this was Ark’s crucial mistake. His hasty jump meant he had avoided the land mine. But there were still dozens of bones over his head. If he fell then he would be turned into a hedgehog.

“Pure Shield!”

Larlette quickly tried to defend with her magic but it was ineffective. The thin white shield which appeared in the air was crushed by the sharp bone shafts.

‘Oh my god, if I am hit by that many bones.....!’

He already only had 50% health left. If he was hit by the dozens of bones then he would die! It was highly likely when considering the attack power of the bones. Andel brightened as he saw Ark looking pale.

“Hahaha! Die Ark!”

‘This bastard.....! Damn. If I’m going to die then I won’t die

politely! I'll take your life as well.'

Ark cursed before raising his cursed sword. There was only one attack Ark could do in this situation.

"Blade Tempest!"

The skill which had been paused for a bit finally activated! The cursed sword exploded into fragments and created a storm. Ark honestly wasn't expecting this attack to work. He didn't want to die like this so he wanted to do some damage to Andel. But it had an unexpected effect.

Chwa chwa chwa chwa! Chwa chwa chwa chwa!

When the sword fragments swirled around, the bone shafts surrounding Ark disappeared. No, to be exact it didn't disappear. It moved at a quick speed and formed a shield around Andel. Therefore Andel didn't receive any damage from Blade Tempest despite being in the range of the attack. However, it made it possible for Ark to salvage his life. But it didn't just save Ark's life.

'What the? Chromatin's reaction just now?'

Ark stared at Chromatin with surprise. Andel hadn't given a command just then. Chromatin's reaction was too fast to be anything but reflex.

'Despite the fact that Blade Tempest could damage its body, its first instinct was to protect Andel!'

That's right, he hadn't been thinking about the target of his attacks! Ark's eyes brightened as he had an idea. When attacking and defending against a monster, normally a certain pattern could be identified. But that was difficult against a user. The most significant difference between users and monsters was that the user could predict their opponent's attacks. Previously Chromatin had sealed Ark and Shambala's attacks by predicting it. Ark had thought that Chromatin was a difficult opponent but it was actually the combination of Andel + Chromatin that made it hard.

But the situation changed if Chromatin had to protect Andel. If Andel

wasn't there to raise Chromatin's abilities then it would become easier! That's right. Now the target for his attacks wasn't Chromatin but Andel. If he used Andel then it would be possible to block Chromatin's attacks. The question was how to capture Andel.....

Ark avoided the bones while visualizing the situation in his head. After a while, Ark narrowed his eyes at Andel before smiling. Okay, he would try that method!

-Shambala, I have a plan so please attract Chromatin's attention.

Ark explained to Shambala while using Feather of Whispering.

-You found a way to defeat it?

-Yes, a quite fun way.

-Hmm, I'll trust your plan.

"Seom, Torrential Sword!"

Shambala rushed to one side and violently attacked Chromatin. Chromatin shrieked and shot the bones towards him. All the nearby bones were focused on Shambala.

"Summon Demon, Razak. Transform!"

Razak appeared in an open space and changed into the Saw blade. Ark grabbed the Saw blade and threw it towards Andel.

"Razak, transformation off! Shield Stroke!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak returned to his skeletal form and raised his shield. This was Ark's plan. After nearing Chromatin, he planned to have Racard transform back and hit Andel with Shield Stroke and knocking Andel off Chromatin's body. However.....

"Heh, what a shallow plan!"

The moment Racard flew in the air and was about to hit Andel with his shield. Andel just turned his head and laughed. At the same time, three bone shafts rose from the neck where Andel was sitting down.

Razak hurriedly blocked with his shield but he was still blown back.

“Is it really like that?”

Ark laughed and muttered. And then.....!

“Ohhhh, back attack strike! Dark Dash!”

Racard suddenly appeared from the sky and hit Razak's body. And Razak flew away like a spiked volleyball towards Andel. Before Andel could react, Razak raised his shield and hit Andel's face.

Clack clack clack clack, daengkang! “Kuak! What, what..... C-Chromatin.....!”

Andel who was hit in the face fell to the ground. Then Chromatin stopped attacking Shambala and sent the bones towards Ark. It's first instinct was to protect Andel so it judged that it should attack Ark. Around 30 bone shafts flew towards Ark! But Ark had no interest in the bones.

“Don't miss! Summon release, Razak! Summon Demon, Razak! Transform! Fly, Saw blade!”

Ark's mouth recited the skills as quickly as possible. Razak who was on Chromatin's neck changed into a blade and reappeared in Ark's hand. Ark immediately switch to the whip and wrapped it around Andel's leg. Andel was pulled along the slippery snowfield by the sword. Ark finally grabbed Andel's collar and raised him in the air. At the same time, all the bones flying towards him stopped. Ark stared at the bones floating 1 metres away from him and laughed.

“It is like I thought.”

“You, you bastard.....!”

“Shut up!”

Popok, popopok!

Andel received a baptism of fists and blood dripped from his nose. Although he couldn't check Andel's information using Eyes of the Cat, as expected he was a lot weaker than Ark. It was

impossible to think that Andel was higher than level 150. Ark was level 432 and with the dark attribute bonus he was level 648, so Andel was no match for him.

‘That’s why Chromatin’s top priority is to protect him.’

He didn’t know what type of item or skill Andel and Alan had to control monsters. It even worked on a level 500 elite boss. But this was a crucial mistake in Andel’s plan. Chromatin was programmed to instinctively protect him. That was why the bones stopped attacking when Ark grabbed Andel. If it attacked Ark then it would also attack Andel so it instinctively stopped.

Kurwarwarwarwa!

Then Chromatin roared and blew bones all over the area. The special forces screamed and rolled across the ground.

‘Huhuhu, is it running wild after losing its Master? Okay, then I’ll return him.’

Ark grinned as he grabbed the handle of the whip. He grabbed the handle with both hands and began to spin it around. Andel’s leg was still tied by the Saw blade so he was dragged into the air and spun around. It looked like the giant swing in wrestling.

‘Now, time to attack!’

Ark rotated the body and threw Andel towards the place where the special forces were. Andel’s health decreased as he was hit by bones while flying through the sky. The Chromatin flinched and urgently stopped its bombing.

‘Kukukuku, now your attacks are blocked!’

Ark smiled as Chromatin struck the ground with its paw. It was the Land mine attack which caused paralysis! However, the Land mine attack couldn’t be used in conjunction with the bone attack so it had no effect. Ark just jumped to avoid the Land Mine. Then he raised the Saw blade and slammed Andel into the ground.

“Hiik, s-stop! Kiaaaaaaah!”

Andel who was slammed upside down into the ground also became paralyzed. Ark started swinging Andel again and shouted.

“Now, don’t worry about Chromatin’s attacks and just attack it!”

Before they couldn’t even walk let alone attack because of the hundreds of bones but now the situation had changed. Ark’s whip turned Andel into a 20 metre shield which completely blocked the bone attack. Chromatin couldn’t attack so it was just a pile of bones.

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

“Smash! Chain Strike! Heroic Strike!”

“Thunderbolt, thunderbolt, destroy the enemy! Thunder Break!”

“Bone Crusher Arrow!”

The soldiers used various special attacks on Chromatin. The swords and maces, arrows and various magic drained Chromatin’s health. 90%, 80%, 70%..... Chromatin couldn’t even oppose when its health decreased.

‘But I can’t defeat Chromatin like this.’

Ark looked down at the ragged looking Andel. The reason Andel became so ragged was because Ark deliberately moved him to the side of the bone attacks to block Chromatin from attacking. Despite Chromatin hurriedly stopping its bones, Andel still received some damage. But there was another larger reason.....

“Ack, t..... This bastard.....s.....stop.....!”

Andel tried to talk despite having the Saw blade wrapped around his leg.

“Shut up!”

Ark shouted and slammed Andel into the ground again. Andel was hit on the head and stiffened. He was a warrior receiving fall damage so he became ‘stunned.’ That’s right. This was the reason why Andel was so tattered. The Saw blade was securely tied but Andel was a user. Therefore he had to focus on the Saw blade and he stunned

Andel every time he regained himself. Of course, this was only possible because Andel was level 150.

“You.....you..... th.....bastard.....!”

In the end, Andel’s face armour was crumbled like a piece of paper and his face was discoloured.

‘Well, it seems like Andel is almost about to break.....’

He couldn’t confirm Andel’s health using Eyes of the Cat but he seemed to be in a critical condition. If Andel died then the way to stop Chromatin’s attacks would also disappear. However, he couldn’t stop slamming Andel into the ground.

‘I’m sorry but I need you alive until Chromatin is defeated.’

Therefore he needed the priests to cast recovery magic!

“The Great God’s ability, Great Heal!”

The priests poured their recovery magic on Andel. Therefore Andel’s tattered body was restored. And he was struck before he could do anything.

“Now, continuously attack!”

Ark continued to swing Andel around and shouted. After a short time, the Chromatin’s health fell down to 20% without it even resisting. Then the crumpled Andel regained his spirit again. Andel waited until Ark was about to slam him and took out a small glass bead before breaking it.

“T-this.....if I have to go like this.....I’d rather.....release..... Soul Chain Release!”

When the bead broke, Chromatin suddenly stirred and withdrew. The black light around it slowly turned red and the bones started flying.

‘That bastard?’

Ark waited for the bones to stop moving. But this time something was different. Chromatin didn’t stop the bones flying towards Andel. The bones perforated Andel’s body.

-A level 150 chaotic player has been killed.
<Fame +3>

The level 150 Andel went to the afterlife with one blow.

‘What the? Chromatin attacked Andel..... Then the item Andel just broke was the one controlling Chromatin? Damn, it must be one of the black code items that Global Exos talked about.....’

The previous incident had been caused by the black code items. If Andel really had the black code items then he could’ve obtained 1 billion won from Global Exos. Of course, the item that Alan had might be the black code item but wasn’t it a chance to get a clue to obtain the 1 billion won?

‘But it’s already broken so it can’t be helped. The problem right now is.....’

Kurwarwarwarwa!

Chromatin had been released from the soul restraint. He couldn’t use the Andel shield anymore and Chromatin still had 20% health left. Furthermore, Chromatin was now insane. Ark looked at Chromatin’s movements and muttered.

“Chromatin’s movements is different from before.”

While Andel was alive it kept on shooting the hundreds of bones but now it was just attacking randomly. It had gone completely insane after the soul restrain had been released.

‘This is enough to give it a try!’

He had the members with a 2nd profession surround Chromatin. Ark, Shambala and 5 other members surrounded Chromatin and used Area Declaration.

“Area Declaration, River of Blood!”

“Area Declaration, Garden of the Warriors!”

“Area Declaration, Magic Space!”

Various Area Declarations were exercised around Chromatin. The earth around Shambala changed into a river of blood which increased his attack and defense by 50%. Meanwhile a muscular angel appeared in the warrior's area and blew a horn to increase various stats. The mana concentrations in the magician's Area Declaration increased and they could use various high ranking magic more easily. But there was one ultimate Area Declaration.

"Area Declaration, Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang! Hwarrrrruk!

Ark stuck the Saw blade into the ground and change to the Promised Sword before running towards Chromatin. He avoided the bones and slid under Chromatin's belly before using the skill and a dark spirit rose from the ground. At the same time the area was wrapped in darkness. But then flames soared upwards from the dark area. The flames formed a Fire Draconian! The Fire Draconian flew upwards before falling like a lightning bolt towards Ark's head. Ark was wrapped in the flames. Every time he breathed out, flames 10 centimetres long shot from his mouth.

-You have used the Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!

The <Immortal Fire Draconian> effect will be applied for 10 minutes.

- * 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.

- * Attack speed at the skill and speed, reaction speed will increase by 50%.

- * All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.

- * Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.

- * When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

"It is in a critical condition. Attack it with everything you have!"

Ark breathed out flames and shouted, causing the soldiers to run up and wield their weapons. Chromatin shrieked and used Land Mine and the bone attack randomly. But the members who used Area Declaration around Chromatin blocked more than 50% of those attacks.

“Take this, Dark Blade!”

Kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang, kwa!

Ark bombarded the Chromatin with his attacks. But Chromatin who had escaped from its restraints wasn't an insignificant rival. Although it was under attack, it managed to counterattack against the special forces. The special forces tried to decrease Chromatin's 20% health before the Area Declarations ran out.

‘Damn! That useless Andel put me in this position.....If we can't knock it down before the Area Declarations end then the situation will become more serious!’

“Radun, the best magic sword! Blade Tempest!”

Ark caught the sword Radun spat out and made it explode. The effect of Descent of the Fire Draconian was applied to Blade Tempest and a whirlwind of fire hit Chromatin. Chromatin's bones instantly split apart and its health ran out. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-Chromatin's health has fallen below 3% and you can extract the demonic aura.

“That's it! Demonic Seal!” Ark used Demonic Seal without thinking.

Chwajijijijik!

Light shot from Ark's hand and penetrated Chromatin's chest. Then the black soul was forcibly dragged out by the light.

“Okay. Radun, equipment!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun opened his mouth and spat out a piece of armour. Ark

immediately shoved Chromatin's soul into the armour. But before he could sigh with relief, the armour crumbled and the soul popped out. And it flickered and tried to return to Chromatin's body?

"What, what the? D-Demonic Seal!"

Ark hurriedly used Demonic Seal and captured Chromatin's soul again. And he realized there was a significant problem he forgot.

'Dammit.....!'

Ark had forgotten about the success rate of Demonic Seal. In order for Demonic Seal to have a 80~90% chance of success, the item level should be at a similar level to the monster. In other words, he needed a level 500 equipment in order to be able to properly seal Chromatin. However, Ark currently only had equipment around level 300~400. It meant the probability of success was almost nil.

'There's the Hell's Shoulder Blades.....'

It was the shoulder blades he obtained from Magura! It had a level restriction of 450 so Ark couldn't wear it yet. But there was still a 50 level difference so the probability of success was only 50%. And the Hell's Shoulders Blades was a unique item. If the demonic aura was sealed into a unique item then didn't it mean he couldn't repair it?

'If the seal fails.....'

He didn't even want to imagine the result.

'If the soul returns to the body then I won't be able to catch it again.'

When the soul pulled using Demonic Seal returned to the body, the monster was revived with 30~50% of its health. They had barely managed to reduce its health down from 20% using the Area Declarations. If it was restored with 30~50% health, the Area Declaration couldn't be used anymore so there was no way to kill it.

'Besides, it has been 30 minutes since the battle started. I have to end the fight with Chromatin now or else Alan will arrive from the underground base!'

Ark was completely lost.

[-There is 1 minute left on Demonic Seal.]

A warning message flashed in front of Ark.

‘Damn, I can’t let it return to its body. There must be a chance even if the success rate is 1%.....’

“Radun, give me all the equipment up to level 400!”

Radun opened his mouth and vomited out all the equipment. Ark shoved Chromatin’s soul into the equipment. However.....

Peng, peng, peng, peng!

The level 230~350 equipment just exploded. Ark was close to tears with every explosion. But the result would be even worse if he allowed the soul to return to the body! Ark had no choice so he closed his eyes and shoved Chromatin’s soul into random equipment. With every backlash he felt like Chromatin was getting stronger. Ark who was using Demonic Seal desperately opened his eyes and looked down. It was in order to confirm the equipment left. But Ark’s face became confused the moment he checked the equipment.

“Heok! What, what the? That fellow is near the soul.....?”

Chromatin’s soul was near a sword that was plunged into the ground. It was the Saw blade that he had plunged there and forgotten about after Andel died.

‘W-will this blade explode as well?’

Wasn’t the Saw blade a joining of the sword and Razak? No, he would be worried even if it was possible to use Demonic Seal on it. When Demonic Seal was used, the power of the equipment increased by leaps and bounds. But the endurance would fall by a lot and it will be difficult to repair. If that effect was applied then who knew what would happen to Razak?

‘..... Oh my god! What type of position is this?’

Ark stared with a pale face at the Saw blade. But it was too late.

Chromatin's soul couldn't be captured if it returned to its body so Ark shoved the soul into the Saw Blade.

Jjajang~~~! Jjajajajang~~~!

It was at that moment. Cracks started to spread on the surface of the blade. And after a while, the sword suddenly shattered?

"Ah, no! U-unbelievable.....really.....!"

Ark murmured with a soulless voice at the sight of the shattered fragments. The Saw blade had been destroyed. Didn't that mean Chromatin's sealing had failed and even Razak had disappeared? The idea sent Ark into a complete panic. But the next moment an unimaginable scene occurred in front of Ark. The fragments scattered seemed to fly backwards as if time rewound and the sword reformed? But it wasn't the previous Saw Blade. Although the previous Saw blade was a one-handed sword, this one was an enormous greatsword 30 centimetres wide and 150 centimetres long.

"What, what the? This sword? What happened?"

Ark looked at the sword with bemused eyes.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

The message windows rose in front of him. He had gained 7 levels.....As soon as his level was adjusted Chromatin's body instantly collapsed, leaving behind a part of the spine.

-Chromatin's Lance (Unique)
Weapon type: Two-Handed Lance
Damage: 45-55
Durability: 53/120

Weight: 60

User Restriction: Level 450 or more

A lance made from the spine of Chromatin. Since dragon is a high class material, this lance is light and firm compared to ordinary lances. Since this is made from Chromatin's bone, it is imbued with its power and the 'Bone Thorn' attack can be used. It is the best weapon for a knight.

<Option: Strength +20, Agility +10>

<Special Option (Bone Thorn Attack) This attack launches 10~20 bones from the lance. The flying bones can be controlling through the movement of the lance.

Mana consumption: 100 Cool down time: 1 hour>

A unique lance! It was a lance which had an obviously high value just by looking at it. However, Ark didn't have time to look at the abilities of Chromatin's Lance.

"Radun, swallow the spear!"

Ark gave the command to Radun and hurriedly ran to the Saw blade. He wanted to check what happened to it so he grabbed the handle. An information window rose in front of him along with some crafty laughter.

-Your summon Razak has successfully absorbed the soul.

The dragon Chromatin which has been changed to a soul state and weakened has been successfully absorbed the physical body reorganized.

Razak has absorbed the soul of a death master several levels higher and he has evolved to a higher profession 'Death Lord.' Through this spiritual awakening, Razak has been renamed to 'Purital.'

'Evolution? He evolved?'

Ark looked at the information window with stunned eyes. Although he was confused, Ark was soon able to understand most of the situation.

‘Chromatin is an undead dragon which is the strongest among the undead series.

If Racard absorbed the soul of the strongest monster which had been weakened then wouldn't he evolve?’

When he thought back, the essential part to evolving to Death Master was obtaining the Necromancer's skeleton. Racard also absorbed Karakul's blood to evolve into a higher ranking vampire. In other words, evolution involved absorbing a monster with the same properties. Ark's eyes shone brilliantly at the thought. What he thought was Demonic Seal failing was actually his pet's evolution! Razak's original features had been changed by the evolution.

Just like the sword had changed, Purital also looked different. The surface of the bones were carved with patterns that looked like dragon scales while there were sharp horns in the joints such as the arms, shoulders and knees. When Purital transformed, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

Purital			
A skeleton who has evolved into the highest rank of the death property 'Death Lord' after absorbing an undead dragon.			
'Death Lord' is a knight who takes pride in his military exploits and being his Masters sword and shield is the biggest honour. So the skills of a 'Death Lord' is concentrated on raising the abilities of his Master.			
Race	Demonic	Alignment	Dark
Ranking	Middle Class		
Health	5,720 (+ 500)	Loyalty	1,589 (+100)
Strength	712 (+50)	Agility	256 (+30)

Stamina	753 (+500)	Wisdom	74 (+20)
Intelligence	78 (+30)	Luck	89 (+20)
<p>* Bone Blade damage increased by 15, Durability by 100 and the attack range is increased by 5 metres.</p> <p>-You have learnt the 'Clad Armour' skill.</p> <p>-You have learnt the 'Hook Explosion' skill.</p>			
<p>-Clad Armour (Beginner, Species Characteristics):</p> <p>Purital will take his body apart and became his Master's armour. When clad with the armour, 30% of Purital's health, defense and attack will be applied to the user. However, if the increased health is consumed then the skill will automatically be cancelled and Purital can't be summoned for 24 hours.</p> <p><Purital will become armour and 30% of Purital's health, defense and attack will be applied to the user.</p> <p>Spiritual Power consumption: 200 Cool down time: 24 hours></p>			
<p>-Hook Explosion <When under the effect of Clad Armour> (Beginner, Species Characteristics):</p> <p>When the user is clad with Purital, the hooks on each of his joints will grab the enemy and explode. Each explosion will deal 50~100 damage to enemies and they will then be pulled to the user.</p> <p><Deals 50~100 damage to the enemy and has a 'grab' effect.</p> <p>Mana consumption: 100></p>			

'Clad Armour?'

Ark's eyes widened as he looked at the information window. Purital could change into a sword and now he could change into an armour. But the sword transformation was completely different from Clad Armour. It was a battle armour created using Purital. And 30% of Purital's health, defense and attack would be applied to Ark. Purital was currently around level 300 so 30% of his health,

defense and attack meant that his abilities increased by approximately 90 levels.

‘I would love to look at it in more detail.....’

He could check the skill information of his pets at any time. His pet had evolved safely so he could look at it later. Chromatin was defeated so he had to quickly blow up the Black Obelisk Forest.

‘It’s been 40 minutes since the battle with Chromatin started. Combined with the time consumed in the canyon, that is 55 minutes. Alan is likely already heading here after escaping from the underground base. Our health and mana is already low from fighting Chromatin so we would be no match against Alan’s group. I have to destroy the Black Obelisk Forest and quickly escape to Shangri-La!’

Ark estimated the time and quickly shouted towards the special forces.

“Quickly install the Starlight Bombs!”

And after 10 minutes.....

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The Starlight Bombs installed on the obelisks exploded. Cracks spread over the black obelisk and they crumbled into fine sand. It was 50 obelisks! Now the monsters at Pabiun Fortress couldn’t be resurrected anymore. He finally accomplished the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> operation. The only thing left was for the Schudenberg expedition to capture the fortress!

“Racard, fly to the base and tell them the operation was a success. Quickly!”

“Yes!”

Racard saluted and flew the shortest path to the base. But it still wasn’t over.

“Wormer, hurry up!”

“Understood, understood!”

Wormer ran into the Black Obelisk Forest and took out the kettle (magic converter). He poured the black sand into the kettle and the magic battery became brighter and stronger. While Wormer was still gathering the MG.

“Ark, it’s them!”

Ark’s face stiffened as he turned his head. Thousands of monsters were heading from the canyon towards them. At the forefront of the group was a black knight.....

Shangri-La

“.....Alan!”

Ark muttered as he bit his lip. That's right. Alan had escaped the underground base and gathered the monsters in the canyon.

“Dammit! Wormer, is it almost ready yet?”

“Close.....okay. The MG has been collected!”

“Then? Where is the thing?”

“My invention is near the underground base.”

“Huh?”

Ark stared at Wormer with a stupid expression. Then they had to go through that huge number of monsters to enter the canyon again? But he only had 20 cursed japtem left.

‘I can't use Demonic Distortion.’

He would need at least 200~300 cursed japtem to move those many monsters.

“You should've told me that earlier!”

“Shouldn't you have known by my words? Did you think I could carry my amazing invention in my backpack?”

Wormer answered naturally. Then he closed his mouth and acted like he was remembering something.

“Ah, that's right. Didn't I develop that device before?”

Wormer placed his entire head in his bag before pulling something out. The machine looked just like a radio but it had an antenna which looked like a satellite dish on top.

||-Magic Energy Remote Transmitter

The magic energy converted to MG while transmit an energy wave to a machine a long distance away. Although the machine which stopped working can be charged with the energy from a distance away, some energy will be lost due to the wireless transfer.

“Hahaha, I really am a genius!”

Wormer laughed as he held the remote transmitter. Ark asked Wormer after hearing the explanation of the remote transmitter.

“If the invention has its energy charged then it can be brought here?”

“Yes, I possess the remote control for the invention so it won’t be a problem.”

“But doesn’t the invention have to move through the canyon to get here?”

“Don’t worry about it. I can definitely bring it here after the energy is charged.”

“I’ll believe you. How long will it take to transfer the energy and get here?”

“My estimate is 5~10 minutes.”

“5~10 minutes.....!”

Ark looked at the swarm of monsters and sighed. They had to endure against Alan, Timosi and the thousands of monsters for 5~10 minutes. There were only 100 soldiers left because 30 had died in the battle against Chromatin.

‘But.....!’

Ark looked at the canyon. The Black Obelisk Forest could be reached from the path in the middle of the canyon. In other words, there was a ravine on the left and right and Alan was coming from one of them. On the other side was a narrow entrance into another canyon.

“Everybody move to that canyon!”

Ark shouted. The special forces followed Ark's order and moved towards the entrance of the canyon.

“Warriors make a defense formation behind the entrance!”

There was a reason Ark moved to this canyon. Wormer needed coordinates to input into his invention so they couldn't excessively run away. Therefore they had to fight for 5~10 minutes. If they were unable to hold out against the numerous monsters then they would be wiped out in a few minutes. But the canyon entrance was narrow enough that only 10 warriors could fit standing side by side. This meant that if they established a defense formation inside the canyon then they could restrict the number of enemies that entered. It was a basic strategy which involved the terrain.

“Ark!”

Alan's voice was heard while they were making the defense camp. Alan looked like an evil spirit. It was reasonable. He had been deceived by Ark and trapped in the underground base so now he wasn't in the proper mental state. But that wasn't the only reason for Alan's fury. Alan had received the mission from the Red Man to defend Pabiun Fortress and steal the artifact from Shangri-La. There were two goals. However the Black Obelisk Forest had been blown up. It would be difficult for Alan to defend Pabiun Fortress against the Schudenberg expedition. If Pabiun Fortress was taken away then Shangri-La would also fall into the hands of the Schudenberg expedition.

“Ark, Ark, Ark! I will kill you no matter what!”

Alan muttered before shouting.

“Kill them all!”

Kuaaaaaah, kuaaaaaah!

Thousands of creatures with glossy eyes ran into the canyon. Ark carefully observed them before giving a command.

“Magician unit, slide!”

“Make their path uncomfortable.....Slide!”

10 magicians simultaneously unleashed their spells. Slide turned the floor slippery like ice allowing zero friction. When the magic was used on the snowfield, the monsters instantly started falling.

“Now! Archers intercept the monsters that didn’t fall!”

The archers followed up by continuously shooting blunt arrows. The damage wasn’t strong but it had the same effect as blunt weapons. The monsters were hit with the blunt arrows and combined with the slippery floor, it caused the monsters to be pushed back dozens of metres. Ark intended to use this method to block the monsters during the time limit. If they were ordinary monsters then he easily could’ve survived 5~10 minutes. However there was a user leading the monsters.

“Bah, he’s just a cornered rat. Monster troop, make footholds with your bodies!”

Hundreds of monsters immediately lay down on the ground after hearing Alan’s command. Other monsters stepped on them before lying down in front. After that repeated a few times, the space between the monsters and the special forces was covered. Slide wasn’t applied to the monsters stepping on their colleagues so the blunt arrows didn’t have an effect anymore.

“Damn! Warriors, prepare to defend!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Eventually the monsters entered and collided with the special forces. Violent clashing sounds were heard at the same time. If this was a wide open space then the defense formation would be quickly destroyed. But even if they overcame Slide, only a few monsters were allowed to enter at a time. The special forces members were also elite troops from the expedition so they were able to hold up to a certain extent. However.....

“Get out of the way, you stupid things! Hate Aura!”

“I’ll go too! Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!”

The situation immediately changed after Alan and Timosi ran through the monsters. With his attack and defense raised by the black aura around him, the warriors trying to block with their shields stumbled and fell. Timosi's quick arrows also penetrated the shields and damaged the soldiers.

"Damn, those guys are always a problem."

"Ark, I'll take care of that female! Torrential Sword!"

Shambala cleared the barrier and engaged Timosi. Timosi avoided the dagger with a somersault and taunted.

"Oh, it's you again? Are you really that attracted to me?"

"It's the opposite. It's to the extent that I want to kill you. Burnt Sword."

"Your method of expressing affection is too extreme. Matanyi Shooter no. 2, Devil Chasing Arrow!"

Syu syu syu syuk!

Shambala and Timosi flew violently around the canyon.

"Then my opponent is that guy?"

Ark muttered as he looked at Alan. Ark had already been pushed back by Alan while they were fighting in the destroyed Nuran village. But he didn't know that Alan could use various skills from monsters and was hit by various abnormal conditions. Well, there was also Alan's Hate Aura but Ark was less concerned about that now.

"This is a chance to practice the new skills. Purital, Clad Armour!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

It was at that moment. Purital had been participating in the defense formation when his body exploded and disassembled into pieces. The pieces flew towards Ark and began to snap into place around him. After a moment, an armour of bone was formed around Ark.

-You have used Clad Armour.

* Damage will increase by 17~22.

* Defense will increase by 98.

* Health will increase by 1,866.

<If the 1,866 health is consumed then Clad Armour will automatically dismantle>

When he checked his health gauge, the 1,866 health was marked in yellow. If the yellow gauge disappeared then Clad Armour would also be gone.

‘The attack and defense didn’t go up as much as I expected.’

Ark had thought Clad Armour was based on his stats. But after thinking about it, he realized that it was actually 30% of Purital’s stats. Purital didn’t have much equipment so his attack and defense wasn’t as high as his stats.

‘But this alone should be enough to handle Alan!’

“Hook Explosion!”

Ark fixed his gaze on Alan and shouted. Then the hooks on the shoulders and knees of his armour shot across the area towards Alan. Alan received damage and was pulled like elastic towards Ark.

“What, what the?”

“Are you wondering what is going on? It is revenge! Dark Blade!”

“Impertinent bastard! The Devil’s Fang!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

A tremendous shock wave shook the area as both swords collided. When they fought in Nuran village, the ratio was 6:4 with Ark at a disadvantage. Now it was different. Thanks to the 30% bonus from Clad Armour, it was an even match. Both Alan and Ark took a few steps back from the shockwave.

“Ugh, how did you suddenly become like this?”

“It is a secret you idiot!”

Ark continuously attacked until Alan opened his mouth.

“Devil’s Breath!”

It was the poisonous fog which couldn’t be cured without an antidote. Ark turned to the side using Dark Dance and attacked Alan again. Then Alan started to display his ‘Predator of Devils’ ability as he used random monster skills. Ark and Alan’s battle was almost equal. Ark had levelled out their abilities using Clad Armour. When it came to actual fighting ability, Ark with his taekwondo was clearly superior. It was natural to think that Ark could control Alan but Alan had his ‘Predator of Devils’ ability.

‘Damn! How did that bastard get so strong?’

Both of them had the same thought while fighting. But if they looked at the whole situation then Alan clearly had the upper hand. The priests still hadn’t recovered all the mana after fighting against Chromatin so the warriors were started to collapse from the monsters’ attacks. The archers and magicians were also spreading some damage from the rear. The White Tiger clan were also struggling so Ark’s group wouldn’t be able to hold on much longer.

‘Even the White Tigers are going to collapse soon!’

Ark sighed after surveying the military situation while still fighting Alan. Then Wormer who had just been looking at his remote control raised his head and shouted.

“That’s it. There it is!”

The special forces turned their gazes to Wormer’s invention in unison. The monsters also reflexively turned to look. Then it seemed like the users, monsters and NPCs gathered at the canyon were turned to stone.

Kuoooooh-!

Something enormous was flying in a straight line. It was an

enormous human shaped object 40 metres large. The arms and limbs of the huge object seemed to be made of iron metal. In other words, it was a giant made of steel.....

That's right. Wormer had amazingly created a robot from an animated cartoon.

"Hahaha, a giant flying robot! It is the dream of all men!"

Wormer jumped up while holding the remote control. The users never imagined that they would see a robot in the game so their expressions looked like their souls had left them. The robot receiving the shocked looks crossed the canyon and descended behind the special forces. From up close it really resembled a robot from an animated cartoon. Wormer dived between the spread toes of the robot and shouted.

"This is the entrance. Get on the robot!"

"Wait? If we have a robot like this then isn't it unnecessary to run away?"

"Does it have beams or rockets or something?"

"You idiot, why would I attach weapons to my robot?"

Wormer shouted in a pained voice.

"All residents board first then the special forces!"

"I won't miss!"

Alan rushed up to Ark while he was giving orders to the special forces. Then the robot suddenly stuck its huge fist in the area between Alan and Ark. There was a huge roaring sound and snow fell from the sky. At that moment, Ark used a combination of Dark Dance and Sprint to enter between the toes of the giant robot.

"This way!"

Shambala and Lariette who had gone inside first beckoned from a machine which looked like an elevator. Ark rolled his body to avoid Alan's Evil Insight and there was a metallic sound as the toes closed

up.

“This.....attack! Smash a hole in that iron!”

Alan shouted angrily.

Ku ku ku ku, ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The monsters swarmed around the robot's foot when a huge storm suddenly occurred. Jet flames emerged from the soles of the feet and the robot soared into the sky at an absurd speed.

“Dandarararara dandada dandarararara dandada.”

All users under 20 years old would know the theme song for Taekwon V was emerging from Wormer's mouth.

Including Ark, the special forces, White Tiger Clan and the Nuran residents, there were a total of 110 people on board the Taekwon V. 70 of the elite forces had died during the fight in the canyon and only 40 people remained from the White Tiger clan and the Nuran residents. However, the robot successfully flew through the sky and they safely escaped from Alan and the monsters. It was flying among the mountain ranges under the guidance of the White Tiger clan.

“Shangri-La!”

One of the White Tiger clan members looking outside through a monitor shouted.

“That is Shangri-La where the prophet clan lives.....!”

Ark turned his eyes towards the place where the White Tiger pointed and saw Shangri-La. At that moment, he could see why the White Tiger clan said that Shangri-La wasn't accessible to the outside. Shangri-La was originally located deep within the forest on the mountain. But thanks to the wards that the 7 heroes placed, it was now a floating island. It was impossible to reach Shangri-La unless they flew through the air. Shambala surveyed the area then asked with a frown.

“What are those things gathered over there?”

Shambala pointed towards a place where black shadows were flying like a dark cloud. Wormer zoomed in on the ground and shouted.

“Demonic monsters! It is a swarm of flying monsters!”

They confirmed on the screen that the dark cloud was filled with hundreds of gargoyles. They were like the ancient stone statues placed in dungeons or castles that attacked passing travellers. Those creatures were probably sent in order to attack Shangri-La. The gargoyles spotted the unidentified robot approaching Shangri-La and started attacking. However, unlike its outer appearance the robot didn't have any weapons. It quickly became tattered under the attack of the sky monsters.

“Wormer, increase the speed!”

“We're flying at the top speed!”

Wormer answered with an urgent expression.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Then there was a loud roaring sound and the whole cockpit shook. The gargoyles shot narrow beams from their mouths and started to attack the robot. A red light in the room started ringing like an emergency bell. Wormer grabbed his hair and started screaming.

“Ack! The arm has been broken. Fuck, the leg is on fire! Dammit, I spent several months making this so what are they doing to my Taekwon V? Do you know how much effort I placed into this?”

‘Damn, if the robot is that valuable then you should've attached some cannons to it!’

He really wanted to snap those words out. But what was the point? Ark grabbed the instrument panel as the cockpit shook roughly and asked Wormer.

“Ugh, can we reach Shangri-La while being attacked like this?”

“It's not a problem. Taekwon V has a secondary engine in cases of

emergency.....ack!”

Wormer once again pulled his hair and screamed.

“What’s wrong?”

“.....The secondary engine was destroyed a while ago.”

“What now.....?”

“.....We’ll fall.”

Wormer stared blankly at the monitor and muttered.

“Damn.....How much.....I spent making this.....uwooo!”

“I don’t care about the robot. There’s 100 metres left to reach Shangri-La so we can’t just crash here. Something, isn’t there another way?”

Ark grabbed Wormer’s collar who trembled and replied.

“Dammit, damn, I didn’t want to use this..... It can’t be helped. Everybody climb up that ladder!”

“What’s at the top?”

“There’s no time to explain. Do you want to crash to the ground and die?”

He had no intention of committing suicide with the robot. Ark ordered everyone in his group to climb up the ladder. Then Wormer climbed after them and took something out from underneath the pilot’s seat. Wormer turned several switches before pressing a red button.

“Emergency escape!”

At the same time, there was a huge vibration and the head of the robot was launched like a rocket. Ark and his companions were in the emergency escape pod of Taekwon V’s head. Wormer looked back at the black smoke spouting from the robot with tearful eyes. And he pressed a skull shaped button attached to one side of the cockpit.

“Goodbye Taekwon V1!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Fire appeared in different parts of the robot and it exploded. When it exploded, all gargoyles within 40 metres of it were turned into grey powder. But even the destruction of the robot couldn't wipe out all the gargoyles. Hundreds of gargoyles immediately chased after the separated head. The top of the head was crushed from an attack and it instantly became bald.

-The escape pod has received an attack and the durability has decreased to 80%.

The engine has caught on fire and the temperature of the escape pod is rapidly rising.

The red warning message appeared on the monitor.

“Hiiik, the escape pod is overheating. If we continuing being hit then the escape pod will explode before it reaches Shangri-La!”

Wormer trembled as he looked at the dashboard. Like he said, some parts of the escape pod already had holes in it. The only thing Ark could do was block the gaps and maintain the balance of the pod.

‘Damn, Shangri-La is almost in sight.....!’

Ark moaned as he looked at Shangri-La that was only a few metres away.

Kwajijijiji! Kwajijijiji! Kwajijijiji!

A giant crystal ball on top of a tower in Shangri-La started emitting something. Deep blue sparks occurred inside the crystal ball until it gathered in one spot. Then dozens of lightning bolts shot from the crystal ball and hit the gargoyles surrounding the escape pod. The gargoyles' health quickly decreased. A White Tiger witnessing the scene shouted.

“That's it! We've entered the boundaries of Shangri-La's defense

ward!”

“Everybody hold on tight. We’re about to land!”

The escape pod that had barely escaped from the gargoyles fell towards Shangri-La.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang.

The escape pod hit Shangri-La and skidded a few metres. At the same time, the dashboards that received the impact burst into flames. Wormer ran to the exit of the cockpit and shouted.

“What are you doing? Hurry up! It will explode soon!”

“What, what the?”

Ark, Shambala, Lariette, the special forces, the White Tiger clan and the Nuran residents rushed to the exit. They all yelled and escaped from the pod in a stampede.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The escape pod emitted black smoke and finally exploded.

“Phew……That was really crazy. However we’ve arrived at Shangri-La.”

Ark looked at the flaming escape pod and wiped off the sweat. Then he turned to look at Shangri-La. They were in the forest around Shangri-La. The White Tiger clan looked around before heading to the front and saying.

“The tower of the prophet clan is this way.”

The White Tiger clan led Ark’s group through the forest. How much time had passed? Suddenly a huge tower caught their eye. The tower was white like snow. Hundreds of NPCs were gathered in front of the tower. The majority of them were the White Tiger clan who defended Shangri-La but 20 of them were wearing hoods. When Ark and his companions emerged, they placed both hands on the chests and bowed.

“Welcome. Ark-nim.”

“You knew I was coming?”

“Yes, we saw your appearance a while ago through the Truth Crystal.”

“Truth Crystal?”

“The crystal is associated with the divine will of the Great God. A while ago we saw you defeating the dragon Chromatin that threatened Shangri-La and that were you coming here.”

“The dragon Chromatin was threatening Shangri-La?”

Ark now knew the reason why Andel suddenly appeared at the canyon exit. One of Alan’s goals was to steal the artifact from Shangri-La. However, Shangri-La had now become a floating island so ordinary monsters were unable to penetrate its defences. Therefore Alan mobilized flying type monsters to capture Shangri-La. That’s why there were no flying monsters at Pabiun Canyon. And the most powerful flying monster threatening Shangri-La was the undead dragon that Andel controlled. But after Alan was trapped in the underground base he instantly called Andel to stop Ark.

‘Then I ended up saving Shangri-La because I killed Chromatin and Andel?’

But Ark had no interest in such a thing. He just wanted to receive the compensation for the <Witness the Legend> quest now.

“The reason I came here is to receive the revelation of the stars.”

“We’re aware of that. Then follow me.”

As expected, there was no need to explain to the prophet clan. Ark’s group entered the tower along with the prophet clan. Inside the white tower were huge crystals the size of a door lined up. The prophet explained that each memory crystal contained 10 years of the continent’s history. There were hundreds of the crystals so thousands of years’ worth of New World’s history was recorded here.

“The other people please wait here.”

The prophets told the special forces once they reached the end of the passage. They then opened an enormous door and entered a giant hall accompanied by only Ark. The walls of the whole hall were formed using cylindrical shaped memory crystals. But there wasn't just one. Crystal slabs the size of a small book lined the walls. There were millions of these crystal slabs were inserted into the cylindrical holes.

“The memory crystals in this room contain all the information on the foreigners.”

“Foreigners?”

“At the end of the Dark Century.....the Great God showed us a horrible prediction through the Truth Crystal. Although the dark forces threatening the world had disappeared, one day it would appear again and it would lead this world to destruction.”

The prophets suddenly began a history lecture out of nowhere. At that time, the 7 heroes who destroyed the Dark Lord had gathered and heard the prediction of the Truth Crystal and fell into despair. However, there was also light in the darkness. The Truth Crystal showed a glimmer of hope to those who were in despair. Brave and wise visitors from another world would appear in this world. And they would have the power to stop the resurrection of the dark forces. So the 7 heroes planned to pass on their powers to the foreigners in the hope of stopping this evil. That was why only users could be the descendants of the 7 heroes.

“And 100 heroes who heard the prophecy also arranged to help the foreigners

“100 heroes?”

“Yes, 100 heroes who fought against the darkness under the 7 heroes' command. They heard the prophecy and left their own equipment behind in order to help the foreigners fight against the dark forces. But if the dark forces gained these equipment then it would change to the darkness and be used to damage us. Because

these equipment were made using ancient techniques.”

“Then the Hero Stars.....?”

The White Tiger clan called the stars Ark received from the Lore quests Hero Stars. Did that mean he would receive one of the 100 equipment for the Hero Stars?

“One of the 7 heroes, the great magician Norad used powerful magic that transcended time and space to create the Hero Stars. Those who fight against the darkness hidden in the world will accumulate the Hero Stars in their body. When it accumulates in their body, they will head to Shangri-La to receive the heritage that the 100 heroes left behind.”

Every time he completed a Lore quest, the stars would accumulate in his body! But Ark had no interest in such things. The important thing was that if he gathered these stars then he could gain the strong equipment that the 100 heroes used. Ark had headed towards Shangri-La because he received the Hero Stars.

“Then.....?”

“Ark.”

When Ark opened his mouth to talk, the prophet murmured in a low voice. Then a huge wall moved and a crystal slab moved in front of the prophet. The crystal slab had 10 jewels embedded in it. A prophet approached Ark holding the crystal slab. “This is the memory crystal where your record is written.” Ark’s information started to appear on the crystal slab.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +500	Nobility Title	Baron
Fame	21,788 (+500)	Level	439
Profession	Dark Soul		
	Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People,		

Title		Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero	
Health	8,125 (+475)	Mana	8,315(+225)
Spiritual Power	956	Strength	844
Agility	1,139 (+90)	Stamina	1,379 (+45)
Wisdom	205 (+10)	Intelligence	1,517 (+5)
Luck	209 (+60)	Flexibility	268
Art of Communication	79	Affection	129 (+10)
Resilience	483	Dark Fog	74
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		233	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople (Armour): Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available			
* <Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20, Defense +40			
Promised Sword(Two-handed Sword): Strength +20, Stamina +10			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance + 100%, Agility +20, 'Magic Protection' is automatically activated when health is less			

than 50%.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense.

[Hero Stars]

☆ ☆ ☆: Sealed Gates of Hell in the Underground World

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆: Resurrection of Seutandal's World Tree, Yuzuria

☆☆☆ : Extermination of the Devil Magura

The prophet looked down at the crystal slab and said.

"The Jewels embedded in the slab represent the achievements you

did to receive the Hero Stars. This is the proof that you are qualified to receive the 100 heroes' legacy. The Hero Stars will give you the legacy which suits your abilities. However there is something you should pay attention to. Naturally 100 legacies exist. All of them have incredible power but it also depends on the differences in abilities of each of the 100 heroes. The Hero Stars will give you the equipment best suited for your abilities at the moment. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

He couldn't understand the words at first. But he started to guess after thinking about the prophet's words. The 100 equipment had various restriction levels. So the user would only receive the equipment which matched their level when they arrived at Shangri-La. In other words, if Ark was level 100 then he would receive a level 100 equipment and so on. If he raised his level then he could receive higher levelled equipment!

But Ark didn't worry too much about it.

'If I wait then I can get better equipment. But.....'

Ark raised his head and looked at the huge amount of crystal slabs inserted into the holes in the wall. There were at least 10 slabs inserted with 7~8 jewels. This meant Ark wasn't the only user collecting stars.

'The 100 heroes only left being 100 legacies. I don't know when I will be able to receive the compensation again. If I wait in order to become greedy for better equipment then other users might fill all the stars and my share will disappear. No, postponing my reward for another day isn't my style.'

Ark nodded without any hesitation.

"I would like to receive the legacy of the heroes right now."

".....As you wish."

The prophet accepted Ark's decision without any arguing. Then the 10 jewels flew out of the slab and gathered on top of an altar. There was an intense light as the jewels combined into one. Then a shape gradually started to form like iron entering a furnace. After a while,

the light disappeared and a sword was placed on top of the altar.

-Shining Darkness (Legendary)

Weapon: Two-handed sword

Attack: 55~65

Durability: 200/200

Weight: 80

User Restriction: Level 430 or more

A sword used by a hero who fought under Hero Maban. After fighting for three days and three nights against the demonic forces, the warrior was named a hero for his bravery.

This sword was made with a metal forged in the fires of hell for 100 years, Orichalcum and was a treasure of the demons.

But now that it is used by a hero, it changed to a sword of light with the ability to pierce the darkness. Just like its name, the Shining Darkness has special abilities that can be used when fighting the forces of darkness.

<Option: Damage +10% when fighting the demonic attribute, Agility +20, Stamina +20, Intelligence +20>

<Special Option (Shining Darkness):

A knockdown technique used against the demonic forces. In order for Shining Darkness to be activated, a certain amount of demonic monsters are needed. In order to use this skill, the sword needs to be charged with the demonic energy.

The subsequent explosion will overpower the darkness. The damage depends on the amount of demonic energy charged.

Mana consumption: 1,000 Cool down time: 1 hour>

‘A legendary sword!’

Ark's eyes widened after he checked the information window. He had expected a lot from the equipment of the 100 heroes who played an active part in the Dark Century but the sword received was really beyond his imagination.

‘Amazing combat ability!’

The damage caused was 55~65! The base damage of the Promised Sword was 40~50 so it did 15 less damage. It also had the option attached of increasing the important stats such as agility, stamina and intelligence. And it also deals an extra 10% damage against demonic monsters. If was a sword worthy of being used on the front lines! Furthermore, there was also the Shining Darkness skill available.

‘It is impossible to tell from the description how strong one of the techniques used by one of the 100 heroes is. It is clearly a skill that is specialized in fighting against demonic monsters.’

Ark didn't doubt the power of Shining Darkness. He had received a long awaited good item but there was one problem weighing on his mind. It was the Promised Sword. Ark had obtained 4 Hearthstones after much suffering and inserted it into the Promised Sword. With the various added bonuses, the damage of the Promised Sword was comparable to the Shining Darkness.

‘I'll just switch between the Promised Sword and Shining Darkness and test which one can be utilized better. I will choose and sell the other one.’

One was a legendary sword which the other one had 3 rare Hearthstones and one unique Hearthstone inserted. No matter which one he sold, it would be possible to receive tens of millions of won for it. Ark collected the legendary sword and exited the hall. Lariette who was waiting outside then asked the prophets.

“Excuse me. Do you have the Ark of Creation stored here?”

The prophets flinched for the first time and looked at Lariette with shocked eyes.

“Where did you hear that name?”

“I heard it from a bishop of the Ares church not long ago in Selebrid. It was a holy relic that the 7 heroes used during the Dark Century to defeat the darkness. And this holy relic was stored in a sacred area called Shangri-La when the Dark Century ended. The name of that holy relic was the Ark of Creation. However, the bishop feared the advent of the Dark Century and asked me to find the Ark of Creation. Not long ago, I heard from the White Tiger clan that something similar to that was kept in Shangri-La. Wouldn't the object they talked about be the Ark of Creation?”

“A bishop requested it of you? Then you are? The descendant of Holy Knight Ronian.....?”

“I have received Ronian's blessings and am the Innocence Knight Lariette.”

“Innocence Knight!”

The prophets were startled by Lariette's answer. The prophets couldn't hide their confusion as they approached.

“Yes, the ark kept in Shangri-La is the Ark of Creation. If you are truly the foreigner who inherited Holy Knight Ronian's will then you have the right to the Ark of Creation. The Ark of Creation can either be used as a blessing by the Holy Knight or as a curse by the Ruin Knight. It is proof of God's will that you arrived here first before the Ruin Knight. Then follow me.”

The prophet said and led her somewhere. Thus a huge change occurred to the continent and the dark war from this encounter.

Several days after Ark arrived at Shangri-La.....

“Ah, damn, why do you have to defend this place?”

“Yeah. The Lord of this territory shouldn't just come and go as he pleases.”

The members of Dark Eden waiting on Silvana's rampart stretched and complained. The whole continent was focused on the black

obelisks and the demonic monsters that had attacked. Thanks to the martial law, sieges were forbidden so Nagaran was currently empty. But some members of Dark Eden still remained in Silvana. Some of the members of the coalition were still low levelled so Ark direction them to hunt in the secret dungeon. Therefore the Dark Eden members helped the Meow, raccoons, Wolrang and Eastern Nation level up in the secret dungeon.

“I would rather support the supply unit.”

The users would rather escort NPCs for money..... The users sighed as they thought about it.

Kuaaaaaaaah!

A roaring sound suddenly came from the sky and there was a huge vibration. The coalition members reflexively raised their heads and turned pale. Something huge was approaching in the sky. It was a flying object resembling a huge stingray. The enormous skyray flapping its wings and bearing a castle on its back was the aerial fortress Rwigenberg.

“What the, that is?”

“Look over there, the stomach is opening!”

After arriving at Silvana, the stomach of Rwigenberg was opening to the sides. Then it poured out many black objects.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

The hundreds of objects plunging into the estate were black obelisks. After the black obelisks plunged into the ground, it turned dark and demonic monsters started to crawl out. Hundreds of users riding gargoyles also flew out from Rwigenberg’s stomach and headed towards Silvana. The one leading the gargoyles was a knight in black armour.

“Ark, no matter how you try to escape you are still in the palm of my hand. We met unexpectedly last time so my preparations were negligent but this time it will be different. For the moment I will step on Silvana.”

The black knight with cold eyes was Alan. And the users who flew after him were from Andel's 'Avenger' guild.

"Ark, come! This will be the site of our second battle!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The thousands of gargoyles started to attack Silvana's walls. Now that the continent was covered in darkness, Alan finally started sharpening his knife of revenge.

Descent of the Goddess

“Waaahhhh!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The thick castle walls were nestled between high cliffs. An intense battle between monsters and humans was taking place in front of the castle wall. Monsters armed with thick leather, fangs and claws collided with warriors armed with armour, shields and swords. Meanwhile, the spells of the magicians and monsters clashed and shook the area filled with death. Chaos.....the tens of thousands fighting turned it into a chaotic battle. And the chaos also affected the headquarters.

“The Heavenly Knights unit on the right side has been isolated among the enemies!”

“The spear troops who have been supporting the Heavenly Knights have been caught by Tallons!”

“The 3rd defense battalion in the centre is being destroyed by a giant!”

“The 7th division commander is requesting wide area magic support!”

A bloody messenger reported the military situation in a breathless voice.

“Move the cavalry to the right to support the Heavenly Knights unit. Have the 11th reserve battalion move to the centre and built a defense line while rescuing the survivors. And we can’t grant the 7th division’s request at the moment. Presently the support magicians can’t be moved to that area. Have them retreat to the strategy area and join with the magician unit on the left side of the hill.”

“But the 7th division will find it difficult to retreat without the support

of the magicians.”

“There are no units that are free right now!”

“.....I’ll communicate the orders.”

The messenger sighed painfully and jumped back onto the battlefield. Haverstein also sighed as he looked at the disappearing messenger.

“The monsters are stubbornly resisting.”

Haverstein looked at the castle walls with the black fog floating around it. Right now Haverstein was leading the Schudenberg expedition while they were trying to invade Pabiun Fortress. Pabiun Fortress was blocking the only passage into the Sinus Principality from Schudenberg kingdom. Over the last 100 years, Pabiun Fortress never fell despite the repeated attacks from Schudenberg. It was the same even with Pabiun Fortress occupied by monsters. Despite the Schudenberg army having 30,000 troops, they hadn’t been able to capture the fortress despite trying for 10 days. There were two significant reasons.

One reason already mentioned was that Pabiun Fortress was an impregnable fortress. And the second reason was the Black Obelisk Forest. Thanks to the Black Obelisk Forest, the monsters that died were resurrected after a scheduled amount of time passed. If the dead kept on being revived, it was the natural that the battle would come to a standstill. But a few days ago, the situation had worsened with the news that the Bristania expedition had already crossed the border and was marching towards Silrinad. If the Bristania expedition reached Silrinad first then they would become in charge. If control was taken away by the Bristania expedition then Haverstein would be divested of the commander position. Despite that, Haverstein couldn’t attack aggressively. If the Black Obelisk Forest still existed then the expedition would only receive more damage by being reckless. Then a few hours ago Haverstein received some good news.

“Hik hik hik! O-operation.....success.....”

Racard had flown from the canyon and passed on the message while panting. After crossing through Smuggler's Pass, Ark had succeeded in the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> operation. The most troublesome problem was gone! Haverstein's voice immediately resounded through the camp.

"The problem that is blocking us is gone! The Black Obelisk Forest has been destroyed and the demonic monsters are in a state of confusion so this is the perfect chance to capture the Fortress!"

Haverstein rallied all the troops and headed to attack Pabiun Fortress. Just like Haverstein expected, the demonic monsters were rushing back and forth as the obelisk was blown up. They would be unable to respond properly to the expedition's attacks. Therefore the military expedition penetrated the canyon and reached Pabiun Fortress within a few hours.

"If we continue pressing like this then it will be possible to capture the fortress by the end of the day!"

For the first time in days, the expedition army was convinced of their victory and they cheered. Of course, the biggest challenge of the castle's walls still remained. But organization rather than numbers were needed in a siege. While the demons were more systematic than ordinary monsters, it wasn't to the extent that they could endure a siege. It was the reason why the demons left the fortress and battled in the canyon. On the other hand, the expedition members were familiar with sieges and had large weapons able to break the walls. Now that the black obelisks were destroyed, the number of demons couldn't be reinforced anymore. They were able to take advantage of the demons' confusion to penetrate the canyon and reach the fortress. At this point, the expedition army were already half way to victory. Yet they still had to cross a mountain in order to win.

"Commander-nim, they've appeared!"

A desperate voice was suddenly heard from the supporter's camp. Haverstein turned around and saw that huge monsters had appeared in front of Pabiun's gates. They were giant monsters 20 metres big with chains circling their body and holding a large

pillar. Tension filled Haverstein's eyes.

“.....Gripper!”

That's right. The Grippers! The mountain standing in the way of the expedition's victory was the Grippers. No, to be exact it was the Gripper's 'Earth Blast' skill! When the Gripper used Earth Blast, all monsters within 2 kilometres had their abilities increased by 50% while the soldiers had theirs reduced by 50%. For example, if the expedition and monsters were both level 100 then the 50% increase meant the monsters' abilities were equivalent to level 150. On the other hand, the expedition forces received a 50% penalty and were reduced to level 50. Therefore there was a 3 times difference in abilities. That difference was huge in a war. If it was used then the military situation would be instantly reversed. The expedition had failed to capture Pabiun Fortress many times because of the Gripper's Earth Blast.

‘But this time the situation is different!’

“Armoured troops, all at the front gates with the large weapons!”

After receiving Haverstein's order, the catapults and Fire Barrage Crossbows aimed towards the gates. Haverstein had discovered a weakness in the Gripper's Earth Blast skill during the days spent trying to capture the fortress. It was that they needed a certain amount of space in order to use the skill. If there were any structures within the area of the skill then it would offset the impact through the earth and it wouldn't work properly. The space required was approximately 100 metres. In other words, the Grippers needed to be 100 metres away from the fortress before they could use the skill.

So the Grippers had to go through the gates. This was the reason why Haverstein hurried towards Pabiun Fortress after receiving Racard's message. If the Grippers went outside and scattered then it would be impossible to handle all of them. However, the situation changed if they were still exiting the fortress. They could intercept every Gripper when they exited the gates. So although the sacrifices weren't small, Haverstein rushed to reach the fortress. He arranged the large weapons and made sure they were aimed at the

gates. Their one objective was to intercept the Gripper.

“.....Launch!”

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Hundreds of artillery flew across the battlefield at the Grippers. The Gripper who was exiting could barely take a few steps before kneeling down and becoming tattered.

-Kuaaaaaah!

As soon as one collapsed, another Gripper exited through the gates. But the large weapons were already aimed at the gates!

“.....Launch!”

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Large weapons fired again and clouds of dust appeared. When that repeated a few times, the bodies of dozens of Grippers were piled up like a mountain. Then another Gripper once again appeared in front of the gates.

“Lord, Lord, it’s the last one!”

Racard flew towards Haverstein’s head and exclaimed. Ark hadn’t unsummoned Racard.....Ark had also moved to Shangri-La so they couldn’t communicate wirelessly.....so he helped Haverstein using satellite mode. Anyway, if they dealt with one more then they didn’t need to worry about Earth Blast! After receiving Racard’s report, the last Gripper was hit by the crossbows and catapults.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

“That’s it! Now all the obstacles in front of us are gone!”

After watching the explosion which occurred in front of the gates, Haverstein was convinced of their victory. The Earth Blast played a huge role so the monsters would become even more confused! But that sense of victory soon turned to shock.

“U-unbelievable.....!”

-Grrrrrrr.

The growl of the Gripper could be heard. The Gripper hadn't died despite being hit by all those artillery.

"H-How on earth.....?"

Haverstein murmured with an incredulous voice.

Tuduk, tuduk, syu syu syu.....

Something suddenly emerged from the body of the Gripper. After seeing what it was, Haverstein could now understand the reason behind the Gripper's incredible defense. It was a demonic monster which emerged from the body of the Gripper. The tattered demon had arrows piercing it. That's right. Before the siege weapons had attacked, the Gripper had used the surrounding demonic monsters as armour. Therefore the Gripper managed to survive the hundreds of artillery shots.

"No way! Such a thing....."

"It takes 1 minute to charge the large weapons."

"We can't just wait until then. Magic and arrows is also fine. Just stop it!"

The expedition troops fired magic and arrows after receiving Haverstein's order. However, the response of the demons also couldn't be underestimated. Thanks to the demonic monsters creeping up the Gripper's body as armour, it was able to travel 100 metres. And the Gripper finally plunged the stone pillar into the ground.

-Kuaaaah!

The Gripper then roughly pulled out its heart. The Gripper's body exploded like a bomb and a huge shock wave spread in all directions. Then a hopeless information window floated in front of the expedition members.

-The Gripper has invoked the 'Earth Blast!'

The Gripper has sacrificed its life and used the huge stone pillar to spread the impact of the curse through the earth. Sacrificing its life will give a more powerful impact. Those who receive the impact will be deprived of their power and won't be able to oppose any more evil spirits. Those within 2 kilometres who receive the impact will take 24 hours to recover their power. Meanwhile, the evil curse will strengthen the demonic influence within 2 kilometres and the monsters will become stronger.

<NPCs and users will have their abilities decreased by 50%. Monsters with the demonic influence will have their abilities increased by 50%.

Duration: 24 hours>

“In the end.....!”

Haverstein's face turned dark from the impact. Earth Blast was still used despite their efforts. Of course, the black obelisks were blown up so the Grippers couldn't be revived anymore. The last Gripper had self-destructed to use Earth Blast. They could retire outside the 2 kilometres range of Earth Blast and wait until the skill ended before attacking again. However Haverstein couldn't afford to do that now. The Bristania expedition had been advancing towards Silrinad for 3~4 days already. Even if the Schudenberg expedition managed to capture Pabiun Fortress, they still required 2~3 days to march towards Silrinad. In other words, it would be impossible for the Schudenberg expedition to catch up to the Bristania one if they couldn't capture Pabiun Fortress within one day. They couldn't afford to waste 24 hours. No, it wasn't even easy to retreat. Haverstein had advanced to the front of the fortress because he was 100% confident that he could interrupt the Earth Blast. He hadn't considered retreating at all so he developed a strategy where the troops just advanced. If he gave an order to retreat then it was possible the formations would collapse and the situation would worsen.

-Kuraka, kuraka, nohun! Arkra mojaham!

While Haverstein was hesitating, the demonic monsters started to

flow out from the fortress. The first group that emerged were the Heavy Walkers that were 10 metres big. The Heavy Walker wore thick armour like the infantry and wielded a hammer.

“Heok! Stop those guys!”

The warriors at the front hurriedly raised their shields while getting into their defense formations. The Heavy Walker had a huge body and possessed tremendous attack power. But if the warriors were in a defensive formation then it was possible to thwart it to some degree. That was now impossible thanks to the effect of Earth Blast.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The warriors hit by the Heavy Walkers flew dozens of metres away. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of the warriors.

-The attack has exceeded your defense and the ‘Guard Break’ effect is applied.

<When Guard Break is in effect, a penalty is applied to your defense and you will receive 1.5 times the damage. When getting into a defense position, it will automatically be released and ‘stun’ will occur for 3 seconds>

The Guard Break effect which was applied when the attack exceeded the defense! Guard Break was the most troublesome problem under the effect of Earth Blast. Usually armour warriors never had their defense lower than the enemy’s damage, no matter how strong the enemy was. The combination of armour, helmet, gloves, shoes etc. all contributed to a high defense. The warriors who took a defense position could also use their shields to full effect....if the shield was successfully used to defend then its defense would be applied. So the shield boasted the best defensive power of all equipment! When 100% of the shield’s defense was applied, the warrior would become like a tanker. However, the 3 times stat difference had a huge effect. The Heavy Walker was also a huge demon with tremendous attack power. After Earth Blast was used, the Heavy Walker’s attack immediately exceeded the warriors’

defense. So the expedition's defense line collapsed in vain.

-Bakuram, bakuram, puraibata, bakuram!

Following behind the Heavy Walkers were the Tallons, monsters with 5 heads and 8 arms, etc.....all the demonic monsters within the fortress shrieked and exited. With the defense formation collapsed, the monsters rampaged among the expedition's troops. Requests for help started to come from all over the place.

".....Retreat."

In the end, Haverstein sighed and gave the command to retreat. Then the unit commanders started shouted.

"What do you mean? Retreat?"

"If we retreat then we won't be able to catch up with the Bristania expedition!"

"The Bristania expedition will take control!"

"Besides.....have you forgotten? If Bristania arrives first then Commander-nim....."

"It doesn't matter if I am reassigned."

Haverstein replied through clenched teeth.

"If we retreat then we won't be able to catch up with the Bristania expedition. But if we continue to fight and are wiped out then what is the point of arriving at Silrinad first?"

"That is true however....."

"There is no time for arguing. As you can see, the military situation has completely reversed. If we continue to hold on then the sacrifices will only become larger. The strategy has already failed. We need to save as much people as possible for any future plans."

The unit commanders looked upset but they no longer raised any objections. They didn't know of any method to change the situation. Then like Haverstein said, it would be best to retreat and avoid any more damages. The Black Obelisk Forest was already

destroyed and the Grippers all killed so the next commander should have no problem capturing Pabiun Fortress. Of course the Bristania expedition would've already triumphantly entered Silrinad.

"I understand. Then Commander-nim should also retreat."

".....I will stay here until the end."

"Huh?"

"If we retreat here then leadership will be handed to Bristania and a new commander will replace me. I'm the knight who caused such problems to the kingdom. Then my job now isn't to preserve my life but save as many soldiers of the Schudenberg Kingdom as possible."

"Commander-nim!"

The unit commanders were lost in admiration after hearing Haverstein's words. However Racard's voice shattered the mood.

"Stupid people, this isn't the time to be idle!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Racard cried out as a roaring sound occurred to the right side. Haverstein and the unit commanders turned around and stiffened. The Heavy Walkers and Tallons had broken through the lines of defense and was heading towards headquarters. They had aimed to capture the fortress in this battle so the headquarters was placed too far in front. After the expedition army was pushed, the monsters immediately headed towards the headquarters.

"Heok, stop those guys!"

"Request support from the nearby unit!"

The leaders grasped the situation too late and their orders were one step behind. Before the commands could be obeyed, the defense line had been annihilated by the Heavy Walkers. Then the Tallons poured into the camp and caused chaos among the soldiers.

"Ugh, royal guards! Protect the Commander!"

The unit commanders shouted as the troops blocked the monsters. Meanwhile the royal guards had surrounded Haverstein. But before they could sneak out of headquarters, they were caught by the Heavy Walkers and attacked. The Heavy Walker's attacks caused Guard Break and the barrier created by the royal guards was pulled down. When the royal guards flew everywhere, Haverstein instantly swung his sword.

"You demons!"

Haverstein's long sword accurately split a Tallon's neck. Just like a user, the NPC's abilities varied depending on the level and skills. As the commander of the expedition, Haverstein was a high ranking NPC. He might be young but he had elite stats for a NPC. Even under the effect of Earth Blast, Haverstein's attack dealt a critical blow. Haverstein didn't miss the opportunity and continued defeating dozens of Tallons with the help of the royal guards. But killing dozens of Tallons didn't have the situation. After a short time, the royal guards were defeated and the injured Haverstein was surrounded by monsters. It was a desperate crisis! But Haverstein's face didn't show any signs of fear.

"I have no intention of leaving the commander's position alive. I have to kill even more before I die!"

Haverstein made a desperate resolution and enthusiastically rushed towards the demonic monsters. It was the true spirit of a warrior! Unfortunately, his sword couldn't keep up with his determination. After 10 minutes of fierce fighting.....

Kakakakak, chaeng!

His sword collided with a Heavy Walker's hammer and broke.

"Dammit, Dark Dash!"

Racard didn't know what to do so he closed his eyes and used Dark Dash on the Heavy Walker. Racard knew what an important person Haverstein was to Ark. Wouldn't he be beaten if he allowed Haverstein to be killed?

"Ack!"

However Racard was the one thrown back after hitting the Heavy Walker. If the users' attacks that were affected by Earth Blast didn't work properly then naturally Racard's attacks wouldn't work either. When Haverstein stumbled and fell, the Tallons swarmed like ants.

"Ugh! Is it going to end here?"

Haverstein murmured in a hopeless voice.

"Oooohhh! T-they're here!"

Racard who was touching the bump on his head suddenly looked out and shouted. At that moment, a voice rang out through the battlefield.

"Demonic Distortion!"

Then an amazing scene occurred in front of Haverstein. Something appeared in the sky over the battlefield. They were swords, spears, armour and various other equipment. The equipment tangled together and formed a pentagon. After floating in the air for a bit, the equipment then exploded. And the surrounding space started to mysteriously warp. There was a sucking sensation from the warped space and the monsters surrounding Haverstein were sucked in.

"T-this is.....?"

Haverstein's crisis had been averted. Then 200 different people appeared in the warped space. Haverstein was shock after seeing their faces.

"Y-you guys?"

"Please retreat to the back. Take this, Dark Strike!"

One man moved like a flash of light. At the same time, the Heavy Walker approaching behind Haverstein received heavy damage and stumbled. The man dived at the Heavy Walker and continuously wielded his sword. Dozens of attacks hit the Heavy Walker's body like a meteor shower. The Heavy Walker couldn't counterattack properly and collapsed.

“.....Fortunately I’m not too late.”

The man smiled and turned around after handling the Heavy Walker. Haverstein gaped with surprise before exclaiming.

“Ark!”

That’s right. The one holding a sword with a dark aura was Ark.

“You’ve returned. By the way, that vortex just now? How did you.....?”

“I’ll explain later.”

Ark said to Haverstein before looking around.

“The situation isn’t as good as I expected.”

“.....As you can see. You risked your life to blow up the Black Obelisk Forest but we couldn’t stop the Earth Blast so it turned out like this. At present the Bristania expedition will reach Silrinad and even if we retreat, there is no guarantee we can do it safely.”

“Retreat? Is that a joke?”

Ark shook his head at the ridiculousness of those words. Then he raised a palm in front of Haverstein and said.

“5 minutes. Give me 5 minutes. I assure you. You’ll be able to capture Pabiun Fortress after exactly 5 minutes.”

“5 minutes? What does that mean? The effect of Earth Blast still hasn’t disappeared.....”

“I don’t have time to explain in detail. Believe in me and delay the retreat by 5 minutes.”

Ark interrupted Haverstein and spoke bluntly. Haverstein looked at Ark before shouting to the leaders nearby.

“Quickly send a signal to all troops on the battlefield. Cancel the orders for a retreat. Maintain the current position. Concentrate on defense and wait for the next command!”

“You won’t regret your choice.”

Ark checked the signal flare in the sky with a smile and turned his body.

“You know the situation right? There is no time to be playing around.”

The people who appeared with Ark simultaneously pulled out their weapons. Around 70 special forces had survived the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> operation. But they weren’t the only people who appeared from the vortex.

“Grrrrr.”

“You can see the demonic monsters.”

“We can’t let them win!”

130 people with fangs also appeared among the group and glared at the demons. With white fur and black strops, they were the White Tiger clan that protected Shangri-La. Ark looked around and directed the White Tiger clan and special forces.

“The special forces will help the main army to restore the defense line. Each White Tiger member will move with a special forces member.”

Before arriving at the battlefield, the White Tigers had already been paired off. There was a reason Ark organized it this way. Based on their experience in the canyon, the White Tiger clan were the strongest! The NPCs were stronger than the level 350 special forces.

‘But they don’t have experience in a group battle.’

That was the only disadvantage with the White Tigers. They were born with the power of the tiger and were without a doubt the strongest warriors. But they were born and lived in Shangri-La so they didn’t have battle experience. That was the reason a few White Tigers died at the canyon. They just ran in blindly and became the focus of the concentrated attacks.

‘I have to teach them how to fight in a group if I want to take

advantage of their power.'

This was the conclusion Ark came to. But it took time to teach them tricks of a group battle. They were beast NPCs so there was no guarantee how long it would take to teach them to fight like humans. So he came up with the system of pairing the White Tigers with the soldiers. The special forces were the elite users from the expedition force so they had a good grasp on how to move in a war. When paired with their tactics, the abilities of the White Tigers could be utilized to full effect. Ark was able to confirm that effect straight away.

-Kuaaaaaah!

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When the Heavy Walkers used Guard Break and the defense of the special forces decreased and they became stunned. There was no way to stop the onslaught of the Heavy Walkers!

"Keuaaaaang!"

Then 1 of the White Tiger members ran up to the Heavy Walker. The White Tiger jumped up and dug their fangs into the neck of the Heavy Walker. The Heavy Walker shrieked and shook its body but the fangs didn't move. After knocking down the Heavy Walker, the special forces members who weren't stunned anymore helped the White Tiger. The White Tiger removed his fangs and licked his lips that were wet with blood before seeking another prey. But the soldier shook his head and said.

"It is dangerous to go out from now on. We should have the defense camp for now."

The White Tiger stepped back after the soldier's words. The White Tigers helped the lacking offensive power of the soldiers while the soldiers helped the White Tigers with their tactics.

'The urgent fire has been put out.'

Ark looked around with satisfaction. Before Ark's troops arrived, the headquarters had been completely surrounded by the demonic

monsters. But Ark had exchanged 200 monsters with Demonic Distortion. Therefore the number of demons around headquarters was reduced while Ark's group appeared there. The defense formation of headquarters which had fallen into confusion was restored with the appearance of the White Tigers and the special forces.

'Now, shall I get started?'

Ark turned around and looked at the White Tigers. Around 70 White Tigers had joined the battle with the 70 special forces so there were 60 still remaining. They were gathered to protect the 10 prophets in the centre. That's right. Some prophets had accompanied Ark's group. There was a reason the prophets came to the battlefield despite having no combat power. It was because of the big box a prophet was carrying. The old wooden box was the Ark of Creation kept in Shangri-La for hundreds of years!

"Lariette-nim!"

Ark shouted and Lariette nodded. The prophets lowered the Ark of Creation to the ground. The prophets began to circle the ark while kneeling and humming.

"Tasha, Naburan heirado narado....."

"Sinarudo maguran harena boradu baram....."

When the prophets started chanting spells, light immediately began to flow around the ark. But strangely the light was a mixture of black and white light which seemed to be fighting. But the tainted light disappeared when Lariette approached and touch the Ark of Creation, causing a bright light to shoot up into the dark sky.

-Kurak, baguram, baguram!

The demonic monsters started shrieking. Until then, the thousands of demonic monsters had been recklessly attacking the expedition. In fact, the monsters hadn't intended to attack the headquarters and were just randomly attacking. But when the light shot up from the sky to pierce the darkness, the movements of the demons immediately changed. They all shrieked and started to head towards

the pillar of light.

‘I thought it would become like this.’

Ark had expected this situation and arranged some troops around the Ark of Creation.

“Now switch to a defense formation! All troops concentrate on protecting this area!”

The special forces and White Tiger clan formed a circle around the ark and got into a defense formation. Then Ark looked at Shambala and laughed.

“What are you doing? Come! It is time to work Shambala.”

“What? You want me to fight? Am I your pet? Even if you shed tears begging me to help you.....”

“Stop joking around. I used the ‘1 time Shambala use’ coupon. You should be a little more compliant.”

“What do you mean? I’ve already.....”

“I didn’t want you to help with the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> operation.”

Ark laughed and muttered. That’s right. When Ark used the ‘1 time Shambala use’ coupon, he hadn’t clearly stated what the condition was. He just spoke ambiguously that he wanted Shambala’s help with this war. Shambala thought he meant helping with the operation to blow up the black obelisks.

!”Didn’t I say that I wanted help with this war?”

“What? Then you meant?”

“Yes, the ‘1 time Shambala use’ coupon will last until this war ends. And you’ve already agreed.”

“This bastard! Only saying that now.....”

Shambala glared at Ark’s shameless answer. But Ark just murmured cunningly.

“You and I are friends. Isabel will be disappointed if you don’t keep promises with your friends.”

“.....You cheeky bastard!”

Shambala gave up and took out his daggers before entering the battlefield. Despite his anger, he didn’t want Isabel to know him as someone who broke promises.

‘Kekeke, what an innocent fellow. He is like my pet now.’

Ark looked at the back of Shambala’s head and laughed. But Shambala was just a bonus. Ark’s summons were a separate matter

“Racard!”

“Yes Master!”

“Use satellite surveillance mode and keep repeating the movements of the monsters!”

“Understood, roger!”

Racard flew like a bullet into the sky at Ark’s command. He switched to satellite mode and occasionally reported updates about the battlefield.

“200 monsters consisting of Tallons ad Heavy Walkers are approaching from the right side!”

“Alright! Shambala, move to the right side defense line. Summon Demon Purital, Clad Armour!”

Ark rushed to the target area and shouted.

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Purital was summoned to the area behind Ark. As soon as Purital appeared, his bones were taken apart and reformed around Ark. The ribs split to cover his upper body while the skull covered his head like a helmet. The leg and arm bones twisted strangely and stuck to Ark’s gloves and shoes.

||-You have used Clad Armour.

* Damage will increase by 17~22.

* Defense will increase by 98.

* Health will increase by 1,866.

<If the 1,866 health is consumed then Clad Armour will automatically dismantle>

“Flash!”

The transformed Ark brandished his sword and shouted. Ark swept through the group of Tallons like a lightning bolt. The heads of the Tallons that Ark pierced spouted blood like a fountain. Even with Earth Blast increasing their abilities by 50%, the health of the Tallons was drained.

“.....This is no joke.”

Ark looked at his sword that had a black aura around it. It was the ‘Shining Darkness’ that he received as a quest reward for <Witness the Legend>. The attack was 55~65! This was 15 more than the Promised Sword’s base damage. In addition, it dealt an extra 10% against demonic monsters. Purital also increased his attack by 17~22. In the end, Shining Darkness’ attack increased by 37~42. This number was similar to Ark’s original damage. In other words, his damage had increase by more than two times. But that was just the base damage. His damage against demons increased thanks to Demonic Response. Currently, the level of ‘Demonic Response’ was IV. This meant a 40% damage bonus when dealing with demonic monsters.

‘I’m also impervious to the Demonic sphere of influence!’

Ark smiled as he used Dark Blade and turned the Tallons into rags. That’s right. Ark had the dark attribute so the Demonic sphere of influence didn’t affect him. It was the same even with the effect of Earth Blast amplifying the sphere of influence. In fact, the black fog caused darkness so Ark received the 50% dark attribute bonus even in the daytime. Well, that was offset by the demons also having their stats increased by 50%. But besides the dark attribute bonus, Ark

also had the Demonic Response IV which increased his attack by 40%. Along with the 10% bonus of Shining Darkness, that was a 50% bonus against the demons. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that Dark Soul was a profession specialized towards fighting against demonic monsters.

"Dark Strike!"

Pepepepeng, pepepepeng!

The Tallons went flying whenever Ark swung their swords. It was ineffective even if the Tallons tried to use their shields or weapons. This time Ark was the one who used Guard Break against the demonic monsters. Moreover, Shambala was also fighting near Ark.

"Shambala, take the right side!"

"Sheesh, you don't have to say it again. Torrential Sword!"

Shambala spun his body like a spinning top and dozens of daggers appeared in the area. The Heavy Walker who was running towards Ark became like a hedgehog and stumbled. Assassins possessed the dark attribute so Shambala also wasn't affected by the demonic sphere of influence. He actually had a dark attribute bonus similar to Ark. It wasn't that different from dealing with general monsters of a similar level. They already weren't rivals for Shambala anymore.

"Sun, Gae, Yeol, Seom!"

Shambala ran lightly across the battlefield with his dagger. Shambala would never admit it and he argued every time but he liked fighting together with Ark. If Ark attacked to the right then Shambala would automatically rotate to the left and attack. If Shambala ever rushed an opponent then Ark would go behind him and prevent any attacks from the rear. It was a perfect combination! The demons collapsed one-sidedly when the two people moved in unison. Thanks to Earth Blast, an ordinary user couldn't even last against one demon. Yet the two of them were one-sidedly slaughtering dozens of monsters.

"T-that is ridiculous.....!"

“Two people are stronger than a unit?”

“I heard rumours that they are Dark Wolf and Blue Sword.....”

“Dark Wolf and Blue Sword!”

“They interrupted a huge war and helped Seutandal rise! If we have Dark Wolf and Blue Sword then it is possible to win this battle! They will create a similar legend to Seutandal!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

Thanks to Ark and Shambala’s actions, the expedition army regained their morale and pushed back against the demonic monsters while shouting. However, motivation wasn’t enough to change the tide of the war. In addition, the monsters were crowding around the Ark of Creation! While other troops were able to escape the crisis, the headquarters was receiving the concentrated attacks from thousands of monsters. No matter how much Ark and Shambala raised the morale of the soldiers, it was impossible for them to block all the demons.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

After a few minutes. In the end, part of the defensive line around headquarters collapsed. Ark and Shambala were on the opposite side of that place.

“Damn, if the defense line collapses then headquarters will become dangerous! Special forces and the White Tiger clan will reinforce the part that collapsed. “Shambala, there’s no time. Push them to one place so we can quickly take care of those guys.”

“I know! Torrential Sword!”

Shambala might’ve complained but he still pushed the demonic monsters to one place. They were finally gathered in a large group. Ark’s eyes brightened and he shouted.

“White Tiger’s Roar!”

Keuaaaaang!

A huge tiger appeared above Ark's head and roared. A tremendous shock wave spread and caused the demonic monsters to stumble. White Tiger's Roar was a special option attached to the 'White Tiger's Cloak' that was flapping from Ark's back.

-White Tiger's Cloak (Rare)

Armour type: Mantle

Defense: 35 Durability: 60/60

Weight: 35 User restriction: Level 400

A cloak made from the leather of the White Tiger clan that lives in the snow covered mountains to the north of the continent. The White Tiger clan was known for their valour and received the duty of protecting the prophet clan living in Shangri-La from Hero Maban. The valour of the White Tiger clan is lodged in this cloak and can be used in different types of situations.

<Option: Immune to effects that decrease morale. Courage +30%, Agility +30>

<Special Option (White Tiger's Roar): The tiger is known as one of the reigning beasts. Therefore the white tiger possesses the dignity required to subdue lesser animals. The White Tiger's Roar causes all enemies within a 100 metre area to tremble with fear.

Cool down time: 1 hour. Mana consumption: 200>

This cloak was the compensation for the <Shangri-La> quest. The White Tiger clan elders gave it to him after safely bringing the Nuran residents to Shangri-La. That was another reason Ark headed to Shangri-La after exiting the canyon. The <Shangri-La> quest was an additional quest that he could solve in one go. And the difficulty of that quest was A+. Therefore the quest rewards would also be considerable. It was a rare cloak that raised courage by 30% and agility by 30! There was also the White Tiger's Roar which caused fear among the enemies. However, there was another meaning being the rare 'White Tiger's Cloak.' As soon as Ark received the cloak from the White Tiger elder, a new information window

appeared.

-The set items' effect has been applied.

You have equipped a new item in the set.

-Set

A special set of items that craftsmen created for an ancient hero. Naturally, the effects will become more powerful when the number of equipped set items increases. If you obtain all the items in a set then the effects will be beyond compare.

* Currently equipped set items: <Animal King>

『Raccoon's Pith』 『Cat Paws』 『Guardian Armour of the Merpeople』 『Wolf's Feet』 『White Tiger's Cloak』

You have equipped 5 items in the <Animal King> set and an additional effect will be applied.

<Wild Ability: Strength +20 (+15), Agility +20 (+15), Stamina +20 (+15), Defense +40 (+30)>

<The Animal King set has been completed and the bonus skill [Wild Strength] can be used>

That's right. It was the set completion! Ark had met several beast clans and received a set equipment as a reward. So he had obtained 4 of the Animal King set. There was only one remaining until the set was complete. But the set was finally completed after obtaining the White Tiger's Cloak. Once the set was completed, the bonus given far surpassed the previous ones. When he added up the combined stats that increased, strength, stamina and agility increase by 35 while defense increased by 70! The additional bonus of the set effect was the same as gaining 16~17 levels.

'It's good that I haven't changed the equipment in the meantime!'

In fact, Ark had obtained several equipment better than his current ones but the set effect was valuable so he had kept it. But as his

level grew, the equipment had been reaching his limit. Now that the set was completed and he checked the added bonus, all his worries were settled. However, the set completion bonus wasn't just additional stats.

“Wild Strength!”

Ark cried out after causing fear with the White Tiger's Roar. At the same time, Ark's equipment started shining. The armour, helmet, gloves, shoes.....

The forms of the beasts Ark obtained the equipment from floated in front of the equipment. From the armour was a mermaid swimming in the ocean, the helmet had a raccoon digging a tunnel, the gloves had the Meow jumping around the trees while they shoes had the wolves howling on the plains. Finally from the fluttering cloak emerged a white tiger roaring from the top of a snow-covered mountain.

A message window floated in front of Ark the moment the white tiger roaring from the mountain appeared.

-The Wild Strength skill from the Animal King set has been activated.

These equipment are connected with several beast clans who live in New World. Each equipment contains a property of the beast clan in it. Although the species are different, they live in the natural ecosystems and have an inseparable symbiotic relationship with each other. When equipped with these equipment, the mutual power will react and you will be given a strong power. When all the equipment is worn, the wearer's potential would explode and Wild Strength will be unleashed.

<Wild Strength: Unlike the wild beasts, humans are only able to display 60% of their strength. In moments of crisis, humans can display 100% of their power! When Wild Strength is used, the power sleeping inside the user will awaken by 100% and the effectiveness of all skills will increase by 50% for 10 minutes. However, the mana consumption for all skills will increase by 100%.

Cool down time: 12 hours>

* Passive skills are excluded

It was the option Wild Strength that he obtained from collecting all of the Animal King set. It increased the effectiveness of all skills by 50% for 10 minutes. This meant all offensive skills would gain an additional 50% damage. Well, he consumed double the mana instead but he could show tremendous power for a short period of time.

“Radun, a demonic sealed sword!”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

“Blade Tempest!”

Radun spat out a sword and quickly made it explode. The cursed sword shattered and caused a storm. After receiving various bonuses, Ark’s combat power had increased. The cursed sword also had a lot of damage. Thanks to Wild Strength will increased all skills by 50%, the power of Blade Tempest surpassed imagination. It wasn’t just the damage but also the number of fragments that changed. Usually the sword broke into hundreds of pieces when Blade Tempest was triggered. But the power of the skill had increased by 50% thanks to Wild Strength. Therefore the sword broke into 1,000 pieces.

When the sword fragments collided with a body, sparks flew and the whole space was swallowed up. The demons inside the storm had their health sucked out at a tremendous rate. When the storm passed, the unsteady demonic monsters were in various tattered states. The demons couldn’t even heal. The demons were in various pieces with limbs cut off that they couldn’t even recognize themselves, let alone check their health.

“Now. Finish them quickly and concentrate on the defense on the other side.”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

The discouraged soldiers ran over with surprised looks. The demons were already in a state of panic from Blade Tempest and couldn't withstand the assault from the soldiers. After Ark gave the order, he rushed over with Shambala to the collapsed defense line. But despite Ark and Shambala's struggles, the situation was still worsening. Thanks to the light from the Ark of Creation, 4~5 times the number of demons were already crowding headquarters.

"All units should concentrate on headquarters and construct defense lines!"

Haverstein called the expedition forces to headquarters but it was already overrun by demonic monsters. The units had arrived too late so they could only attack the monsters on the outskirts. The monsters ignored the expedition members and just attacked headquarters even more violently. The numbers of demons kept on increasing no matter how many Ark and Shambala killed.

Flash, kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

An intense flash of light suddenly appeared at headquarters.

"That's it!"

Ark turned his back on the demonic monsters. At the same time, a tremendous view unfolded in front of him.

".....Descend to this earth, Great Mother of Creation!"

The prophets surrounding the Ark of Creation simultaneously raised their heads and chanted a spell. The Ark of Creation opened and a pure white light shot into the sky. It spun like a whirlwind and was sucked into Lariette's body. When the light entwined with Lariette's body, her body became thousands of times larger. The Lariette who rose against the background of the black sky was different. With black hair like obsidian, crystal clear eyes and skin as white as a snowfield, she was a surprisingly beautiful woman.....no, it was the form of a goddess.

"T-that is.....?"

When she appeared, everybody forgot themselves and looked up

captivated. Even the demonic monsters stared.

Kuoooooh-!

Shining silvery wings with thousands of eyes on it unfolded from the goddess' back. The huge wings reached several kilometres.....The wings flapped and swept through the black fog. And light started to cover the space where the wings flapped. At first it was a small and soft light until it spread and exploded like a big bang.

Ku kwa kwa kwa kwa, ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The light that touched the black fog swallowed it up.

“Huck! E-explosion? Avoid it!”

When the explosion occurred, the expedition forces screamed and rushed all over the place. However the entire area was exploding. There was no place to run away. Eventually the expedition members were caught by the blast. But the expedition members were all confused in the next moment. There was no impact from being involved in the explosion. No, instead they actually started recovering instead of being damaged.

“The heavy spirit pressing down on my body has disappeared.”

“But there's more. This aura gushing from my chest.....”

“I don't know why but my courage is rising quickly!”

The expedition members murmured as they were enveloped with light.

-Keuahahak!

But the demonic monsters caught in the explosion were different. Their flesh burnt from the explosion and the health dropped. Suddenly a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-The Ark of creation has been triggered!
--

The power of the Creator who made this world in the beginning is contained inside the Ark of Creation. Because both light and dark
--

were a part of the Creator, this power can be used for light or darkness. If used by a Holy Knight then it can be a blessing or a curse if used by a Ruin Knight.

When a Saint Knight calls upon the inner light (Sanctuary: Saint).

When a Ruin Knight calls upon the darkness (Sanctuary: Devil).

-Saint Knight's special ability 'Sanctuary: Saint' has been triggered.

<All effects related to the 'Demonic Sphere of Influence' within 10 kilometres will be completely destroyed.

The area blessed with the effect from the Ark of Creation can't be affected by the 'Demonic Sphere of Influence' or the 'Black Obelisk' for 1 year.

In addition, all demonic monsters within the light will receive 1~2,000 damage. However all allies will regain 1~1,000 health, have all abnormal states removed and morale increased by 50%>

'This is the effect of Ark of Creation.'

Ark's eyes widened after he checked the information window. In fact, Ark hadn't known the effect of the Ark of Creation. The prophet clan protecting the Ark of Creation was the same as well. All he knew was that the Ark of Creation had the power to drive back the darkness. He was sure that the Ark of Creation would change the military situation but was uncertain about the rest. Nevertheless, he talked confidently to Haverstein because he couldn't let them retreat. If the expedition retreated then Haverstein would lose his position. If that happened then Ark would become bankrupt.

'It will be the same as dying! If there is even the slightest chance then I have to take it!'

That was Ark's thought. However, the effect of the Ark of Creation was unthinkable. All the black fog within a 10 kilometres distance was destroyed. It meant the effect of the Demonic Sphere of Influence also disappeared. All the bonuses given to the demonic monsters had faded! The demons lost their 50% bonus with the

supporters recovered the 50% stats. In addition, the demons caught in the explosion were damaged while the allies had their health recovered and morale increased by 50%. The situation had reversed.

“What on earth.....?”

Haverstein muttered as he looked up at the blue sky. Ark replied with a wicked grin.

“Now we can fight back.”

Haverstein looked around after hearing Ark’s words. The expedition members who had been looking battered now looked recovered. On the other hand, the demons had lost their bonuses and looked fearful. It was obvious to everybody. The side of victory had tipped.....

“Do you see? We have the will of God. Now we will take that will of God and show the power of justice. Defeat the demons!”

“Waaahhhh!”

The expedition members shouted as they attacked. The demons had seen the pillar of light and swarmed the headquarters. And the expedition members were gathered around the outskirts because of Haverstein’s order. The result was obvious. With all the bonuses and penalties gone, the demons were no match for the military expedition. And their morale rose even more when the enemy weakly died. On the other hand, the demonic monsters had completely lost their fighting spirit. When the expedition members cried out and pressed forward, the demons quickly collapsed.

And Pabiun Fortress that they struggled with for more than 10 days was captured in a few hours.

War to Secure the Sacred Blood

“There is no doubt that we managed to capture Pabiun Fortress thanks to you and the special forces.”

Pabiun Fortress had finally been captured and arrangements after the battle were being cleared up. Haverstein embraced Ark and said those words. Then a message window floated in front of Ark.

-The sub quest <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> has been completed.

The Schudenberg expedition has been stuck at Pabiun Fortress for a long time and had been unable to enter the Sinius Principality. You and the special forces have risked your lives to accomplish this mission and managed to capture Pabiun Fortress as well as passage into the Sinius Principality.

<Compensation: Achievement +3000>

+ Commander Additional Compensation: Achievement +1000

“Ohhh 3000 achievement points!”

The eyes of the special forces members sparkled as the quest was completed. In the battlefield it was common to gain only 5~15 achievements yet they had earned a few hundred times that from one quest. But this was the laws of the world. The infantry killing dozens of enemies couldn't change the landscape of the war. However, the special forces penetrated the enemy's camp and changed the landscape of the war with one explosion. It was natural for the special forces who risked their lives to gain more achievements. Once again, if they hadn't blown up the Black Obelisk Forest and obtained the Ark of Creation then Pabiun Fortress wouldn't have been able to be captured.

Of course, finding the Ark of Creation would've impossible if he

hadn't begun the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> operation. Even the users who fought and died received between 2,500~3,000 achievement points. So the special forces had collected achievements a lot more quickly. As the commander of the special forces, Ark gained an additional 1,000 achievement. He also played an active role as the supplier so he had scraped together 6,000 achievements.

'In fact, I had to give up a certain degree.....'

His saliva dried up as he confirmed the achievements. According to how much achievements he accumulated, the compensation for the <Schudenberg Expedition's Crusade> would change. However, the compensation for this wasn't just in the game. Ha Myung-woo from Global Exos had formally declared on TV that there was a huge reward for this war against the demons. The total prize pool was worth 10 billion won!

If they received first place in either the Schudenberg or Bristania expedition then the reward received was 300 million won. But there were at least 30,000 users participating in each expedition. In other words, the competitive rate was 30,000 to 1. It was like winning the lottery so Ark hadn't expected to get it from the beginning. But that changed once the war actually began.

'Hopefully.....'

He had started to think like that. Besides, this event also had a higher cash prize than receiving the no.1 rank in achievements. It was finding something hidden in New World. Surprisingly the reward prize was 1 billion won. And that was Ark's target.

'Ordinary users will have no idea what 'that' thing was. I am the same but I have a lot more information than they do. That is enough for me to aim for it.'

That's right. It was the hidden secret behind the event! Ark had already heard about it from Global Exos. It was the 'black code' items that Ho Myung-hwan talked about. After his encounter with Andel and Alan, Ark had more information about other the black code items than other users. So Ark had decided to give up on

earning achievements when the event started.

‘But the situation has changed. The prizes for the 1st ranked achievement and finding the black code item is separate. Doesn’t it mean that I could possibly receive both prizes? That is 300 million won for the achievements and 1 billion won for finding the target item. In other words, it is possible to gain 1.3 billion won from this event!’

1.3 billion won! It was money that a mere citizen like Ark had difficulty imagining. It was money that was difficult to imagine in reality. The thought made his heart jump like crazy. But Ark shook off the thought with a shake of his head. In the present situation, it was possible for Ark to aim for both prizes. But it was just an aim. The possibility of it being achieved was very low.

.....The Demonic War was just beginning. No one knew what would happen in the future. There was no guarantee about what could happen so wasn’t it better for him to focus on things that would actually earn money?

‘It doesn’t change the fact that it is still like winning the lottery.’

Ark escaped from the delusion of 1.3 billion won and started putting things in order. He had settled the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest>, the <Witness the Legend> and the <Shangri-La> quests. He had gained 4,000 achievements, the legendary sword Shining Darkness and the final piece of his set equipment, the White Tiger’s Cloak. It was severing three things with one stroke! But the biggest harvest was.....

“You said you would explain later. Who are those people in hoods and the beasts? No. What is the box that they brought which gave Lariette miraculous powers?”

Haverstein asked at that moment with curious eyes. It was the miraculous power which overturned the situation where the expedition was threatened! As the commander of the military expedition, Haverstein was naturally curious. Ark had expected this question and explained straightforwardly.

“It is called the Ark of Creation and it has the power of the Creator sealed inside it. The chest belonged to the 7 heroes during the Dark Century and the entrusted it to the prophet clan to protect. The demons actually flocked here in order to steal the power within the Ark of Creation.”

“In order to steal the power within the Ark of Creation?”

“That is the reason but.....”

Ark hesitated and recalled the description that a prophet gave him in Shangri-La. The power of ‘Sanctuary’ activated by the Ark of Creation clearly proved deadly to the demonic monsters. However, they didn’t want to steal the ark just because of the threat.

“The Creator made darkness as well as light. It is both good and evil. Then if a Saint Knight used the ark then it would spread a blessing but if a Ruin Knight used it then it would spread a curse. If a Saint Knight obtains the ark then it would display great power against the darkness. But if a Ruin Knight obtains it then conversely it will show great strength against the light.”

The power of the Ark of Creation had already been verified.

“If the demons get their hands on the Ark of Creation.....”

Haverstein murmured in a trembling voice at the fearful thought. Then he asked again after a short time.

“Then the only one who can use the Ark of Creation is Lariette?”

“Yes, on our side only Lariette can use it.”

Ark looked at Lariette and answered. In fact, Lariette had changed a lot from when she was in Shangri-La. Her body still had a light glow around it. The reason was associated with Lariette’s profession. When Ark arrived at Shangri-La, he discovered that Lariette had received the quest to look for the Ark of Creation from a bishop. It was a profession change quest for the Innocence Knight. And Lariette changed to a Saint Knight after obtaining the Ark of Creation. The glow emitted from Lariette’s body was the passive skill ‘Permanent Brilliance’ which increased defense and

damage against demonic monsters by 40%. The descendants of the 7 heroes gained abilities specialized for dealing with demonic monsters. It was revealed at Shangri-La that the 7 heroes expected the Dark Lord to be resurrected and arranged to convey those powers to foreigners.

‘It really is dazzling in many ways.’

A sigh naturally flowed out when he saw the shining Lariette. Anyway, the only ones who could use the Ark of Creation’s power was a Saint Knight or a Ruin Knight. Although Ark still didn’t know that Alan was a Ruin Knight. And despite the Ark of Creation being brought into the expedition’s hand, it was like Lariette was the owner.

.....This was the part Ark felt strongly about. In fact, Ark had been full of dreams when he heard about the Ark of Creation. Once again, the reason Ark executed this mission was to ensure that the Schudenberg expedition reached Silrinad before the Bristania expedition. If the Bristania expedition arrived first then Haverstein would be replaced and Ark would lose all his profits. But that worry was gone thanks to the Ark of Creation. The Bristania expedition was expected to arrive in Silrinad in 3~4 days but the Schudenberg expedition could get there in 2~3 days after capturing the fortress. Of course, the Sinus Principality had black obelisks stuck everywhere and demonic monsters were swarming. There was no guarantee about what they would encounter after passing through Pabiun Fortress.

But it was the same for the Bristania expedition so there was no reason for the Schudenberg expedition to arrive later. Although the Bristania expedition had 80,000 troops, the Schudenberg expedition had something to fill up the gap left by insufficient numbers. It was the Ark of Creation! No, in fact it didn’t matter who arrived in Silrinad first now. The final goal of the expeditions was to purge the demonic monsters from the continent. In order to do that, the influence of the black obelisks had to be perfectly cleansed. If they didn’t completely destroy the black obelisks then wouldn’t it just be resurrected later? Despite all the magicians and priests in each kingdom working on a way to purify the Demonic Sphere of Influence, the perfect way

to do that had fallen into the hands of the Schudenberg expedition.

That's right. The Ark of Creation was the key to resolving the Demonic War. A sigh naturally flowed from Ark's mouth at the thought.

'If I could handle it.....'

He could negotiate a significant amount of money from both kingdoms in order to allow the expeditions to use it. But was that all? The Ark of Creation was able to turn the tide of the war so he could gain a lot of achievements. If that happened then he could get his hands on the 1.3 billion won prize money!

'But Lariette-nim is the only one that can use the Ark of Creation.....'

It would become difficult to engage in business involving the Ark of Creation. But who was Ark? He was an unscrupulous merchant who didn't let go of even a single blade of grass! It was a lucrative treasure so Ark wasn't going to give up the chance to earn money. And Ark found a way to make money from it in an unexpected direction. It was the prophet clan who provided Ark with a hint.

'Huhuhu, I can't miss this opportunity.'

Ark was smiling at his thoughts when he heard Haverstein's voice again.

"This is a big deal. With the Ark of Creation, we can fully cleanse the black fog spreading from the black obelisks on the continent.

This is the method to save the continent."

Haverstein continuously praised Ark's achievements in a cheerful voice. But Ark's next words poured cold water on Haverstein's giddy mood.

"I'm sorry but the Ark of Creation can't be used at the moment.

".....Can't be used? What do you mean?"

"Actually, a significant amount of 'Sacred Blood' is required in order to use the Ark of Creation.

“Sacred Blood?”

“This.”

Ark took out a few small, red stones from his bag.

-Sacred Blood (Special)

A mysterious stone rarely found in deep dungeons. This stone is called Sacred Blood and has something to do with an ancient myth. According to the ancient myth, the Creator used its own body to make the world.

The pieces of skin became the earth while the bones became various minerals. And the oceans and lakes were made with blood and tears. But when separating the body, some blood mixed with the pieces of skin and became buried underground. These pieces hardened after several thousand years passed. Because it contains the hardened blood of the Creator, the Sacred Blood is said to be the closest thing to the Creator's body which exists in this age.

But this is not confirmed as it reacts like a common stone to magic and solvents.

“These stones are necessary to use the Ark of Creation?”

Haverstein asked after examining the Sacred Blood.

“Yes, there is a legend that the Sacred Blood is a hardened drop of the Creator's Blood.”

“I have heard of that legend before.”

The person who answered was Nadin, the person in charge of spreading supplies. He dealt with various supplies so was well-versed in different legends.

“But wasn't that a rumour some merchant used to try and sell the Sacred Blood?”

“It's not just a rumour.”

“Then the Sacred Blood really contains the blood of the Creator?”

“That is unknown....but the Ark of Creation contains the Creator’s power. And the Sacred Blood is its source of power. Therefore it is highly likely that the legend of the Sacred Blood isn’t entirely unfounded.”

“The legend of the Sacred Blood isn’t the important thing.”

Haverstein said after looking at Ark.

“The important thing is to collect the Sacred Blood so we can use the Ark of Creation.”

“Yes, but the problem is that it is fairly difficult to obtain the Sacred Blood.”

Ark mock sighed and replied. The Ark of Creation consumed 100 Sacred Blood with every use! When considering the future, there was no telling how many Sacred Blood was needed. But like Ark said, it wasn’t that easy to secure the Sacred Blood. Despite the legend attached to the information window, it still seemed like an ordinary stone. It couldn’t be used as a magic equipment or be used in jewellery since it was a plain stone. Therefore the NPC stores weren’t willing to buy it. In other words, the only way to purchase the Sacred Blood was through users. That’s why it was difficult for Ark to obtain the Sacred Blood.

“We have no choice but to use the Ark of Creation to purify the black fog in the Sinius Principality. So it is most important to obtain a reliable supply of Sacred Blood. But it can only be bought from foreigners so it is difficult to obtain a steady supply.”

“Do you have a solution?”

“There is a way.....”

Ark hesitated before carefully replying.

“The problem is money.”

“Money?”

“Yes, the Sacred Blood is a stone rarely found. The foreigners

haven't discovered its uses yet but they have a lot of curiosity so they won't sell it cheaply. And in order to obtain a steady supply, men would have to be sent to various places to buy it. So considerable labour costs are required."

"I know what you mean."

Haverstein nodded as if he understood. And he answered in a firm voice.

"But the Ark of Creation is the key to settling the Demonic War. We have to secure the Sacred Blood no matter how much it costs so please put all your efforts into it."

'It's a success!'

Ark nodded with a smile of satisfaction at Haverstein's words. This was the method Ark used to gain money from the Ark of Creation. In fact, it was quite difficult for Ark to secure the Sacred Blood. But even if it was a rare item, there were millions of users in New World. There would always be some for him to buy. Still the reason Ark exaggerated it was to raise the price of the Sacred Blood. Currently Ark was supplying the expedition with munitions at 70% of the market price. But that was possible because Ark was participating in the production of the supplies. But if he bought it from the foreigners and sold it at 70% then he would suffer a loss.

So Ark had included a provision when making the contract for the exclusive supplies. If the commander and quartermaster acknowledged an exception for an item then he could get 10% of the purchase fee. In other words, if an exception was authorized then Ark would obtain a profit of 10%. Of course, the Sacred Blood was the exception item. No matter how much he bought in the end, Ark could make a profit of 10%. However, the reason Ark raised a fuss was to obtain more profit. In other words, he could state the he required additional labour fees in order to obtain a steady supply of the Sacred Blood. And the Schudenberg expedition had no choice but to buy the Sacred Blood in order to use the Ark of Creation.

'Hopefully I can gain 20% of the purchase price because of the handling fee and still obtain a lot of Sacred Blood. If the price inflates

then I can receive several thousand gold in profit.'

Ark thought like that and made an even bigger fuss.

"Well, money isn't the only problem to obtaining the Sacred Blood.....

But I know the important of the Ark of Creation so I will mobilize my guild and try my best to secure it. But the amount of Sacred Blood required by the expedition will be huge. Even if I rally my personnel, the 10% handling charge in the contract won't be sufficient. In order to make certain ends meet, I need at least 20% of the fee....."

Just as Ark was about to bargain in earnest.

"Wait a minute."

Nadin who was looking at Ark carefully suddenly interrupted.

"Is it really that hard for Lord Ark to obtain the Sacred Blood?"

"What do you mean?"

"I know that the Sacred Blood is a rare stone but I'm not sure that obtaining it will be difficult enough to guarantee raising the fee in the contract. No, in fact I've been doubting your abilities as the exclusive supplier for the expedition army."

'This bastard, what is he suddenly making a fuss about?'

Ark felt annoyance rise at Nadin's words. But Nadin just ignored Ark's reaction and continued talking.

"Commander-nim knows fully the important of the Ark of Creation to the expedition. Clearly money isn't an issue if it is to obtain the Sacred Blood. The supply of Sacred Blood is important. I have no objections to this part."

"Then what's the problem?"

"The problem is the quality of the supplier."

"The quality of the supplier?"

“Your duty is to supply items for soldiers fighting in the war to support them. Being able to supply the necessary items no matter how hard it is to obtain is a necessary quality of the supplier. But Lord Ark just admitted that it would be difficult for him to obtain a reliable supply of the Sacred Blood. Then isn't he missing the qualities of a supplier?”

“No, that.....”

Ark hurriedly rushed to talk. However Nadine struck first.

“Sacred Blood is the most important item for the expedition so having the supplier be unable to obtain it is a huge problem. If he has no confidence then can we really leave such an important item to Lord Ark?”

“Hmmm.....”

Haverstein sighed with a careful expression. Nadin's words did make sense. Haverstein's expedition going forward would centre around the Ark of Creation. It was the obvious strategy. But he couldn't ignore the risk of what would happen if the important Sacred Blood supply was disrupted.

“But Lord Ark has done wonderfully as the expedition's supplier. Shouldn't you just believe in him?”

“The Sacred Blood isn't some simple supplies. It is a key item which will determine success or failure. I think that leaving to problem to a more accomplished merchant would be better.”

“You think that a merchant will be better?”

“Yes, the merchant's guild in Selebrid.”

‘That bastard.....’

Ark started to realize Nadin's reason for causing an uproar. Nadin was an aristocrat who belonged to Duke Sarkin's faction. Duke Sarking had been sure his candidate would win and had already organized with the merchant's guild in Selebrid to provide supplies. However, that was all wasted when Haverstein

unexpectedly became commander. That's why Nadin had disapproved of Ark from the beginning. And he immediately pounced on this situation with the Sacred Blood to cause problems for Ark. He even tried to transfer the matter of the Sacred Blood over to the merchant's guild in Selebrid.

"It isn't necessary to say but the merchant's guild has networks all over the continent. And the merchant's guild in Selebrid can use its large influence. If they were in charge then they would be a reliable supplier of the Sacred Blood."

Nadin spoke steadily. Then Haverstein made a perplexed expression.

"But Lord Ark is the one who brought us the Ark of Creation."

"Of course. The success of the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> is a worthy achievement and I praise him for that. But....."

Nadine sighed and gazed at Ark.

"His achievements as a warrior are different from his work as a supplier. The Sacred Blood is urgently needed so shouldn't it be handed over to a more competent supplier?"

"I didn't say that I couldn't supply the Sacred Blood! I said it would be difficult."

Nadin lifted a corner of his mouth and muttered.

"But the merchant's guild in Selebrid wouldn't have those problems.

.....That is all I'm saying."

Haverstein also couldn't respond to Nadin's words. Like Nadin said, the success or failure of the expedition depended on the Sacred Blood. As the Schudenberg commander, he had to put aside personal emotions and decide without any bias. However, it was difficult to obediently accept Nadin's words.

"It is not yet confirmed whether the merchant's guild in Selebrid can provide a steady supply of Sacred Blood or whether Lord Ark can't supply it. Shouldn't both sides have a chance to try?"

Nadin's eyes then flashed. And he proposed like he had been waiting for this chance.

"Then how about a price competition?"

"Competition? What competition are you talking about?"

"The key is a reliable source of Sacred Blood. That is the easiest way to test their abilities."

Nadine smiled and continued.

"It will take the expedition approximately 3 days to arrive in Silrinad. Ark and the merchant's guild have until then to obtain the Sacred Blood. How about the aim is for both of them to supply 1,000 Sacred Blood by the time we reach Silrinad? That would be a better way to choose the right supplier."

"What.....!"

Ark made a ridiculous expression. Nadin just shrugged cynically.

"What's wrong? Are those conditions disadvantageous to you? You said you have a lot of personnel but you don't have any confidence that you can beat the merchant's guild?"

"Lord Nadin wants a competition between suppliers when we are in the middle of a war?"

"It is because it is a war. Commander-nim."

Nadin answered in a sharp voice.

"The fate of thousands of soldiers and the continent is at stake so important positions need to be entrusted to competent people. To be honest, I've already doubted Lord Ark's qualifications as the supplier and those doubts only worsened after hearing his words about the Sacred Blood. It is only because of Lord Ark's achievements that I am giving him a chance."

Nadin had caught Ark and Haverstein's tails with his clever answer. There was no room to refute those words. In the end, the stubborn Haverstein was forced to wave a white flag.

“.....Like Sir Nadin said, the supply of Sacred Blood is vitally important. So you will compete over who can obtain the required Sacred Blood. But Sir Ark has been the supplier without any problems so far so that shouldn't be involved in this matter.”

Haverstein was able to give Ark that much. However, Haverstein had firmly made up his mind.

“The issue is not as simple as you think. When compared to all the munitions, the Sacred Blood is very few. If the merchant's guild is able to supply the Sacred Blood and doesn't receive any profit then they will suffer a loss. Then why would the merchant's guild in Selebrid participate in this competition? It is unprecedented for an expedition to trade with two businesses. It is obvious. The business that wins in this competition should become the supply group.....”

“But.....”

“Okay. I accept.”

Haverstein said reluctantly. Ark who had been listening from the side made an angry expression. But it was impossible for him to decline in this atmosphere. It would be better for him to accept the competition and quickly think of ways to win. When Ark accepted the competition, the conversation proceeded rapidly.

“But what if both parties bring 1,000 Sacred Blood?”

“Then they'll compete with the price.”

“Price?”

“Yes, the Sacred Blood is important so it isn't possible to question the money spent on it. But I am in charge of the expedition's funds. It is natural for the side with a lower purchase price to be the winner. And the expedition will pay the winner of the competition an average of the two Sacred Blood bids.”

“What does that mean?”

Haverstein was at a loss so Nadin explained. “Isn't it possible to report that the item was bought cheaply in order to win the

competition when it was actually bought at an expensive price? So the expedition will pay the winner the average price of the two corporation's purchase price."

In other words, let's say it was 55 gold. Then Ark would receive a loss of 45 gold for every Sacred Blood he supplied. However, it wasn't possible to buy the Sacred Blood at an excessively high price. If the purchase price was high then it would be easier to buy the Sacred Blood, but if the merchant's guild also supplied 1,000 and they had a lower price than they would win. This competition was a way to catch 2 rabbits by deciding the supplier and reducing the monetary burden of the Sacred Blood purchases on the expedition!

"Okay, then I will take your advice regarding the competition."

The talk about the war to secure the Sacred Blood ended with Haverstein's words. Ark made a complicated expression as he left the tent and Shambala laughed at him.

"You made a mistake."

"Do you want your house to catch on fire?"

"Isn't this because you were too greedy? It is your own fault."

"You really.....!"

Ark was about to retort sharply when he shook his head.

'Damn, I was too greedy.....'

Like Shambala said, Ark's greed was coming back to haunt him. Ark could've just quietly accepted the 10% fee for the Sacred Blood and there wouldn't be any problems. In the end, he became too greedy and was stuck in a competition with the merchant's guild of Selebrid.

'I have a headache.'

He had three days before the expedition arrived at Silrinad to provide the Sacred Blood but that wasn't enough time. Even if he managed to buy the right amounts, it still needed to be transported to Silrinad. If he removed the transport time which was approximately 12 hours then he had around one day to buy 1,000

Sacred Blood from users.

‘But I’ve already know where I can buy the required amounts of Sacred Blood.’

Ark had learnt from Shangri-La that Sacred Blood was needed. So Ark had already determined how to make a profit from the Sacred Blood before leaving Shangri-La. That was why Ark accepted the competition.

‘The problem is how to win the competition.’

Ark was irritable because of Nadin’s condition to pay the average purchase price of the two competitors. If Ark bought 1,000 Sacred Blood at a high price then he would lose the competition. But if he lowered the price too much to win then it would be hard to obtain a profit. No, he might actually receive a loss instead. If that happened then he would rather give up the competition. But now he had to win the competition, even if it meant suffering a loss.

“I should’ve just taken the 10% fee.....”

Ark murmured as he bit his lip. Then a question popped into Ark’s head.

‘Wait? Wasn’t I perfectly trapped?’

Now that he thought about it, it was like Nadin knew about the situation in advance. He had grabbed Ark and Haverstein’s tails before bringing out the competition. And he also presented the condition of the purchase price. It was too complicated and clever to be devised suddenly.

‘But there’s even more. Nadin seemed to have already gotten the agreement from the merchant’s guild beforehand. How could Nadin just suddenly decide on a competition?’

It was impossible. Despite the merchant’s guild having the advantage, it wasn’t 100% that they would win. And if it was a low price then they would have to suffer a loss. That wasn’t something that Nadin could decide for them. Then Nadine would have to check whether the merchant’s guild wanted to compete. But he didn’t say a

single word about that. So he must've already had the merchant's guild's agreement from the beginning.

'Then Nadin has already contacted the merchant's guild about this. But how? Only Shambala and Lariette knew that the Sacred Blood was needed to power the Ark of Creation.'

There was no way Nadin could know about it beforehand. However, there was one person Ark had not considered. Somebody other than Ark and Lariette knew about the Sacred Blood. It wasn't just Shambala. It was Sid! Ark had contacted Sid in order to purchase the Sacred Blood for him. But Sid had leaked the information to Nadine.

"How dare that bastard.....?"

"Bah, did you think I would stay under you forever?"

"You bastard!"

Ark was about to approach him.

"What does that mean? This merchant is my guest."

"Guest?"

"Yes, if you want to see him then you'll have to explain and ask permission from me first."

Nadin declared sharply before taking Sid and entering the tent. Then Shambala whistled and muttered.

"How is it? Isn't this quite fascinating?"

"Shut up!"

Ark shouted angrily. He thought Sid was becoming more impertinent these days but he never imagined that Sid would secretly communicate with Nadin. But the problem wasn't Sid's betrayal. He could find another hobbit.

'Sid is the one I asked to secure the Sacred Blood forme.'

That was the biggest problem. Ark had known about the Sacred

Blood since Shangri-La. So he had contacted Sid and ordered him to buy the Sacred Blood. Sid had considerable connections in various places so he could secure the Sacred Blood. It was why Ark accepted the competition. But Sid had attached himself to Nadin. The Sacred Blood that Sid purchased also went to Nadin. It was like Sid had transferred the exclusive trading rights to Nadin. In return for his betrayal of Ark, Nadin had probably promised him a share of the Sacred Blood profit.

‘How dare he betray me?’

A harsh sound emerged from Ark’s mouth. If he kept on grinding his teeth like that then it would wear away. Now that Sid had aligned with Nadin, Ark no longer had a solution to his problem.

He was facing a large crisis.

Double Agent

“Silrinad!”

The soldiers marching in the lead cheered. After Haverstein captured Pabiun Fortress with 30,000 troops, another 15,000 had joined the main army. That was because the earth around Pabiun Canyon had been cleansed with Sanctuary. While 45,000 troops had died during the 10 days capturing Pabiun Fortress, most of the users revived and only 5,000 NPCs actually died. It was finally possible to march towards Silrinad.

“Doesn’t it resemble Giran in Schudenberg Kingdom?”

Shambala asked as he looked around. Wide plains stretched out in all directions while various roads headed to the city like spider webs. Like Shambala said, the terrain surrounding Silrinad was similar to that of Giran.

“Are you a fool? That’s why it was selected as the stopping place of the expedition forces.”

Ark scowled at Shambala and muttered. That’s right. The reason why Silrinad was the stopping place was because like Giran, it was the biggest commercial city in the Sinius Principality. As the commercial city, it had a lot of roads stretching in all directions. If the expeditions stayed at Silrinad then they could move anywhere in the Sinius Principality in a short time. But it wasn’t the only reason the city was selected. When the Schudenberg and Bristania joined together, there would be 130,000 troops! It was natural for that many soldiers to gather at a large city. They needed meals and lodging for 130,000 people. Moreover, if they blew their nose then 130,000 tissue paper was necessary. A massive amounts of supplies were needed. Especially when starting the Demonic War. The problem was carrying a massive amount of supplies over land was limited. And that problem would worsen the further they marched. Therefore the expedition armies needed to secure a

supply route and both kingdoms agreed to stop at Silrinad.

“You came all the way here and you didn’t know?”

“What? Why are you in such a bad mood?”

“Do you need to ask? Why do you think I’m like this?”

Ark retorted with an angry expression. Just as he was about to say something else, the rough sound of a horse hoof could be heard. It was the advance party that had entered Silrinad first to scout and returned. Haverstein hurriedly asked the advance party leader.

“What is Silrinad’s current situation?”

“It isn’t different from the other areas. The surrounding villages are ruins while the residents were either killed or took refuge somewhere.”

“Any news about the Bristania expedition?”

“We encountered the Bristania advance scouting party on route. They were quite surprised to see us. It seems like they will reach Silrinad tonight.”

The leader replied with an elated smile. Then the leader blew a sigh of relief.

“Oh, now I can feel at ease.”

Despite rushing from Pabiun Fortress, they didn’t know the situation with the Bristania expedition and had been inwardly worried. Of course, the Schudenberg expedition had obtained the Ark of Creation so they didn’t need to worry about having the control taken away. But reaching the place first was still a good thing. Haverstein also looked relieved and asked a question.

“The demons?”

“They seem to know that the expedition forces are gathering here. The demonic monsters spread throughout this region are gathering. I can’t grasp the correct number yet but there are around 70,000 demons gathered.”

“Then they should have more than 80,000 monsters if they keep on gathering.”

Haverstein thought for a moment before ordering.

“If more of them start gathering then it will become dangerous. Move to the western region and construct a camp there. As soon as the Bristania expedition arrives, we will use the Ark of Creation to purify the black fog and start the invasion!”

“Ohhhhhh!”

The soldiers cheered at the command. And they resumed the march and murmured with expectant faces.

“We can see the goddess again tomorrow?”

“Huhuhu, I can’t wait to see the faces of those in the Bristania expedition.”

“Anyone who isn’t stunned after seeing that appearance isn’t human.”

“If they see the goddess then those Bristania guys will have to hand over the leadership without a sound.”

The goddess they were thinking about was Lariette. After using Sanctuary to capture the Pabiun Fortress, the military expedition really viewed Lariette as a goddess. The effect of Sanctuary was so overwhelming that it was enough to make users and NPCs kneel down. Lariette was praised as a goddess so it was difficult for Ark to meet her anymore. Anyway, that was the reason Haverstein wanted to wait for the Bristania expedition before beginning the battle. Even if the Schudenberg expedition arrived first, it was unknown if Bristania would concede the initiative. They could use the excuse that the Bristania border was further away to try and take the initiative. But if they saw Sanctuary being used then the situation would change. Sanctuary’s effects were overwhelming.

‘Dammit!’

Unlike the soldiers, Ark’s face was permanently in a

frown. Haverstein's words about the Ark of Creation had reminded him of a huge problem. If you want to use the Ark of Creation then Sacred Blood was necessary. In other words, before the Bristania expedition joined..... It meant the competition for the Sacred Blood would need to be resolved by tonight.

'Is it possible to rewind time?'

Sid's betrayal was a fatal blow to Ark. Sid's betrayal meant the Sacred Blood he had would be given to Nadin. Fortunately, he was able to direct JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members to secure the Sacred Blood. But the time given to Ark was three days. In this situation, there was no telling how long the required Sacred Blood would take to get here.

'There's no guarantee that I will arrive even if the items arrive in time.'

In fact, he had received no contact from JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members even after reaching Silrinad. So Ark had been hoping that some problems would occur and the Schudenberg expedition would fall behind schedule. But that didn't happen. After the expedition passed through Pabiun Fortress, they hadn't really encountered demonic monsters. That's why Ark's features were unpleasant.

"Damn, nothing is going my way!"

Ark scratched his head with annoyance. No matter how much Ark pouted, there was no way for him to slow down the 45,000 troops. After 2 hours, the expedition army had managed to arrive at the western region and construct their camp. The fated time he wanted to avoid had finally arrived.

"Who will go first?"

They were in the tent at the centre of the camp. The troop leaders were lined up while Haverstein asked Ark and Nadin. Ark held his tongue and avoided their eyes. The items hadn't even arrived yet so how could he report first? Nadin seemed to grasp the circumstances by looking at Ark's reaction and replied with a smug expression.

“We will go first.”

At the same time, 10 merchants entered the tent holding a large box. They were Ark's competition from the merchant's guild in Selebrid. The merchants placed the box down with a flash gesture and greeted Haverstein.

“How are you doing? I am Tito, Selebrid's branch manager. We are grateful for the commander of the Schudenberg expedition for this opportunity. We were confused by the sudden proposal, but we've done everything possible to obtain the items required. And.....”

He continued blabbering on like he was writing a long novel. Ark felt anger well up inside him as he listened to Tito's blabbering.

‘Confused by the sudden proposal? They made every effort to obtain the Sacred Blood?’

They knew about the competition from the start thanks to Sid's betrayal. And Sid, Nadin and Tito were all accomplices! Obviously Tito bought all the Sacred Blood from Sid that was supposed to belong to Ark. It was like they were toying with him. Shamelessness might be a basic skill of merchants but wasn't this guy too excessive?

“Shouldn't I see the things first before judging?”

Haverstein interrupted with an uncomfortable expression when Tito didn't seem to stop talking. Tito finished his speech and opened the box.

“..... I hope this meets your expectations.”

“Ohhhhhh!”

The unit commanders exclaimed as the box was opened. The box was filled with an absurd number of Sacred Blood. For a long time, the Sacred Blood had been just like stone in the side of the road to the unit commanders. But now the Sacred Blood stones were more valuable than thousands of soldiers. Therefore the ordinary stones now seemed like shiny jewellery.

“Is that everything?”

“It is 1,000 like you ordered.”

Tito replied with a proud expression.

‘1,000.....’

Ark felt a heavy feeling in his chest. In fact, Ark had thought Sid wouldn't be able to obtain 1,000 of the Sacred Blood. Because of the Demonic War, martial law was enacted so users couldn't trade or hunt properly. So the connection rate to the game was low and there weren't many users in the villages. In such a situation, finding 1,000 of a rare item like the Sacred Blood wasn't an easy task. And that had been Ark's only hope. But Sid had managed to obtain it.

“Now it's your turn.”

Nadin laughed as he looked at Ark. However, Ark's items still hadn't arrived. Ark chewed on his lips before letting out a long sigh and accepted defeat.

“I still.....”

“Ark-nim!”

No, he was about to acknowledge defeat. Some users suddenly ran into the headquarters and shouted. Ark's head instantly shot up like a spring. Just moments before disaster, the ones who ran into the tent were members of Dark Eden. They were JusticeMan's supply troops. They breathed roughly as they put down the box.

“We have the Sacred Blood!”

“How many?”

“1, 000!”

The coalition members opened the box and replied. There was also a huge number of Sacred Blood in their box. He had only contacted JusticeMan three days before so he didn't know how they managed to obtain that many Sacred Blood. But he didn't question it too closely. The important thing was that Ark also managed to obtain

1,000 Sacred Blood! Yet Ark still couldn't be relieved.

'It is still a tie.'

Nadin started at the Sacred Blood with surprised eyes before smiling and speaking.

"I also respect Lord Ark's ability. I'm honestly amazed. But did you forget?"

If both sides manage to secure 1,000 Sacred Blood then victory is decided by the purchase price."

That's right. If didn't matter how much Sacred Blood he obtained if the price was too high. If he was defeated in the competition then he would suffer a huge loss.

"That's right. This is the detailed statement of the dealings."

Tito handed over the transaction statement to Haverstein. When a merchant bought specific goods, a detailed statement of the transaction could be issued.

"We bought each Sacred Blood for 10 gold and the total purchase amount of 10,000 gold."

After that Ark handed over his transaction statement to Haverstein. Haverstein skimmed through it and his face stiffened. A look of joy spread over Nadin's face. Ark had bought the Sacred Blood within a short time so Nadin was sure that he had purchased it at a high price. But Nadin's face turned an ashen colour at Haverstein's next words.

"Lord Ark bought each Sacred Blood at 1 gold for a total purchase price of 1,000 gold."

"Huh? What are you saying.....?"

"Look at it yourself."

Haverstein handed over the transaction statement to Nadin who turned to stone. Surprisingly, the words that Haverstein said were written on the transaction statement.

-Transaction Item: Sacred Blood
Price: 1 gold Total purchase price: 1,000 gold

“U-unbelievable.....!”

Nadin stuttered and shook his head.

“T-this.... It is ridiculous. The market price for Sacred Blood is currently 10 gold.

Even if you buy it cheaply, it will only be a discount of a few silver. This must be some trick!”

“Those words are serious.”

Ark frowned and declared sharply.

“I participated in the competition that Lord Nadin thought of. And I used my best efforts to get this result. Isn't it horrible to say these results are the because of a trick? Do you have any evidence?”

“E-evidence?”

Nadin winced and looked at the transaction statement in his hand again.

“T-that's right. This statement. This statement has obviously been manipulated!”

“Why would I do such a thing? I bought it for 1 gold while Selebrid bought it for 10 gold so the delivery price for the Sacred Blood would only be 5 gold and 50 silver. If I bought the Sacred Blood for 10 gold and manipulated it to say that I bought it for 1 gold then wouldn't I be receiving a loss of 4 gold and 50 silver?”

“That loss could be recuperated if you continue to supply the munitions!”

“Bah, you're really going too far. Then look at it properly. You've been a supply officer for decades so shouldn't you be able to judge if that trading statement is genuine or not?”

“Bah! Okay, then I’ll appraise it properly!”

Nadin snorted and started to examine the transaction statement. It was unnecessary to say but the ‘Counterfeit’ skill existed in New World. But it was possible for ‘forged’ papers to be detected by users or NPCs with a high ‘accounting’ skill. As a supply officer, Nadin’s Accounting skill had probably reached Master level. But sweat just dripped from Nadin’s mouth after examining the trading statement for a while. Ark asked Nadine with a challenging expression.

“Is there anything strange?”

“T-this is impossible.....”

“Lord Nadin, your attitude is too excessive!”

At that moment, Haverstein shouted in an angry voice.

“Lord Ark is an honourable knight with many achievements. Although this competition is necessary, your attitude towards Lord Ark is too much. You should control your emotions.”

Nadin opened his mouth silently a few times before sighing and leaving. When Nadin left, Tito also bowed and exited the tent. When the situation put in order, Haverstein looked at Ark.

“I don’t know whether to celebrate that you won the competition or not. I don’t know how you managed to get the Sacred Blood for 1 gold when Tito said the market price was 10 gold. If the merchant’s guild says so then it must be true. Doesn’t that mean you will suffer a loss of 4 gold and 50 silver now every time you deliver the Sacred Blood?”

That’s right. He won the competition but he couldn’t be pleased about it. In order to win, he had to play a trick which would cause him to lose money from now on. He had somehow protected his position as supplier but there would still be a deficit every time he delivered the Sacred Blood. But it had been like that since the competition was decided.

“That will somehow be solved with the delivery of munitions. The

reason I took the position of supplier wasn't for my personal benefit. Even if I have to suffer a loss, I want to help the Schudenberg Kingdom somehow."

His words wasn't much different from the novel Tito was spouting before. But when Ark spoke such words in this situation, the weight of the words were different.

"As expected from Lord Ark.....!"

Haverstein and the unit leaders looked at Ark with impressed eyes. After a while, Haverstein handed him the contract for the Sacred Blood delivery with an apologetic expression.

-Schudenberg Royal Agreement

<Contractor: The Expedition Commander Viscount Haverstein= Ark, the representative of Ark's Corporation>

The Schudenberg expedition will entrust the supply of Sacred Blood to Ark's Corporation.

The delivery price for the Sacred Blood is fixed at 5 gold and 50 silver.

"Dammit!"

Nadin cursed harshly as he left the tent. There was a reason Nadin had tried to remove Ark from the supplier position. Duke Sarkin and Tito of the Selebrid branch had worked together for a long time. And Tito had given Duke Sarkin and Nadin considerable bribes in order to become the exclusive supplier of this expedition. But Haverstein had become the commander and Ark had snatched the supplier position. Therefore Nadine who had accepted the bribe was in a difficult position. Nadin had to removed Ark from the position no matter what. But the result this time was a failure! It was like he had been slapped in front of Haverstein and the unit leaders. But that was not the problem.

“Lord Nadin, how did this happen?”

Tito ran up to him as soon as he left the tent.

“Do you know how much damage we received from this? How did the result turn out like this? Didn’t you say that Lord Ark would definitely fail to obtain the Sacred Blood? Yet he managed to get the Sacred Blood for a ridiculous price of 1 gold?”

“T-that is.....”

“That’s okay.”

Tito didn’t want to listen to Nadin anymore and interrupted.

“Didn’t you say that you would bear the expenses if this competition failed? Please pay the 2,000 gold in shipping costs. And also return the 5,000 gold that I gave you.”

That was the problem. Nadin had been 100% sure that he would win this competition. Sid was the reason why Nadin was so sure. Sid had been Ark’s agent to buy the Sacred Blood. Yet Sid had betrayed Ark and attached himself to Nadin before the competition started. And the Sacred Blood Ark ordered in advance had been given to Nadin. At this point, Ark’s defeat had already been finalized. Therefore Nadin never even considered the probability of him failing and had offered to pay the expenses for Tito.

“Just listen to me.”

“I don’t want to. If you don’t return the shipping expenses and the fee then I will disclose that Lord Nadin accepted bribed in exchange for the exclusive supply contract.”

“Are you really going to be like this?”

“A long talk isn’t necessary. Are you going to give me the money?”

Tito threatened him like he was a private money lender. Nadin eventually sighed and nodded.

“I understand. I will send you the 7,000 gold.”

“So we will be leaving.”

Tito snorted and left. Nadin looked like he was about to collapse from despair. He had to pay the shipping expenses and return the bribe money to Tito. That was 2,000 gold flying away for nothing.

“Dammit! Where will I get that money right now? If I delay the payment date then I don’t know how that Tito will act.....”

Nadin stood there sighing. Suddenly a small hobbit ran out from behind a tent. He looked around restlessly before running to Nadin.

“Lord Nadin, what happened? Of course it worked right?”

The hobbit whose eyes shone with anticipation was Sid. Anger snapped inside Nadin. This guy. It was because of the hobbit that Nadin lost 2,000 gold. If it wasn’t for him then a situation like this wouldn’t have occurred. Nadin wasn’t able to stomach the anger inside him and grabbed Sid’s throat.

“It worked? Did you just ask whether it worked?”

“Hik! W-why?”

“Are you asking whether it went well? When I was embarrassed in front of the Commander and the unit leaders? When a mere merchant like Tito threatened me? Or when Ark managed to secure the Sacred Blood?”

“Oh, Ark-nim managed to obtain the required amount?”

“Yes. He also bought it at 1 gold!”

“T-then the competition?”

“If you know then don’t ask!”

Nadin shouted and punched Sid. Sid fell to the ground with a bloody nose. But Sid just raised his head like he didn’t feel any pain and asked.

“Then what about the store permission in Selebrid that you promised me?”

That’s right. This was the reason Sid had done something as perilous as betray Ark.

It was the price he received for betraying Ark! While working at the Continental Commerce Firm, Sid had obtained a lot of money. With that much money in his hands, the greedy Sid started to dream of independence. And the place Sid wanted a store was in Selebrid. However, Selebrid was the capital city of the Schudenberg Kingdom. All the rights to the stores had been swept up by other users a long time ago. Then Ark directed Sid to buy the Sacred Blood. And Sid had come up with a brilliant idea. Nadin wanted to take the supply group position away from Ark. So he exchanged information about the Sacred Blood in return for permission to a store in Selebrid. Of course, Nadin was just the supply officer for the expedition so he didn't have such authority but he could ask Duke Sarkin for it. Although he couldn't deceive Ark forever, the thought of obtaining his own store in Selebrid made it worth it. That was Sid's plan. Sid was sure that Nadin would win and dreamed about his rosy future as the owner of a store.

"Fail? It failed? Then what about my store permission? "Huh?"

Sid sporting a bloody nose clung onto Nadin's pants.

"Do you really want to die?"

Nadin raised a sharp sword to his face with a cruel expression. But Sid had already abandoned his life after betraying Ark.

"Then just kill me already. Just somehow give me the shop permission.

You might've been defeated in the competition but didn't I do as promised?"

"This guy is still making sounds.....!"

The furious Nadin started to step on Sid.

Kung kung kung, jeok jeok jeok!

The sound of someone being pounded continued. Sid was completely kneaded like pasta dough and lost consciousness.

"Che, that unlucky hobbit bastard!"

Nadin spat and left Sid. Sid finally regained his spirit and looked up. When he couldn't see Nadin anymore, he walked away while dripping tears.

"Huk! I've been prepared to be killed by Ark in order to obtain my store permissions."

Nadin had been defeated in the competition. Yet his store permission had flown away so the only choice left was to go and die. Then someone stepped in front of Sid. Sid who was still dripping tears flinched and looked up. And his face instantly turned black.

"A-Ark-nim.....!"

Standing in front of Sid was Ark and Shambala. Ark looked at Sid's face which looked like a bloody flattened rice cake and smiled pleasantly.

"Follow me."

Sid's eyes rolled around anxiously. The place Ark had taken the captured Sid to was Ark's tent. It was obvious what would occur now. Although Ark ended up winning the competition, he had been about to lose his supplier position. Even if he received 10% of the commission, he would still suffer a loss of 4 gold and 50 silver every time he delivered the Sacred Blood. All of this was because of Sid's betrayal!

"Now, where was I? Ah, what did you get in exchange for betraying me?"

Ark muttered with narrowed eyes. Then Sid winced and once again shed tears.

"Huk, please kill me."

"Oh? You want me to kill you?"

"Huk huk huk, nothing I say will change anything. I understand. I know I was wrong. Huk huk huk, then just kill me. I've already been prepared for it."

“Okay, since you’re prepared then I don’t have to say anything.”

Ark gave a bloody smile and approached Sid. Shambala just looked at the scene where it seemed like a tiger was about to eat its prey. And he waited for the screaming.

“Huk huk huk, huk, h..... Huhuhu, hahaha!”

Why did Sid’s cries suddenly turn to laughter?

“What, what the? Has this guy became crazy?”

Shambala looked at Ark with confusion after seeing Sid’s strange behaviour. But Sid wasn’t the only strange one. After Sid began laughing, Ark also couldn’t hold it in anymore and started giggling.

“Hahaha!”

“Hahaha!”

“Weren’t we going to act until the end?”

“What about Ark-nim? Nadin, Haverstein and Shambala fell for it.”

“Huhuhu, in order to deceive the enemy we must first deceive our allies.”

“It is wonderful.”

Sid twisted both hands and trembled. Shambala couldn’t understand what was going on.

“What, what the? Are you both crazy?”

“Kuahahahaha!”

“Hihihihhi!”

Shambala looked at Ark and Sid rolling around the floor laughing with confusion.

“What? Is there something I don’t know? What is it? I’m getting really angry?”

Shambala frowned with anger and shouted. Ark and Sid barely held

in their laughed and sat down.

“You still don’t understand?”

Someone would pay 1 gold to buy the Sacred Blood! The rumour spread among users and they gathered at an auction room. So Ark had bought 20,000 Sacred Blood for 20,000 gold! It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that he had bought most of the Sacred Blood in New World. But he started feeling regretful after buying so much.

‘If I receive a 10% commission for 20,000 gold then that is only a 2,000 gold profit.’

2,000 gold wasn’t a small amount to most people.

‘Isn’t there a way to gain more profit from the Ark of Creation?’

While he was mulling over it, a brilliant idea came to Ark’s head.

‘Nadin will use any chance to remove me from the supply position. What will Nadin do if information about the Sacred Blood and Ark of Creation was given to him beforehand? And if I mention that I’ll have difficult retrieving the Sacred Blood? Nadin will undoubtedly use that chance to think of a scheme. And if I control Nadin’s scheme then it will be possible to obtain more profit for the Sacred Blood!’

This was the special mission Ark left to Sid. So Sid had approached Nadin with information about the Ark of Creation and incited him to think of this competition. That’s right. Ark was the one who planted the idea of having a competition over the Sacred Blood in Nadin’s head. While Ark used Sid to incite Nadin, he was using the Dark Eden members to drive up the prices in the auction.

‘Selling Sacred Blood for 10 gold.’

Ark wrote that sentence but he didn’t really intend to sell the Sacred Blood. No user would spend 10 gold to buy a useless stone. However, users were surprisingly simple. Just a day ago, somebody had bought huge amounts of that worthless pebble for 1 gold. And now there was a user selling it for 10 gold. The phenomenon led the users to believe that the Sacred Blood could be used somewhere. For example, the Sacred Blood might be a

necessary material to make a rare armour. A competition instantly started because of that situation. It was at that point that the merchant's guild in Selebrid started moving to buy the Sacred Blood. So when the merchant's guild contacted the users, the price was an unconditional 10 gold. It was the reason why Nadin and Tito thought the price for the Sacred Blood was 10 gold.

"There was no way anyone could buy it for cheaper. That's why Nadin and Tito firmly believed they would win the competition. They didn't realize that I had bought all the Sacred Blood from the auction a few hours before. Nadin and Tito couldn't know about that situation and believed that Sid had betrayed me so they bought 1,000 Sacred Blood for 10 gold."

"Then how did Tito manage to buy the 1,000 Sacred Blood if you bought all of it?"

Shambala asked in a voice that indicated he couldn't understand. Ark waved his finger and clicked his tongue.

"Tsk ts k ts k, didn't I just say it? Of course it is Sid who sold the Sacred Blood."

Tito had to somehow obtain the 1,000 Sacred Blood in order to obtain the supplier position. So they bought the Sacred Blood that Sid bought for Ark for 10 gold.

"He bought 1,000 Sacred Blood for 10 gold while I bought it for 1 gold. That means a profit of 9,000 gold."

Shambala's mouth widened as he heard Ark's words. It was enormous profits all at once! But 9,000 gold wasn't the only profit Ark received from this strategy.

"Now I can deliver the remaining 19,000 Sacred Blood for 5 gold and 50 silver each. I bought it for 1 gold and will receive 5 gold and 50 silver for it. So that means the actual amount I will receive is 4 gold and 50 silver. In the end, I will receive 85,500 gold for delivering 19,000 items. Along with the 9,000 gold received from selling to Tito, that is a profit of 94,500 gold for the Sacred Blood. Do you understand?"

94,500 gold!

.....This was Ark's true purpose.

"Y-you scammer!"

"It is a scam. But all business is just a successful scam."

Ark laughed and muttered. That's right. The whole competition with the Sacred Blood was just a scam with Ark as the director and lead actor!

"Although my face ended up as a rice cake....."

Sid muttered as he rubbed his swollen face. In this scam, the star actor was the double agent. Sid who played the double agent had perfectly tricked Nadin and Tito. Furthermore, Sid had acted like a gold digger until the end and received a beating from Nadin. But a laugh just spread on Sid's face. Sid received 20% of the profit from the success of this scam! That was 18,900 gold from the delivery of the Sacred Blood. Who care about a bloody, swollen face with that much profit?

"But what will happen when you run out of the Sacred Blood? You made a contract with the expedition to supply Sacred Blood. But now the market price has increased to 10 gold. Then won't you suffer a loss if you keep on delivering it?"

"The Sacred Blood can only be used for the Ark of Creation. The price has soared to 10 gold but no user will buy it. And I've secured 19,000 Sacred Blood already. No matter how fast they use it, I won't need to purchase the Sacred Blood for a least a few months. If no one buys it within one month then the price will fall again."

That wasn't all. Ark had mobilized his coalition members to buy the Sacred Blood for 99 silver on the auction site. The present market price was 10 gold but if no one bought it in one month then the users would accept 99 silver as the market price.

"I am the only person who will purchase the Sacred Blood."

It wasn't an item that would become popular.

“So the price will fall continuously. My aim is to make it eventually fall to 1 silver. Then the profit when I deliver the Sacred Blood is 4 gold and 49 silver. Wuhahaha!”

“.....Sick.”

Shambala shook his head and muttered. But no matter what Shambala thought, Ark and Sid were dancing with joy. Just as Ark was enjoying his happiness.

“Ark-nim!”

Suddenly a messenger shouted from outside his tent.

“It is serious! Nagaran has been attacked by a huge number of monsters!”

“W-what?”

..... It was like a lightning bolt had struck from the heavens.

Behind the History

“Dammit!”

Ark cursed as he exited the main tent. Sid and Shambala who were waiting outside ran towards him.

“Ark-nim!”

“Ark, what happened?”

“This whole situation is bad.”

Ark muttered nervously as he kicked a stone on the ground.

“The Schudenberg and Bristania kingdoms won’t move.”

“How come?”

Sid asked in confusion. Ark rubbed his forehead and recalled the situation that happened just then. It all began with the messenger’s report. Silvana had been attacked by demonic monsters! After receiving the unimaginable report, Ark flew straight away to headquarters.

“Commander-nim!”

“You came? Take a seat.”

The leaders had already received the notification and were meeting in the main tent. Ark was able to hear more specific details about Nagaran. Apparently hundreds of obelisks had been plunged into Nagaran. The number of demons there were 100,000. And 2 territories had fallen immediately. Ark who had listened to the general situation asked in a desperate tone.

“They’ve already captured 3 territories?”

“Because sieges were forbidden under martial law, most of the estates were empty.”

“D-do you know which territories have been occupied?”

“The news was sent from the kingdom. So we don’t know which territories have been captured.”

Haverstein said with a serious expression.

“I know there are many parts you’re worried about but wait for a bit. There is currently a meeting of nobles in progress so we might be able to figure out more about the situation.”

Then Haverstein closed his mouth.

‘Have the demonic monsters already captured Silvana?’

Ark had flown to the headquarters to check that information. Yet Haverstein was unaware of which territories had been captured. Ark became jumpy at the idea and thought of contacting the Dark Eden members. But Ark soon shook his head.

‘I can check if Silvana is safe at any time. The important thing is learning how the Schudenberg expedition responds to the invasion.’

That’s right. 100,000 demons had invaded Nagaran so it didn’t matter which territories were occupied. Even if it was still safe, it was only a matter of time before Silvana was occupied. And even if Silvana wasn’t occupied, Ark had no way to prevent it by himself. The fate of Silvana hung on what the Schudenberg Kingdom would do. And the first one to receive the decision of the Kingdom was those inside the headquarters. Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

“I don’t understand their intentions.”

“Why are they trying to attack Nagaran.....?”

The unit leaders sighed and complained. The unit leaders weren’t the only ones confused. Currently the Schudenberg expedition was about to enter Silrinad. When the Bristania expedition arrived either tonight or tomorrow then they would begin their invasion of Silrinad.

‘With the Ark of Creation to remove the Sphere of Influence, it won’t take a long time to wipe out all the monsters. And the Demonic War

will change 180 degrees when the expedition army regains Silrinad.'

That's right. It was because the demonic monsters had blocked the users from reviving in the Sinus Principality. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that users played a large role in the wars of New World. When an NPC died it was forever but a user would just revive after 24 hours. The black obelisks had the same function of reviving the demons but the obelisks could be destroyed. Then it would be like an ordinary war. If the users from the Sinus Principality concentrated their strengths then it wouldn't have been occupied so easily by the demonic monsters. But several thousand obelisks had hit the major cities and towns at the same time so the users and NPCs didn't really have time before it was occupied. The users who registered their recovery places in those cities and towns couldn't revive any more. This was the reason why the Sinus Principality couldn't fight back and became occupied.

'But if the military expedition regains Silrinad.....'

Silrinad was the Sinus Principality's main commercial city and the centre of traffic! There were a considerable number of users who registered it as a resurrection place. Those users would be able to resurrect. With Silrinad secured as a resurrection place, they could spread out to recapture the cities and villages and obtain more places for users to resurrect. It wasn't just the users. Although the regular troops of the Sinus Principality had been killed, not all of them had been wiped out. All the hiding soldiers would gather at Silrinad once it was regained. In addition, if the magic tower was restored then movement between Bristania and Schudenberg would be easy.

'When considering the future war situation, the most important thing for the demonic monsters was to defend Silrinad. If they can prevent the expedition from recapturing Silrinad then it would prevent the expansion of power. But to mobilize a high number of demons to attack Nagaran out of nowhere.....'

This was the part that confused Ark and the unit leaders.

"Their purpose might not be Nagaran itself."

Then a unit commander who was carefully locked in thought said.

“Nagaran is an area which borders to the Bristania and Schudenberg kingdom. Then aren't they occupying Nagaran in order to intimidate both countries and seal the expedition's movements while the gather monsters around Silrinad?”

“It is a strategy to intimidate us and seal our movements?”

Haverstein narrowed his eyes and murmured. If they thought like that then it was possible to understand the movement of the demonic monsters. Nagaran was an area which bordered the three kingdoms. In other words, if they occupied Nagaran then it was possible to advance into any kingdom. The aristocrats of Schudenberg and Bristania would have no choice but to feel uneasy. If they judged that protecting their own kingdom was more important than freeing the Sinus Principality then they might recall the expeditions to prepare for an invasion. The armies would have no choice but to return to their home kingdoms. Like Haverstein said, it was a strategy to threaten the body and seal the arms! But another leader said in a sceptical voice.

“That makes some sense. But can the demons really move that strategically?”

“Didn't we have a hard time capturing Pabiun Fortress because the demons showed surprising tactics?”

“But they didn't show those type of movements after that. We spent three days moving here. If the demons knew the importance of Silrinad then they should've responded earlier. But they haven't used such good strategy anywhere else.”

“Then what do you think their aim is?”

“That.....”

The leader who objected sighed and closed his mouth. In the end, little progress was made in the meeting.

“It is difficult for us to accurately judge the situation in Nagaran. Anyway, I will connect with the kingdom and ask the opinion of His

Majesty. His Majesty will decide how to respond to this problem.”

Eventually Haverstein forced the problem onto the King. After that, the magician in charge of communication used a crystal ball and connected to the kingdom. The aristocrat meeting had already been held and they finished discussing how to cope with the situation. When the communication was connected, the conclusion of the meeting was passed on.

If the intention of the demons was to tie the ankles of the expedition then there was no reason to be fooled. The nobles also didn't have to deal with the demonic monsters so they didn't respond sensitively to the threat. In addition, the demons had stopped their movements after capturing Silvana, Radon and Beiku. Even if they wanted to threaten the other kingdoms, there was enough time to build a line of defense. The military expedition could focus on recapturing Silrinad.

“T-then Silvana has been captured?”

Sid shouted with a pale face after hearing the explanation.

“Don't say it again!”

Ark shouted with a displeased expression. Ark had felt utterly gloomy after hearing the news. Then Shambala asked in a sarcastic tone.

“What will you do? Will you die now that your territory was taken away?”

“The estate hasn't been completely lost.”

Ark scowled at Shambala and declared sharply. That's right. The demonic monsters hadn't taken the ownership of Silvana away but just occupied it. The rule that the three kingdoms set was that only those who won in the siege would claim ownership. And Ark was the proper Lord of Silvana. If he drove the demons away then Silvana would be returned to Ark. So there was still hope that Ark could regain Silvana.

‘Hopefully the demons didn't do too much damage when they occupied it.’

Shortly after receiving the message, the Continental Commerce Firm was the first thing that came to his mind. Even if he managed to take back Silvana, the place where his current supplies for the expedition were stored was the Continental Commerce Firm. The goods from Seutandal had been shipped and stored in the Continental Commerce Firm. If the Continental Commerce Firm was attacked by the demons and the supplies destroyed then Ark would become bankrupt. But luckily the demons didn't attack Silvana from outside. They had driven the black obelisks around the castle and attacked. When the demons concentrated on the castle, the staff of the Continental Commerce Firm managed to obtain the supplies in the warehouse and escaped.

'The NPC coalition members are also safe.'

Naturally all the users who protected the castle had died from the monsters. But the users could resurrect. The problem was the Meow, Wolrang and Eastern Nation NPCs in the coalition. If they died then it would be a fatal blow to Dark Eden. But fortunately the coalition members had followed Ark's instructions and had been training in the secret dungeon. Therefore they didn't know the castle was being attacked until Ark contacted them.

"But....."

Ark murmured as he bit his lip. Ark still received some damage. Since the castle was occupied by the demons, the monthly salary disappeared. That was 18,000 gold for one month. Of course, not all of that salary went into Ark's pocket but it was still thousands of gold a month. But was that all? Thanks to all his investments, the B class promotion had been just around the corner. But if it was occupied by the demons then the territory would clearly become impoverished. If the facilities and farmland was destroyed then the rating of the territory would fall. Even if he obtained the territory back, there was no guarantee how much time it would take to recover.

"Now's not the time to be talking about this!"

Sid jumped and shouted.

“Don’t you think I know that already?”

Ark yelled in an annoyed voice. It was unnecessary to say but every second the estate was receiving some damage. But unless the Schudenberg kingdom moved, there was no way to retake Silvana. Dark Eden only had 3,800 troops. And there were 1,500 NPCs and 300 users, for a total of 1,800 troops stuck in the secret dungeon. Despite the situation, he also couldn’t give up the delivery of goods..... No, with the income from the estate gone then he had to have JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members work even harder to supply the goods. In the end, if Ark wanted to retake Silvana then he would have to fight the 100,000 monsters by himself. 100,000 against 1..... Ark would be swept away instantly.

‘It is stressful but there is nothing I can do. In this situation, I have no choice but to give up on Silvana for the moment. If we win the Demonic War then Silvana can be taken back so I should concentrate on the military supplies.’

That was the conclusion Ark came to after thinking for a while. But Sid became even more frantic.

“You’re going to just give up?”

“Damn, what am I supposed to do?”

“Isn’t there any way at all?”

“Do you think I haven’t considered all possibilities? No, why are you in such an uproar about it?”

“T-that.....”

Sid flinched and stuttered before sighing. The reason Sid was in such an uproar was the Silvana’s real estate. Like mentioned before, Sid had earned quite a lot of money from working at the Continental Commerce Firm. And his talk about owning a store in Selebrid was just to deceive Nadin. His real goal was a real estate venture!

‘Huhuhu, if I invested in real estate then I can increase my money. Ark-nim also made a lot by investing in Lancel. Then I can also do that.’

So Sid used Ark as a role model and stated to buy real estate in Silvana. Silvana was an appropriate place for Sid to invest in. Contribution to the area was necessary to possess real estate. Thanks to working at the Continental Commerce Firm, Sid had increased Silvana's economy and earned quite a bit of contribution. He also knew about Ark's secret funds that he planned to use to develop Silvana. In other words, it meant that the land value would 100% rise as time passed.

'If the rating of the estate rises then the real estate value will also rise!'

Sid determined that and poured his saved money into the real estate. But if the territory became impoverished because of the demons then the real estate price would slump. Like Ark said, there was no guarantee on how long it would take to recover.

"It is the herbs to the rice." (I think he is comparing Sid as the herb to Ark who is the rice)

Shambala murmured with a pitying expression.

".....Well, I understand but it is inevitable. Just give up for now. It's not like the demonic monsters care about living there. If the Demonic War ends then we can recover it somehow."

"That's not it."

Sid sighed and said.

"Do you really not know? Why did the demons attack Silvana?"

"Isn't it to plunge the real estate price?"

Ark muttered sarcastically. Sid nodded with a firm expression and replied.

"Yes, that's it!"

"What? You figured out something about the demons?"

"It is because of Ark-nim's enemy!"

"Me?"

“.....Alan!”

Ark's face stiffened at Sid's answer.

“Isn't Alan controlling the demonic monsters? Isn't that why they attacked Silvana? They clearly want to destroy Silvana!”

‘Oh my god, why did I never think of that guy?’

His relaxed feeling melted away at the sound of Alan's name. His biggest question at the moment was why the demons had attacked Nagaran. What if their purpose was to attack Silvana? And couldn't Alan control the demonic monsters?

.....Then the answer was simple.

‘Alan might intend to occupy Silvana in order to damage me. He rallied the demons to make Silvana a barren land.’

It was possible if he used the various skills that belonged to the demons to pollute the land. If Ark recovered Silvana then the damage he would receive wouldn't be small.

‘That Alan bastard, he really won't let go until the end!’

Ark grinded his teeth together as he thought of this. Then Ark felt something strange.

‘Wait? Is that really Alan's only purpose?’

If Silvana became barren then it would be a huge blow to Ark. But in the end, that would be it. Silvana couldn't still be valuable without the farmland. Silvana had easy to navigate terrain and a river available for transport of goods. Its strong point was its geographical advantageous position in Nagaran. That geographic advantage wouldn't disappear even if the land became barren.

‘Alan used to be the Lord of Silvana and he is a user in New World so he should already know this. It is impossible for him not to understand Silvana's special quality. Then he only rallied 100,000 monsters to make the territory barren?’

Moreover, the military expedition was now about to attack Silrinad.

‘Alan moving overseas means that he is one of the ones behind this event. He wouldn’t do something simply for revenge. Alan is clearly getting something very important from this war.’

Yet he risked losing the war and brought 100,000 monsters to Nagaran just to damage Ark?

‘If Alan is moving then it must have something to do with this event. Is it simply to tie the ankle of the Schudenberg expedition? Or is there something else? It can’t be.....’

.....Silvana itself?

‘Wait! Let me organize my thoughts.’

The more he thought about it, the more complicated Ark’s head became. First, was Silvana occupied to grab the ankle of the Schudenberg expedition? According to the intelligence, they had stopped moving after capturing Silvana and 2 other territories.

.....So the probability was less than 10%.

Secondly, was Silvana captured in order for Alan to hit back at Ark? It was a possibility but Silvana would return to Ark when the Demonic War ended. Since Silvana’s value lay in its geographic advantage, the actual blow wasn’t that big.

.....The probability was less than 40%.

‘There is only one reason why Alan gave up on Silrinad and attacked Nagaran. It is because Silvana contains something that he believes will win the Demonic War.’

When he thought about it like that, it was possible to explain while the demonic monsters stopped moving after they captured Radon and Beiku which surrounded Silvana. If Silvana was their goal then there would be no reason to capture Radon and Beiku. In fact, it might incite the Schudenberg and Bristania kingdoms even more if they occupied more estates. However the demons only captured the two territories on both sides of Silvana.

‘Their reason for capturing Radon and Beiku is to block any possible

attacks!'

It might be a bit of a stretch. But according to the defending coalition members, the Rwigenberg had appeared in the sky about Silvana. Rwigenberg was the Red Man's aerial fortress. Therefore the Red Man was related to why Alan attacked Silvana.

'There is something there. Just like the secret dungeon that the Three Kingdoms don't know about, there must be something hidden there!'

Ark was convinced of his guess. It was highly likely that this was the key to solving the situation.

'Then the reason Silvana was attacked has something to do with the future of this war? Whatever it is will change the situation by 180 degrees. It is necessary to find the reason why the demons are attacking Silvana. If I can prove it.....'

The Schudenberg and Bristania kingdoms were just observing the situation because they judged that it wouldn't have a big influence on the Demonic War. However, couldn't the secret hidden in Silvana change the tides of the war? If both kingdoms knew that then they would rally their power to regain Silvana!

'It is imperative that I find out what it is!'

"Radun, transform to Radunma!"

Ssak ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark who was locked in though suddenly shouted. Radun instantly turned in a giant lizard. Sid looked at Radun and asked with a flustered look.

"Eek! What, what the? Why all of a sudden?"

"There is a place I have to go."

"A place you have to go? Where? What about Silvana?"

"There's no time to explain. Let's go Radun!"

Radun then ran off through the snowfield.

Pa pa pa pa, pa pa pa pa!

Radun moved with tremendous speed across the snowfield. The place Ark was riding was towards the Albana Mountains. No, to be correct it was Shangri-La. That's right. After worrying about how to figure out Silvana's secret, Ark had thought of Shangri-La. Currently Ark couldn't guess what Alan wanted from Silvana. But some records of Silvana should remain. Shangri-La held the history of New World so if he looked for information about Silvana then wouldn't he find a clue?

'I have to quickly discover Alan's plan so I can stop it!'

After a while he finally arrived at the snow-capped Albana Mountains. It had taken the expedition three days to pass through the Albana Mountains to Silrinad and it had only taken Ark 14 hours to return. It was thanks to Radun's +500% movement speed and riding without a break.

"Only a bit more to go. Try your best Radun!"

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Pa pa pa pa! Pa pa pa pa!

Ark comforted the gasping Radunma while pushing him onwards. His short legs began to move even faster. Ark glanced around while using Nursing on Radunma.

'That's it, if I pass that gorge then I'll reach Shangri-La.'

The defense war had turned off and Shangri-La had floated back to its position on the ground. This was because the demonic monsters had retreated after Ark arrived in Shangri-La. The demons probably already realized that the Ark of Creation was in his hands and retreated. And not long afterwards, Ark had joined the expedition and helped capture Pabiun Fortress. At the same time, the demonic monsters withdrew from the Albana Mountains so there was no reason for the defense ward to be activated. As soon as he crossed the gorge, the site of Shangri-La reached his eyes.

'What the?'

But confusion spread over Ark's face as he looked at Shangri-La. It looked different from the Shangri-La that he saw before. The forest was burnt and the defensive tower from before had disappeared without a trace. Even the white tower in the middle was smashed in parts.

"Radun, stop. Summon Demon, Racard and Purital!"

Ark stopped in front of Shangri-La and summoned his pets.

"Racard, enter Shangri-La and find out what happened. Purital, be on the lookout for any monsters!"

"Yes!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Racard flapped his wings and flew away. Ark carefully entered Shangri-La with Purital escorting him. The situation became clearer once he entered. The trees surrounding the white tower were cut with claw marks while blood spots were scattered over the snow covered ground. It was unmistakable signs of a battle!

'The only culprits that would attack Shangri-La are the demons. But why?'

The demons had targeted the Ark of Creation. However, the expedition force had already obtained the Ark of Creation. Then it wasn't the reason the demons had attacked Shangri-La?

"Master, there are no demons around. There are some White Tigers and prophets around the tower. But they are dead."

Then he heard Racard's voice who had been scouting. Ark ran straight towards the white tower on Radunma. Like Racard said, the dead bodies of the White Tigers and prophets were scattered around the tower.

"20 White Tigers and 10 prophets..... They were all wiped out?"

Ark muttered as he counted the bodies. Originally there were 150 White Tigers and 20 prophets living in Shangri-La. But they couldn't hand the Ark of Creation over to an unknown person. That was why

Larlette had been accompanied by 10 prophets carrying the Ark of Creation. 130 White Tigers had come along to protect them on the battlefield. Therefore that he only been 20 White Tigers and 10 prophets left in Shangri-La.

Ssak ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radunma who had been licking the air suddenly turned his head. At the same time, one of the prophets lying on the ground flinched and moaned.

“Eung..... Eung.....”

‘A survivor!’

Ark hurriedly jumped down from Radunma. He forcibly opened the mouth and poured 3~4 potions into the prophet’s mouth. The prophet narrowed his eyes and asked.

“W-who.....”

“It’s me. Ark. What happened?”

“Ark..... Hero Maban’s descendant..... Cough!”

When the prophet coughed, his health instantly drained away.

.....It was already too late to him. In this situation, the NPC was sure to die unless a priest used magic to heal the soul. Feeding them potions was the same. Their health would just decrease over time.

“Have strength. You can beat this.”

But after Ark grabbed his hands and used Nursing, the prophet regained some vigour.

“After you left with the Ark of Creation, a black knight..... Leading the demons..... Shangri-La was attacked.”

“A black knight?”

Alan instantly popped into Ark’s head. In fact, Ark had thought there was one strange part while attacking Pabiun Fortress. The demons in Pabiun Canyon had been coordinated by Alan. But he never saw

Alan while capturing Pabiun Fortress. It was the same even when marching through Pabiun Canyon towards Silrinad.

‘Then he ended up attacking Shangri-La?’

“But wasn’t their purpose to obtain the Ark of Creation? Shouldn’t they know that you don’t have the Ark of Creation anymore?”

“Their purpose..... From the beginning it wasn’t the Ark of Creation..... It seems.”

“It wasn’t the Ark of Creation?”

“Yes. The knight in black armour..... Took the Hell Stone stored underneath Shangri-La.....”

“Hell Stone? Why?”

“That is..... Why the knight took it..... I don’t know exactly. Along with some powerful demons..... Stepped into the History Crystal..... And left in a hurry.”

‘History Crystal!’

Ark’s eyes flashed. Hundreds of crystals were lined up in the tower. Each one had 10 years of history recorded in it. And this network of crystals was connected to the History Crystal.

‘Alan entered the History Crystal before leaving in a hurry?’

Alan had immediately attacked Shangri-La after Ark left so that was three days ago. And the demonic monsters had invaded Nagaran yesterday. This couldn’t be a coincidence.

‘Yes, it is simple once I think about it. They must’ve just discovered that the thing they seek is in Silvana. That means they didn’t originally know it was in Silvana. Their purpose in attacking Shangri-La wasn’t to obtain the Ark of Creation but to get information!’

And it was likely that the strike against Silvana was organized by Alan. In fact, the coalition who defended the castle had testified that there were users mixed in with the monsters.

‘There’s no doubt about it. Alan occupied Silvana after getting the

information here! Then I can also figure out what he is after!’

“Rest for a while. Purital, Racard, protect him.”

Ark who reached a conclusion moved the prophet to a suitable place and ran inside the tower. Despite the shattered tower, the crystals inside were all fine. According to the prophets, the crystals were protected with divine power so it couldn’t be broken. After searching the tower for a bit, Ark was able to discover an enormous lump of crystal. It was the History Crystal that all the other ones connected to! Ark belatedly realized something after discovering the crystal.

“How do I use this? Damn, I should’ve asked the prophet..... Ah. Didn’t the prophet say that Alan went into the History Crystal? Then is there a door to enter the crystal?”

Ark had that thought and touched the crystal. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-You have connected to the History Crystal. Do you want to view the information on the History Crystal?
--

“What? I can enter just by touching it?”

Ark who read the message instantly nodded and replied.

“Yes!”

Hwaaaaack!

It was at that moment. His body was suddenly sucked into the crystal. He felt like he had been swept into a hurricane as he flew somewhere before the space in front of him brightened.

“Heok! T-this is.....”

Ark’s mouth opened as he looked at the intense light. Before he was standing in front of the crystal and now Ark was in an endless space. Both the floor and sky were covered in space. And in this space were thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands..... No, an incalculable number of crystal slabs were

floating around him.

“No way, all of this.....”

-It is the information contained in the History Crystal.

Suddenly a woman's voice was heard in his head.

“Heok! W-who?”

-I am a navigation system to help users comfortably search for the information on the History Crystal. You can call me Miss Navi as a nickname in order to feel more comfortable.

A navigation system? It was hidden in a secret sanctuary so wasn't it too excessive to have a user friendly crystal? Furthermore, she wanted to be called by Miss Navi? Was this a joke? Didn't she know this was a serious situation? Ark pushed down the desire to say those words.

“Okay, then I will call you Miss Navi. How do I search for the information I want?”

-Just cry out the keyword for the information you are searching for.

“Keyword? Isn't this similar to searching on the internet? Then.....”
Silvana!”

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

At the same time, a huge amount of slabs started gathering. And with a roar they piled up in front of Ark. The pile was dozens of metres high! Ark opened his mouth and murmured absent-mindedly.

“T-this is all the information related to Silvana?”

-That's right. You can read from the top.

Each slab contained one chapter holding different information.

The [Demons] in the [Dark Century] waged a war against humans in [Nagaran] and after the Dark Century ended, a war between the three kingdoms [Schudenberg], [Bristania] and [Sinius] began. Then came the [Foreigners] as they waged battle over the right to

the territory. And the current Lord of [Silvana] is [Ark].

The Silvana territory is 126,785 square metres, the amount of rainfall.....

As expected, the most basic information was recorded in the beginning. But some words written on the slabs caught his attention. They were words marked with [].

“What the? These indications are?”

-They are words that allow you to search for more detailed information. Just press your hand to it and the relevant information will be displayed.

Ark was curious and pressed his hand to the word [Ark]. Then 1 slab flew from the pile.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +500	Nobility Title	Baron
Fame	23,535 (+500)	Level	439
Profession		Dark Soul	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero	
Health	8,175 (+475)	Mana	8,365(+325)
Spiritual Power	956	Strength	844 (+34)
Agility	1,159 (+170)	Stamina	1,389 (+65)
Wisdom	185 (+10)	Intelligence	1,527 (+25)
Luck	209 (+60)	Flexibility	268

Art of Communication	79	Affection	129 (+10)
Resilience	483	Dark Fog	74
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics	233		
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople (Armour): Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available			
*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 35, Agility + 35, Stamina +35, Defense +70, Wild Strength is available			
Shining Darkness (Two-handed Sword): +10% additional damage against demonic monsters, Agility +20, Stamina +20, Intelligence +20			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
White Tiger's Cloak (Mantle): immune to skills that lower morale, Courage +30%, Agility +30, White Tiger's Roar is available			
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available			
Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available			
Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available			
Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds			

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense.

'That's right. Now I understand how to look for information.'

So Ark started to look through the information about Silvana. But after 1 hour of searching through hundreds of slabs, Ark couldn't find the information that he wanted.

'Weird. There's something weird.'

Ark realized that he had been feeling a strange uneasiness. The information in the History Crystal was incredibly detailed. It even had the weather information for Silvana over the last hundreds of years. And if he used the [] indications then he could see for information so detailed it was almost trivial.

'But the record for Silvana and Nagaran only goes back hundreds of years. It is impossible to search for details prior to that.'

That was exactly the problem. Other areas had records from before the Dark Century. But the information on Silvana and Nagaran only goes back to the Dark Century. To be exact, it connects to the information about the Dark Century. Yet he couldn't search for any general information about Silvana during the Dark Century. It was like someone had intentionally hidden the records.....

‘Then I should do a more direct keyword search.....’

Alan found something related to the Demonic War. And the last Demonic War was in the Dark Century. Then the information was likely to be on the records about the Dark Century. The problem was he didn’t know what keyword to search for. But he couldn’t just look for the information blindly.

‘Alan left in a hurry after finding the necessary information. Then Alan must’ve known the keyword and searched for that information.’

Then something popped into Ark’s head.

‘Wait? Alan didn’t just come to Shangri-La to search for information. The prophet said that Alan also stole a Hell Stone. Then didn’t that Hell Stone have something to do with Alan and Silvana? Then.....’

“Search, Hell Stone!”

Ark finished thinking and shouted. While he had been searching so far, the related slabs had flown to him. But this time the space suddenly warped. In the next moment, the environment turned black and there was a huge barrier of flames.

“Huk, what is this?”

-A firewall. The information of the keyword you searched for just now is kept in a secured area. You have to enter a password if you want to view the information.

Navi’s voice was heard. Firewall? Password? There really were various things. How could Ark know the password to the firewall? But unlike Navi’s explanation, he didn’t need a password to access the area.

“This.....!”

A small hole caught Ark’s eyes. It was a small area near the bottom of the firewall that had warped. Ark was convinced after he visited the hole.

‘That’s right. The prophet said Alan and some high ranking demons entered the crystal. Then Alan was aware of the existence of the

firewall in advance?’

Alan had used the skills of the demons to penetrate the firewall. In other words, the information Alan had been searching for was beyond this firewall. And he could also access the firewall thanks to Alan. Ark quickly passed through the firewall. There was a large room behind the firewall with 10 slabs piled up. Unlike the other slabs, these ones were black.

‘That Alan, he must’ve been in a hurry. To leave a trail like this.....’

Ark instantly checked the slab on top. But when he lifted the slab, there was a sudden noise and he couldn’t check the contents. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-You are lacking the ability to read this information.

<300 Knowledge of Ancient Relics is required to confirm the information. Or 300 points in Hieroglyphic Deciphering. 300 Pursuit of Truth is needed>

“What, what the? I need 300 Knowledge of Ancient Relics to read the information?”

Ark hurriedly checked the other slabs. All the other slabs needed Knowledge of Ancient Relics, Pursuit of Truth or professions like Treasure Hunter or a druid type profession to decipher the information. Fortunately, not all of them required the same level of knowledge.

‘I currently have 233 Knowledge of Ancient Relics. I’ll gather all the slabs I can decipher at the moment. I might now be able to check all the information that Alan searched for but I can put together the general outline.’

Ark organized the 10 slabs based on his Knowledge of Ancient Relics. In the end there was a separate collection of 4 slabs.

‘That is less than half. But it should be enough for the general principles.’

“Now, shall I check Alan’s ulterior motive?”

Ark laughed and touched one of the slabs. Then the slab vibrated and the information appeared in front of him.

-You have found the history hidden behind the History Crystal.

This hidden history is dangerous if leaked outside so the ancient prophets hid it. This hidden history also wasn’t passed down through the prophet clan.

<Knowledge of Ancient Relics +25, Intelligence +20, Luck +10 and Fame increased by 200>

The slab was unsealed and the contents appeared.

“Huh? “What the, this is?”

A baffled exclamation fell from Ark’s mouth. The first slab was a map. It showed Seutandal and two other continents that had emerged in the northern oceans of New World. This slab had been hidden a long time ago and Seutandal was marked there so it was probably before the Dark Century. But Nagaran had been strangely marked on the map. He was able to discover the reason after checking the remaining slabs he could read.

.....When the Dark Lord appeared, the boundaries between hell and reality collapsed and the Hell River flooded through the centre of New World. The Hell River spread a powerful curse and strengthened the demonic monsters.....

..... When flooded with the Hell River, the curse is so powerful that no humans can live on that land for the next 60 years. Various demons also used the Hell River as sources of powerful curse magic.....

.....Until the 7 legendary heroes and the 100 heroes used their magic to seal the Hell River deep underneath Nagaran. But the Hell River couldn’t be sent back to hell. It could only be sealed underground and a mechanism was created to stop the hell power

from floating outside.

.....The 7 legendary heroes and the 100 heroes brought the Hell Stone which controls that hellish power to Shangri-La to be hidden. But the Truth Crystal showed that the Dark Lord would be resurrected one day. And only the foreigners could save this world. The heroes learnt about the crisis in the future and offered their lives to prepare for it.....

“Hell River!”

Ark learnt why Nagaran was marked on the map. That’s right. It was because of the Hell River that appeared from the impact of the Dark Lord showing up. And the 7 legendary heroes and 100 heroes sealed the river deep underground in.....

“.....Silvana!”

All of Ark’s questions was answered with that information. Ark had already seen the Hell River in the lowest floor of Silvana’s secret dungeon. But the Hell River he saw had been sealed by the power of the heroes. It was the reason why Nagaran didn’t belong to any of the Three Kingdoms after the Dark Century ended. Since the Hell River caused barren land for 60 years, none of the kingdoms had asserted their rights to Nagaran. Then after 60 years passed, the Three Kingdoms began a war for control of Nagaran. But that was not the problem. The 7 legendary heroes and 100 veterans weren’t able to completely seal the Hell River. So they made a device that ensured Nagaran’s safety for hundreds of years. And the key to that device was the Hell Stone! After confirming the information about the Hell River, he had seized the Hell Stone and disappeared. He didn’t need to check the rest of the slabs to determine Alan’s goal.

“Oh my god! He wants to flood Nagaran again with the Hell River!”

Ark’s face turned white and terrified. Ark had thought he could recover Silvana after the Demonic War. But if the Hell River was unsealed then nobody could live on that land for 60 years. If he calculated it in real time, 60 years was 20 years. It would be the end of Silvana if the Hell River flooded. In addition, the Hell River was like the sphere of influence in that it strengthened curse magic and

turned normal monsters into demons. He didn't know how big, but it would have a tremendous impact on the Demonic War.

'There's no time to waste. I have to stop Alan!'

Ark left the firewall and shouted.

"Miss Navi, what is the method to exit the History Crystal?"

-Just shout 'End.'

"Okay. E....."

Ark stopped as he was about to exit the crystal. The History Crystal contained information about all the history and people of New World.

'Then I might be able to figure out the reason for Alan's strange strength!'

"Information search, Alan!"

Ark used Alan as a keyword. And one slab came flying. Alan's information was contained on the slab.

".....What, what the? Ruin Knight? Then Alan is the Ruin Knight?"

Ark muttered as he read the information. Alan was originally a Holy Knight. Of course, Lariette had become an Innocence Knight so he knew that Alan must've changed professions. But he never imagined that Alan would change to a Ruin Knight. Ark had originally guessed that the Red Man was the Ruin Knight.

'Damn, after searching Alan I was going to look for information about the Red Man and Ruin Knight..... Yet Alan and the Ruin Knight was the same person.'

He also didn't know the name of the Red Man so he couldn't search for information.

'By the way, isn't something odd? Alan can't be more than level 400. Even if he got the Hate Aura from the Hate Set, how did he manage to match my dark attribute bonus?'

Ark tried to search for information about the 'Ruin Knight's skills'. But

the message window stated that the keyword didn't exist.

'It would've been helpful to know but I guess it isn't possible. I have no more time for this!

"End search!"

Ark's body moved towards the sky and he exited the History Crystal. The prophet was dead after he left the tower.

"The prophet died suddenly after Master entered.

Racard said while scratching his ears. However, he had no time to mourn the death of the prophet.

"Radun, transform to Radunma!" Head back to Silrinad!"

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radunma once again ran across the snowfield. At that moment Ark still couldn't imagine. The fearful contents recorded on the slabs that Ark couldn't confirm.....

Nagaran's Coalition

[TL] People seem to be misunderstanding what happened with the slabs last chapter so I thought I would clear it up a bit. The slabs don't seem to be an ancient relic since he didn't get any bonuses from reading the normal slabs. The message window which popped up is also different from the normal Ancient Relics message windows. The +25 ancient relic is just part of the onetime bonus that he got for finding the 'hidden history' not reading an ancient relic. Therefore he wouldn't get any bonuses from reading the other slabs. Even if that wasn't the case, it was stated that each slab had varying levels of requirements. For all we know, those requirements could be 355/400 Knowledge of Ancient Relics. Therefore, the only thing we do know is that there were some slabs that Ark wasn't able to read.

"Rulrulru....."

Gwon Hwa-rang hummed and smiled. Something about Gwon Hwa-rang was different today. He had polished his shoes, applied a face mask earlier and even shaved his beard. Instead of wearing his old leather jacket, he was wearing a sharp suit. Gwon Hwa-rang was fully armed because today was the day of the decisive battle.

"Huhuhuhu."

Gwon Hwa-rang laughed like a crazy person as he took out a small box from his pocket. And he slowly opened the box. Inside the box was a ring. Although it wasn't very big but it was still a diamond studded ring..... That's right. Today was 'the day.' A satisfied feeling rose inside Gwon Hwa-rang as he looked at the box.

'It has come! The day has come!'

Gwon Hwa-rang had been waiting for 'this day' for a few years. However, a few trivial problems had popped up that prevented him. And the most worrisome problem was Gwon Hwa-

rang himself. After being stabbed in the leg with a knife, his leg had a limp. Furthermore, public opinion was against him and he had been reluctantly driven from police work. He couldn't stay at work with a disability. He had a great sense of pride in his work so the loss was difficult for Gwon Hwa-rang to express in words. He felt like a straggler abandoned by the world. Of course, the police considered the circumstances and gave him management of the ex-convicts rehabilitation program but he still felt a sense of loss. In this situation he hadn't even dare try. However, Gwon Hwa-rang's situation changed dramatically two years ago.

Over the last few years, Gwon Hwa-rang had gradually recovered and lost his injury. And he unintentionally received an income from the various work he did helping Hyun-woo. It wasn't just Gwon Hwa-rang that changed. Two years ago Hyun-woo also started to gradually raise his income for so his lifestyle had improved. Park So-mi was also quickly recovering. All these changes to Gwon Hwa-rang, Hyun-woo and Park So-mi were because of New World. Their health and income improved because of New World.

"Ah, my life had been a dark tunnel. But I encountered New World and my life changed. Darkness changed to light and despair changed to hope. I've been saved. Hallelujah!"

Anyway, the present situation had changed around Gwon Hwa-rang. And the timing was important. Gwon Hwa-rang might've wavered in the last few years but he had finally made up his mind.

Pro-po-sal!

That's right. That was what Gwon Hwa-rang had been hesitating several years over. And he finally decided today was 'the day.' His heart trembled at the thought of proposing to Park So-mi. According to Hyun-woo, his success rate if he proposed now was 90%. Therefore Gwon Hwa-rang's confidence increased because of Hyun-woo.

'Then.....'

His chest felt tight as he arrived in front of the house. He visited the house often so it felt like home but now it seemed large and

scary. But overcoming that horror was the true sign of a man!

'I'm going to do it! I will! Gwon Hwa-rang, if you're a man then you can do it!'

Gwon Hwa-rang placed the ring box back in his pocket and entered the house. Gwon Hwa-rang grinned as Park So-mi greeted him at the door.

"Welcome."

"Ah, this is it, this is it. What I wish.....'

For a wife to lovingly greet her husband when he comes home. It might've been an ordinary routine for others but the thought was impressive enough to cause tears to flow for Gwon Hwa-rang. It was impressive for a man who lived by himself for decades. It might be because he had decided to propose today but Park So-mi was looking exceptionally pretty. With neatly arranged hair and wearing a blue cardigan, a beautiful light appeared around her even when she was sitting in the wheelchair.

"I'm a little surprised. You suddenly wanted to eat out and now you're wearing conservative clothes. Am I underdressed?"

"Ah, no. You look beautiful. Really pretty! So pretty that my head has become strange!"

Gwon Hwa-rang jumped with surprise and hurriedly said. Park So-mi blushed and turned to look at the door to Hyun-woo's game room.

"Thank you. But what is that boy doing? A guest has come to that house and he doesn't even show his face."

"No, it's okay. Since when have I been a guest? He seems to be busy so let's just leave."

"Then we're the only ones going out today?"

"Huh? Oh, yes.....I call Hyun-woo earlier today and he said he was too busy to go anywhere."

"Then isn't it better to go next time? Isn't this a precious experience

eating out?”

“That.....it has already been booked. We can't just cancel.....we'll have another chance next time with Hyun-woo.”

Gwon Hwa-rang prevaricated like Hyun-woo taught him. Fortunately Park So-mi didn't question him and just nodded.

“Really? Then it can't be helped. Sorry but can you push the wheelchair?”

“Yes, I'll be happy to! I'll push it forever!”

Gwon Hwa-rang enthusiastically grabbed the wheelchair handle. Park So-mi looked at him strangely as Gwon Hwa-rang's attitude seemed different from normal.

“Well, is something good happening? We're suddenly eating out and your attire seems different from usual.....”

“A good thing? There is.”

“What is it? Am I not supposed to know?”

“That's impossible. I'll tell you slowly over the meal.”

Gwon Hwa-rang laughed and was about to push the wheelchair.

Kwatang, udandandang!

Suddenly there was a commotion and Hyun-woo ran out of his room. Gwon Hwa-rang and Park So-mi turned their heads with surprise and looked at him.

“Eh? Hyun-woo? What's the matter?”

“Don't make me talk. I'm busy now!”

Hyun-woo didn't even look at them and picked up the telephone quickly. He pressed the buttons at a furious speed and called someone.

Diririri, diririri.....

Then the cell phone in Gwon Hwa-rang's chest pocket rang and he

took it out. Hyun-woo's desperate voice was heard from two phones.

"Gwon ajusshi? Where are you now?"

"What are you doing?"

Gwon Hwa-rang muttered in an incredulous voice. Hyun-woo alternating looking at the phone and Gwon Hwa-rang standing by the door with a confused expression. He belatedly realized the situation and threw the phone away before running towards Gwon Hwa-rang.

"Gwon ajusshi, it's serious!"

"It's serious? What are you saying?"

"I can't do this now. Call the rehabilitation hyungs here because I need to speak with them."

"Hey, you. Have you already forgotten? Today's the day."

"I don't know what day it is when Silvana might disappear!"

Hyun-woo pulled his hair and shouted.

"What the, that is ridiculous....."

Jjak-tung stuttered with an absurd look. It wasn't just Jjak-tung. All the rehabilitation members summoned to the emergency meeting also looked the same. The contents of Hyun-woo's words were shocking. Silvana had been attacked by demonic monsters! And Alan's purpose was to unseal the Hell River on the lowest floor of Silvana's secret dungeon and flood Nagaran. In addition, if the Hell River was unsealed then everything would die and not even a blade of grass would grow for the next 60 years. Nagaran would become like a non-existent land on maps.

"It really is absurd."

What is that fellow thinking?"

Bul-kkun muttered after hearing the explanations.

Then Yapsab sneered and retorted.

“Do you have to ask? Of course it is revenge.”

“That’s not the only reason.

Hyun-woo said as he shook his head.

“It’s not? Then what else is there?”

“I haven’t told you this but the things happening in New World now isn’t a scheduled event. A group which exists in New World is using an item which shouldn’t exist to cause chaos. And Alan belongs to that group.”

Hyun-woo finally explained everything that Global Exos told him. Alan had even anticipated this incident a few months ago and escape abroad.

“If the Hell River is unsealed then the damage to Nagaran would be huge. That is enough of a target for Alan. But judging by Alan’s behaviour, his goal in unleashing the Hell River has to do with the Demonic War. That is why he mobilized 100,000 monsters despite Silrinad being surrounded.”

“He even went abroad to escape being caught?”

“Then what is he after?”

“He escaped now but what will happen if he returns home later?”

“These guys probably have a lot of things planned. If they succeed then it won’t be a problem returning home in the future.”

Jjak-tung crossed his arms with a serious expression and muttered. Then one of the rehabilitation members hit the table and said.

“What do you think would happen if Alan wins the Demonic War?”

“What? Global Exos would be screwed.”

The answer was a no-brainer.

“They’ll be screwed?”

“Yes and Alan will be able to avoid any problems.....”

The rehabilitation member flinched and closed his mouth. Then Jjak-tung smiled and laughed.

“That’s right. Like Hyun-woo said, currently there is no way for Global Exos to stop Alan’s movements. So they had no control over his actions. That is why Alan and the demonic monsters can move freely to try and swallow up New World. In other words, Alan could use the demons to take control of a city and act as the city guards in New World.

.....He could become the absolute dictator of New World!

“He’s trying to make a situation where users can’t play the game. And there is no way for the publisher to stop them. So there is only one option if the publisher wanted to maintain New World.”

“We have to stop Alan!”

“That’s right.”

Jjak-tung tapped his fingers and replied. The atmosphere became quiet. Hyun-woo, Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members thought about the situation. If the demons conquered New World then the users on the continent could be wiped out anytime. If that situation repeated many times then they users would obviously become dissatisfied and complain to Global Exos. They would also receive various lawsuits. There was only one way for Global Exos to stop that. It was to stop Alan from conquering New World. And they spent a considerable amount of money for that goal.

“I heard that New World accounts for 30% of Global Exos sales. Can you imagine? The annual profit of 30% of a big business would be in the thousands of billions. If a problem happened to New World then Global Exos might collapse. Billions of won was also invested in operating New World. That’s not all. Global Exos’ stocks would also be affected if something happened to New World.

“Stocks?”

“Yes, when the Demonic War started and users protested then the stocks related to New World plunged. After they announced that the war was a scheduled event, the stock price eventually returned to normal.”

That’s right. It was why Ha Myung-woo invested 10 billion won on the event. Compared to the plunging stock prices, 10 billion won was nothing.

“This is all the result of Alan’s group. Then those guys probably have a way to gain money from it. They could buy the stocks when it plunged because of the demons. Then they could have the demons retreat and sell the stocks when the price rises. If they conquered New World then there are various methods to earn a profit. They could make tens of billions or even hundreds of billions in profit.

“Tens of billions, hundreds of billions.....!”

“Damn, we stabbed someone and only earned tens of millions of won a month. Meanwhile those guys can just sit back and watch the game while earning hundreds of billions of won?”

“A real villain is like this.”

Jjak-tung muttered in a pessimistic voice. Anyway, Hyun-woo wasn’t exactly astonished by Jjak-tung’s words. He had already guessed the general principles after hearing that Alan escaped overseas. It was natural. Alan was a clever criminal so he wouldn’t do something reckless. He would be aware of the risks of becoming a criminal. If his plan succeeded then Global Exos wouldn’t be able to punish Alan when he returned. If he failed he was a criminal, if he succeeded then he was a tycoon! Alan was risking his life on this gamble. Therefore Hyun-woo judged that Alan wouldn’t make any disadvantageous choices in the Demonic War. The fact that he was concentrated on releasing the Hell River underneath Silvana instead of Silrinad meant that it was important.

‘Well, I don’t care whether Alan is scamming Global Exos. But.....’

The problem was that Hyun-woo would receive huge damage as a result. Alan had a deep grudge against Hyun-woo so if he conquered

New World then Hyun-woo would have nowhere to run.

‘I have to do whatever it takes to stop him’

After going round and round, he eventually ended up with his first conclusion. The rehabilitation members also came to the same conclusion and shouted.

“Now’s not the time to be talking about this!”

“You have to let the Schudenberg expedition know so they can recapture Silvana!”

“I’ve already told them.”

Hyun-woo murmured with a sigh. After Hyun-woo discovered Alan’s plan, he had run from Shangri-La straight to Haverstein. And he immediately delivered the contents to Haverstein. But his response was different from what Hyun-woo expected. The Schudenberg and Bristania expeditions were still focused on the invasion of Silrinad.

“What are you saying.....?”

The rehabilitation members stuttered at Hyun-woo’s words.

“No way! They don’t care if Nagaran disappears?”

“They said it was unrelated.”

“What?”

Hyun-woo sighed painfully and recalled his conversation with Haverstein.

“What on earth? Do you not believe my information?”

“Even if your information is certain, it doesn’t change anything.”

“Why.....?”

“That’s because the location is Nagaran.”

Haverstein replied with a heavy look. That’s right. It was the reason the Schudenberg Kingdom didn’t seriously consider Hyun-woo’s words. Originally Nagaran was an area that the Three Kingdoms

fought over. But the Three Kingdoms became tired of the endless competition and called for a ceasefire before agreeing to give the buffer zone to the foreigners. In other words, it was an area not owned by any of the kingdoms. The foreigners who became the Lord of the territory had to pay taxes but it was split between three countries so the money wasn't that much. There was no reason for them to stop the invasion.

On the other hand, the Sinus Principality was definitely money. That's why the Schudenberg and Bristania kingdoms embarked on an expedition to take it back before it was destroyed by the demons. They could receive enormous compensation from the Sinus Principality. No, in some cases the marching army might even be able to increase the land of their respective kingdoms. It was why both kingdoms poured an absurd amount of money into the expeditions.

"That's why I've been told to keep on marching. What would happen if the Schudenberg expedition suddenly exited after joining up with the Bristania expedition? We've only just managed to take the initiative in leading the expeditions in the Sinus Principality. Even if the Schudenberg expedition reclaims Nagaran, it isn't a land that Schudenberg can insist ownership of. We would end up losing more than we've gained."

"But if the Hell River is unsealed then it won't just be Nagaran that is submerged. According to the records, it has the power to strengthen the demons and their magic....."

"Have you forgotten?"

Haverstein interrupted the conversation and looked at him.

"The Schudenberg expedition has the Ark of Creation."

Hyun-woo's body instantly stiffened. That's it. The Ark of Creation which was able to get rid of the 'Sphere of Influence!' If the Schudenberg Kingdom had that then they didn't need to fear the threat of the demonic influence anymore. No, if the demons became stronger and the Schudenberg Kingdom had the Ark of Creation then Schudenberg Kingdom could exert an influence on the entire

continent. Therefore the Schudenberg expedition just dismissed Hyun-woo's report. In the long run, Hyun-woo finding the treasure had become a burden to him. However he still couldn't give up.

"But Alan knows we have the Ark of Creation. Yet his purpose is still to unseal the Hell River. That means even the Ark of Creation can't prevent it."

"Is there anything which proves that?"

"T-that....."

Hyun-woo was speechless from Haverstein's question. That's right. It was just Hyun-woo's guess. Hyun-woo couldn't answer Haverstein so he just sighed and shook his head.

".....I'm sorry.

The rehabilitation members instantly became angry when Hyun-woo explained.

"Is there nothing we can do?"

"Then contact Lariette and tell her to leave with the Ark of Creation!"

One rehabilitation member clamoured with an angry voice. Hyun-woo shook his head. Hyun-woo had also thought about that at first. However, the aristocrats of the Schudenberg Kingdom wouldn't be so lenient. After the Ark of Creation was used the first time, the soldiers thought of Lariette as a goddess and protected her. Even Hyun-woo had to go through several checks in the game before he could meet with Lariette.

'Although I say that Lariette was protected.....'

It wasn't that simple. To be exact, it wasn't 'protection' but 'surveillance.' The Schudenberg nobles knew about the power of the Ark of Creation through Haverstein's report and kept a close eye on Lariette and the prophets.

"High ranking people are the same whether it is reality or the game."

"So? What about Lariette? Even if the NPCs are watching, isn't

Lariette a user? If she is threatened then can't she just end the connection?"

"I've also thought about that....."

Ark sighed and shook his head. Hyun-woo had also thought about threatening the Schudenberg Kingdom like that. However, the situation wasn't that simple. The Ark of Creation was a key item in the Demonic War. And it wasn't just the expedition who was interested in the treasure. Global Exos wanted the Demonic War to end and were also looking at the Ark of Creation eagerly. And Lariette was one of Global Exos' candidates. So Lariette had already provided information about the Ark of Creation and Global Exos had negotiated with her. Lariette had accepted the conditions and now she didn't go to work but just concentrated on the game and using the Ark of Creation. There was no way Hyun-woo could convince her to use it for his benefit. Although her existence did help his cause.

'It is thanks to Lariette-nim that Schudenberg promised some military supplies.....'

Hyun-woo had been despondently leaving headquarters. Then he heard from behind him.

"Wait a minute!"

10 people escorting Lariette was approaching headquarters. And she said with a resolute expression.

"I heard the general outline of the situation. I understand the position of Schudenberg Kingdom. But isn't Nagaran a territory that offers the Schudenberg Kingdom some taxes? The ones making the decision might think it has nothing to do with their kingdom but that's not exactly true. In addition, Ark was the one who played a crucial role in finding the Ark of Creation. It is because of Ark-nim that I am able to use the Ark of Creation for Schudenberg's benefit."

Hyun-woo was aware of Lariette's arrangement with Global Exos. However the NPCs couldn't understand those circumstances. They knew the importance of the Ark of Creation so

they couldn't ignore the light threat in her words. Furthermore, the commander of the expedition force was Hyun-woo's friend. Haverstein inflated Lariette's threat by 200 times.

"Therefore the Schudenberg Kingdom should supply all the munitions he requires to retake Nagaran."

This was the condition she proposed to the Schudenberg Kingdom. Lariette withdrew once more after making the strong request. The rehabilitation members nodded as they were told this.

"Huhuhu, as expected from Lariette. She is normally careful in her conduct but also has strength."

The rehabilitation members looked at Hyun-woo. Hyun-woo knew that Lariette had done that for him. And he felt gratitude as well as a mysterious emotion when she appeared. After discovering that Lariette didn't have a relationship with Alan at Pabiun Canyon, he had been feeling that emotion more often. But now wasn't the time to consider it.

"The thing we need most is troops."

Hyun-woo sighed and muttered. That's right. Right now troops were absolutely necessary. If he didn't have any combat troops then what was the point of military supplies? The rehabilitation realized the situation and once again complained.

"There's no time to complain."

Jjak-tung spoke with a serious expression.

"If the Schudenberg kingdom won't help then Bristania will be the same. There is no need to even mention the Sinus Principality. In the end we can't receive help from the NPCs."

There was a heavy silence around the table. That's right. There were several issues but this was the biggest problem. They would have to regain Silvana overrun with 100,000 demons without any troops. It was for that reason that Hyun-woo gathered Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members. But Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members couldn't think of a way. Hyun-woo scratched

his head and asked.

“Is there any way to gather troops?”

“Let’s see..... Even if we reduce the number of troops in the supply unit, that is still only 1,000 people. If we pull out more soldiers then there might be a problem with the supply of munitions.”

“Then we’ve secured 1,000 people. Is there any other ways?”

“Even if we gather the users in Seutandal.....most users are already in the expedition force and other users aren’t connecting at all because they can’t hunt or trade.....even if the Baran warriors are included, that is at most 3,000 or 4,000 people?”

Gwon Hwa-rang murmured but Jjak-tung shook his head.

“Seutandal won’t get there quickly enough. Isn’t that right?”

“Yes.”

Hyun-woo answered absent-mindedly. Jjak-tung clicked his tongue and said.

“Silvana is already occupied by the demons so there isn’t a lot of time.”

That’s right. It had already been three days since Silvana was occupied by the demons. Alan was after the Hell River on the lowest floor of Silvana’s secret dungeon. While it had taken Hyun-woo 18 days to reach the lowest floor of the dungeon, it wouldn’t take Alan that much time. Hyun-woo had the Dark Eden members train in the secret dungeon so a lot of monsters had already been cleared.

‘Alan also rallied 100,000 demonic monsters to attack Silvana. If they arrange some for defending Radon and Beiku, then he probably has 10,000 monsters with him.’

In the end, Alan probably only entered the dungeon with 10,000 demons.

“Will it take a few days?”

“Presently Dark Eden is hunting on the 58th and 59th floors. The

50th floor is where there is an ancient maze while the 51st floor is the Abyss so the terrain becomes more complicated and there are a lot of traps.”

This was one of the reasons why Seutandal won't work. It would take 4~5 days to move troops from Seutandal to Nagaran. Alan had already entered the secret dungeon for three days so it would be over by the time they arrived. And 3,000~4,000 troops wouldn't be enough.

“In the end, we have to gather troops that can make it to Nagaran in one or two days.”

The rehabilitation members fell silent at Jjak-tung's words. Nagaran wasn't under the demonic sphere of influence yet. There were 100,000 monsters so at least 50,000 troops were necessary. If there was a time limit then users waiting for the resurrection time to be over wouldn't be able to join. When considering that point 50,000 was the minimum. They needed 50,000 troops from areas adjacent to Nagaran. It was an almost impossible task.

Hyun-woo and the rehabilitation members sighed as time passed. Yapsab noticed the heavy atmosphere and stealthily headed towards the living room. All the rehabilitation members turned their heads as the TV turned on. Hyun-woo also looked at the TV without thinking.

“Damn, if we were celebrities then it would be possible.....”

Yapsab smacked his lips and muttered as he looked at the TV. Yapsab was watching a guerrilla concert that was being broadcasted. The concert was being held by an amateur singer who had gathered an audience through various promotions. The TV was broadcasting the concert where 10,000 people were gathered to watch the new singer.

“If we were celebrities then gathering people won't be a problem.”

“Yeah.....”

Hyun-woo who was watching the TV sighed and answered. Then an intense spark occurred in his head.

‘Celebrity? TV? People?’

Those three words entwined together and formed an idea. Hyun-woo jumped up and shouted.

“There might be a way!”

Grab Hold of the Enemy

-Kuraka, kuraka, beldram!

Ku kwa kwa kwa kwa, ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

A huge number of demonic monsters were shrieking while running. The number of demons running while causing a dust cloud numbered in the tens of thousands! Armed with swords and spears, the Tallons riding ugly horses were leading them. There were so many different types of monsters roaring that it could fill a museum. The number of demons was enough to step on a city! Anyone facing those many demons would shudder with fear.....

“Bah!”

But Ark just snorted as he laughed. Then he spoke to JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members on either side of him.

“Hyung-nims, it’s begun!”

“Archer units, aim at the monsters in the lead!”

The rehabilitation members on either side of him simultaneously shouted. Then a huge dark cloud appeared in the sky behind Ark. The huge dark cloud.....

That’s right. It was tens of thousands of arrows. It flew into the sky like a dark cloud before falling like a shower of rain.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

The tens of thousands of arrows fell over the heads of the demons. The Tallons in the lead fell to the ground like a hedgehog and were trampled to pieces by the charging demons. It was hundreds of them. But it didn’t feel like the number of demons had even decreased.

-Kuraka, kuraka, beldram!

When their colleagues fell down, the demons just shrieked and ran forward even more.

“JusticeMan ajusshi!”

“Okay. Shield units, prepare for a collision!”

JusticeMan lifted his left arm and shouted. Thousands of warriors behind Ark raised their shield. They advanced 10 metres, placed one knee on the ground and raised their shields vertically. It was a shield barriers made of thousands of warriors.

“Spear units should stand behind the shield units to prevent their attacks!”

This time JusticeMan raised his right arm. The spear units got into position and positioned their spears diagonally. The spears were raised at a 30 degree angle above the shields. In moments a wall made of shields and spears were built. It was the ultimate defense position to prevent a charge. It was the formation he thought of when fighting monsters in the secret dungeon.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

A roaring sound shook the space. The demons hadn't reduced their speed and collided with the spears and shields. The shields were firmly anchored and they prevented the assault while the spears pushed through the gaps in the demons' leather. Ark's eyes shone at the sight.

“Now. Go forward, every unit intercept the demons!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

Like an enormous dam had discharged, the protective barrier split to the left and right. And thousands of soldiers ran through the gap in the protective barrier. The infantry tangled with the demons and a fierce battle began.

‘I didn't think I would gather this much!’

Ark looked at the fighting soldiers with a warm look. They were tens of thousands of soldiers with remarkable armour and weapons! They

were all the users that Ark had collected in a mere day. They numbered 60,000!

.....How had Ark managed to gather that many users in just one day? Ark found the method after Yapsab turned on the TV yesterday evening. The TV had been broadcasting a guerrilla concert. An amateur singer had managed to attract 10,000 people for a concert. Ark looked at the broadcast and considered.

‘The singer gathered that many people just from PR?’

The singer was excellent but it was because of the power of the TV that people gathered. They were interested in appearing on TV and showed up. No matter if it was Korea or the world, the influence of television was enormous.

‘Why didn’t I think of it before?’

Ark thought about the game exclusive news. Ark had used the broadcast to influence users to protect Lancel village. But he couldn’t use such methods this time. These days the biggest topic on the game exclusive news was the Demonic War. So the videos of the Schudenberg and Bristania expeditions were being played every day. In such a situation, appearing on TV wouldn’t garner a lot of attention.

‘However, if it is associated with the war then that will change.’

“I have a scoop related to New World. Can you broadcast it right now?”

“If it is Ark-nim’s scoop then we will broadcast it anytime!”

Ark was guaranteed to increase the ratings so the game exclusive news immediately accepted. Ark sent a video he took a few hours ago and it was broadcasted on TV. The video showed Ark entering the History Crystal in Shangri-La and finding the secret about the Hell River. After the video ended, the host continued talking.

“It is clear that there are other secrets entangled with the Demonic War. The demons are plotting to unseal the Hell River hidden underneath Silvana and flood all of Nagaran. Yet the Schudenberg

and Bristania kingdoms are taking no action.”

The host spoke with an excited voice.

“On Dark Wolf-nim who is supported by our game exclusive news is trying to smash the demons conspiracy on his own. But no matter how strong Dark Wolf-nim is, it is impossible for him to defeat 100,000 monsters by himself. So Dark Wolf-nim is recruiting heroes to crush the conspiracy of the demons! If you visit the game exclusive news’ homepage then you can find out more details!”

The impact of this broadcast was enormous. Tens of thousands of people instantly connected to the website as soon as the broadcast ended. And several users left commands on the special bulletin board that Ark requested.

-I am Aramis, the Lord of Radon. I asked for help as soon as the demons invaded but both Bristania and Schudenberg refused. If Dark Wolf is moving then the 4,800 people of the Aramis alliance will join him.

-I am the Lord of Beiku, Saruman. You should know my position so I won’t write a lot. Those of the Golden Cross alliance will join with Dark Wolf-nim!

-I am Pejito, the Lord of Granada. If Dark Wolf-nim’s information is correct and the Hell River will flood all of Nagaran then it isn’t just the problem of one territory. The 4,900 members of our Union alliance will fight with Dark Wolf-nim.....

This was what Ark had aimed for. That’s right. If the Hell River flooded then various problems would form, but the ones most affected would be the various local lords and their alliances. When removing the direction connection with Alan, their circumstances were similar to Ark’s.

‘What will happen if they know the situation in Nagaran?’

Of course they would try every method to stop it like Ark. And Dark Wolf was already a name known throughout New World. If Ark appealed to them directly then the lords and their alliances wouldn’t

hesitate to help! The results were exactly what Ark expected. After the broadcast was viewed, the lords of each territory rushed like wild boars to apply. There were quite a few alliance members in the expedition but their territory was at stake so they flew to Nagaran without questioning it. Users spread all over the continent used the Letter Movement to move among cities and ran to Nagaran. In just two days of game time, the alliances of the 12 territories had assembled in Nagaran.

“The assembly of the 4,800 Aramis alliance members from Radon territory is complete!”

“The assembly of the 5,200 Golden Cross alliance members from Beiku is complete!”

“The assembly of the 4,900 Union alliance members from Gurana is complete.....”

The final number was 60,000 people! It was the birth of 60,000 allied forces consisting entirely of users that had never occurred before in New World’s history.

“Don’t back off! If you retreat then your territory will be lost!”

“Kill as much monsters as you can before you die!”

The biggest advantage of this alliance was that they weren’t afraid to go through fire or water. Who cared about death if their territory would be lost if the Hell River flooded? It was the same for the 1,000 Dark Eden members led by JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group. They received an income from the triangular trade and the munitions supply so if they lost the territory then their income would fly away. They became resolute in following Ark to defend Silvana. But JusticeMan’s case was slightly different.

“Dammit! It just had to happen now!”

JusticeMan yelled as he knocked down some demons to the ground. He was angry because they had interfered in his proposal to Park So-mi.

Of course, Ark wasn’t just leisurely watching the situation.

“Okay, shall I go too? Summon Demon. Racard, Purital, Shambala!”

“.....Do you want to die?”

Shambala glared threateningly as he was summoned (?). But Ark just ignored it and gave his summons (?) and order.

“Racard, watch the military situation using satellite surveillance mode!”

“Yes!”

Purital, Clad Armour!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Purital was taken apart like a robot transformation and incorporated himself around Ark’s body. Racard’s voice was heard in his ear at the same time.

“Master, the Dark Loaders are moving on the left side while being escorted by Heavy Walkers.”

“Over there?”

Ark’s eyes looked at the demons through the bone armour and he ran lightly across the area. The demons wearing black robes surrounded by armoured Heavy Walkers caught his eye. In fact, even Ark wasn’t able to do that much in a situation where thousands of soldiers and users were fighting. If he killed 10 monsters among the 10,000 then it was just like a ratio of 1000:1. That type of number wouldn’t have a huge influence on the military situation. But there was a way for one person to have an influence on the military situation. It was to intercept enemies with special abilities! If he took out demons with wide area abilities or healing magic then it would reduce the burden. The Dark Loaders were demons who could restore health like priests. Ark focused on them and shouted.

“Hook Explosion!”

The hooks at Ark’s shoulder and knees crossed the space. It grabbed the bodies of two Dark Loaders and pulled them to Ark.

“Shambala, now!”

“Can you stop ordering me around?”

Ark drove his sword into one of the monster’s chest. Thanks to the damage from Hook Explosion and Ark’s attack, the Dark Loader stumbled and its spell was cancelled. Then Shambala shot forward like an arrow and drove his dagger into the neck of a Dark Loader. There was an eerie sound and the Dark Loader’s neck was cut. It was a perfect critical hit to the neck of an enemy made defenseless by his partner. Ark and Shambala finished up the Dark Loaders and cruised the battlefield for more enemies. Therefore the allied forces could minimize any unnecessary consumption of supplies and ran down the demons.

“Knock down the demons no matter what!”

“Archers aim for the legs of any that are escaping!”

“Destroy the black obelisks!”

The voices of the allied forces shouted from among the monsters. After a while, there was the sound of a horse’s hooves and one of the allied members attacking a monster collapsed. Each of the leaders expressed their confusion at the same time.

“Dullahan!”

“The Dullahan Knights are coming!”

Around 100 knights had appeared and were trampling the allied members. The knights had exposed bones through various areas of their black armour. They were also holding their heads in their left hand. Holding a sword in the right hand and blowing flames from the mouth of the head being held in the left hand, it was the knight called Dullahan.

“Kukukuku, show these ignorant humans the power of the darkness! Become a dead person in hell!”

The Dullahan shouted while blowing hell flames. When the high ranking demons appeared, the defense line of the allied forces

suddenly collapsed.

“JusticeMan ajusshi, rehabilitation hyungnims!”

“Understood. The Pejito and Gurana troops, move to the right side!”

“Golden Cross troops, rotate in a semicircle to the left!”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members shouted towards the surrounding allied forces. Then the allied forces fighting split to the left and right.

“Magicians, connect your magic using Willpower Exchange!”

The magicians simultaneously started chanting spells. The intense light covered the bodies of the magicians like a net. It was the spell which connected magic to make higher ranking magic available.

“Light of the world which swallows the darkness.....anger of the Thunder God!”

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

At the same time, hundreds of stems of lighting struck from the ground. It was a dominant wide area magic with attacked the targets within 8 circles! The magicians were completely exhausted afterwards but the Dullahan were vaporized by the thousands of hundreds of strikes and were on the verge of death.

“Smash their heads!”

The thousands of allied forces simultaneously attacked at Ark’s command. Thanks to the magicians’ 8 circles, the Dullahan were unable to resist. Several hundred spears penetrated its body while hundreds of swords and maces slammed down on the Dullahans’ heads.

“The Dullahan Knights have been exterminated!”

“Run and destroy the black obelisks!”

The allied forces had their morale increased from killing the Dullahans and instantly charged the other demons. This time 30,000 demons were in front of the allied forces. The allied forces number

60,000 troops. The momentum was with the allied forces thanks to the wide area magic and the crushed the demons. Several hours later, the allied forces swallowed the demons like a huge wave and advanced. After a while, the demons received enormous damage and were forced to retreat.

“We’ve regained Beiku territory!”

“Let’s advance to Silvana!”

“Ohhhhhh!”

The tens of thousands of soldiers stood on the piled up dead bodies of the demons and cheered with their weapons raised.

“Damn!”

A curse automatically emerged from Ark’s mouth. Ark was standing on the hill looking down at Silvana. But the sight that caught his eyes was different from the Silvana he remembered. The wide farmland was pitted with holes like bombs had exploded and the villages were ruins.

‘The estate which I raised.....’

Ark grinded his teeth together. After obtaining Silvana from the Hermes alliance, he had used the secret funds from the Continental Commerce Firm to develop the territory. Thanks to his efforts, a B rank promotion had been just around the corner. But the demons had stepped all over his territory.

The B rank promotion was set aside and it had fallen to D rank.

He had already known this but the sight made anger well up inside him. Ark took a deep breath and pushed it down.

‘Calm down. Now isn’t the time to be thinking about that.’

That’s right. If didn’t matter if it was a B or D rank territory if he couldn’t protect Silvana. Silvana would disappear if the Hell River flooded.

“.....This can't continue.”

Ark muttered as he looked down at the territory. After forming the allied forces, they had instantly retaken Beiku and Radon. They were then able to advance into Silvana. It was a series of consecutive victories for Nagaran's allied forces! On the other hand, the demons had received successive defeats and retreated to Silvana. Even so, it wasn't possible to say that the present situation was good. The reason was the existence of the black obelisks. 80% of the black obelisks that fell in Nagaran were concentrated on Silvana castle and the surrounding areas. The demons that occupied Radon and Beiku also moved back to join those at Silvana. While regaining Beiku and Radon, they had killed a large number of demons but only destroyed 20% of the obelisks. In other words, the number of demons had only decreased by 20%. The other demons would be restored by the black obelisks around Silvana. Therefore, there were 70,000~80,000 demons left as a last line of defense around Silvana. This was also the number that could be resurrected in the future. However, the allied forces were also able to resurrect at well.

‘With the power of Nagaran's allied forces, it is possible to exterminate the demons over the next few days and regain the territory.’

That's right. Nagaran's allied forces currently had 60,000 people! They weren't ordinary NPCs and users. They were the alliances that had fought in New World's largest battlefields and won the territories. Personal combat power, organizational abilities, experience and equipment.....it wasn't an exaggeration to say they were all experts of the highest level. There were 60,000 of those experts. Killing 70,000~80,000 demons should be no problem for them. The allied forces were already on schedule to retake Silvana. But Ark's biggest worry wasn't this battle's victory or defeat.

‘The problem is time!’

After Ark used the TV to gather the allied forces, they finally reached Silvana three days later. Forming the allied forces took 2 days while it took a week to capture Beiku and Radon and advance to Silvana.

‘That means one week has passed since Alan entered the secret

dungeon.'

That's right. Ark's problem wasn't retaking Silvana. Even if they retook Silvana, if they couldn't stop Alan then Nagaran would be flooded with the Hell River. If he couldn't stop Alan before he arrived at the Hell River then everything would end. So while the allied forces were marching towards Silvana, Ark had ordered the Dark Eden members hiding in the secret dungeon to monitor Alan's movements. And just now.....

-I've spotted Alan's group.

A Dark Eden member hiding in the secret dungeon whispered. The place the coalition member was watching was the entrance to the Abyss on the 51st floor. Alan, the Avenger guild and 10,000 demons had entered the Abyss. Ark thought about the situation after hearing the report.

'The Abyss is different from the 50 floors before it. It is the size of a huge maze and was just as complicated. Unimaginable traps are laid out everywhere like spider webs. No matter how many troops there are, it won't be easy for them to penetrate the Abyss.'

Ark remembered his experiences in the Abyss. But at that time monsters were swarming the dungeon. On the other hand, the monsters in the secret dungeon were reduced after Dark Eden's training and wouldn't revive for a few days. While there were monsters in the previous 50 floors, there weren't any in the Abyss yet.

'If Alan doesn't have to worry about the disruption from monsters then he can pass in 2~3 days.'

In other words, Ark only had 2~3 days left! Of course it was possible for Nagaran's allied forces to recapture Silvana in 2~3 days. But the problem was they would have to go down from the 1st floor of the secret dungeon after recapturing Silvana. Alan had already passed the 50th floor. Even if they didn't sleep and ran with full speed forward, there was no guarantee that Ark could catch up with Alan. Silvana also hadn't even been regained yet. Alan would reach the 60th floor by the time Ark regained Silvana! Silvana would

be flooded with the Hell River.

“.....I have no choice but to use that method.”

Ark returned to the camp and muttered. Ark had expected a situation like this in the first place.

‘Alan had already entered the secret dungeon by the time I learnt about Silvana’s occupation. No matter how fast I regain Silvana, won’t I still be too late to stop Alan?’

Ark had some expectations from the elite monsters in the secret dungeon. The experienced Dark Eden now only hunted in the Abyss. So the 50 floors before that were left alone with a lot of monsters.

‘Alan’s group would have to clear them while going down. Hopefully it will take them a few days and we can catch up.’

But Alan was entering the Abyss with the Avenger guild and 10,000 monsters. The monsters in the ancient maze wouldn’t be able to stop those many troops. And Alan had already entered the Abyss.

“I thought you were elite monsters? You’re all just boring monsters!”

Ark cursed the elite monsters in the secret dungeon. But Ark wasn’t naive enough to believe that the monsters could stop them. He was able to predict this and made some preparations.

Ttukttuk, ttukttuk, ttukttuk!

Ark heard some hammer sounds as he entered the camp of the allied forces. He turned his head and saw a huge device among the tents. It was an odd machine with old TVs and antennas placed here and there. And 1 balloon like user was busily going around with various tools, tightening screws and hammering in nails.

“Are you there yet?”

“Phew.....what? Ah, it’s you?”

The balloon like user wiped the sweat and raised his eyes as Ark approached. The user covered with oil spots was Wormer. Wormer

tapped the big machine and laughed.

“It’s almost done. I need to finish increasing the stability.”

“What about the performance?”

“Don’t worry about it. The performance will fall a little bit with the stability but it will still work. Because this is the work of the genius inventor Wormer. If you doubt me then you can test it out. The functional parts have been built so you can check it.”

Ark put his hands on the machine after hearing Ark’s words. Then the information about the machine rose in front of him.

-Quantum Material Transmission Device

Type: 1st grade invention

Design and Production: Wormer

A machine that converts a person or object to quantum material and transmits it to another place. However, a receiver is required in order for the machine to return the person or object to their original form. The magic necessary for the quantum transmission is proportional to the volume of the target and the distance between the transmission machine and the receiver. If the volume is big or the transmission distance is far then it will consume more magic energy.

That’s right. This machine was one of the precautions Ark thought of. The Quantum Material Transmission Device! It was a mobile device that could move a person anywhere! While Ark, Shambala and JusticeMan were arguing about a way to enter the secret dungeon, Wormer had explained about the machine. When Ark heard the explanation of the machine, he instantly supplied Wormer with the materials and commissioned him to produce it.

“How is it? Are you positive about the performance?”

Wormer asked Ark with an elated expression after the information was confirmed. Then he muttered with vexation.

“But I’m dissatisfied with some parts since I had to create it in a hurry. The design..... Damn, the quantum machine I left in the underground base had a better performance and design.....”

This wasn’t the first time Wormer had made a Quantum Material Transmission Device. He had made one with better energy efficiency and reliability and placed it in the underground base. However, Wormer’s underground base had been used to trap Alan and the demons. When they had visited the underground base after Pabian Fortress was captured, they discovered that all the inventions were shattered. This was why the hermit like Wormer was helping in the war.

“That bastard Alan, he dared to turn my inventions that are artwork into scrap iron? I’ll make you experience how terrible these items are with your own body!”

Wormer trembled as he thought about it again. Then he suddenly remembered something and asked Ark.

“But is it really okay? Like I said, this quantum device is like junk compared to my other one. But it still requires the receiver to be used. The receiver is easy to use but don’t you want to move to the secret dungeon?”

That’s right. The quantum machine couldn’t be used yet even if it was finished. The Quantum Material Transmission Device couldn’t be used to transfer people anywhere they wanted. Just like the Letter Movement built by the Magic Institute, the quantum machine was paired with a receiver. And Ark wanted to use the quantum machine to move to the 60th floor of the secret dungeon.

‘That is the only way to stop Alan in the present situation.’

This was a situation where there was no way to catch up with Alan even if he quickly captured Silvana. So Ark wanted to use the quantum machine to move directly to the 60th floor where the Dark Eden members were hiding and join with them to catch Alan’s ankle. It was a way to stop Alan while the allied forces regained Silvana!

‘If I block Alan then it will be easy for Nagaran’s allied forces to catch up. Stepping on Alan and the 10,000 demons won’t be a problem.’

But in order to use the quantum machine to move to the 60th floor, he needed to install the receiver onto the 60th floor. It was the situation where he had to install the receiver on the 60th floor in order to go to the 60th floor! It was the reason why the quantum machine couldn’t be used when they were hiding in Wormer’s underground base.

‘But there is a way!’

“Is the receiver easy to make?”

Ark asked after a short time. Wormer nodded and replied.

“How many times have I said it? Anyway can create the device if they have my genius design.”

“Good. Please finish everything and prepare to use it at any time.”

Ark smiled and headed towards the garrison JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and the 60,000 members of Nagaran’s allied forces were gathered. They all looked at Ark and he began to talk.

“There is no more time for resting. I know that you’re exhausted and suffered a lot but it is all for the sake of protecting Nagaran. Our goal is to crush the ambitions of the demons so please exert yourself a bit more.”

“Don’t worry. Our alliance members are prepared to fight at any time!”

“Yes. Staying up a few nights is no problem if it is to protect Nagaran!”

The alliance leaders spoke in an expression filled with determination. They would receive a huge monetary loss if Nagaran disappeared so there was no room to consider other matters. Ark looked at them and nodded.

“Okay. Everything is right before our eyes. There are a lot of them

and the demons occupying Silvana are strong. The battles would become fiercer than before but there is no doubt that we can crush these guys!”

Ark pulled out his sword and indicated Silvana.

“Now, advance!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

At Ark’s command, the 60,000 users shouted in unison and rushed towards Silvana. Nagaran’s allied forces ran down the hill and towards the demons gathered around Silvana. There were shouts and shrieks as thousands of feet shook the earth. After a while.....

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, pepepepeng!

It was a conflict between more than 100,000 humans and demons. The allies wielding shields and swords tackled the demons. But the swell enveloped the resisting demons and they were torn to pieces. The maces broke the heads of the demons and the swords cut off body pieces. It was a hellish scene where thousands of lives were lost and the ground was filled with pools of blood. The allied forces had an average level of 350. On the other hand, the demons had an average level of 400. But the allied forces were equipped with rare equipment and special skills. It was the reason for their victory when capturing Radon and Beiku. However, the demons that were Silvana’s last line of defense weren’t insignificant.

-Nadan, nadan, baramud, nadan.....kuranosu!

An spell suddenly came from behind the demons. Huge black flames swept all over the place and hundreds of allies were turned to grey powder. Dozens of huge demons appeared through a gap. At the same time, red warning messages flashed before the eyes of the allied forces.

- The boss monster, Hell Lion ‘Soul Crusher’ has appeared.
- The boss monster, Creature of Despair ‘Gorgon’ has appeared.
- The elite boss monster, King of Despair ‘Moraid’ has

||appeared.....||

They were dozens of bosses and elite bosses between level 500~600! When they appeared, several units were instantly wiped out.

“Magicians and archers to the rear concentrate on support fire!”

“Don’t attack without reason! Use your battle formation to confront them!”

“Priests focus on restoring the troops fighting the bosses first!”

The unit commanders ran back and forth while shouting. Thanks to the appearance of the demonic bosses, the war became even more confusing. But Ark’s eyes didn’t look at the opposing bosses

“Now. Demonic Manifestations. Spear, spear, spear, mace and mace!”

This was the chance Ark aimed for as his eyes flashed and he shouted. The equipment chosen jumped out from his bag and appeared above the heads of the 1,000 Dark Eden members. The shape of a spear was formed and shattered before being absorbed into the soldiers’ bodies.

-Demonic energy has been extracted from the offerings (Spear, spear, spear, mace and mace).

The effect exercised by this combination is <Power Charge>.

Power Charge: The users will gain the effect of ‘Power Charge’ for 10 minutes. However, this effect only applies to the enemy in front. When Power Charge is in effect, assault speed will increase by 50% and there is a chance of pushing the opponent back 5 metres.

However, this effect only applies to the enemy in front.

“Dark Eden, avoid the bosses and charge the demons on the left!”

“Ohhhh, everybody charge!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Thanks to the effect of Power Charge, the demons flew everywhere as the Dark Eden members rushed forward. Ark and Dark Eden approached the outskirts of Silvana castle. Then a bush with a small gap between the rocks caught his eye.

“That’s it, Racard!”

Ark’s eyes brightened as he spotted the rock gap and shouted. Then Racard who had been watching the battlefield using satellite surveillance mode flew towards Ark. Ark pulled out a scroll from the bag and said.

“Do I need to explain the situation again?”

“No, I understand. Master.”

“Now the fate of Silvana depends on you and your wings.”

“Y-you don’t need to say it. Y-you will increase my burden.”

Racard stuttered with a tense expression.

“Now go.”

Racard grabbed the scroll and turned his body. Then Ark looked at Racard’s trembling wings and hugged him.

“There is no need to be too tense. I know how hard you work to perform the missions. If this mission fails then it won’t be your fault. I won’t blame you. And.....if possible, please survive and return. Because you are the pet that I prize most.”

“M-Master.....!”

Racard stuttered as he heard Ark’s embarrassing words. Tears flowed from his eyes before he made a determined expression.

“I won’t say goodbye!”

Racard answered and flew between the crack in the rock. This was the reason why Ark disregarded the military situation and sneaked to this place. No, it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that this battle was

all for allowing Racard to fly between the rock gap. The gap in the rocks contained the entrance to the secret tunnel into Silvana! Previously he had used the raccoons to make this secret tunnel into the dungeon. That's right. This was the method Ark came up with.

Even if he moved the troops through the secret tunnel, there was no way to catch up with Alan. If he sent a large amount of troops then of course the demons would notice the existence of the tunnel. But there was no worry about being discovered with just 1 bat. Racard also thoroughly knew the terrain of the secret dungeon so he could reach the 60th floor before Alan. Ark had given him Wormer's design before infiltrating the secret dungeon. The raccoons were down there so they could easily make the receiver.

"I believe in you!"

Ark saluted towards the rock that Racard disappeared into. Then Shambala next to him snorted and said.

"Are you just playing around?"

"No. Now, let's enter the battlefield again before the demons notice!"

Dark Eden attacked the demons at Ark's command and he stepped out of the bush. Now the fate of Nagaran hung on Racard's wings.

"I've found the stairs going down to the next floor!"

Magicians were scattered all over the place when one of them shouted. The magician wearing a black robe.....

He was the main magician of the Hermes alliance, Jewel. But after his attack on Lancel and Ark failed, he had become trapped in Jackson's underground prison. Then Hermes' leader Raiden banished Jewel and he became like dog food. At that moment, Andel visited in order to recruit Jewel into the Avenger guild. That's right. Jewel was currently in the Avenger guild. Jewel reported to a knight wearing black armour.....

“Okay. Gather the scattered troops. We will head to the next floor as soon as they are assembled.”

The person who gave the order was Alan. Jewel nodded and gazed at the other users.

“Yes! Communication soldiers, connect with each unit and tell them to join us.”

10 people simultaneously used the Feather of Whispering. And they communicated Alan’s order to their colleagues scattered around the dungeon.

-We’ve found the entrance. Bring the demons and return!

This was the reason Alan brought the Avenger guild into the secret dungeon. It was in order to control the demons! While Jewel was gathering the scattered troops, Alan looked around at the surroundings.

‘The work is progressing as scheduled but something is strange.’

Alan had started to feel uneasy after entering the 51st floor and the Abyss. It was a secret dungeon with elite creatures. Alan led the Avenger guild and the 10,000 demons in order to capture it as quickly as possible. But the circumstances were different from what Alan expected after he entered. The first 10 floors were similar to what he remembered but afterwards it felt like the number of monsters had reduced. Usually there were more monsters the deeper they entered the dungeon. Yet this phenomenon worsened after he came down to the 51st floor where the Abyss was. It was difficult to see any monsters at all.

‘It’s become easier but.....’

Previously Alan had only reached the 4th floor of the secret dungeon when he occupied Silvana. It was the limit since Alan and his guild were around level 150 at the time. Even though Alan was the Lord of Silvana, he had little information about the secret dungeon. The terrain and the special abilities of the monsters were something he had never experienced. It was the reason why Alan entered the Abyss with 10,000 demons. When first arriving at the Abyss, Alan

had faced the same situation as Ark. They received quite a bit of damage from the traps laid everywhere.

‘If there were monsters here then I would be delayed even more.’

Alan thought it was fortunate that there were no monsters in the Abyss. He never considered that this wasn’t the normal situation. So although Alan thought it was lucky, he still felt uncomfortable.

‘Well, I’ll find out eventually. I won’t be interrupted as long as Silvana is occupied by the demons!’

Alan smiled as he looked at the demons that were gathering. No matter the enemy, they had 10,000 users and demons. Nagaran would disappear from the map the moment Alan entered the bottom floor of the secret dungeon!

‘Huhuhu, I wonder what Ark will look like when he sees Nagaran submerged by the Hell River. But this is only the beginning. If I conquer New World then there will be nowhere for him.’

“Let’s go down to the next floor!”

Alan commanded and ran across the dungeon. At that moment, Jewel who had been using his magic to search for traps raised his head. He had seen a white object floating in the darkness.

“What the, that is? Second Sight!”

Jewel immediately used long distance viewing magic. And his face became confused as he determined the identity of the white object.

“A bat? Hik! W-wait? He is Ark’s summon! Alan-nim, Ark’s summon is here!”

That’s right. The white object near the ceiling was Racard. No, to be exact it was Racard with his back covered in a white glittering powder.

“What? Gargoyles, catch him!”

Dozens of gargoyles flew towards Racard.

“H-hik!”

Racard freaked out and started running away. Although Racard was no match for the gargoyles 1 on 1, thanks to Ark's training he could easily escape from them. Dozens of gargoyles shot rays at him but Racard used acrobatic flight manoeuvres to avoid it. And he ran way to the stairs leading down to the next floor. No, he tried to run away.

"Timosi!"

"Okay! Matanyi Shooter no. 2, Devil Chasing Arrow!"

The Dark Elf behind Alan started shooting arrows. But the Dark Elf was more than 100 metres away from Racard!

"Bah, not a chance!"

Racard checked the direction of the arrow and snorted before changing directions. Yet the arrow followed Racard's movements? That's right. This was the Dark Elf's special skill that gave even Shambala a hard time.

"Eek? What, what is this....kuek, kuek, kuek!"

In the end, Racard's chubby belly was studded with three arrows. While he was stumbling, he became surrounded by 10 gargoyles. Racard was caught by the gargoyles.

"D-dammit! Ugh, my stomach...."

"How did Ark's pet get all the way here?"

Alan asked as he approached Racard. Then he spotted something that Racard was holding.

"This?"

Alan asked as he verifying the contents of the scroll. Racard just scratched his neck.

"What? Silvana is occupied by demons so you shouldn't be able to enter even if Ark knows about the secret dungeon. But who are you trying to pass this scroll to?"

"D-damn! What are you saying after shooting my stomach with arrows! I am Ark's pet! I won't talk! I won't talk even if I die! Get lost

you loser! Chwe, chwe, chwe!”

As expected from the dirty Racard! He had daringly spat in Alan’s face.

“You.....!”

Alan took out his sword as his face became covered in saliva.

“Alan-nim, leave him to me.”

Alan flinched and turned his head as he heard an eerie voice. A huge figure wearing a hood approached Alan. A smile spread on Alan’s face as he saw the figure.

“That’s right. You’re also here”

“Bah, don’t make me laugh. I am a vampire. Everyone here is useless.”

“.....Is that right?”

The man giggled at Racard’s words and pulled down his hood. Fear filled Racard’s face.

“Dark Strike!”

Pepepepeng, pepepepeng!

Shining Darkness flashed and launched a series of chain explosions. It penetrated the demons gathered in a straight line and their health was reduced by 20%.

“Now. Destroy the black obelisk while they’re delayed!”

The allied forces flocked to the obelisk while Ark struck and distracted the demons. After Racard had gone through the tunnel, Ark and Dark Eden had immediately re-joined the allied forces. And they’ve been battling the demons for almost a day. But they couldn’t even approach Silvana thanks to the black obelisks. On the other hand, the allied forces were slowly destroying the black obelisks and the tide was turning in their favour.

‘But the limit has already been reached.’

Ark surveyed his allies gasping for breath and sighed. The allied forces were users. They could leave to restore health and mana but the fatigue would continue piling up. Moreover, they had little rest while quickly advancing to Silvana. No matter how much they wanted to keep their territories, their stamina was still limited.

‘They might be completely wiped out if this continues. We should retire and take a break.....’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him. A message window had appeared in front of Ark.

[-Your connection with your summon Racard has been stopped!]

‘What the? Did Alan catch Racard?’

The last method Ark devised had been blocked. But a small smile still spread on Ark’s face.

‘Huhuhu, it is proceeding!’

“All troops, concentrate on defense and retreat while maintaining battle formation!”

Pweeet, pweeet!

Ark commanded and the alliance leaders blew a whistle in unison. The allied forces swiftly retreated from the demons. There were also quite a few demons injured so they gave up chasing and returned to Silvana. Ark quickly gave some orders once they had retreated.

“Divide the troops into two. One half will be prepared for ambushes from the demons while the other half will get some sleep. The amount of time to sleep is 4 hours. We will gather and attack Silvana again in 8 hours. So far we’ve destroyed 1/3rd of the obelisks so we can win back Silvana in the next battle!”

“I understand. But.....”

One of the tired alliance leaders showed signs of insecurity.

“We need a break but is there enough time? We still have to catch up with the demons even if we capture Silvana.....”

“Just leave it to me.”

Ark replied with a grin.

-Boramae-nim has used a [Feather of Whispering] to whisper to you.
--

Boramae was the leader of the unit guarding the NPCs in the secret dungeon. Ark accepted the whisper and Boramae’s voice rang in his ears.

-Ark-nim, Radun has arrived.

-The blueprint?

-It was received.

-How long will it take the raccoons to make?

-The device itself is simple so 1 hour. Radun had brought all the necessary materials and the raccoons have already started working.

-Get back to me as soon as it is completed.

-Understood.

‘It’s a success!’

Ark clenched his fist as the whisper ended. That’s right. This was the reason Ark had panicked when he received the disconnection message. From the beginning this plan wasn’t based on Racard. Wormer’s design wasn’t complicated but the raccoons still couldn’t make it. Special materials were needed to create the receiver. So Ark had left it up to Radun to carry the items. But a problem had occurred in the execution stage.

‘Alan is accompanied by 10,000 monsters. There are also 1,000 users. Despite Radun’s Protective Colouration skill, there is no guarantee he will go unnoticed. And if he gets caught.....’

The operation would be unsuccessful and Hell River would flood.

‘.....What if Alan’s attention is drawn elsewhere?’

The real thing was Radun. And Racard was the bait! That’s right. Ark was the one who coated Racard’s back with the shiny powder. He had stealthily done it when embracing Racard at the rocks. Thanks to that glitter, Racard drew Alan’s eyes and Radun successfully reached the 60th floor.

“Devilish child!”

Shambala muttered as he heard the explanation. Well, Ark also felt a little bad this time. But was he the type to listen to his conscience?

“I can bring troops into the secret dungeon and stop Alan. However, the quantum device can’t move a lot of troops. There are 1,800 people hidden in the secret dungeon. They’re no match for Alan. But it will be enough to tie his ankles until Silvana is captured and the other troops enter the dungeon. Please.”

“Oh, as expected from Dark Wolf-nim!”

The alliance leaders exclaimed as they heard the secret strategy. After Ark explained the strategy, he left and visited Wormer.

“Wormer, are you ready?”

“The MG is charging now.”

Wormer was charging the quantum machine with a machine that looked like a kettle. The allied forces had gathered the fragments of the destroyed obelisks and he was using them to charge the MG. After a while, the MG was full and the quantum machine started to make noise. Wormer examined the dashboard before nodding.

“Okay. The frequency is captured. 720 metres underground..... Isn’t it good? It wouldn’t have been easy to assemble even with the design..... Anyway, the receiver is good for being created in a short time. Let’s see..... Ark, it can move 500 people with the MG charged now.”

“500? That’s less than I expected.”

Ark sighed and muttered. 500 people. When combined with the troops in the secret dungeon, it was only 2,300 people. Wormer replied petulantly.

“Damn, do you think that spatial movement is that simple?”

“I understand. Then prepare for the move.”

Things wouldn’t change even if he complained to Wormer. And whether it was 1,800 or 2,300 people, they still couldn’t confront Alan. All they had to do was find a way to ‘stop’ Alan. So Ark picked out the troops to enter the secret dungeon. Considering the circumstances, Ark only selected members of Dark Eden. Now everything was organized.

The success or failure of this war hung on Ark, Shambala, the rehabilitation members, Wormer and Dark Eden.

“JusticeMan ajusshi, please take command of the allied forces here.”

“Understood. Contact me soon.”

“Yes, thank you.”

Ark left the allied forces to JusticeMan and moved to the quantum machine.

“Come, let’s go!”

Wormer started the machine as soon as all the preparations finished. And sparks flew from the antenna attached to the top of the machine. The sparks intensified and wound around the 500 coalition members. Then the coalition members turned into light and were sucked into the antenna.

Jiiiiiiik.....kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The antenna began spinning and shot out a beam of light into the ground. The 500 soldiers who had been changed into particles entered the ground.

Dungeon Keeper

Chwajijijijik!

A big underground enclosed room was flooded with darkness. Violent sparks suddenly spread from the ceiling of the closed room. The sparks jumped and concentrated on the satellite antenna installed in the room. A deep flash spread across the area and changed into hundreds of people at the same time.

“They’ve arrived!”

Several beasts and coalition members gathered around the antenna shouted.

“They’ve come. The elite of Nagaran’s allied forces!”

Hundreds of soldiers appeared among the light! That’s right. They were the selected elite soldiers of Nagaran’s allied forces. They arrived at the underground room on the 60th floor where the raccoons had installed the movement receiver. Their aim was to protect Nagaran.....

“Kuaaaaack! F-fire!”

“Ugh! D-disgusting..... B-bag.....uweeeeeek!”

The users ran back and forth and screamed. Some users with their asses on fire rolled along the ground while others with their heads on fire slammed into the wall and shrieked. More than half were vomiting while others were stretched on the ground like they were dying. Ark was also on the ground and vomiting.

“D-dammit..... What on earth.....this is?”

He had travelled around New World using the Letter Movement. However, the quantum movement seemed many times more horrible. While the Letter Movement felt like he was being shaken in a jar, the quantum movement felt like he had been grinded

in a blended. It really was a horrible feeling. In fact, 70~80% of the users' health was lost thanks to the quantum movement. If they had moved any further then all of the soldiers would probably be dead. Ark realized once again to not trust in Wormer's inventions.

"I already told you. I made it quickly and there was a slight problem with the stability. The quantum conversion rate isn't 100% so not all the obstacles in the ground could be avoided. If I had the quantum machine from my base then the conversion rate would've been 100%. Well, even so....."

That's right. The quantum machine was made in a rush so it couldn't convert the users 100%. According to Wormer, the conversion rate was around 70~80%. Therefore while Ark's group had been moving through the ground, they had been hit by the dirt, gravel and rocks. That was why some of them caught on fire or had bruises over their whole bodies. However, surprisingly Wormer was fine.

"Who would be harmed from small shakes like that? Young people these days have weak minds."

Wormer twirled his beard and murmured. He was the one who tested his inventions so he wouldn't even blink an eye if he was turned into a monster. He really was an absurd human being.

'Anyway, at least we've all arrived alive.'

Ark barely recovered his spirit as he looked around. After Alan had occupied Silvana, he had order the coalition members in the hidden dungeon to hide on the 60th floor. There were 1,800 people but 1,500 consisted of the Meow, Wolrang, raccoons and the Eastern Nation. The losses of these NPCs would be catastrophic to Dark Eden. As Ark directed, the members of Dark Eden had enclosed themselves inside a room on the 60th floor. That room was the place where Ark moved with his selected users. While Ark braced himself, the coalition members ran up.

"You're here!"

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

But Radun was the first one to greet him as he moved around Ark's

waist.

“Well done Radun. The current status?”

Ark stroked Radun’s head as he asked. Then Boramae who was in charge of the group replied.

“The demons are currently on the 56th floor.”

“That’s one day after they’ve entered the 51st floor..... It is pretty fast.”

But it was natural for Alan to move quickly. When Ark had first entered the Abyss, it had taken him one day to go down one floor. It was because the degree of difficulty in the Abyss was different from the 50 floors before it. However, that was when it was full of elite monsters. Thanks to Dark Eden hunting, it was difficult to see any monsters in the Abyss at the moment. While the Abyss was a dangerous area with various traps, it wasn’t enough to slow down Alan’s group. Boramae continued talking.

“The movements of the demons suddenly slowed down on the 55th floor. I’ve been monitoring them since they’ve entered the Abyss and they are still looking for the stairs down from the 55th floor.”

‘Huhuhu, it is like that.’

A satisfied smile appeared on Ark’s face after hearing Boramae’s words. In fact, Ark had two aims when he used Racard. One of it was to use Racard to distract Alan’s group so Radun could be safe. And the other reason was to slow down the movement of Alan’s group. After Alan captured Racard, he probably got his hands on Wormer’s design that Ark handed to Racard. But this design wasn’t for the receiving but the transmission device.

‘There are no monsters in the Abyss. Of course, that is because of Dark Eden’s NPC unit but Alan doesn’t know that. If he knew then he would kill the NPC unit in order to weaken Dark Eden’s power.’

And Ark had sent Racard into the secret dungeon without telling him the strategy. He was informed that there were 3,000~4,000 troops inside the Abyss. And when Racard entered the Abyss, Ark would

use the remote communication to explain more.

‘And Alan will get that information.’

Ark didn't expect that Racard would be able to keep his mouth shut when being tortured. If Racard was caught then there was no doubt that Alan would obtain the information. Then what would Alan thing? Racard was caught and there was no way for him to run away. Then Alan couldn't ignore the possibility that a group was hiding somewhere to ambush him. So Alan was looking through every corner of every floor before advancing to check for any ambushes. Therefore Ark had used Racard to distract and slow down Alan. It was achieving two purposes at once.

‘Alan will never imagine that I am on the 60th floor.’

“Now what do we do?”

Boramae looked at the collapsed special attack unit with a sceptical expression. It was reasonable. There were only 500 people in the special attack unit. When combined, it was only 2,300 people. On the other hand, Alan led 10,000 demons and users from the Avenger guild. They had to somehow stop Alan until the allied forces captured Silvana and joined them. Furthermore, the special attack unit was in this state as soon as they arrived. But Ark's face was full of confidence.

“Our aim isn't to kill Alan's group but to stop them! We have to buy time until the allied forces arrive.”

“But won't that be difficult?”

“No, not at all.”

Ark said with a smirk.

“Now, now! Is it show time? Quickly bring me a map of the dungeon! It is the reason I came along. Good. I'll make that fellow realize his mistake in turning my inventions into scrap iron. Oh, what? Didn't I say to bring it quickly? I said, a map! And is there anyone who knows how to use a hammer? Bring them all to me!”

Wormer waved his arms and shouted.

“What is with that noisy pig?”

Ark smiled at Boramae’s question and replied.

“My secret weapon to thwart Alan.”

“Alan-nim, it appeared again!”

A member of the Avenger guild who was searching the area exclaimed. The Avenger member pointed to the underground valley where there was a signpost.

<p><Dungeon Keeper Says></p> <p>Danger! I can’t assure what will happen to you.</p> <p>If you don’t want it to happen then turn back.</p>

“These bastards really.....”

Alan’s face distorted after reading the contents. Then the Avenger said carefully.

“Alan-nim, what will we do?”

“What?”

“The last time we ignored the warning.....”

“Then you want to believe the warning and turn back?”

Alan glared at the Avenger member. The Avenger member flinched and stuttered.

“T-that’s not.....because we can’t search for the traps in the Abyss.....”

“Fool! Why do you think I brought along 10,000 demons?”

Alan shouted with irritation.

“Jewel!”

“Yes, Alan-nim.”

“Order 200 Tallons to march into the valley!”

“Understood. Tallon unit stand in line!”

Jewel shouted and the Tallons gathered in front of the valley. Fear of the unidentified monsters shone in the Tallons’ eyes. But they were tied by the black obelisks and couldn’t refuse Alan’s command. Although they trembled with fear, the Tallon started walking towards the valley at Alan’s command. The reason the Tallons were trembling with fear was because of the signpost the Avenger member discovered. After Alan and the demons entered the secret dungeon, they had steadily marched forward. The elite monsters in the dungeon weren’t a match for the 10,000 demons. But that all changed once they crossed the 50th floor towards the 51st and the Abyss. The monsters were just marching forward like normal. Then they encountered the cannibalistic rocks! And the floor suddenly dropped and sent hundreds of demons to their death! Spurting lava geysers..... That’s right. The demons weren’t threatened by the monsters but by traps. These traps were artificially created so it was impossible for the hunters to discover it in advance.

‘But that’s not the recent problem.’

Alan bit his lip with an annoyed look. Currently Alan was on the 59th floor. He had broken through 9 floors on the Abyss. After moving through 9 floors, they could somehow cope with the traps. But things started to change on the 59th floor. A signpost had caught their eyes as soon as they entered the 59th floor.

<Dungeon Keeper Says>

Welcome to the Abyss!

Welcome to any explorers of the Abyss. I have some advice for everyone who rashly enters this dangerous cave.

This road might be dangerous. Please watch your feet.

“What the, what is this?”

Alan thought it was just a joke when he saw the first signpost. He had ignored it and just walked past. Suddenly a huge number of rocks poured down like hail from both sides. They weren't just rocks.

“Huck! T-these are the cannibalism rocks!”

“Kueeeek!”

When the Avengers and demons were hit by the rocks, their flesh and bones were sucked into it. It soon became apparent that the traps were linked with the signposts. If it said ‘look after your feet’ then lava would pour from above or ‘look above’ and acid would shoot out from below. After experiencing this situation a few times, Alan decided to go the opposite way but then the traps started occurring from the direction indicated on the signpost. Someone was enjoying themselves playing around.....!

‘What the? These aren't like the natural traps experience so far. Obviously someone created these traps intentionally. The only think I can think of it the Dark Eden members the bat spoke about.’

But the problem wasn't resolved even when he figured out the opponent. There were a lot of signposts on the 59th floor. In other words, there were many traps laid out like spider webs. In a place like this, carelessly distributing the troops to search for Dark Eden was like suicide. Of course, if someone had installed the traps then hunters or thieves should be able to sense the traps. But these weren't simple traps and the signposts were cleverly linked to natural traps so finding them took a significant amount of time. It was like searching for a needle in a wide desert. Alan couldn't move forward until he found the traps one by one.

‘That Ark, I can't believe he discovered information about the Hell River and dragged the alliances of Nagaran into this.’

The allied forces were currently surrounding Silvana and striking violently. It would be a problem if the demons protecting Silvana were completely wiped out. After the killed the demons, the Nagaran

allied forces would flock into the secret dungeon. And the combined forces would join up with Ark. Since Alan had already cleared the monsters, it would only take them 2~3 days to catch up with Alan.

‘If I keep on searching for traps then there is no telling what will happen.’

Alan was running out of time.

‘Fortunately we’re almost at the destination. Although it is vexing but the only way is to submit to damage.’

So Alan instantly sacrificed victims to the traps. Alan had bought most of the high ranking demons like the Hemeras and the Dullahans. He didn’t know what would happen in the secret dungeon so he bought as much demons as possible to reduce the casualties. So he had the low ranking demons advance first to intentionally trigger the traps. In other words, it was the system of releasing the traps with their bodies. It was the reason why the Tallons trembled with fear as they advanced.

“What are you doing? Hurry!”

Alan roared at the Tallons who moved a little quicker. Then Alan smiled at the sight.

“Huhuhu, it might be cruel but being able to control demons and send them to their deaths is great.”

Anyway, the Tallons marched into the valley and crossed the place where the signpost was. A flag on the signpost suddenly snapped up.

<Dungeon Keeper Says>

You have ignored the warnings and now there will be a penalty.

“Be on the lookout!”

Alan shouted as Timosi ran forward. The Avenger and demons stopped with a tense expression. This flag was a sign that a trap had been triggered. And it wasn’t a simple trap that had been

activated so no one could predict the effects. However, a long time passed and nothing happened. Alan observed the situation for a while before his face warped.

“Dammit, it was just a bluff?”

Alan became even more irate. Signposts were stuck into the ground of the 59th floor. But not all of them were connected to traps. Despite a threat being written on the signpost, sometimes nothing would happen. That was the reason why he decided to sacrifice the monsters to advance. With such threats, they might waste several hours looking for a trap that wasn't there.

“Damn, all troops advance into the valley!”

“Alan-nim!”

Then one of the Avengers flinched and pointed near the signpost. Alan turned and saw that something was quickly moving near the signpost. It was a small light. The light moved quickly and Alan, the Avengers and demons gaped with surprise. The light crossed the valley and moved up a pillar to where a sign could be seen on the ceiling.

<Dungeon Keeper Says>

Byung, did you think it was safe?

‘What, what the?’

“Scatter! Get away from here as quickly as possible!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

A huge sound rang out from the ceiling. It sounded like dozens of bombs were exploding quickly! Cracks started to spread on the ceiling as sharp rocks fell like hail over the heads of the demons and Avengers.

“Ack, what the hell?”

Alan turned and ran 100 metres using ‘quickness.’ Dust was pouring

down from above. The sounds of broken bones and pierced flesh as well as screams could be heard. Of course, not a log of demons died from the falling rocks but they had their health shaved away.

“Quickly arrange into units and report the damage!”

“The 3rd and 4th Tallon unit has been destroyed!”

“The 6th and 9th Hemera units have suffered a blow and are close to being destroyed!”

“The 13th unit is down to 40% health.....kuaaaack!”

Pepeng, pepeng, pepeng, pepeng!

An Avenger screamed and a violent clash was heard among the dust.

“What is going on? Magician unit, blow away the dust using wind magic!”

“Spirits of the wind running through the blue sky.....Wind!”

The magicians recited spells and a storm blew the dust away. Alan’s face stiffened at the sight revealed.

“T-those guys are.....?”

After the dust disappeared, he saw that the demons were being attacked by soldiers. They were soldiers with black masks and black clothes! Alan had seen NPCs in those clothes a long time ago. It was the assassin clan living near Selebrid. That’s right. The Dark Brothers. They had settled in Seutandal and became the Eastern Nation and now they were apart of Ark’s Dark Eden. As Alan looked on, two people flew all over the place and the demons fell into turmoil from their attacks!

“Dark Strike!”

“Cruciate Flower Wave!”

They were Ark and Shambala.

“That’s right, it was those guys!”

Alan exclaimed as he saw both of them. Alan had been inwardly thinking it was strange. A person had been playing tricks with the signposts! The person using such methods was his old enemy Ark. The Dark Eden members hiding in the secret dungeon would obviously be taking orders from Ark. He was convinced that Ark was behind everything. But there was a separate issue.

“How did they get here?”

Once one question was solved, other questions popped up. However, he couldn't answer those questions now.

“Catch them! Don't worry about the others! Ark and Shambala, catch those two!”

The demons shrieked and ran forward at Alan's command. Then Ark, Shambala and the Easter Nation escaped.

“That's it, let's go!”

“Retreat! Everybody retreat!”

“Chase them. You absolutely can't miss! Surround and trap them!”

Alan had 10,000 demons and the Avengers members so they could easily form many layers to surround them. The demons were quickly rallied and they ran after Ark. Then Ark, Shambala and the Eastern Nation were cornered under a cliff. The demons moved and encircled Ark's group.

“Kuack, dammit.....!”

Ark looked up at the cliff that was dozens of metres high and groaned. And Alan ordered in a cold voice.

“Your tricks end here. Trample them!”

“Kuwaaaah!”

The demons bared their fangs and claws and swarmed. Then there was a soft vibration the moment the demons and the Avengers moved. Ark who had been fidgeting smiled and yelled.

“Hyung-nims, now!”

“Okay!”

At the same time Jjak-tung, Yapsab, the other rehabilitation members and hundreds of soldiers appeared on the cliff. And they pushed the rocks piled on the cliff down. While the rocks were falling, there was a mechanical sound and the ground were Ark, Shambala and the Eastern Nation was standing rose up the cliff like an elevator.

“What, what the? Stop them! Stop those guys!”

Alan burst out as he saw Ark escaping from right under his nose. The demons shrieked and used their claws to climb the cliff.

“It’s too late. Start!”

Jjak-tung laughed and raised his hands.

The hundreds of Dark Eden members started hammering at the cliff. They struck there on the stakes that were placed here and there.

Ku kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Every time the stake was driven in a bit more, cracks would spread until there was a roar and the cliff collapsed. The demons climbing up were buried by the falling cliff.

But that wasn’t the problem.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Lava surged from the cliff after it collapsed.

“T-that.....lava!”

“The rocks were blocking the lava and now it is pouring out!”

“R-run away! Escape to a high place!”

-Kurak, kurak, madurama, kurak!

The Avengers and demons gathered in front of the cliff screamed and ran away. Alan looked at the shattered cliff and shouted.

“S-stop! There isn’t a lot of lava flowing from the cliff. Don’t come here!”

-Kurak, kurak, madurama, kurak!

When the lava surged, Alan couldn’t properly control the demons anymore. The demons screamed and stepped on each other trying to climb up to a high place. The same Tallons were stepped on by the Heavy Walkers and the bigger demons and were squashed.

“Those stupid guys……!”

Alan stared at the demons with furious eyes and raised his head. Alan’s face darkened as he caught sight of Ark, Shambala, the rehabilitation members, the Eastern Nation and the Dark Eden members on top of the cliff. His voice sounded like a rock was stuck in his mouth.

“Ark!”

“…….It’s just starting. Let’s enjoy it properly from now on.”

Ark grinned and disappeared.

“Isn’t this surprisingly fun?”

“Did you see Alan’s face before?”

“Kikiki, they look like chickens from up here.”

Jjak-tung and Yapsab who were carrying hammers on their shoulders laughed and chattered together. Ark also felt like his stress was disappearing.

“Huhuhu, that Alan. He must be seething right now.”

Ark grinned as he walked along the path on top of the cliff. It was unnecessary to explain but the signposts Alan found on the 59th floor were Ark’s work. The signposts which threatened them were all intended to limit Alan’s movements. However, the signpost wasn’t exactly Ark’s work.

‘I never thought that Wormer’s ‘inventions’ could be used in such a way. His skills can also be applied in this way.’

That’s right. The signposts in conjunction with the traps were Wormer’s work. In fact, Ark had planned to use guerrilla attacks along with natural traps to stop Alan’s movements. He had fully identified all the terrain traps in the Abyss and planned to take advantage of that. They were 2,300 against 10,000. That was more than 4 times the troops. Furthermore, Alan had bought a large amount of high ranking demons so the natural traps couldn’t really stifle their movements. In addition, 1,500 out of the 2,300 troops were beasts and NPCs. It would be a serious blow to Dark Eden’s power if they were killed.

‘However, I will sacrifice them if it means protecting Nagaran.’

Ark had such thoughts and became resolute.

“It isn’t necessary to have them fight.”

The person who spoke was Wormer.

“What are you saying?”

“How do you think I raised my level to over 400 if I only made inventions?”

Wormer laughed. Ark had also been wondering that. Wormer was an inventor. He was a user who stayed in the underground base and made strange machines. Yet he was level 410. It was almost comparable to Ark’s level. Wormer nodded at Ark’s expression.

“There’s no need for a long explanation. You said you captured this dungeon before? Do you have a map of it?”

“Yes. That.....”

Ark handed over the map made with his ‘cartography’ skill. Wormer examined the map with a satisfied expression and laughed.

“Oh, this is quite detailed? I like it. This should be enough.”

“What do you mean?”

“I will show you how an inventor hunts.”

Wormer opened the map and started to place draw various shapes and formulas on it.

“The ground here overturns? That’s funny. But only a few will be caught with these substandard traps. If I want to stop those guys then I need to make some improvements. Here....oh, cannibalistic rocks? They should be moved and dropped over here. Ah, if this cliff is pulled down then the river of lave will flow. Well well, shall I drive in stakes here and here?”

The shapes and formulas Wormer drew on the map were plans and devices to remodel the traps. A timed equipment to break the aerial bridge or an equipment to drop the cannibalistic rocks. And the direction and places to hit to make the cliff collapse.....it was using the terrain and remodelling the traps to get the biggest effect from the traps! That’s right. This was the real value of the inventor Wormer. Needless to say, Wormer didn’t have any combat abilities. While he could get experience for inventions, it wouldn’t be enough to reach Ark’s level. Wormer’s secret in reaching level 410 was his ability to convert an entire dungeon.

Wormer didn’t explore and kill monsters inside dungeons like warriors. If he found a new dungeon then he would completely explore it while being killed a few times to get updated terrain information. He would make an invention with various skills and lure the monsters to a room where they would be exterminated with the invention. Wormer generously plagued Alan using this knowledge. While Alan was capturing the 56, 57 and 58th floors, Wormer gathered the raccoons and completely reconstructed the 59th floor. That was the identity of the traps that were making Alan and the demons miserable. Thanks to that, Ark could grab Alan’s ankle without fighting directly.

“Now, let’s move on to the next place!”

A rehabilitation member said in a lively voice. At that moment, Shambala tilted his head to one side and asked.

“By the way, why did we attack the demons directly just now? We

didn't deal that much damage to the demons. And if we made a mistake then we would've been surrounded by the demons."

"I just wanted to make Alan lose it."

Ark smiled and replied.

"It is because of Alan's response to the trap before. In fact, I was most worried about that method. Using weak demons as scapegoats to trigger the traps. If he checks every signpost that way then it won't be a threat anymore. But now that I've showed Alan I can attack any time, he can't use that method."

"Hmm, you still think of such petty tricks."

"It is tactics."

"It is a dirty tactic."

Shambala snorted and muttered. That's right. It was the reason why Ark attacked despite previously only harassing Alan through the traps. It was to show him that the danger wasn't only traps. Now that Alan confirmed Ark was here, he would have to consider it when thinking about how to move his troops. And his movements would slow because he has too many ideas.

'Since Alan entered the 59th floor, around 1,700 demons and Avengers had died. Before they come down to the 60th floor from the 59th, I have to reduce the troops by 3,000~4,000 to ensure that we don't receive damage. Then there would be 6,000~7,000 demons left. We have 2,300 troops. While a head on confrontation is impossible, Wormer has converted the 60th floor into a last line of defense so Dark Eden and the special attack unit should be able to deal with the demons!'

Ark thought while walking.

"Ark!"

A loud roar suddenly echoed through the dungeon. It was Alan using voice amplification magic.

"Huhuhu, he must be quite angry at my appearance. Yes, just

continue shouting.”

Ark chuckled as he heard Alan’s voice.

“You cowardly fellow, show you face immediately!”

“You fool, do you think I will come out just because you called?”

Ark scratched his neck and sneered.

“Master.”

Then he heard a familiar voice. Ark flinched and stopped walking. And he hurriedly returned to the cliff and hid his body behind a rock while looking down. Alan and the demons were gathered near the collapsed cliff. But Ark wasn’t looking at Alan or the demons. In front of Alan was a bat confined in a huge birdcage with a black magnetic field around it.

‘What, what the? Isn’t that Racard?’

That’s right. The bat trapped inside the birdcage was Racard.

‘What is going on? Wasn’t he recalled back to the Dark Earth?’

Ark couldn’t understand what was happening. Around 18 hours ago, he had received a message that his connection to Racard had been broken. Ark had thought that Racard died after being captured by Alan. Yet now Racard was locked in a cage?

‘If Racard didn’t die then perhaps the cage broke the connection?’

Ark stared at the black magnetic field around the cage. Alan who was watching for a reaction shouted again after a while.

“If you don’t appear then you will lose this bat!”

‘I will lose Racard?’

Ark looked on with an astounded expression. Racard was a summon. Unlike regular NPCs, he would be resurrected like a user. Yet here Alan was threatening to kill Ark’s pet?

‘That guy, is he crazy? What is he saying?’

“I guess Ark had completely abandoned you.”

Alan murmured to Racard after a short time passed. Then a huge figure wearing a hood approached the birdcage. When the man appeared, Racard who was flying about instantly turned pale.

“H-hik. M-Master! S-save me..... T-that guy is.....”

“Infector, begin.”

The man then lowered his hood. He had a pale white face like flour was applied to it and red eyes. The man cheered with delight after hearing Alan’s command. Blood red lips opened and revealed sharp fangs dripping with saliva.

‘Is that a vampire? What are they trying to do?’

Alan’s strange attitude and Racard’s reaction....something was strange. Was there something Ark didn’t know? Ark considered and quickly used Eyes of the Cat. Then he automatically used Skill Penetration and the information window appeared.

-Infector’s (Ancient Vampire) skill: Kin Blood-sucking

A vampire is often called the nobles of the night, with lives a few hundred times longer than humans or monsters. Among them exists the purebred vampires with lives spanning over 1,000 years that the world has now forgotten after they withdrew into seclusion. They became driven to the brink of extinction thanks to Kin Blood-sucking.

Kin Blood-sucking is a vampire’s secret technique and the most feared skill among all vampires. Vampires who use Kin Blood-sucking can bit and absorb the magic and very existence of their target. Despite vampires having their souls decomposed, even they can become a target. Since the vampire’s primarily used Kin Blood-sucking among themselves, the number of vampires rapidly reduced. The Vampire Lord who sensed this crisis named ‘Kin Blood-sucking’ as a prohibited technique and sealed it into the darkness.

<A vampire that absorbs the blood will have their magic

strengthened. When all of the blood and magic is absorbed, the vampire who was robbed of it will be completely destroyed>

Racard's Destruction

'Huk, what is this?'

Ark's heart fell after he checked the information window.

"Infector is a vampire who has lived for more than 1,000 years. Even if your bat is a summon, if he encounters Infector's Kin Blood-sucking skill then he will be completely destroyed. If you don't want the summon that you've raised to disappear then reveal yourself!"

Alan reiterated the information Ark already confirmed from the information window. That's right. Infector had the ability to eat another vampire. Even if he was a pet, he was still a vampire so Kin Blood-sucking would work and destroy Racard!

'Recently Racard's work has become smaller but.....'

In fact, Ark didn't really use Racard that much these days. Radun was the pet that he always used thanks to his role as a bag. Purital had become more useful than Racard after evolving because of Clad Armour. But the only thing Racard did these days was use satellite surveillance mode. Despite the low utilization, they had been together from the start. Racard was also the only one among his 3 pets who could talk. During the time travelling alone, how much comfort had Racard been to him? Yet now Racard would be destroyed?

'It doesn't matter if Alan is aiming for my life. But Alan's goal is Dark Eden. If Dark Eden moves in order to save Racard then they would be wiped out.....'

His method of stopping Alan would disappear. And it would lead to Silvana being flooded by the Hell River. It was Racard's life against Silvana. In this situation he could only chose one option. No, if he thought about it calmly then he didn't have to choose one option. Even if Ark ran out now, what guarantee was there that Alan would release Racard? Alan was 100%, not 1000% bound to

destroy Racard. There was no way he could run out and save Racard. He had to give up. Despite those rational words, Ark couldn't simply give up on Racard.

'W-what is an alternative method.....?'

Ark was distressed thinking about it. Alan looked around and smiled as he muttered.

"Look at those tears. Infector!"

"Waaaahhhh! M-Master! S-save me....."

As soon as Infector approached, Racard started crying and trembling. At the same time, the numerous times he spent with Racard passed through his head like a kaleidoscope. Finally he couldn't endure it anymore and was about to stand up. Then Infector drove his fangs into Racard's neck. Racard trembled and moaned.

"Uwa, waaah, waaaahhhh....."

At that moment, Racard's body blurred and changed to red crystals which were sucked into Infector's mouth. Suddenly a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-Your summon Racard had his blood sucked by the vampire Infector.

*If Infector absorbs all his blood then Racard will be destroyed.

<Absorption Rate: 1%>

"Oh my god!"

Ark's face paled.

His head was also a blur and he couldn't think of any ideas. The footage of Racard having his blood sucked replayed repeatedly in his head. The scene replayed every time the message window appeared.

-Your summon Racard has been absorbed.

||<Absorption Rate: 5%.....10%.....15%.....20%>||

Infector became increasingly healthier looking. In an instant Racard's absorption had reached 20%. After Ark saw the message window, it felt like cold water had been poured on him.

'T-that bastard. Doing this type of thing to my pet!'

Ark glared at Infector. The pet that he had raised and spoiled (?) for 2 years was going to be eaten? Well, it was Ark's fault that the pet he raised for 2 years was in danger.....anyway!

'I have to protect the pet I raised for 2 years!'

However, he was already late. Racard had been eaten. And he wouldn't come back. Even if he ran and killed Infector right now, there was no guarantee that Racard would be saved. Alan definitely wouldn't sit back and watch while Ark killed Infector. No, this was Alan's trap. It was that Ark wouldn't resist his anger and would come running out. If he didn't move he would lose Racard. If he moved to save Racard then he would lose Silvana or even both. The situation was clear. But he couldn't accept it emotionally.

'What can I do.....wait? Come to think of it.....'

Ark who was torturing himself suddenly raised his head. Despite Ark's anxieties, Racard wasn't fully absorbed yet. That's right. Racard wasn't fully absorbed yet. But Racard was in Infector's stomach. Then.....

"Summon release, Racard!"

.....Couldn't he compel his pet to be recalled? Then Racard would be released to the summoning port in Dark Earth. Since 20% of him had been absorbed, it was likely that Racard would lose stats when he was recalled. But in this situation he might be destroyed. Ark couldn't begrudge the loss of 20% stats.

"It doesn't matter. If I can somehow save him.....please, please, please....."

||

-Your control over your summon is insufficient and your summoning release has failed!

“N-no! I can do this! Summon release, Racard! Summon release, Racard! Summon release, Racard!”

Ark shouted like a crazy person. But Ark’s resistance was stopped by the enormous wall that was New World’s system.

-Your control over your summon is insufficient and your summoning release has failed!

-Your control over your summon is insufficient and your summoning release has failed!

-Your control over your summon is insufficient and your summoning release has failed!

-Your summon Racard has been digested.

<Absorption Rate: 45%.....50%.....>

The message that showed Racard being absorbed appeared. Ark felt something inside him snap.

“Dammit. Really.....is there another way?”

Ark feebly leaned back against the wall and muttered with a hopeless voice. Then he noticed something unusual. When he thought back to the beginning, he noticed the source of the feeling. It was the message window. Normally when his pet died it would say ‘your summon has been recalled.’ The previous message came to mind. When he thought Racard had died, the message window said ‘the connection with your summon has been lost.’ Thanks to the frenzy of the battle, Ark had just accepted that Racard was dead.

‘This time I also made the same mistake of not reading the message window properly!’

His summoning wasn’t released so he had thought about giving up. But when he checked the message window again, he realized it wasn’t that simple. His summoning release had failed but at the

beginning it said that his 'control was insufficient.' If it was in regards to his controlling power.....didn't it mean his controlling power had to become stronger than Infector in order to release the summoning?

'Controlling power!'

Ark's eyes flashed as he thought of an idea. A numerical value was applied whenever a pet was summoned. The value of the controlling power decided whether a pet would obey or not. In order to summon a higher ranking pet, a large controlling power value was needed. If it was too low then the pets would refuse the order or attack their owner. When he thought back, Ark remembered that his pets didn't really obey him in the beginning. Ark had summoned 3 pets at the same time so his controlling power had dispersed between all of them. But Ark had tamed his pets using a combination of threats, violence and food.

'If I increase my controlling power then I can release the summoning!'

Ark turned and shouted.

"All summoners come forward!"

A few users came running at Ark's shout. They were the Necromancers whose profession normally involved summons. They possessed some magic and combat power but mainly used their summons to attack. While it was a strong profession during the early stages of the game, there were various restrictions as their level increased so there were less high levelled Necromancers. Among the 500 members of the attack unit, only 7 could use summoning. However, Ark hadn't called them or a headcount. He intended to borrow the equipment from the summoners.

"Does anybody have equipment that gives extra controlling power as a bonus?"

That's right. It was the reason why Ark called the summoners. The controlling power over their pets could decide the combat power. Therefore most summoners chose options that gave bonus

controlling power. By raising the controlling power, the pets would follow orders more obediently and their combat power would increase. If he borrowed equipment with controlling power then he could make up for what he was lacking.

“I have earrings that give +90 controlling power.”

“This is a necklace that gives +180 controlling power.”

The summoners handed over their equipment after hearing his explanation. There was more equipment with controlling power but they were restricted to summoners so Ark could only wear the accessories. When he wore the necklace, earrings and ring, his controlling power increase by 570. It was 1.5 times Ark's original controlling power!

“Summon release Radun, summon release Purital!”

Ark also cancelled his summoning of Radun and Purital to increase his controlling power. He increased his concentration to the maximum and shouted.

“Summon release, Racard!”

-Your control over your summon is insufficient and your summoning release has failed!

“.....Dammit!”

But the result was the same. Even though his controlling power had doubled, it couldn't surpass Infector's controlling power. Ark instantly became gloomy.

“Is there a way to gain more controlling power? A food which increases it.....”

Ark muttered as he thought of various ways. Then something rose in his head. This method might not be possible but he had to try. He no longer had time to think about it. Ark immediately executed his idea.

“Animal King set special option, Wild Strength!”

At that moment, Ark's armour shone with a brilliant light. The shapes

of the merpeople, Meow, raccoons, and Wolrang emerged one after the other. Finally Wild Strength was exercised with the appearance of the White Tiger.

-The Wild Strength skill from the Animal King set has been activated.

<The effect of all skills will increase by 50% for 10 minutes. However, mana consumption will increase by 100%>

This was the method Ark came up with in the desperate situation. The power of all his skills had increased by 50%. His Summon Demon and Summon Release were also skills. In other words, Wild Strength would increase his Summon release skill by 50%. Ark's controlling power was 1,100. The accessories also gave him an extra 570. If 50% was applied to the 1,670 then it would be 2,505 controlling power! His controlling power had increased by 2.5 times!

"Now it is time to finish this. Damn, that stupid Racard! I will even chase you to the depths of hell and shove food into your mouth. Summon release, Racard!"

Ark clenched his teeth firmly and glared. He had used every method possible. It was him versus New World. He had to entrust the results to New World's system. But in the next moment, something no one expected occurred.

"W-what, this strong power....."

Infector flinched and suddenly disappeared. Alan quickly shouted as Infector disappeared before his eyes.

"Jewel!"

"I found it. They're on the cliff where they disappeared from before!"

Jewel who had been tracking the flow of mana pointed towards the cliff. Alan's eyes flashed and he ordered.

"As expected, you've exposed your tail. You're still hiding there?"

Okay. The flooded lava has hardened already. Catch those guys!”

“Kuwaaaaah!”

The gargoyles flew towards the cliff first while the Avengers and demons followed.

“Damn, they found us!”

“Let’s move on from this place!”

“Ark, we can think about the problem with Racard later!”

Shambala grabbed Ark and ran away.

Hwiriririri!

Inside a dark bedroom. A vortex suddenly appeared in front of a magic seal drawn in a corner. It was a pale vampire wearing black robes, Infector.

“Ugh, what, what the?”

Infector looked around with puzzled eyes at the unexpected place he appeared in. He looked at the magic seal emitting a shallow light and understood the situation.

“Summoning Port…….

Infector frowned unpleasantly. That’s right. The magic seal in the corner of the bedroom was the Summoning Port that Ark had registered. The Summoning Port was where he had registered Racard’s recall spot. In other words, Infector had flown to the corner of Seutandal where the Vampire Lord ruled Dark Earth.

“Only humans with more than 1,000 points can surpass my controlling power. But shouldn’t his pet have moved to the Summoning Port? That Racard, he still had some will left? I had thought it was surprisingly easy to threaten him.”

Infector then looked at his bulging stomach. No matter how strong Ark’s controlling power was, it wouldn’t have worked if Racard had

lost all willpower. Despite Racard's feeble state, he had responded when his Master called.

"The vampire that was about to die tried to meet his owner's call in that urgent situation. Doesn't that mean he has a deep rapport with his owner?"

But that was just Infector's misunderstanding. Racard who was on the verge of death had responded to Ark's urgent order. However, it was completely unrelated to mental rapport. Racard was freaked out by Ark's threat of chasing him to the ends of hell to make him eat food. Racard believed that Ark was really a person who would do that. Therefore Racard had instinctively obeyed the order despite his unconscious state. That was the cause of Infector's misunderstanding.

"Anyway, this place is Dark Earth..... That is a problem."

Infector muttered as he looked around anxiously. This place was Dark Earth, a sealed off place in Seutandal. It was over 1,000 kilometres away from Silvana. It would be difficult to get back. However, Infector wasn't worried about returning. The problem was this was the land of the vampires where the Vampire Lord ruled.

"If I'm found by the Vampire Lord then I'll become extinct. I have to escape before they get here!"

Infector hurriedly rushed to exit the bedroom with a fearful look. Suddenly the bedroom warped and there was a wave of enormous energy. The strong energy indicated the presence of spatial movement magic. Infector who was running to the door hurriedly hid behind the bed.

'S-shit! Isn't this wave of energy only produced by spatial movement? If the magic is this strong..... Lord! The Vampire Lord? It can't be. Encountering the Lord in a place like this.....'

Fear filled Infector's face as he thought about the Vampire Lord. At the same time, someone appeared from the warped space. Wearing a black hood with complicated designs carved on it.....A fluttering cloak with a dark aura around it and huge black wings which emitted

a feeling of oppression. It was a vampire with an intense presence! The vampire looked around the area doubtfully.

“Strange. The magic I sensed that was produced in this area.....”

‘That guy is.....?’

Infector’s eyes widened as watched from behind the bed. The vampire who appeared in the room wasn’t the Vampire Lord he was concerned about. It was the vampire referee that appeared when Racard defeated Karakul. The reason that the vampire referee showed up here was because of Infector. The one cardinal rule in Dark Earth was that vampires couldn’t invade other vampire territories. If they broke the rules and invaded another vampire’s territory then the magic would conflict. And the vampire referee was the highest ranked vampire who was in charge of monitoring other vampires. He had sensed the collision of magic and had used spatial magic to check the situation.

‘The vampire referee..... Kukuku, I’m lucky today.’

Infector licked his lips and smiled with delight after seeing his opponent. The moment the vampire referee approached the door, Infector shot out from behind the bed like a lightning bolt.

“Uh? Who?”

The vampire referee quickly turned around. But he was too late and Infector shoved his fangs into the vampire referees’ neck. The vampire referee burst out with confusion as the fangs touched his neck.

“T-this is..... How dare this person.....”

“Kukukuku. It’s been a while, Tarosu.

“Huk! This voice is..... Infector!”

“Has it been a few hundred years? It is good to see you again. You took quite good care of me in the past.”

“Infector! You dare set your foot on this land again.....”

“I didn’t want to come here.”

Infector murmured as he inserted his fangs in deeper.

“But it’s not bad. I got to taste your blood because I came here. Have you been sucking up to the Lord while I was gone? For a lowly vampire like you to become the referee..... Or has the Lord already grown old? Well, that’s good. I’ll also have to eat the Lord sometime. Just like I promised a long time ago.”

“You dare to say the Lord’s name.....!”

The vampire referee Tarosu shook with fury. But that was just his emotion. Tarosu actually couldn’t move even one finger. Tarosu belatedly realized the situation he was in.

“This spell.....Kin Blood-sucking!”

“Kukukuku, do you understand now? But it’s too late.”

Infector smiled while giving off the smell of blood. Tarosu moaned as he blurred and changed to blood crystals that were absorbed by Infector. Infector withdrew and wiped at the blood flowing from his mouth. An intense light started emitting from the Summoning Port in the corner of the bedroom. Infector smiled at the light and muttered.

“Huhuhu, it seems like I don’t have to worry about going back.”

Infector then entered the light coming from the Summoning Port.

“Hyung-nims, move over there and lure the demons!”

When a crossroad appeared, Ark ran to one side with 300 soldiers and shouted. Jjak-tung quickly nodded and gave the order.

“Understood. Dong-chi, Bul-kkun, Tazza.....take 100 troops and lure the demons to the traps at D-15, 16 and 17. We will also take 100 people and lure the remaining monsters to C-6, 7, 8 and 9!”

“Okay, meet at the 59th floor when the situation is cleaned up!”

Therefore the rehabilitation members split to the left and right with

the demons following. Fire immediately spouted as the demons entered the road that the rehabilitation members ran through. Once again, Wormer and the raccoons had created many traps.

.....Immediately after Infector disappeared, Alan had mobilized the demons and the Avengers to attack Ark's troops. Thus Ark instantly withdrew from the cliff. Despite having the terrain advantage, they wouldn't be able to face that many monsters with only 500. So they used the terrain and traps laid out on the 59th floor to escape the pursuing demons. Now Ark hid in a suitable place and entrusted the demons to the rehabilitation members. He had no time to be playing tag with the demons.

"Infector was definitely moved to Dark Earth!"

Ark muttered as he bit his lip. The reason Ark had cancelled the summoning was a desperate measure to save Racard from Infector. If they flew off together then nothing had changed. Whether it was the secret dungeon or Dark Earth, Racard would still end up being digested.

'But.....'

Ark once again had another idea. He had succeeded in his goal of sending Racard back to Dark Earth but Infector had also gone along. Then what if he tried to summon Racard again? I might be able to find a way to summon Racard from Infector. It was the reason Ark had the rehabilitation members lure the demons away. It was in order to get Racard away from Infector without the demons interfering! After a while, Ark's group arrived at an underground square surrounded by high cliffs on all sides.

"Okay. I will start the summoning. Everybody be prepared to attack.
"Summon Demon, Racard!"

Ark summoned Racard in the underground square. Then Infector appeared on one side near Ark.

"Che, this has become troublesome."

Infector frowned as he saw the 300 troops surrounding him. Then Ark raised his sword and used Advanced Intimidation to shout.

“Infector, vomit out Racard!”

“Kukukuku, intimidation? Do you think a trick like that will work on a vampire? It is impossible. I am a vampire who has lived for more than 1,000 years!”

Infector then shouted.

“Blood Arrows!”

Chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa!

Dozens of arrows shot in all directions from the hem of his robes. The warriors hurriedly raised their shields as the arrows flew. Then Infector revealed huge black wings and flew into the sky.

“Hahaha! You fools, did you think you were the first ones who thought about surrounding me? I’ll drink all of your blood in the near future. Blood Arrows!”

Infector shot Blood Arrows while flying in the air. If he flew beyond the cliff then he would escape to where the demons were. But Ark just sneered and muttered.

“Bah, you still don’t know your situation. Summon release, Racard. Summon Demon, Racard!”

“Ugh! W-what? Dammit!”

Infector who was just about to fly beyond the cliff cursed as he disappeared. And he once again appeared in front of Ark. That’s right. This was a situation Infector couldn’t avoid because Racard still hadn’t been fully digested. As long as Racard was inside Infector, Ark could freely release and summon him again. Ark’s controlling power had already surpassed Infector’s so there was nothing Infector could do.

‘But as Racard’s absorption rate increases, Infector’s controlling power would become higher. And soon I won’t be able to freely summon him.’

“Archer units, chain shot attack!”

The archers at the rear of the troops took out some portable cannon. It was the cannons that the raccoon clans used. After the raccoons worked on reconstructing the 59th floor, they also supplied the troops. However, the cannons were originally the weapon of the raccoons. Archers who were used to ranged weapons such as bows wouldn't be able to exert the full power of the cannons. However, Ark had them carry the cannons because of the effect of the 'special' bullets.

-Special Bullet (Artillery)

A special bullet that the raccoon clan created after many years of research. Just like the name, it is a bullet produced for a special purpose. They are special bullets that give blunt damage to the enemy and 'stun' them, bullets which shocked an enemy, tied up an enemy, caused 'slowness,' made the enemy unable to fly, penetrate the enemy's defense, etc.

And it is possible to convert to such special bullets according to the circumstances.

Ark and Shambala attacked Infector like a storm from the left and right. Infector's health quickly drained thanks to the combined attacks of the warriors, priests, Ark and Shambala.

"Kuaaaack! T-these lowly fellows.....!"

But a level 500 boss wasn't an insignificant opponent. Despite the pouring attacks and magic, Infector managed to complete a spell.

".....Blood of the Great King. Confusion!"

A red flash occurred in Infector's eyes. It was the special skill of a high ranking Infector, 'Confusion!' Although the magic didn't do any damage, it was a really troublesome spell. Most warriors brandishing a shield made dim expressions and turned with a pleasant smile. Then the spat on the floor like they had rabies and attacked the priests.

"Damn, those fools! Get a hold of yourself!"

Ark yelled and kicked the warriors' backs.

While the warriors were recovering from being kicked, the priests used 'mental purification' magic and released the confusion. But the number of priests was lacking compared to the warriors and spells were hard to chant when they were being attacked. While the warriors were attacking the priests, Infector had started to chant his 'Confusion' spell again.

".....Blood of the Great King....."

"You're praying too much!"

At that moment, Ark took out a black meat from his bag and threw it.

-Hell Bomb

A special food made using Creative Cooking. It is created by combining hot peppers, vinegar, rotten meat, horseradish etc. An extremely bad smell which goes beyond human limits is drifting from this dish. If you pull it out in a public place then you will receive a wild beating.

<Hell Bomb has an effect of 5 metres>

It was Hell Bomb created using Creative Cooking! When hit by the Hell Bomb, Infector immediately shrieked.

"Kuaaak! W-what is this?" E-eyes...n-nose.....they're burning!"

The Hell Bomb released an extremely bad smell that made the vampire go crazy. The impact was the same as a gas grenade as Infector rolled along the ground while grabbing his nose. It was the same for the warriors. The soldiers who were 'confused' also screamed at the bad smell and rolled across the ground.

"Now. Priests, use your holy magic!"

".....Holy!"

The priests avoided the bad smell and unleashed their holy magic. Infector tried to run away many times but the archers shot

chains at him and forced him to the ground. Meanwhile, the effect of Hell Bomb had disappeared. The warriors that escaped from the effect of Confusion surrounded Infector and attacked. When that situation repeated a few times, Infector became deeply bruised. There were no breaks in the attacks and Infector soon fell into a critical condition.

“Shambala!”

“Okay. Chain, chain, chain!”

Shambala ran towards Infector after hearing Ark’s words. At the same time, dozens of chains tied around Infector. ‘Chain’ was the exclusive skill of the God Killer that was only available after the enemy fell into a critical condition.

Ark stepped on the neck of the tied up Infector with his foot.

High Pureness Vampire

“It’s over!”

Ark’s voice echoed through the area. Infector glared at Ark and growled.

“Y....you! An insignificant human like you.....”

“Take this, Dark Strike!”

Ark snorted and raised his sword. Then Infector shouted in a desperate voice.

“W-wait a minute! You don’t care what would happen to your pet if I die?”

“W-what?”

Ark’s eyes glanced at him with surprise. Dark Strike narrowed missed and hit the ground. Infector laughed and murmured.

“You don’t want to lose your pet.”

“You bastard, what do you mean by that?”

“Hehehe, it is like I said. You are the owner of a pet so you should understand. I’ve already absorbed 80% of his blood. Racard has already become a part of me. If I die then he will obviously die. You should’ve already guessed since you tried to use Intimidation on me. Huhuhu, you wouldn’t want to lose the loyal pet that still responded to its owner’s commands while being absorbed do you?”

Ark’s eyes shook after hearing Infector’s words. After thinking for a moment, Ark pressed his foot harder against Infector’s neck and said.

“.....Vomit out Racard immediately!”

Infector immediately closed his mouth. And his eyeballs rolled before

he giggled and said.

“Kukuku. Okay. No matter how good the food is, it is no use if I die. If you really want the bat back then I will return him. But I have some conditions. Release me. And move all the soldiers to the rear. I will release that fellow as soon as my safety is secured.

“Do you think I’m naive enough to believe something like that?”

“It is your choice whether to believe it or not.”

Infector replied with a vile smile. Ark was completely at a loss from Infector’s relaxed attitude. In fact, that was the part that caught in Ark’s mind while he was fighting. He had been worried that Racard would be destroyed along with Racard. Of course, there was a chance that wouldn’t happen. However, he couldn’t risk Racard’s life on a gamble. He also couldn’t give into Infector’s request.

‘If I save Infector then he will spare Racard.’

But Ark specialized in dirty tricks. He wasn’t naive enough to believe that Infector would do what he promised.

‘The problem is I don’t know whether that guy is telling the truth or not. Will Racard really die along with him? If I figure that how then I would know how to respond.....’

Ark was conflicted about what to do. Then he suddenly heard someone’s voice in his head.

-Don’t be fooled Foreigner!

“What, what the?”

Ark looked around with bewilderment after hearing the voice.

-I am the vampire referee appointed by the great Vampire Lord of Dark Earth.

“Vampire referee?”

Ark thought aloud, causing Infector to flinch and angrily shout.

“Vampire referee? Tarosu? T-that bastard! You’re still

conscious.....!"

"How do you know the vampire referee?"

Ark asked and kicked Infector a few times. There was a long sigh and the voice of the vampire referee was heard again.

-.....It's shameful to admit this but I was absorbed by Infector after he came to Dark Earth. I was able to apply a shield so that I wouldn't lose consciousness while I was being absorbed. And Infector is weakened so I can talk to you.

The vampire referee was eaten during the short time Infector was sent to Dark Earth? Ark looked at Infector with amazed eyes. And he realized why he thought Infector had changed after flying to Dark Earth. Before Infector had been sent away to Dark Earth, he had already absorbed 50% of Racard in 10 minutes. But those message windows never appeared again after he was sent to Dark Earth.

'Infector said Racard is still alive in his stomach. Nevertheless, the absorption has stopped. There must be a reason why.'

Ark had thought about the reason while fighting. However, he figured out the real reason after hearing the vampire referee's words. He had stopped absorbing Racard in order to absorb Tarosu.

'If that is true then I'm lucky because of Tarosu.'

It was thanks to him that Racard's absorption was stopped.

"By the way, why did you tell me not to be fooled?"

-After I entered Infector's body, I became aware that Racard was also eaten. Infector used the Kin Blood-sucking skill which had been sealed by the Vampire Lord for a long time. Once Infector has swallowed a soul using Kin Blood-sucking, he cannot vomit it out again.

"W-what?"

Ark felt his heart drop at the Tarosu's words. In the end, there was no way to stop Racard's extinction? Tarosu had just reconfirmed the

fact that Racard wouldn't survive.

-My demise was inevitable from the moment I was eaten. Now that I know the relationship between you and Racard, I have no choice. Now, foreigner who as succeeded Hero Maban's will! There is no time to hesitate. Strike down with your sword.

"Won't you die as well?"

-There is a reason I've maintained the protective shield despite not being afraid of death. It isn't because I wasn't willing to lose my willpower after being absorbed by that guy. Instead of being killed by Master's enemy, I would rather die with honour! Moreover, I want to help the person who has inherited Master's will.

"The person who has inherited your Master's will?"

-That's right. I am Hero Maban's summon.

Tututudung!

Tarosu really said unbelievable words in this absurd situation. Ark stared with a dumbfounded expression as Tarosu's explanation came out of nowhere

-.....A long time ago, I was just a low ranking vampire sucking on the blood of travellers. Then I was seized while attempting to eat one of the travellers. I thought it was all over then. But he didn't kill me. On the contrary, he actually made me one of his summons. He later became one of the 7 heroes and was called Hero Maban.

Ark recalled a previous event that he experienced in Dark Earth. The first time Ark had met Tarosu, he had spoken Hero Maban's name with a subtle longing. He didn't know why at the time but if Tarosu was Hero Maban's pet then it was understandable. He had spent hundreds of years longing for his master who disappeared.

"By the way, what did you mean by your Master's enemy?"

Ark wondered and the vampire referee recalled the past.

-The reason Hero Maban entered the land of the vampires was to

meet with the Vampire Lord to request that he cut of relations with the Dark Lord.

According to Tarosu, the vampires had belonged to the forces of darkness in the early days of the Dark Century. And Hero Maban had gone alone to convince the Vampire Lord. The Vampire Lord admired Hero Maban's courage for visiting alone and met for a week to seriously discuss it. It was at this point that Infector appeared. Infector was the vampire referee at the time. He had tricked the Vampire Lord and had a secret deal with the Dark Lord. During the meetings to convince the Vampire Lord to withdraw from the forces of darkness, Infector secretly snuck into Hero Maban's room. However, Hero Maban already knew about the relationship between Infector and the Dark Lord. Thanks to Hero Maban making preparations beforehand, Infector was caught and trapped in a dungeon after incurring the Vampire Lord's rage.

-But Infector escaped from the prison not long after that. Up until that moment, the Lord hadn't known. The Dark Lord had trained Infector in the ancient art of Kin Blood-sucking. Infector used Kin Blood-sucking to steal the souls of countless vampires while escaping to the dark forces.

The Vampire Lord broke off all relations with the Dark Lord after that event. And while Hero Maban and the other heroes were fighting the Dark Lord, Tarosu had killed Infector. But he was a stubborn villain. He was once again restored with the power of the black obelisks. It was the tangled history between Hero Maban and the vampire clan! Ark had accidentally discovered one of the hidden secrets of New World. But that history was useless to Ark. The only think that mattered to Ark was Racard who he had raised for 2 years.

"Is there really no way to save Racard?"

-No. That is the fearful part about Kin Blood-sucking. Once Racard was absorbed, he became a part of that guy. If he receives damage then we receive damage. Killing that body would be no different from killing Racard.

“Kukukuku, what did he say? Did he say there was a way?”

The sarcastic words fell from Infector’s mouth at that moment.

“I guess I can’t deceive you anymore. Racard and that referee have been perfectly integrated into my body. Those guys and I am the same vampire. Since we are linked, if I receive damage then they will also receive damage.”

“This bastard……!”

Ark was about to angrily kick Infector again. Then something rose in Ark’s head.

‘Wait, they have no choice but to receive the same damage as Infector?’

Infector was clamouring because he was fully aware there was no way to save Racard. However, his words actually gave him a hint about saving Racard.

‘If I consider Tarosu and Infector’s words then there might be a way to rescue Racard. I don’t know if it will succeed or fail but it is my best option. But they problem won’t go away even if I’m successful.’

Ark’s thoughts spun furiously in his head.

“Tarusu-nim, what kind of situation is Racard in now?”

-Racard is close to being fully absorbed by Infector. It will take approximately 1 more minute until he is fully absorbed by Infector. Even if I spread my shield to him, he will only survive for another 10 minutes. Infector will become many times stronger once we are fully absorbed. This is the only chance to kill him.

This was the problem that Ark was worried about. A considerable amount of time had passed since Racard was eaten and sent back to Dark Earth and now his absorption rate was at 90%. Ark had thought the method of saving Racard was to separate him from Infector’s body. It was impossible to save Racard’s stats when he had already been absorbed this much. In other words, if the level 350 Racard was 90% absorbed then it meant Racard’s stats would

become equivalent to level 35.

‘Still, if there is a way then I have to save him.’

Even if he saved Racard, he could no longer be useful as a summon.

‘But.....’

“Tarosu-nim, please listen to my words from now on and tell me whether it is possible or not.”

Ark organized his thoughts before talking again. And he explained the idea he had a while ago. Tarosu considered before replying in an affirmative voice.

-It is possible. But.....

“That’s okay. I have a way to save Racard and referee-nim inside Infector’s body.”

-What? Is that true?

“Yes, but to be exact I can’t save both of you.

-Both of us? That’s right. I also considered it after hearing the question you asked me. Are you asking me to sacrifice myself for Racard?

“I’m really sorry. But I can truly only save one person. And if I have to pick there the choice is obvious.”

Ark replied in a firm voice. Tarosu replied after a moment of silence.

-Hahahaha! You don’t care about anyone aside from your pet?

“No, you don’t have to go that far.....”

-Great!

Tarusu shouted and interrupted Ark.

-That’s it. I understand your will. And I’ve already lived for hundreds of years so death has no meaning to me. But that little fellow with tears in his eyes probably doesn’t want to die. Why would I

hesitate? Then Foreigner who received Hero Maban's will, I accept your offer!

He arranged the situation after everything was put in order.

"A cannon!"

When Ark reached out his hand, one of the archers handed him a cannon.

"Huck! T-these bastards.....what on earth.....n-no..... The way you devised won't work! Are you really going to destroy the pet you raised? T-those words! You'll fail....."

"Shut up!"

Infector guessed the situation after listening to Ark and Tarosu's conversation so he started struggling and screaming. However, Ark already made up his mind and changed the special bullet with no hesitation. The cannon was loaded with the special bullets containing 'holy water!' Ark smiled and shoved the cannon into Infector's mouth.

"Goodbye you bastard!"

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

When the trigger was pulled, the cannon vibrated and dozens of holy water bullets were shot. Since the cannon was shoved into Infector's mouth, the dozens of fire holy water bullets entered his stomach. After a while.....

Ku ku ku kung! Ku ku ku lung! Pepeng!

Infector swelled like a balloon. The swollen Infector then exploded and scattered blood all over the place.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

He was relatively easy to handle but Infector was still a level 500 boss. After Infector's stomach burst and he blew up like a balloon,

the attack group instantly gained 7 levels. As a bonus, he discovered the blood covered necklace lying on the ground.

-Infector's Blood Gem (Unique)

Item Type: Necklace

Durability: 53/60

Weight: 30 User restriction: Level 450 and more

This necklace contains Infector's ability. A long time ago, Infector betrayed the Vampire Lord in order to obtain the power 'Kin Blood-sucking.' And part of his power was trapped into the necklace to strengthen Kin Blood-sucking.

<Option: Controlling power +200, Intelligence +30>

<Special Option (Kin Blood-sucking): Then the wearer of the necklace kills someone of the same race (Human-Human, Elf-Elf, etc.) a part of their ability will be absorbed. When this ability is absorbed, you can randomly absorb 1~3% of Strength, Agility, Stamina, Wisdom, Intelligence or Luck. But the absorbed ability is only applied for 1 hour.

Mana consumption: 1,000

Cool down time: 1 hour>

A unique necklace! Ark's eyes brightened as he picked up the necklace and read the information window. However, Infector's loot wasn't as good as expected. While the special option Kin Blood-sucking was quite threatening, it was ultimately an item that didn't have a lot of merit. If he used the skill and killed the enemy then he would be able to absorb 1~3% of the abilities. However, these stats were only applied for 1 hour. And the cool down time was 1 hour. That meant Kin Blood-sucking was a skill that could be repeatedly used.

'Well, it will be good against boss monsters with absurdly high levels and stats but.....'

Like its name, Kin Blood-sucking could only be used on those of the same race. In the end, Ark could only use it on humans and most users had an average level of 300~350. Even if he used Kin Blood-sucking, he would only be able to raise it around 3~1 levels. It didn't feel like it was worth consuming 1,000 mana just for those kind of stats.

'Yet the Intelligence +30 is better than Adelaine's Necklace. If I decide to sell it later than the +200 controlling power will make it popular among summoners.'

Ark judged after looking at the necklace. In fact, Ark wasn't concerned about the necklace right now.

'Racard? What is happening with him?'

Ark searched through the fragments of Infector scattered everywhere. Then something started wriggling underneath a piece of skin from the stomach. At first something seemed to rise in the blood. Then the scattered blood started moving and joined together into one large lump. And it changed into the form of a person?

"Racard!"

Ark shouted as he confirmed the form of the lump. That's right. The blood was clotting together to form Racard.

"That is definitely Racard. As I expected!"

Ark shouted with glee. His method to separate Racard from Infector worked! It was actually Infector who told Ark the method to save Racard. If Infector was damaged then Racard would have no choice but to receive the damage as well! The moment he heard those words, Ark had recalled Racard's duel with Karakul. At that time, Ark had used crosses and garlic to attack from the outside. Therefore Racard was able to defeat Karakul and evolve despite not fighting properly. This was because Racard wasn't affected by light, garlic or crosses.

It was because of Racard's existence. He wasn't originally a vampire but a bat who had learnt the power of a vampire. Therefore he had the power of a vampire but he didn't gain its weaknesses. Well, he

couldn't fly around in the middle of the day without being harmed but that was another story. It was to the extent that Racard could wash his face and brush his teeth with holy water.

.....That's right. Holy water!

It was why Ark's had shot holy water into Infector's body. If the holy water bullets exploded in his stomach then Infector would receive enormous damage. However, it was just simple water to Racard. It was the same even when Racard gained the same properties as Infector. So Ark's liquid damage had no effect on Racard. However, there was one problem with that method.

'The problem is that his stats have already been absorbed by Infector!'

That's right. If he forcibly separated Racard then there would be no way to regain those stats. So Ark had negotiated with Tarosu before he made Infector die from the explosion. Tarosu was originally a vampire. If the holy water bullets were fired then Tarosu would die along with Infector. But what if Tarosu fused with Racard? Ark had already seen Racard absorb Karakul's blood in Dark Earth. Kin Blood-sucking was a skill which allowed the vampire to absorb the abilities of the same species. While Racard was being absorbed using Kin Blood-sucking, Tarosu had also been absorbed. Since both Racard and Tarosu's blood was being absorbed, there was a possibility of their blood fusing together. Thanks to fusing with Racard's blood, Tarosu was able to survive the influence of the holy water.

'Infector absorbed quite a bit of the referee's stats but he is still an elite level monster. Even with some of Tarosu's abilities absorbed, Racard can recover his stolen stats!'

This was the method that Ark devised to restore the stats. Tarosu willingly accepted the offer and fused with Racard's blood.

'Now I have to check Racard's stats.'

Ark quickly checked Racard's information window after he was restored. He craftily laughed when the information window floated in

front of him.

-Racard has successfully absorbed the soul of the vampire referee Tarosu and has evolved.

Racard has absorbed the blood of the vampire referee. While Kin Blood-sucking is forbidden, another vampire can absorb the status and abilities depending on the rules of kinship.

Racard who was absorbed along with Tarosu has gained the abilities of the vampire referee. Since Tarosu and Infector are top ranking vampires, his body has been reconstructed using their blood and he has become a high pureness vampire. Racard who has become a high pureness vampire has been given the name 'Curio' by the great power that oversees the Netherworld.

“E-evolution?”

Ark looked at the information window with stunned eyes. His shortcut to restore Racard's stats became linked to evolution. When he thought about it, it was to be expected. The vampire referee was a top level vampire who was the aide of the Vampire Lord so it was natural Racard's standing would ascend when the blood was absorbed. Racard had succeeded in his evolution and changed to Curio. His face turned white like someone who had never seen the sun since he was born and his eyes were red. Curio was engulfed in a red coloured light and a new information window appeared close to Ark.

Curio

A vampire who has evolved into a high pureness vampire after the vampire referee willingly gave Curio his blood.

He has inherited the power of a top level vampire and awakened more of a vampire's abilities. However, a high pureness vampire has a fatal weakness to light.

<He cannot turn himself into a vampire in the daytime. When receiving direct sunlight, he will receive 30 damage per second and

his stats will decrease by 50%. However, dungeons are an exception. In addition, his resistance to the dark attribute will increase by 100% while his resistance to the light attribute will decrease by 100%>

Race	Demonic	Alignment	Dark
Ranking	Middle Class		
Health	2,820 (+150)	Loyalty	450 (+20)
Strength	173 (+40)	Agility	155 (+60)
Stamina	399 (+40)	Wisdom	88 (+30)
Intelligence	255 (+80)	Luck	63 (+20)

- * The attack power of Lancel's sword has increased by 12 and the durability has increased by 90.
- * The skill slots of Blood-sucking has increased to 3.
- * The 'Confusion' effect has been added to the Blood-sucking skill.
- * You have learnt the 'Blood Storm' skill.

-Confusion <Blood-sucking secondary effect> (Beginner, Species Characteristics): Curio's special skill.

When using the Blood-sucking skill on a weak enemy, there is a 50% chance of a 'Confusion' effect being applied to the enemy.

Thanks to Confusion, Curio can control the monsters for 30 minutes.

-Blood Storm (Beginner, Species Characteristics): A strong destruction power is present in the blood of a vampire.

Blood Storm scatters the blood of a vampire around like a storm and will deal strong damage to enemies within the area. All enemies within the area will receive 50~70 with each hit. The amount inflicted on the enemy is proportional to the amount of blood Curio has.

However, the vampire's stats will fall by 50% until he manages to

recover the blood lost. In addition, it can only be used in the darkness and can't be overlapped with Blood Lane.

<All enemies within a 50 metre area will be damaged>

“Huhuhuhu.....”

Ark checked Curio's information window. Then Curio suddenly burst out laughing. And he rocked back and forth while laughing.

“Hahaha, I am now a top level vampire of pure blood! I.....”

While Curio was speaking with an elated voice.

“Ark-nim!”

One of the soldiers can running from the rear and shouted with panting.

“It is important! The last line of defense on the 59th floor has just been pierced!”

“What? What about the rehabilitation hyung-nims' troops?”

“That.....they've been wiped out!”

“Dammit!”

Ark and the other soldiers ran off. Curio was left along until he transformed into a bat and followed.

“Eh? Hey, look.....I just evolved. Hey, Master.....let's go together!”

Hell Door's Defensive War

'Huk huk huk.....dammit!'

Ark bit his lip and sighed. After entering the secret dungeon using the quantum machine, Ark had developed a plan to handle the present circumstances. He used Wormer who renovated the 59th floor to delay Alan and the demons while the Nagaran allied forces recaptured Silvana. Of course, holding out against the 10,000 demons and Avenger guild for a few days wasn't easy with such a small number of troops. However, the special attack unit used the complicated terrain of the 59th floor and the traps to conduct guerrilla warfare. Ark thought utilizing those methods would be enough.

'Meanwhile Nagaran's allied forces will conquer Silvana and enter the secret dungeon. Presently all the monsters in the secret dungeon are gone thanks to Alan and the demons. Furthermore, there is no reason for JusticeMan ajusshi to get lost when he has grasped the terrain perfectly. They could advance all the way to the 60th floor in one day. I just have to somehow hold the 60th floor until then.'

If the combined forces reached the 60th floor then the situation would end. That was Ark's plan and it was proceeding as planned. However, an unexpected problem had occurred. Right.....

"How about it? Don't I look different from before?"

A proud voice was heard from nearby. It was Curio leaning against a nearby stone wall with an arrogant posture. He was showing off his form to Radun and Purital.

"Huhuhu, of course I look different. It is natural that I'm different. You guys might not know but I am different from yesterday. I am high pureness vampire. Do you know what that means?"

Ttadadadak, clack clack?

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak?

“I’m not an ordinary summon like you anymore.”

Curio spat into his hand and ran it through his bangs.

“Heh, well I have a right to act like this. Like I said just now, my social status and face has improved so you should respect me a bit more. Because I am a high pureness vampire. Yes, a high pureness vampire. Doesn’t that word feel good? I brought it up in conversation but.....”

“Don’t go overboard, eh?”

“What do you mean? Are my words wrong?”

Curio pouted with discontent at Ark’s sharp words. After looking at Curio, his irritation rose from 100% to 120%.

‘Damn, my plan was useless. Because of this guy.....’

That’s right. The problem that occurred in Ark’s plan was this bat. Ark had cancelled all his plans for Alan after Curio became absorbed by Infector. In order to rescue Curio, he had split up the rehabilitation troops. This led him to lose 200 members and for Alan to reach the 60th floor quicker than expected. All his plans had perished because of one bat. Despite that, Curio couldn’t grasp the atmosphere and continued bragging.

‘His nature is still the same!’

That feeling wouldn’t go away even if the bat was boiled in a soup. But unfortunately he had no time for that now.

“Ark-nim, those guys are coming again!”

A voice coming from the watchtower was heard. Ark who was watching Curio flinched and turned his head. Between the dark red rocks that formed a valley, thousands of pairs of red eyes were approaching over the swamp. The smell of beasts came from the valley. It was them! The thousands of demons that Alan commanded! 600 Avengers and 8,000 demons had entered the 60th floor. That was 1,000~2,000 more monsters than Ark had expected.

On the other hand, Ark only had 2,000 troops to defend with. He was losing in the numbers game.

‘But.....’

“Every unit go to their positions!”

The soldiers quickly dispersed at Ark’s command.

-Kuaaaaah!

By the time the soldiers got to their positions, the demons were already a short distance away.

“Damn, there’s no time to rest. Curio, Purital, move to the strategy area!”

“Sheesh, making me do this.....”

Curio complained and flew into the air. Meanwhile, the Tallons came running first. The Tallons raised their spears and axes as they ran across the muddy ground and into the stone wall. In the middle of the valley, rocks were stacked to form a wall that looked like a dam. It had a height of 10 metres. The Tallons climbed up and reached the middle of the wall.

Ark’s eyes flash and he yelled.

“Defense system operation, change the fortress to B type!”

Chelkong, chelkong, chelkong, chelkong!

There was a mechanical sound and the wall was covered with sharp thorns. Hundreds of spears had emerged between the rocks making up the wall. The spears pierced through the bodies of the Tallons climbing the wall. The hundreds of alive Tallons struggled and shrieked while they were like insects stuck on a stick.

-Kurak, nomarad panaram!

After the first assault unit was skewered, the high ranking demons yelled. And several thousand demons once again gathered to attack the wall. Ark just sneered and shouted.

“Bah, not a chance. Launch!”

Kiririririk.....tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

It was the sound effect of something being fired! At the same time, hundreds of spears exploded from the wall.

The demons screamed and tried to run away as the spears descended. However, the valley was naturally narrow in front of the wall. There was no space to hide. The demons sunk into the swamp as the spears plunged into their bodies.

“This is the castle that I erected. There is no place for them to hide. Continue your attacks!”

“I understand. Engineers keep on loading the catapults!”

The voice of the unit commanders was audible throughout the place. The raccoons scurried all around the walls and loaded several equipment. They were equipping the spears that they Meow and Wolrang standing next to them were holding. The machine automatically worked and new spears flew outside the wall. It was similar to a work simulation being repeated many times.

“Launch!”

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Hundreds of spears once again flew. Ark marvelled once again over the power of the spear as he watched from the fort's wall.

‘It's terrible.’

The strength of the spears being shot from the machine was absurd. It flew 100 metres and pierced through 2~3 demons at once. Of course, the demons wouldn't die from one hit no matter how powerful the spears were. But they lost at least 10~20% health.

‘Even so, I can exterminate the demons after the attack repeats a few times!’

That's what Ark was thinking.

-Kurak, kurak, banum!

100 large demons lumbered ponderously towards the front. Wearing thick armour and shield, it was the Heavy Walkers.

With their heavy defense, even the spears which boasted overwhelming power would bounce off the Heavy Walkers! If those guys defended in the front then the demons wouldn't be hit by the spears anymore. Ark clicked his tongue in irritation as the spear attack was blocked.

"Sheesh, those guys..... But the spear attack is just the beginning. Now, it is time to clean the water. Open the floodgates!"

Ark tapped his finger and shouted. One part of the wall opened and huge amounts of water was poured out. Since the 60th floor of the Abyss consisted primarily of deep swamps. But if the water was drained away then it would just be a muddy ground. That was why Ark built the fort in the middle of the valley like a dam and the water was collected. Of course, he didn't make that function just for fun.

Ku kwa kwa kwa kwa, ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The water poured out of the floodgates in a rough, rapid stream. And it swallowed up the valley like an angry beast. The demons were naturally swept away by such a rapid torrent of water. But Ark wasn't satisfied with just that.

"Chain attack, water grinder movement!"

"Wah ah ah ah!"

The coalition members shouted and poured something from the wall. They were stones as sharp as a knife blade. The tons of gravel that poured down were sucked in by the rapid stream. The rapid stream which emerged from the floodgates had overwhelming power but it was ultimately just water. It wouldn't deal the demons direct damage. But it was different if sharp stones were mixed in with the water. The water swirled violently while holding the sharp stones!

Ka ka ka ka, ka ka ka ka, ka ka ka ka!

The demons cried out as the rapid stream hit them. The fiercely spinning water and sharp stones ripped through the flesh of the demons.

“It really is effective.”

That’s right. Ark was trying to get this effect when he blocked up the water. The torrent alone wouldn’t cause much damage to the demons. However, that situation changed with the presence of the sharp stones. Adding the stones to the water had the effect of a grinder. And the actual effect was more than expected. The demons caught by the torrent of water became tattered rags in an instant. The torrent was dyed red because of the demons’ blood. In particular, it dealt catastrophic damage to the Heavy Walkers.

“It was a good thing that I stocked up on those stones.”

Ark laughed as he saw the water dyed red from the blood. Other demons were pushed by the water to some degree and were hit by the stones. However, the Heavy Walkers were wearing heavy armour which weighted a lot! Therefore they weren’t lightly pushed by the approaching water. They had no choice but to be hit harder by the stones. Armour and shields were no help against such attacks. The armour and shields which became tattered fell off the Heavy Walkers, leaving them naked and at the mercy of the sharp stones. That’s why Ark named it water grinder! It was literally a grinder made with water. Thanks to the rapid stream, the demons gathered in front of the fort were swept away. However, he couldn’t afford to sigh with relief.

-Kuram, kuram, baradram!

A voice resonated through the valley and the demons once again gathered at the swamp. Along with the Tallons and Heavy Walkers, there were also gargoyles flying around. It was a nightmare like situation where they were attacked by land and air. A moan flowed from the mouth of the coalition members who thought they had finally interrupted the attacks.

“Oh my god.....!”

“They won’t stop coming!”

Then Ark shouted towards the coalition members.

“Everybody steady your spirit! It’s not anything new. We knew from

the start that we had the disadvantage in numbers. That's why we didn't sleep for a few days to make the fort. Now it is time to test the performance of the fortress that you spent many days struggling to make. First, use the anti-aircraft engine!"

"Yes. The gargoyle will attack from the sky. G engine operation!"

Ku ku ku ku, kwa kwa kwa kwa, kkikikiki, tung tung tung tung!

A mechanical sound rang out and various devices started operating. The coalition members ran around and cut dozens of ropes, causing a pole around 10 metres high to spring up. A steel lattice was stuck to the end of it like an enormous fly swatter. And it hit the gargoyles flying in the sky like swatting flies in a swamp.

"Okay. From now on we will deploy the engines of the fortress. Each leader will operate the engines depending on the situation! Don't forget. If you allow those guys to enter the fort then all your efforts will be wasted! We are the last defense line to protect Nagaran!"

"Ohhhhhh!"

The coalition members shouted and ran around the walls after shotting down the gargoyles. There were various mechanical sounds as the engines within the fort began to operate. Lava flowed down the wall that the demons were clinging to while rocks flew over the wall and crushed the demons. That's right. The reason Ark was able to stop the 8,000 demons with only 2,000 troops was because of this fortress. While Ark and the attack unit were delaying Alan on the 59th floor, Wormer had used the Meow, raccoons, Wolrang and the Eastern Nation to build the fortress. It was a fortress created by the genius inventor Wormer and the gifted raccoons! When those engines were used, even the thousands of demons were helpless. The number of dead demon bodies just accumulated in front of the fortress as time passed. Despite their numbers, the coalition members were clearly superior when looking at the military situation. However.....

'Why?'

Ark looked at the surging demons with an uneasy look. There was one part he couldn't accept. Now he would clarify the situation.

The demons had to pass through the fortress to reach the Hell Door that led to the Hell River. If their plan was successful then Silvana along with Nagaran would be flooded with the Hell River. He confirmed in Shangri-La that the demons would gain a significant advantage if the Hell River flooded. In fact, this part was very subtle. The records in Shangri-La didn't tell him the advantages the demons would get in detail.

'But there is no doubt that it would have a devastating impact on the Demonic War.'

Ark was convinced of that. At first, Ark had simply regarded this event as Alan's revenge. But he changed his mind after talking with the rehabilitation members before gathering the allied forces. It was clear that this event was aimed towards Global Exos by Alan and some villains. It wasn't different from an attack on a big business. And depending on the results, Alan could either be a criminal or a tycoon. Alan wasn't just moving with the intention of getting revenge on Ark.

'The Red Man is clearly acting behind Alan.'

That's right. The Red Man! When looking at the context so far, there was no doubt that he was the one pulling the strings. He was a user causing problems to a big business on an international scale. Ark couldn't fathom how he came up with the idea. But considering the astronomical amount of money Global Exos poured into the online game.....The person must have huge funds and exceptional organizational skills. Depending on the outcome of this event, hundreds of billions of won could be moved by an international criminal organization. If Alan was connected with such an organization then he could move selfishly.

'This means the incident with Silvana is the result of a long plan!'

Ark reached that conclusion. The demons in the Sinus Principality were currently on the defensive thanks to the Bristania and Schudenberg expeditions. Yet they had removed 100,000 troops

from such a situation. This meant that the flooding of the Hell River was strategically more important than the Sinus Principality.

‘Despite the fortress’ incredible defense, the demons are just attacking like crazy and receiving huge damage. But.....’

The genius inventor Wormer and the raccoons had created all types of devices to block the Hell Door on the 60th floor. Despite the demons having 4 times more troops than the coalition forces, it wasn’t enough when taking into consideration the fortress. And the 8,000 demons have been blocked for 24 hours. In the meantime, at least 1,500 demons had died. Meanwhile the coalition only lost 200 people.

‘Why are they blindly attacking despite knowing that they can’t capture the fortress? Why are they attacking so excessively?’

This was the part Ark wasn’t convinced about. Of course, they were demons. They were still monsters. How could monsters come up with a clear strategy? However, currently Alan was commanding the demons. So he couldn’t understand why they were blindly attacking the fortress. There had to be a reason Alan was rushing. It all started a few hours with JusticeMan’s emergency communication.

-Ark, what is your situation now?

-I’ve somehow blocked Alan on the 60th floor.

-Is that so?” Everything has been put in order here.

-Huh? Everything has been cleaned up?

-Yes, we’ve destroyed the black obelisks and regained Silvana.

It was felt like it suddenly rained in the middle of a drought. If the allied forces recaptured Silvana then they could enter the secret dungeon! If the allied forces entered the secret dungeon and exterminated the demons then everything would end.

Of course, there was still a mountain to cross before that happened. Ark had to stop the Alan until the allied forces reached the 60th floor.

–Alan has already disposed of the monsters so you should have no obstacles in the dungeon. JusticeMan ajusshi has also fully grasped the terrain of the dungeon which will reduce a lot of time. When taking that into consideration, it would only take a day or two. With the fortress that Wormer and Dark Eden created, we will somehow be able to endure for that time.

Ark was optimistic about the situation. Then JusticeMan said with a concerned voice.

-..... By the way, there is a bit of a problem.

-A problem?

-It has been weighing on my mind.....as you know, we've recaptured Silvana. We checked that there were 40,000 demons before our last attack. But when fighting the demons, I noticed the number was reduced by 10,000. Thanks to that, we recaptured Silvana faster than expected.

-There were fewer demons?

Ark's face was filled with confusion for a moment. Then he instantly understood the situation. And JusticeMan's next words convinced him even more.

-We've already entered the dungeon and discovered traces of movement that is a few hours old.

Ark felt his heart drop at the words. This was the worst case scenario for Ark. The demons on the defensive by the allied forces' attack judged that it would be difficult to protect Silvana. Therefore they abandoned the castle early to send reinforcements to Alan. While the allied forces had captured Silvana immediately, the demons were already ahead by a few hours. If the monsters were still in the secret dungeon then those few hours wouldn't be a problem. However, all the mobs in the secret dungeon had been cleared by Alan. With the obstacles gone, it would be difficult for the allied forces to catch up with the demons. And if the demons arrived at the 60th floor before the allied forces.....

‘10,000 demons would be added to Alan’s 6,500 troops!’

While the allied forces would arrive a few hours later, Ark’s group currently only had 1,800 people. There was no guarantee that could hold the fortress against 16,500 demons for even a few hours.

-It is still too early to be disappointed. Despite Alan learning how to navigate the dungeon, the demons descending haven’t experienced that yet. Even if the demons are a few hours ahead, if the fast-moving task force is organized then they can reach the 60th floor before the demons. Then the combined forces can delay Alan until the allied forces catch up.

-But.....

Ark started to talk before sighing and shaking his head. Like JusticeMan said, if they organized a task force then they could catch up with the demons. Even if there were no monsters, the secret dungeon was a complicated place like a maze. Even if Alan sent them a guide, this wasn’t an easy place to memorize. The demons that entered would have no choice but to wander around a lot. On the other hand, Ark and the allied forces had completely memorized the construction of the secret dungeon. They could take the shortest course while the demons were wandering and overtake them to arrive at the 60th floor first. However, overtaking the demons was different from stopping them.

‘The secret dungeon has complicated passages that didn’t move. Yet there is only one way to go to the next floor. If those demons aren’t stopped then won’t they keep on steadily advancing?’

In the end, the task force wouldn’t be able to tie up the ankles of the demons. Eventually the thousands of demons would join Alan. Ark didn’t mention this because JusticeMan also already knew it. None of the dirty tricks or schemes he tried to think about would work.

“Damn, do we just have to sit here and watch as it happens?”

Shambala muttered in an annoyed voice after he was told the contents of the communication. Ark thought about something and shook his head.

“No, the situation is not that bad.”

“What?”

“I told you. The task force can catch up with the demon reinforcements.”

“But isn’t there any way for the task-force to stop the demons?”

“That’s right. It means that every time the task force catches up, there will reduce the number of reinforcements. When considering the level of the monsters, the task force should consist of 2,000 troops. In other words, if the task force catches up 2~3 times then they can reduce the number of reinforcements by 4,000~6,000.”

“But if they join forces with Alan then we will still be dealing with 10,000~12,000 demons. We don’t even have 2,000 troops at the moment.”

“That is why we had Wormer and the raccoons build the fortress.”

“But this sloppy fortress can’t even stop 6,500 demons.”

“H-huh? You bastard, what did you say? It is thanks to the fortress that you’re still alive.....”

Wormer who was the architect of the fortress jumped up and exclaimed after hearing Shambala’s words. Then Ark raised his hand, restrained Wormer and said.

“The fortress is still in an unfinished state.”

Ark said in response to Shambala. That’s right. In fact, the fort built on the 60th floor was still unfinished. Wormer designed the fort to be constructed in three days. So Ark and the attack unit were supposed to gain 3 days on the 59th floor. However, Curio’s crisis had unexpectedly destroyed that plan and Alan broke through the 59th floor in only 40 hours.

“Hoh, you already know it. That’s right. The original fortress was designed to block Alan and the 10,000 demons. But you guys didn’t buy the right amount of time on the 59th floor so it is only 50% completed. If the fortress is 100% completed then the demons won’t

be a problem no matter their number!”

Wormer snorted and said. Even if it was 100% completed, how much of a difference would it make? However, Wormer had designed the fortress to withstand 10,000 demons. If they had the 3~4 days to complete it then it could last against the 10,000 demons. In other words, if the fortress was completed then enduring against 12,000 monsters for a few hours wouldn't be a problem. Shambala also realized this and asked.

“Then.....?”

“Yes, it would take the demon reinforcements at least a day to reach Alan. If we finish Wormer's design then we can hold out until the allied forces arrive.”

“But we only have 2,000 people. To prevent the attacks and build the fortress.....”

Shambala muttered sceptically until he trailed off as he realized something. Then he gave a look like he was confirming it.

“.....That's right. Isn't Alan oblivious to the fact that the fortress is unfinished?”

“Exactly.”

Ark grinned and nodded.

“Alan knows that this fort won't be easily captured with 6,500 monsters. So he sacrificed Silvana to bring reinforcements. And he only has to wait a day for thousands of reinforcements to arrive. In such a situation, there is no reason to waste troops by attacking the fortress. Alan will definitely rest until the reinforcements arrive. In other words, we have at least a day.”

This was the only solution Ark came up with. No, it was an analysis of the situation rather than an idea he conceived.

“In the meantime, if all forces work on it then we can increase the fort's completion rate to 80%. It should be enough to endure the attack from the reinforcements for 2~3 hours until the allied forces

arrive. If it is 80% completed then the fortress can last against 10,000 monsters. No, we have to use every possible method to make it endure!”

“Of course!”

Wormer exclaimed while touching his chest. So Ark’s troops started the fortress construction without any breaks. But the situation didn’t go as he imagined. In the beginning, Alan had stopped attacking like Ark expected after receiving the notification that the reinforcements were coming. After 5 hours had passed, the demons unexpectedly stirred and started making their way to the fort again. It had been 1 hour since then. Despite the demons receiving enormous damage, they just relentlessly continued to attack. He couldn’t understand Alan’s behaviour.....

Ark bit his lip as he recalled the memories.

“There’s only one thing I can think of.”

Alan had used the gargoyles to spy on Ark and noticed that they were constructing the fort. And he immediately knew Ark’s strategy.

“Dammit!”

He cursed at the unpleasant thought. Now Ark only had one choice left. The fortress couldn’t be constructed anymore so they had to reduce the number of demons as much as possible before the reinforcements arrived. That was the way to survive. But that also wasn’t an easy task.

‘The loaded equipment can’t be used forever.’

That’s right. The devices on the fortress could be used repeatedly but they couldn’t be used randomly. For example, the engine that discharged the water couldn’t be used again until enough water had built up. It was the same for the lava flow along the walls. If the demons continued attacking around the clock then some devices would become unnecessary. A long battle without any breaks was also a problem for the exhausted soldiers who hadn’t rested for several days.

'If we continued fighting like this then we'll be too exhausted when the reinforcements show up.'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

"Ark-nim, Cyclops are approaching from the demon camp!"

"Cyclops!"

Ark flinched and paid attention. Huge monsters were walking through the valley. They were one eyed giants with huge, muscular bodies, the Cyclops. Those guys approached while carrying huge objects in their hands. Then they swung their arms and the huge objects began to fly towards the fortress. Ark looked panicked.

"T-this.....block it! All magicians focus their magic on shields!"

Wormer's fortress was armed with various devices. However, this fortress also had a fatal weakness. It was vulnerable to long distance attacks from ranged weapons. This was the reason why installing traps on the walls weren't used in regular sieges. No matter how many traps were on the walls, it would become obsolete if destroyed by a siege weapon.

"My will shall be a strong shield.....Bounce Shield!"

The magicians simultaneously cast shield spells. But among the 2,000 troops, 1,500 of them were NPCs such as the Meow, Wolrang, raccoons and Eastern Nation. Among the 500 users, only 40 of them were magicians. It would take more than 40 magicians to shield an entire wall. Furthermore, the Cyclops had thrown dozens of massive objects.

Kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

With a roar, the rocks tore through the shields of the magicians. There was no way the fly swatter could block dozens of rocks. Once again, the Cyclops was a huge 20 metres monster with enormous strength. But they weren't a tricky opponent. Despite their destructive power, their movements and reaction rate was low so it was easy to deal with them. However, that was in a conventional battle. In a situation like this, the Cyclops could use its incredible

speed to throw huge rocks across hundreds of metres. They were the worst opponent in a siege.

“Ark-nim, we’ve suffered serious damage on the left wall!”

“The attack just now destroyed 10 spear launchers!”

Not surprisingly, the situation became confused from that one attack.

“Dammit! Engineers, hurry and repair the damage!”

Dozens of engineers rushed towards the damaged walls.

“The necessary materials....huck! What, what the? T-this.....”

One of the engineers surveying a crushed device stepped back with a pale face. The engineer saw that the huge object thrown was moving. The object moved and twitched. And something protruded from the object.....

-Grrrrrrr!

“Huck, it isn’t a rock. T-this is.....”

“It is Kurak! These guys are Kurak! Run....kuaaaack!”

The engineer screamed before his body was cut and a fountain of blood spurted out. The one devouring the engineer’s upper body that was cut was a huge maggot called Kurak. That’s right. The huge objects that the Cyclops’ threw were the maggots Kurak. The Kurak moved had been thrown past the walls and attacked the engineers.

“This is.....damn, the aims of these fellows are the devices!”

Ark shouted in an urgent voice.

“If the devices are destroyed then the fortress will instantly collapse. The Meow will protect the raccoons and lure the Kurak to the rear defenders. The Wolrang and attack unit will exterminate the lured Kurak. Hurry!”

“Nyaaaaa. This way you maggots!”

Hundreds of Meow clawed the Kurak and provoked them.

“Now’s the time. Attack!”

After the Meow lured the Kurak to the right position, the Wolrang and special attack unit lying in wait jumped out.

Despite being only level 300, the Kurak’s shell was hard as steel so its defense was enormous. However, they had received quite a bit of damage after being thrown 100 metres by the Cyclops. When the Meow, Wolrang and special attack unit poured their attacks then the monsters deflated like a balloon. But 10 more Kurak flew as the first ones were wiped out. One small part of the wall collapsed as the Kurak flew in. The thrown Kurak dealt damage to the fortress and attacked the engineers and the devices. The dual attack of the Cyclops and Kurak caused chaos.

“Concentrate all iron arrows on the Cyclops!”

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Hundreds of iron arrows were shot from the walls. However, the iron flew over 100 metres and lost the power to penetrate the Cyclops’ thick skin and muscles.

Most of the iron arrows barely pierced the skin. Meanwhile, the Cyclops had thrown another 10 Kurak into the fortress.

The leader who was dealing with the Kurak shouted breathlessly.

“We can’t deal with the Kurak if they keep on coming in!”

“I know!”

Ark shouted angrily. Suddenly he heard Curio’s voice in his ear.

“Master, I’ve arrived!”

“Okay, Curio. Get started. This is a chance!”

“Sheesh, saying the same thing.....”

Curio grunted and muttered. Then one of the Cyclops suddenly winced. And it hit its own body like hitting a mosquito.....

Ark’s mana was sucked out and a message window appeared in front of him.

-Curio has successfully used Blood-sucking on the Cyclops.
--

<p>* The secondary effect of skill absorption has failed!</p> <p>* The secondary effect of skill absorption has failed!</p> <p>* The secondary effect of Blood-sucking, 'Confusion' has been successful!</p> <p><Curio can control the 'Confused' Cyclops for 30 minutes></p>

"It's a success!"

Ark laughed and muttered. That's right. This was Ark's trump card against the Cyclops. Confusion was the secondary effect of Blood-sucking that Curio acquired after evolving! The Cyclops was the epitome of 'strong but stupid.' Their power was so strong that they could throw large rocks hundreds of metres but they were so stupid they couldn't learn skills. And Curio's Confusion had a higher chance of working the more stupid the opponent was. It was unnecessary to say but weren't they easier to incite because they were stupid? So Ark attacked the Cyclops and made them move near the entrance of the valley where Curio was waiting. While they were focused on the fort, Curio used Blood-sucking several times until the Confusion effect was applied.

"Hehehe, these oversized but stupid monsters. Become the body of the high pureness vampire. Now! One eyed monster, let's get started!"

Curio hit the head of the confused Cyclops with his wing and shouted.

-Roaaaaar!

The Cyclops shrieked and attacked another Cyclops. The Kurak it was about to throw fell and was stepped on. The Cyclops belatedly realized the situation and swung its fist. But Curio quickly flew around the Cyclops and sucked its blood like crazy. In fact, Blood-sucking wasn't easy to use against general monsters. So the probability of Confusion being triggered wasn't high. However, it was different when dealing with a 20 metres large Cyclops. There were a lot of places to bite and the danger was low thanks to its slow

reactions. Moreover, their intelligence was probably in the single digits so it easy to trigger Confusion. On the other hand, if successful then they could get a large demon to work for them.

“There is no way you can hit this body!”

Suck, suck, suck, suck!

After a few times, another Cyclops fell victim to Confusion. Curio whose stomach became swollen from the blood laughed and raised his voice.

“Kekekeke. Now, these Cyclops. Feel free to run wild!”

The demons in the area fell into a state of chaos. The Cyclops under Curio’s control started rolling on the ground while fighting other Cyclops. The Cyclops randomly crashed into the valley while fighting and caused a hail of rocks to fall. The demons near the Cyclops were crushed by the huge bodies and falling rocks. The entrance of the valley was filled with screams and blood.

-Kuram, kuram, baradram!

In the end, it became a situation where the demons killed their fellow colleagues.

“Kekekeke. Good, good. I’ll have you guys fight and die among yourselves.....eh?”

Curio who was flapping his wings and watching from the ceiling flinched. His eyes narrowed and he frowned until he raised his voice.

“Master, it is Alan!”

“What? Alan?”

Ark who was dealing with the Kurak along with the Meow and Wolrang suddenly raised his head.

“Where?”

“Near the place where the Cyclops are running wild!”

Ark leapt onto a wall and used Eyes of the Cat to look at the area

Curio indicated. But even if he used Eyes of the Cat, it wasn't easy to spot Alan from hundreds of metres away through thousands of monsters. Ark gave up checking himself and asked Curio.

"Curio, check it again. Are you certain it is Alan?"

"Do you think I wouldn't recognize him? I'm certain! It is Alan!"

"Is there anyone else around him?"

"Including the Dark Elf and magician we saw before, there is approximately 100 people."

'The Dark Elf and magician is Timosi and Jewel, so the person they're accompanying is without a doubt Alan!'

Ark's forehead wrinkled at Curio's answer.

'Why did that guy appear?'

It had already been a day and a half since Alan and his troops entered the 60th floor. Yet Alan had never directly appeared on the battlefield. Currently the fortress was blocking the exit of the valley so there problems stopping Alan from conducting the problem. Wormer and the raccoons had also installed various traps scattered around the fortress so there was no reason for him to take a risk.

'However, this is the first time that Alan appeared on the battlefield.'

The all-out assault of the demons wasn't a burden on Alan. Just a little more and he had a chance for success. But he never expected that the Cyclops would become confused and started attacking each other.

'He must be trying something different. Anyway.....'

A cold smile spread on Ark's face as he organized his thoughts.

'.....This is a chance!'

Ark knew that the current military situation wasn't that good. His troops had tirelessly sneaked through the secret dungeon to install traps and they also constructed the fortress. They could barely

concentrate on the battle and swing their swords because of their fatigue. But was that all? The demons continuous push meant that quite a few devices were damaged.

‘It might not even hold until the allied forces and demon reinforcements appeared.’

But there was a way to quickly reverse the military situation. It was Alan’s death! That’s right. The person commanding the thousands of demons was Alan. If Ark dealt with Alan then the person commanding the demons would disappear.

‘Of course, dealing with the demons still won’t be easy.’

He had confidence that he could win against Alan. After his encounter with Alan in Pabiun Canyon, he had gained all of his Animal King set as well as the legendary sword, ‘Shining Darkness.’ Alan wasn’t an opponent easily dealt with but Ark had confidence he could win. The problem was that Ark would have to reach the place where Alan was. Even if he managed to deal with Alan, there was a chance he would be killed by the demons. However, Ark and Alan’s importance was different.

If Ark died, there were still a number of users that could be left in charge including Wormer and Boramae. They had the ability to command the units if Ark died. However, the demons were different. Alan was a unique commander within the demon army. In other words, Alan’s death meant the demons would just degenerate into a group of monsters. No matter how tired the troops were, they could deal with the disorganized demons.

‘I have a lot more to gain from this gamble. So there is no reason to hesitate!’

“Shambala, gather 400 people from the coalition and have them gather in the back.

Ark shouted after quickly grasping the situation. Shambala sensed that the atmosphere wasn’t ordinary and quickly organized a detachment of soldiers. Ark left the defense of the Hell Door to the coalition members. Ark registered the people as a separate attack group and shouted.

“Demonic Distortion!”

Ark’s bag opened and black equipment flew into the sky. It formed a large pentagram and exploded before a message window appeared.

-You have used Demonic Distortion.

The released demonic energy from the equipment will distort the space, changing the location of allies and enemies.

Please designate an enemy target when changing locations.

“Curio!”

“300 metres to your 3 o’clock!”

“The demons 300 metres away at my 3 o’clock!”

Ark shouted after hearing Curio’s words. At the same time there, the space warped around Ark’s group. Then Ark was sucked into thin air and flew away to the specified place. Alan, Timosi and the Avengers immediately appeared in front of him. That’s right. Ark used Demonic Distortion to appear in front of Alan. The valid range for Demonic Distortion was 500 metres. Alan had appeared within 500 metres of the fort so it was a perfect opportunity for Ark.

“Now! Don’t worry about the surrounding demons. Concentrate all your offensive power on Alan!”

Shambala and the detachment instantly ran towards Alan. The Avengers belatedly realized their appearance and hurriedly gathered around Alan. However, Alan’s convoy only had 100 people. There were thousands of demons around but they weren’t trained so they wouldn’t respond promptly to sudden situations like this. Besides, the demons were still in chaos because of the confused Cyclops. Meanwhile, the 400 elite detachment penetrated through the Avenger’s defense line.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There were clashing sounds and dozens of Avengers collapsed. Alan became flustered and tried to retreat as his guards collapsed. Ark

was convinced of his victory by those reactions.

“It is already too late! Shambala, go!”

“Ark and Shambala narrowed the distance before attacking Alan from both sides. The black light and red light intersected and went through Alan’s body. Alan’s health quickly fell to 50%.

‘What the? This guy.....why is he so weak?’

Ark was baffled as he used Eyes of the Cat to check Alan’s health. Even in a 1 on 1 fight, he wasn’t able to guarantee the chances of success against Alan. Even if it was a surprise, one attack had really decreased his health by 50%? No, what on earth was that crude movement just then? Furthermore, he is running away after one hit? Alan wasn’t the only one. Shambala had tried to attack Timosi but she was also running away.

“What is this? Do you think I will miss?”

Shambala shouted angrily and moved like the wind. Ark noticed and also chased after Alan with Sprint. The demons belatedly realized the situation and stepped in front of Ark and Shambala. But they moved systematically and the detachment stopped the demons, making it possible for Ark and Shambala to catch up with Alan.

“Kkiiiiik! Kkiiiiik!”

When Ark ran in front of him, Alan let out a bizarre moan. Shambala muttered with a disgusted expression.

“What the? This guy, has he suddenly turned into a monkey?”

“Kkikik!”

Then Alan turned and ran towards Shambala.

“What’s this? Just try it! Torrential Sword!”

Shambala laughed as he blocked Alan’s clumsy attack and brandished his dagger. At the same time, dozens of daggers pierced Alan’s body. Alan instantly fell to the ground. He got to his feet and tried to run away again. No, it was when he tried to get up.

‘Why is he like this.....?’

“Who would’ve expected this situation?”

Ark laughed as he pressed his sword to Alan’s neck. And Ark’s sword went vertically through Alan’s neck.

“Kuaaaaah!”

Alan screamed with distress as his health reached the bottom. The commander of the enemy had been defeated in the middle of enemy territory!

“What the hell? That Alan.....maybe he stayed up a few days and fell asleep in the unit?”

Shambala murmured after dealing with Alan so easily. But Ark had no interest in Alan’s circumstances. The important thing was that Alan was killed. Now that the demons lost their commander, their organizational ability would quickly collapse!

“Okay. Now we just have to return to the fortress.”

Ark muttered while looking down at Alan’s corpse before his face suddenly stiffened. A mysterious phenomenon was happening to Alan’s body. Alan’s body that was lying on the ground warped and turned into pieces of dough. The face also cleared and became as smooth as an egg. What was going on? Ark used Skill Penetration and the unexpected message window appeared.

-Doppelganger’s special skill: Steal a Face

A doppelganger is a mysterious demon who existed since ancient times.

The doppelganger is a relatively weak demon but it has the uncanny ability to steal faces. Although the technique is called ‘Steal a Face,’ it actually copies everything about the target. When Steal a Face is used, the doppelganger perfectly replicates the target’s information and even their habits. The doppelganger uses this skill to lure friends of family members so that the demons can devour them. In ancient times, the doppelganger even committed

terrible crimes and caused a witch hunt to spread.

Flood, Hell River (I)

‘Doppelganger?’

Ark asked as he checked the information window. Even after seeing it with his eyes, he couldn’t understand what had happened. All the information Ark knew about the doppelgangers passed through his head. In fact, the biggest reason the kingdom had for initiating martial law and closing the checkpoints was because of the doppelgangers. There was an outbreak of doppelgangers stealing the faces of travelling merchants and hiding in villages to eat the residents. But most of those incidents disappeared after martial law was initiated and the checkpoints closed. Ark had never seen an actual doppelganger so far.....

‘Then Alan also brought some doppelgangers into the secret dungeon?’

Ark hurriedly looked around. Ark saw that of the dead Avenger members also had their bodies turn to dough.

.....They weren’t simply mixed in. Alan and all of the Avengers were doppelgangers.

‘The doppelgangers wouldn’t have selfishly copied Alan’s appearance. Then the doppelgangers’ transformations must be due to Alan’s order. If that’s the case?’

This situation was a trap made by Alan? Ark thought of something and the hairs on his body suddenly raised. Alan had the doppelganger transform into him to lure Ark here!

“The detachment should build a defense around Shambala and I!”

Ark yelled before looking at Curio.

“Curio, use satellite surveillance mode and look for Alan’s position!”

“Eh? Eh? U-understood!”

Curio flew down from the ceiling and used satellite surveillance mode. There was only one reason Ark could think of for Alan to use the doppelganger to lure Ark to the battlefield. It was to hide behind the doppelganger for a surprise attack on Ark. So Ark immediately switched to a defense formation to prepare for Alan's attack. However, the demons were the only ones to attack Ark's group.

"I can't see him. There is no signs of Alan on the battlefield."

"Nothing? That's impossible....."

Ark became even more baffled after hearing Curio's report. Why did Alan lure Ark to the battlefield if not to attack him? If it wasn't to lure him then why did the doppelgangers transform into him and exposed themselves? No, this was a good chance so where on earth was Alan?

'Something.....it must be something obvious. What's going on?'

-Kuaaaa!

Ark worried about it while attacking the monsters coming from all directions. Although the confused Cyclops were still running wild, sooner or later they would end up being surrounded by thousands of demons.

"Jeez, what are you doing? This is the middle of enemy territory! Don't just stand there!"

Shambala shouted as he fought the encroaching demons. However Ark couldn't easily decide his next move. Ark couldn't grasp Alan's scheme for removing him for the fortress so he couldn't easily move.

'It is imperative that I determine Alan's location!'

"Curio, search the 60th floor thoroughly using satellite surveillance mode. Find Alan!"

Ark shouted when he suddenly heard.

-Ark-nim, there is a surprise attack!

Boramae's voice shook his eardrums sharply. Ark flinched and looked at the fortress as he asked.

-Surprise? Surprise attack? What does that mean? The demons crossed the walls from outside?

-It isn't from outside. From behind.....is it the Avenger guild!

-Avenger? That.....

What did that mean? The Avengers suddenly appeared in the fortress out of nowhere? But Ark was surrounded by demons and couldn't properly determine what was happening inside the fortress. The situation wasn't calm enough for him to ask.

"Everybody gather around me!"

Ark shouted after hearing Boramae's words. At the same time, he used Demonic Distortion and dozens of cursed japtem flew from his bag. Ark used Demonic Distortion and swapped with the group of demons gathered by the wall. Even if he wanted to move inside the fortress, there were no demons inside for him to switch with. So Ark and the detachment suddenly appeared in a fierce battlefield.

"Damn, there's nowhere to place my foot. Torrential Sword!"

"Maintain defense formation and retreat to the fortress. Riposte!"

Ark, Shambala and the soldiers pushed back the demons and retreated to the fortress. But he couldn't see the Avengers that appeared inside the fort anymore.

"Boramae, what the hell happened?"

Ark ran up to Boramae and asked. Then Boramae answered with a puzzled expression.

"It happened so suddenly that I don't understand the situation myself. Those guys appeared behind the fortress and headed towards the Hell Door. I belatedly discovered them but couldn't chase after them with so troops because of the demons' attacks. And Ark-nim also left some troops to guard the Hell Door so....."

“Where did those guys appear?”

“T-that is.....”

“Did they appear inside the fortress? Do you know how? The 60th floor is a valley! It is impossible to come here without climbing over the walls! Even if they used some inconspicuous method, hundreds of Avengers crossing the walls should be noticed.....”

Ark shouted when he winced and shut his mouth. Then he looked around with stupid eyes before running somewhere. He rushed to the place where the Cyclops had thrown the giant maggots and examined the bodies of the dead Kurak. A desperate light filled Ark’s eyes as he saw the dead bodies.

“This is.....!”

Ark murmured as he bit his lip. The demons all-out attack, the doppelgangers transforming into Alan to lure Ark out.....the whole situation was for only one purpose. To allow Alan and the Avengers to infiltrate the fortress! That’s right. Like Ark said before, there was no reach for Alan to reach the Hell Door unless he passed through the fortress. The walls had various devices on them while the sky was blocked by the metal lattice. And even if some monsters crossed the walls, the Hell Door was defended by 400 elite members. There was no way for even an ant to enter the Hell Door unless the fortress fell. At least that’s what Ark thought. But there was a gap. No, to be exact a gap had been made. That’s right. This battle had proceeded under Alan’s scenario from the beginning.

‘The attack on the fortress wasn’t to prevent us from building it up.’

That was what Ark had thought at the time. When Ark saw the strategy of the Cyclops and Kurak, he just thought that Alan was impatient. In fact, the strategy of throwing the Kurak into the fortress wasn’t meaningless. It dealt damage to the fortress and the Kurak also shaved away some of the soldiers’ health.

“But the Kurak’s main purpose is different.”

“Main purpose?”

“The Kurak was used to secretly transport Alan and the Avengers.”

Ark muttered sharply.

“Transport? What.....huck! D-don’t tell me.....?”

Shambala who was looking confused suddenly flinched as he saw the Kurak. He ran to the one of the Kurak and wielded his dagger. The side of the Kurak was split and revealed a large, empty space. The stomach of the Kurak was large enough that 10 adult men could sufficiently hide in it.

“Unbelievable.....!”

Shambala finally understood the situation. The Kurak were huge demons dozens of metres large. And they possessed the habit of swallowing their prey. Alan used this habit of the Kurak. Alan had divided the Avengers into units of 10 and put them inside the Kurak. Then the Cyclops had thrown the Kurak inside the fortress. Ark thought Alan was trying to damage the fortress and deliberately lured them to the rear of the fortress. The rear of the fortress.....right on the doorstep of hell.

At this point, Ark had already lost the battle against Alan. Alan had used Ark to help him infiltrate right to the door of hell.

However, there was a checkpoint Alan and the Avengers still had to cross before they could enter the Hell Door. It was the 400 elite members that Shambala had selected to protect the Hell Door.

Around 50 Kurak had fallen into the fortress before Ark had neutralized the Cyclops using Confusion. If he calculated that there were 10 in each Kurak, that was 500 Avenger members. If those many enemies launched a surprise attack then they could penetrate the elite crew. However, Ark’s group was inside the fortress. If Alan’s group conflicted with Ark then they would receive the concentrated attack of 1,500 people. If Alan died in battle then the situation would end. That was why Alan lured out Ark using the doppelgangers.

“This is Alan’s plan. He knew that the doppelgangers would be discovered by Curio after the Cyclops became confused. Then I would obviously move out. And I would take some troops with me to

deal with the doppelgangers. Meanwhile they can take care of the elite troops guarding the Hell Door.....dammit!"

Ark cursed and kicked the Kurak's body. That's right. While Ark and Shambala were dealing with the doppelgangers, Alan and the Avengers had strolled right through the door into hell. It was like the Trojan Horse in the myths.

"Damn, then what did we do all that work for?"

"What happens now? We should pursue them immediately....."

Boramae started calling for soldiers.

"I will only pursue them with Shambala and the selected detachment."

"Huh?"

"We've only been able to stop the 6,000 monsters with 2,000 troops because of the fortress. The moment we give up the fortress then we'll become the demons' prey. We have to defend the fortress until the very last moment."

This was also a part of Alan's plan. Even if Ark read Alan's movements, he would only be able to mobilize 400 people. Alan's plan to tie up the ankles of the soldiers had worked.

"Looking at the Kurak, Alan should only have 500 people. If I catch him before he floods the Hell River then I can win against those numbers. Shambala and the detachment will enter the Hell Door with me. Boramae, this is Alan's plan so the attack from the demons will strengthen from now on. Defend this fortress unless I give any orders."

He didn't have time to consider various situations any more. Ark immediately led Shambala and the detachment through the Hell Door. It had been 5 minutes since Alan and the Avengers pass through the Hell Door. Yet when he had previously entered the Hell Door, he hadn't seen any device to make the river flood. He hadn't seen anything at the crystal temple that he destroyed.

‘Then the device which will flood the Hell River must be hidden somewhere. Hopefully Alan will wander around trying to find the device.’

This was Ark’s only hope. But even those expectations were crushed when he passed through the Hell Door.

“What on earth?”

Ark muttered with a foolish expression. When Ark first came here, the Hell River had been right in front of the entrance. But now the Hell River in front of him was divided in half just like Moses divided the Red Sea. And a long passage stretched in the centre of the divided Hell River. One word floated in Ark’s head at the sight of the divided Hell River.

“Hell Stone!”

The Hell Stone was the mysterious artifact Alan had seized from Shangri-La. According to the information from the History Crystal, the Hell Stone had the power to control the Hell River. The Hell Stone parting like the Red Sea was due to the Hell Stone.

“.....Is it already too late?”

“The Hell River hasn’t flooded yet!”

Shambala tapped Ark’s shoulder while he was making a hopeless expression and ran down the passage. Ark followed Shambala using Sprint and muttered.

“Yes, it’s still.....not over yet!”

So they ran down the passage created by the split hell river. When the passage widened, an even more amazing scene appeared in front of them. At the end of the Hell River was the black crystal temple! The black crystal temple had been replicated at the end of the passage. And before the crystal temple.....

“Alan!”

Ark cried out as he rushed down the passage towards the crystal temple. The person standing before an altar turned around.

“..... It’s too late.”

Alan, the man wearing black armour muttered. Timosi and the 500 Avenger members were gathered around Alan. But Ark and Shambala weren’t looking at them.

“W-what is going on?”

One of the soldiers muttered with a puzzled voice. Ark flinched and took a step back as he saw a huge object in front of Alan.

Dukong, dukong, dukong, dukong.

A huge black heart was in front of Alan. It was a huge heart at least 10 metres in size! The heart was placed on the altar that was carved in the shape of a beast like an offering. The crystal temple vibrated with each pounding of the heart. Ark’s group was 100 metres away and they could clearly feel the vibration. Ark gazed at the heart warmly before beginning to talk.

“You figured out my purpose and came here. But the heart is already in my hands.”

“Heart? Your purpose is the heart?”

What was he saying? Alan made an absurd expression after seeing Ark’s bewildered look.

“What? You didn’t know about the heart? Then.....aha, you thought I came all this way just to flood the Hell River and submerge Nagaran. Kukuku, what silly behaviour. I overestimated you. I thought you’ve changed but you’re still just a little bug trembling for money. Well, okay. I will step on the bug and kill it.”

“You’re still chattering on. As you said, I don’t know your purpose. But I’m not interested. If you’re going to keep on talking about your purpose then that will change. Talking like that is a big mistake.”

Ark smiled and muttered. In fact, Ark had thought Alan’s purpose was to flood the Hell River. Then it would’ve been the end if Alan arrived at the altar first. But if Alan kept on talking about the heart then it changed. The heart that was 10 metres large was more like a

structure then an item. In other words, a user would be unable to put it in their bags. The fact that Alan was watching the heart meant he couldn't place it in his bag. If Alan's purpose was to flood the river then he would've already achieved it. However, it would be more difficult if he wanted to seize the heart. It meant Ark just had to snatch the huge heart.

'If I stop him from getting the heart then I can prevent the river from flooding!'

That was the reason Ark recovered his spirit. Then Alan giggled and said.

"I know what you're thinking. But didn't I already say it? You're too late."

At the same time, an intense glare occurred behind Alan. And intense sparks spread over the huge black heart and it disappeared. Ark, Shambala and their group couldn't understand what had happened. Wormer who was watching from behind ran out and shouted.

"Ah! T-that.....that's mine? It is my quantum transmitter that was located at my secret base!"

That's right. The device hidden behind the heart was the quantum machine that Wormer invented. The quantum machine had moved the heart somewhere else. But how did Alan get his hands on the transmitter? The answer was simple. Ark and Wormer had trapped Alan in the underground base. When they visited the base again later, Ark and Wormer found that all the inventions were smashed. The thing they hadn't considered was that Alan smashed all the inventions to hide that he stole the quantum transmitter.

'That's right. Alan ignored the troops and headed straight to the heart because he had the quantum transmitter. Damn, is he going to flood the Hell River now?'

Ark considered the situation and quickly shouted.

"Everybody, the target is Alan! Kill Alan!"

“I said it was too late.”

Alan said as Ark and Shambala flew towards him. Alan laughed and laid a black stone on the altar. Then the altar made of bone split in half and revealed a lever. Alan pulled the lever and smiled.

“Kukuku, this is my gift to you. Your ruin.”

A red warning message appeared in front of Ark.

-The Hell Altar has been used!

The Hell Altar is the device to flood the Hell River. When the device is used, the magic of the Hell River will go out of control and will gradually rise. It can't be stopped until the whole area is flooded.

“You, you bastard!”

“This degree is enough for now.”

Alan made a playful expression and struck the altar with his sword. Then cracks like spider webs spread on the Hell Altar.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

The river that was split in half started shaking. It was the sound of destruction in Ark's head.

“T-the Hell River is moving.....”

The soldiers looked around with confused eyes. As soon as the Hell Altar broke, the river surrounding the temple started changing. It fluctuated like it was a living creature. No, to be exact it was the humans and beasts floating on the Hell River....the transparent existences convulsed as they rubbed against each other. The hundreds and thousands of souls suddenly opened their eyes. At the same time, tears of blood started falling from their eyes. It was an eerie scene from a horror movie! An unearthly scream rocked the area.

Kkiyaaaaaah, kkiyaaaaaah!

It was a sharp scream which pierced the eardrums!

“Kuaaaak!”

“Huk, what the? This sound?”

“Ugh! It feels like my head is breaking!”

The soldiers moaned and blocked their ears after hearing the scream from the Hell River. But they couldn't block out the sound. The scream from the Hell River made their brains feel like it was going to explode. Therefore Ark, Shambala, the soldiers and even Alan and the Avenger members screamed from the shock to their brains. All the people around the crystal temple fell into a state of panic as 'it' began. Millions.....the screams that burst from incalculable number of souls turned into a huge shockwave.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, jjajjajjang, jjajjajjang!

The soldiers were thrown back onto the ground from the enormous invisible power. The shockwave caused cracks to spread on the pillars and floor of the temple. However, that was just the beginning. The Hell River started to vibrate. It started to tremble like pudding. When the screams continued, it started to shake and gradually became bigger like a surging tsunami. And a huge whirlpool was produced with the crystal temple in the centre.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

“The temple is rising!”

One of the soldiers moaning on the ground muttered. His words were correct. He couldn't sense it clearly inside the crystal temple but it was rising. It was like a huge raft floating back and forth in the centre of the swirling Hell River.

“The Hell River.....it is flooding.....”

Ark muttered with a foolish expression. The situation became when he looked at the rising temple. The Hell River was like the floodgates to a dam blocking a huge river had been released. At this speed it would fill the hell immediately. And the place the Hell River was heading towards was the only exit, the Hell Door. No, it was the

secret dungeon, Silvana and then Nagaran. It was the true meaning of ruin.

“Now it’s all over.....”

Ark looked at the Hell Altar with a blank expression. The Hell Altar was the ancient device which controlled the Hell River..... Despite all his efforts, the altar had been triggered. And it was broken. That’s right. That was important. The trigger had been broken. Now all Ark could do was watch as the Hell River flooded Nagaran.

‘Wait?’

It was at that moment. Ark who was struggling in a sea of despair felt a spark of light in his head. Ark quickly looked around him. Thanks to the shockwave, his group was scattered all over the place. The shock wave didn’t do any damage but they were also in despair from witnessing the Hell River flooding. However Ark wasn’t looking for them.

‘Where on earth is he? Ah, there he is!’

Ark eyed a prone body on the ground near a pillar. Ark immediately rushed over and shook the body while shouting.

“Wormer!”

“Ugh, don’t shout! It feels like my ears will break!”

The lump of flesh.....Wormer shouted angrily.

“I don’t have time to talk. Did you see the Hell Altar?”

“Hell Altar? That thing?”

Wormer looked at the altar split in half. Ark nodded and said.

“Can it be repaired?”

That’s right. This was the method Ark came up with. The altar had been activated but Silvana wasn’t submerged yet. This was the lowest layer of the secret dungeon. The Hell River was out of control but didn’t he still have time before it left? Then what if he could seal the altar back up? He might be able to stop the Hell River from going

out of control. The problem is that the altar had been destroyed in hell right away! Ark had thought everything was ended.....too many incidents happened in a short time that he could hardly think. Broken things could be repaired. This was the idea that passed through his head. And didn't Ark have a great mechanic with him? But Wormer looked at the Hell Altar and shook his head.

"I don't know. I can't imagine the type of mechanism that could control the Hell River."

"Huh? Then?"

"But....."

Wormer took out a spanner and laughed.

"The altar that Alan broke is nothing but a huge switch. So the altar is just a mechanical device. If I repair the broken circuits and replace the gear then it should be enough to fix it. Well, it is possible for me."

'That's it. Then there is still hope!'

Ark asked with eager eyes.

"How long will it take?"

"I can't know until I examine it myself."

"Then hurry up!"

"Understood. But can you really stop the Hell River if I repair the altar?"

Wormer's question reminded him about the warning message that appeared. In fact, Ark had thought everything ended when the Hell Altar was triggered. But the warning message said that the magic had gone out of control and wouldn't stop until the whole area was submerged. In other words, wasn't there something to stop the magic from going out of control? That's right. The warning message let him know that something could stop the Hell River.

"It can stop. No, it's going to stop!"

Ark exclaimed in a decisive voice.

“That confidence can’t appear out of nowhere. Okay, I’ll display my capabilities.”

Wormer smiled and ran towards the altar.

If Wormer repaired the altar then the problem of the Hell River flooring would be solved. However, he had to leave it to Wormer.

‘Then the work I have to do.....’

Ark pulled out his sword and turned around. Wormer needed time to repair the altar to stop the flooding. The Hell Altar was just a mechanical device. And the Hell Stone was the artifact that controlled the Hell River. It was the black stone Alan was holding in his hand. Alan and the Avengers were also scattered because of the shock wave. While Wormer was running to the altar, Alan laughed and raised the Hell Stone.

“I can guess what your idea is. Do you want this?”

Ark grinned and nodded.

“I want it. I will cut your neck to get it.”

“Didn’t you confirm the other day that your skills aren’t enough?”

“Why don’t we confirm it again?”

“I would love to but.....”

Alan stared at him before shaking his head.

“I don’t have time to play with you today.”

“What?”

“Ark, that is.....the magic charger!”

Wormer shouted from the altar. Ark’s eyes caught Jewel quickly moving towards Alan. No, he saw the object Jewel was holding. It was a large cylindrical object made with a silver metal. Ark had previously seen it in Wormer’s secret base.

If Ark’s memory was correct.....



-Magic Charger

Type: 3rd grade invention

Design and Production: Wormer

A type of battery that can store magic energy. It can store 5,000 MG at one time. If all the MG is consumed then it is possible to charge it and use it again. This magic charger was made using Wormer's specific standards.

"Damn, that's mine. These thieves!"

Wormer grinded his teeth together. However, Ark didn't care about who was the owner of the charger.

'MG battery! Don't tell me.....?'

Panic spread on Ark's face as he remembered the information about the magic charger. In fact, Ark had come up with the way to stop the Hell River by assuming that Alan couldn't use the quantum transmitter again. Once the quantum machine was used, it needed to be charged with MG to be used again. Therefore the quantum transmitter became like scrap iron after it was used once. That was Ark's reasoning. However, the situation was different if Alan had a magic charger.

"Why do you look surprised?"

Alan grinned and muttered.

"Didn't I say it? The reason I came here was to look for the heart as well as flooding the Hell River. The heart is ours now. Did you really think we wouldn't come prepared to use the quantum transmitter twice? Did you expect that I would flood the Hell River and die along with you? I don't regard my life that cheaply."

Alan raised a finger. Jewel smiled and placed the charger into the quantum transmitter. Sparks flew from the antenna attached to the top of the machine. Alan was going to disappear with the Hell Stone! Ark instantly used Sprint and shouted.

“Wait. You bastard, are you running away?”

“The dog who lost the fight is barking louder.”

Alan muttered with a smug expression. Timosi hooked her arms with Alan’s and shouted.

“Bye. You guys can enjoy swimming in the Hell River!”

The sparks gradually intensified as they revolved around Alan and the Avengers. At the same time, Alan and the Avengers turned into light and was sucked into the antenna. Ark’s eyes darkened as he saw the scene from dozens of metres away.

“U-unbelievable……!”

Alan had run away. And there was no method to chase after them.

Jiiiiiiik, kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

500 lights spun towards the ceiling. This was the moment Nagaran was confirmed to be ‘ruined.’ No, just as he thought that.

……Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

“What, what the?”

Ark’s eyes widened as he heard a thud. Alan and the Avengers had been successfully converted to quantum matter. And they were moving somewhere through the antenna. At this point, there were no problems and everything was as it should be. Yet some unexpected developments occurred. The beam fired from the antenna hit the ceiling and bounced around several places. After bouncing around for a while, the light was sucked back into the antenna. There was a huge flash and sparks rose on the quantum transmitter. The sparks soon turned into Alan and the Avenger members.

“What is this?”

“Ugh, this is?”

Ark watched with bewilderment as Alan appeared on the ground again. The reaction of the Avenger guild members and Wormer who was the inventor of the quantum machine was the same. No one

could understand what had happened. Jewel looked at the quantum machine and murmured.

“Strange. It says that the frequency of the receiver wasn’t caught!”

“What do you mean? Didn’t the heart disappear without any problems just now?”

“I don’t know.....the machine must be broken if the frequency can’t be caught.”

“What? Broken? The inventions I made won’t break so easily!”

Wormer shouted angrily after hearing Jewel’s words. The quantum transmitter was a machine which allowed spatial movement. Once the receiver was placed then the quantum material would be transmitted along that frequency. If the frequency wasn’t caught then the spatial movement would be cancelled. He didn’t know why the frequency of the receiver placed beforehand wasn’t working. The reason wasn’t important to Ark. The important thing was that Alan had failed to disappear!

“Summon Demon, Curio! Go!”

“Okay, Dark Dash!”

Curio shot forward like an arrow. He flew dozens of metres and crashed into Alan’s head while he was looking at Jewel.

The crash to the skull caused a dark fog to cover his eyes. The sudden blow would cause him to be in a ‘blinded’ state.

“Ugh! T-this bastard...!”

Alan belatedly noticed and swung his sword. However, swinging his sword randomly wouldn’t work against Curio.

“Bah, take this! Nostril destruction!”

Curio avoided the sword and lowered his body. Then he extended both arms and thrust his fingers into Alan’s nostrils. The blinded Alan couldn’t imagine the situation and fell to the ground from the attack.

“Kekekeke. That’s what you get for throwing me to Infector.”

Curio laughed as he removed his fingers from the bloody nose. The sight of a bat taking down the cocky Alan would stay with him for at least 10 years. But Ark didn't have time to enjoy the spectacle. When Alan fell to the ground, the Hell Stone had been thrown into the air and bounced off a rock.

"Sprint!"

"S-stop him!"

Ark sprinted forward with his eyes locked on the Hell Stone. The Avenger members belatedly realized the situation and got up before rushing towards Ark. They formed a wall in front of him while some of them threw their bodies and tried to tackle Ark.

"Dark Dance!"

Ark used Dark Dance to avoid the assault. When he faced the human wall, he used their knees and shoulders as a springboard to jump towards the Hell Stone.

"Matanyi Shooter no. 1 Devil Penetrating Arrow!"

Timosi who had been watching from afar shot an arrow. However, the goal of the arrow wasn't Ark. The arrow struck the Hell Stone. Thanks to that, the Hell Stone was thrown in the opposite direction.

"Kuack, dammit! Curio!"

Ark quickly commanded Curio to retrieve the Hell Stone. Meanwhile Timosi was continuously rotating her body and unleashing a barrage of arrows.

"Bah, that stupid bat! Matanyi Shooter no. 2, Devil's Chasing Arrow!"

"Hik! Why does that Dark Elf keep on shooting arrows at me?"

Curio screamed as the arrows flew towards him. Curio flapped his wings and turned but the Devil's Chasing Arrow was an arrow that pursued until the target was hit. The arrow moved like a guided missile towards Curio's butt. Just before it hit Curio's butt!

Syu syu syu syu, chaengkang!

A sharp metal impacted with the arrow. Another dagger also flew towards Timosi who was unleashing another arrow. Timosi did a handspring and avoided the arrow.

“That abnormal bastard.....!”

“You stupid female, I won’t let you freely run wild.”

Shambala raised his dagger and muttered. Thanks to Shambala distracting Timosi, Curio was able to reach the Hell Stone.

No, just as he was about to grab it.

“Hehehehe, I will grab this.”

“Blast of Wind!”

Jewel raised his staff and shouted. A gust of wind wound around Curio and pushed him back several metres.

“Ugh, that damn magician!”

Curio glared at Jewel. However, Jewel was looking elsewhere. It wasn’t just Jewel. Ark and Shambala’s group had 400 people. Including Timosi and Jewel, the Avengers had 500 people. The 900 pairs of eyes were focused on one spot.....

Tuk, tuk tuk, degul degul.

The Hell Stone was rolling around the floor of the crystal temple. The fate of Nagaran depended on that Hell Stone! Everybody here knew how important the Hell Stone was.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Meanwhile, the Hell River was being larger and even more unstable. The walls of the hell wasn’t able to withstand it and was cracking. However, none of the soldiers were looking at the Hell River anymore. Their bodies tensed as they started at the place where the Hell Stone had fallen. After a moment, the Avengers and the soldiers simultaneously moved towards the Hell Stone.

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

“Grab the Hell Stone!”

“Don’t allow them to get the Hell Stone!” The 900 soldiers scattered all over the place all flocked towards the Hell Stone. One Avenger that was closest threw his body towards the Hell Stone and shouted.

“I got it! The Hell Stone....kuack!”

But the Avenger’s words instantly turned to a scream. Dozens of soldiers had jumped onto his body. Therefore the Avenger was crushed like a frog and missed the Hell Stone. The soldiers threw their body, was crushed, another one threw their body and the situation repeated many times..... In the end, the 900 soldiers were layered on top of each other like a small mountain.

“Kuack! Out of my way!”

“Where is the Hell Stone?”

“Dammit, is somebody stepping on my face?”

“Who is touching my ass?”

Screams emerged here and there from the pile of bodies. They were so jumbled up that nobody could distinguish friend from foe. And there was no need to verify it. They only came for one thing, the Hell Stone! The soldiers crowded and stepped on each other to find the Hell Stone.

‘Hell Stone, Hell Stone....find it!’

Ark also dug into the huge mountain of flesh to look for the Hell Stone. However, it was impossible to even distinguish the ground from the bodies.

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Then Radun suddenly flicked his tongue and moved somewhere. He crawled through the many piles of soldiers.

‘Yes, Radun’s Stalking! Radun has found the Hell Stone!’

Ark watched gleefully as Radun continued moving. After a moment, he could finally see the Hell Stone stuck between some soldiers. Ark was 3 metres away from it. However, it felt like 300 metres away

thanks to the crush of soldiers. He could only depend on Radun to get the Hell Stone. No matter how mixed up the soldiers were, Radun was determined to make it through. Radun's unique flexibility allowed him to reach the Hell Stone little by little.

'Well done Radun. A bit more.....a bit more.....!'

Just as Radun was almost at the Hell Stone.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was an abrupt roar and the whole temple shook. The soldiers flew all over the place from the impact. And the Hell Stone that had almost entered Radun's mouth flew somewhere.

"D-dammit!"

Ark cursed as he rolled along the ground. Then he raised his head and stiffened. Ark wasn't the only one with this reaction. The 900 soldiers scattered all around also looked surprised.

.....It was collapsing. The Hell Door that had been blocking the Hell River until now was collapsing. The Hell River had strong curse magic and the Hell Door couldn't withstand it any longer. When the Hell Door collapsed, the crystal temple was caught up in the swirl of water. The walls surrounding the Hell Door also started to collapse. With the only barrier gone, there was nothing stopping the Hell River anymore. The continuously rising Hell River would be pushed outside the Hell Door.

Now the countdown to Nagaran's ruin had begun.

Hell River (II)

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The rocks surrounding the Hell Door fell down into the Hell River. A huge spray of water rose and poured over the temple.

The water from the Hell River was filled with the forms of the cursed evil spirit. Every time a drop filled with evil spirit fell on the soldiers, it caused an electric shock.

-You have touched the Hell River.

If you touch it then you will lose 100 health per second>

A red warning message floated in front of Ark's dumbfounded face. Ark realized that he had forgotten something important.

'The coalition members!'

That's right. The coalition members were fighting against the demons on the 60th floor. The Hell River contained deadly poison that was like hydrochloric acid. If the Hell River poured from the Hell Door to the 60th floor then all the coalition members would be dissolved in moments. Furthermore, he had only brought users along with him to fight Alan. In other words, the 1,500 Meow, Wolrang, raccoons and Eastern Nation were still protecting the fort..... They were the NPC members of Dark Eden. And the NPC members were the main axis of Dark Eden!

'But it'll be too late even if I give the order to escape now.....'

It was only a matter of time until the Hell Door collapsed. Once it did, the Hell River would flow out to the 60th floor. No matter how quick the coalition members were, there was no way they could escape from the 60th floor in time. With how quickly the Hell River would rise after entering the 60th floor, they wouldn't be able to escape the secret dungeon at all. Weren't there also thousands of

demons blocking the front of the fortress? Then Ark thought of a brilliant idea.

'I don't know if it's possible but it is the only way!'

Ark instantly sent a whisper to Boramae who was the commander of the fort.

-Boramae, it is an emergency!

-Ark-nim, what was that shock just now?

-There's no time to explain. Give up the fortress and retreat immediately!

-Retreat? We're retreating? Retreat to where?

Boramae asked in an amazed voice after hearing Ark's order.

-In the underground closed room.

-The closed room? The place we made when we were hiding?

-Yes, retreat to that room right away with the troops. Make them blow up the entrance to completely seal it off. Don't let even a single drop of water enter. Do you understand?

This was the best course of action that Ark could come up with. Ark had previously commanded them to make a closed room on the 60th floor. It had a narrow passage in a rock wall which led to a wide stone room. The length of the passage was approximately 20 metres. In other words, the room was surrounded by 20 metres of rock walls. It was possible to avoid the Hell River in there. Of course, this was just a temporary solution. If the 60th floor was flooded then the closed room would eventually be as well. No, if the entrance was blocked because of that then they would suffocate from a lack of oxygen first. Anyway, if the Hell River wasn't sealed then all of Nagaran would disappear. Then he wouldn't have to worry about the alliance members anymore.

-Blowing up the entrance.....

-There's no time to explain!

-.....I understand.

Boramae answered after hearing Ark's desperate tone and cut off communications. Now the life of his alliance members depended on how fast Boramae ran.

'I have to regain the Hell Stone and reseal the Hell River!'

But finding the Hell Stone was an even more confusion situation. Due to the shaking of the crystal temple, everybody was jumbled up like a cocktail had been shaken. Not only did the 900 soldiers fly away in every direction, there was no way to even tell where the Hell Stone was. Pieces of the crystal temple had broken and small crystal pieces were scattered all over the place. The temple was made of black crystal while the Hell Stone was also black. Looking for the Hell Stone in a pile of crystals was like finding a needle in a desert. However, this wasn't bad for Ark.

"Radun, find the Hell Stone!"

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun dropped down from his waist and looked around with glittering eyes. He flicked his tongue from side to side before pointing towards one side.

-Radun's search target: Hell Stone search mode.

<Radun's search target: the Hell Stone has been sensed 200 metres way in the 3 o'clock direction>

"Okay, let's go!"

Ark instantly ran to a pile of crystal that Radun indicated.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

However, he had only taken a few steps before the temple started shaking uncontrollably. Then the floor suddenly inclined at a sharp angle.

'The Hell Door has broken!'

That's right. In the end, the Hell Door wasn't able to withstand the pressure any longer and broke. The Hell River quickly rushed out after the Hell Door broke. The Hell River pushed out like a swirling storm into the secret dungeon! The crystal temple was located in the centre of the swirl, just like the eye of a cyclone and it was embroiled in the torrent that rushed out the Hell Door. Therefore the crystal pieces and soldiers all fell to one side. Most of them grabbed onto the cracked ground or pillar but some unfortunately soldiers were thrown out the crystal shrine into the Hell River.

"Waaaaah!"

"Huck! S-save me!"

The evil spirits flocked around the soldiers that had fallen into the river. After a few seconds, the soldiers became pieces of bones like piranhas had attacked them. The fearful scene showed how toxic the Hell River was.

"This.....?"

Ark looked around as he held onto his sword that he plunged into the ground. The Hell Door was built directly in front of the fortress that contained thousands of demons. After the coalition members hid in the underground like Ark commanded, the demons had immediately entered the fortress. But before they could even enjoy their victory, the Hell River swept over the fortress like a tsunami. The demons fell into a state of panic and shrieked while running away.

-Kiri, karam, keurama!

-Nohun, bakirama, kurara!

However, the demons were like fleas running around the 60th floor.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The Hell River enveloped the demons in one huge breath. The fate of the demons caught in the swirl was gruesome. The thick leather that prevented the demons from being pierced with a knife was no use against something like this. The demons caught in the swirl seemed like they were caught in a grinder and shredded into chunks of meat.

The Hell River became a deep red colour from the blood of thousands of demons.

“There it is! The Hell Stone!”

Then he heard someone’s voice near him.

Ark who had been looking at the bloody Hell River flinched and turned. A pile of crystals had collapsed from the impact just then and the Hell Stone rolling out caught his eyes. The Hell Stone was also tumbling around everywhere thanks to the shaking of the temple. The soldiers would rush towards it whenever the Hell Stone rolled in their area. But the temple was still at a 30 degree tilt. The temple would shake again every time the river collided with the valley. Thanks to that, the soldiers rushing towards the Hell Stone lost their balance and died. Some of them even pulled the Avenger members with them. And they became minced meat. When the situation was like this, the soldiers and Avengers couldn’t easily move. It was a strange confrontation between two groups over the Hell Stone.....

However, those circumstances didn’t last long. The movement of the Hell River suddenly changed. The river had completely submerged the 60th floor and there was a moment of silence. Then a fierce geyser of water shot up near the crystal temple. And it started drilling a hole in the ceiling.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

There was a violent roar and the ceiling broke. It was like a scene where the demons of hell clawed through the ground with their claws. A groan flowed from Ark’s mouth at the unimaginable situation.

‘Oh my god, this is.....!’

Ark had thought the Hell River would flood from the 60th floor to the 59th floor to the 58th.....the secret dungeon would gradually fill up and head towards the outside. Considering the Hell River’s speed, it would take at least a few hours to reach the outside. But if it penetrated through the ceiling then it would take less than an hour.

‘There’s no time!’

He couldn’t afford to relax now. Since the Hell River had calmed, the tilted temple returned to a flat position. While rocks still fell from the ceiling, it was better than when the temple was 30 degrees tilted.

“We can’t blindly chase after it. It will become too messy.”

Ark raised his body and shouted.

“All warriors rush and seal the movement of the Avengers! Meanwhile the archers and hunters should quickly seize the Hell Stone. The magicians in the rear will attack the Avengers searching for the Hell Stone!”

Based on his previous experience, blindly chasing after the Hell Stone wasn’t the right answer. In such confused circumstances, the soldiers would definitely have the disadvantage. The soldiers had 100 less members than the Avengers. Even if the altar was repaired, everything would be finished if they couldn’t get the Hell Stone. There was also no meaning if someone placed the Hell Stone in their bag and died. On the other hand, the Avengers could place the Hell Stone in their bag and win. It really was disadvantageous to the soldiers in every way.

‘But Alan and the Avenger members are confused because the quantum transmitter didn’t work properly. This is the only chance to obtain the Hell Stone. The game starts now!’

This was the quick conclusion Ark came up with. The soldiers immediately organized themselves according to Ark’s order.

“Hap, hap, hap, hap!”

“Go!”

When the signal rang out, they simultaneously ran towards to Hell Stone. Meanwhile, the soldiers moved towards the Avengers. “Warriors block them from both sides and secure a path!” The warriors followed Ark’s instructions and stopped the Avengers from mobbing. The sound of hundreds of warriors clashing rang out. While the warriors were stopping each other, the archers

and hunters rushed towards the Hell Stone. But this was different from a football game.

“Damn, stop them!”

Dozens of magic blasts flew from the other side. At the same time, a 100 metres area became wrapped in a black aura.

-You have entered the influential range of ‘Blackout.’

* Due to the magical smoke screen, the vision of all life forms within the 100 metres area will be limited.

* There is no way to expand the limited view using magic or skills.

* The effect will only be displayed at night or in a dungeon.

The message window appeared in front of all the soldiers. The Avengers saw the soldiers’ methodical movements and used Blackout to prevent them from finding the Hell Stone. Thanks to the dense smoke screen it was impossible to distinguish between rocks or the Hell Stone. Contrary to Ark’s intention, once again it became a scene of confusion and disorder.

“I got it! The Hell Stone!”

“Bah, not a chance. Rush!”

“Ugh, this bastard.....ah, my hell stone!”

“Kukuku, I caught it!”

“Don’t be ridiculous. Heroic Strike!”

Shouts poured out from the smoke screen. Dozens of skills flew around in the vicinity of the Hell Stone. Whenever someone grabbed the stone, a skill would be used to stop them. Therefore the Hell Stone switched hands between the soldiers and the Avengers many times.

‘.....We’re being pushed!’

Ark looking at the situation he could see through the smoke screen

with irritation. It was 400 against 500. The numbers were against them but Ark thought they could win if they faced the Avengers. The reason was due to his level. While Ark was distracting Alan on the 59th floor, he had looked at the Avengers using Eyes of the Cat. Their level was between 330~350. On the other hand, the allied forces and Dark Eden had an average level of more than 350. He judged that the level difference would make up for the extra 100 troops. However, the actual results were unexpected. When facing them 1 on 1, the Avengers showed no sign of being pushed.

‘There can only be one reason. When I encountered Alan at Pabiun Canyon, I was pushed despite obviously being high levelled than him. Alan and the Avengers must have something to raise their stats!’

But now wasn’t the time to ponder the mystery. The problem was that his soldiers were dying.

‘If we’re pushed during these circumstances then it is the end!’

“Radun, use Stalking and secure the Hell Stone!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun shook his tail and went into the smoke. Ark also followed Radun in the scuffle and shouted.

“Summon Demon, Purital! Clad Armour!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Purital was summoned to the area behind Ark. As soon as Purital appeared, his bones were taken apart and reformed around Ark. The ribs split to cover his upper body while the skull covered his head like a helmet. The leg and arm bones twisted strangely and stuck to Ark’s gloves and shoes.

-You have used Clad Armour.

* Damage will increase by 17~22.

* Defense will increase by 98.

* Health will increase by 1,866.

<If the 1,866 health is consumed then Clad Armour will automatically dismantle>

“Hook Explosion!”

When he used the skill, 4 hooks shot from Ark’s body. The hooks wound around a pillar and he flew into the smoke screen.

“Eh, what the?”

“Ark! Kill him!”

When he entered the smoke, the Avengers ran to him immediately.

“These children.....Dark Dance!”

Ark’s body disappeared like a ghost. It wasn’t easy for someone to catch Ark when he used Dark Dance in broad daylight. It was impossible in a dark dungeon filled with smoke.

“Huck! W-where is he?”

The Avengers said as they lost sight of their quarry. But before their confusion could disappear, a dark blade shot through the darkness and dealt a critical blow to an Avenger member. It was like an invisible ghost holding a blade was mocking them. He used the chain skill of Dark Dance and Dark Blade. With Ark helping, the battle in the smoke screen instantly tilted to the side of the soldiers. Ark yelled out when he had taken care of all the surrounding Avengers.

“That’s it! Radun, find the Hell Stone!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun crawled on the ground and licked it with his tongue. During that short time, he had sensed the Hell Stone within the smoke.

‘Okay, the Avengers are unaware of Radun’s presence because of the smoke.’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him. All of a

sudden he had his health sucked out? At the same time, a warning message flashed before his eyes.

-Your pet 'Radun' has been forcefully recalled to the Netherworld. You have received 50% of the Familiar's health as damage.

“What, what the? R-Radun.....?”

Ark burst out after seeing the perplexing message. Suddenly there was a flash through the smoke screen. Ark reflexively turned his body towards the flash. In the midst of the smoke was someone wearing shining black armour. But Ark's eyes weren't looking at the man. He was looking at the snake pierced through by the sword the man was holding. It was Radun. He had been looking for the Hell Stone and encountered the man! Ark slowly looked at the dead body before it disappeared. And he glared at the man in black armour.

“.....Alan!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The crystal shrine started rising along with the Hell River. The river was like a giant creature digging through the ground. The river rose through the penetrated ceiling and had already submerged half of the secret dungeon. The crystal shrine also received large amounts of damage. While the river was blasting through the ceiling, it was pouring down rocks onto the crystal shrine. Every time the ceiling opened, a huge rock would fall and break a part of the temple's floor. The situation became even more confused inside the temple. The whereabouts of the Hell Stone became unclear.

Once again, finding the black Hell Stone among the rocks and black crystal pieces was like finding a needle in a desert.

Meanwhile, the magicians continually feared that someone from the opposite site would find the Hell Stone and continually used Blackout. Thanks to that, the crystal temple became completely enveloped in a dense smoke screen. The hundreds of people entangled in the smoke screen could only see 4~5 metres around them. The screams and iron clashing sounds that came from

everywhere meant he couldn't accurately grasp the war situation.

Jjang!

A violent metallic sound was heard from the smoke. Two blades collided with each other and caused constant flashes. Once one flash occurred, a different one occurred several metres away from the first. When that flash disappeared, another one would occur in a different place so that it seemed like dozens of people were taking a photo.

After a long time.....

Ka ka ka kang, chaechang!

The intense flash of light occurred when two people conflicted. Wearing black armour and leather armour, the two people were Ark and Alan. The two of them had only been clashing swords for a few minutes. However both of them looked like they had been fighting for a couple of hours. Their mantles were ripped to shreds while the armour was also covered in small tears. Their swords that collided without any rests seemed like they were going to break. It was possible to guess how intense the 5 minute battle had been from that alone. Their two swords clashed and pushed against each other, causing Alan to pant out breathlessly.

"That Ark bastard....."

"Huck huck, don't call me names. Don't you know it makes me feel dirty?"

".....I'll kill you."

"Can you really say that when you lost your breath like a puppy?"

"You'll see soon."

A black aura exploded from Alan's body. He instantly felt an enormous pressure on his sword. It felt like he was being pushed with enormous pressure! Ark was forced to his knees from Alan's tremendous power as his sword was pushed downwards. Eventually Alan's sword slid off Ark's and struck the ground with a large spark.

Kwajajak!

A thick crack spread on the ground and crystal debris shot from the ground. The sharp edges of the crystal tore the skin and fresh blood splattered. But Ark and Alan didn't blink once. They knew that looking away for one minute could mean the difference between victory or defeat.

"Evil Insight!"

A ray shot from Alan's eyes. Ark rolled on the ground and avoided the ray.

"Inferno!"

Alan followed Ark's movements while shooting flames from his mouth. Ark hurriedly placed his hands on the floor and kicked upwards, hitting Alan's jaw. Alan's jaw was pushed upwards and the flames gushed towards the sky.

'This is a chance!'

Ark moved his body like a squirrel and rolled under Alan's foot. He felt a pain in his side the moment he tried to kick Alan.

At that moment, Alan lowered his sword and attacked. Thanks to the unexpected attack in his side, Ark was hit by Alan's counterattack and he fell. He rolled several metres before finally raising his body. However, he had no time to catch his breath. A sword with a black energy was descending on his head like a lightning bolt. Ark hurriedly lifted his sword and the shock felt like his shoulders had been hit by a hammer.

"Ugh!"

A moan flowed from firmly closed lips. However, Ark who was lying on the ground kicked out and hit Alan's leg. Alan lost his balance and stumbled. Meanwhile, Ark grasped Alan's leg and rolled along the ground. Thanks to Ark rolling on the ground while grasping his foot, Alan naturally fell as well. It was a chance to attack Alan!

"Alan! Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!"

Then a black shadow appeared dozens of metres away from Ark. It was the Dark Elf with black hair that fluttered like a cape! The Dark Elf Timosi! Ark reflexively turned to look at the voice. Then an arrow flew through the smoke to hit his shoulder. Alan instantly raised his body during that gap. Timosi shot another arrow at the same time.

“Matanyi Shooter no. 2, Devil Chasing Arrow!”

The arrow launched was the ones that would chase the target until it hit! Ark popped up in front of Alan the moment the arrow was shot. Then Alan who had got up swung his sword. Ark instantly used Dark Dance and rotated around Alan, changing their locations. The arrow that had been chasing after Ark lodged itself into Alan’s shoulder.

“Kyaaak! A-Alan!”

Timosi was startled as Alan was hit. Alan blocked Ark’s follow-up attack and shook his head.

“Ugh, I’m fine! Timosi, don’t worry about this battle!”

“B-but.....”

“Can’t you see? Your arrows aren’t helpful in this situation. Pay attention to the altar.”

“Altar?”

“Yes, I’ve left the altar to Jewel but then I got involved in the fight and haven’t contacted him. Leave me and dispose of the guy repairing the altar!”

“I understand!”

Timosi nodded and turned her body. When Timosi disappeared towards the altar, Alan pulled out the arrow from his shoulder and laughed.

“Come Ark! What will you do now?”

Ark’s eyes shook as he breathed harshly. In fact, the altar had also been weighing on Ark’s mind. In this confused situation, there was no

way to predict who could get their hands on the Hell Stone. But there was a way for Alan to achieve his goal even if he didn't obtain the Hell Stone. It was the Hell Altar! If anyone got rid of Wormer who was repairing the Hell Altar then it didn't matter who obtained the Hell Stone. With the whereabouts of the Hell Stone unclear, the battle had started focusing on the altar. Now Timosi had received the assassination order and was heading towards Wormer. It was the most unbearable situation in Ark's view. But a small smile still spread on Ark's face.

"Let's see? Will it really be as easy as you think?"

"That pig, I'll catch you! Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!"

Then Timosi's sharp voice was heard over the noise of the battlefield. He couldn't see because of the smoke but Timosi had approached Wormer at the altar. But the next moment.....

"What, what the? That abnormal bastard.....!"

"I knew this female would appear again."

Alan's face warped as he heard Shambala's voice. That's right. The reason Ark wasn't worried about the altar was because of Shambala. The altar was one of the two keys required to stop the Hell River. How could he leaving Wormer who was repairing such an important key alone? Ark was able to roam the battlefield freely because he had placed Shambala who was the most reliable person to guard Wormer. This was the reason why Shambala hadn't been fighting in the meantime.

"Matanyi Shooter no. 3, Devil's Stabbing Arrow!"

"Torrential Sword!"

Although it wasn't intended, once again it became a confrontation between Shambala and Timosi. Ark raised his sword and laughed.

"Now, shall we start again? Or do you want a little break?"

".....This impertinent brat!"

Kwa kwang, kakakakak, kwa kwa kwa kwa kwang!

‘Damn, this bastard.....’

Ark breathed roughly and glared at Alan. In fact, Ark had been confident that he could beat Alan. That confidence didn’t come out of nowhere. In the past Ark had been pushed back by Alan. But they were almost equal after using Purital’s Clad Armour skill. And he also had the legendary sword Shining Darkness. Once again, upgrading weapons in battle had a profound effect in games. That was why users would risk their lives to gain a stronger weapon. And Shining Darkness was the highest ranked sword, a legendary weapon! Of course he would gain the upper hand with the legendary sword. However, the results weren’t much different from the previous fights. Just like Ark gained the legendary sword, Alan had probably gained a new ability.

‘This is really irritating.’

Alan must’ve come here thinking the same thing. The situation really was very irritating. Alan must be in the same position.....Thus the frustrating and unyielding match between the two of them continued. But after a while, the balance collapsed in a way he never imagined.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The Hell River once again swirled and rose through the ceiling.

“Rocks are falling! Scatter!”

There was a violent roar and the crystal temple shook. At the same time, small and large rocks fell like hail. Although most of the rocks fell into the Hell River, around 100 of them struck the crystal temple. It just caused the battle between the two opposing sides to become even more confused. However, rocks weren’t the only things that came pouring in.

Patter, patter.

A drop of water suddenly fell onto Ark. At first he thought it was the river water. But when he saw the stain on Alan’s face, he realized that it wasn’t a simple water drop.

.....Blood! Blood was dripping from above their heads. Ark wasn't the only one surprised by the situation. Alan's face also looked surprised after seeing the wet blood on Ark's face. The two of them raised their heads at the same time.

'What the, that is?'

Pukakakaka, pukakakaka!

The Hell River was swirling at a fast rate around the temple. And a large number of demons were being grinded into mincemeat in the water?

'Demons? What.....?'

Ark belatedly realized the identity of the demons. It was the demons that entered the secret dungeon just before Silvana was recaptured! After contacting Boramae on the 60th floor, he had also talked to JusticeMan and told the allied forces to retreat. The allied forces wouldn't be able to help with the Hell Altar and they hadn't entered that long ago so they were able to escape from the secret dungeon. But the demon reinforcements had entered the secret dungeon a few hours earlier. While running through the dungeon, the ground had opened and they fell into the Hell River. That's right. The blood of demons was pouring over the crystal temple! The site of thousands of demons bleeding above them was a terrible scene. However, the truly horrible situation happened afterwards.

-Kuram, kurama, kuram!

-Bahoguram, norun, kararara!

The voices came from among the rocks falling from the ceiling. They were the red eyed demons. 100 demons falling from the ceiling were fortunate enough to avoid the Hell River and fell onto the crystal temple. 10,000 demons had entered the secret dungeon but only 100 of them had fallen onto the temple. Alan had calculated up to here which was why he hadn't ordered the demons to retreat..... Anyway, both Ark and the soldiers battled were shocked. Meanwhile Alan smiled at the sight of the demons.

"Exterminate them!"

-Kurwarwarwarwa!

The demons began to rampage after hearing Alan's order. Although the falling demons avoided the swirling water, they still lost between 30~50% health thanks to the fall damage. In particular, the Heavy Walkers that wore a lot of armour lost 70% of their health. But there were still 100 demons. That normally wouldn't be a problem. However, the present fight between the two opposing sides had been almost equal. When the 100 demons appeared, that balance was broken. It was the same for Ark.

"Dark Strike!"

When Ark swung his sword, a demon interrupted in front of him. Alan stepped out from behind the demon and attacked Ark.

"The Devil's Fang!"

There were three different ways to fight an opponent. Locking weapons together, avoiding the opponent or close combat. The opponent could then avoid the attack or chose to attack back. But when the demons interrupted Ark's attacks, his movements weren't smooth anymore. Alan would take advantage of that gap to strike back. Of course, the demons weren't at a level to really interrupt the battle between Alan and Ark. But with the interference of the demons, Ark had no choice but to be hit by some attacks. And this had devastating consequences to Ark.

-Purital's health has been consumed and Clad Armour will disappear!

Purital will be forcibly recalled and you will be damaged by 50% of his health.

* Purital's 30% defense, attack and health bonus will disappear.

The bones around Ark disappeared as the message window appeared. This was the reason Ark had tried to avoid being hit. The 30% bonus that Purital's armour gave to Ark made him equal to Alan. But if the 1,544 health given by Clad Armour was consumed then it would automatically be released. When that happened, Ark

wouldn't be a match for Alan anymore. That wasn't all.

'Dammit, nearly 4,000 health flew away!'

Clad Armour disappearing meant that Purital would be forcibly recalled. And Ark received 50% of his pet's health as damage when they were recalled. Purital currently had 5,720 health. When Clad Armour turned off, Ark lost the extra health bonus as well as 2,860 health. Clad Armour was released and he received 2,860 damage. This was a deadly penalty against an opponent like Alan.

'Dammit.....!'

Ark was continuously pressed by the attacks of Alan and the demons. Once Clad Armour disappeared, all of Alan's attacks felt like a hammer were beating on him. The soldiers were also being pushed back by the demons and the Avenger members. With their health already low, 100 soldiers quickly died.

'This is ridiculous! I rallied tens of thousands of people to save Nagaran yet we're going to be defeated because of 100 demons?'

It was an exhausting thought.

'But I won't die like this! If I die then I have to take Alan with me!'

Ark's eyes flashed and he shot forward.

"Heh, is this the last desperate struggle? The Devil's Fang!"

Alan snorted and attacked. However, Ark's goal wasn't Alan. Ark used Dark Dance to avoid Alan's attack and plunged his sword into a demon before shouting.

"Demonic Seal!"

Kuwaaaaaaaah!

The body of the demon crumpled and was sucked into the sword. Originally Demonic Seal was a skill to seal the demon into an item. But this time the demon wasn't sealed in a common item. It was the legendary sword Shining Darkness! When Demonic Seal was used, the black aura strengthened and a message window

appeared.

-Shining Darkness has been charged with demonic energy. <Charged demons: 1> * A minimum of 10 demons is needed to use the Shining Darkness skill.

That's right. This was the method Ark came up with. Ark hadn't used Shining Darkness yet. He didn't know how powerful the unknown skill was. However, this skill was an option attached to a legendary sword. Furthermore, the skill had to be charged with demons before it could be used. There was no doubt that it would exert a tremendous power. Of course, it wouldn't reverse the situation no matter how powerful the skill was. But couldn't it take care of Alan?

"You coward, are you running away?"

"Bah, it is a strategic retreat. Demonic Seal, Demonic Seal, Demonic Seal!"

Ark dodged Alan's attacks and sealed the demons into the sword. After a while, the message window he was waiting for finally appeared.

-Shining Darkness has been charged with demonic energy. <Charged demons: 10> * Shining Darkness can be used.
--

"That's it!"

Ark confirmed the message and turned around while shouting. He brandished his sword and yelled. No, just as he was about to yell.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a tremendous roar and the crystal temple suddenly fluctuated uncontrollably. There was a flare of brightness like all the

lights had been turned on in a dark room.

[-The effects of Blackout have been destroyed by the sun's rays!]

‘The sun’s rays?’

Ark hurriedly looked around. He grasped the situation a bit too late and his face darkened.

“U-unbelievable.....! O-outside!”

When the Blackout effect disappeared, he could see the mountains and plains. That’s right. In the end, the Hell River had risen through all 60 floors. The shock just then was Silvana’s earth collapsing. The Hell River and crystal temple shot dozens of metres out of the ground like a water fountain.

“Huck! T-the Hell River!”

“We failed after all?”

“Ah ah ah, it is the end of Nagaran!”

Confused voices could be heard as the Hell River rose. It was coming from JusticeMan and the allied forces who had escaped the secret dungeon. Ark heard their voices and also despaired. No, the moment he was about to give up!

“The Hell Stone!”

Someone cried out. And Ark’s eyes caught the Hell Stone. The Hell Stone had fallen into a crack between a large number of black crystal fragments. It was impossible to find during the Blackout stage. But once the Blackout effect faded and the temple started shaking, all of the crystal fragments and the Hell Stone were swept to one side. Ark saw the Hell Stone with incredible timing and his hope was revived.

‘Yes, now.....I might not be too late..... I can stop the Hell River!’

“Wormer!”

“The repairs are finished!”

Wormer yelled towards Ark. Ark's body then flew like an arrow towards the Hell Stone. However, one person had moved to the Hell Stone before Ark.

"Hate Aura!"

The person surrounded by a black aura and rushing forward at extravagant speed was Alan. Hate Aura increased Alan's movement speed by 30%. Alan overtook Ark and reached the Hell Stone. Ark let out a distressed cry and swung his sword.

"Ah, no. Shining Darkness!"

Flash! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

At the moment, the black aura surrounding Ark's sword exploded. It was so utterly pitch black dark that nothing could be seen! The darkness shot out in front of it like a huge tsunami and swallowed everything. A chain explosion occurred and Alan was also swallowed up.

"Kuaaaaak!"

Alan screamed as he was caught in the explosion and blasted dozens of metres away. Shining Darkness was the knockdown technique of the legendary sword which dealt a critical hit and ate 40% of Alan's health at once. That wasn't all. The demons and Avengers caught in the explosion were torn to shreds and also flew away, causing a radiating pattern around Ark. The destructive power was enough that the Avengers and demons caught in the explosion turned to dust.

A giant crater was created in the area where Shining Darkness was used. It was like a nuclear bomb had been dropped.

"T-this is....."

Ark stuttered with a stunned look.

While he was astonished at the incredible power of Shining Darkness, the reason he was stunned was because the area where the Hell Stone was located had also been caught in the explosion.

At that moment, the hundreds of people left in the temple looked on

in unison.

Tuk, tuk, tuk, tuk.....

A black stone fell from the sky and rolled away. The Hell Stone! It had been caught in the blast and blown away. And.....

Snap!

Someone picked up the Hell Stone as it rolled to their feet. Ark, Shambala and the soldiers all stiffened as they saw the person.

“Jewel.....!”

A moan emerged from Ark’s mouth. That’s right. The person who picked up the Hell Stone was the magician Jewel. Hundreds of eyes looked at Jewel as he picked it up.

“Ugh! J-Jewel.....Hell Stone.....throw it outside the temple!”

Alan who was a piece of rag on the ground tried to get up while shouting. All of Ark’s hope disappeared. Everybody expected Jewel to obey Alan and throw away the Hell Stone. However, everybody watching the scene became stunned in the next moment.

“W-what is this.....?”

Jewel had thrown the Hell Stone towards Wormer at the Hell Altar. Everybody was surprised at Jewel’s rogue actions. Then the distinctive form of a bat appeared from Jewel’s hood.

“Kekekeke, the person who always settles a situation is me!”

“Curio!”

Ark exclaimed. Ark finally understood everything. During the chaos of Blackout covering the temple, Curio had used Blood-sucking on Jewel many times. In the end, he managed to successfully ‘confuse’ Jewel and hid in his hood. It was the reason why Jewel didn’t obey Alan’s command to attack Wormer. In fact, during the battle Ark had received a message stating that Curio had successfully used Confusion. However, he was battling with Alan and couldn’t check the name. Therefore he thought that a random Avenger had been

confused. He hadn't unexpected Curio's action to be such a big influence.

"Wormer!"

Ark burst out.

"S-stop! Stop him!"

Alan's cry rang out and the demons and Avengers rushed to the altar. But it was already too late to stop Wormer. Wormer placed the Hell Stone on the altar and pulled the switch.

Dduk.

All the noises around him suddenly disappeared. The Hell Altar shook and a lightning bolt struck the temple. The lightning bolt pierced through the temple and hit the Hell River. When it struck, the Hell River that was rising from the secret dungeon stopped moving. An earthquake simultaneously shook Silvana.

Jjajjajjajjang, jjajjajjajjang!

A splitting sound continuously rang from the secret dungeon. It was soon possible to know what the sound was. Clear ice was quickly covering the Hell River and coming upwards. The river spouting from the ground suddenly turned into ice pillars.

-The Hell River has been sealed.

"W-we did it. It is interrupted....."

Ark muttered at the sight of the message in front of him. At that moment, the ice turned to sand and the crystal temple crashed to the ground.

"Huk! I-it is falling! Everybody prepare for impact!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The crystal temple plunged into the ground dozens of metres from the entrance to the secret dungeon. There was a huge shock and the crystal temple split. When the temple crashed, huge damage

was applied to the users and demons. Most of the users barely survived while the demons died from the impact. Ark also had low health but he barely managed to survive. Then the demons and Avengers who survived around Ark unsteadily got up.

“Ugh, do you want to see this through to the end?”

Ark was unsteadily raising his voice when he heard it.

“The Hell River has been sealed. Attack and exterminate them!”

JusticeMan’s voice was heard from behind Ark. At the same time, tens of thousands of allied forces rushed into the temple.

That’s right. It was the allied forces who had been watching the situation from Silvana. There few remaining demons and Avengers inside the temple were no match.

“Dark Strike!”

Ark who received recovery magic also jumped back in the fray. Now that almost everything was cleared up, he wanted to handle Alan. But no matter how hard he looked, Ark couldn’t find Alan or Timosi. At that moment he heard Curio’s voice over his head.

“Master, those guys!”

And he looked where Curio was pointing.

“.....Alan!”

Curio was pointing towards Alan, Timosi and some Avenger members who were flying away on gargoyles. When the crystal temple was falling, those guys had quickly escaped into the sky using gargoyles.

“Shoot them down with magic and arrows!”

At JusticeMan’s command, the allied forces fired off magic and arrows. But Alan was already more than 100 metres away. Most of the magic and arrows failed to even hit them. Alan looked at the magic and arrows flying under his feet before flying away with the gargoyles.

“Damn.....!”

Ark cursed as he watched Alan. Then he sighed and turned away. At the moment, a loud cry shook his eardrums.

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

“We did it! We protected Nagaran!”

“Hooray Nagaran’s allied forces! Hooray Dark Wolf!”

Silvana erupted with the loud cheers. But Ark didn’t hear the loud cheers. With all the tension and barely sleeping for the last 10 days, Ark just looked at the allied forces with dumb surprise and collapsed from exhaustion.

“Ark-nim!”

The allied forces flocked to the fallen Ark. The long battle to defend Nagaran had finally ended.

Swirl of Intrigue

Thick pillars lined up in the corridor like a temple in ancient Rome. A huge stone room was located at the end of the corridor. The walls of the stone chamber were filled with carvings and had a black aura around them. They were carvings of deformed beasts that were normally seen in nightmares. A large number of people were suffering under the claws of the beasts. The torch flickered weirdly and made it seem like the carvings were alive.

Dukong, dukong, dukong!

A steady pounding sound was heard throughout the stone room. The pounding sound came from the object placed on the altar in the centre of the stone hut. A heart.....that's right. It was the mysterious heart Alan had taken from the Hell River. With every swell and shrinking of the 10 metres huge heart, the black aura would become larger. And the black aura spread along the ground of the stone room like dry ice.

"It's been hundreds of years.....wonderful."

An old man wearing a hood murmured in a cheerful voice. And he stretched out his hand to touch the heart. Just as the wrinkled finger was about to touch the rising heart.....

"Maseutyu!"

A rough voice shook the stone chamber. The old man's eyes became displeased. The old man looked at the heart before turning around slowly and taking off his hood. With the face covered in so many deep wrinkles that it was impossible to guess his age, Maseutyu was the archbishop of the Ankh church.

".....You came?"

The person who approached was a man wearing black armour and covered in blood. It was Alan who had escaped from Silvana on the

gargoyles. Alan glared at Maseutyu and declared sharply.

“I want an explanation.”

“Explanation? For what?”

Maseutyu asked.

“The quantum transmitter receiver!”

“What’s the problem?”

Maseutyu tilted his head to one side like he didn’t understand the words. Then Alan shouted angrily.

“If the receiver worked as planned then Nagaran would’ve been submerged by the Hell River now. But it didn’t work. Thanks to that, I was almost wiped out and the Hell River resealed. How can you explain this situation?”

“Did you try checking the quantum receiver?”

“Of course I checked it. It was broken.”

“I know that. That’s why the receiver didn’t work properly.”

“.....I want to know why it is broken.”

Alan asked in a harsh voice. Once again, Alan had two reasons to invade Silvana. One was to obtain the heart inside the stone room from the Hell River. And the other reason was to submerge Nagaran with the Hell River. But it was impossible to achieve both goals at the same time. It was impossible to leave with the heart if he made the Hell River flood. Then he accidentally stumbled on the quantum transmitter at Pabiun Canyon and discovered a method to achieve both goals at once. It was possible to immediately move the heart with spatial movement. And Alan’s plan to transfer the heart was a success. But it didn’t work when Alan and the Avenger members tried to use it.

‘Why didn’t it catch the quantum receiver’s frequency?’

Alan had been thinking that question the whole time. However, the reason was simple once he reached this place.

The quantum receiver placed here had been destroyed.

“The expedition armies don’t know about this place yet. There were no signs of a surprise attack when I got here. Yet why is the quantum receiver broken? Besides, it worked properly when it had to transmit the heart.”

Alan couldn’t accept the situation. And there was something else he couldn’t understand.

“Furthermore, I was contacted by the dead Avenger members before I got here.....”

Alan opened his mouth again. Maseutyu who had been listening silently finally laughed and muttered.

“.....I was the one who destroyed the quantum receiver.”

“W-what?”

Alan flinched and closed his mouth. Maseutyu was the one who broke the receiver? What was he saying? Alan looked at him with a foolish look.

“Why would you do that?”

“Calm down.”

“Calm down? You’re telling me to calm down?”

“There is a reason for it.”

Maseutyu waved his hands.

“Reason? You have a reason?”

“Yes.”

Maseutyu answered in a light tone. He slowly moved around the heart and said.

“It isn’t necessary to explain but this heart is the most important object. It isn’t an exaggeration to say that all of our plans were for finding this object. The value of destroying Nagaran is nothing

compared to the heart. And the person who found this heart is the Ruin Knight. Your achievement really deserves admiration.”

“Then why did you do something.....?”

“Well, well! Just wait a bit more. The reason you could transmit the heart here is because of the quantum transmitter. If you also took advantage of the transmitter then you could come here safely. But what next?”

“Next?”

“If those guys got a hold on the quantum transmitter then wouldn’t they obtain the frequency to this place?”

Maseutyu shook his head.

“It is better not to risk it. If they got the quantum transmitter then wouldn’t they be able to move straight to this place? Of course, those guys would die once they reach here but the concern is that they might tell the expedition forces. There are also foreigners who can track mana so they could also discover this place.”

Alan frowned as he thought about Maseutyu’s explanation. If he thought about it like that then Maseutyu’s action was understandable. While the MG had disappeared after Ark used the quantum transmitter, Ark had Wormer. There was no guarantee that Wormer couldn’t develop another magic charger. If Ark came here with the quantum transmitter then the expedition army would know about this location. Therefore Maseutyu reduced the risk by destroying the receiver. Alan understood. But just because he understood didn’t mean the problem was solved.

“Then shouldn’t you have explained it to me before?”

“I couldn’t say it.”

“You couldn’t?”

“In fact, I had another reason to break the receiver.”

“Another reason?”

“Now.....”

Maseutyu licked his lips and narrowed his eyes.

“Your help has become unnecessary. No, that’s not it. To be exact, you can only help one last time. You guy.....the immortal lives of the foreigners.....that is needed. It is the last ingredient to resurrect the Dark Lord.”

“Our lives.....?”

Alan felt an ominous feeling.

-Grrrrrrr.

An eerie roar echoed from behind his back. At the same time, glossy red pupils appeared all around him. The wall carvings.....the deformed beasts on the carvings all opened their eyes simultaneously. And they rose and crawled off the wall. The room instantly filled with the thousands of animals and a nasty fish smell. Alan had seen the wall carvings many times but he never thought they were alive. The atmosphere around them were different from the demons controlled by Alan. The thousands of eyes that were thirsty for blood all focused on Alan.

“T-this is.....!”

Confusion appeared on Alan’s face. Then Maseutyu bowed gracefully and said.

“Ruin Knight, we’ve spent a lot of time together. But our relationship will end here.”

“Y-you....then everything you said so far.....”

“It was true. You will rise to the ultimate seat in this world. As the Dark Lord’s flesh and blood. Forever.....”

“This bastard!”

Alan growled and took out his sword. The beasts drooled and simultaneously ran up to Alan.

-Kuwaaaaaaaaaah!

“D-damn! The Devil’s Fang!”

Alan roared with fury and twisted his sword. But Alan’s roar became a scream in the next moment. Alan’s attacks only did 1% damage to the wave of beasts. It meant they were elite monsters. Thousands of elite creatures!

“Ugh, rampaging spirits!”

In the end, Alan turned away from Maseutyu. He used the skill which increased his movement speed and ran away. This place was the hidden base of the demons. And those demons were Alan’s subordinates. Now that he was betrayed by Maseutyu, the demons didn’t listen to Alan anymore. It was the lair of the demons trying to sacrifice Alan to restore the Dark Lord.

‘No. I can’t die in a place like his!’

-Kuwaaaaaaaaaah!

He did his best to run away but the beasts caught up with tremendous speed and swung their claws. Alan’s health was sucked out with every attack.

“Ugh, boundaries of the dead! Rampaging spirits!”

Alan rolled on the ground and persistently fired his skills while running away. And he finally reached the corridor near the entrance.

‘The Avenger members are waiting outside this time so if I join them I can escape. It isn’t too late. Maseutyu.....I dare him to come out! I’ll do whatever it takes to make him pay!’

Alan pledged when he tried to escape the temple. Suddenly a red shape quickly ran from behind a pillar towards the entrance.

“Heok! What, what the?”

Alan swung his sword reflexively. But the shadow moved like a snake and hit Alan.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, jjejejejeok!

Something ripped from inside his body and there was a ringing sound. The message window appeared when the noise finished.

-You have been hit by a 'Chakra Wave.'

<You have received the direct impact of 'Chakra Wave' inside your body.

Defense is ignored and you have received 800 damage. The shock wave also ruined the balance of mana inside your body and you have lost 1000 mana. Thanks to the severe bruising, your attack speed and movement speed is reduced by 10% for 5 minutes.

Your body is also rigid and you will be unable to move for 3 seconds>

'Chakra wave!'

Alan vomited blood and looked around anxiously. Alan knew of only one person who could use Chakra wave.

"The Red Man!"

That's right. The person who hit Alan had red hair while wearing a white mask. Alan was in a critical condition from the beasts' attacks and now the Red Man. Alan looked at the Red Man who appeared and shouted.

"Are you and Maseutyu working together?"

The Red Man just drew the two swords hanging on his waist instead of answering. Then a flash headed towards Alan who was rigid for 3 seconds. But the image that appeared in Alan's eyes wasn't the Red Man. An Asura with a frightening face attacked him with dozens of swords. The sword of light that the Asura wielded passed through Alan.....

Chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa!

Alan lost 5% health and he had almost no more left as his blood

drained out.

“You, you bastard.....!”

Alan stared at the Red Man with red eyes. The form of the Red Man was reflected in his eyes.....Alan vowed revenge but he had no more opportunity to achieve it. The reason was a message that surfaced in front of Alan.

-A special item has been triggered.

All of the character's data has been absorbed by the 'Token of Darkness.' All the data absorbed by the Token of Darkness has been deleted from New World.

‘Oh my god, the thing the Avenger talked about.....!’

Alan felt his heart fall. It had what Alan had previously tried to ask Maseutyu. When Alan had escaped from Silvana to come here, the Avenger members who did had called him. The contents were what Alan witnessed in the information window just now.

“Alan-nim, something is strange!”

“When we died, we received the message that our character data was being sucked in by the necklace!”

“What on earth is going on?”

The Avenger members had seen the same message as Alan when they died. And when the Avenger members logged back into New World, there appeared in a new character creation screen. It meant all of their character data had been completely deleted from New World's server.

‘Did Global Exos take some action against us?’

Alan had thought this at first. Alan knew that this situation was a threat to Global Exos. If it was possible then Global Exos would've immediately deleted their characters and seized their accounts. But Alan was aware that Global Exos had lost control of New World. Alan had participated in the plan because he knew that

Global Exos couldn't take action to suspend him. Then he could only think of one reason for his data being sucked into the necklace. Alan looked at the necklace pulsing on his chest.

-Token of Darkness (Rare)

Item Type: Necklace

Durability: 60/60

Weight: 10

User Restrictions: Level 300 more, chaotic value of more than 300.

The ancient power of darkness is lodged in this necklace. This necklace contains a wicked magic that was created by the forces of darkness a long time ago. The person who wears this necklace will receive the effect of Demonic Sphere of Influence. However, only a corrupted person can wear this necklace.

<Option: When entering the Demonic Sphere of Influence, an advantage equal to the demons are applied>

<Special Option: Unidentified>

This was the necklace that the Red Man gave Alan and the Avenger members before they left for Silvana. It was an artifact which gave chaotic users a bonus equal to the demonic monsters when they entered the Demonic Sphere of Influence. That's right. Like Ark guessed in the secret dungeon, this was the artifact which increased their abilities beyond their level. But other secrets were hidden in the artifact. When the wearer died, it absorbed the data and sent it somewhere else! That was the unidentified special option of the 'Token of Darkness.'

'This is ridiculous! An item which erases the information of the character!'

It was incomprehensible. But Alan encountered it so he couldn't deny its existence. At the same time, numerous thoughts ran through Alan's head.

‘This had been planned from the very beginning. Maseutyu said.....the immortal life of the users.....it means the users’ data. It is a sacrifice to resurrect the Dark Lord..... What is this? And the person trying to restore the Dark Lord.....’

Alan looked at the Red Man with confused eyes. At the same time, his body died and collapsed towards the Red Man.

Then Alan confirmed something about the Red Man as he fell. Perhaps Alan’s sword that he swung when hit by Chakra Wave hadn’t missed. In New World, when a equipment’s durability ended then it would disappear. Alan’s eyes concentrated on the mask as he fell. The moment he checked the mask, surprise and disbelief entered his eyes. The face of the Red Man hidden behind the mask.....

‘T-this.....huck! Ah ah ah, wahhhhh!’

Alan suddenly felt a tremendous pain in his head. The pain felt like his head was exploding. It wasn’t pain from New World. His real self that was lying down in the unit in reality was in pain. Alan screamed from the pain. The next moment, a weird phenomenon occurred to Alan’s body. A deep black lump rose from the stone room and flew towards his body. Maseutyu also walked out from the stone room.

“Huhuhu, the Ruin Knight has absorbed the heart.”

Maseutyu looked at Alan’s dead body before saying towards the Red Man.

“The necessary souls have already been collected.”

“.....Let’s move to the location.”

“Yes. But what about those people shivering outside?”

“.....Kill them.”

The Red Man replied in a low voice.

“Don’t think of them as ordinary users. Think of them as terrorists.”

A middle age leaning next to the door said in a low voice. The 10

people in a circle around the door nodded with tense expressions. The foreigners with blond hair and a south-east Asian origin had badges engraved with G·A·S·P attached to their chest. G· A· S· P.....it stood for Global Exos Special Security Personnel. That's right. These were the special security agents that Global Exos had dispatched. And they were currently surrounded a villa in the suburbs of Hong Kong.

"Everybody move to their assigned positions.

The members scattered from the leader's order. It resembled a scene of FBI's fighting against terrorists in a movie or drama. Although they weren't holding real pistols, they had gas guns in their hands. They were blocking the villa because of an order that came from the headquarters in Korea. They wanted to seal off the Hong Kong villa 1134-46 in order to meet a user playing New World. The relevant legal procedures had already been handled between headquarters and the Hong Kong police.

The reason for the order was related to a top secret project that headquarters was working on. It was a project that Kim Gwon-tae had rallied a large number of hackers to work on. The project started after Hyun-woo told them that Alan was working with the demons. However, by that time Alan had already escaped to Hong Kong. Kim Gwon-tae had rallied the programmers to hack the Hong Kong servers so they could find Alan's residence. And they finally succeeded in the backtracking and discovered Alan's residence. But the villa that the special security agents sealed wasn't Alan's residence. It was because of Kim Gwon-tae's opinion.

"Okay. Mobilize the security staff in Hong King to arrest Alan!"

When Ha Myung-woo first received Kim Gwon-tae's report, he immediately mobilized the troops. Kim Gwon-tae shook his head and explained.

"No, just wait."

"What does that mean? Don't you know the current situation in New World? We have to arrest him and appease our customers. The first thing to do is stop those guys!"

“Don’t you think it would become a problem if people discover that we hired hackers to hack our own servers?”

“Then what?”

Ha Myung-woo wrinkled his forehead as he frowned. Kim Kwon-tae tapped a thick paper file with his finger and explained.

“After we discovered Alan’s server tracks, we traced his movements. As expected, Alan is deeply involved with this event. But he is not the mastermind.”

“He’s not? Then.....?”

“Yes. Using Alan’s circuit, we tapped all of the Avenger members and the transcripts of the NPCs he talked to. As a result, we’re certain that the Red Man is the mastermind.”

“Didn’t we expect that? But what does this have to do with holding back on punishing Alan?”

“If we want to fry a large fish then it is better to leave the small fish as bait.”

Ha Myung-woo’s eyes narrowed at Kim Gwon-tae’s answer.

“You’re saying.....there is a way to catch the larger fish?”

“Didn’t I tell you from the beginning?”

Kim Gwon-tae pointed to the office infested with hackers.

“We’ve hacked into the Hong Kong circuits and are keeping track of Alan. So we can intercept all data exchanged with the main server. That doesn’t just mean that we can see information only related to Alan.”

That’s right. Whenever a user took some action in the game, the commands would be sent to the main server. For example, if Alan swung his sword when fighting an enemy then a command would be sent to the main server telling it that Alan swung the sword. But if the enemy attacked Alan then the main server would communicate that action to Alan. In other words, all actions applied to Alan within the

game relied information exchange with the main server. If they hacked the circuit where the information was exchanged then they could discover all users, items and NPCs that Alan got in contact with. That's why there were 100 hackers analyzing the data day and night.....

Anyway, Kim Gwon-tae and the 100 hackers discovered all of the information exchanged with the main server in a few days. That's why they were convinced that the Red Man was the main person in charge of this event.

"Alan made contact with the Red Man last time."

Kim Gwon-tae said with sharp eyes.

"We've figured out Alan's residence so we no longer need to track him. So he rallied all the hackers and chased the Red Man's circuit that had got in contact with Alan's. There were a few minor problems but they were professionals.....eventually they found the place he was connecting from.

"Where is it?"

"That fellow is also in Hong Kong."

"Hong Kong? Then that is why Alan went to Hong Kong in the first place....."

"He must've made contact with the Red Man then."

"Then you've decided not to catch Alan?"

"If they've made contact then the Red Man will probably notice if we grab Alan. Then the Red Man will cut the connection loop with Alan and move behind even more sophisticated firewalls. We know his plan is to shake Global Exos. Then he has that kind of ability. If that guy notices out movements then it will be difficult to find his trail again."

Just like Hyun-woo and the rehabilitation members, Kim Gwon-tae and Ha Myung-woo had determined that the Red Man's purpose was to either cheat, blackmail or manipulate the stock prices in

order to raise huge revenues. If that happened then hundreds or thousands of billions of won would be moved. Then this simply wasn't an event in the game anymore.

It was an act of global terrorism aimed at a huge business. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that the Red Man was a terrorist. A large organization would be moving behind the scene. And they would've had contingencies for every conceivable situation. Kim Gwon-tae was sure that one of those precautions involved Alan.

"The Red Man must have some sort of safety device for Alan. He would probably hide if Alan was exposed."

"Then we will leave Alan alone until we grab the Red Man?"

"That is the only way to catch the Red Man."

"How much time is needed to track the Red Man's circuit?"

"I've already learned Alan's residence so I don't need to backtrack his line anymore. If all the hackers only concentrate on the Red Man's circuit then we can find his residence in a few days."

"Understood. Hurry!"

So they moved on to tracing the Red Man's circuit. After two days of staying up all night and nosebleeds, the hackers were finally able to figure out where the Red Man connected from. Ha Myung-woo immediately contacted the Hong Kong branch and dispatched security personnel to the Red Man and Alan's hiding places. Currently the security agents were surrounding the Red Man's residence. Of course, they were only the security staff of a private company. They didn't have any right to search or arrest the culprit. However, Global Exos had poured tremendous funds into this project. Therefore the security agents were accompanied by the Hong Kong police, but they just watched with arms folded.

"Rush in!"

The assault crew kicked the door and rushed into the villa. And they were followed by 10 more agents.

"They're not on the 1st floor!"

“Wait on the 1st floor for 1 minute. Enter the 2nd floor in 2 minutes!”

The security agents move quickly like a real SWAT team. They sealed each corridor and climbed to the 2nd floor while quickly searching all rooms.

“I found it. The unit for New World. But.....”

After a while, the voice of a security agent stuttered with confusion. Confusion also spread over the leader’s face after he entered the room.

Wiiiiing, wiiiiing.

Heat and mechanical sounds flowed from the room. The unit was inside the room just like the agent said. And the unit was moving like it was connected to the game. But the user couldn’t be seen. Instead of a user, hundreds of cables were stripped and connected to a computer in the corner of the room? A huge circuit? The computer was connected to the unit.

“W-what is this?”

The leader looked at the other members with an astonished look. Then a system management staff connected a laptop to the machine. They typed into their keyboard for a while before saying in a freaked out voice.

“It is connected to the unit.....this computer.....oh my god, it is a giant auto program.”

“Auto program?”

“The user isn’t moving directly but the program is sending orders telling the character how to move.”

“What does that mean? Is this 2010? Why are they using an auto program? And how much terabytes would the auto program need to be able to operate a character in New World? Wouldn’t it be easier for the user to move directly in New World?”

“It is unbelievable even though I am seeing it with my own eyes.”

The system staff muttered while sweating.

“This computer changes the data to brain waves and transmits it to the unit. For a program like this, millions of terabytes is used to respond to any situation. The unit has also been perfectly remodelled. An ordinary user couldn’t do this. They have to understand New World..... then.....”

“Then?”

The leader asked in an anxious voice. The staff suddenly shouted in a stricken voice.

“This computer’s hard disk is empty!”

“What? Didn’t you say it had millions of terabytes just before?”

“That is certain. This computer’s hard disk had millions of terabytes worth of information. But it’s not there now. And the data.....has all been transferred to New World’s main server.

“What nonsense is this? The data was sent to New World’s main server through a mere unit? That isn’t possible!”

“Yes. It’s not possible. It is impossible.....”

The server management agent stuttered with perplexity. That’s right. It was impossible to move new data to New World’s main server. Even Global Exos had lost control of the main server and couldn’t add new information to it. Yet a mere unit had managed to forcibly transmit information to the main server? An auto program had managed something that thousands of hackers couldn’t do? It was complete nonsense. But if it was really possible.....And this auto program was the data of the Red Man.....

Didn’t that mean the Red Man had become an NPC in New World? The Red Man created by the auto program have evolved into a life form in New World! Even if they smashed the computer or caught the person who created the auto program, it was impossible to stop the Red Man.

“What on earth? Gather the computer and unit and contact

headquarters immediately!”

The leader commanded. Then one of the crew members came in and shouted.

“Captain-nim, the Bravo Team has entered the office that Alan rented. Then.....”

“Then?” What is it? Was Alan not there?”

“No, that is.....”

The member hesitated before finally replying.

“Alan was connected to the unit. But he was already in a brain-dead condition when we secured him.”

“Brain-dead condition?”

“Yes, one of the staff investigated and said it was likely due to the shock caused by a backflow of data.”

The leader’s face darkened at the report.

“What is he doing?”

Timosi muttered. After escaping from Silvana, Timosi and 30 Avenger members were gathered in front of a temple.

Alan had gone inside the temple to receive an explanation from Maseutyu about the broken receiving and they were waiting for him. However, it had already been more than 10 minutes and Alan hadn’t returned. One of the Avenger members looked at the temple with a bored look.

“What are they talking about?”

“How long do we have to wait?”

Timosi shot her bow with an angry expression and declared sharply.

“Damn, if they don’t give us a good reason then I won’t leave Maseutyu and the Red Man alone!”

“I wonder what the reason will be.”

The Avenger member replied to Timosi. Timosi was glaring at the temple when she suddenly blinked. A small object was flying from the entrance of the temple.

“Eh? What is that? Hawk’s Eye!”

Timosi immediately used Hawk’s Eye. The scenery zoomed in many times like she was looking through a telescope. Timosi examined the object with Hawk’s Eye and laughed.

“Hohoho, what the? Alan’s eyeball? Doesn’t he know that I can’t stand seeing it? Anyway, it can’t be helped. It belongs to Alan so isn’t it quite cute?”

The Avenger members made expressions that said ‘no way’ after hearing Timosi’s words. Timosi was different from the other Avenger members. Most of them were chaotic users that joined after being scouted by Andel. However, Timosi had seen Alan on TV and voluntarily joined the Avenger guild. It was all so that she could ogle Alan night and day.

‘That woman seems partial to rich men.’

That was Timosi’s reputation among the Avenger members. Even so, there was a reason Alan and the Avenger members didn’t mess with her. Although Timosi was a crazy woman with a few screws loose, her skills and level made her the strongest user in the Avenger guild.

“Hohoho, is he trying to record me?”

Timosi immediately took out a mirror after seeing Alan’s eyeball. She also pulled out a cosmetics set and applied it. At that moment, the eyeball suddenly fell to the ground.

“Eh, it fell!”

“Is it because it saw Timosi’s shocking makeup?”

“Well.....it certainly is fearful when looking at it in the evening.....”

“What? Do you want to fight?”

Timosi huffed and angrily hit the Avenger members for their words. But then the eyeball which fell to the ground started rotting? The Avenger members exchanging jokes flinched and shut their mouths. Alan's eyeball was rotting. There were only two reasons for that. One was that Timosi's painted face was horrible enough to make it rot, or more likely it meant that the person who used Vampire's Eye was dead. But how could Alan die at the secret base of the demons? Timosi and the Avenger members hurriedly ran to the rotting eyeball. Although it was rotting, the memory crystal lodged in it was still fine.

"What the hell happened in the temple?"

That information would be left in the memory crystal driven into Alan's eyeball. No, clearly Alan had sent the eyeball to them to inform the Avenger members of something important. Timosi had that idea and hurriedly played the memory crystal. When the crystal was used, an image began to form in the sky.

"What, what the? T-this is.....!"

Timosi and the Avengers burst out as they watched the video. The memory crystal played from the moment Alan entered the temple to when he tried to escape. In other words, it showed the words Alan exchanged with Maseutyu and when he was chased by the beasts. That's right. Alan had sent the eyeball to the Avenger members for help when he was being chased by the beasts. And it fell to the ground when the Red Man dealt the final blow near the entrance to the temple.

While the scene of the Red Man killing him wasn't recorded, the rotted eyeball clearly meant that Alan was dead. Timosi grinded her teeth together after the video ended.

"Maseutyu dared do that to Alan.....!"

"Timosi-nim!"

An Avenger cried out next to her. Timosi raised her head after hearing the panicked noise.

-Kuwaaaaah!

A large number of beasts were exiting the temple. They were the beasts that attacked Alan. Even people with an IQ in the single digits would be able to tell why the monsters were coming. It was to kill Timosi and the Avenger members like they did Alan!

Paduduk!

The sound of Timosi's tooth breaking was heard. She wanted to kill those beasts and roast their flesh. But according to the information Alan left behind, all of the beasts were elite monsters. No, even if they weren't elite monsters it was impossible for 30 Avengers to fight against thousands of monsters. When considering the power inside the demons' lair, it was almost impossible to escape. If they fought they would be 100% wiped out. Then there was no reason to think too much.

"Damn, Matanyi Shooter no. 3, Devil's Stabbing Arrow!"

Timosi turned and shot dozens of arrows. The movements of the rushing beasts became a little dull.

"Let's get out of here for the moment! Maintain formation and retreat!"

-Kuwaaaaah!

Timosi's voice was soon buried by the roars of the beasts.

Save Nagaran's Restoration Funds

It had taken 10 days to prevent Alan's plan. He had invested a tremendous amount of time, money and effort into Silvana.

Hyun-woo disappeared into his room and barely slept as he tried to save Silvana. Therefore Hyun-woo only slept an average of two hours for 10 days. All his tension was released after the Hell River was sealed and he slept like the dead. But his sleep wasn't comfortable.

"Waaaaahhhhh!"

"Fight. Do whatever it takes to save Nagaran!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The intense battle situations which caused him a lot of stress replayed over and over in Hyun-woo's head while he was sleeping. Screams and the sound of metal clashing had been ringing in his ears nonstop for the last 10 days. How long did he sleep?

Diririri, diririri.

He finally stirred as the shouts changed to a familiar ringing sound. Hyun-woo who was wandering the land of dreams heard the sound of the phone ringing.

"Ohhhh, what bastard.....? I don't know, I don't know. I don't care even if the world is going to be destroyed today!"

Hyun-woo who had fallen asleep within the unit angrily snapped. The phone disconnected after a short time. But the moment Hyun-woo tried to sleep again, the phone once again began to noisily ring.

"Dammit!"

Eventually Hyun-woo cursed and got up. And he picked up the

phone.

“Oh, Hyun-woo?”

“Jjak-tung hyung?”

“Yes, it’s me.”

“Why do you keep on calling in the morning?”

“What are you saying? This is the first time..... Were you sleeping?”

“..... I was sleeping. Hyung-nim woke me up before. I’m going to hang up and go back to sleep.”

Hyun-woo declared with a 120% petulant voice. Then Jjak-tung said.

“You can sleep later. The internet has been overturned!”

“Why should I care that the internet has been overturned?”

“Of course you should care! You are the culprit.”

“What are you saying out of nowhere? What did I do?”

“There’s no need to worry. Just connect to the internet immediately and search for the name Ark. Then you’ll know.”

Hyun-woo frowned and scratched his head after hearing Jjak-tung’s words. Hyun-woo had just woken up and he was still tired so he couldn’t understand what Jjak-tung was saying. But something must’ve happened judging from Jjak-tung’s excitement. Hyun-woo turned on his computer and accessed the internet. And he typed in ‘Ark’ in the search engine. Hyun-woo looked at his monitor with an astonished expression before stuttering.

“W-what is this?”

“Are you wondering what is going on? Everybody is talking about you!”

“Oh my god.....”

Hyun-woo moaned as he finally realized the situation. Hyun-woo was shocked by the contents of his computer screen. There were 14,680

results when he searched for 'Ark'. The hero who saved Nagaran from 100,000 demons! Shortly after the battle of Nagaran finished, Hyun-woo quickly became famous. Previously Hyun-woo had used a different name when doing anything on a large scale. Yet the number of Nagaran's allied forces who participated in the battle was 60,000. In other words, 60,000 users had entered the battle with Hyun-woo and the 60,000 started talking about their experiences. And the story became a little.....no, a huge exaggeration.

-.....Ark directly commanded the troops and stopped the demons' attacks. In fact, more than half the rumours about Ark had been inflated. It was to the extent that it made him feel lacking. Ark-nim treated the demons lightly and always fearlessly plunged behind enemy lines.....

(Fact: It was to pick up the loot that Radun couldn't.)

-..... Ark-nim grasped my hand and said. 'If we give up here then we're just soldiers. If we don't give up then we're heroes.' After listening to his words, an incredible power rose in my body.....

(Fact: don't be mistaken. The power was just the effect from Nursing.)

-.....We advanced all the way to Silvana but I almost gave up after hearing that they had already invaded deep into the secret dungeon. But Ark-nim carried out a complex operation using his summons and managed to transport us to the 60th floor of the secret dungeon. I had goose bumps after listening to the explanation of the operation. And managing to stop 10,000 troops with just 2,000.....

(This was true but the description of the battle made it seem like a hero movie.)

.....Anyway, Hyun-woo was a hero on the internet. In fact, if it was just this level then it would've been good. Hyun-woo's face turned red as there were a few sentences he couldn't bear to read at all. There were thousands of different types of posts flying around the internet. Ark's fighting is so intense that one slap on the cheek from him would be enough to slap the life back in someone, his

strategy is so good that it would pull the moustache of Zhuge Liang, he is willing to risk his life for his colleagues, etc.....

“What on earth? This Ark?”

Hyun-woo asked as he read the posts.

“Hehehe, I don’t understand either. Anyway, you’re a star! A star!”

Jjak-tung giggled and said. He fell asleep completely normally and when he woke up, he was a ‘star. It was only 11 a.m. when he checked the clock. Hyun-woo had sealed the Hell River at 3 a.m. so it was 7 hours since he passed out. 14,680 posts had been published during that 7 hours. He couldn’t imagine how many more posts would appear. When it was to this extent, there were no users in New World who wouldn’t know Ark’s name. Just like in the past, people also knew the name of famous pro Starcraft gamers.

‘Fuck!’

That was the first word that surfaced in Hyun-woo’s mind. Once again, Hyun-woo didn’t like drawing the attention of so many people. There were a number of reasons but the biggest one was that he would keep on being interrupted in the game. If he was famous then a lot of eyes and ears would concentrate on him. Then a lot of people would approach him in the game and waste his time. It would be a huge inconvenience for Hyun-woo. If that happened then it would be difficult to engage in business comfortable like he was now. If Hyun-woo slipped even just a little bit then it would become gossip on the internet. But was that all? He would soon become the target of jealousy and envy. While the impact of the Nagaran battle was huge right now and Hyun-woo was treated as a hero, there was no guarantee how long that would last. And people would start criticizing the hero for various actions taken. Didn’t Alan also walk that that dismal road?

‘It is best to be inconspicuous.’

That was Hyun-woo’s ideal game style. It was why Hyun-woo always broadcasted videos as Dark Wolf. But this time Dark Wolf wasn’t the one who saved Silvana. He had revealed to the 60,000

allied forces that Silvana's Lord and Dark Wolf was the same person so Ark's existence was revealed to the world.

'Damn, I was too worried about Silvana that I didn't pay any attention to this part.'

However, there was no way to stop it from happening. If he didn't want to be slandered on the internet then he would have to act as a 'good guy' from now on. If he made even the smallest mistake then he might be labelled as a public enemy. And become a public enemy would make it difficult to play the game normally. He had to avoid that situation at all costs! Once again, Hyun-woo earned a considerable amount of his livelihood from New World.

'I should've thought about this part before I gathered the Nagaran allied forces!'

Hyun-woo belatedly regretted his actions.

Diririri, diririri.

The phone rang again as soon as Jjak-tung hung up. The voice of a middle aged man was heard when he picked up the phone.

"Ark-nim, you've finally picked up."

"Who.....?"

"I am the PD of the game exclusive news, Lee Yun-gyu!"

Hyun-woo looked doubtful as he heard the words. If it was the PD of the game exclusive news then of course he knew him.

After defending Lancel village against Jewel's group, he had signed an exclusive contract with him for Hyun-woo's videos. Hyun-woo was confused because the contract had already ended a while ago after sending 8 videos.

"I called you because I wanted to renegotiate the contract."

"Renegotiate?"

"Yes, the edited videos that Ark-nim sent to the game exclusive news has been received quite well. Thanks to a lot of requests, the

broadcasting station has decided to organize a 'Dark Wolf's Adventures season 2'."

"Dark Wolf Adventures season 2?"

Hyun-woo's eyes shone at Lee Yun-gyu's words. He meant there was another chance for Hyun-woo to sell his videos to the broadcasting station? Hyun-woo's previous contract gave him a copyright fee of 2.5 million won. In the past two months, he had secured a fixed income of 25 million won for 10 videos. With the name Ark now well known, he had been worrying about how to earn money in the future. But now the station called asking to renew the contract? His mind was still dull and sleepy. Yet Hyun-woo had to organize his thoughts as soon as he woke up.

"The reaction to the previous videos was quite good so I will give a copyright fee of 3 million won per video this time. The video of Nagaran's defense will also have a special broadcast. The copyright fee for that video will be a separate 10 million won. Global Exos has already assented so we just need Ark-nim's agreement for the contract."

Lee Yun-gyu hurriedly said. Hyun-woo's mouth dropped open. 3 million won for 10 videos would be 30 million won!

And the video of Nagaran's defense was 10 million won! If he simply sent in videos then he could earn 40 million won in two months.

'What kind of luck is this?'

Hyun-woo was about to give the OK sign without thinking. Then Hyun-woo realized that something was strange.

'We're the ratings of 'Dark Wolf's Adventures' really that good?'

Hyun-woo never heard those words during the two months it was broadcasted. To be exact, Dark Wolf's Adventure was like a bungle for the game exclusive news. The game exclusive news had spent 2 weeks collected and putting together the videos Hyun-woo sent. But by the time it was broadcasted, the Demonic War had begun. So the interest of the audience was concentrated on the demonic war. Of course, Hyun-woo also entered the Demonic War but there were

thousands of videos about it so Hyun-woo's videos weren't that interesting. There was only a surge in ratings when Hyun-woo released the video related to information about the Hell River from Shangri-La.

'Yet they're planning season 2 and will even give an extra 500,000 won as a copyright fee?'

After thinking about it, questions would naturally rise. The broadcasting station wouldn't do that without a good reason.

'Something is fishy.....?'

Hyun-woo was immersed in his thoughts until the image of the computer screen floated in his head. He had gained 14,680 posts in just 7 hours!

'Yes, that's what it is.'

Hyun-woo was beginning to wake up and started to understand the circumstances. That's right. He didn't know what would happen later but Ark's fame in New World was currently at its peak! Thanks to 60,000 people spreading the words on the internet, there wouldn't be anyone in New World who didn't know Ark's name. And the place that would be most responsive to that interest is the broadcasting station! Hyun-woo started to understand why the broadcasting station was offering a higher copyright fee. Of course, there were 60,000 people who entered the battle to defend Nagaran. There would also be a lot of related videos. But Hyun-woo was the commander of the battlefield so his videos would naturally be different. The audience rating would explode even if there was only one advertisement stating that 'Ark took the video directly.' That's why the station wanted to produce Dark Wolf's Adventures season 2.

'That's right. Then the phone that rang before Jjak-tung hyung.....'

The broadcasting station must've been the one calling. They were calling without any breaks to prevent other broadcasting stations from reaching him first. Hyun-woo completely woke up and thoughts began to turn over in his head.

‘Then that changes things.’

That’s right. If the broadcasting station were desperate to buy the video from Hyun-woo then the situation would change by 180 degrees. There was no reason for Hyun-woo to contract with the game exclusive news.

‘But won’t I make a lot of profit if I contract with the game exclusive news?’

There was a reason Hyun-woo should contract with the game exclusive news. The game exclusive news was known as the broadcasting program that supported Dark Wolf completely. If Hyun-woo became a hero and then suddenly went to another broadcasting station then the audience would treat him coldly. That was why the game exclusive news impatiently tried to call him. It was in order to defend the image of the station and prevent other stations from getting their hands on the videos. Hyun-woo was the valuable thing. Then it would be easy to maximize his profits. This chance might never come again. If the users’ admiration changed to jealousy then they might not watch Hyun-woo’s videos that were being broadcasted. Then it was better to raise it as much as possible while he could!

“Let’s see? The offer is appreciated but I’m quite busy these days so it is hard to give a definite answer.”

Hyun-woo tried a little fishing (?).

“Have you already been contacted by another broadcasting station?”

“Huh? No, t-that’s not.....”

Hyun-woo deliberately stuttered. Lee Yun-gyu immediately grabbed the bait.

“I understand. Can you wait a moment without hanging up?”

Lee Yun-gyu put the phone on standby and disappeared somewhere. After being on hold for 3~4 minutes, he once again heard Lee Yun-gyu’s voice.

“I just consulted with the broadcasting station chief. We will pay 15 million won for the Nagaran defense video. And Dark Wolf’s Adventures season 2 will be a 10 part video, each 10 minutes long. We will pay 4 million won for each video. No other broadcasting station will offer a higher price. How about it?”

Hyun-woo felt his heart jump after hearing Lee Yun-gyu’s words.

‘1 video for 15 million won and 10 x 4 million is 40 million won. That is a total of 55 million won!’

The first amount that the game exclusive news offered was 40 million won. If he hadn’t received Jjak-tung’s call first then he wouldn’t have realized the situation and would’ve lost 15 million won.

‘What? I might’ve settled for 40 million won?’

He felt furious just thinking about it. And this was a long-awaited change to raise the price a bit more. But Hyun-woo soon shook his head. It was clear that Lee Yun-gyu already had a grasp on how much the other broadcasting stations would offer. Then 55 million won was the highest amount the game exclusive news would give. When taken into account the other broadcasting stations, the game exclusive news offered the highest copyright fees of all the stations. If he became even greedier and refused the price for the video then he might have to accept a lesser price from other broadcasting stations. When engaging in business, he had to know when to push and when to back off.

“I understand. I’ll accept that price. Do I have to go to the broadcasting station?”

“The recorded contents of this call will be the contract agreement for now. You can come to the broadcasting station whenever it is convenient to sign the written contract.”

“Yes.”

Hyun-woo calmly hung up the call while inwardly he was jumping with excitement.

‘Having my fame soar isn’t that bad. No, in the meantime I have only

been thinking that it wasn't good. If I'm the focus of the players then it wouldn't be as easy to trade as before. But there is also a way to trade using my fame.'

Hyun-woo looked at this situation in a new light after talking to the game exclusive news. Therefore he woke up and connected to New World with an excited feeling.

"Hah....."

A sigh naturally emerged from Ark's mouth. Ark was the hero who organized an unprecedented scale of allied forces and defeated 100,000 demons!

Thanks to his accomplishments in New World, Ark managed to get fame and wealth at the same time in reality. However, when he entered New World a gloomy reality awaited him.

Currently Owned Territory Information Window <Lancel (Silvana)>			
【Territory】	Silvana	【Current Lord】	Ark
【Rating】	C	【Classification】	Large Estate (15 villages present)
【Number of Residents in Territory】	7,040 (▽ Falling)	【Residents' Bond】	350 (▽ Falling)
【Residents' Loyalty】	210 (▽ Falling)	【Territory's Gross Income】	Every 10 days – ??? gold (Impossible to calculate)
【Territory's Current Assets】	3,700 gold	【Value of the Current Territory】	447,150 (▽ Falling)
【Territory's Fame】	380,400 (▽ Falling)	【Development】	32,460 (▽ Falling)
【Development Speed】	30,470 (▽	【Commerce】	52,290 (▽ Falling)

	Falling)		
【Civilization】	46,560 (▽ Falling)	【Armament】	5,500
* Current effects applied to the territory			
<p>【Shrine of War】 Armament +30%, 'Maintenance of Peace' effect <Due to the destruction, the effort will stop until it is reconstructed></p> <p>【Cathedral's Support】 Resident's loyalty +10%, Resident's Bond +10% <Due to the destruction, the effort will stop until it is reconstructed></p> <p>【Mercenary's Office】The number of mercenaries that can be hired by the estate increases. In addition, if the estate hires mercenaries from the Mercenary's Office then the costs will be reduced based on the rating. <Due to the destruction, the effort will stop until it is reconstructed></p>			
* Current situation of the territory			
<p>-Residents are in a tough situation so it is difficult to keep the peace. (▽ Falling)</p> <p>-Some farmland has become impoverished and the income of the territory has sharply decreased. (▽ Falling)</p> <p>-Some houses have been destroyed so the public sentiment of the residents who lost their homes will be rough. Hurry and prepare shelter and jobs for the residents of the number of inhabitants will suddenly plummet.</p>			

"This is the current situation of the territory."

An NPC showed him a thick pile of documents. The one handing him these documents was Rokon, the son of his former assistant Berami Alan had used the Rwigenberg to invade Nagaran and Silvana with the demons. While most of the residents of the territory were able to escape without large damages, the NPCs and civil

servants staying that Silvana castle were wiped out. Therefore Ark had thought Silvana would be empty. But when he arrived at Silvana, there were surprisingly a lot of civil servants handling the task. They were the children of the NPCs that had died. In New World, NPCs with the ability to run the territory were essential. He once again realized that this was an online game no matter how real it felt. However, not all of the empty NPC seats were automatically filled. While the essential seats such as advisor were filled, others remained empty. Anyway, thanks to that Ark was about to confirm Silvana's situation as soon as he connected.

“As you can see, the current situation is very serious. Fortunately the demons concentrated on the castle so many residents escaped but they are still trembling in fear. In addition, many facilities have been destroyed by the battle between the demons and the allied forces. There are many problems but the most urgent one is food. This is supposed to be the time of the spring harvest.....”

The business like voice of the assistant Rokon droned into his ear.

‘Looking at the figures, the damage is less than I expected.’

Ark stopped listening to Rokon and looked out the window at his territory. After hearing that Alan had occupied Silvana, he had expected Silvana to be turned to ash. However, the actual damage wasn't that serious. Other than the area where the allied forces and demons fought, there was almost no damage to the territory.

‘It is fortunate that Alan's purpose was to flood the Hell River.’

That's right. There was a reason for this. If Alan's purpose was revenge against Ark then he would've destroyed Silvana so much that it would've been impossible for Silvana to be occupied again. But Alan's purpose was to flood the Hell River so that was the only thing he concentrated on. If the Hell River flood then Silvana and of course Nagaran would disappear. So there was no need to have the demons purposely destroy Silvana. That's why Silvana wasn't destroyed even after the demons occupied it for 10 days. But as expected the development, commerce, civilization, armament, etc.....all of the figures related to the territory development had a drop of 20~30%.

‘But.....’

It was clear that he still received damage. How much had Ark suffered in order to develop the territory? Ark had captured Silvana 1 year and 6 months after the Hermes guild occupied it and he had used all of his secret funds to develop the estate. An astronomical amount of money was invested into it. But those efforts were wasted. The information window said that the territory was C ranked, but if he didn't improve the falling values within a month then it would fall to a D rank. Of course, due to the Demonic War all administration related to Nagaran had been halted. However, if the rating fell and the territory's financial deficit would affect the Lord's salary. That was 6,000 gold in 10 days. It meant the monthly income of 18,000 gold had been paused. And this was deadly for a coalition that only had 4,000 people.

‘Well, the main problem is that the coalition consists of 1,500 NPCs from the beast clan and the Eastern Nation.’

An NPC alliance was different from a user alliance. Ark had to pay the coalition a monthly salary of 2,000 gold every 10 days. That meant Ark needed 6,000 gold every month to maintain the coalition.

‘I would like to discard it but.....’

If the NPCs in the coalition were fired then the relationship with the raccoons and Eastern Nation might be aggravated.

If that happened then it would cause problems with Seutandal and the Underground World, and might even affect the supply of munitions. This was the reason why Ark was concerned about the NPCs when the Hell River flooded. If the NPCs that Ark hired were killed then he would have to pay thousands of gold as compensation. Fortunately, all the NPCs had hid in the closed off room on the 60th floor and were rescued with almost no casualties. But now the maintenance fee was the problem.

‘Anyway, I've avoided the worst situation where the military supplies were affected. With the income from that then I can hold on for several months.’

The problem wasn't the immediate loss. This problem wasn't one

that would improve in several months. Once again, quite a few farmland and facilities had been destroyed in Silvana. It wasn't simply that they were destroyed. It meant a lot of residents on the territory lost their jobs and homes. The income of the territory was also subject to taxes. Yet the residents of the territory had lost their jobs. In that situation, the residents wouldn't be able to pay the taxes and would have to claim the unemployment benefits. However, Silvana only had 3,700 gold remaining. It wasn't enough to help the 7,000 victims. It also wasn't enough to restore the farmland and the destroyed facilities.

"They've become impoverished and lost their houses so the residents' public sentiment is low. In this situation, the territory would become violent and prone to plunder. However, most of the soldiers stationed in the territory have died in battle so it isn't easy to maintain public security. Swift action is required."

Rokon explained the situation. Ark was also worried about that part. He couldn't collect taxes from residents without a job. Without jobs then the residents couldn't pay taxes. It was a vicious cycle..... If it continued then the residents would eventually riot. It was indeed a death flag. If he proceeded like this then there was no way for the territory to recover. There was only one way to solve this problem.

'Money.....'

That's right. Whether it was a game or reality, the only thing that mattered in the end was money.

If he used the money to restore the businesses then the residents could get jobs. If the residents got jobs then it was possible to pay taxes. If taxes were restored then it was possible to invest in more businesses and restore more jobs. The residents would return to the territory and Silvana could continue developing like before.

"Rokon, what is the most urgent problem right now?"

"The restoration of the reservoir and the farming facilities. If they are restored then we can supply jobs to residents and reduce the burden of a food problem."

"The amount of funds necessary?"

“At least a minimum of 300,000 gold is required.”

“300,000 gold.....”

Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped. Currently Silvana had no money at all. In the end, Ark had no choice but to obtain the funds required to repair the territory from outside. However, at the moment Ark already had trouble obtaining the money required to pay the coalition members. How could he manage to gain 300,000 gold?

“There’s only one way I can get that type of money.”

Ark murmured as he thought out loud. Then Rokon seemed to sense what he was thinking.

“..... Investment?”

In fact, Silvana had the concept of investments. In other words, he could receive investments from users and NPCs in order to finance the development of the territory. Of course, all the money received would be the territory’s public funds. After a certain period of time had passed, those who invested would be able to get dividends from their investment. If he used such a system that the territory could receive the necessary development and the investors could safely receive profit. But he didn’t have any investors that he could recruit. If they invested in the territory then they could safely make money. So if he wanted people to invest then they needed to get some benefits. That’s right. It was similar to the benefits that the coalition members received after they invested in the estate.

‘But the coalition and Dark Eden has already invested most of their funds.’

That’s right. It was the special privilege of the coalition members! And not long ago, Silvana had been quickly developing. How could the coalition members and Dark Eden give up such privileges? Therefore Ark and the coalition had already reached the limit of how much they could invest. But now Silvana was broke. The dissatisfied complaints from the coalition members who invested in it were enough to give him a headache. In the end, he could only procure foreign investment. However.....

“It isn’t a few gold but 300,000 gold. Even if 300,000 pours in, the territory still won’t be completely recovered. It won’t be easy to find people willing to invest in the territory.”

Rokon replied in a sceptical voice.

.....That was the problem. If Silvana grew without any problems then he could even get 1 million gold as investment. However, Silvana was an estate where riots could occur at any moment. Even if the demons were driven away, there was no telling if they would return. And if Silvana was ruined that all that invested money would fly away. No user would be willing to invest in such an insecure territory.

‘There’s also a limit. Individuals can only invest a maximum of 100 gold into the territory. If everybody paid the necessary amount then I would need at least a minimum of 3,000 investors.’

Currently Silvana only had 3,700 gold so it wasn’t easy to feed the victims. Even if they ate flour porridge, wouldn’t that only last one week at most? In the end, he needed to secure investments from at least 3,000 people in one week. It was impossible.

‘Do I just have to watch as Silvana perishes?’

He had desperately tried to protect it for 10 days yet the result was like this.....

“Dammit!”

Ark slammed his hand on the desk. Then a piece of paper fell from the piled up documents. The document that fell had 317,000 gold written on it.

‘What the? 317, 100 gold?’

Currently he had turned Silvana upside down and there was no more money. So what was the amount stated on the paper? Had he forgotten a possible source of money? Ark picked up the document with that thought in his mind. But he soon became disappointed as he read the contents of the document.

“Ah, damn. I forgot about this. The number just has to be 317,000

gold? Having this dangled in my face. If only I could invest it in Silvana.....”

Ark flinched and looked back at the document.

“Wait? Maybe.....no, I’ll just have to believe that it will work!”

After thinking for a while, Ark stood up and shouted.

“Rokon, summon all of Nagaran’s lords immediately!”

After a while.....

Buzz, buzz.

Inside a conference room in Silvana castle. Users were gathered and talking noisily. They were the 11 lords of Nagaran. The reason why Ark summoned them was because of the paper he found in his office. This was the present state of the amount of munitions each alliance used in defending Nagaran.

The 4,800 Aramis alliance members from Radon territory (Military provisions and basic equipment): 24,000 gold

The 5,200 Golden Cross alliance members from Beiku territory (Military provisions and basic equipment): 26,000 gold

“The 4,900 Union alliance members from Gurana territory (Military Provisions and basic supplies): 24,500 gold.....

<The total cost of munitions that 63,420 people from the 12 territories: 317, 100 gold>

It was the cost of munitions that the allied forces used in this war. The reason that Ark investigated this was simple. Before the start of the battle, Ark had asked for help from the Schudenberg Kingdom. But the Schudenberg Kingdom was focused on the Sinus Principality and didn’t dispatch any troops. Instead, they promised to pay for the munitions that Ark used.

Well, the allied forces actually used a lot of military supplied. Generally when recruiting soldiers from each kingdom, a basic

distribution of 5 gold per person was given. That's why the Schudenberg Kingdom said that they would support them. Yet there were 60,000 people and that ended up adding to 317,100 gold! It was a colossal amount. But each individual person in the allied forces is only receiving 5 gold.'

This was the idea that Ark had after seeing the documents. That's right. While the Schudenberg Kingdom would be paying them more than 300,000 gold, each individual member would only receive 5 gold. And the users had an average level of 350 so 5 gold wasn't a large amount of money. If he persuaded the allied forces then he could invest the 317,100 gold from the Schudenberg Kingdom into Silvana.

'I just need to believe. If I can't receive the 317,100 gold investment then it is the end for Silvana!'

".....So if everyone is willing to help a little bit."

Ark explained the circumstances and humbly asked with a lowered head. There was no other hole that money could come out of. If he couldn't gain the money that Silvana would go down the drain. Of course, it wasn't that easy to receive an investment from the lords of Nagaran. However, this was Ark's last method. Ark was even prepared to grab the hem of their pants to beg. However.....

"I understand."

"Of course I know the decision isn't easy. But each individual will only receive 5 gold at most. If you think about.....huh?"

Ark was trying to persuade them when he suddenly raised his head.

".....What did you say just now?"

"We will listen to Ark-nim and invest."

"R-really?"

He thought that the lords were assenting too easily. When Ark's mouth dropped open, Aramis who was the lord of Radon laughed and said.

“We are also lords. We can guess Silvana’s situation just by looking at it. Of course we are competitors but didn’t you risk your life in order to protect Nagaran? That’s why all of the lords have agreed to help Ark-nim.”

“Yes. If it wasn’t for Ark-nim then we would’ve lost our territories.”

“Furthermore, even if the total is 300,000 gold then we will still only receive 5 gold like Ark-nim said.”

“We have to live and help each other.”

The lords smiled as they spoke generously. Ark just looked at them dumbly. Ark naturally expected the lords to reject the investment offer. In other words, he had been trying to think of things to persuade them. Yet they had already decided to help before he even asked for it? Why? They might’ve worked together to protect Nagaran but they were still competitors. If they left it alone then a strong competitor would disappear.

‘If it was me.....’

Ark thought inwardly before wincing. And he slowly examined each of their faces. The memory of the past 10 days floated into his head. They had been treated coldly by the NPCs of Schudenberg Kingdom and had to depend on Ark to stop Alan and the demons. They had barely slept and fought against the 100,000 demons for the last 10 days. Of course, they only fought with Ark to protect their territories. However, it wasn’t important why they fought. The important thing was that they fought together! That’s right. Ark was already the leader of the 11 lords, no the 60,000 soldiers! They were fellow soldiers who had desperately struggled with each other for 10 days!

‘.....There is no option but to help.’

When he thought about it, that was the only answer. And he felt a strange emotion that he had never experienced in New World before. So far JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Roco, etc. were the only users that Ark had interacted with. The other users were divided into two types. The enemy. Or people he could take

advantage of. He therefore had no other expectations from the players. He thought that was enough and anymore was unnecessary. But Ark miscalculated.

‘Damn, it’s not that bad?’

That’s right. Someone.....the feeling of enjoying the game together with other users wasn’t bad. In this situation, Ark couldn’t reject those feelings. It was no different from the feelings Ark felt when building relationships with NPCs.

“Thank you!”

Ark humbly lowered his head. For the first time since he started New World, Ark truly thanks some users.

Even after all this, Ark never imagined the situation he would experience in Selebrid.

Duke Sarkin's Plot

“What are you saying?”

Ark couldn't understand what had gone wrong. The day before, Ark had painstakingly found a way to repair Silvana thanks to the help of Nagaran's lords. If he used the funds that Schudenberg Kingdom promised to pay for the military supplies than it could be used to finance Silvana's recovery projects.

‘That's it. Now I can raise the funds to repair Silvana!’

The only thing left was to receive the money and start fixing the reservoir and farmlands. Of course, not all the problems could be solved with that amount of money. It would take time and effort before Silvana returned to normal. However, that money felt like he had come back alive from the brink of hell.

‘I can't afford to waste even one more second or minute!’

So Ark hopefully ran to Selebrid. And he presented the document that Rokon drew up about the military supplies funding to the Finance Minister. However, the Finance Minister just tilted his head to one side and said.

“What is this?”

“What? It is the bill for the funding of the military supplies that His Majesty promised for the Nagaran battle.

“The bill for the military supplies? I don't know what you're saying.”

Lipton who was the grey haired middle aged aristocrat in charge of the treasury muttered with a frown.

“That is impossible. When the demons invaded Nagaran 10 days ago, Lord Haverstein who is the commander of the expedition couldn't give any support troops so he promised to pay for the necessary military supplies.”

“Hrmm.....”

Lipton scanned the document after hearing Ark's explanation. Then he nodded and said.

“Okay. Then did you bring the issued form?”

“The issued form?”

“Yes, you raised 60,000 troops according to this form. The funding you require is more than 300,000 gold. If you were promised that type of funding then shouldn't a form have been issued?”

“T-that is.....”

Ark was totally at a loss. He had been so busy at the time that he hadn't even thought about it. No, he didn't want to waste even one second so he hadn't thought about it. There was no time to collect such documents from his allies. Lipton asked in an outraged tone after seeing Ark's panic.

“What? You want the treasury to pay 300,000 gold without such documents?”

“But it is true. Can't you check it?”

“Check it? With who?”

Lipton glared and asked. Ark replied.

“Didn't I tell you? The communication office who contacted the expedition told us that His Majesty had promised to pay the funding. It must be an obvious mistake if the forms weren't submitted to the Finance Minister. If you contact the communication officer then you can confirm it!”

Lipton's eyes suddenly narrowed and he said.

“That would be the communication officer in charge of the expedition a month ago? He was dismissed from his position a week ago due to bribery charges. His actions after that are unclear.”

“Huh?”

Ark was completely astonished by Lipton's words. The communication officer had been accused of bribery and now his whereabouts was unknown? How was that possible? Ark made an absurd expression and said.

"Viscount Haverstein, the expedition commander was also with me when I heard it."

"Hey."

Lipton rubbed his face and asked in a tired voice.

"You claimed that the King promised funding but you didn't bring any papers related to that. The witness you claimed is the communications officer who was stripped of his position due to bribery charges and ran away. And now you claim that another witness is Lord Haverstein who is the commander of the expedition who isn't here. That's my summary of the situation. Yet you want the Schudenberg treasury to pay you 300,000 gold?"

.....The situation was becoming dirty and twisted up. However, Ark couldn't possibly give up the 300,000 gold. If he gave up 300,000 gold then Silvana would be ruined. Besides, the 300,000 gold wasn't just Ark's money. It was the money he borrowed from the 60,000 Nagaran allied forces. In other words, if Ark couldn't obtain the 300,000 gold then he would be in debt. Silvana would fail and Ark would be sitting on a pile of debt. In addition, it wasn't any different from betraying the faith of the allied forces. He couldn't just leave it like this.

"Then His Majesty, please check with the King!"

The cornered Ark shouted. Lipton's eyes became even more incredulous.

"You want me to check with His Majesty? Are you serious?"

"Yes, if you check with His Majesty then you will know the truth....."

Ark suddenly flinched and held his tongue. He had been desperate after hearing Lipton's words. But now that he thought about it, he sensed a somewhat subtle nuance. Haverstein who knew Ark wasn't

here. Therefore it sounded like Ark was just trying to use Haverstein's name to rip off money from the kingdom.

‘.....There is something strange.’

Ark had clearly confirmed the message in the headquarters of the expedition force. Yet the Finance Minister wasn't convinced no matter what he said. Furthermore, the communication officer in charge of that communication had been stripped of his position due to bribery charges. What was the chance that such a coincidence could happen?

‘Is this someone's scheme?’

Ark suddenly had that idea. That's right. Someone had deliberately removed the communications officer who had talked to Ark. The communications officer then disappeared with a bad name. Ark had no choice but to receive confirmation from either Haverstein or the king. However, if this was someone's scheme then the king wouldn't know the details about the funding. If the Finance Minister talked to the king and he didn't know anything then it would be like Ark tried to embezzle 300,000 gold. If the King then asked Haverstein then he might become known as Ark's accomplice and be forced to resign from the position of the expedition commander. And if Haverstein was removed from the position then the person that would profit the most was.....

‘Duke Sarkin!’

The name popped into his head and all his doubts were gone. Duke Sarkin could easily bribe the communication officer to deliver the message and then remove him. Moreover, the Finance Minister Lipton was an aristocrat who belonged in Sarkin's faction. Then wouldn't the picture naturally emerge?

‘Oh my god, if so.....’

In the end, the funding that had been promised was only Duke Sarkin's plot to entrap Ark and Haverstein? Ark immediately realized his intentions after thinking about it. The only way to solve this problem was to reveal Sarkin's scheme. However, the

communications officer had disappeared and the only other people who knew about it were Lariette and Nadin.

Nadin was in Sarkin's pocket so it wasn't necessary to speak about it but Lariette was a user so her word wouldn't be accepted. The only remaining person was Haverstein. However, there wasn't anyone who didn't know the relationship between Ark and Haverstein. Since Duke Sarkin controlled the communications officer, the evidence didn't exist and Ark and Haverstein would be accused of embezzlement.

'If I ask the check with the King then it won't be fixed!'

He knew that. But Ark couldn't just give up. If he withdrew without the recovery funds then Silvana would be ruined. However, that was nothing. The Nagaran allied forces had promised the war funds to Ark. If he didn't receive the funding then Ark would have to pay 300,000 gold to Nagaran's allied forces instead. And if he couldn't pay the 300,000 gold.....Then the 60,000 allied forces would become his enemy! Ark and Haverstein would be dropped into hell. It was a well thought out scheme from the beginning.

".....There has absolutely been a mistake. I will check and come back again."

Ark said after worrying for a while. Lipton who had expected Ark's destruction just nodded.

"It is still too early to conclude."

Ark exited the building and muttered while shaking his head. Although he was suspicious inside the office, he wasn't 100% sure that this was Duke Sarkin's plot. Maybe it was just some error?

"The first thing I need to check is whether the king actually granted the funding."

Ark came to that conclusion. If the king was aware of it then this situation would be simply resolved. The problem was how to confirm it.

"If this is indeed Duke Sarkin's scheme then asking the Finance Minister to check will open me to accusations of embezzlement. I

have to confirm it without going through the Finance Minister.”

Therefore Ark went straight to the residence of Marquis Daltin. It was possible for him to meet the king in Selebrid and he had helped Ark before. After Ark explained the circumstances to Daltin.....

“I visited him.”

Marquis Daltin took off his coat and said with a bitter voice.

“I consulted with His Majesty about the problems in the Sinius Principality and tried to stealthily ask about Nagaran. I said that they 100,000 demons were defeated so the army should be somewhat compensated. But Duke Sarkin decisively disagreed. And His Majesty didn’t show any special interest.”

“Then.....”

“His Majesty didn’t know about the military support funding.”

Ark felt like the sky was crashing down after hearing those words. If the King had decided to grant funding to Nagaran and then decided to pull it then he would have a reaction to Daltin’s words. The fact that he showed no reaction meant he didn’t hear anything in regards to funding Nagaran. Ark’s speculation that it was a plot had come true.

“It’s good that you didn’t respond to Lipton’s provocation and visited me first. If he tried to confirm it with the king then you and Haverstein would be accused of embezzlement. Haverstein would be instantly dismissed from the commander’s position. You haven’t completely fallen into Duke Sarkin’s plot.”

He was indeed fortunate. But the results didn’t really change for Ark. If he couldn’t secure the funds then Ark’s worst case situation would soon become a reality. Silvana would soon collapse without the recovery funds and he would owe the 60,000 allied forces a 300,000 debt. Of course, if he explained the circumstances to the lords then they would probably understand. But their good impression of him would be gone and Silvana would also disappear.

‘What did I spend 10 days barely sleeping for?’

He felt his anger explode.

‘Duke Sarkin.....!’

He grinded his teeth together. This was the first time he felt such fury against a NPC. Right now he was tempted to go visit Sarkin and just stab him. No, if Silvana was ruined then he really would cut off Sarkin’s neck. But now wasn’t the time to be thinking about something like that.

‘Is there another way?’

“If we find the communication officer that Duke Sarkin bribed then the situation would be simple to fix. Then it wouldn’t be a problem. That officer impersonated His Majesty and sent a false message to the battlefield. If that was revealed then even Duke Sarkin wouldn’t be safe. Do you understand?”

He understood. This was Duke Sarkin’s scheme. It was a scheme that he prepared carefully. Then wasn’t the key to this scheme the communication officer? Lipton said that the communications officer had been charged with bribery but he had probably been removed by Sarkin. The problem was that the communication officer had disappeared. While Ark had fallen into despair, he grasped Daltin’s hand and said.

“Will the Marquis help me?”

“What did you say? I can’t do anything unless you find the communications officer.”

“It is no use revealing Duke Sarkin’s scheme.”

“Then what can I do to help?”

“Needless to say, the promise of support money for Nagaran was all Duke Sarkin’s scheme. But no matter the scheme, doesn’t Nagaran’s allied forces deserve Schudenberg’s support? If Nagaran’s allied forces hadn’t stopped the 100,000 demons and the Hell River from flooding then the demons within the Sinus Principality would become even stronger. Didn’t Nagaran’s allied forces stop that? Can’t you remind His Majesty and suggest the possibility of some support

funding?”

This was the final method that Ark came up with. Even if he wanted to now, assassinating Sarkin wouldn't solve Ark's problem. More than Sarkin's neck, Ark needed to obtain 300,000 gold. It didn't matter how he got it. Getting 300,000 gold from the kingdom was the most urgent problem.

“That is difficult.”

Daltin sighed and shook his head.

“Duke Sarkin wanted to hang you and Haverstein with this scheme. But you didn't give into Lipton's provocation so he missed the chance to get Haverstein. Can't you be satisfied that you dealt some damage to Sarkin's plot? Duke Sarkin is the one who arranged everything about this scheme. Of course you want to make a desperate stand against Duke Sarkin. Even if I try to oppose it, Duke Sarkin is the one who controls the kingdom's finances so the King won't easily agree.”

“But if you and Marquis Halben join together.....”

It was the only thing he could believe in. Ark desperately entreated. However, Daltin's reaction was still sceptical.

“.....It might be possible. But the timing right now isn't really good.”

“The timing isn't good?”

“You just came from Nagaran so you wouldn't know about it yet.”

Daltin scratched his beard and murmured.

“Not long ago, the Bristania and Schudenberg expeditions managed to drive all the demons from the Sinus Principality. No, to be exact the demons felt a crisis after the expeditions advanced and retreated.”

Of course Ark knew that information. He had received it from the Dark Eden members who were delivering supplies to the Sinus Principality. In addition, the news about New World on the TV and internet were all concentrated on the Demonic War. The demons

retreating from the Sinus Principality was a major event. However, the reason why the demons retreated was still unknown. The expedition armies had gained consecutive victories and managed to control the Silrinad area but there were still lots of demons left. Yet all the demons had suddenly retreated from the Sinus Principality like a flood. Therefore the users had many differing opinions about why the demons disappeared. It was the same for the NPCs.

“There are various theories but nothing is certain. But thanks to that, the Bristania-Schudenberg expeditions succeeded in regaining the Sinus Principality.”

..... And a new problem began from this.

“It isn’t an exaggeration to say that the Sinus Principality is impoverished and on the verge of collapse thanks to the demons. Furthermore, most of the royal family and nobles were killed. Only several royalty and local lords barely survived. So Bristania and Schudenberg has agreed to divide the Sinus Principality and govern it for the next 10 years.”

Daltin spoke while tapping his finger on the table. Ark immediately grasped the aims of Bristania and Schudenberg after hearing Daltin’s speech. Bristania and Schudenberg had sent military expeditions to regain the Sinus Principality from the demons. While it was to stop the demons, they had another reason for saving the Sinus Principality. It was the right to request a reward from the Sinus Principality. However, the Sinus Principality was devastated by the demons and couldn’t afford to give anything. Therefore Bristania and Schudenberg gained the right to split the Sinus Principality and govern it for the next 10 years. But that was just a pretext. The Sinus Principality had been completely destroyed by the demons. The atmosphere was polluted after being exposed to the black fog for a long time so there was no guarantee it would be properly restored in 10 years. Even if Bristania and Schudenberg governed for 10 years, there was no benefit in it for them. No, they actually had to invest a lot of money into the recovery work. Yet there was a simple reason why the two controls divided it up.

“This is a chance to swallow up the territory of the impoverished

Sinius Principality.”

Daltin laughed as he laid both elbows on the table. That’s right. Bristania and the Schudenberg kingdoms intended to colonize the Sinus Principality. On the pretext of dividing the territories, the Governor of each estate intended to fully absorb it. From the moment they organized the military expedition, they hadn’t been thinking about profit. But it wasn’t as easy as it sounded.

“Didn’t you say that some of the royal family survived? If some royalty is still alive then wouldn’t the two kingdoms have no justification for absorbing the territories?”

“That is normally the case. But this is the Sinus Principality.”

Daltin smiled and explained. The land in a kingdom was basically the property of the king. While the reality is a little different but each Lord and general citizen is just borrowing the real estate from the King. That’s why no other country could claim the territory if the Lord died. But the Sinus Principality was different from other kingdoms.

“Sinus is not a kingdom. It is a principality where dozens of species combined together. The royal family of the Sinus Principality are nothing but representatives of the species. And the representatives of each species each have a territory. But after a long time, the various species mixed together.”

That’s why the Sinus Principality was engulfed in chaos. With the territories deprived of their representative, chaos and anarchy crept in and there were quite few cases of aggression against neighbouring territories. Therefore the Sinus Principality felt it was necessary to establish leadership for each territory.

“Those with the right tokens will gain ownership of the territory in the Sinus Principality.”

“Tokens?”

“Yes, look at this.”

Daltin opened a piece of silk fabric and showed a piece of jewellery. Inside was a ring with a glowing purple stone.

-Soul Ring (Legendary)

Item type: Ring

User Restriction: NPC aristocrats only

A ring inlaid with a brilliantly shining ore.

The residents who live in the northeast area of Morai on the continent believe that the soul of their ancestors reside in the ore. A long time ago, the King of the Sinius Principality was asked to pick a symbol to represent Morai and he picked this ore ring with no hesitation. When shown this ring then all Morai residents will pledge vows of loyalty. Those who own this ring will be given the right to govern Morai territory. However, this is impossible for foreigners as a large majority of residents in New World don't respect them. Therefore it is only for NPCs. Only a noble NPC with a high status can use this ring to claim ownership of the territory.

<Special Option: It is possible to claim ownership of the Morai territory>

"This is a symbol that the Bristania expedition got their hands on."

"Bristania? Then why does Marquis-nim own this?"

"The token ended up with the Schudenberg expedition. Because the territory that the Soul Ring rules over is located in the northeast area governed by the Schudenberg Kingdom. We gave the Bristania expedition a token for an area in the northwest. This was due to the negotiations."

Ark now understood the situation. The Sinius Principality had been completely destroyed by the demons. And the Bristania and Schudenberg army had defeated the demons. They also recovered the tokens representing the territories from the demons. But these tokens weren't primarily a possession of the Sinius Principality. Each of the lords for those territories were dead so the expedition who found the tokens claimed ownership. So the tokens were divided between the Bristania and Schudenberg kingdom after the war was over.....and they were able to claim the rights to the territory.

“The Sinius Principality has 26 different territories. Only 9 royalty and lords survived. In the end, that means that 17 territories have no owners. The Bristania Kingdom is governing 7 territories in the northwest while Schudenberg is governing 10 territories in the northeast.”

Schudenberg was able to gain more territories because they reached Silrinad first and gained the initiative.

“Then 10 territories in the Sinius Principality belong to Schudenberg Kingdom?”

“That’s not it.”

Daltin shook his head with a tired expression.

“Out of the 10 territories given to Schudenberg kingdom, only tokens for 6 territories have been found. The whereabouts of the remaining tokens are unclear. That is why I can’t take to His Majesty about funding for Nagaran’s military supplies.”

The Schudenberg kingdom only had tokens for 6 territories out of 10.....In other words, most of the aristocrats with the tokens would own the estate while those without one would have to return the token after 10 years. So there was a fierce fight between the three factions of Duke Sarkin, Marquis Halben and Marquis Daltin to find the token so they could gain an advantage over the other factions. That was because their influence would become bigger if their subordinates governed a territory. And tomorrow was the final meeting to decide what nobles to dispatch to the territories. If Daltin mentioned funding 300,000 gold to Nagaran’s allied forces then it was just an opportunity to be caught by Duke Sarkin and Marquis Halben.

“If I mention this then I won’t have any influence over who to send as a governor. The meeting is tomorrow and I’ve only managed to secure two tokens after negotiations with Bristania.”

“Then what about Marquis Halben?”

“Marquis Halben was also able to obtain two. But Haverstein is the commander of the expedition force so one territory will be entrusted

to him. That means his faction has 3 territories.”

Ark tilted his head after hearing Daltin’s words. Schudenberg Kingdom had found 6 tokens. Marquis Daltin had 2 and Halben had 3 so only one was left.

‘Then Duke Sarkin only managed to obtain one token?’

Duke Sarkin’s faction was the most influential among the three factions. So wasn’t it strange that he only found one token? Daltin nodded after hearing Ark’s question and replied.

“Yes, Duke Sarkin only secured one token. So he will obtain the right to temporarily govern the 4 territories where the tokens haven’t been found.”

“But what happens if he can’t find the token after 10 years? Moreover, the territories have become ruins. He would have to invest a huge amount of income in order to restore the businesses. There is no guarantee how long that will take. There is no security that he can recover the amount of funds invested after 10 years.”

“That’s right. But he might be able to find the tokens without those 10 years.”

‘Is it really like that?’

Ark couldn’t completely agree with Daltin’s words. If Sarkin found the token during those 10 years then he could claim ownership of the territory. If that happened then Sarkin would obtain 5 territories in the Sinius Principality. However, it was just a gamble. The odds of victory were low.

The reason was simple. The Sinius Principality had been occupied by the demons so of course the tokens would be lost. But the expedition forces defeated the demons and couldn’t find all the tokens. If the demons retreated then it was natural to think that they took the tokens with them. In the end, it was highly unlikely that the token would be found within the territory. Daltin and Halben didn’t want the territories with no tokens so it had passed onto Sarkin. The question was why Sarkin accepted. Even if he invested huge amounts of money into the territory, if he couldn’t find the token then

he would have to return it 10 years later. The revenue he would gain from the territory would be no match for how much he invested. So why would Sarkin do something that would lose him money? There must be something. Sarkin was clearly up to something.

‘If I was Duke Sarkin, what would be my reason.....?’

Ark’s eyes suddenly flashed. There was only one reason Ark could think of for Sarkin’s behaviour.

‘Sarkin must’ve already obtained the tokens!’

That’s right. If he thought like that then all his questions were answered. Over 30% of the soldiers in the expedition army belonged to Duke Sarkin. If Sarkin used those soldiers then he could easily smuggle the tokens from under Haverstein’s eyes.

‘That is why Haverstein couldn’t find the tokens. If Sarkin only had 1 token then Daltin and Halben would easily concede the four territories to him. In the end, Sarkin will sneakily manage to obtain 5 territories.’

He could recognize the smell of someone similar to him! If Ark had the same power as Sarkin then he would probably do the same thing to obtain the four territories.....

‘What if these facts were made known?’

Of course Sarkin would pay the price for tricking the King!

‘But how do I prove it?’

.....That was the problem. If Sarkin succeeded in gaining 5 territories then he would have even more influence. However, if it was revealed then Sarkin would receive a fatal blow. That’s why all the soldiers involved in retrieving the tokens must be kept under tight security. Ark had one day left to find a way to damage Sarkin. The meeting tomorrow afternoon will bestow the rights to the 4 territories to Sarkin. How could he prove that Sarkin had discovered the tokens beforehand? He had to prove that Sarkin had the tokens before the meeting started.

‘Sarkin is probably the only one who knows where the token is hidden. It is probably hidden inside Duke Sarkin’s house.

That’s right. Sarkin was a person who plotted several schemes. If there was something dangerous that could strangle him then he would always place it right next to him. And that was Ark’s biggest difficulty. Once again, New World was a game which allowed infinite degrees of freedom. If the user wanted to then they could assassinate a NPC or steal from one. Even so, there was one reason why they couldn’t rob the house of an NPC! Most of the houses of high ranking NPCs had crime prevention security that couldn’t even be compared to dungeons. If they did one thing wrong then the user would become chaotic and guards would flock like bees. Moreover, Duke Sarkin was one of the most influential nobles in Schudenberg. Even a professional assassin like Shambala wouldn’t be able to enter without being detected.

‘I only have one day left. After that there will be no more chances to find evidence. If I want to enter directly then I need a search warrant like in the movies. Anyway, now I have nothing to lose. Either he dies or I die.....’

Ark made a determined expression. Suddenly there were fierce sparks inside Ark’s head.

‘That’s right. There is such that method!’

After organizing his thoughts, Ark stood up and shouted.

“Marquis-nim, do you have any papers with Duke Sarkin’s seal?”

“Duke Sarkin’s seal? I have a few but....”

“Please prepare it for me.”

A brutal smile appeared on Ark’s face as his eyes narrowed and he began to talk.

Viscount Ark

“The meeting will start in 5 minutes!”

The chief director of the King’s Hall shouted. The soldiers blew through the trumpet and announced that the meeting time was imminent. This meeting was to decide the aristocrats that would be dispatched to the 10 territories in the Sinus Principality. Once the trumpets starting sounding, the aristocrats began to gather in the King’s Hall.

‘Now, it is time to start.....’

Ark who was standing at the entrance of the King’s Hall and looked at the nobles with bright eyes. After a moment, he saw a grey-haired old man surrounded by other nobles. The old man that looked like a raccoon was Duke Sarkin.

Ark quickly ran over and lowered his head.

“Duke Sarkin-nim, hello?”

“Huh? You are?”

“I’m Baron Ark.”

“Ah, you are the upstart foreigner who managed to become an aristocrat?”

Duke Sarkin muttered with a mocking smile. The nobles trailing Sarkin muttered among themselves. But Ark just pasted a casual smile on his face and nodded.

“Yes, I am that upstart foreigner.”

“Bah. Yes, then what business does a foreigner like you have with me?”

“I came to tell you this despite your disrespect.”

“I don’t know what you’re saying but I have nothing to say to you.”

Duke Sarkin looked Ark up and down with an unpleasant look and turned his back.

“Aren’t you going to regret it?”

“What?”

“I picked something like this up.”

Ark laughed as he took out a scroll from his bag and shook it. Anger flared in Sarkin’s eyes at Ark’s provocation. But his face stiffened after he looked at the contents of the scroll. He suddenly ran forward like an angry wild boar and stretched his arm towards the scroll. However, a sixty year old man was no match for Ark. Ark just turned his body like he was dancing and Sarkin fell to the ground. When Sarkin fell, the nobles flinched and grabbed their sword hilts.

“You bastard! What are you doing?”

“Oh? Why don’t you wait and see?”

Ark muttered and laughed. Duke Sarkin got up and yelled.

“Stop!”

“Huh? But.....”

“Didn’t you hear me? I want to talk with him so you guys enter the hall first.”

Sarkin stared at the nobles and gave them an order. The nobles looked puzzled by Sarkin’s changed attitude but obediently entered the King’s Hall. Ark whistled and clapped like he admired Sarkin’s behaviour.

“As expected of Duke Sarkin-nim, your judgement is really fast.”

“You bastard.....what? How did you get that?”

“This letter? Didn’t I tell you? I picked it up. This letter has Duke-nim’s seal on it. So this upstart foreigner came to talk to you.”

“Then it’s not necessary to speak for a long time. Give it to me.”

“So you admit that this letter is yours?”

Sarkin’s face stiffened at Ark’s question. His forehead wrinkled and he started at Ark for a while with narrowed eyes before saying in a cold voice.

“And if it’s not?”

“Then I have no reason to give this letter to Duke-nim.”

“.....What will you do if it’s mine?”

“I don’t know. The contents of the letter are quite suspicious.”

Ark smiled and lifted the letter. Duke Sarkin read the contents of the letter with a perplexity.

To. Nadin

Secretly transport the <Laurels of Purity> that has been salvaged to my mansion on the night of the full moon.

From Sarkin

The Laurels of Purity was one of the 22 tokens of the Sinus Principality that Daltin spoke about. It was a token which granted the right to own the territory to Schudenberg Kingdom! The problem was that the Laurels of Purity haven’t been reported to the King yet. In other words, this letter was proof that Duke Sarkin had commanded his subordinates to sneakily obtain the tokens. However, Sarkin shook his head and stubbornly denied it.

“I never wrote that letter!”

“But isn’t this Duke-nim’s handwriting and even your seal?”

“It’s a plot! Someone clearly faked that letter in order to trap me in some plot!”

“That might be true.”

Ark grinned and nodded. When Ark nodded, Sarkin flinched and asked in a low voice.

“Perhaps.....it is you?”

“That might be true.”

Ark jokingly replied. Then Sarkin looked at him with outraged eyes.

“You must be crazy. Do you think you will be safe if you do something like this?”

“Shouldn’t you be more worried about yourself than me?”

“Why should I be worried when you are the one who counterfeited a letter? If I call for an investigation then it will instantly be revealed that this is a counterfeit.”

“Yet the content of the letter is between Duke-nim and your subordinate. Shouldn’t you be worried?”

“What?”

“Because it doesn’t matter if this letter is a counterfeit or not.”

Ark narrowed his eyes. And Sarkin twitched like he was worried.

“W-what are you saying?”

“Obviously this letter might be a counterfeit. If examined then it will be revealed whether it is a counterfeit or not. But even if the latter is fake, it will still raise suspicions. Especially if the letter is present during a meeting related to the territories of the Sinus Principality. Since this letter contains potential problems, Marquis Daltin and Halben will no doubt raise objections and the King might even order Duke-nim’s mansion to be searched. Isn’t Duke-nim worried about that?”

That’s right. This was the plan Ark came up with. The letter Ark was holding was one that Jjak-tung created. Ark had asked Daltin for any letters from Sarkin so Jjak-tung could fake his handwriting and seal. Jjak-tung was currently level 350 and his Counterfeit skill had reached ‘High class.’ It was to the extent that Jjak-tung could produce SA counterfeits. However, that wasn’t the reason why Ark faked the letter. There were various specialists that dealt with official documents. Even if it was made with a High Class Counterfeit skill, it would still be revealed as fake.

‘However, that doesn’t matter!’

There was currently a subtle psychological war between Daltin, Halben and Sarkin over the Sinius Principality. In such a situation, the letter would raise suspicions even if it was discovered to be fake. The King and aristocrats wouldn’t be able to leave it alone. And if such problems arose then Ark had already instructed Daltin to raise a huge fuss.

‘In order to dispel the suspicions, the King would have to order Sarkin’s mansion to be searched. And Sarkin has no justification to refuse a house search. That would be like admitting the allegations were true.’

This was one of the reasons Ark made the Counterfeit letter. Ark was convinced that Sarkin had the missing tokens. However, it was impossible for Ark to sneak into Sarkin’s house to secure the evidence. Then the only way was to rally the government authorities to search Sarkin’s mansion. If the tokens were found in Sarkin’s house then he would quickly be ruined.

‘But if the token isn’t found at Sarkin’s house.....’

Then it would be Ark in a difficult situation. He would be charged with forgery and blackmail and would rot in a jail cell.

That’s why Ark met with Sarkin before submitting the letter to the King. And Sarkin had removed his subordinates as soon as he saw the letter. Sarkin made some instinctive judgements the moment he saw the letter. And Ark’s conviction became even stronger after seeing that judgement.

‘Obviously Sarkin left the tokens in his house!’

“Y-you.....!”

Duke Sarkin grinded his teeth together and trembled at Ark’s words. Ark just smirked and laughed.

“Shut up you old man.”

“What, what the?”

“Weren’t you the one who started it first? Do you think I don’t know about your scheme with Nagaran’s funding? But you misjudged me. Even if I have to die, I won’t let go of my dirty nature. If I have to die then let’s die together.”

Ark growled and approached Sarkin. Sarkin winced and murmured.

“....What do you want?”

“Now you’re ready for a proper conversation?”

“You seem to be misunderstanding something. The nerves of the nobles are sharp over the problem of dividing the territories. I have no wish to strain His Majesty’s mind with such an ugly accusation.”

As expected from a noble, Sarkin still tried to avoid showing any weaknesses. He thought for a short moment before suggesting.

“Do you want the funding for Nagaran’s military supplies? Will that settle it?”

“Is this a joke?”

Ark shouted with a displeased expression.

“That is a fair compensation that the allied forces should’ve received in the first place. It is a difficult situation because you’re the one who played a trick in the middle. Yet now you think offering it as compensation will settle things? Furthermore, that is Schudenberg Kingdom’s money. Doesn’t that mean you won’t be damaged?”

“The meeting will commence in 1 minute! All aristocrats who haven’t entered yet then please hurry! The King’s Hall will close as soon as the meeting starts!”

Once again the chief director in front of the King’s Hall shouted. A hurried look appeared on Sarkin’s face. This was why Ark used the counterfeit letter to threaten Sarkin before the meeting started. If the cunning Sarkin had time then he would secretly try to hide the tokens somewhere else. However, if there were only a few minutes left until the meeting then he wouldn’t have time to think.

“Then what do you want?”

“If you sign an agreement that you will provide the funds to restore Silvana then I will leave it alone.”

“What, what the? You.....!”

Sarkin’s face wrinkled after hearing Ark’s answer. All the funds necessary to restore Silvana?

Wasn’t it shameful? When considering the amount of money required to restore Silvana, it took a lot more than 300,000 gold. 300,000 gold was just the money required to put out the urgent fire and restore some businesses. Millions of gold were actually required to make sure that Silvana was perfectly recovered. No matter how much influence he had, Duke Sarkin would go bankrupt if he had to pay the millions of gold.

“I’m not crazy. You think I would pay all of that for a fake letter? Okay. It seems like your brain isn’t working. Time is wasting so I’m going to go. Do what you want.” Sarkin turned around like he didn’t care anymore.

Ark felt his heart drop. In fact, forging a letter to threaten Sarkin was just a gamble. If Sarkin ignored it then he couldn’t hand the letter to the king. The reason was simple. If the king didn’t give the order to search Sarkin’s house then Ark would be the one in trouble for forgery and blackmail. It was a very high possibility. And there was no guarantee even if Duke Sarkin’s house was searched. Searching a house wasn’t as easy as it sounded. And Duke Sarkin wasn’t stupid so he wouldn’t just display a dangerous item like the tokens somewhere in the open. It would be hidden in a secret place only he knew. There was no guarantee it would be found by the searching soldiers. Yet Sarkin still tried to negotiate with Ark because of his insecurity. Even if the probability was only 0.1%, there was still a chance that Sarkin would lose everything. So he had tried to compromise. Sarkin tried to leave which meant that Ark had exceeded his limit.

‘If Sarkin leaves like this then I will be the one in trouble!’

“W-wait a minute! My words just now were a mistake. I only asked for funds to restore Silvana castle!”

The distressed Ark hurriedly rushed in front of Sarkin and exclaimed. But that was also a failure. Sarkin instantly snubbed him after Ark showed a weakness.

“I’m sorry but I have no intention of negotiating with you anymore.”

“W-wait. My words just now were also a mistake. As a matter of fact..... y-yes! I just want you to pay the cost of reconstructing the temple that was destroyed during the battle. The 300,000 gold for Nagaran’s military supplies and the cost of rebuilding the temple!”

“The cost of rebuilding the temple?”

Sarkin stopped moving. Ark was talking about the Asyeosu temple which covered the entrance to the secret dungeon.

In fact, the secret dungeon had been revealed to the world so there was no reason for a temple to cover it anymore. However, his pride wouldn’t allow him to leave with just the 300,000 gold provided by the kingdom. The temple reconstruction would only cost 10,000 gold. If it was that much then it wouldn’t be a burden on Sarkin.

“I suppose we can compromise with that.”

“The meeting will commence in 30 seconds!”

Once again the voice of the chief director was heard. Although previously Sarkin was the impatient one, the situation had now reversed. If the door to King’s Hall closed then Ark wouldn’t even be able to claim the 300,000 gold for Nagaran’s military supplies. Ark hurriedly pulled out a merchant’s agreement and scribbled the contents of the negotiations before giving it to Sarkin.

-A Merchant’s Agreement.

<Contractor: Sarkin=Ark>

As a sign of sincerity, Sarkin will pay for the costs of rebuilding the temple in Silvana. The contract will end with the temple is completely rebuilt.

* The above contract will place the moment Duke Sarkin receives the funding for Nagaran’s military supplies from the kingdom.

“Ten seconds left!”

Sarkin hurriedly read the contract and signed it before rushing into the King's Hall. At this time, Sarkin still couldn't imagine what would happen in the future. The results from this single contract were unexpected.

“Huhuhu. Sarkin, you're caught now.”

A smile spread on Ark's mouth as he followed behind Sarkin into the King's Hall.

“Okay. Now I just have to find these at a suitable time.”

Sarkin looked at the 4 gems on the table with a satisfied expression. A golden necklace shaped like a laurel wreath, a bracelet with a complicated pattern made of sapphire and platinum, etc..... They were the tokens which symbolized the territories of the Sinius Principality. That's right. Just like Ark expected, Duke Sarkin had obtained the 4 tokens. He had used his subordinates who entered the war to secretly sneak the tokens away from Haverstein. During the meeting in King's Hall not long ago, Sarkin had obtained one territory with a token and the four vacant territories. He couldn't use the tokens to insist on ownership of the territories immediately but 5 estates now belonged to Sarkin.

“With all these territories, Daltin and Halben will no longer be my rivals.”

The amount of territories and nobles determined Sarkin's influence. And currently 60% of the territories in Schudenberg Kingdom belonged to Sarkin. But Daltin and Halben also possessed quite a few estates. If Sarkin obtained even more territories then there was no faction in the Schudenberg kingdom who was a match for him anymore.

“Ark you fool, soon you will realize what a big mistake you made. You will never be able to set foot in Schudenberg Kingdom again! Hahaha, hahaha!”

Sarkin laughed crazily inside a dark room.

Then a knock on the door suddenly interrupted the atmosphere.

“W-wait a minute.....that’s it. Come in.”

Sarkin placed the tokens inside a secret safe and replied. The door opened and someone came in with a pile of documents.

“What is that?”

“This is the bill from Silvana.”

“Silvana castle? Ah, is that the bill for the reconstruction of the Asyeosu temple? Well, it is slightly unpleasant but if it’s only this degree.....gasp, w-what is this?”

Blood drained from Sarkin’s face as he looked at the bill. He looked at the bill with dumbstruck eyes before standing up and shouting.

“Make preparations! I’m heading to Silvana immediately!”

Ttukttuk, ttukttuk!

The sound of hammering resonated through Silvana. After negotiations with Ark a week ago, Sarkin had suggested sending support funding for Nagaran during the meeting. With Daltin and Halben also supporting the suggestion, the King eventually gave permission. Ark finally got his hands on the 300,000 gold to repair Silvana. The urgent problem in Silvana was food and water! After gathering Rokon’s opinion, he placed the 300,000 gold into repairing the reservoir and the farmlands. After the 300,000 gold investment, the large estate instantly regained its liveliness.

‘But this is only the beginning.’

Ark turned and smiled. He was looking at the workmen gathered. Just like he told Sarkin, he had hired workmen to restore Asyeosu temple after it was destroyed. But the number wasn’t a joke. The workmen that gathered for the temple was many more times that those required for the reservoir and farmlands. Why were so many

people required to repair a small shrine? Ark was hiding a wicked scheme.

“Lord-nim, Duke Sarkin has come from Selebrid.”

Rokon came in at that moment and told him.

‘Huhuhu, he came.’

Ark laughed and nodded.

“Bring him in.”

“Ark!”

Sarkin pushed past Rokon and ran into the office. Ark asked him with a surprised look.

“Eh? Why did Duke Sarkin come all the way to my castle?”

“Y-you bastard.....what is this?”

Sarkin slammed a bunch of papers down on the desk. Ark browsed through the documents before asking.

“What? The bill for the reconstruction of Asyeosu church? Duke-nim came all this way just because of the cost for the reconstruction? Did you forget about it?”

“Who would forget? I’m talking about the ridiculous amount of money!”

Sarkin trembled as he shouted.

-Expense bill for the reconstruction of Silvana’s Asyeosu temple (Labourer Salary: 8, 000 Gold)
--

-Expense bill for the reconstruction of Silvana’s Asyeosu temple (Various material costs: 12, 000 Gold).....

The amount recorded on the bill was beyond Sarkin’s imagination. The labourer cost for only one day was 8,000 gold!

The costs for the various materials consumed in one day was 12,000 gold! Due to various other additional costs, the total bill for one day reached 50,000~60,000 gold. That's right. This was the reason why Sarkin frantically hurried to Silvana.

When Ark asked Sarkin to pay the cost for rebuilding Asyeosu temple, Sarkin had thought that 10,000~20,000 gold would be sufficient. If it was only 10,000~20,000 gold then it was worth paying to get rid of he forced letter. The profit he would get from the territories in the Sinius Principality would recoup any loss. Yet the bill had become this ridiculous. Just one week of work had reached 390,000 gold! Therefore Sarkin had suffered a huge blow after just a week. Ark sounded like he didn't know what the problem was.

"The costs listed on the bill are correct."

"Don't make me laugh! How could the temple reconstruction cost 50,000~60,000 gold in one day?"

"Ah, didn't I explain it to you?"

"What? What do you mean?"

"Rokon, explain it to Duke Sarkin."

Ark folded his arms and looked at Rokon. Rokon smiled and clapped. At the same time, soldiers came in with a big panel. Rokon pointed to a large figure painted on the panel and began to talk.

"Then I will start the explanation. As you can see, we've started the reconstruction of Asyeosu temple. Do you see this black part here? This is the underground dungeon where the Hell River is. We are currently working on purifying the underground dungeon and filling it in."

"What, what the? Purifying and filling in the secret dungeon?"

"Yes, that's right. This is just a small temple. Lord-nim wants to rebuild the temple perfectly. But as you can see here, the terrain isn't suitable for building on. The 60th floor is full of holes. This is also the place where the Hell River spouted up. After getting advice from the Asyeosu church, we decided to purify the earth with holy water and

salt before filling in the underground dungeon.”

That’s right. This was the secret to the huge amount of gold behind the reconstruction. Once again, the earth submerged by the Hell River would be barren for 60 years. Thanks to Ark and the allied forces’ efforts, they managed to stop Nagaran from being submerged but some areas were still affected by the Hell River. That was the secret dungeon.

After being flooded by the Hell River, the secret dungeon had become barren. Even monsters weren’t resurrected in the secret dungeon anymore. Therefore the secret dungeon was an unnecessary space for Ark. The air was dull and dusty like an abandoned place and it caused a bad atmosphere when it drifted up. Therefore Ark had thought about closing up the secret dungeon when repairing Silvana. That idea changed after the problem with Duke Sarkin occurred.

‘I can’t be sure that Sarkin will be 100% ruined because of the fake letter. If I pass the letter to the king and the tokens couldn’t be found then I would be the one suffering. It is best to use the fake letter to obtain the 300,000 gold.’

Ark thought this after hearing the situation from Daltin. But he thought there was something lacking about only receiving 300,000 gold.

‘If I can’t make Sarkin suffer then my grudge won’t be resolved!’

Then Ark thought of the Asyeosu temple. The Asyeosu temple was built on top of the secret dungeon. If he used the justification of the Asyeosu temple then it would also be applied to the secret dungeon. Obtaining salt, holy water and the labour for filling in the secret dungeon will be expensive.....

‘Sarkin will become broke in just one month!’

That was the details of Ark’s brutal plan. That’s right. Ark had asked for funds to repair Silvana and then they castle in order to make Sarkin less suspicious and to pave the way for him to accept the offer to repair Asyeosu temple. In order to amplify the damage even further, Ark had waited to collect the bill for one week before

sending it. Thanks to that, Sarkin felt like he had been hit by a bomb.

‘It is your mistake for trying to touch me.’

Sarkin became increasingly pale after hearing Rokon’s explanation while Ark just smirked. Finally Rokon reached the final part of the Asyeosu reconstruction project.

“.....Around 30% of the 60th floor in the underground dungeon has been buried. If the rest of the cleansing and filling in goes on schedule then the Asyeosu temple will finish the reconstruction in 1 year.”

“1, 1 year? 50,000~60,000 a day for 1 year?”

Sarkin stuttered with a terrified face after hearing Rokon’s words. Rokon made a serious expression and replied in a diffident voice.

“Let’s see? That isn’t entirely correct. That only covers the initial cost of purification so it will probably require more money as the project progresses. The construction expense will be many times more than now. In addition, we have to pay a salary to the priest who is the advisor for this construction.....”

“That is impossible!”

Sarkin shouted angrily. Then he ran to Ark and grabbed his collar.

“It’s a scam!”

“What do you mean?”

“If there are holes in the bottom then just use the money to fill it up!”

“The Asyeosu temple is built on top of that hole. If we want to rebuild it in the same location then there is no choice but to use this method. We’re just following the advice of the Asyeosu church by purifying the earth and filling it in. So how can Duke Sarkin say that the cost of the reconstruction is a scam? I have confidence that I’ll win if I fight it in court.”

“You, you bastard!”

Sarkin shrieked and swung his fist. But his blood pressure became

too high from the excitement and he grabbed his neck as he stumbled. Ark helpfully caught him and said.

“Please be careful. I want you to see the temple when it is completed in 1 year.”

“Ugh.....t-this bastard.....you dare.....”

Sarkin started at Ark with a stricken expression. After a short while, he shook his head and moaned.

“....What do you want?”

In the end, Duke Sarkin recognized his defeat. Then Ark faced the caught Sarkin and made a proposal.

“You who have received the right to reign over the 4 estates at the meeting, please hand me the 4 tokens.”

“What, what the? What are you saying now?”

“I’m not going to force you.”

Ark whispered and laughed. No matter what condition Ark presented, Sarkin would have no choice but to accept.

Ark knew from Daltin that Sarkin’s property was worth approximately 2 million gold. Just one day of reconstruction had already cost 50,000~60,000 gold. If the reconstruction was completed today than 20% of Sarkin’s entire fortune would’ve flown away. If the construction was scheduled to be completed in 1 year then Sarkin would become bankrupt and would have a huge pile of debt. Additionally, if Sarkin obtained the 4 territories then he would have to invest considerable amount of funds to restore them. Under such financial stress and bankruptcy, it was no wonder that Sarkin had high blood pressure. And Sarkin had no way to stop Ark’s construction project. The Asyeosu church was on top of the secret dungeon. Therefore if the temple was reconstructed then the secret dungeon would also be included in it. He was also being advised by a priest so there were no legal problems.

“.....I understand. The construction.....stop the construction immediately!”

Sarkin said with cold sweat dripping down his face while coughing up blood. Thus the construction project which spent 50,000~60,000 gold a day was stopped.

“.....Nobody in Schudenberg Kingdom can deny your achievements this time. For the loyalty and devotion you showed, I hereby bestow upon Baron Ark the title of Viscount!”

A middle aged aristocrat dressed in flashy court robes proclaimed. The aristocrat handed him a golden scroll. After Ark received the scroll, there were some heroic sound effects and the information window appeared.

-You have acquired the 'Peerage Bestowment Certificate.'

The 'Peerage Bestowment Certificate' has granted you the title 'Honour Knight' (Viscount).

Your achievements have ensured that you will go down in Schudenberg's history. As a Viscount, you will be able to take on various businesses.

Currently you can gain the position of knight. If you chose to make 'knight' your sub-profession then you can join a knight corps and serve the kingdom. Whether participating in wars or fighting monsters, you can gain up to three times the fame and achievements if you participate with the knight corps. There is also a larger chance to get missions that will give more achievements. However, if the knight corps are wiped out during the mission then you will receive three times the penalty. Your fame and achievement will be removed and you might even be stripped of the title.

* As a noble title bonus, all stats will increase by 15.

* Fame has increase by 10,000.

* When completing a quest given by an NPC with a noble title, your status (Honour Knight: 1000 people) will allow you to receive the support of the guards.

-You have learnt a new Lord's skill.

As a Viscount, you can form a knight corps on your territory that will be under your direct control. The knight corps formed on your territory will receive the same advantages as other knight corps. However, if you have already become a part of a knight corps then you can't form one.

+ Knight Corps Formation (Lord Skill): This skill allows you to hire users or NPCs to form a knight corps.

Unlike a normal party or attack group, the knight corps will receive an extra morale bonus. When fighting in the territory, a 10% tactics bonus will also be applied. When participating in a foreign war, they will receive 2 times the fame and achievements than regular knights. In addition, you can get a 50% discount when using all public facilities (knight housing, stables, barracks etc.) under the kingdom's jurisdiction. However, the knights must be accompanied by the Lord.

<It is possible to form and control a Knight Corps>

'I hadn't intended this with my scheme.'

Ark's mouth seemed like it reached his ears after seeing the information. Ark had become a Viscount thanks to the 4 tokens.

'In order to stop the Asyeosu reconstruction, Sarkin was forced to yield the 4 tokens to me. It was the tokens which symbolized ownership to territories within the Sinius Principality.

Ark had instantly taken the 4 tokens to the King.

"Oh, you truly are the paragon of a Schudenberg noble!"

The King's reaction was huge. Finding the 4 tokens was like adding 4 more territories to his kingdom! What King wouldn't like expanding his territories by 4 more? Thus the King praised Ark and made him a Viscount. Naturally a Viscount would be given more bonuses than a Baron. He gained +15 to all stats and 10,000 fame! There was also the new permanent skill, 'Knight Corps Formation.' When he formed

the knight corps, he could use public facilities with a 50% discount. However, the real benefit to Ark was something else.

“Congratulations on becoming a Viscount.”

Two middle aged knights approached. They were Daltin and Halben, the head of two of Schudenberg’s factions. Ark laughed and nodded his head.

“Thank you.”

“Honestly, I thought it was impossible when you first suggested it to me..... Yet you really did it.....”

“I heard that Duke Sarkin is sick in bed.”

“It is natural. He lost 20% of his fortune and even the territories were taken away from him.....”

Therefore Sarkin lost the trust of the nobles in his faction. He tried to crush Ark yet he ended up being the one crushed.

Daltin looked at Ark before saying deliberately.

“Wasn’t the plan a little intense against someone of Duke Sarkin’s age?”

“He is the one who touched me first.”

“Scary.”

Ark just smiled and nodded.

“Then you should develop your new territories quickly.”

“Yes, we’re very grateful.”

Ark grinned and nodded. That’s right. This was why Ark snatched the 4 territories from Sarkin. In fact, the 4 territories were useless to Ark. Currently the only place where users could become Lords was in Nagaran. Therefore only noble NPCs could claim ownership with the tokens. So Ark had thought about extorting money from Sarkin as a condition to cancel the contract. But even with the contract broken, Ark had already gained 20% of Sarkin’s fortune. Ark grasped that Sarkin was worth 2 million gold, including real estate

and various other assets. When calculating the cash assets, he only had approximately 600,000~700,000 gold. He had already lost 400,000 so he only had 200,000~300,000 remaining. If he tried to obtain gold from Sarkin then there would be a limit.

‘With how much Silvana is damaged, that would be enough to restore it.’

So Ark came up with the method to sell the 4 tokens.

‘Anyway, Sarkin has given up the right to the territories. If I return the tokens then it would have no choice but to go to Daltin and Halben. If I request 10% of the profit from the territories from Daltin and Halben then they can’t refuse.’

Ark instantly went to meet with Daltin and Halben.

If Duke Sarkin’s plan succeeded and he gained those 4 territories then his influence would’ve completely surpassed that of Daltin and Halben. But now Daltin and Halben could obtain those 4 territories and surpass Sarkin. That alone would be a windfall for Daltin and Halben. Especially if they restored the territories in the future and obtained an income from it. Giving 10% of that income to Ark didn’t matter. The continuous income from the 4 territories was better than earning several thousand gold at once. Of course, the territories in the Sinus Principality were still impoverished but once they recovered then they would be a golden goose. Ark understood this and signed a contract with Daltin and Halben. So Ark’s entire plan had worked as expected.

“Should the three of us go and visit Duke Sarkin?”

“We shouldn’t. What if we really kill that old man?”

Daltin murmured with a sick expression.

“Ark!”

A sharp cry was suddenly heard across from him. Ark reflexively flinched and stopped. 5~6 bloody people were running up a dark alley in front of the gate. Surprisingly, they were Timosi and some Avenger members.

“Ark, I have something to say!”

Timosi breathed harshly as she looked at Ark.

Legend Quest

“What’s wrong?”

Ho Myung-hwan asked as he quickly approached him. Hyun-woo who was sitting in a chair and drinking coffee got up.

“I found out new information and I wanted to give it to you.”

“Information?”

“Yes.....”

Hyun-woo nodded and lowered his voice.

“Before you came here, I actually met with one of the users involved in this event.”

“One of the Avenger members assisting the demons? You met them in New World?”

“No, we met in real life.”

Ho Myung-hwan’s eyes widened at Hyun-woo’s words. Global Exos had been trying to secure the Avenger members involved in this incident. Of course, all their investigations focused on Alan and the Red Man but they were also interested in the Avenger members. In Hong Kong it was possible to backtrack the New World connection circuits but that was impossible in Korea where there were millions of circuits. Therefore this was the first time Global Exos got any information on the Avenger members. Ho Myung-hwan looked around restlessly after hearing Hyun-woo’s words. And he took Hyun-woo to a meeting room.

“Who was the person that Ark-nim met?”

“The user with the ID Timosi.”

“Timosi? Her real name?”

“She didn’t tell me her real name. I didn’t learn that much about her, but in New World it is clear that she has a close relationship with Alan.”

“Alan.....?”

Ho Myung-hwan trembled after hearing the name Alan. Then he considered something and asked in an anxious voice.

“Timosi was the one who contacted Ark-nim first?”

“She visited me in New World and set a place to meet.”

“Why did she want to meet Ark-nim?”

“That.....”

Hyun-woo recalled what had happened in New World a few hours ago.

“Ark!”

Hyun-woo heard the sharp cry in his ear. Then he saw Timosi and 5 bloodied Avenger members coming from an alley in Selebrid. Hyun-woo reflexively pulled out his sword when he saw them. But before he could do anything, the guards flocked towards the chaotic Timosi and Avenger members. Timosi just pulled out a scroll and continued to shout.

“Ark, I have something to say!” Today at 4 p.m. in Yeouido.....”

Timosi said before warping somewhere with the Avenger members. Timosi and the Avengers who had suddenly appeared then disappeared. Thanks to that, Hyun-woo was completely confused. Why on earth did Timosi suddenly want to meet him in reality?

‘Are they planning to PK me in real life?’

He had those doubts at first. But it was strange that they would deliberately risk discovery. Furthermore, the meeting point was in the middle of Yeouido square.....

If there was an ulterior motive then they wouldn’t want to meet in a place like that. After thinking about it, Hyun-woo ended up going to

the arranged meeting place.

“Ark? I can recognize you with one look.”

He heard the voice of a woman after reaching the meeting place. He turned around and saw a high school student.

“I am Timosi.”

He felt annoyed that he had been so anxious about meeting Timosi.

The Timosi in New World and in reality seemed completely different. Her looks were the same but her personality was completely different. While the Timosi in New World was always noisy, the one he met in reality was surprisingly quiet.

“Why did you want to see me?”

“That is.....a request. Please listen to what I have to say.”

“I don’t know what is going on but why should I accept your request?”

“Decide after listening to me.”

Timosi murmured in a testy tone. And Hyun-woo never imagined the words he was about to hear.

The Red Man and Maseutyu had betrayed and killed Alan. Fortunately, Alan who was on the verge of death sent one of his eyeballs in a desperate move. The information stored in the memory crystal allowed Timosi and the Avenger members to escape. However, Timosi and the Avengers were soon pushed into a corner. They had barely escaped the temple but now they had nowhere to go. Timosi and the Avenger members had slaughtered millions of users and NPCs with the demons. Therefore their chaotic value was astronomical and it was difficult for them to even approach a village or city. Now with the Red Man and Maseutyu’s betrayal, they were also the enemy of the demons.

“It isn’t possible.....”

Timosi and the Avenger members realized the reality of their

situation. They had risked standing on the side of the demons because of the compensation. If everything had progressed as planned then New World would become the world of the demons. If it was the demons' world then it would be easy for the Avenger members to gain territories. Alan had also promised a significant amount of compensation in real life. The Avenger members didn't doubt that and joined. However, that was all ruined with the Red Man's betrayal.

".....We're finished now!"

"Dammit, there is no place for us to go in New World."

"But that's not all. We participated in the plan to conquer New World so we will certainly receive some punishment from the game publishers. The whole of New World was rattled so....."

The Avengers sighed and murmured with each other. Their biggest worry was the action of Global Exos. If they won the war as planned then Global Exos wouldn't even dare to touch them. If they conquered New World with the demons then the legal sanctions wouldn't matter. Now that they were kicked out by the demons, they were just mere users causing problems. Global Exos would have no problems prosecuting them even if the demons conquered New World. They wouldn't be able to play the game properly. Now they could only choose one way.

"Should we delete the character information before that happens?"

"But the characters we raised for 2 years....."

'Ugh, there is no other way.'

The Avengers' opinions were that they would rather commit suicide.

"No, there's still a way."

Timosi broken the silence and continued.

"Originally we were going against the publisher. If the plan succeeded then we were confident that we could handle the game company. Even though we've been betrayed, the Red Man and

Maseutyu are still continuing with the plan. From the publisher's perspective, it will be more important to stop the plan than to catch some minor fish like us. And we possess information that the game publisher doesn't know. It allows us room to negotiate."

That's right. Although they looked shabby now, Timosi and the Avengers played a central role in the Demonic War.

In other words, they knew quite a lot of information about the side of the demons. Global Exos would definitely want to know the information. If Timosi used that information, she could guarantee safety (character isn't deleted and no charges) from Global Exos. It was similar to an immunity deal!

"However, we would have to visit the game company directly."

"If we go then there is no guarantee that they would negotiate with us."

"If we use a powerful candidate as an intermediary....."

Hyun-woo instantly appeared in Timosi's head. Whether he intended it or not, Hyun-woo was one of the core people in this event. Hyun-woo knew better than general users and NPCs how big this incident was. How many times did they fail because of Hyun-woo? Furthermore, Hyun-woo's fame rose like a storm after his victory in the Nagaran battle. Global Exos wouldn't be able to ignore Hyun-woo's opinion. But that wasn't the only reason why Timosi thought of Hyun-woo.

"That Red Man.....!"

Timosi had joined the Avenger guild because of Alan. Yet the Red Man had betrayed Alan. Normally the death of a character wasn't worth getting that angry about. However, this time was different. The Avenger members who were killed while wearing the Token of Darkness had their characters deleted. And Alan was also wearing the Token of Darkness when he died. That's right. In New World, Alan was now 'dead.'

"For Alan, I will never forgive them!"

Timosi had no intention of hiding in fear. Even if her character ended

up deleted, she would smash the Red Man who betrayed Alan. And Timosi knew that Hyun-woo was the closest person to that goal among all the users. She would contact Hyun-woo who was in the centre of a storm in order to get the chance to smash the Red Man! That's why she risked danger to enter Selebrid and contact Hyun-woo. The problem was whether Hyun-woo would accept Timosi's offer. But that problem was settled surprisingly easily.

‘.....I can't waste a chance like this.’

Hyun-woo was inwardly delighted after hearing Timosi's words. Anyway, Hyun-woo would benefit from conveying that information to Global Exos. Furthermore, if he took the intermediary role between the Avengers and Global Exos then he would obtain a lot of information he wouldn't know. Hyun-woo could use that information to play a more active role in the Demonic War. And he might be able to get his hands on a black code item. The prize for the 1st ranking in achievements was 500 million won! Recovering the black code item was 1 billion won! He could obtain a cash prize of 1.5 billion won. That's right. Hyun-woo could easily forget a trivial grudge for the chance to earn 1.5 billion won. So he immediately visited Global Exos.

“.....So that's what happened.”

Hyun-woo explained it to Ho Myung-hwan who nodded. His reaction was more lukewarm than expected. Hyun-woo looked at Ho Myung-hwan strangely before continuing.

“I realized it after hearing Timosi's words. The true person behind this event is the Red Man. The Red Man used Alan and the Avengers. It seems like he knows all the secrets in New World.....”

“I know.”

Ho Myung-hwan interrupted Hyun-woo's words while rubbing his cigarette into an ashtray. And he sighed before speaking.

“I also know what the Red Man wants.”

“Huh?”

“To resurrect the Dark Lord. Isn’t that right?”

“How do you know that?”

Hyun-woo asked with a dumbfounded look. That’s right. Hyun-woo heard from Timosi that the Red Man’s goal was to resurrect the Dark Lord. Of course, Alan controlled the demons so he knew this incident was related to the Dark Lord.

However, the situation being related was very different from actually resurrecting the Dark Lord. And the only way to prevent it was to stop the Red Man. But how did Ho Myung-hwan know the Red Man’s purpose?

“In fact, I also received the information not long ago. And I’ve been worrying about whether to consult with Ark-nim.”

“Consult with me? What is it?”

“That is..... It is hard to explain.”

Ho Myung-hwan sighed again before opening his mouth.

“Then I’ll tell you honestly. In fact, the chief of the Planning Department ordered absolute secrecy regarding this matter. However, Ark became aware of the issue after meeting with the Avenger members. No, we have to explain so that Ark-nim will keep it quiet.”

Ho Myung-hwan said.

“Actually, our security agents found the residences of Alan and the Red Man not long ago.”

“You found their homes?”

“Yes, I can’t explain how we found it.”

“So where is Alan now?”

“We’ll talk about Alan later but for now I’ll explain about the Red Man. The perpetrator of the Red Man and the one behind this incident is Park Woo-seong.

“Park Woo-seong?”

Hyun-woo frowned and tilted his head to one side. The name was familiar to him somehow. Ho Myung-hwan added in a heavy voice after seeing Hyun-woo's confused expression.

"He is the one who created the main system of New World."

"The creator.....that's right, I heard that name in the TV commercial before New World was officially opened.....!"

Hyun-woo finally remembered where he heard the name Park Woo-seong. Park Woo-seong had been called the best game designer of this century on the TV two years ago! New World wasn't the only game that Park Woo-seong designed.

Even before New World, Park Woo-seong was known for other online games. Some of Hyun-woo's questions regarding the Red Man would be solved if Park Woo-seong was behind it. The Red Man knew everything about New World and proceeded with his plan. And it was natural that he would be able to control the demons. It was why the Red Man's gameplay transcended beyond that of an ordinary user. It was possible if Park Woo-seong the creator of New World was behind the Red Man.

"Then Park Woo-seong is the Red Man?"

"That's not it."

"Huh? But you said just now....."

".....He is the one who made it. The Red Man is a type of hacking program that Park Woo-seong made."

"Hacking? The Red Man is a hacking program?"

"That's the part I can't explain in detail. Anyway, the important part is that the Red Man is a character that Park Woo-seong created and it is currently active in the game."

"But why would he.....?"

Hyun-woo asked in an expression that indicated he didn't understand. That's right. Why would he do this?

If the Red Man succeeded in resurrecting the Dark Lord then it was

possible to shake Global Exos and gain enormous benefits. So Alan and the Avenger members thought they were betrayed so that the Red Man could monopolize the profit now that it was in the final stages. Timosi also thought like that. Yet the Red Man was the game creator? Then wouldn't the Red Man have major stocks in New World? If New World fell into chaos then he would suffer a loss.

'There must be some other circumstances.....'

Anyway, Park Woo-seong was New World's creator. If he made up his mind to throw New World into confusion then he didn't need trial and error. He knew all the systems of New World. If he connected to the main server then everything would go as he planned. Hyun-woo was thinking that when Ho Myung-hwan muttered in a low voice.

"Originally the Dark Lord didn't exist in New World."

"Huh? What..... Timosi said the Red Man....."

"Yes. The goal of the Red Man is to resurrect the Dark Lord. But the Dark Lord just originally existed as a scenario in New World. The resurrection of the Dark Lord was never supposed to be possible in New World until Park Woo-seong. This means no one can predict what will happen to New World when the Dark Lord is resurrected.

"It can't be predicted?"

"That's correct."

Ho Myung-hwan replied with a heavy look. In fact, Global Exos had browsed through various data that they obtained from the villa. But if the information leaked then it would cause chaos in New World. Therefore Ho Myung-hwan had to be careful about every word.

"Then Ark-nim, please connect the user Timosi to outside."

"Connect? You will accept Timosi's offer?"

"We honestly weren't thinking about taking legal action against them. Even if we had such aims, that isn't possible now. It is important to track the Red Man's movements so we need information of every Avenger member."

“You want information from the users involved in the Avenger guild?”

Hyun-woo tilted his head to one side. Timosi said most of the Avengers had already died. Thanks to the Token of Darkness, their characters were completely deleted. Now those users were completely removed from this event. So why was information needed from them.

“Are you considering laying charges against them?”

“Didn’t I already say we aren’t planning to do that?”

“But why do you want their information if you don’t want to sue them?”

“That.....”

Ho Myung-hwan struggled for a while before replying.

“Actually, a problem occurred while searching for Alan.”

“A problem? There’s another problem?”

“..... Currently Alan is in an unconscious state.”

“Huh? U-unconscious?”

Hyun-woo asked with a dumbfounded look. Ho Myung-hwan rubbed his forehead like he had a headache.

“We’ve recovered Alan’s unit but it is possible that he might have used an illegal program to join this event. The Token of Darkness that deleted their characters is a type of hacking item. The Token of Darkness clashed with the illegal program stored in Alan’s unit and caused the current problem. This is our opinion after some investigation. Then there is a possibility that other Avenger members have experienced the same thing.”

Therefore Global Exos entered an emergency state. Of course, Global Exos’ biggest problem was to stop Park Woo-seong and the Red Man. But if more users fell unconscious like Alan then it would be a huge problem. Although they were unconscious, they could die from the slightest slip and then Global Exos would become

responsible. A user dying from the game. The backlash from that would be enough to close down New World.

‘What the hell is going on?’

It was a problem Hyun-woo never realized would happen. The Red Man’s identity was the game creator Park Woo-seong.

Alan who worked with Park Woo-seong was in an unconscious state. Why did he feel like he had suddenly become entangled in a huge conspiracy?

“People’s lives are at stake. The Avengers are a secret society so wouldn’t they contact each other offline? Currently their characters are deleted so the fastest way is for Timosi to get in contact with them.”

“I understand. We decided to meet in New World after speaking with Global Exos so I will connect to the game and let you know the situation.”

Hyun-woo answered immediately. This problem concerned other people’s lives. But while Hyun-woo was standing up from his seat, he suddenly flinched and stopped. Too much had happened in a short period of time and there was still a question that hadn’t been answered.

“Why is Park Woo-seong doing this? Do you know?”

Ho Myung-hwan worried over the question for a while before extending an object that was hanging on a string. It was a nail-sized flash drive. Ho Myung-hwan pressed the flash drive into Ark’s hand and spoke in a heavy voice.

“This is a copy of the data obtained from Park Woo-seong’s villa. Like I said a while ago, the chief of the Planning Department ordered the information to be locked down tightly. I’ve been continuously worried so I copied the files. But.....Ark-nim knows about this incident and has experienced more than any other user. If this information will help you stop the Red Man then it is better than you not knowing.”

It was like an information window floated in front of Ark.

-Hyun-woo has obtained Park Woo-seong's Data file.

"I-is that true?"

The Schudenberg King asked in a quivering voice. And the Dark Elf surrounded by 10 guardsmen nodded.

"That's right."

The King seemed to deflate like a balloon the moment he heard those words. At the same time, the dozens of nobles packed into the King's Hall fell into a state of panic.

"Oh my god, our concerns were true after all....."

"We thought the demons have been driven from the Sinius Principality and now....."

"What are we going to do now?"

"Everyone please stay quiet!"

A heroic voice was heard from among the nobles. The voice had come from Marquis Daltin. Daltin turned his eyes to the man standing next to the Dark Elf.

"Lord Ark, can we believe the Dark Elf?"

"Timosi is a mole I planted on the side of the Red Man shortly after the Demonic War started. Until her true identity was revealed, she managed to stay next to the Red Man and see all his plans."

Ark surveyed the nobles gathered inside the King's Hall and replied. This was the best thing Ark could do. Ark's thoughts had been complicated after returning from Global Exos. The Red Man's identity, Alan falling unconscious..... His work inside the game was gradually growing. Ark found it difficult to grasp how he should feel about the situation.

'Let's put it in order step by step.'

Ark whispered to Timosi as soon as he connected to the game. And

he told Timosi who was hiding near Selebrid what Ho Myung-hwan told him. Global Exos promised not to legally punish them if Timosi handed over all their information. That information was the Red Man's plan.

-The Red Man occupied the Sinius Principality because of the preparations required to revive the Dark Lord. After obtaining the heart filled with the magic of the devil, the Red Man's plan is now in the final stages. That's why they withdrew from the Sinius Principality.

-Then the preparations for resurrecting the Dark Lord have already ended?

-Yes. When the ceremony starts then the Dark Lord will be resurrected after a few days.

Ark felt his heart drop at the Timosi's words. Originally the Dark Lord didn't exist in New World! If Park Woo-seong tried to resurrect the Dark Lord then he would now exist. Park Woo-seong's plan of resurrection the Dark Lord wasn't a joke anymore. He must have a goal. And whatever his goal was, it wouldn't have a good effect on New World. Park Woo-seong dared to take on Global Exos for that purpose.

'There is no guarantee what will happen to New World once the Dark Lord resurrects!'

It was a tremendous threat to Ark. Lancel village, Silvana and the proceeds from the territories in the Sinius Principality.....all the time Ark had invested over the 2 years in his achievements in New World.

'I have to do whatever it takes to stop him!'

However, Ark couldn't stop the Red Man by himself. The Red Man was leading millions of demons. Furthermore, he was moving into the final stages of his plan so he would concentrate all his power and forces in one place. The only way to stop the Red Man was to gather the strength of all the NPCs and users in New World.

'If the Red Man restores the Dark Lord then it will be too late. I have

to quickly collect the users and NPCs to stop the Red Man. But the Avengers are the only ones that know about the Red Man's plan. The users and NPCs are already confused because they thought they won the Demonic War already. Even if I try to raise a fuss, it will be useless.'

That's why Ark called in Timosi. If he listened to Timosi's testimony who was on the side of the demons then the King would have to believe. Ark insisted that Timosi was someone from his intelligence network to account for her chaotic status and to make her claim more convincing. But the method he chose seemed a bit too extreme.

"If all the preparations have been finished.....The Dark Lord will really resurrect?"

Ark had hoped to take measures to prompt the nobles into action. However, the nobles were just caught by their fear and everything was a mess.

"Will making such noise stop the Dark Lord from resurrecting?"

Daltin frowned and yelled at the nobles. Then he turned back to Timosi and said.

"How many days remain until the Red Man resurrects the Dark Lord?"

"I don't know."

"Where is the place that the Red Man will start the resurrection?"

"I don't know."

"Do you know anything?"

"Damn, how am I supposed to know? The Red Man was planning to betray us so of course he wouldn't tell us all of his plans. I thought the resurrection was taking place at the dark temple until a while ago.

Timosi shouted angrily.

“The dark temple?”

“I’ve already checked that place. But they have already left.”

Ark replied to Daltin’s question. In fact, this was his biggest problem. After hearing Timosi’s information, Ark had instantly contacted Haverstein. In this current situation, finding the location of the Dark Lord’s resurrection was the top priority. The temple Timosi escaped from was located in the centre of a mountain range in the Sinus Principality. So he asked the expedition to quickly check the temple while returning from the Sinus Principality. But the search party Haverstein sent determined that the temple was empty. This meant the resurrection ceremony wasn’t taking place at the temple. Daltin muttered with a disappointed voice.

“So we don’t know the place where the Dark Lord is going to be resurrected?”

“There is a way to find out.”

“A way to find out? How?”

“.....It will arrive soon.”

Ark murmured in a low voice. Then something happened outside the King’s Hall and 10 people poured in. They were wearing white hoods and accompanying a woman wearing white armour. They struggled against a barrier of guards and shouted.

“Ark-nim!”

“Your Majesty, tell the guards to stand down!”

“Yes, all guards withdraw!”

The King waved his hand and shouted, causing the guards to salute and withdraw. That’s right. This was the method Ark used to figure out the whereabouts of the Red Man. Lariette and the prophet clan. After Ark requested the temple search from Haverstein, he asked Lariette and the prophet clan to find information about the resurrection ritual in the History Crystal. The History Crystal contained all the information about New World so some remnants of

the resurrection ritual might still remain from the Dark Century. Since the temple was empty, he had no choice but to rely on the History Crystal.

“Lariette-nim, did you check it?”

“The History Crystal doesn’t contain any information about the Dark Lord.”

Lariette answered while gasping.

“But we can guess where the resurrection will take place.”

“You can guess the location?”

“When we arrived at Shangri-La, the Truth Crystal was violently unstable.”

One of the prophet clan members came to the front and explained. The Truth Crystal revealed the will of the Creator. Using this, the prophets could see the past, present and future of New World. But when Lariette and the prophet clan arrived at Shangri-La, something rose in the Truth Crystal.

“It was an island emitting unimaginable amounts of dark energy. It is clearly a revelation that the Dark Lord will appear on this island in the foreseeable future.”

“Do you know where that island is?”

“I know. It is an island called Kwarian.”

“Kwarian?”

The bishop standing next to the King burst out after hearing the prophet’s answer. He staggered like he received an impact and muttered.

“Oh my god, I should’ve known earlier.....”

“What do you mean?”

“Kwarian.....it is an island from the Bible. After gathering the power of the universe together, this holy island was the first place that the

Creator stepped foot on in order to create this world..... In the Bible, this island was called the beginning and end of the world. If an existence that wanted to destroy the world was revived.....then the only possible location is Kwarian.”

“Your Majesty!”

Daltin kneeled down and shouted. The King’s Hall that was wrapped in silence suddenly seemed to awaken. Dozens of nobles kneeled down simultaneously and repeated.

“Your Majesty!”

It was clear what their behaviour meant. The King looked at the nobles and smacked the arm of the throne with his fist before getting up.

“Listen. Based on the reports just now, it is clear that the continent is on the brink of ruin. This doesn’t just apply to the residents of the Schudenberg Kingdom. This is an existence which threatens the whole world. I proclaim as the Schudenberg King. Summon all warriors who have stepped foot on this land! Also request for the total mobilization of warriors from the Bristania Kingdom!”

“As you will!”

The shout echoed like a bomb through the King’s Hall. At the same time, there was the beating of drums and the quest renewed.

-The quest has been updated.

Expedition Army’s Crusade= The Dark Lord (Legend Quest)

Despite the efforts of millions of people, the continent is facing its worst crisis. The Dark Lord who will drive this world to ruin is preparing for his resurrection. If the Dark Lord is resurrected then this world can only groan with despair and grief. The living and dead will become reversed and a hellish poison will emerge that will poison the earth.

The Schudenberg King has decreed a mobilization of all the troops on the continent. This is a message of salvation that transcends all

the barriers of borders and species. It doesn't matter whether you are brave warriors with hearts of steel or saints who preach the divine will! This is the last crusade to protect the world!

This crusade will become a legend!

<Difficulty: S++ Quest Restriction: Level 300 or more>

<All users over level 300 will be forced to accept this quest>

'That's it!'

Ark's chest pounded after he confirmed the quest. Now the whole continent would move to prevent the Dark Lord's resurrection.

'But the person we need to stop is New World's creator, Park Woo-seong!'

That's right. The Legend Quest was just the beginning. The Red Man would use every method possible to resurrect the Dark Lord. Even if the whole continent was rallied, there was no guarantee that they could stop the creator of New World.

'However, this is a war that can't be avoided!'

It was the will of everybody who lived in New World.

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

The quest proceeded like a rapid stream.

"Find out the exact location of Kwarian!"

"Move the expedition armies that are returning towards the northeast coast!"

"Open all possible channels of communication and request the support of the 3 guilds!"

"Commandeer all merchant ships, passenger ship and war ships, arranging them at the coast!"

"Acquire all necessary munitions from each territory!"

Dozens of communications spread throughout the continent. It was determined that Kwarian was hundreds of kilometres off the northeast coast of the continent. So the king ordered all ships to move towards the east coast. The expeditions that were returning home would head to the northeast coast where they would board the boats to reach Kwarian. Meanwhile, all the regular soldiers and users who reached the requirements were summoned. However, most of the regular soldiers and high level users were already fighting in the expeditions. The amount of troops left didn't really amount to anything. In addition, most of the general users didn't know it was a life or death situation for New World. They just thought another quest was triggered. So they weren't desperate like Ark.

"6,000 troops were gathered in 10 hours..... When joined with Dark Eden, there are only 10,000 soldiers."

Ark sighed after hearing JusticeMan's report. Another sigh naturally emerged after looking at the thousands of users gathered. Of course, the Schudenberg and Bristania expeditions had already left for Kwarian. 140,000 people had entered the combined armies and when considering the NPCs that died in battle, 100,000 were left. However, the number of demons that occupied the Sinius Principality was many times that. They had retreated so there was sure to be many more demons at Kwarian since it was the final battle. Furthermore, he wasn't only concerned about the troops.

After the Legend Quest was triggered, Ark had visited the Magic Institute in Selebrid. It was in order to contact the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute and ask for help. After the communication to the Grandmaster was connected.

-Well, the Magic Institute will have to cooperate if this is the situation. But will soldiers alone be enough?

Ark couldn't understand the Grandmaster's question. However, he soon realized the meaning after the Grandmaster transmitted a video. The video showed a huge flying stingray in the sky. It was the aerial fortress Rwigenberg!

-This is a video taken by a hot air balloon that the Magic Institute dispatched to check the situation in the Sinius Principality. The hot air balloon was destroyed soon after it sent the video. It is probably because the demons were up to something.

The Grandmaster emphasized in a serious voice.

-As you know, Rwigenberg is just like the stomping ground of the demons. There is no doubt that Rwigenberg will also be there on the day of the Dark Lord's resurrection. And Rwigenberg is the aerial fortress that countless allied forces couldn't defeat during the Dark Century. There is no way we can take measures against the aerial fortress with just soldiers.

This was the reasoning behind the Grandmaster's question.

-I'm also aware of that.....

Ark sighed and replied. In fact, Ark was the first person who knew about the existence of the Rwigenberg in New World (aside from the Red Man). Of course Ark would think about the Rwigenberg. Ark had started preparations as soon as he obtained the information about the Dark Lord's resurrection.

'The question is whether it will make it in time.'

That's right. The countdown to the Dark Lord's resurrection had already begun. Ark felt like he had started preparations too late But Ark had no other choice. Ark explained what he was thinking and the Grandmaster replied.

*-That's right. You've also thought about the general principles. Then let me help with the preparations. I will immediately dispatch the engineers from the closest branch of the Magic Institute. And.....
The Grandmaster smiled subtly before continuing.*

-I will send you a gift in the near future.

-A gift?

-You don't need to know now.

-Then the Magic Institute will support the troops?

-When you receive my gift then the answer will be obvious.

The Grandmaster said before he broke the communication. Anyway, the Grandmaster seemed to accept that the problem was serious. His answer didn't seem definite but he seemed to be supporting the troops. However, Ark was worried because the Magic Institute didn't contact him after that.

"Even if the Magic Institute sends magicians as support, it will be hard with these numbers."

Ark sighed as he looked at the troops in front of the castle. Only 10,000 people gathered for a battle where the destruction of New World was at stake? Even if the 'thing' Ark prepared was ready in an hour, it wouldn't work with these numbers of troops. If he had more time then he could gather more troops. If he revealed the information through the TV then it would gather more users. However, there was no time to even do that. There was no knowing when the resurrection ceremony would begin.

"If they move then....."

Ark had desperately contacted some potential troops but they hadn't replied yet. Then one of the soldiers jumped and shouted.

"Viscount Ark-nim, tens of thousands of soldiers are looking for you!"

The soldier reported to Ark who hurriedly moved to them. There were a huge amount of soldiers in front of the Selebrid gates. When Ark appeared outside the gates, 11 users walked out from among the soldiers. He knew their faces. Aramis, Saruman, Pejito, etc. They were the leaders of the allied forces who participated with Ark in defending Nagaran. That's right. Ark had requested help from Nagaran's allied forces.

"Y-you came!"

Then the soldiers raised their fists to their chests and shouted.

"The 4,800 members of the Aramis alliance under Lord Aramis of

Radon have gathered in honour of Ark, the leader of Nagaran's allied forces!"

"The 5,200 members of the Golden Cross alliance under Lord Saruman of Beiku has gathered in honour of Ark, the leader of Nagaran's allied forces!"

"The 4,900 members of the Union alliance under Lord Pejito of Gurana have gathered in honour of Ark, the leader of Nagaran's allied forces.....!"

"The alliance leader?"

Aramis instantly smiled after seeing Ark's stunned expression.

"To be honest, I have no interest in this crusade but it is the request of Ark-nim who protected Nagaran. So I consulted with the other lords and we decided to form a new alliance to enter the war. Isn't it obvious that Ark-nim would be the leader since you are the reason we entered the war?"

"B-but....."

"Arguing is useless."

"The only person who can lead this alliance is Ark-nim who brought us to fighting during the Nagaran battle."

"If you don't agree to become the alliance leader then we will take back our investment in Silvana."

Ark could only stare as he heard Saruman and Pejito's words. Ark had never received the trust of so many users like this. But their kindness and trust were a huge burden. Now wasn't the time to be flooded with sentiment.

"I understand. And.....thank you."

"We've discussed it."

Suddenly 4 nobles approached Ark. They were the Schudenberg King and Daltin, Halben and Sarkin, the head of the three factions. Ark immediately kneeled after receiving a glance from the King. The

King pulled a shining sword from his waist and laid it on Ark's shoulder before proclaiming.

"In the name of the Schudenberg King, I name Viscount Ark the commander of Schudenberg's 2nd expedition army!"

Ark's eyes widened as he heard the King's words.

"Commander of the 2nd expedition? Me?"

"We decided with His Majesty after a consultation. You have numerous achievements in the Demonic War and you are also the one who brought us important information about the Dark Lord's resurrection. You are the only person suitable to become the expedition's commander."

Ark made an embarrassed expression as Daltin patted his shoulder after saying those words. Then Halben also touched Ark's shoulder and said.

"And 60,000 soldiers in the 2nd expedition already recognize you as the leader. Who else would be able to become the commander after that?"

However, Sarkin who Ark scammed (?) just turned his head away and didn't say anything. How could he oppose the decision when the Kin, Daltin and Halben all agreed? Anyway, there might be 70,000 people in the expedition army but 64,000 of them already followed Ark. Ark was already the commander. There was no reason to refuse.

"I understand. I will do everything possible to stop the Dark Lord's resurrection."

"Waaaaahhhhh!"

"Cut down the demons!"

When Ark bowed and nodded, the shouts of 60,000 people rang out through Selebrid. At the same time an information window appeared.

-You have become the commander of Schudenberg's 2nd expedition army.
--

As the commander, all the troops will be under your command and will obey your strategies. Whenever the expedition army gains some achievement, bonus fame and achievement points will be given to the commander.

However, if the battle ends in a loss then all fame and achievements gained will be destroyed.

“Let’s quickly head towards Reuben to depart on the boats.”

“Yes. There is no time to delay. Advance!”

The 70,000 troops began moving at Ark’s command. He didn’t know when the resurrection ceremony would begin so there was no time to waste on marching. Ark divided the soldiers into units of 300 people and moved them to Reuben using the Letter Movement. Even when using Letter Movement, transferring 70,000 troops consumed a few hours. After he moved 50,000 troops to Reuben.....

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Suddenly there was a huge roar and the whole earth shook. The sky turned black and a deep red warning message appeared.

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord’s resurrection ceremony has begun!

Time remaining until the Dark Lord’s resurrection: 72 hours>

“U-unbelievable.....!”

Ark’s face turned gloomy after seeing the warning. The expedition army hadn’t even all gathered at Reuben yet. Furthermore, Kwarian was 1,000 kilometres from Reuben. It would take several days to get there by boat. It would take even longer if the waves became rough from the resurrection ceremony. However, the remaining time was only 72 hours?

“Is it too late?”

Ark muttered desperately.

“O-over there!”

“Huk! what, what the? That is?”

A soldier who was looking at the sky muttered in a puzzled voice. Ark reflexively lifted his gaze and his eyes brightened.

A large shadow was approaching in the sky. A giant air balloon was approaching. And underneath the air balloon, dozens of ships of staggering proportions shone. Flying in the lead was a huge silver airship.

“The Silver Arrow!”

That’s right. It was the Magic Institute’s Silver Arrow! The air balloon approached and landed in Reuben. At the same time, the Silver Arrow’s deck opened and dozens of soldiers emerged and formed a line. Someone wearing an admiral’s hat walked past the soldiers and arrived in front of Ark.

“Y-you.....”

Surprisingly, Ark knew the face of the man. He was the bosun from the Silver Arrow when it crashed in the war to defend Jackson, Jabel!

“I am Admiral Jabel from the Magic Institute. We have 30 airships like the Silver Arrow. And 500 hot air balloons. Under the name of the Grandmaster, I will now transfer command to Lord Ark. I am honoured to fight together in this crusade!”

Jabel saluted after handing him a document. Then he added.

“The Grandmaster wants to ask if you like his present.”

That’s right. This was the gift that the Grandmaster was referring to. The airships that the Magic Institute had invested huge funds and several years to create!

“..... Tell him that he is the best.”

“If I live and return then I will tell him.”

Jabel laughed pleasantly before turning and shouting.

“I have now transferred command of the airships to Ark-nim. Hurry and allow everyone in the expedition to board. The destination is Kwarian. The place where the Dark Lord is being resurrected!”

“Ohhhhhh!”

The crew of the airships simultaneously cheered.

Pendragon

Kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang!

The violent roar shook the atmosphere. Thousands of flashes exploded in the sky. A large number of flying objects were revealed by the flashes.

“I guessed but.....”

Ark murmured as he involuntarily swallowed his saliva. Using the airships from the Magic Institute, Ark and the 70,000 expedition members flew across the sea. Since the Dark Lord's resurrection had begun, the sky and water were unstable like angry beasts. However, the airship used the magic engine to separate the wind and flew steadily through the sky. And after two days had passed.

“There is Kwarian!”

An island appeared in the water. It was the island called Kwarian where the Creator stepped foot on to create this world! When the airships entered the area near Kwarian Island, a warning message instantly appeared in front of the expedition force.

-You have entered the sphere of influence of the 'Jin Demons!'

The Jin clan are one of the rulers of hell and their presence in middle earth has distorted the area. The distortion of this space thanks to the 'demonic' influence has corrupted the environment and turned it into a hell space. If more powerful demons appear then the sphere of influence will become stronger.

<The abilities of all players within the Jin Demons' sphere of influence will decrease by 20%. On the other hand, all monsters that have been changed by the demonic influence will have their stats increase by 20%>

As expected, Kwarian was enclosed in a dark aura. It was like the whole island was covered in a black veil and the outline couldn't even be seen properly. And the mountain peaks in the centre of Kwarian soared towards the sky. Red flashes appeared around a long pole stuck there. And a huge stingray with a castle on its back floated in the air. It was the Dark Lord's aerial fortress, Rwigenberg. Then a magician aboard the Magic Institute's Silver Arrow murmured in a quivering voice.

"A huge amount of magic is concentrated on the large castle on the back of the stingray. There are at least 10 million units of magic energy..... That amount of magic alone can completely blow up the island. Furthermore, the magic energy is still increasing. If it continues like this then it will surpass 100 million units in a few days. That is enough to blow up the whole continent....."

It would be like the continent was repeatedly hit by a nuclear bomb. But that wasn't the urgent problem right now. It was the message window that was blinking continuously in the right corner that tightened his nerves.

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony has begun!

<Time remaining until the Dark Lord's resurrection: 18 hours>

That's right. The Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony had already been ongoing for 2 days. Now Ark only had 18 hours left to save New World.

'Fortunately the 1st expedition had arrived first.'

Ark looked down at the waters surrounding Kwarian. When the airships arrived, an intense naval battle was already occurring with the demons. The Bristania expedition and Schudenberg's 1st expedition had moved to the northeast coast of the Sinus Principality and arrived first.

"Launch!"

Kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang!

Huge amounts of artillery from the ships flew across the sea. The sea continuously exploded and thousands of demons were torn apart. However, there were no signs that the demons present in the waters surrounding Kwarian were reduced at all. Meanwhile, demons called Karadon the size of elephants with sharp horns ignored the bombardment and just headed straight to the ships. When the horns stick in the ship, the enormous vessel was turned upside down.

“Throw a hook and seal their movements!”

“Use magic and harpoons to stop the demons from approaching the ships!”

Magic, arrows and various weapons poured from the ships. The few ships used a joint operation to grab the Karadon and bombarded them. Explosions occurred all over the body and the Karadon became like a tattered rag. But while they were taking care of the Karadon, dozens of lizard like demons swarmed and one ship sank. Hundreds of soldiers fell into the sea and were slaughtered by the demons. The water ran with the blood of the soldiers and demons, making it completely different from the original sea. Despite arriving at Kwarian for almost a day, the military expeditions were being pushed back from Kwarian rather than landing on the island. If this continued that the 1st military expedition would be wiped out in one day! Ark confirmed the situation from the sky and shouted.

“Admiral Jabel, hurry!”

“I understand. All magic engines to their maximum output!”

“The magic engines are working at their maximum output!”

The crew busily ran around the deck after receiving Jabel’s order. At the same time, the airships and hundreds of hot air balloons shot across the darkness. They quickly narrowed the distance and arrived at the screaming battlefield.

“Now, let’s show the demons the power of the Magic Institute’s airships. All airships prepare for battle! Prepare the Spear of Thor on all airships!”

There was a mechanical sound and the doors for the gunports opened simultaneously. And showed gun barrels that looked like a sharp spear. It was a magic gun which shot out condensed magic engine! But that wasn't what captured all eyes. It was a huge trident shaped barrel that appeared on all 30 ships! It was the weapon the Spear of Thor that the Magic Institute boasted about.

"Launch!"

Flash!

The light shot vertically down towards the sea. It was 30 attacks from the airships and 500 shots from the hot air balloons! The demons hit by the light were ripped to shreds. The sea was instantly covered with blood and flesh. And that was just the beginning.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

After the normal gun fire hit, the Spear of Thor exploded all over the place. It was like a lightning bolt had passed by and scratched the surface of the sea. When the devastating amount of energy hit, the sea turned deep blue and sparks spread. Thousands of tons of water were instantly vaporized and turned into water vapour. The demons in the water boiled and swelled like a balloon before exploding. It was enormous damage!

"T-this is.....?"

"Above! The hot air balloons and airships.....it is the reinforcements from our home kingdom!"

"R-reinforcements! It is reinforcements!"

The soldiers who were in a predicament looked up at the sky and shouted. The morale of the tired spirits rose.

"Okay, this is an opportunity! Exterminate the demons with the help of the air support!"

The soldiers attacked the demons and advanced towards Kwarian. But the demons that died were just the front troops. When the demons surrounding Kwarian ran towards the ship, the entire sea

seemed to move.

“Admiral Jabel, turn towards the expedition force receiving the main brunt of the demons’ attacks!”

“I understand. Turn the fleet 45 degrees to the port side! All 30 airships aim the Spear of Thor downwards!”

Jabel started giving commands after hearing Ark’s words. However, the fleet hadn’t finished their bombardment preparations when a sailor who was scouting around shouted in a desperate voice.

“Admiral-nim, over there! Thousands from the front.....tens of thousands of flying enemies are approaching!”

“What?”

Ark and Jabel turned their eyes towards that direction.

Kaaaaaaa-!

It was the huge Rwigenberg floating in the sky above Kwarian! The Rwigenberg’s stomach split to the left and right. And a large number of demons poured out like an evening shower.

-Kurwarwarwarwa!

A huge number of Drakens and gargoyles flew from the Rwigenberg’s stomach. Thousands of Tallons riding the Drakens and gargoyles covered the black sky and headed towards the airships. The voice of the scout trembled.

“The enemy is 500 metres away from the lead troops! 400 meters, 300 meters.....”

“Damn, aim the guns and the Spear of Thor at the flying enemies!”

Ark shouted after hitting the ship’s microphone. If the airships were swarmed by the demons then they would be destroyed. Now they couldn’t afford to support the naval battle. The airships changed the angle of their weapons.

“Launch!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

At the same time, the Spear of Thor shot out lightning bolts. The enormous light shot through the darkness and tore through the Drakens and gargoyles. Thousands of demons were hit by the guns while the Spear of Thor swallowed 100 monsters each. At least 1,000 demons turned to ash and fell into the sea. However, more Drakens and gargoyles just appeared.

“Ugh, they’re like cockroaches! Everybody deploy their shields!”

-Bekun, bekun madohoram!

-Kurwarwarwarwa!

Kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang!

The shields were deployed and the hull shook from a violent impact. The Drakens tried to bite the shields while the gargoyles flew around and shot their rays. The Tallons jumped down onto the deck and swung their swords.

“Oppa!”

Then he heard Roco’s voice from behind him. He turned around and saw several Tallons rushing towards him.

“Dark Blade! Riposte!”

Ark pushed the Tallons back and surveyed the battle situation. The airships instantly became scenes of confusion when the demons swarmed. The demons were attached to the magic engine so the ships couldn’t move. Meanwhile the hot air balloons were in a predicament as their shields were being torn by the demons and their allies couldn’t fire the guns in case it would hit them.

“Roco, please start singing!”

Roco nodded after seeing Ark’s worried face and started singing.

‘The airships are surrounded so I have no choice but to deal with the demons individually.’

“Admiral Jabel, concentrate the weapons on the demons approaching the front!”

“I understand!”

“JusticeMan ajusshi, rehabilitation hyung-nims, face the demons with individual combat!”

Ark yelled as he ran towards a machine lined up on the deck. When he grabbed the handle and pulled it forcefully, there was a roar and it blew up. It was a flying boat for personal battle that the Magic Institute had developed thanks to Magaro’s research.

“Take this. Dark Strike!”

Buaaaah!

Ark flew the flying boat into the sky and swung his sword. The Drakens biting the defense shield shrieked and fell. Then dozens of gargoyles fired rays at him. Ark immediately turned the handle on the flying boat and used the gun mounted on it. The gargoyles that were flying towards him were repeatedly hit. However, the guns mounted on the flying boat only had 1/2 the power of the ones on the airships. And the flying boat shook from a gargoyle’s sharp claws.

“Ugh!”

While Ark corrected the shaky boat, the other gargoyles had caught up. They opened their mouths and fired the rays again!

“Splitting blade of the wind, Wind Cutter!”

“Heroic Strike!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Dozens of magic and attacks suddenly hit the gargoyles and pushed them away. Hundreds of flying boats had arrived behind Ark. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were leading the flying boats from the Silver Arrow. It wasn’t just them. Thousands of flying boats emerged from the 30 other airships. The soldiers from the expedition were taking the flying boats to deal with the demons.

“Bah, I’ll make them pay for Alan! Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!”

Among them was the Dark Elf Timosi. After Global Exos promised not to take any legal actions against them, the other Avenger members stopped playing the game. But Timosi heard that Alan was in an unconscious state and insisted on participating in the war.

“Okay! JusticeMan ajusshi and the rehabilitation hyungs will each take 100 flying boats and form a unit to attack the demons! Each leader should organize their unit with the appropriate amount of professions and attack using the tripod battle formation!”

“Understood. The 1st squadron commander will use the tripod formation in the centre! The other units will unfold the tripod formation around the 1st squadron!”

Thousands of allied users were taking the flying boats. They were the top level users of New World. Of course, fighting using the flying boat wasn’t easy. However, Ark had used the last two days wisely. After listening to the description of the flying boat from Jabel, Ark had made the users undergo continuous flight training while they were moving. Now the users could fly the boats for at least 30 continuous hours. There was the sound of magic engines from thousands of airboats as they moved. After 1 minute, they had made a huge triangular centering around Ark. Ark’s eyes flashed after the formation was completed and he yelled.

“Now show them the skills of Nagaran’s allied forces!”

“Show them the results of our training!”

“Let’s go!”

Buaaaaa! Buaaaaa!

At the same time, thousands of airboats roared and rushed towards the demons. The demons attacking the airships and air balloons started flocking towards the airboats.

-Kurwarwarwarwa!

“Split through the darkness, Ray!”

“Burning steel sword, Blazing Blade!”

“Take this, Arrow Storm!”

Thousands of skills and magic tore through the darkness. There were flashes and flames as the demons and soldiers collided in the dark sky. Dozens of airboats spouted black smoke and fell into the water. And the demons also collapsed and dyed the water with their blood.

“Riposte! Each squadron rearrange their formation!”

Ark pushed back the demons coming from all directions and shouted. The squadrons rearranged their formation and once again fired magic and skills into the sky. After a short time, the number of demons around the airships and balloons were noticeably reduced. The airships and air balloons also continuously fired their guns and the Spear of Thor. The number of demons covering the sky was obviously decreased.

“That’s it. Their numbers have decreased to some extent! Admiral Jabel!”

Ark shouted into Curio’s ear on his shoulder.

“Yes, Ark-nim!”

Then Jabel’s voice came from the mouth of the bat. Thanks to Curio’s Summon Stud skill, they could communicate wirelessly between the bats.

“The momentum of the demons has slowed. Advance towards Rwigenberg!”

“I understand. The entire fleet, advance!”

“Each squadron will escort the airship and air balloons as they advance!”

The ships started to advance towards Rwigenberg at Ark’s command. Ark and the flying boat squadrons took care of the

demons along the way. They had approached within a few kilometres. Suddenly flames rose from the mountain peaks of Kwarian.

“What?”

Ark frowned and fixed his gaze on the mountain. He couldn't tell from far away but he could guess the approximate shape after getting closer. A huge arm was on top of Kwarian's mountain peak. The giant arm was bizarrely twisted with fingers pointed upwards! The fire was spouting from the end of each finger. Ark's face stiffened the moment he confirmed what it was.

“T-that, perhaps.....a scorch cannon!”

That's right. The bizarre arm was a scorch cannon. Two of these cannons had almost destroyed Jackson in the past! Ark knew their power. However, the scary thing wasn't the destructive power of the scorch cannons. It was.....

Ark instantly lifted his head and grabbed Curio's neck before shouting.

“Jabel, we've been deceived! Make the fleet retreat!”

“Huh? What does that mean.....?”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a huge roaring sound and a black flaming mass 10 metres in diameter shot across the space. Jabel's perplexed voice came from Curio's mouth.

“T-that is a flash bomb!”

Jabel keenly remembered the might of the flash bomb. While he was the bosun of the Silver Arrow, the flash bomb had shot down the Silver Arrow while they were on the outskirts of Jackson. Jabel let out a cry of distress from the memory of that time.

“All fleet ships, evade and retreat at full speed!”

But the black mass was already nearing the airships.

Ku kwa kwa kwa kwa, ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The black mass crossed several kilometres. It struck the hot air balloons and flames spouted from the hull. Five hot air balloons and airships received 30% damage. Meanwhile the demons gathered around the ships hit by the flash bombs.

“Drive back the demons and retreat!”

Ark shouted while dealing with the demons. Ark commanded the flight formation and intercepted the flash bombs with magic. However, that could only stop 1~2 bombs using that method. In the end, many hot air balloons were hit by the bombs and went down in flames. Although a few more hot air balloons were shot down, the other ships barely managed to retreat from the range of the scorch cannons.

“Dammit, we can’t approach the Rwigenberg like this!”

That’s right. This was the horrible point about the scorch cannons. The maximum range of the Spear of Thor was 500~700 metres. However, the maximum range of the scorch cannon was 2 kilometres. In order for the airships to attack the scorch cannons, they had to get within 1 kilometre. With thousands of demons interrupting, the movement speed of the airships was slower than riding a horse. If the airships rushed in excessively then they would just be shot down by the scorch cannon.

‘However, there’s no time to hesitate here!’

Ark grinded his teeth as he looked at the blinking message window.

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord’s resurrection ceremony has begun!

<Time remaining until the Dark Lord’s resurrection: 14 hours>

That’s right. There was a time limit attached to the expedition. They had already spent 4 hours here. 4 hours had passed since they arrived and they couldn’t even approach the island. He also didn’t know what difficulties he would face as they continued so 14 hours wasn’t enough. However, the expedition wouldn’t be able to

approach Kwarian if they didn't deal with the scorch cannons. The marine expeditions were also stuck in the rear. If they approached Kwarian then they would become the prey of the cannons.

'There is only one way left!'

"JusticeMan ajusshi, rehabilitation hyungnims, take charge of 10 formations. Plunge into enemy lines!"

Ark turned and shouted. That's right. The only way left was for the flying boats to get rid of the scorch cannon directly.

It had a long range but moved slowly. The airships had slow evasive abilities but a small flying boat could easily avoid the bombs. But Ark wasn't just worried about the scorch cannons.

'The problem is that we'll be attacked by demons.'

Reaching the scorch cannons on Kwarian Island through all the demons wasn't easy. Furthermore, the demons would still be attacking the airships. He had to leave some flying boats to protect the airships and air balloons.

'10 units means 1,000 people.....there is no way they can destroy the scorch cannons!'

"Ark, we're ready!"

JusticeMan's voice was heard from behind Ark. The 1,000 flying boats had formed a wedge formation behind Ark.

"All flying boats will lure the demons to the airships!"

The thousands of flying boats lured the demons after receiving Ark's command. The demons gathered in front of the airships!

"Admiral Jabel, annihilate them using the guns and the Spear of Thor!"

"Yes. Launch!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

A huge flash of light engulfed the demons. 1,000 demons dissolved in moments and the remaining demons shrieked and scattered.

“Now’s the time. The special attack corps will rush towards Kwarian!”

Buaaaaa! Buaaaaa!

The demons have either died or ran away after being hit by that magic shot! The 1,000 flying boats instantly followed the trajectory of that blast. The 1,000 flying boats led by Ark shot forward like an arrow while the scattered demons chased after them. And thousands of demons also rushed from the front. The special attack corps was sandwiched by the demons.

“Don’t pay them any regard and rush at top speed! Demonic Distortion! The target is the monster troops right in front!”

Dozens of cursed japtem rose from his bag. They formed a pentagon and exploding, causing a storm and the position of the special attack corps and the monsters to swap. Once the spatial movement was completely, the demons rushed back and forth with confusion. Meanwhile Ark and the special attack corps increase the distance and rushed towards Kwarian. The scorch cannons instantly fired when the special attack corps narrowed the distance to within a few hundred metres. It was expected.....no, it was the attack he desired. Ark just stared at the approaching flaming black mass.

“The black bomb has a slow speed. Maintain your course until it is 50 metres away!”

So they continued advancing right under the nose of the flash bomb. Ark’s eyes flashed and he shouted.

“Now’s the time. Stop the previous formation and move at top speed!”

At the same time, the 1,000 flying boats scattered. Then the thousands of demons chasing them were hit by the bomb and engulfed in flames.

“JusticeMan ajusshi and the rehabilitation hyung-nims, take 100 boats each and attack a separate scorch cannon.”

“Understood. 2nd squadron, follow me!”

“The 3rd squadron will attach the scorch cannon in the 3 o’clock direction!”

They scattered and flew towards the scorch cannons. A huge crater hundreds of metres deep occupied the centre of the Kwarian mountains. 10 scorch cannons surrounding the surging lava.

“The 1st squadron will attack the one in the 6 o’clock direction!”

Ark led 100 flying boats and flew towards the scorch cannon in the front. The reason Ark chose that place was because it had the most demons. It was the most dangerous place to go! That was Ark’s battle style.

“Attack. Dark Strike!”

“Heroic Strike!”

“Smashing Sword!”

Ark’s 1st squadron surrounded the scorch cannon and used various skills. During the Jackson defense war, he had only managed to destroy the scorch cannon using the Magic Bomb. However, at that time Ark and the other users only had an average level of 60. Now Ark was level 460 and the other users in the squadron exceeded level 350. There were only the 100 magic guns on the flying boats. When 100 people surrounded it, the durability of the scorch cannon quickly decreased.

-Kurwarwarwarwa!

The cannon’s durability had gone down to 50%. Meanwhile the 1,000 chasing demons reached the formation. Ark turned and ordered the flying boat.

“Damn, 50 people will keep on attack the scorch cannons while the other 50 will go with me to fight the demons!”

There was nowhere left to go. The highest ranking soldiers in the Nagaran allied forces were in Ark’s 1st squadron. The special attack corps had to quickly destroy the scorch cannon.

“Demonic Manifestations. Shield, shield, shield, shield and shield!”

It was at that moment. Ark screamed and shields soared out from his bag. They exploded and a giant shield insignia formed over the squadron.

-Demonic energy has been extracted from the offerings (Shield, shield, shield, shield and shield).

The effect exercised by this combinations is 'Physical Shield.'

[Physical Shield]: When Physical Shield is exercised, the centre of a 100 metre space will have its defense increased by 500. The defense shield will have a durability of 1,000. The effect of the shield lasts for 10 minutes or until the 1,000 durability is consumed.

However, the defense shield doesn't move. It also isn't possible to make the same effect overlap.

A transparent shield formed around the squadron along with the message. Almost at the same time, the squadron collided with the thousands of demons.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a violent flash and a huge roaring sound. Once the thousands of demons and the soldiers collided, it quickly became a confusing fight. The demons claws and rays flew all over the place. However, the soldiers also blindly fired their skills and took care of the demons. But it was thousands against 50 people. As time passed, more flying boats spouted black smoke and crashed into the lava. And it became even more difficult to fight against the demons as their numbers reduced. In the end, dozens of demons broken through the defense line and rushed towards the group attacking the demons.

'Damn, we won't be able to hold on much longer. Are they almost done?'

Ark split an approaching demon in half and turned towards the scorch cannon. However, the scorch cannon still had 30% health left. The scorch cannons being attacked by JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members had 10% durability left.

‘10%..... Then the other 9 scorch cannons can be destroyed in 5 minutes. Once the 9 cannons are destroyed, they can join forces to destroy the remaining one and we can retreat! 5 minutes, we just need to endure for 5 minutes!’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

“It’s dangerous, above you!”

A scream was audible over his head. Ark lifted his head and flinched. A flying boat spouting black smoke was falling towards Ark’s head. His body reacted before he could think. Ark increased the speed and reflexing turned the steering wheel. Therefore he avoided a direct hit but the falling boat grazed the side. The flying boat was deprived of its centre. At that moment, Ark missed the handle and was thrown from the boat.

‘Ah!’

Ark turned cold as he became horrified. And everything slowed down like time had stopped. Squadron members were fighting the demons around him. And the deep black sky was passing by. And.....he was rapidly approaching the lava.

‘Oh my god, this is.....!’

Ark reflexively closed his eyes. And he prepared to fall into the lava.

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun hissed from his waist and jumped into the lava.

‘Radun? Why.....?’

Ark burst out with confusion after seeing Radun’s weird behaviour. Then an information window suddenly flashed in front

-Your summon Radun has digested 100% of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian.

Radun’s body has changed after being influenced by the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. When the Alamone grows to a certain extent, it has the ability to master similar skills which belong to

other species. When that power is fully absorbed into the body, it can evolve into a new species.

Radun has completely absorbed the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian and evolved.

‘Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian?’

Ark felt refreshed as he saw the information window. That’s right. Radun had eaten the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian a long time ago and was still digesting it. And his digestion level had been at 95%. It had taken three months to reach that amount. Therefore Ark had expected that it would take another 10 days for Radun to digest it 100%. However, there was a secret Ark didn’t know about Radun’s digestion of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. Just like its name, the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian came from a Fire Draconian. Heat was necessary in order to digest the heart. Therefore the digestion increased when Ark went to a hot location and slowed when he moved to a cold place. It especially slowed when it was winter. It had taken three months for the digestion to reach 95% because he hadn’t been in any desert or volcanic areas. Radun who was suddenly in a lava area had his digestion rate increased at a tremendous pace. When it had reached 99%, Radun had jumped into the lava and the digestion had reached 100%.

‘But.....’

A frustrated sigh emerged from Ark’s mouth. In this situation, there was only a few seconds left before he would plunge into the lava. If the remaining military expedition couldn’t stop the Dark Lord’s resurrection then New World would be destroyed. What was the point of Radun evolving now? Just as Ark was thinking this.

Flash! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Suddenly there was a flash from the lava where Radun disappeared. And a dragon with glossy, red scales flew up.

‘What? There are still demons within the lava.....’

Then the dragon grabbed Ark's collar and flew up into the sky. Suddenly a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-Radun has absorbed the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian and successfully evolved.

After absorbing the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian, Radun has evolved into a new species. The Fire Draconian is a species with the lineage and magic of a dragon. Radun has absorbed the magic and inherited this lineage after growing into an adult.

According to the great power that oversees the Netherworld, Radun will now be named 'Burning Soul.'

Burning Soul

Radun has obtained the biology of the Fire Draconian after absorbing the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. As an Alamone, Burning Soul has gained the ancient characteristics of the Fire Draconian. He can store more items and use more skills freely. In addition, he will learn more skills using his instincts as his experience and knowledge accumulate.

Race	Netherworld Creature	Alignment	Dark
Ranking	Complete Body		
Health	2,000	Loyalty	—
Strength	—	Agility	—
Stamina	—	Wisdom	—
Intelligence	—	Luck	—

* The equipped skills slot has expanded to 4.

* Item storage capacity has doubled.

* Able to transform into 'Pendragon.'

Pendragon: Burning Soul can transform into a dragon called Pendragon.

Pendragon is an ancient dragon that can fly in the sky and shoot

flames from its mouth. No species can match its flying speed and the sacred flames can increase the attack and defense of its master. In ancient times, warriors riding the Pendragons were regarded as the ultimate warriors in battle. However, Burning Soul will consume 20 mana every 10 seconds when he transforms into Pendragon.

* Pendragon's health once transformed: + 5,000

* When mounted on Pendragon, movement speed +1,000%

* Attack and defense of the player will increase by 20% when mounted on Pendragon

"Pendragon? T-then this dragon is.....?"

Kurarara, kurarara!

Ark looked at Burning Soul with dumbfounded eyes. When he stared into the dragon's eyes, Radun's personality shone through!

-Kurwarwarwarwa!

When Burning Soul soared up with Ark, the Drakens immediately came running. Then Burning Soul shook his head and placed Ark on his back. He opened his wings and ripped between the Drakens like an arrow.

At that moment, a dark aura exploded from Ark's sword.

"Dark Strike!"

Pepepepeng, pepepepeng!

Ark's sword tore through the Drakens. Ark's attack and defense had increased by 20% because he was riding Pendragon!

Therefore the damage of Dark Strike increased by 20% and the Drakens fell down.

"Okay. I'll just this momentum! Surviving squadron members, gather around me!"

Ark shouted as he approached the demons on Burning Soul. Then 20

flying boats followed behind him while shooting their guns.

“Follow the Commander!”

Once again a fierce struggle began against the demons.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a deafening cry and the cannon being attack by JusticeMan’s squadron exploded. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-The focused magic used in the Dark Lord’s resurrection ceremony has scattered.

<Time remaining until the Dark Lord’s resurrection: 14 hours>

‘Eh? The time.....it increased!’

Ark’s eyes sparkled as he checked the contents of the information window. There had only been 12 hours left when he checked it a short time ago. But that time had increased to 14 hours after the scorch cannon exploded.

‘Then attacking isn’t the scorch cannons only role! It is used to steer the flow of magic that is gathering at Rwigenberg! If we destroy all the scorch cannons then it is possible to delay the resurrection ceremony!’

Ark was soon convinced of his guess. Every time a scorch cannon exploded, the remaining time increased. When the last squadron led by Yapsab destroyed the scorch cannon, the time had increased to 24 hours. There had only been 12 hours left and now the time had doubled.

‘The magic being concentrated on the Rwigenberg is gathered from two places, the sky and the earth. If the scorch cannons are destroyed then the magic rising from the earth is sealed and only the magic from the sky remains. Is that why the time doubled?’

Ark immediately understood the situation. However, that was the maximum amount of time that could be increased. There was no way

to stop the magic falling from the sky.

‘Anyway, I destroyed the scorch cannons and gained some time. Now the only thing left is for the airships to join the battle and destroy the Rwigenberg!’

“Arrange the formation and all airships join the battle!”

Ark gathered the surviving 800 people and returned to the airships. He used the strong firepower of the airships to melt the remaining demons and advanced towards Kwarian. The fierce battle continued for 20 minutes. The numerous airships and hot air balloons advanced towards Rwigenberg using the Spear of Thor. Ark rode Burning Soul at the front of the formation and shouted.

“That’s it. All ships, concentrate your firepower on the Rwigenberg!”

“Launch!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Thousands of lights exploded from the airships and headed towards the Rwigenberg. And the light caused a blinding explosion as soon as it touched.

“That’s it. Even the Rwigenberg would be damaged with this attack.....”

There was no doubt it would suffer tremendous damage! However, perplexing gradually spread on Ark’s face as he kept on watching the Rwigenberg. He couldn’t even see one scratch on the Rwigenberg. Only a transparent capsule covering the Rwigenberg was lightly damaged.

“S-shield?”

Ark’s eyes trembled. Now there was a shield? Furthermore, it was only lightly scratched after receiving 20 shots from the Spear of Thor that had 1,000 concentrated magic energy? Ark felt like it was a nightmare he couldn’t escape from.

-Kurwarwarwarwa!

Then a huge number of Drakens and gargoyles once again poured from the Rwigenberg. And a huge amount of monsters also appeared in the sea. It was like the last few hours of fighting against the demons were in vain.

“The black obelisks.....!”

That’s right. The black obelisks! Kwarian was the last battlefield chosen by the demons! Obviously countless numbers of obelisks would be driven under the water and on the Rwigenberg. And the strong magic around this place would end up resurrecting the Dark Lord. Therefore the resurrection speed of the black obelisks would be greatly accelerated.

“Unbelievable.....!”

“How many more times do we have to kill these demons?”

“Besides, the Spear of Thor couldn’t break the Rwigenberg’s shields at all.....”

The expedition members muttered and groaned. It really seemed like a scene of despair.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

There was an abrupt roar and the castle on Rwigenberg’s back vibrated. And the walls twisted and started to form a giant arm. The bizarre twisted arms.....! That’s right. It was the scorch cannons Ark had risked his life to destroy. They had suffered tremendous damage just to destroy the 10 scorch cannons. But now dozens of scorch cannons sprang up from the castle! Furthermore, the Rwigenberg was protected by a shield. The resurrected demons and the new scorch cannons!

“Oh my god! T-this is a scam!”

Ark muttered with a groan. Dozens of shots from the scorch cannons headed towards the airships. It was an attack they couldn’t avoid!

‘It is finished!’

Ark couldn’t even think of running away and just stared with dumb

surprise. Then there was an intense storm and dozens of flashes shot from behind the airships. The pillars of light penetrated through the demons and the flash bombs.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The flash bombs simultaneously exploded and the space warped.

“This.....!”

Ark hurriedly turned around. Then a huge flying object was reflected in his eyes. It was a huge land mass covered with thick forests and a white tower.....

“Shangri-La!”

That’s right. The land mass flying through the sky was the land of the prophet clan, Shangri-La. But Shangri-La looked different from before. Giant gun turrets covered Shangri-La in several places.

“Hahaha, the main character always shows up at the last moment!”

A person with a swollen body like a balloon stood on a gun turret and shouted through a loudspeaker.

“Wormer!”

An excited cry emerged from Ark’s mouth. That’s right. This was the plan Ark had prepared to deal with the Rwigenberg! Before Ark had convened the military expedition, he had sent Wormer and the raccoons to reconstruct Shangri-La. While thinking about the Rwigenberg, Ark had remembered that Shangri-La’s defense ward had been able to deal with a large number of flying monsters.

‘The defense ward was made using the magic from the 7 heroes and the 100 warriors. If I make Shangri-La a moving fortress then it might be able to deal with the Rwigenberg!’

His one worry was that the reconstruction wouldn’t be completed in time. And Wormer had contacted him and said that the modifications would take a few days. Ark had almost given up but then the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute had dispatched the airships. And Shangri-La wasn’t the only reinforcements that Ark

prepared. Thousands of shadows also appeared along with Shangri-La. And they fired towards the demons. They were the skyrays holding the Eastern Nation members.

“Good job Wormer! Like you said, the main character always shows up at the last moment! Torrential Sword!”

The one brandishing his weapon and shouting in the lead was Shambala. At that time, 100 armoured ships also appeared in the sea.

“If I’m last then am I the main character?”

The hobbit Sid stood on one of the ships flying the flag of the merchant’s guild and laughed. Flames ignited in his eyes as Ark surveyed them.

“New World isn’t over yet. Let’s go, Burning Soul!”

Kurarara, kurarara!

Burning Soul roared and spewed flames as he flew towards the demons. The airships and 1,000 flying boats followed him. The battle to decide the fate of New World was just beginning!

TO BE CONTINUED

Invade Rwigenberg

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

1,200 W speakers let out a burst of violent sound in Global Exos Planning Department. The bass made it feel like the air was vibrating. It was a storm of sound! However, the staff of the Planning Department didn't care about that sound anymore. Rather than listening to the sound, they were watching the overwhelming images on the 120 inch LED TV. The staff of the Planning Department such as Ha Myung-woo, Kim Gwon-tae and Ho Myung-hwan had been staring blankly at the large TV screen for a few hours. They weren't the only ones staring at the TV. Korea.....No, perhaps millions of people were in the same situation all over the world. The TV was showing the real time battle of the Demonic War at Kwarian Island. Currently, similar images were being broadcasted from 5~6 different channels. Shortly after the Legend Quest was triggered in New World, each broadcaster mobilized to broadcast the combat situation in Kwarian in real time. And a large number of personnel from Global Exos were also monitoring the situation. They were watching the TV broadcast in the Planning Department. However, the Global Exos' Planning Department staff wasn't watching the broadcast comfortably.

"T-this!"

"Damn those demons!"

"The expedition army is being pushed back!"

"Aw, the lead fleet has been wiped out by the demons' counterattack!"

The staffs' faces changed every moment because of the military situation. The outcome of this battle affected a lot of people. If the expedition army failed to stop the Dark Lord from resurrecting then there was no guarantee what would happen to New World. Global

Exos would completely lose control of New World. Then they wouldn't be able to give the normal game service anymore. It was truly a crisis for Global Exos. And the crisis in the workplace was also a crisis for the staff. If Global Exos had a financial problem then they would be transmitted down to the employees. That's right. The outcome of the Demonic War didn't just affect the contents of the game. Their livelihood also depended on it. If New World was occupied by the Dark Lord then the users might not be able to play the game anymore. They might lose their jobs altogether. The Demonic War felt even more urgent to the staff of Global Exos than the players.

"Ugh, three combat ships have sunk!"

"Dammit, we can only look at his situation....."

Despairing voices emerged as they watch the expedition's battleship being destroyed. In fact, Global Exos gave a special holiday for the staff playing New World so that they would join the expedition army. Most of the staff was monitoring them. However, that was only possible if the staff had reached a certain level. The low levelled staff had no choice but to watch the screen blankly. But the military situation was different from their expectations and they became gloomier by the minute. The combined expedition from the Bristania and Schudenberg kingdoms had approximately 100,000 people! They rode the ships and arrived at Kwarian Island. However, the power of the demons present at Kwarian was beyond imagination. There were hundreds of thousands of demons prepared to stop the expedition army! And there was also a huge amount of magic concentrated on Kwarian so their revival speed also quickened. Therefore the expedition was in danger of being destroyed within a few hours.

"Is there really no way?"

"Do we just have to watch the destruction of New World?"

Everyone moaned desperately.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Then there was a flash of light and an abrupt roar from the TV. The spacious office was filled with a lot of light. The staff flinched and lifted their heads.

“Is that.....?”

“There’s no doubt, it is the airships of the Magic Institute!”

That’s right. The airships had appeared in the dark sky! The airships used the Spear of Thor to melt thousands of demons. They immediately began to support the expedition army by air.

“Ohhhhhh!”

The light coming from the Spear of Thor was like a light of salvation to the staff of the Planning Division.

“They’re just in time!”

Ha Myung-woo clutched his fist tightly and shouted. It was the presence of the 2nd expedition force. But after the 2nd expedition force joined, it couldn’t afford to support the naval battle anymore. When the airships appeared, the gargoyles and Drakens instantly appeared from the Rwigenberg. The flying monsters gathered like vultures and the air battle started.

“Damn, the airships have low manoeuvrability so it will be difficult to deal with them!”

“Is it possible?”

The staff once again watched anxiously as several hot air balloons crashed.

Buaaaaa! Buaaaaa!

Then there was the sound of engines and thousands of flying boats emerged from the 30 airships. They began attacking the gargoyles and Drakens in an orderly fashion.

“A-amazing!”

“I didn’t know that the Magic Institute possessed flying boats!”

“The users controlling the flying boats don’t seem to be ordinary either.....”

“.....What on earth? The person commanding the flying boat in the lead?”

All the employees’ eyes were focused on the user who took control of the aerial combat. The user was commanding the flying boat formation and killing demons with amazing skill! Then Ho Myung-hwan in the back jumped up and yelled.

“Ark, that user is Ark-nim!”

That’s right. The user that the camera and the Global Exos staff were focused on in the battlefield was Ark. Ha Myung-woo looked at Ark on the screen after hearing Ho Myung-hwan’s words.

“Ark?”

Of course, Ha Myung-woo had heard the name Ark a few times. But he had always appeared as Dark Wolf in the videos so this was the first time he saw Ark’s actual appearance.

“That’s right, that user.....”

Ha Myung-woo hadn’t become the chief of the Planning Department of a big company at a young age because of luck. He got this position because of his ability to judge the situation and respond faster than other people. Ha Myung-woo instinctively sensed that the core of this battle was Ark.

“Okay, tell all the candidates participating in the Kwarian battle to support Ark as much as possible!”

Ha Myung-woo judged the situation and directed. Well, he couldn’t know how useful the instruction was just by watching on TV. But that was all he could do now. Thanks to Ark, the battle tilted towards the side of the expedition army. The cheat like scorch cannons installed on Kwarian were expected by Ha Myung-woo after hearing about it from several staff members and he watched as Ark annihilated them after much struggles.

“Did you see? Did you see? That is Ark-nim!”

Ho Myung-hwan shouted excitedly as Ark soared up from the lava like a phoenix and destroyed the scorch cannons. Ho Myung-hwan felt a deep emotion for Ark so he had been watching him since Ark was level 150.

“Ohhh, as expected of Ark!”

“As expected, Ark is immortal!”

The Planning Department instantly became excited after seeing Ark’s moves.

“Now, let’s go. Ark!”

“Take out that stingray quickly!”

“If the Rwigenberg is destroyed then it will be the expedition’s victory!”

The staff shouted as Ark finished destroying the cannons and approached Rwigenberg with the airships. But the next moment, their faces stiffened.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The attack launched by the airships hit the Rwigenberg. The Planning Department staff and the millions of viewers thought it was all over. However, the scene revealed was different from their expectations. The Rwigenberg didn’t even have one scratch. Only the transparent shield surrounding the Rwigenberg was scratched.

“S-shield?”

The staffs’ faces became puzzled just like Ark’s. A huge number of demons once again appeared from the Rwigenberg. And that was just the beginning. The scorch cannons that Ark had barely managed to destroy once again reformed on top of the castle walls on Rwigenberg’s back.

“That is ridiculous!”

The staff stared at the scene with shock and despair. Ha Myung-

woo hurriedly shouted.

“Kim Gwon-tae, something.....isn't there another way?”

“If there was another way then would we just be watching this?”

Kim Gwon-tae sighed and shook his head. Ha Myung-woo slammed his fist against a desk.

“Damn, we are the game publisher! Does it make sense that we can only watch New World be smashed? Isn't there something we can do? If only we could stop the Dark Lord's resurrection by hacking the main server!”

“But.....”

The Planning Department staff trailed off. Then Ho Myung-hwan's eyes widened as he watched the TV.

“Team Chief-nim!”

“What?”

Ha Myung-woo was about to shout angrily when he suddenly shut his mouth. A giant object had appeared on the 120 inch screen. A white tower in the centre of a huge land mass was crossing the sky. The giant land mass had dozens of gun turrets installed that fired towards the flash bombs heading towards the airships. That wasn't all. Then thousands of people riding on the back of skyrays shot arrows and 100 armoured battleships attacked the sea demons.

“Shangri-La and the Eastern Nation, the merchant's guild..... They are Wormer, Shambala.....Ark's clan!”

Ho Myung-hwan shouted at the sight.

“Ark's clan?”

“Ark-nim is the centre of his group. But Wormer is the inventor who helped Ark-nim in the Demonic War and he had fought in life and death situations with Shambala. The relationship between them is a little strange but Sid is the one who helps Ark-nim financially and he has a vast amount of influence in the merchant's guild.

“They entered the war to help Ark?”

“That’s right!”

Ho Myung-hwan replied in an excited voice. Ha Myung-woo nodded after hearing those words.

“As my intuition said, the core of this battle is Ark. Wouldn’t we understand the situation more if we closely watch Ark?”

“Ark-nim has a deal with the game exclusive news. While the other stations are also broadcasting this in real time, the game exclusive news will be showing the video taken by Ark.”

“Okay, change to the game exclusive news channel.”

The staff switched channels on the TV at Ha Myung-woo’s command. The game exclusive news was also broadcasting the Kwarian battle as a special story. As expected, they were broadcasting the video Ark took using the eyeball.

“Ho Myung-hwan, watch carefully since you know Ark the best.”

“I understand.”

Ho Myung-hwan answered with an excited expression.

“We…….”

The other staff stuttered as they looked at Ha Myung-woo. He had just been yelling about finding another method while watching the battle and now Ha Myung-woo’s attitude had completely changed. They looked at Ha Myung-woo before turning back to the screen as he exclaimed.

“If you have nothing to do then cheer!”

“I understand.”

“Play, play, Ark!”

The Planning Department staff entered cheering mode.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The roaring sound resounded through the dark space again and again. It was a sound that shook the brain through their eardrums. However, that deafening sound through the video was nothing to experiencing it in real life. The battlefield considered of several kilometres with Kwarian Island in the centre and thousands of flashes covered this space. 1,000 armoured battleships were fighting against the sea demons while the airships were engaged with thousands of demons in the sky. However, the most intense battles were coming from the flying boats that Ark commanded. Ark fought fiercely in the forefront while riding Burning Soul.

“Hmmm Burning Soul, let’s rearrange the formation!”

Kurarara, kurarara!

Then Burning Soul who was transformed in Pendragon spewed out flames and retreated. There was no time to rest once stepping foot on a battlefield. As soon as he left, a flying boat approached him and shouted.

“Ark-nim, the 21st squadron has been encircled by the demons!”

Ark couldn’t take a break as he gave out new orders.

“Tell the 13th and 14th squadron to support them!”

“If the 13th and 14th squadron leaves then there will be no one to protect the hot air balloons on the right side.”

“I know that. But if the 21st squadron doesn’t survive then the demons will penetrate the right defense line. The whole defense line will be at risk. How the hot air balloons retreat and concentrate on rescuing the 21st squadron!”

“I understand.”

The messenger who received Ark’s order turned the flying boat around and flew back into battle. However, other messengers arrived and shouted before the other one had even disappeared.

“Ark-nim, the 8th squadron is requesting support!”

“There is no room to support them at the moment. Tell them to retreat from the front lines and recover!”

“Yes, I’ll communicate the orders!”

The messenger replied before flying back.

“Damn, it feels like my head is about to burst.....”

Ark sighed after looking at the complicated tangle of flying boat squadrons and demons. When looking at the military situation, there were several painful scenes. If he focused the troops here then it would be possible to somewhat improve the military situation. Why couldn’t the Commander see it?

.....That was what he had thought once or twice. In fact, that was the reason why Ark accepted the position of the 2nd expedition’s commander. But he realized it was different once he actually became the commander and looked at the military situation. Of course, this wasn’t the first time Ark was a commander. He had experience in conducting the raccoons in the Underground World and the Baran clan in Seutandal. He also had experience in the siege to recapture Silvana. However, that was in a limited area with thousands of people. This time the size of the troops and battlefield was different. The battlefield was several kilometres of sea and sky and there were hundreds of thousands of people fighting. With an enormous battlefield like this, it wasn’t so simple to give out instructions. He couldn’t afford to worry about one individual or squadron. He had to grasp the overall military situation and make moves according to that.

“A best choice in a large scale battlefield that changes every moment doesn’t exist!”

Ark realized this after commanding the military expedition. In order to minimize serious damage, Ark had to determine when to send reinforcements or when to leave the squad alone. Of course, if he worried over it then there might be another way. However, there was no time to think on a battlefield that was always changing. But there were other reasons why Ark was experiencing difficulties.

‘The important thing in a commander is to quickly confirm the entire military situation.’

However, it wasn't that easy to move the troops. In fact, previously Ark had used a Feather of Whispering to convey the communication to the troops after grasping the situation. But if there were a lot of troops then that was impossible. The reason was because the Feather of Whispering didn't overlap. In other words, it was impossible to communicate with other leaders when he was already talking to someone. If they weren't many troops then that wasn't a problem. But it was different when commanding tens of thousands of people. Moreover, the Feather of Whispering could only be used between users so he couldn't communicate with the NPC captains of the airships. In order to avoid confusion, Ark only used the Feather of Whispering with the major leaders like JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members and used messengers for everybody else. Therefore Ark had to make commands within a few seconds so there was a considerable burden on him.

‘This can't continue. Sometimes he was already too late when he gave the order. If I visualize the military situation in my mind then I can estimate the moves of the demons beforehand. But in a large battlefield like this, the slightest error will cause more damage to the troops! In order to avoid the large damage, I have to willingly submit to the small damage.’

Ark came to that conclusion. For example, if unit A advanced then there was a high probability that unit A would be attacked by the demons. Before making unit A advance, he had to command the troops on the left and right side beforehand. If the demons attacked unit A then the flying boats on the left side would attack and wipe the demons out. He lured the enemy within a certain area and attacked! Those sorts of tactics were effective. If they responded flexibly to the situation then it would be possible to minimize the damage while dealing huge damage to the enemy. Since Ark used these strategies, the 2nd expedition received less damage than the 1st. But in some cases, the demons didn't move as expected and the unit was isolated before being wiped out. He had expected that when thinking of ways to minimize the damage. While Ark was surveying the

battlefield, he had to look at a 3D field consisting of land and air that was several kilometres wide. Therefore Ark felt like his head was breaking.

“Nevertheless.....”

Ark sighed as he observed the battlefield.

“..... The situation isn't good.”

Ark had used a large number of strategies while enduring the headaches but the military situation was still dark. In fact, the situation had improved with the appearance of Shangri-La, the Eastern Nation and the merchant's guild. However, the battle didn't move as expected. The timing was also bad. By the time the merchant ships joined, almost half of the 1st expedition fleet had already sunk. The power was reduced by half. Of course, the sea monsters also suffered a lot of damage but their strength was restored thanks to the black obelisks. If the merchant ships had arrived earlier then it would be different but the 1st expedition had received a lot of damage. It was the same for Shangri-La and the Eastern Nation who were helping with the aerial combat. Shangri-La had interrupted the flash bombs that were heading towards the airships. In the end, the flying boats and the skyrays were the ones taking care of the thousands of enemies. Unlike the expedition, the demons would resurrect once a certain amount of time passed.

“If I don't find a way to change the current military situation then it will be hopeless.”

Ark made a pained face and bit his lip. The best way to move away from this status quo was for the expedition to retreat and attack again once they were in their best condition. If the dead users revived then they could concentrate everything on killing the demons faster than they could revive. Unfortunately, there was a time limit on this battle.

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony has begun!

<Time remaining until the Dark Lord's resurrection: 17 hours>

That's right. The Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony! He had gained some time by destroying the scorch cannons on Kwarian but now there were only 17 hours left. Even if the warriors had revived and were waiting on the continent's coast, there was no time for them to reach Kwarian.

"In the end, I have to somehow stop the resurrection with these troops."

But they were barely able to maintain the present position with these troops. They had to be able to penetrate Rwigenberg's shields in order to stop the resurrection ceremony.....

-Kurwarwarwarwa!

At that time, there was a loud cry and a surge of monsters. He turned his head and saw some Drakens rushing towards him. The 8th squadron had retreated like Ark commanded so the demons had reached the rear.

'Che, these jerks. They don't even give me a gap to think. Burning Soul!"

Ark bit his lip and grabbed Burning Soul tightly. Then Burning Soul rotated his body and fired some skills.

"Dark strike! Dark strike! Dark strike!"

The dark blade penetrated their necks. Pendragon had the special effect of increase his defense and attack by 20%! When he hit the Drakens' vital spot, they lost 20% health and stumbled.

"Burning Soul, this time attack the right Draken!"

Kurarara, kurarara!

Burning Soul turned and grabbed the Draken. The Draken struggled but its smaller body was no match for Burning Soul. The Tallon riding on the Draken lost its balance and fell. But Burning Soul continued embracing the Draken and stuck his claws in its chest. Meanwhile, Ark had stayed firmly on Burning Soul and continuously struck the other Draken with Dark Strike. After a while, the Draken's health

was reduced to 3%.

“Bah, now it is ready to eat. Demonic Seal!”

Ark shouted as he shoved his sword into the Draken’s chest. At the same time, the Draken’s body was sucked into the blade. The black aura strengthened and a message window appeared.

-Shining Darkness has been charged with demonic energy.

<Charged demons: 46>

* Shining Darkness can be used.

“.....That’s it.”

There was a satisfied smile on Ark’s face. Ark had sealed as much demons as possible using Demonic Seal. Of course it wasn’t that easy. Shining Darkness had to be plunged directly into the demon before it could be sealed up. However, that was difficult while fighting in the air. Even so, Ark had several reasons for using Demonic Seal. He could use Demonic Soul when the demon’s health fell to 3%. It was possible to take care of the demons and secure the energy in order to use the skill Shining Darkness.

‘I can’t guarantee what will happen in the future. So I should have a strong special move available. Shining Darkness becomes stronger as more energy is charged so I should gather the energy when there is a chance.’

And there was another advantage to using Demonic Seal. There were a large number of black obelisks around Kwarian. And a huge amount of magic was concentrated thanks to the resurrection ceremony. No matter how many demons they handled, they would just resurrect after a certain amount of time. The black obelisks were on the Rwigenberg so it wasn’t possible to destroy them. However, there were other ways to prevent the resurrection of the demons. That was sealing them into the sword using Demonic Seal! That’s right. Demonic Seal didn’t just kill the demons. It was used to seal the demons within equipment. Therefore the demons affected by Demonic Seal couldn’t be resurrected. Of course, the

amount of demons that Ark could seal was limited. There were hundreds of thousands of demons on the battlefield so Demonic Seal might be insignificant. But if he sealed dozens of them then wasn't that better than killing them?

'If the demons decrease by even one then that will decrease the damage to my allies!'

-Kurwarwarwarwa!

Meanwhile, another two Drakens rushed towards him on both sides.

"Burning Soul, take the left Draken!"

Burning Soul quickly turned and grabbed the wings of the left Draken. Then Ark threw his body off Burning Soul and shouted.

"Summon Demon, Purital. Clad Armour! Hook Explosion!"

At the same time, bones reformed around Ark. And the hooks grabbed the neck of a Draken. Ark was pulled 10 metres towards the Draken. The Tallon riding the Draken flinched and lifted its spear.

-Bakum, bakum, boramarad!

"Shut up! Riposte!"

-Kurama, nohumnira..... Karak..... Kuaaaa....

Riposte pushed the enemy back 10 metres! When Ark perfectly connected Parry with Counterattack, Riposte was used and the Tallon was thrown off. It fell into the sea with a scream.

"Now, shall I check how hard the back of your head is?"

Ark smiled and muttered while on top of the Draken. The Draken started sweating and tried to throw Ark off its back. However, Purital's hooks were solidly fixed on its body and Ark kept on attacking its head.

"Dark strike! Dark strike! Dark strike!"

Pepepepeng, pepepepeng, pepepepeng!

The Draken soon had huge lumps on the back of its head. He turned the Draken towards Burning Soul. He used the Draken to approach Burning Soul.

“Hook Explosion!”

Ark used the hooks to transfer his body. Then something shrieked and a Draken fell down like a lightning bolt above him.

“Ack, what the? Damn, Riposte!”

Ark rotated while flying through the air and used Riposte like mad. The falling Draken was hit by Riposte and wobbled.

-Makum, baramada!

Ark conquered the crisis and barely managed to reach the Draken. The Tallon that was riding the falling Draken shrieked and grabbed Ark's waist. Thanks to the sudden weight of two bodies, one of the hooks fell.

“T-this bastard! Dark Stri.....damn!”

-Baram, kuradara, kuram!”

Ark tried to wield his sword but the Tallon kept on shaking his body. The demon wasn't smart but it was determined what to do in this situation.

.....It intended for both of them to die together.

“Who would want to die with a demon like you? Dammit, go away! Away!”

Ark stepped on the Tallon with his foot but it wouldn't budge. Meanwhile Burning Soul was struggling with the Draken so the remaining hook was also coming loose.

“Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!”

There was a sharp voice and a bolt crossed the space. It hit the wrist of the Tallon holding onto Ark. With its wrist cut in half, the Tallon instantly fell.

“Phew..... I-I lived!”

Ark sighed with relief after the Tallon fell and turned his gaze. The person who shot the arrow was Timosi. She was a solid ally when they were on the same side. When it was an aerial battle, the magicians and archers could exert a more powerful effect than the warriors. And she had superior firepower among the archers! While she was equal to Shambala when fighting on the ground, Timosi was like a fish who met water in the air. While Ark had a hard time taking care of three or four Drakens, Timosi was easily dealt with four or five while also helping Ark. Of course, Timosi wasn't fighting in order to help Ark. She stayed close to Ark because she thought it would be a chance to get revenge on Maseutyu and the Red Man. However, helping him was a separate problem.

“Bah, don't misunderstand. I didn't help you because I'm interested in you!”

Timosi snorted and turned her head when Ark smiled to thank her. What on earth? They were on the same side but she really was a strange woman.

‘Well, if she's useful then her personality isn't a problem. Now.....’

“Dark strike! Dark strike!”

Ark safely got on the Draken and got rid of the Tallon. The combination of Burning Soul and Ark's attacks made the Draken quickly lose health and it was sealed inside his sword. And he moved back to Burning Soul before whispering to JusticeMan.

-JusticeMan ajusshi, what is the situation?

-We've lured the demons as planned.

He then heard the voices of JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members who were leading the 11th squadron. Ark mainly used JusticeMan's squadron to lure the demons for his prediction tactics. Ark's actual combat ability couldn't keep up with JusticeMan's experience. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members showed their skills but continuously luring the demons and surviving.

“Admiral Jabel, turn the airships in the 4 o’clock direction and launch the Spear of Thor!”

Ark shouted into Curio’s ear. He couldn’t use the Feather of Whispering to talk to NPCs. Therefore Ark used Curio’s Summon Stud and placed the subordinates with the captains of the airships. This was in order to give quick commands during the battle. Therefore the airships turned right away after receiving Ark’s order.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

This was the reason for luring the demons to one place. In fact, the flying boat squadrons alone weren’t enough to reduce the number of demons. The only way to quickly reduce the number of demons before they could revive was to use tremendous firepower. And the power of the Spear of Thor was enough to melt hundreds of demons.

“That’s it, now I have some leeway again.”

Ark looked around and muttered. However, it was just a temporary break. With the black obelisks, the demons could revive infinitely. And every time the expedition would suffer more damage. The Eastern Nation members that Shambala led wouldn’t be able to last forever if the demons kept on reviving. No, already 1,000 warriors on the flying boats and the Eastern Nation members have already been killed. Therefore it became more difficult to face the demons that kept on proliferating.

“And even if I destroy all the black obelisks.....”

Ark sighed and gazed around. The armoured ships in the sea and the airships were dealing with tens of thousands of demons. However, a powerful battle was still continuing that made the ones on the sea and sky feel boring.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Dozens of shells were fired from a large land mass! And the giant stingray fired the scorch cannons in retaliation! That’s right. The aerial combat between Shangri-La and Rwigenberg! The battle on Kwarian wasn’t just to drive the demons back. The purpose of the

expedition armies was to stop the Dark Lord's resurrection. And the resurrection ceremony was currently taking place on Rwigenberg. In other words, the number of demons they killed didn't matter if they couldn't penetrate Rwigenberg's shield. Currently the expedition could compete equally with Rwigenberg thanks to Shangri-La. Despite them being 1 kilometre apart, an intense bombardment was continuing.

'The offensive power is 6:4, with Rwigenberg being slightly stronger.'

This was what Ark concluded from seeing the engagement. Therefore Shangri-La was using all its firepower to stop the attacks from the scorch cannons.

'But the biggest problem is its defense.'

That's right. That was the problem. The cheat like shield surrounding Rwigenberg! Despite the close battle between Shangri-La and Rwigenberg going on for a few hours, the shield was still holding strong. Of course, most of the firepower was used to intercept the flash bombs but quite a few attacks still hit. Therefore Shangri-La was receiving more damage as the battle became longer. If this continued then Shangri-La would eventually become battered and destroyed.

".....There is only one way left.

Ark muttered and bit his lip. In fact, he knew this from the beginning. Despite that, Ark had focused his strategies on reducing the number of demons. But now he had no choice. Ark looked at the flashing message window on the right corner again.

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony has begun!

<Time remaining until the Dark Lord's resurrection: 16 hours>

There was no time left.

'If I miss this opportunity then I don't know when there will be a chance to try again.'

Ark worried for a while before finally making his decision.

“Admiral Jabel, the airships and flying boat squadrons will use the last strategy!”

“I understand. The entire fleet!”

Curio conveyed Jabel’s voice. At the same time, dozens of signals shot from the deck of the Silver Arrow. Then hundreds of hot air balloons, 20 airships and thousands of flying boats rose and formed a line between Rwigenberg and Shangri-La.

“Shangri-La and the airships will concentrate on charging their weapons! Meanwhile the flying boat squadrons will defense against the demon attacks!”

The flying boats used their engines and scattered. Their strategy to exterminate the number of demons had succeeded so the flying boats could easily defend against the attacks. Of course, those demons would obviously be revived.

‘It will be 10~20 minutes before the demons revive. We have to defend and make sure that Shangri-La and the airships don’t receive any attacks. The problem is the flash bomb from the Rwigenberg. But the scorch cannons just unleashed a barrage so it will take some time to recharge.’

This was why Ark had reduced the number of demons. It was the blank period where the thousands of dead demons hadn’t revived yet! While the flying boats interrupted the attacks from the demons.....

“Ark, all the gun turrets on Shangri-La have finished charging!”

“Ark-nim, the magic guns and the Spear of Thor has finished recharging!”

He heard Wormer’s words and then Jabel’s. All of the weapons aimed towards the Rwigenberg.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Meanwhile, the scorch cannons had finished recharging and were

ready to resume the bombardment. Then hundreds of flying boats headed towards Ark. The leaders of the squadrons saluted.

“Ark-nim!”

“Hum.....then please.”

Ark nodded with a resolute face.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The scorch cannons exploded from the Rwigenberg at the same time. Dozens of black masses were fired. If they hit the airships then enormous damage would be suffered! Then Ark’s eyes flashed and he shouted.

“Suicide corps.....!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

“Ohh, my will is a powerful shield!”

At that moment, 30 flying boats flew towards the front and scattered. The magicians in them faced the approaching flash bombs. The 30 of them used Willpower Exchange to share magic and used the shield spell. When the magicians used their shield magic, dozens of shields appeared in front of the airships and Shangri-La. The flash bombs collided with the defense shields.

“It has collided. Everybody focus!”

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The dozens of flash bombs stopped moving. However, that was just a temporary phenomenon. The magicians’ magic wasn’t enough to stop the attack. It wouldn’t even be able to stop the guns from Shangri-La or the Spear of Thor from the airships. Cracks started to spread on the shield until it broke. In fact, Ark hadn’t expected the shields to stop the flash bombs.

‘.....But now’s the chance!’

The magicians pulled something small from their bags.

-Magic Bomb

Type: 1st grade invention Designer and Producer: Wormer, Magic Institute

In the past, the Magic Institute created a power Magic Bomb that was unstable. But thanks to Magaro's research notes, that problem has been fixed. Wormer has also improved the bomb using high level techniques. But since the magic is now stable, the explosive power is slightly reduced.

<When the timer is operated, it will explode after 5 seconds>

-The timer of the Magic Bomb has been started.

<Time remaining until the explosion: 3 seconds, 2 seconds, 1 second.....>

It was the Magic Bomb that the Magic Institute designer and Wormer improved. In fact, Shangri-La's gun turrets were actually made using technology that Wormer had adapted from this bomb. It was also because of these bombs that Ark thought of involving Shangri-La. When the magicians operated the bombs, numbers quickly appeared on the surface. And the time remaining was 0 seconds!

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Hundreds of flying boats shook from the shock. 30 Magic Bombs had exploded at once. The explosive power far exceeded the gun turrets. The flash bombs that had been delayed by the shield magic exploded in the air. This was the main reason why the magicians acted to delay the flash bombs. They sacrificed their lives to interrupt it! And immediately after their sacrifice.....

"Now. Focus all the firepower on one spot!"

The Spear of Thor and gun turrets fired at once. There was an intense roaring sound and flash of light that blinded their eyes and deafened them. All of these attacks were heading towards Rwigenberg!

'This powerful attack should be enough to penetrate Rwigenberg's shields!'

That's right. Ark had reduced the number of demons and sacrificed the magicians in order to stop the flash bombs! It was in order to save Shangri-La and the airships' firepower so they could concentrate 100% of their attacks on one point of Rwigenberg's shield.

"Take this! This is the maximum firepower of the military expedition. Try and stop it!"

The dozens of shots fired from Shangri-La and the airships struck Rwigenberg's shield. Rwigenberg shook as it was struck and there wrapped in a wave of heat.

After a while.....

Heroes' Descendants

“Oh my god!”

“T-that is ridiculous!”

“Who on earth made such a ridiculous thing?”

The staff of the Planning Department watched the 120 inch screen with baffled faces. The same cry came from the screen showing Ark and the expedition members.

Kaaaaaaah!

The Rwigenberg flapped its huge wings as it was hit by the heat wave. And the shield wrapped around the Rwigenberg flickered. That's right! Despite concentrating the firepower of the military expedition, the shield was still there. A groan emerged from Ark's mouth as he stared at the protective film.

“The shield didn't break despite all the firepower being concentrated on one point.....”

Was it saying there was no way to break the shield? This meant they couldn't prevent the resurrection ceremony even if they destroyed all the demons.

....Despair!

That's right. It meant despair. Despair was the conclusion he came to despite sacrificing all those soldiers.

“Ark-nim, the demons are attacking by using the gap left by the destroyed shields!”

“The members have fallen into disorder. Please give a command!”

Messengers shouted from every direction.

“The soldiers.....”

Ark said in a hoarse voice and shut his mouth. Many soldiers had died in order to penetrate the Rwigenberg's shield. They were also attacked by the demons or the flash bombs. There was even a cheat like shield. He thought that the expedition's concentrated firepower would destroy the shield but it didn't. This meant there was no way to attack the Rwigenberg and land. There was no way to prevent the Dark Lord's resurrection. So what was the expedition fighting for?

".....Endure. We have no choice but to endure it."

Ark murmured with a sigh after much contemplation. There was no way. Yet he still hadn't given up.

"Ark!"

Then Wormer's voice came from Curio.

"Come to Shangri-La quickly. I have something to show you!"

'Show me?'

Ark's forehead wrinkled and he turned towards Shangri-La. Ark had honestly thought there was no chance. Everyone else was the same as well. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members who had been full of will, Shambala who wanted to crush everybody, Timosi who wanted to avenge Alan, Sid who wasn't thinking about anything and the other soldiers..... Their motivation was lost after seeing Rwigenberg's cheat like shield. But now Wormer's words were vivid in his mind. Wormer had converted Shangri-La along with the raccoons and the Magic Institute engineers. He sensed something in this desperate moment.

'Did he perhaps figure out a way?'

Ark had such expectations after hearing Wormer's voice.

"Burning Soul, head to Shangri-La!"

Ark immediately turned Burning Soul and flew towards Shangri-La. He landed in front of the White Tower and entered the control room (central office of the White Tower.

“Ark-nim!”

Lariette and the prophet clan greeted him as he entered the control room. Lariette and the prophets had been riding on Shangri-La. This was the power source to move the huge land mass that was Shangri-La. As an aside, there were two reasons why the 7 heroes decided to hide the Ark of Creation in Shangri-La. One reason was to protect the Ark of Creation from the demons. Another reason was that the Ark of Creation was the power source for Shangri-La’s defense ward. That’s right. The reason it was about to float hundreds of metres in the air and raise the defense ward was thanks to the Ark of Creation. After Lariette had removed the Ark of Creation, Shangri-La’s defense ward was released which allowed Alan to slaughter the prophets.

..... Well, that wasn’t important now. Ark exchanged nods and approached Wormer.

“Wormer, what did you want to show me?”

“It is this.”

Wormer pointed towards a huge crystal. To be exact, it was the modified Truth Crystal that linked to the Creator’s will. When Ark looked doubtfully at the truth crystal, Wormer operated something small at the bottom of the crystal. A video instantly appeared on the Truth Crystal. It was the image of when Shangri-La and the airships attacked Rwigenberg. Despite the huge shock and heat wave, Rwigenberg had just shaken off the attack. Watching it just made him feel despair again.

“Why are you showing me this?”

Ark asked with a frown. Wormer scratched his messy hair and muttered.

“Do you see the output of the Ruin Gun mounted on Shangri-La?”

The Ruin Gun was the huge gun turret that Wormer and the Magic Institute joined forces to engineer. But Ark didn’t understand anything about the output of the Ruin Gun. Despite the name, it was just an extremely large magic gun. Ark shook his head and Wormer replied.

“It is 200,000 MG. There were a total of 34 shots. The total output reached 6.8 million MG.”

It was amazing. Everybody would understand how frightening that was. Yet even the terrifying power of the Ruin Guns didn't break Rwigenberg's shield? But why did Wormer call him here just to boast about the output from the Ruin Gun?

“The Spear of Thor designed by the Magic Institute has an output of 70,000~100,000 MG. The normal magic guns on the airships have an output of 4,000 MG while the ones on the hot air balloons are roughly 2,500 MG. In other words, the total firepower is approximately 10 million MG.”

“.....So?”

Ark asked with a dumb expression. Wormer shouted angrily.

“You idiot, you still don't understand? 10 million MG, 10 million MG! Do you know how many zeroes are attached to that number? Seven. Seven! That is an astronomical amount of magic energy. That amount of MG is enough to evaporate a whole territory! In theory, that amount of magic energy should be enough to defeat any shield in New World.”

Wormer explained frantically while spitting. Once again, New World was an online game. In other words, the laws could be different from reality. But no matter what happened here, one swing of a sword wouldn't be able to kill hundreds of enemies. This was the most fundamental law of New World. These laws existed to maintain New World's balance. If these laws collapsed then New World couldn't be called a game anymore. Wormer and the engineers from the Magic Institute were convinced that 10 million MG should be enough to penetrate Rwigenberg's shield. No material or magic existed in New World that could thwart a concentrated attack of 10 million MG.

“But Rwigenberg's shield didn't break?”

“That's right. It is strange.”

Wormer nodded and replied to Ark's question.

“It goes against the fundamental laws of New World. Then the Rwigenberg is an existence where the laws of New World aren’t applied to it. But after thinking about it carefully, I realized that it was different.”

Ark also agreed with the idea. Ark was one of the few people who knew most of the information related to this event. The Red Man was the alter ego of New World’s creator, Park Woo-seong! The reason the Rwigenberg could withstand that attack was probably because of something Park Woo-seong did. Park Woo-seong was New World’s creator so he would be able to make a cheat like shield.

‘But the Red Man’s ability isn’t limitless. If he had the ability to do whatever he wanted to the system then he wouldn’t need to use this method to achieve his goals.’

That’s right. If the Red Man was able to exert a tremendous power over New World then he wouldn’t need to resurrect the Dark Lord. Couldn’t he just ruin New World by connecting to the main server? Despite that, the Red Man had used the complicated method of resurrecting the demons and using Alan to distract the users as well as stealing the devil’s heart. He had carefully pushed forward his plan step by step. Then it was obvious.

“I don’t know why but the Red Man doesn’t have the ability of the Creator in New World!”

In other words, if his information regarding New World was removed then the Red Man was just an ordinary user. Of course, there was no denying that he had a large advantage over general users. He also couldn’t override the laws of New World. So how was it possible to have a shield that ignores New World’s laws of creation?

‘.....It is impossible.’

This meant that the laws of New World also applied to the shield. Wormer smiled after Ark reached that conclusion and nodded.

“Now you’re starting to understand the situation.”

“But actually.....”

“It doesn’t exist. That’s what I thought. Therefore I replayed the scene in the Truth Crystal over and over until I found the identity of that shield.”

“Have you ever figured out the reason?”

“I didn’t understand the first few times I watched. But I slowed the video to 1/100th of a second and was able to discover the absurd secret.”

“Absurd secret?”

“Look.”

Wormer manipulated the video before playing it again. This time it was played at 1/100th of a second so the video looked like a slide show. After a while, Ark started to see the hidden secret behind the shield.

“T-this is.....?”

“Yes, the shield doesn’t have enormous defense like we thought. No amount of defense would be able to withstand 10 million MG. I barely noticed it after playing it at 1/100th of a second. Damn, I never imagined such a method until I saw this image. Now I’ll replay the shield in real time.”

Wormer murmured with amazement as he modified the Truth Crystal again. That’s right. The Rwigenberg’s cheat like shield had a hidden secret. It wasn’t possible to see until seen through the modified Truth Crystal but more than half of the shield had melted the moment the firepower hit it. If there were continuous attacks then the defense shield would’ve probably broken. But he was able to examine the shield when it was played at 1/100th of the speed. The shield was growing back at an equal rate to the speed of the attack! When the offensive ended, the shield became thin like paper but it returned to its original form after some time passed.

“Such a thing.....?”

“My guess is that there are two possible reasons. An infinite amount of magic is currently being focused on the Rwigenberg. And the other reason is this.”

Wormer once again manipulated the Truth Crystal. Then Rwigenberg expanded and was zoomed into a large area. There was a weird scene in the middle of the area. An old man wearing a hood was standing in front of an altar. When the shield shook from the attack, the old man instantly took out a strange looking dagger and chanted a spell. Then thousands of demons gathered in the square exploded and were sucked into the altar? Wormer stopped the video there and said.

“At this point, the shield recovered extremely quickly. So I asked the Magic Institute and they said it was a black magic sacrifice ritual.”

“Black magic sacrifice ritual?”

“It changes the life energy into magic energy. That black magician is converting the demons’ lives into magic energy to heal the shield.”

An engineer from the Magic Institute replied. Ark started to understand the secret behind Rwigenberg’s shield. That’s right. The shield was invincible like Ark thought it was. The black magician sacrificed the lives of thousands to demons to instantly heal Rwigenberg’s shield.

‘I see. Therefore the Dark Lord’s resurrection time will be slightly different from the clock on my warning message.’

Ark managed to figure out one of his questions. The Dark Lord needed time to resurrect. Therefore Ark always checked the time remaining while fighting. But he noticed that time was progressing slightly more slowly than Ark’s clock. He couldn’t understand why and thought it was just an error.

‘That’s because some of the concentrated magic was used to restore the shield. Therefore the magic used for the resurrection ceremony was dispersed and the time remaining slowed. In other words, attacking the shield will also slow down the resurrection ceremony. But it will still be the same in the end if I can’t penetrate

the shield.'

Ark's eyes flashed at the thought.

"Based on the video just now, the speed that the attack destroys the shield is slightly faster than the recovery speed. If we rally the flying boat squadron to attack right afterwards then wouldn't we be able to penetrate the shield?"

"That's impossible."

Wormer shook his head and answered.

"Once again, the recovery speed is so fast that we were barely able to spot it when the playback speed was 1/100th of a second. Even if the flying boat squadron attacks right afterwards then several seconds would be consumed. More than half of the shield would've already recovered. The attacks of the flying boat squadron won't be able to catch up with the recovery speed."

"Then there is no way?"

Wormer sighed and scratched his head.

"I calculated two possible methods. One is to deal continuous damage worth 1 million MG for 5 minutes. The other way is to increase the output to 11.5 million MG so that the shield doesn't have time to recover before it breaks."

"A continuous output of 1 million MG for 5 minutes?"

"Yes."

"Or an output of 11.5 million MG?"

"That's what I thought of....."

"Is that possible?"

"If the 500 hot air balloons and 30 airships from the beginning of the battle were intact then it would barely reach 11.5 million MG when combined with Shangri-La."

Ark looked amazed at Wormer's answer. Didn't that mean it was

only possible to crack the shield if they had attacked it from the beginning of the battle? But now 200 hot air balloons and 10 airships had been shot down during the fight. Ark hurriedly looked at the engineers from the Magic Institute.

“Does the Magic Institute have any extra airships or hot air balloons?”

“Yes. All airships were summoned by the Grandmaster but 300 hot air balloons had been dispatched somewhere else on scouting missions. And we already sent a request to the Grandmaster for reinforcements after listening to Wormer but.....”

The Magic Institute member trailed off with a dark expression.

“The summoned air balloons will take at least 3 days to get here.”

3 days for NPCs was 24 hours. Now there was only 15 hours left until the Dark Lord was resurrected. It meant the situation would already be over by the time the hot air balloons arrived.

‘In the end, is there no way to penetrate the shield before the Dark Lord was resurrected?’

Ark sighed with a depressed expression. Despite all of Wormer’s calculations, in the end it was still hopeless.

‘.....Wait?’

Then something popped into Ark’s head.

Now, he was going to put it in order. According to Wormer’s calculations, maintaining an output of 1 million MG for 5 minutes or attacking with 11.5 million MG would melt the shield. But the air balloons from the Magic Institute required at least 24 hours to get here. If the armoured battleships attacked then a sufficient output could be reached but the Rwigenberg was floating hundreds of metres away from them.

‘If only the merchant ships had the scorch cannons. The range of the scorch cannon would allow it to attack the Rwigenberg. But the reality is that the ships would have to get past thousands of sea

monsters in order to reach Kwarian. Even if we the airships as support, the armoured ships wouldn't be able to reach the Kwarian in 15 hours. In the end it is impossible to break the shield. But.....'

Ark recalled a memory from 2 months ago. It was the scene Ark saw when he first approached Shangri-La on board Wormer's Taekwon V. The defense tower on Shangri-La had attacked the demons the moment they passed the wards. There was a strong magnetic field between the defense tower and the defense ward that roasted any demons that tried to approach. He didn't understand Wormer's figure of 10 million MG but how much energy was required to turn thousands of gargoyles to dust? Ark had a crazy idea and asked Wormer. Wormer nodded and replied.

"Yes. If we use the defense ward then 1 million MG will easy come out. Like I said a while ago, the 24 Ruin Guns reached 6.8 million MG. If the burden on the source of power decreases then we can make the 1 million MG last for 5 minutes. However....."

"However? What's the problem?"

"You know, Shangri-La's previous defense ward was destroyed by Alan's surprise attack. The Magic Institute engineers had restored it. But we don't know how to activate it."

"Activate it? Didn't the prophet clan use it previously?"

"They did. But the equipment is slightly strange. Because it was broken and then restored. The circuit route which converts the magic coming from the Ark of Creation to power the ward has changed. And there is a strange lock in the middle of that circuit."

"Lock?"

"This. Have a look."

Wormer operated a small number of buttons. Then there was a mechanical sound and something rose from the bottom of the Truth Crystal. It was a circular, crystal slab. However, there were various shapes carved into the slab such as a circle, triangle, knife, water drop etc. Wormer pointed to it and said.

“Probably some devices fit in here in order to make it work. But even the prophet clan don’t know what they are. So I’ve been looking for ways to circumvent the power circuit but even my engineering skills can’t decipher it.”

“Have you tried to look for information in the History Crystal?”

“Of course I tried. But the information on this crystal disc is contained inside the level 1 security area.”

Ark frowned at Wormer’s answer. A level 1 security area meant a password was needed to access the information in the History Crystal. However, if they knew the password then there would be no reason to search for information in the History Crystal. If he knew what went into the holes then he could get a sense of that the password was.

‘Eh?’

Ark suddenly blinked while he was looking at the circular slab. One hole cut in the slab had a surprisingly familiar size and shape.

‘Do I have something circular that will match with that hole? The size and shape is just like.....’

Ark gazed at it for a while before eagerly pulling something out of his bag. It was a small disc. Ark was even surer after taking out the disc. When he compared it to the hole, the disc was roughly the same size and shape. Ark placed the disc into the hole.

Cheolkeok, ku ku ku ku.

The disc started spinning once it entered the hole. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-You have placed Hero Maban’s Three Marvels into Shangri-La’s defense device!

Shangri-La’s powerful defense ward was made using the strong power of the 7 heroes. At that time, the 7 heroes thought of Shangri-La as the last bastion for humanity and combined their abilities to create a ward. But there was a chance that Shangri-La’s

defense ward could be broken by demons and then repaired. In order to stop the demons from using it, they created a safety device. That is the defense ward's control device.

If the 7 heroes' original device ward is destroyed then their descendants need to gather again in order to reactivate the device. Therefore the control device must be equipped with the symbols of the 7 heroes in order for the magic circuit of the defense ward to work. Once all the symbols are loaded then the magic left by the 7 heroes will be completely opened.

<Currently equipped symbol: Three Marvels (Hero Maban/Christin)>

The control device has started preparations to operate the defense ward. The navigation system of the defense ward has been triggered.

"7 heroes!"

Ark felt a flash after reading the information window. The 7 heroes were the ones who originally created Shangri-La's defense ward. Then wouldn't the descendants of the 7 heroes be the key to making it work again? That's right. Ark's Three Marvels was the symbol of Hero Maban and it was assimilated into the defense ward's control device. In the information window, it explained why the control device was restricted to the descendants of the 7 heroes. If the defense ward was destroyed then there was a chance that the demons would take over Shangri-La. Therefore the 7 heroes established a seal to prevent it from being used after it was restored. It was the result of some deep planning.

'Anyway, that doesn't matter now!'

He had figured out how to work the circular slab. However, there was still a problem to be addressed with the circular slab.

'It needs the symbol of all 7 heroes to work. But there is no guarantee that the heroes' descendants have entered this war. Even if they entered the war, they might already be dead. And how am I

supposed to find them in a combat situation like this?’

However, Ark’s worries were immediately settled.

“Eh? What, what the?”

“Wah, what is this? Why is my bag rumbling?”

While Ark was busy thinking. Suddenly there was an intense flash from the other 6 holes in the control device. At the same time, Lariette’s chest started glowing white while Wormer’s bag shook and had a brown glow. The freaked out Lariette and Wormer hurriedly checked the identity of the light. It was a teardrop shaped pendant hanging on Lariette’s neck and Wormer had an old brown diary that vibrated.

‘A tear shaped pendant and a square diary!’

Ark’s eyes immediately moved towards the control device. The two items fit perfectly into the holes glowing with the same coloured light.

‘There’s no doubt. The symbols that the 7 heroes left behind have started to react after the control device was activated! This must be the navigation system. But.....’

He already knew that Lariette had become a hero’s descendant after Alan. Yet he was surprised about Wormer. He never even imagined that Wormer was a hero’s descendant. Wormer noticed Ark’s surprised eyes and laughed.

“Huhuhu, I guess I can’t hide it anymore. I am the descendant of the genius dwarf inventor and hero, Hamilan.....”

“There’s no time. Hurry and insert the symbols!”

Ark shouted angrily and Wormer petulantly placed the diary into the control device. Lariette also inserted her necklace into the teardrop shaped hole. Then Ark saw that the information window had updated again.

-New symbols have been loaded onto the defense ward’s control device.

<Currently equipped symbol: Pocket Diary of a Genius Inventor (Genius engineer Hamilan)>

<Currently equipped symbol: Ronian's Teardrop Pendant (Holy Knight Ronian)>

'That's it! 3 out of found!'

And he had already secured another hero's symbol. Ark knew another hero's descendant, Shambala. Ark immediately used the Feather of Whispering to contact Shambala.

-Shambala, you're not dead yet?

-You bastard, are you going to keep on talking or come help?

-I am doing something. I'm busy so I'll give you the detailed information later but quickly come here!

-Eh? Come where?

-The white tower in Shangri-La. Hurry!

-Why do I have to hurry? Am I your servant now?

-It doesn't matter, just come quickly. It is important.

-.....Understood.

Shambala was about to say something but stopped after hearing Ark's serious voice. He might have a temper but Shambala was quick to notice things.

"Now, the remaining 3 symbols are the problem..... I have to figure out where they are....."

Ark murmured when he saw the empty holes in the control device. Suddenly the red light coming from the dagger shaped hole seemed to become stronger. In fact, Ark had guessed who that belonged to the moment he knew that it was for the symbols of the 7 heroes. Shambala was the descendant of the master assassin Salrin so naturally the dagger shape would belong to him.

‘The light from his hole is gradually becoming stronger? Then perhaps.....?’

He was receiving the message that Shambala was coming closer to Shambala. Then the light became stronger when it reacted to the symbols?

‘That’s right! After thinking about it, the strongest light had emitted from Lariette and Wormer’s hole just now. Obviously the light will become stronger the closer the symbol gets. Then?’

Ark looked at the still unknown three holes. The light there was similar to the standard before Shambala started moving. In other words, the rest of the heroes were close to the place Shambala used to be before he started moving.

‘That means the rest of the heroes’ descendants have entered the war and are still alive!’

Ark immediately left the white tower. He jumped on Burning Soul who was waiting in front of the tower and shouted.

“Curio, disperse all bats on the battlefield right now. Tell them to look in the water and the air and locate the position of anyone who is emitting light!”

“I understand Master. Hey you children, you have a new job!”

Curio ordered all his subordinates to search. At the same time, the voices of the leaders stopped emerging from Curio’s mouth. The 10 subordinates left the NPCs and started to search the battlefield. Therefore Ark couldn’t grasp the situation of the air fleet anymore but that wasn’t important now. Curio murmured in his ear after a while.

“Master, my subordinate has found someone.”

“Where?”

“In the sea. Two people are on the Bristania flagship that is surrounded by demons. 800 metres away at your 7 o’clock.”

“Okay. Burning Soul, let’s go!”

Kurarara, kurarara!

Ark grabbed Burning Soul's horns and flew away. While he was riding away, Shambala who had just arrived at the white tower shouted.

"Hey! I thought you were busy so where are you going?"

"There's no time to explain. Go inside and Lariette will tell you!"

Ark didn't even bother looking back and just yelled as he flew off. An information window appeared shortly afterwards.

<p>-New symbols have been loaded onto the defense ward's control device.</p> <p><Currently equipped symbol: Blood of the Dead (Assassin Master Salrin)></p>

Shambala had also inserted his symbol on the circular slab.

"It worked. Now I just have to find the remaining 3....."

Ark muttered as he observed the battlefield where several battleships were fighting with demons. A battleship surrounded by jellyfish caught his eye. It was the flagship of the Bristania expedition. And two lights were shining from the deck of the battleship.

"Over there! Blade Tempest!"

Ark pushed back the swarming demons with Blade Tempest and landed on the deck. And a voice rang out across the boat.

"The person who has a light shining from his body please come here!"

"Beast Spirit possession, rise power of the dog! What? Light? Are you talking about me?"

"High speed intonation, fire, ice! Damn, what the? Why is light coming from my body? Won't this just catch the demons' eyes even more? Eh, that guy is.....?"

Two people who were fiercely fighting the demons turned around at Ark's shout. Ark's eyes widened as he caught sight of them.

"Aren't you Ark?"

"Eh? Why are you here?"

"Bread, Redian? You guys were heroes' descendants?"

Ark muttered with a foolish expression. That's right. The pair fighting on Bristania's flagship was the Beast Master Bread and the Elemental Master Redian. Ark checked the light coming from both of their bags.

.....Bread and Redian were heroes' descendants.

"Heroes' Descendants? Well, we are but how did you know that?"

"There's no time to explain. Quickly get on!"

"What? Get on what? Can't you see the situation?"

"If we go then the flagship won't be able to hold on and will sink."

"This is more urgent than saving the flagship! Burning Soul!"

It was quite unexpected that Bread and Redian were heroes' descendants. However, now wasn't the time to explain the details of the situation. Ark directed Burning Soul towards Bread and Redian and used Riposte. Then he immediately grabbed the two and flew into the sky.

"Hey! What is going on?"

"I said there's no time to explain."

Ark placed the struggling Bread on the back. Then Curio opened his eyes and shouted.

"Master, I found the last person. 100 metres from Shangri-La in the 11 o'clock direction!"

"Well done. Burning Soul, let's finish this!"

Ark flew Burning Soul towards the area specified by Curio. After a while, the hero's descendant he saw in that place was even more unexpected than Bread and Redian. Riding a flying boat and shooting arrows blindly....no, Ark was surprised as he knew her. No, she was someone that had been in Ark's vicinity a lot.

"Timosi.....you?"

Ark checked the light coming from her bag and murmured in a dumbfounded voice. That's right. The last hero's descendant was the Dark Elf Timosi.

"You idiot, where did you go? The demons revived while you were gone! Furthermore, the shield around Rwigenberg doesn't even have a scratch on it..... Damn, everything is a mess! How am I supposed to get revenge for Alan? Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!"

Timosi cursed as she shot her arrows. Ark who was watching blankly smiled and answered.

"If you want to make sure Maseutyu and the Red Man pays then I'll help you."

"What? How?"

"Just come with me!"

Ark turned Burning Soul and headed towards Shangri-La. After a while Ark, Bread, Redian and Timosi touched down in front of the white tower. He used a simple explanation to ensure the three descendants understood the situation. Then Bread, Redian and Timosi placed their symbols in the control device.

[-All 7 symbols have been equipped.]

The message window renewed in front of everybody.

-New symbols have been loaded onto the defense ward's control device.
<Currently equipped symbol: Tank Bracelet (King of Beasts

Kalgaradon)>

<Currently equipped symbol: Spirit Talisman (Elemental Valkyrie Shura)>

<Currently equipped symbol: Rune of an Ancient Elf (Elf Archer Electric)>

-All the hero's symbols have been loaded onto Shangri-La's defense ward control device.

<Shangri-La's magic circuit has connected and the defense ward reactivated>

<The magic of the heroes sealed in Shangri-La has been released>

At that moment, seven colours flashed from the control device. Then intense sparks occurred and spread from the circuit through the tower. Wormer who was watching the Truth Crystal cheered.

“That's it. The defense system of Shangri-La is working!”

The heroes' descendants gathered in the tower simultaneously looked at the Truth Crystal. The Truth Crystal showed the situation that was happening in Shangri-La.

Snap, snap, snap!

The sparks extended from the white tower towards dozens of defense towers. At the same time, the defense towers that were wrapped in sparks started having the circles at the top spinning and giving off a huge amount of discharge. The sparks shot like a lightning bolt towards the next defense towers. Then onto the next one.....dozens of defense towers were connected by the sparks. The defense towers had started to show their power.

-Kurwarwarwarwa!

While the expedition army had been mired in despair, hundreds of demons had been pushing towards Shangri-La. The gun turrets had been intercepted the scorch cannon blasts so it was helpless against the demons. But once the defense towers linked, thousands of

sparks flew towards the demons.

-Kwaaaaa!

Hundreds of demons had their health drained from the lightning attack and turned to ash. This was the defense ward that Wormer and the Magic Institute upgraded! Wormer excitedly clamoured inside the white tower.

“Hohoho! This, this! Isn’t this great? Isn’t it better than ever? This is the result of my genius skill. The defense towers are restored and the output is steadily increasing. The fact that I couldn’t use the defense ward had been upsetting me..... Anyway, if it is this degree than 1 million MG will be easy. Well, shall we head towards the Rwigenberg?”

Wormer smirked and operated the controls. The magic engines of Shangri-La started working and it rushed towards the Rwigenberg. Despite the sudden rush towards the Rwigenberg, there was still time for the demons to approach them. However, the demons’ attacks didn’t matter now that the defense ward was operated. Any demons that approached Shangri-La’s fearful defense were turned to ash. Whether it was hundreds of thousands, any demon that entered the defense ward was 100% roasted. While the demons were hopeless, the Rwigenberg had fired the scorch cannons. However, even the flash bombs were destroyed by Shangri-La’s defense ward. After rushing for around 10 minutes.

1 kilometre, 500 metres, 300 metres.....

Shangri-La gradually narrowed the distance and collided with Rwigenberg’s shield.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

At the same time there was a tremendous roar and Shangri-La shook. Ark, Shambala, Lariette, Wormer, Bread, Redian and Timosi inside the white tower were able to see what happened through the Truth Crystal.

“Melting! Rwigenberg’s shield is melting!”

The lightning bolts from the defense towers were attacking Rwigenberg's shields. As soon as it touched it, the shield started to melt like water. Of course the shield was being repaired at the same time but it couldn't keep up with the damage.

"Raise the output!"

Wormer and the Magic Institute engineers made small modifications. Shangri-La shook and pressed forward even harder. After a while..... The shield was unable to keep up and Shangri-La gradually surged inside. And the shaking became even worse.

"Pretty soon.....pretty soon.....now.....eh, what the?"

Suddenly Shangri-La was hit by something.

"T-that bastard.....!"

Wormer gnashed his teeth together. Wormer was looking at the Rwigenberg through the Truth Crystal. No, to be exact he was looking at the black magician wearing a hood. When the old man swung his dagger, thousands of demons were sucked into the altar. At the same time, the area of the shield that Shangri-La was pushing against became stronger.

"He is using the health of the demons to amplify the recovery speed of the shield in this area!"

"So even Shangri-La's defense ward can't break it?"

"I don't know. At its maximum output, the defense wards can overpower the recovery speed of the shield but then it will overload in the next few minutes. If we fail to destroy the shield before that happens then Shangri-La will be smashed!"

Ark stared at the Truth Crystal. He had to do something. The black magician was strengthening Rwigenberg's shield. If he couldn't penetrate the shield then he couldn't stop the black magician.

"Keep rushing!"

"If we continue rushing without taking any measures then it is highly likely that we will be smashed."

“It will be the same even if we leave. If that has to happen then it is better to die while breaking the shield.”

“Heh, I knew you would say that. You are a true man. Let’s go and die!”

Wormer laughed at Ark’s answer. At the same time, Shangri-La’s engines roared even more fiercely and it rushed forward. The fate of the Kwarian battle depended on whether this shield broke.

Charge, Charge, Charge!

“Huck, huck, huck!”

Someone was breathing roughly in a dark space. The man's eyes, nose and mouth was covered with a cloth as he dug above him with a shovel. How long had he spent just shovelling? Blisters would appear and disappear until he learnt the 'shovelling' skill. After that, his skill understandably became more sharp and natural. He breathed accurately as he shovelled between bricks! Any ordinary wall would've collapsed after being dug at with a sharp shovel for a long time. But the wall the man was digging at didn't even look like it had a dent in it.

“Damn, just open even a little bit!”

The man growled angrily as he slammed the shovel into the ceiling. Then a pile of dust poured down.

“Cough, cough.....t-this is.....cough.....”

The dust covered man coughed and withdrew. He took off the cloth and revealed his face. He then gazed towards a place where dozens of people were gathered. However, they were just staring blankly. The man stared at them angrily.

‘Damn, why? They're messing with the wrong guy.’

“Hey, maknae (youngest). Why don't I hear you shovelling?”

One of them turned to him and asked. The man's face crumpled before he replied.

“There's some dust falling down hyung-nim. I will start again right now.”

“Work hard. Your hyungnims are bored.”

“I understand.”

The man held the shovel and started working again.

‘Dammit, I was called the ghost of the police agency and now I’m a criminal’s minion.....’

The man thought angrily as he lifted his shovel. The police agency’s ghost!

That’s right. The man’s identity was none other than the special agent of the cyber division, Isyuram. But why was Isyuram shovelling at the ceiling in a dark room? Isyuram had to go back a few months in order to explain. In fact, the situation for Isyuram completely changed after obtaining the video. It was expected that Isyuram would finish the infiltration investigation at this stage. He thought the full scale of the organization would be revealed after the police detectives watched the hideout 24 hours a day. However, most of the criminals were surprisingly cautious. The organization members at the hideout never once made contact with Jepeteu. He couldn’t discontinue the investigation until Jepeteu was caught. Therefore he had immediately resumed the investigation after helping Ark recapture Silvana. However, he needed to join the criminal organization to get the information he wanted. After the video was obtained and a subordinate capture, the criminal organization had become even more careful. Therefore Isyuram had gone through some painful efforts over the past few months to gain their trust.

‘.....Every day was humiliating.’

A sigh naturally flowed from Isyuram’s mouth as he thought about it again. That’s right. Every day over the last few months had been humiliating for Isyuram. Once again, getting information about Jepeteu wasn’t easy unless he was in the organization. Furthermore, quite a few members of the organization still saw Isyuram as an ‘outsider.’ So Isyuram knew that he needed to gain the trust of the organization first. After reuniting with Jepeteu again, Isyuram suggested that he wanted to join the criminal organization.

“Hmm, you want to formally join our organization?”

“Yes. I’ll like to formally enter the organization so that I can sincerely call you hyungnim.”

“Well, your intentions are admirable.....”

Jepeteu scratched his head as he gazed at Isyuram. Then Garam who believed that Isyuram was a friend of the heart interrupted.

“Jepeteu hyungnim, Isyuram is a totally reliable guy. Don’t you know after seeing hyungnim in the meantime? A guy like this won’t be easy to find. And Isyuram has already revealed his address and phone number to us. I know that hyungnim is worried but how can you be when he made his address and telephone number public?”

“.....I guess so.”

Jepeteu nodded. No matter how much they acted together in the game, there was a difference between being a friend or an organization member. The criminal organization didn’t accept anyone who didn’t disclose their personal information. So Isyuram had told Jepeteu his address and phone number in advance. Of course, Jepeteu didn’t really have his address and phone number. That information was something fake that the police agency had authorized. Anyway, giving his address and phone number solved any doubts.

“That idiot was arrested last month so we’re down one member. But it is impossible to explain everything in detail. We can’t just accept an outsider so easily.”

“If hyungnim calls then I’ll drop everything to come running.”

Isyuram quickly replied to Jepeteu. This was exactly what he wanted. If he met Jepeteu outside then wouldn’t everything end? However, it wasn’t resolved that easily.

“That is a bit..... Okay, then let’s do this. Life in the organization isn’t as simple as you think. You might think that we just play the game and earn money but it’s not like that. We need professionals with specialized knowledge. I have to confirm whether you can adapt to life in the organization.”

“T-then?”

“I’ll be watching and if you adapt within one or two months then I will

formally accept you into the organization.”

‘That’s it. Soon I will know the information about the organization!’

Isyuram inwardly cried out with joy at Jepeteu’s suggestion. However, that didn’t take long to change to screams.

“Hey Isyuram. Give me some water.”

“Hyungnim is covered in dust. Hurry and get it off me.”

“What are you doing? If hyungnim gets out a cigarette then you should automatically offer a fire.”

After Isyuram became a probationary member, the attitude towards him changed by 180 degrees. When he was a colleague then they treated him with a small amount of respect but once he joined they treated Isyuram like a minion. It was to educate Isyuram about his ranking in the group. Therefore Isyuram started the life of a minion. He had to be resolute if he wanted to succeed in the infiltration investigation. But it was difficult once he actually experience it. He was sent on various errands, cursed at and was beaten up under the excuse of training. There was a few times where he wanted to give up the infiltration in order to kill all of them.

‘Patience, by patient. This is a job. I have to endure it. If I get angry then I’ll lose.’

No matter the humiliation, Isyuram endured it all without a single cry. And his efforts were rewarded after a few months.

“Well, I’ve been watching and you really are quite useable. Okay, if it is this degree then you will fit within the organization. I’ll see you sometime outside in the near future. Then you will formally join the organization.”

He finally had the chance to arrest Jepeteu.

‘Huhuhu, when will he come out? I’ll make him pay for the humiliation.’

He would shut Jepeteu up in a dim room (interrogation) and beat him up. But there still remained one trail for Isyuram. In fact, this time the

criminal organization was just killing time in New World. Originally they started New World in order to launder money. However, martial law was initiated in the game so it was difficult to launder money since trade was prohibited and the value of gold also fell on the auction site. Then Takosu made a proposal.

“Hyungnim, shall we excavate a dungeon I found?”

“Excavate a dungeon?”

“It is difficult to go anywhere with the expedition army fighting the demons. But the expedition army didn’t find the dungeon. If we’re lucky then we can gain some items in the dungeon, earn money and even level up. So isn’t it like killing three birds with one stone? Recently there is no income so making a livelihood is difficult.”

“That’s not bad? Where is the dungeon?”

“Yes. I found it in the northern desert a while ago.”

Takosu smiled and replied. The members of the criminal organization didn’t like meeting other players. Well, it was natural since they were criminals. Therefore they were normally in areas that didn’t have a lot of players such as the northern desert in the Sinus Principality. And Takosu had found a weird old castle in one corner of the desert. It was a castle that looked hundreds of years old! Of course, it wasn’t rare to find dungeons shaped like castles in New World. The problem was that he had crossed that area a short time ago and the castle hadn’t been there. In other words, an old castle had suddenly appeared in the middle of the desert in a few days.

“That castle definitely wasn’t there before. Then we might be the first people to enter the dungeon. Hopefully we can get huge shares of profit between us.”

“There’s no need to hesitate. Okay, let’s go!”

The criminals departed towards the castle in the desert. The Sinus Principality was empty of demons thanks to the expedition’s victory. Thanks to the expedition army clearing the demons, the criminals arrived at the desert in the Sinus Principality with no problems.

“Now, let’s charge in. Treasures are waiting for us!”

Jepeteu shouted and led his subordinates towards the old castle. They were imagining the treasures piled up in the castle.....

But the sense of expectation soon turned to disappointment after entering the castle.

“What? Isn’t it empty?”

“Did someone else already enter this castle?”

“Dammit, did we come here in vain?”

The expected treasures and monsters inside the temple couldn’t be seen.

“But I don’t see any traces of other people.”

“Then where are the monsters?”

“Perhaps there is a secret passageway leading towards the real dungeon?”

“Hmm, I have heard things like that before. Somethings it might look like there is nothing but there is actually a secret passage. Okay, go search.”

The criminals started to search around the area. After a moment, one of the warriors examining a wall shouted.

“Hyungnim, there is a secret passage here!”

“Oho, indeed.....does the secret passage lead to the basement? Somehow I can smell treasure.”

The criminals dived into the basement.

-Grrrrrrr!

.....It was a mistake. They were surrounded by a huge number of demons once they entered the basement. The basement was filled with intricate passages and the number of demons that appeared wasn’t easy to face.

“Huck! H-hyungnim, we can’t stop these guys!”

The criminal group wasn’t that high levelled thanks to the Demonic War. Therefore the criminals couldn’t face the demons flowing out.

“D-damn. Let’s run!”

Jepeteu hurriedly screamed. However, the castle basement had a complex structure like a maze. Furthermore, only a few of the criminals wanted to go explore the dungeon. In addition, the demons had blocked the exit so they couldn’t escape from the dungeon. They wandered around lost while avoiding the demons and soon reached a critical condition.

“Ugh, we’ll be wiped out at this rate!”

“Hyung-nim, this way!”

Takosu shouted while standing in front of a small stone room. The group quickly ran into the room and Takosu operated the switch. Then a thick iron door fell with a roar.

“W-we lived!”

Now the group could take a break. But after sighing with relief, they realized that the situation wasn’t over.

“Wait? How are we going to leave?”

The group instantly became distressed. The door was able to block the demons. But they were stuck in the stone room at the same time. If they opened the door to leave then the demons would just kill them.

“Do we have to just die?”

Jepeteu worried about it for a while. Then Garam shook his head with a serious expression.

“But didn’t we register our resurrection place in the south of the Sinius Principality? The expedition members are crowded there right now. If we resurrect while being chaotic then everything will be ruined. We will also drop equipment since we are chaotic.”

“But we can’t just rot here!”

Jepeteu shouted angrily. Then Takosu offered another idea.

“Wait? This is a stone room on the 1st floor underground. And weren’t there no demons upstairs?”

Then if we bore through the ceiling then we should be able to escape the demons.

“Bore through the ceiling? Is that possible?”

“The entire ceiling shouldn’t be made out of stone. If we take off a few stones from the ceiling then the rest is likely to be dust. Isn’t it better to take a little time to escape than to die?”

“That makes sense.”

Jepeteu nodded and agreed. Thus the party was determined to dig through the first floor ceiling. Naturally, the task of digging through the ceiling was left to the maknae Isyuram. This was the story of Isyuram’s painful fate. Isyuram had been shovelling for five days. However, the ceiling was still strong and the group could barely climb halfway. Isyuram’s blood pressure had already crossed 200 from being a minion and now he had to keep on digging.

“Hey maknae, when will you hyungnims be able to see the sun?”

‘Dammit, they’ll see. Sooner or later I’ll make it so that they won’t be able to see sunlight for their entire life.’

“I’m working hard hyungnims!”

Despite grinding his teeth fiercely, Isyuram replied with a fake bright expression. Then he pushed all his anger into the ceiling and hit it with all his strength.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

There was a tremendous roar and the stone room started shaking. Cracks spread throughout the stone room and stones fell from the ceiling like hail. The criminals screamed and ran around the room.

“Wah! What, what, what the?”

“Isyuram, what did you do?”

“Are you trying to bury us?”

“Ah, no, I didn’t mean to…….”

Isyuram who avoided the stones tried to explain but suddenly stopped. He suddenly felt some wind flowing in from somewhere. There was a stone room underground so there was no place for the wind to enter. Then? Isyuram hurriedly raised his eyes.

“The ceiling is……?”

That’s right. Isyuram had finally dug through the ceiling! After 5 hard days of shovelling, half of the stones in the ceiling had fallen down. Only a thin slab with cracks in it appeared after the ceiling had fallen. The wind was coming through those cracks from the outside.

“That’s good! Now we can get out!”

“W-what?”

Jepeteu and the criminals gathered after hearing his words. They shouted with joy after confirming the cracked ceiling.

“Waaaaah Isyuram! You finally did it!”

“Okay, then let’s leave! Isyuram, break through the ceiling!”

“Understood!”

After experiencing a range of emotions over the last 5 days, Isyuram gripped his shovel tightly and nodded. He looked at the ceiling with eyes that showed his every humiliation and shouted.

“Haaayaahh, shoryuken!”

Isyuram had become one with the shovel and attacked perfectly. The shovel crashed into the ceiling. After a short time, Isyuram’s anger filled shovel finally drove through the ceiling.

“Ugh!”

He suddenly heard screams from outside.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

There was a huge roar and the ground shook up and down.

“The no 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 defense towers have overloaded!”

“Shangri-La is shaking excessively. It won’t hold on much longer!”

The engineers from the Magic Institute shouted desperately. Wormer frantically manipulated and modified several things before yelling.

“Not yet, not yet! That Shangri-La that I converted isn’t that weak!”

“Even if you say so.....”

“Shut up, shut up, you’re noisy! Press on!”

Wormer made Shangri-La continue rushing. In this situation there was no other choice. But no matter how hard he looked, the present situation was hopeless.

“Is it really impossible?”

Ark bit his lip and looked at the Truth Crystal. The state of Shangri-La shown in the Truth Crystal was terrible. After colliding with Rwigenberg’s shield, the sparking towers were overloaded and emitting black smoke. In such a situation, Shangri-La.....

“That damn old man!”

Ark glared at the old man standing near the altar on Rwigenberg.

“The black souls of those born in darkness.....”

The black magician changed the spell and waved his dagger. That’s right. The present situation was because of that black magician. Shangri-La’s defense ward should exceed the shield’s recovery rate according to Wormer’s calculations. In fact, the defense ward had actually melted Rwigenberg’s shield and had been slowly entering. But that damn black magician had sacrificed the lives of the demons to amplify the recovery rate in that specific area. Therefore the recovery rate of the shield became faster than the

damage from the defense ward. The result was shown in the Truth Crystal.

“What is that guy’s identity? Why is he doing nonsense like this?”

Bread asked with an absurd expression. Then Timosi glared at the Truth Crystal and muttered.

“He is the Archbishop of the dark church, Maseutyu.”

“The archbishop of the dark church?”

“He is the guy who dragged Alan into darkness and betrayed him.”

Timosi replied though clenched teeth. Ark opened his mouth to reply to Timosi.

“The black magician is starting the ceremony again!”

“If the recovery rate of the shield is amplified again then the defense ward won’t be able to hold on anymore!”

An engineer from the Magic Institute screamed. Ark flinched and gazed at the scene of the magician wielding his dagger in the Truth Crystal. Like the engineer said, if the shield was amplified even more then everything was over. Shangri-La who rushed in would be shattered and would disappear without a trace.

‘If we can’t stop that black magician.....’

Ark’s mouth dried up. Then Bread who had been watching the Truth Crystal shouted.

“Why are we just letting the old man do what he wants?”

“You idiot, do you have a brain at all? Please think for a moment. Do you think we want to do nothing? If we can’t penetrate the shield then how can we kill the old man?”

Redian cursed after hearing Bread’s words. But nobody else could say anything to Bread. This was a serious situation.

‘Do we have to just sit and watch as Shangri-La is destroyed?’

Maseutyu's sacrifice ritual was almost over. The lives of thousands of demons would be consumed and the shield recovery rate boosted.

".....Great powers of darkness, I offer you these fallen souls.....!"

Maseutyu's spell was completed. No, the moment it was about to be complete. Something metallic suddenly appeared beneath Maseutyu's feet. And it hit exactly between his legs?

"Ugh!"

Maseutyu who was reciting the spell shrieked. At the same time, all the men watching through the Truth Crystal simultaneously let out a groan.

"Ow!"

A pain that only men could share! Although he was the enemy, they could all sympathize with the enormous pain. But now wasn't the time to worry about the pain. He didn't know what had emerged from Maseutyu's feet. However, it was still good.

"The ceremony has been suspended!"

"The amplification speed of the shield is sharply falling!"

Ark turned his head after hearing Wormer and the engineers' words.

"Charge!"

"I know. Increase Shangri-La's defense wards to the maximum output! Attack!"

Wormer manipulated the buttons at a frantic speed and shouted. Shangri-La's defense wards emitted an intense lightning attack at the same time. Shangri-La's attack started to overwhelm the shield and it began to dissolve. After a while, the surface of the shield became as thin as paper as Shangri-La pushed inside. And it felt like the shield had broken as Shangri-La steadily advanced.

"Oooh.....!"

Maseutyu couldn't understand what had just happened. If he had completed the sacrificial offering then Shangri-La would be turned to dust. However, he had suddenly been hit 'there' by a tremendous force. Maseutyu's spirit automatically flew away to Andromeda. Any man would react the same as Maseutyu.

"What on earth.....?"

Maseutyu who was rolling around on the ground finally recovered slightly and determined what had hit him.

".....Shovel?"

Maseutyu murmured in a dumbfounded voice. That's right. Maseutyu had been hit 'there' by a shovel that had emerged from the ground. Why the hell would a shovel emerge to hit 'that' place? Maseutyu couldn't understand the situation. Then the ground where the shovel emerged from started to shake. And a man slowly crawled out.

"Eh? Where are we?"

The man covered in dust looked around restlessly. The man was Isyuram who had been concentrating on shovelling for 5 days.

"Isyuram, what the? Get out of the way!"

Then dozens of other people crawled out from the hole. It was Jepeteu and his group of criminals. How on earth did Isyuram and the criminal organization emerge from Maseutyu's feet? The reason was simple. In fact, the Red Man had hidden the Rwigenberg in a corner of the northern desert in order to hide it from the expedition army. Rwigenberg had been buried beneath the sand until only the castle was left exposed. That's right. The old castle the criminals found was the castle built on Rwigenberg's back. That was the reason why the criminals couldn't find any treasures or monsters inside the old castle. The Red Man owned the property so it wouldn't have any treasures or monsters. The demons were gathered in the basement so they didn't spot the criminals until they entered the basement. However, no one would've imagined that the criminal group would have entered the stone room and be trapped

inside. The Rwigenberg had flown to Kwarian shortly afterwards in order to start the resurrection ceremony while Isyuram was digging through the ceiling. When Shangri-La had collided with Rwigenberg, the impact had caused part of the ceiling to collapse. But Maseutyu couldn't know such matters.

"Y-you guys..... What on earth? Why that place.....did you come out?"

Maseutyu ground his teeth together as he glared at them. He had been hit in 'that' place by the shovel.

"What's with that old man?"

"Why is he glaring at us?"

"Why is the mood turning uncomfortable?"

The wanted criminals muttered as they stared at Maseutyu.

"Y-you guys....what you did....how dare.....I'm going to kill you!"

Maseutyu said angrily as he chanted a spell.

"Ack! That old man is a magician!"

"Damn, what the hell is going on? Who is that guy and where is this place? Why is everything strange?"

"We'll check it later. Just kill that old man for the moment!"

The criminals hurriedly pulled out their weapons.

"Impertinent.....I'll crush you like mayflies....huck!"

Maseutyu flinched and stopped chanting his spell. Then he recited another spell at tremendous speed and disappeared.

"Eh? Warp magic?"

"What the! Why is he running away?"

"Huck! H-h-h-hyungnim!"

Takosu turned his head and stuttered with a sickly expression.

Jepeteu and the other criminals also turned their heads and paled.

“W-what is going on?”

A huge land mass was reflected in the eyes of the criminals. A land mass at least 1 kilometre in size was rushing towards them. That’s right. It was Shangri-La who had rushed through Rwigenberg’s shield after Maseutyu’s spell was interrupted. Maseutyu had seen it and escaped using Warp.

“Huck! S-scatter!”

“I-it’s too late.....”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The criminals’ cries of distress were buried under the loud roaring sound. Isyuram who had played a vital role in interrupting the ritual and allowed Shangri-La to penetrate Rwigenberg’s shield. However, they were rewarded by being squished between Shangri-La and Rwigenberg. This was the moment when another history originated in New World.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Shangri-La was a 1 kilometre land mass while the Rwigenberg was several kilometres wide. The two objects with an astronomical mass collided in the air. The whole space shook and a roaring sound swept through the battlefield. The shock wave spread and the airships and demons fighting moved like they were fighting on stormy seas. The aftermath around the crash was crazy. More than half of Shangri-La had been destroyed by the collision. Cracks also spread on the white tower because of the impact.

“Danger!”

“Owaaaaah!”

The heroes’ descendants and the engineers fell and rolled all over the place. However, Ark grabbed the control device firmly and stared at the Truth Crystal.

‘Unbelievable.....!’

Ark moaned as the dust disappeared and the scene was revealed on the crystal. After melting the shield with the lightning attack, Shangri-La had crashed into the side of the Rwigenberg. More than half of Shangri-La broke from the impact. It was natural. This was a massive conflict.

“Ah ah ah, S-Shangri-La.....the legacy of the ancient prophet clan.....”

“Damn, the Shangri-La that I meticulously converted.....my aerial fortress that is a man’s dream.....”

The prophet clan and Wormer murmured as they yanked the hair on their heads. The problem was that only Shangri-La was being smashed. Was it due to the shield? Or the defense of Rwigenberg’s shield transcended imagination? The exact reason was unknown but Rwigenberg was still fine. Of course, it had collided with Shangri-La directly so the top part of the building had been crushed. Rwigenberg was also gushing blood from a cut in its side. But when looking at Rwigenberg’s huge figure, it was just a scar. Despite Shangri-La being smashed into its side, the Rwigenberg was still flying. Ark thought it was slightly disappointing that the Rwigenberg didn’t crash.

‘At least the defense shield is pierced!’

He had still achieved his purpose.

“No. 1 system out, no. 2 system out, no. 3 system out.”

“All the circuits connected to the Ark of Creation have stopped working.”

“The buoyancy of Shangri-La has been destroyed. We’re going to fall within a few minutes!”

The voice of the Magic Institute’s engineers shook his ears.

“Damn, there’s no room to breathe. Everybody escape from Shangri-La!”

“To where?”

“.....There’s only one place we can go.”

Ark looked at the Rwigenberg through the Truth Crystal and replied. That’s right. There was only one place where Ark’s group could go. If Shangri-La collided with the Rwigenberg and fell with them still in it then the mission would still be a failure. Even though the altar was hit, it hadn’t been completely destroyed. There was a huge amount of magic concentrated on the Rwigenberg so the shield would slowly recover. Of course, the shield would be weaker than before but it would be impossible to shoot down the Rwigenberg within the time limit. There was only one way left!

“We just have to prevent the resurrection ceremony directly!”

“Stop it directly? I like it. In the end I wanted that as well.”

Bread grabbed his greatsword and laughed.

“There’s no time. Quickly!”

“Good. Let’s go!”

Each of the heroes’ descendants took out their weapons and followed Ark. Then Lariette and the prophet clan shouted.

“Wait, I have to take the Ark of Creation!”

“That’s right. I almost forgot. Where is the Ark of Creation?”

“It’s in the underground power chamber.”

“Underground power chamber.....”

Ark narrowed his eyes and muttered. He forgot because the Ark of Creation had been used as a power source for Shangri-La but it was one of the key weapons in the Demonic War. It couldn’t be allowed to be destroyed with Shangri-La. There was no guarantee what would happen to it if it stayed within the underground room.

‘This is the middle of enemy lines.’

The Ark of Creation can stop the effect of the Demonic Sphere of

influence within 10 kilometres! He couldn't give up such an artifact when he had to plunge into enemy lines. Of course, he couldn't use it while the Ark of Creation was a power source for Shangri-La. But now the circuits were destroyed so it couldn't be used as a power source anymore.

'The reason Shangri-La hasn't fallen immediately is because it is stuck in the Rwigenberg. The Ark of Creation would be no use if left inside Shangri-La's power room.'

Ark hurriedly organized the situation.

"Shambala and Bread, you take the others and escape towards the Rwigenberg first. I'll go and retrieve the Ark of Creation with Lariette and the prophet clan."

"Understood."

Shambala and Bread led the White Tiger clan and the Magic Institute's engineers outside. At the same time, Ark headed towards the underground power chamber with Lariette and the prophet clan. He saw the Ark of Creation shining brilliantly on an altar and took it.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Then the power chamber shook violently and the walls cracked. Shangri-La's collapse quickly accelerated.

"Hurry!"

The prophet clan holding the Ark of Creation quickly ran out after hearing Ark's words. The situation was even more situation when they went outside. The ground had split here and there and sparks were flying up everywhere. The forest surrounding the white tower was being devastated by the flying sparks. It was a scene like an earthquake and wildfire was happening at the same time! The air was clogged with smoke, making it difficult to breathe.

'But we have to go forward!'

"Lariette-nim, please increase the fire resistance!"

"Holy Breathing which stops the flames!"

-Your fire resistance has increased thanks to 'Holy Breathing which stops the flames.'

<All allies will have their fire resistance increased by 35% and the fatigue reduced>

"Everybody stay behind me!"

Ark shouted as he jumped into the forest of flames. An extravagant hot wind hit them but it was somewhat bearable thanks to Lariette's magic. They didn't receive that much damage even if the flames reached them. But it wasn't just flames threatening Ark.

Ujik, ujik, kwadududuk!

The trees rapidly collapsed because of the flames.

"Ack, Riposte! Riposte! Riposte!"

Ark blew back the trees using Riposte as he ran through the forest. After running around for a while, the Rwigenberg finally appeared in several hundred metres in front of him. He also saw the forms of Shambala and Bread at his destination.

"Nearly there. Exert yourself a bit more!"

Ark shouted when he saw the prophet clan who was carrying the Ark of Creation gasping for breath. There was a violent sound and the ground suddenly became unstable. Ark felt something strange as the ground trembled. It felt like he was riding an elevator. Ark's face stiffened as he moved his gaze.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

The piece of land stuck in the Rwigenberg had started to collapse. Shangri-La was deprived of its support and was starting to fall from the Rwigenberg. Ark had felt the strange sensation of falling.

'Damn, I'm too late!'

Panic appeared on Ark's face. He was 100 metres away from the Rwigenberg! 100 metres more and he could escape. Of course, he

could escape the crisis if he rode on the transformed Pendragon. And he could somehow help a few people. However, Lariette and the prophet clan were 11 people. He wouldn't be able to save the remaining 9~10 people. Furthermore, the prophet clan needed to activate the Ark of Creation so he would have to give up on that.

'Although I can't save the Ark of Creation or the prophet clan, I should at least rescue Lariette.'

"Burning Soul, transform into Pendrag....."

Ark was about to shout for Burning Soul when he suddenly closed his mouth. Shambala, Bread and their group who had arrived on the Rwigenberg had been surrounded by demons. While a lot of demons had died in the collision between Shangri-La and Rwigenberg, there were still at least 2,000 remaining. Furthermore, Bread and Shambala's group only had 100 people. However, Ark felt the perfect chance in that desperate situation.

"Demonic Distortion!"

Ark's bag opened and black equipment flew into the sky. It formed a large pentagram and exploded before a message window appeared.

-You have used Demonic Distortion.

The released demonic energy from the equipment will distort the space, changing the location of allies and enemies.

Please designate an enemy target when changing locations.

"The demons 100 metres away!"

That's right. It was Demonic Distortion! At the same time Ark, Lariette and the prophet clan were sucked into a vortex. They were sucked into thin air and appeared on the Rwigenberg. And 12 demons were transferred to Shangri-La and fell along with it.

"Lariette-nim!"

The prophet clan surrounded Lariette and the Ark of Creation and started to chant a spell.

“Saran naburan heiradu naradu.....”

“Dirudo baguran herena boradu baram.....”

When the prophets started chanting their spells, a light immediately began to flow around the ark. The Ark of Creation was starting to activate.

“The Ark of Creation! Exterminate them before the Ark of Creation is triggered!”

A voice ordered from the rear of the demons. It was the hooded archbishop Maseutyu. Just before Shangri-La crashed into the altar, he had used Warp to escape. The 2,000 demons shrieked and flocked after hearing Maseutyu’s order.

“The White Tiger clan will form a defensive barrier around the Ark of Creation!”

After the defense formation was formed, Ark took out the Feather of Whispering. And he sent a whisper to JusticeMan.

-JusticeMan ajusshi, what is the situation now?

-We saw Shangri-La fall. Has the shield been completely destroyed?

-We penetrated but it is closing up again.

Ark replied while watching the shield gradually close up.

-The altar has been destroyed and the recovery rate has suffered enormous damage so it should be completely closed up after 10 minutes. It will be impossible to penetrate again within the time limit. Now there’s only one chance. Don’t worry about supporting the airships and just send all the flying boat squadrons here as quickly as possible.

That was the reason why Ark sent the whisper to JusticeMan as soon as he landed on the Rwigenberg. It was to send the flying boat squadrons inside before the shield closed up. Of course, if the flying boat squadrons entered then the airships wouldn’t be guarded

anymore. But now wasn't the time to worry about the airships. The most important thing was stopping the resurrection ceremony! Even if that meant the expedition forces had to be wiped out.

-Understood.

The flying boat squadrons obeyed his order as soon as the communication ended. They turned sharply and began to rush towards Rwigenberg's shield. The demons then flocked towards the rushing flying boat. The airships fired the Spear of Thor to cover them but it couldn't stop all the demons. 100 flying boats were instantly shot down by the demons. However, the flying boat squadrons didn't fight back. They just headed towards the hole in the shield which had narrowed to a few dozen metres.

"Charge towards the Rwigenberg at top speed!"

Buaaaaa! Buaaaaa!

After a while, the flying boats led by JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members poured in through the shield. However, not all the flying boats could enter. About 1,000 flying boats entered before the shield was closed off so the others re-joined the airships.

"All formations line up! Bombard the demons on the ground!"

JusticeMan flew over the Rwigenberg and shouted. Then the 1,000 flying boats fired their guns towards the demons. It was a bombardment from the sky! The demons that had been attacking the White Tigers and the heroes' descendants started to scream. There was a huge flash of light from behind the defense formation at the same time. The image of a mysterious goddess appeared and opened her pure white wings. At first it was a small and soft light until it spread and exploded like a big bang.

Ku kwa kwa kwa kwa, ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-The Ark of creation has been triggered!

The holy power of the creator has been exercised. However, it is

just the holy magic contained in the Ark of Creation. Therefore the Ark of Creation can't completely purify the Demonic sphere of influence. It is only possible to purify the sphere of influence within 500 metres.

* Saint Knight's special ability 'Sanctuary: Saint' has been triggered.

<The Demonic Sphere of Influence within 500 metres will be burned by the 'light' and the demons will receive 1~2,000 damage. All allies will recover 1~1,000 health, have their statuses cured and morale increased by 50%>

Thanks to the tremendous magic concentrated on this place, the Ark of Creation couldn't exert its full force and was limited to 500 metres. However, it did deal 1~2,000 damage to all demons within 500 metres. Plus all allies recovered 1~1,000 health, had their abnormal statuses released and their morale increased by 50%! When the Ark of Creation was used after the bombing, the health of the demons quickly fell. On the other hand, Ark's party recovered 1,000 health.

"Now charge!"

Ark rushed with the White Tiger clan and Shambala. JusticeMan and the 1,000 flying boats also began to attack the demons. With the bombardment and Sanctuary, the demons who received the attacks quickly collapsed. The demons were no longer opponents for the expedition. The demons rushed back and forth while being slowly destroyed. After the demons were almost wiped out, Maseutyu clicked his tongue and turned around.

"Che!"

"Do you think I will miss? I'll get revenge for Alan! Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!"

Timosi who had discovered Maseutyu shot her arrows. Maseutyu used Warp to avoid the damage and hid his body.

"Leave the rest of the demons to the flying boat and chase after him!"

Ark shouted as he belatedly discovered Maseutyu. If he left Maseutyu alone then there was no telling what black magic he would use. After a moment, it was possible to find Maseutyu in front of a square building among the rubble of other buildings. However Maseutyu ran into the building before they could reach him. The building was the size of a soccer stadium. The dome over it had weird magic characters carved on it. He thought the red light shooting down from the sky had been concentrated on the castle. But it was actually hitting the four spires around the dome. He didn't know what the red light concentrated on the dome was but that wasn't important now. The power to resurrect the Dark Lord was concentrated on that dome! Then it wasn't necessary to consider the dome's identity.

"That is the place where the Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony is taking place."

Ark instantly examined the blinking warning message in the upper right corner.

<p>-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony has begun!</p> <p><Time remaining until the Dark Lord's resurrection: 12 hours></p>

There was 12 hours remaining until the resurrection ceremony was complete.

'Now I don't need to worry about time anymore. When combined with the 1,000 flying boats, the 1,200 troops should be enough to stop the ceremony.'

The dome where the ceremony was taking place was the size of a soccer stadium. The size was only around 10 metres. Even if it was entirely filled with demons, there would only be hundreds of them. The 1,200 troops should be sufficient to take care of those numbers.

'But isn't something strange? Why aren't there any demons around the dome where the resurrection ceremony is taking place?'

"Ark, demons are flocking from the Rwigenberg!"

JusticeMan and the flying boat squadrons flew by and shouted. He looked away from the dome and raised his head.

“The numbers?”

“I can’t grasp it accurately but they should be in the thousands.”

“.....There’s no other choice.”

Ark muttered as he eyed the dome. He already found the building where the resurrection ceremony was taking place so there was no time to deal with the demons. He couldn’t expect any more reinforcements. The best way to prevent any more troops is to march into the dome and stop the resurrection. Of course, they would still be surrounded by thousands of demons even if the ceremony was stopped. But if he stopped the resurrection ceremony then it would be the victory of the expedition army. JusticeMan ajusshi, please land the flying boat squadrons. Enter the dome before the demons arrive!”

“I understand. Everybody land!”

JusticeMan and the flying boat squadrons landed in front of the dome. Then someone ran towards Ark from one of the ships that landed. The girl running with her long hair waving behind her was Roco.

“Ark oppa!”

“Roco? Why are you here?”

“Why did I come? Of course it is to help Oppa.”

Roco quickly grabbed Ark’s arm and send a sharp look towards Lariette. Then Lariette looked at Ark before sighing and glancing away. Ark also sensed Lariette’s attitude. The strange atmosphere between the two girls had appeared again. However, Ark shook his head and got rid of those thoughts. The strange atmosphere between Roco and Lariette was because of Ark. Ark knew that he had to put his emotions in order. He needed to fully realize his feelings before clearing up the situation with both Roco and Lariette. However, now wasn’t the right time.

“Roco, don’t get distracted.”

Ark removed Roco’s arm and spoke in a serious voice. He looked at all the soldiers gathered in front of the dome and shouted.

“Now it is the final battle. All soldiers, enter the dome!”

“Waaaaaaaah!”

Ark led the White Tiger clan, 1,000 of Nagaran’s allied forces and the heroes’ descendants into the dome. Just as they passed the entrance of the dome. The magic characters carved on the wall starting shining and there was the heavy sound of something falling.

“W-what is this?”

Confusion emerged from Ark’s mouth. Once again, the dome was just the size of a soccer stadium. It was only 10 metres in height yet an unimaginable wide space appeared in front of them once they walked in the entrance. The inside of the dome was a strange chaos space. All sorts of strange objects were floating in the dark space. Complex paths also appeared all over the place. Some were twisted like pretzels and some doors floated in the sky. Other places were also upside down or had mushrooms growing from it. Then he heard a voice in the darkness.

“This space embodies the spirit of the great dark god. Traps beyond your imagination are strewn all over this maze. You guys will never be able to get out of here.”

‘Maseutyu! That guy lured us into a trap?’

Ark looked around with a dumbfounded expression. There was a ringing sound and the information window appeared in front of him.

-Idea Maze

You fell for the scheme of the archbishop of the dark church and have been trapped in the maze. The maze reflects the thoughts of the dark god who made it. The common sense of New World isn’t applied in this space. Everything that exists in here moves according to the will of the dark god.

If you want to escape from the Idea Maze then you should find the hidden truth. But existences that you haven't experienced yet are present in this dark maze. Those existences created by the dark god won't approve of intruders.

<Explorer's Knowledge: New dungeon discovered bonus (Skill points: 40)>

Idea Maze (I)

“Damn, is this the reason why there weren’t any demons around the dome?”

Ark muttered as he checked the information window. That’s right. This was why Maseutyu escaped into the dome after being chased by the attack squad. It was in order to trap them in this different dimension of space. And switch must’ve happened when the door to the dome was opened. That’s why the demons didn’t defend the dome. If Ark’s group was busy fighting the demons then they wouldn’t enter the dome so quickly. He would’ve been more cautious and checked for any traps. But when Ark arrived at the dome, thousands of demons were advancing from different directions. That’s why Ark urgently entered the dome and was caught by his ploy.

‘That means..... He intends to tie up our ankles until the Dark Lord is resurrected.’

The Idea Maze was complex and dangerous. He had thought there was 12 hours remaining but now the situation had changed. Like the name suggested, the area was a labyrinth. It wasn’t a jail with no exits. According to the laws of New World, there had to be an exit for the labyrinth but there was no guarantee that they could escape in 12 hours.

“We can’t delay here. Hurry and move ahead quickly!”

-Grrrrrrr.

Ark shouted in an urgent voice. Suddenly some black forms crawled from the space where the attack squad was. It was a monster which a large black figure and red eyes! There was an instant fishy smell as hundreds of animals appeared on all sides.

“These guys!”

Timosi grinded her teeth together after they appeared. The monsters that appeared in this space where the beasts who had previously attacked Alan. And they also annoyed the escaping Timosi and Avenger members for several days. After seeing the beasts, Timosi's arms quickly moved at a quick speed.

“Matanyi Shooter no. 3, Devil's Stabbing Arrow!”

Dozens of arrows flew across the space and exploded.

-Kuwaaaaaaaaaah!

Then the beasts simultaneously rushed towards the attack squad. Ark surveyed their movement and reflexively shouted.

“Warriors forward! Stop them with the counterattack formation!”

The warriors moved to their front with their swords and shields. In battle, warriors either used their shields to increase their defense by 50% while reducing their attack by 30% or vice versa. But warriors who reached a certain level could learn a special counterattack formation that allowed them to attack while defending. It was similar to Ark's Riposte skill that required timing to be successful but once learnt then they could fight the enemies really quickly.

“Prepare for that attack and counterattack simultaneously!”

And the warriors and beasts collided!

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

There was a ringing sound and dozens of warriors flew back like they had been hit by a truck. The defense line instantly collapsed. The dozens of beasts came through the gaps.

“What, what the?”

Ark glanced at the scene with bewilderment. The attack squad members belonged to the Nagaran's allied forces and were some of the best warriors in New World. They had an average level of 350~370 and they wore deluxe equipment, with one shield even costing 10 million won. There were various options and the defense of the equipment wasn't a joke. Although their defense might be

slightly lower because of the formation, why would a level 350 user with good equipment be blown away with one attack?

-Kuwaaaaah!

Then one of the beasts shrieked and ran up to him when he was distracted. Ark reflexively turned his body and used Dark Strike. The attack precisely hit a weak spot. Usually an ordinary demon would wobble and take a few steps back. However, the beast just shook its head and swung its claws. Ark was hit in the shoulder and retreated from the unexpected counterattack.

“Ugh, this bastard.....”

Ark immediately used Dark Dance to avoid the following attack and retreated. However, the beast caught up with Ark and swiped its claws again.

“Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!”

Then a bolt flew passed and hit the beast’s claw. Ark heard Timosi’s voice as he finally managed to escape from the beast.

“These guys aren’t common demons. They’re elite monsters!”

“What? You should’ve said that sooner!”

“I’m telling you now! Matanyi Shooter no. 3, Devil’s Stabbing Arrow!”

Timosi blindly fired at an animal and shouted.

‘These guys are elite demons?’

Ark eyed the beasts running wild around the area. Ark’s fighting style was to check the information and then decide on a counterattack. But they had suddenly been sucked into a strange space and then these beasts had appeared. Furthermore, he was irritated that he fell into Maseutyu’s trap and he couldn’t react as calmly as usual.

“We have to quickly move forward.”

Ark took a deep breath. The most important thing was to escape before the 12 hours was over. However, Rwigenberg’s shield was completely active again. It might not have the same power as before

so the airships would be able to penetrate it with an all-out attack again but they were hindered by the demons. In the end, he could only rely on the 1,200 troops to stop the Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony. If the attack squad hurried and were wiped out then everything would be over.

'Let's concentrate on the situation in front of me at the moment.'

"All warriors change to a defensive position and stop them from breaking into the camp! JusticeMan ajusshi, rehabilitation hyungnims, join up with the barrier. Explain their positions to the warriors. All priests concentrate on healing the warriors holding the barrier first!"

Ark shouted after calming his head. The warriors instantly spread out and formed a wall made of shields. The opponent was hundreds of elite monsters then the warriors in a defense position would still be blown away. That's why Ark gathered the warriors in one place. He had connected the dozens of warriors into a circle. If the weight increased then they wouldn't go flying easily. Ark had devised this method when dealing with the large monsters in the secret dungeon. Once the barrier was completed, it seemed like an iron wall was made using hundreds of shields.

Kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang!

When the beasts rushed to the barrier, 10 people rose with the strike. However, the warriors had their arms linked so they didn't fly away.

"Okay, we've prevented the beasts from breaking into the camp."

But he couldn't be relieved just yet. The shields became dented every time the beasts rushed. The endurance of the shield was being steadily decreased. If this continued then the shield of the lead warriors would be destroyed in no time. Furthermore, the warriors were in a defense position so it wasn't possible for them to counterattack. Ark had no intention of just watching that happen.

"Jjak-tung hyung, please grasp the information of these beasts!"

"U-understood.'Knowing oneself and one's opponent'!"

It was the special skill of the Guardian=Strategist that Jjak-tung changed to! The information about the black beasts appeared when Jjak-tung used the skill.

-Name: Evil Thoughts

Level: 500 (Elite)

Health: 8,000

Description: Dark beasts born from evil thoughts (Demonic).

Characteristics: Resistance to weapons +50%, Resistance to magic -30%, Resistance to the light attribute -50%.

Specialty: <Rush> Breakthrough power will increase by 30%.

<Quick> Movement speed will increase by 30%.

<Confusion> When the Evil Thoughts are in a critical condition, all attacks will have a 'Confusion' effect. When 'Confusion' is used, the health of the Evil Thoughts is decreased but the opponent hit by it will attack their colleague for a certain period of time. The duration will depend on their mental power.

"Now I have some idea about them."

Ark nodded after hearing the information from Jjak-tung. The reason why the beast wasn't really affected by Ark's Dark Strike was because of their resistance to weapons. And they caught up with Dark Dance because of the <Quick> effect, while the warriors were blown away because of the 'Rush' effect.

'50% resistance to weapons, Rush, Quick and Confusion..... There are no abilities that are particularly threatening. The most difficult thing is the 'Quick' effect.

It was unnecessary to say how important speed was in close combat fighting. The warriors weren't able to counterattack because they were overwhelmed by the speed.

'First I have to seal their movements!'

Ark determined and instantly thought of a strategy.

“Magicians add magic to the archers’ arrows!”

The magicians chanted their spells and imbued the arrows with magic after hearing Ark’s command. Fire and ice covered the arrows and became magic arrows.

“Concentrate on attacking their legs!”

“Precision Shot!”

Syu syu syu syu, syu syu syu syuk!

Hundreds of magic flew through the air. They flew in a parabola over the warriors and struck the beasts’ leg. When hit by the arrows in a vital spot like that, the beasts were more likely to get abnormal statuses such as ‘blind’ or ‘blood vessel destruction.’ The abnormal status activated by the damage was the largest advantage of archers. Of course, hitting a vital spot on a battlefield wasn’t an easy task. The ability to hit the vital spots made archers one of the most desired professions in New World but it required a considerable level of archery skill. In fact, there were users over level 100 who never hit the vital spots. However, the attack squad members were some of the best in New World and had a hit rate of above 70%. Furthermore, their arrows were coated in magic so the resistance to weapons didn’t apply.

-Kuwaaaaah!

The beasts stumbled as dozens of arrows were driven into their knees or calves. And more than half of them were ‘slowed.’

“All magicians use wide area magic on the other side of the barrier!”

“Fire of anger from the bottom of hell, Hell Breath!”

“Earth Elemental, Air Elemental, Fire Elemental, Water Elemental. I call you under the command of the great god, be enthusiastic and run wild. Summon spirits!”

Kuwaaaaaaaah!

At that time, the area where the Evil Thoughts were gathered warped. The attack squad members used Willpower Exchange and 3~4 wide area magic was stacked up. Flames rose dozens of metres high from the ground while different elemental spirits appeared and attacked. Thanks to the archers' Precise Shot, the demons were incapable of running away. Hundreds of Evil Thoughts lost their fighting spirit thanks to the magic and arrows!

".....Descend to this earth, Great Mother of Creation!"

Then Lariette's voice came from the rear. The Ark of Creation opened and a goddess appeared in the darkness.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Sanctuary spread light through the darkness and burned the demons. Meanwhile the soldiers wrapped in the explosion recovered their health.

"Now. Magicians, add magic to the warriors' shields and swords!"

"Atmosphere of mana, become the sword and shield!"

The magicians chanted a spell and a flash appeared around the swords and shields. Ark's eyes gleamed and he shouted.

"Now, switch to assault mode!"

"Uhwaaaaaah!"

Hundreds of warriors rushed with their magic swords. The soldiers turned into one solid mass and it seemed like they were a giant tank. The huge tank hit the demons already damaged by the magic arrows and Sanctuary. Black blood welled up like a water fountain. Thanks to the magic arrows, the Evil Thoughts already had their speed reduced. The archers continued to use Precise Shot to hit their eyes, arms and other vital spots to reduce the speed. Therefore the warriors were able to slaughter the Evil Thoughts.

'Okay, now there is a chance to win. We just have to finish it!'

"Everybody enter the battle. Troops divide into units of 10 and attack the Evil Thoughts!"

The soldiers divided into groups of 10 and dispersed. This was a tactic that Ark frequently used in battle. Warrior, magician, priest, White Tiger clan..... Every group had a combination of those professions. In a large battle, the priests normally focused on the warriors while the archers attacked the monsters. The combination could make up for the weaknesses of each profession. Meanwhile Ark's party was composed of Roco and the heroes' descendants!

"Take this, Dark Strike!"

Ark moved like a ghost and attacked. Then a huge figure raised his greatsword and shouted.

"Beast Spirit Possession! Rise power of the bear! Rise power of the dog!"

The man who absorbed the shape of a bear and a dog was the Beast Master Bread! Bread slammed his shoulder and caused the Evil Thoughts to retreat. Then a blurry shape appeared behind the Evil Thoughts. While the Evil Thoughts were concentrated on Ark and Bread, Shambala had appeared behind them.

".....Eunsal!"

Shambala muttered and the side of the Evil Thought split open, causing a shower of black blood. The Evil Thoughts that became tattered from Ark, Bread and Shambala's linked attack shrieked and frantically waved its claw.

"I'll get revenge for Alan! Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!"

An arrow flew from Timosi and hit the shoulders of the Evil Thoughts. At the same time, the arms of the Evil Thoughts became limp. A number of Evil Thoughts burst into tears and angrily rushed towards Ark. Then Lariette's voice came from the rear.

"Pure Shield!"

At that moment, a shield of light formed in front of Ark. Roco couldn't ignore that Lariette helped Ark and raised her harp.

“Melody Rhapsody Impromptu. Sonata of Pain!”

Some powerful sound waves headed towards the beasts. Roco had intended to use the sound waves from her harp to attack the Evil Thoughts. However, the sound waves collided with Lariette’s shield of light and an unimaginable result was produced.

Kuoooooh!

The shield of light vibrated and amplified the sound waves. The amplified shock wave reflected off the shield and light and shot forward. Then cracks appeared on the ground and a few Evil Thoughts flew 20 metres away. Lariette and Roco gaped with shock as an information window appeared in front of them.

-A new cooperative chain skill has been registered.

Combined chain skill: When colleagues with special attributes or professions use specific skills together then they are incorporated into each other and will exert an ever more powerful effect. This is a cooperative chain skill. However, the colleagues that trigger the cooperative chain skill have to possess the same purpose.

Then there was a strange metal whine as Wormer raised a fist and shouted.

“This is a man’s romance! Armoured suit attachment complete!”

-Kuwaaaah!

Several beasts had run up to Wormer. He had expected Wormer to freak out and escape but he just smiled instead.

“Heh, you will be the first to die. Armoured suit engine open! Aim at the Evil Thoughts, launch!”

Tu tu tu tu, tu tu tu tu!

At that moment, the metal pieces fitted on Wormer’s chest opened. The gun carriage fired towards the Evil Thoughts. That’s right. It was a personal battle armour that Wormer and the engineers from the Magic Institute created.

“Hahaha, how do you like the taste of my genius armoured suit?”

The shells fired from the magic gun exploded. After a brief moment, the Evil Thoughts ran out from the detonation area. The power of the magic gun wasn't enough to stop the elite demons.

“Wormer!”

Ark shouted as the Evil Thoughts ran forward. However there was still a smile on Wormer's face.

“Huhuhu, do you think I didn't expect this much? Magic engine open!”

There was a roaring sound from Wormer's foot and he moved backwards. There was a small engine attached to the bottom of the foot that allowed him to move quickly.

“Hahaha, I'll turn you into rags!”

Wormer slid freely around the ground and fired his guns. Wormer became a considerably strong warrior thanks to his armoured suit.

“Ark, the Evil Thoughts are surging!”

Ark had been stupidly watching Wormer when he heard Shambala's voice in his ear. Ark gathered his spirit and shouted.

“Let's go! Dark Strike!”

“Earth storm!”

“Torrential Sword!”

Ark, Bread and Shambala struck at the Evil Thoughts. The power of Ark and the heroes' descendants was overwhelming.

‘Their skills are superior. Mine has also become much stronger after the heroes' descendants are gathered!’

Ark realized it after battling with the party. In fact, Ark had also realized this in the past after fighting with Shambala. At that time, the Dark Walker and Saint Assassin had different skills and effects. But when they fought together, the two skills had a strange connection which made fighting together easy. He later learned that it was

because Ark and Shambala were descendants of heroes that fought together. The Hero Christin and the Assassin Master Salrin had fought against the darkness together and developed skills in conjunction with each other. The rest of the heroes' descendants were also like that. When they fought together, a connection was clearly shown. Despite Roco not being a hero's descendant, she managed to trigger a cooperative skill with Lariette. Furthermore, Ark's Eternal Soul automatically raised his attack by 40% when fighting against demons. Therefore Ark and his party left devastation in their wake on the battlefield. After 30 minutes, the number of Evil Thoughts had been reduced to dozens.

"We're in the final stretches! Annihilate them!"

"Waaaaahhhhh!"

The attack squad cried out after hearing Ark's words and raised their weapons.

"We've exterminated the Evil Thoughts on the left side!"

"We've exterminated the Evil Thoughts on the right side!"

The attack squad covered in the blood and flesh of Evil Thoughts reported back.

"Good work. Recover your health and mana and check your equipment."

Ark nodded and gave an order. After entering the labyrinth, they had already experienced 10 big battles. There was no time left. He couldn't get any more reinforcements. If this was a regular battle then he would use scouts to avoid as much battles as possible. But the Evil Thoughts just suddenly appeared in this space. They showed up and surrounded the group on all side so there was no way to escape.

'Yet I've already grasped the movements of the Evil Thoughts.'

In fact, in online games the monsters were toughest when fighting

against them the first time. They didn't understand the special characteristics of the opponent and the movement patterns so it wasn't easy to respond. The Evil Thoughts were difficult to fight against when they first appeared. But after fighting against the Evil Thoughts 10 times, they had become completely accustomed to the attack pattern. Knowing the attack patterns meant he could predict their movements. The attack squad could now respond to any surprise attacks without panic. When they faced the Evil Thoughts the first time, it took 30 minutes to wipe them all out with 100 casualties. Now it only took 20 minutes and they received no damage.

'I've levelled a lot thanks to that but.....'

Ark sighed and looked at his character information window.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +500	Nobility Title	Viscount
Fame	42,535 (+500)	Level	496
Profession		Dark Soul	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero	
Health	8,990 (+475)	Mana	9,190 (+225)
Spiritual Power	956	Strength	989 (+38)
Agility	1,304 (+120)	Stamina	1,564 (+65)
Wisdom	199 (+10)	Intelligence	1,672 (+25)
Luck	234 (+60)	Flexibility	329
Art of Communication	89	Affection	229 (+10)

Resilience	483	Dark Fog	91
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics	258		
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople (Armour): Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available			
*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 35, Agility + 35, Stamina +35, Defense +70, Wild Strength is available			
Shining Darkness (Two-handed Sword): +10% additional damage against demonic monsters, Agility +20, Stamina +20, Intelligence +20			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
White Tiger's Cloak (Mantle): immune to skills that lower morale, Courage +30%, Agility +30, White Tiger's Roar is available			
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available			
Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available			
Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available			
Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds			
Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%			

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense.

He had been level 492 when he entered the Idea Maze. He had gained 4 levels in here. It was a natural result so they killed thousands of elite monsters without any breaks. However Ark had a gloomy expression on his face.

‘There are still 1,000 soldiers left and it isn’t difficult dealing with the Evil Thoughts. But.....’

Ark’s purpose wasn’t to raise his level. It was to escape from the Idea Maze as soon as possible in order to stop the resurrection ceremony.

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord’s resurrection ceremony has begun!

<Time remaining: 7 hours>

Ark confirmed the blinking warning message and sighed. They had already wasted 5 hours in the maze.

‘Damn, how the hell do I get out of this maze?’

Ark looked at the strange maze with pained eyes. This was actually the largest problem. The labyrinth was like a 3D puzzle and moving the wrong way meant that he could appear back at the beginning.

Furthermore, there were hundreds of weird shapes in the background that spun around like a kaleidoscope that made it difficult to grasp the terrain of the dungeon. Therefore the attack squad had wandered for 5 hours and had returned to almost the beginning.

‘I can’t find the path even if I use the cartography skill.’

Even the cartography skill didn’t work in the Idea Maze. Of course, if he dispersed the troops to look for the exit then it was possible to save time. But he didn’t know when there would be a surprise attack and how many monsters there would be. If he spread his troops then it was possible that they would be wiped out. However, he couldn’t roam this 3D maze blindly.

‘This is a complete dilemma.’

Ark sighed and looked down at Burning Soul coiled around his waist. If he made Burning Soul transform then Ark might be able to find a path in the air. The Idea Maze wasn’t just a blank space. Various pillars and crystals in the air but it wasn’t to the extent that they couldn’t move through it. If he took Burning Soul around the labyrinth then wasn’t it possible to find the exit?

‘Yes, Burning Soul might be able to find the exit but that doesn’t mean we can make our way there.’

Yes, that was the reason why Ark hadn’t used that method. Once again this was a 3D maze with thousands of paths. Even if he found the exit, it might be impossible for Ark to find a path there. Furthermore, the labyrinth also had worm holes that would warp them to another area. There was no way to follow a straight path. The reason the attack squad had wandered around the same areas many time was because of the worm holes. Wormholes also existed in the sky so there was no guarantee that the members could move to the exit.

‘Damn, Maseutyu must be hiding somewhere and laughing.’

Anger welled up inside him at the thought.

‘I’ll smash him as soon as I find him after chasing…….’

Ark was sighing when a thought appeared in his mind.

‘Wait? Chasing? Then.....?’

“That’s right, there is that method!”

Ark thought for a while before standing up and shouting. The attack squad members just stared at Ark after he stood up and yelled. It was a look which showed their confusion. However, his gaze publicized that everything was fine. Ark smiled and looked at them before speaking.

“Everybody get up. Be prepared to get out of here.”

“Only a bit more to go.”

Maseutyu murmured with excitement as he looked at a blood red iron door.

“In the next 4 hours..... After 4 hours the King of Darkness will descend down to this land! Then no one will be able to stop him. The Dark Lord who has been hiding and waiting for hundreds of years will return! Hahahaha.....”

“We won’t let you!”

It was at that moment. Suddenly a ray flew through the darkness. Maseutyu hadn’t considered an attack and the ray hit his thigh. Maseutyu kneeled down and looked at the direction where the ray came from.

“T-these guys?”

Maseutyu stared with confusion. Hundreds of soldiers were approaching from the other side of the square. At the forefront of the soldiers were Ark, Shambala, Bread, Redian, Lariette, Timosi and Wormer, the descendants of the 7 heroes. That’s right. They were the elite members of the expedition force! Maseutyu stared at them with disbelief and stuttered.

“T-this is ridiculous! This is the Idea Maze where no souls can

escape from. But these humans in only 8 hours.....”

“Are you wondering why? It is because you told us the way.”

“Me? That’s impossible.....”

“Well, you left us clues that allowed this wonderful guy to track.

Ark smiled and patted Burning Soul coiled around his waist. Then Burning Soul rubbed against his hand with a happy expression. That’s right. Ark managed to find the exit to this annoying maze thanks to Burning Soul. Around 3 hours ago, Ark had been sitting around when he suddenly stood up and said that they would escape from the maze in a confident voice.

“What does that mean?”

“Didn’t you say there wasn’t a way to escape?”

“Aren’t we like this because we couldn’t find the exit?”

“.....Are you feverish?”

Shambala, Bread, Redian and Lariette looked at him with perplexed eyes. Roco then interrupted with an angry voice.

“Ark oppa isn’t someone who will speak nonsense! If he says we’ll leave then we are leaving!”

As expected, Roco was the person who knew Ark best. That’s right. Ark was such a person. He was a man of action. Bread scratched his head after hearing Roco’s serious voice and asked.

“.....Do you really have a method?”

“Huhuhuhu.”

Ark just laughed instead of answering. Ark shouted towards Burning Soul wound around his waist.

“Burning Soul!”

Kurarara, kurarara?

Burning Soul looked up at him with wide eyes. Ark smiled and spoke

to Burning Soul.

“Burning Soul, using Stalking to find all the footprints in this area!”

Kurarara, kurarara!

Burning Soul nodded and dropped down to the ground. His head moved along the ground as he flicked his tongue. After a while, a huge number of footprints appeared in front of Ark.

“Apply filter, delete the footprints of the demons!”

When Ark gave the command, all the footprints of the beasts disappeared.

“Apply filter, delete the footprint of the foreigners!”

This time the footprints of the attack squad disappeared. After all the footprints disappeared, only one set remained.

-Search for information of the target footprint.
--

<Classification: Black magician, Alignment: Chaotic NPC, Travelling time: 5 hours and 16 minutes ago>

‘I found you Maseutyu!’

A satisfied smile appeared on Ark’s face after seeing the footprints. This was the method Ark devised to escape from the maze. It was thanks to Maseutyu that the attack squad members discovered the exit. He had run away and they had followed him. The place where he had escaped to was probably the exit.

‘In other words, that fellow is either waiting by the exit or had already escaped so we can follow his footprints out the exit!’

That’s how Ark thought about using Burning Soul’s Stalking. Burning Soul’s Stalking had already reached Master level so he gained the ability to filter out footprints. The search time had also extended by 50% and he could now follow the footsteps for 6 hours.

‘Maseutyu passed by 5 hours ago so I can still track him. If I remove the demons and the attack squad, the footprints belonging to the

black magician chaotic NPC is obviously Maseutyu!’

It was a sure way to find the exit. There was no more time to hesitate.

“Everybody rise! From now on we will be marching towards the exit! Burning Soul, lead the way!”

Ark and the attack squad followed Maseutyu’s footsteps. So Maseutyu taught Ark the path.

‘If I didn’t use this method then we would’ve been wandering for a few days.’

Ark once again realized how complicated the Idea Maze was after following Maseutyu’s footprints. Maseutyu had used the shortest course to navigate the labyrinth. Yet it still took the attack squad 3 hours to reach this place. That’s because the path was still complicated. They had also been attacked by Evil Thoughts along the way so the attack squad had decreased by 800 people.

‘800 people were able to escape from the maze because of Burning Soul!’

Then Maseutyu glared and shouted.

“How dare you guys…….”

“It is thanks to you that we got here. Why are you talking such nonsense?”

“……That’s far enough.”

Maseutyu’s face turned red after hearing Ark’s words. He frowned and stood up before yelling.

“Cheeky bastard, I’ll show you what true fear is!”

It was at that moment. Maseutyu’s body was surrounded by a red flash and his skin split open. Blackened mucus flowed out from the cracked skin. After a while, a spider like monster with two heads appeared. A red warning message appeared in front of Ark.



||-The boss of Darkness 'Jin. Maseutyu' has appeared!||

Idea Maze (II)

‘What the? That guy, he wasn’t just an ordinary NPC?’

Ark became upset after seeing the spider like form that Maseutyu had transformed himself into. However, a smile spread on Ark’s face after examining his information with Eyes of the Cat. Surprisingly Maseutyu was level 800. However he wasn’t an elite boss. No matter how high levelled the boss was, he wasn’t a match for 800 elite soldiers. Ark laughed and lifted his fist.

“Let’s start. It is 800 vs. 1.”

He opened his fist and headed towards Maseutyu.

Syu syu syu syu, syu syu syu syu!

A continuous stream of light appeared from behind Ark. They were hundreds of magic arrows. Fire, ice, lightning, poison, etc. All types of magic arrows flew in an arc towards Maseutyu. No, as soon as it was about to hit!

“Teleport!”

Maseutyu invoked a high speed incantation and chanted his spell with extravagant speed before disappearing.

“.....Is he trying to buy time?”

Ark muttered with a frown. Magicians who used that magic couldn’t be easily caught. Furthermore, ‘Teleport’ was different from ‘Warp’ where the location could be designated. However, Ark had a magician slayer that could destroy Teleport!

“Do you think you can escape? Burning Soul, use Stalking to keep track of Maseutyu’s location!”

Kurarara, kurarara!

-Burning Soul has used Stalking.

<He has discovered the mana trace of Teleport. Current mana flow: 100 metres to the 6 o'clock direction>

“The rear! All archers concentrate on shooting 100 metres away in the 6 o'clock direction.....”

Ark shouted before flinching and closing his mouth. Maseutyu had teleported to the place where the attack squad was crowded. If arrows were shot blindly then the attack squad members would become like hedgehogs.

“But having some smarts doesn’t change the fact that this is your grave. All nearby soldiers surround him and use Shield Stroke to cancel the spell!”

The soldiers flocked like vultures towards Maseutyu after hearing Ark’s command. Maseutyu just laughed and shouted.

“.....Run out of control, demons! Shout, devil subordinates! Devil Explosion!”

A black sphere floated about Maseutyu’s head. Dozens of chains shot from the black sphere and tied up the members of the attack squad. The sphere exploded at the same time and the explosion ran down the chain, dealing rapid damage to the soldiers. All attack squad members within 20 metres of Maseutyu received a critical hit and became paralyzed. As the other squad members ran up, Maseutyu just giggled and said.

“Kukukuku, Teleport!”

“Oh my god, what is this?”

Ark’s mouth dropped open as he saw Maseutyu’s battle style. While Teleport was a nuisance spell, it couldn’t actually be used for combat. The reason was that Teleport required 1 minute to chant the spell. Even if he used high speed incantation, it still required 30~40 to finish the chant. Furthermore, Teleport wasn’t an attack magic. Even if he chanted the spell within 30~40 seconds, it would only

teleport him a few hundred metres away. So Teleport was only a magic that could be prepared before the battle began. Yet Maseutyu had solved these issues because of his two heads. One head used Teleport while the other one used Devil Explosion. While Devil Explosion blocked the attack squad members, the other head finished chanting the Teleport spell. That gap was only 10 seconds. Devil Explosion took care of all the obstacles while the other soldiers wouldn't be able to reach in time. Thanks to the two heads chanting Teleport and Devil Explosion, it was like twice the amount of magic.

"Damn, I can't attack even if Burning Soul knows the location of the teleportation!"

Devil Explosion had an attack range of approximately 20 metres. The only way to stop Devil Explosion was using magic and arrows. However, Maseutyu always teleported among warriors so he couldn't shoot the arrows and magic. Devil Explosion blocked close ranged attacks while Teleport blocked long ranged attacks.

"Hahaha, you stupid fellows! Devil Explosion!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Maseutyu appeared among the soldiers like a fish in water and used Devil Explosion. Devil Explosion wasn't powerful enough to kill the soldiers in one blow. However, the warriors surrounding Maseutyu were paralyzed so they couldn't use Shield Stroke. As soon as Maseutyu used Teleport to escape, the attack squad members would instantly receive recovery magic. That's why nobody had been killed despite receiving several attacks.....

'That guy's purpose isn't to kill the soldiers. He wants to waste time.'

That's right. There was no reason for Maseutyu to risk danger by fighting the attack squad. There was only 2 hours and 40 minutes left until the Dark Lord's resurrection. As long as he tied them up for 2 hours and 40 minutes then the world would be engulfed in darkness. If this situation kept on continuing then it was highly likely that would happen.

‘But there is no way to stop him if he keeps teleporting between the members.’

Ark bit his lip and stared at Maseutyu. It was a simple but effective tactic.

‘Wait? He is appearing where the soldiers are gathered. Then.....’

An idea popped into Ark’s head. He turned around and shouted towards Roco who was singing the Song of Recovery.

“Roco, use that!”

“What?”

“The skill you used to trick Jewel in Lancel village!”

“Ah!”

Roco’s eyes sparkled at Ark’s words. Then she began to strum away at her harp with tremendous speed. Suddenly the 800 people multiplied and the area was filled with thousands of people. That’s right. It was the Illusion Sonata that made Jewel and the bandit group wander around trying to find Lancel. It was the secret technique that she learned from the ghost Melody.

“Hahaha, Devil Explosion!”

At that moment, Maseutyu appeared in an area crowded with soldiers and used Devil Explosion. The black sphere floated over his head and chains appeared all over the place. However, the chains just went through their body into the ground. They were the illusionary soldiers.

“What, what the?”

“Huhuhu, why are you so surprised? It is tightly stuck.”

Ark smiled as he raised a finger. The archers simultaneously fired their arrows.

“Huck! T-tele..... Waaahhhh!”

Maseutyu rushed to use Teleport but the arrows were faster.

Maseutyu looked like a hedgehog as he was pierced by more than 100 arrows. And.....

“There’s another round. You stupid spider. Launch!”

Syu syu syu syu, syu syu syu syu!

Maseutyu had appeared in a place where the soldiers were created using Illusion Sonata. Burning Soul had predicted the location using Stalking so the archers had been prepared in advance to shoot hundreds of arrows. Maseutyu received the shower of arrows and 70% of his health quickly flew away. It was a natural result since Maseutyu wasn’t an elite boss and he was also a magic that was weak to weapons.

“Kuuuuoh, these guys.....! They dare to use such tricks.....”

Maseutyu gnashed his teeth as he was hit by another shower of arrows. But Ark just smiled and retorted.

“A spider like you dared to call such tactics cheating?”

“You..... Don’t think it will end like this. Kuwaaaaaaaah! Come out!”

Maseutyu’s body shook as he shouted. Maseutyu who had transformed into a spider suddenly shot thousands of fist sized spiders into the sky. They showed sharp teeth and headed towards the attack squad members. Maseutyu’s intention was clear. The spiders would pass through the illusionary members and attack the actual soldiers. He would then teleport to the place where there were a lot of spiders.

“What? Damn, he still had a surprise like this.”

Ark murmured as he stared at Maseutyu. Then Shambala and Bread shouted in desperate voices.

“Now’s not the time to stare stupidly!”

“Yes, the illusions will be destroyed by the spiders.”

But Ark just laughed and took a deep breath. And he roared into the sky.

“It’s been a while. Spirit of the Cat!”

Nyaaaaaa!

At that moment, the form of a black cat appeared above Ark’s head. Its eyes shone gold and it let out a large cry, making the spiders stiffen and fall to the ground. Spirit of the Cat was a skill Ark learnt in the beginning that made all small monsters in the vicinity paralyzed.

“I-it’s a scam!”

“You’re saying this? Salvo!”

Syu syu syu syu, syu syu syu syu!

A huge amount of arrows headed towards Maseutyu.

“Ugh, Teleport!”

Maseutyu fired the prepared Teleport. He appeared among the attack squad members again but Maseutyu didn’t use Devil Explosion. Thick cobwebs shot out from his hip and shot towards the maze. He realized that he was at a disadvantage and was trying to run away into the maze.

“Not a chance! Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!”

Timosi kicked the ground, jumped up and fired some arrows. The arrows flew like a flash of light and cut through Maseutyu’s cobwebs. The body that was surrounded by the cobweb fell to the ground.

“Now. Archers and magicians, attack!”

Hundreds of arrows and magic exploded from the attack squad members.

“Kuooh..... H-how annoying. But..... You guys will never get away from here. This is where you guys..... You grave. Kukukuku. Hahaha, kuaaack!”

As expected, the boss muttered some unlucky final words before screaming and collapsing from the wave of arrows and magic.

=====

||-Your level has risen.||

“Boring bastard!”

Ark muttered as the message surfaced in front of him. This was the archbishop of the dark church yet Ark only gained 1 level from defeating him? Furthermore, his experience had already been at 80% so Ark actually only got 20% experience. Even the attack squad members didn't level up that much. Despite not being an elite boss, he should've gained more than 1 level.

“Damn, even the loot he dropped isn't that great.”

Ark's face became even more offended as he examined the items.

-Holy Bible of the Dark Church

<The secrets regarding the relationship between the Dark Lord and the dark church is written in this book>

-Church of Darkness' Staff (Rare)

Weapon type: Staff

Attack: 30~38 Durability: 55/90

Weight: 50 User Restriction: Level 350 or more chaotic black magician.

The staff used by Maseutyu, the archbishop of the dark church. The original staff of the dark church had a tremendous amount of dark power concentrated on it. The dark power allowed an archbishop of the dark church to summon strong demons. But it became lost when the dark church was destroyed by the soldiers on the continent. This staff is just an imitation of the lost staff.

<Option: Mental Power +10, Intelligence +40, Mana +200, Black Magician skills +10%>

<Special Option: The black magician exclusive skill 'Stamp of Death' is applied. Stamp of Death has a 1% chance of causing instant death which using cursed magic.

The Holy Bible of the Dark Church was just an ordinary book that could be seen anywhere. And the Church of Darkness' Staff was just a rare staff that only level 250~300 magicians users would use. However, the item restriction on this staff was limited to level 350 chaotic black magicians.

'Well, the loot isn't that important.....'

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

All of a sudden the floor started vibrating and a warning message appeared.

-The magic maintaining the 3D maze has disappeared and the Idea Maze is melting.

<Time remaining until the collapse of the Idea Maze: 59 minutes>

"It is collapsing?"

"Ark, over there!"

He heard JusticeMan's voice on the outskirts of the square. He turned his head and saw the outskirts of the 3D maze were slowly collapsing. However Ark didn't panic. There was no need to panic. The attack squad had already arrived at the exit. This must be the meaning of Maseutyu's final words. There was 59 minutes until it collapsed. It was plenty of time to open the exit and leave. There was no need to worry about escaping from Idea Maze.

'The final battle will start the moment that door opens.'

That's right. The Dark Lord hadn't been resurrected yet but the Red Man and demons would be gathered on the other side. On the other hand, there were 800 attack squad members still remaining. When considering the enemy, 800 wasn't a lot of people. But he couldn't expect any reinforcements because of the shield so he had to make do with these troops.

'Then we should at least be in our best condition!'

“The exit is already secured so there is no need to hurry. If we leave the Idea Maze then it is likely that the battle will start straight away. This might be the last opportunity for a rest so we should recover our health and mana to 100%.”

The soldiers nodded and sat down to recover. In order to prepare for the final battle, the magicians and priests used various buffs while others rearranged their bags.

“I guess I should prepare to.”

Ark muttered as he watched the other members. Ark didn't know how many enemies would be waiting after they exited the maze. But there was one thing he could be sure of.

‘The Red Man!’

That's right. The source behind this event was the Red Man! He already knew how strong the Red Man was after fighting him in Seutandal. Of course, he had only been level 300 at the time. After fighting in the Demonic War, he had reached level 497 and even changed to a 2nd profession. His battle sense had also improved. Even so, Ark wasn't sure that he would be able to overpower the Red Man. At that time the Red Man had showed overwhelming power.

‘But I had no information at that time and also wasn't prepared for the combat. It won't be so easy this time.’

In fact, Ark had been worried about it from the moment he left for Kwarian. And he came up with a countermeasure.

‘I didn't want to use this method again if possible..... But it is the best method.’

Ark sighed before looking at Curio.

“Curio, come with me.”

“What? Why?”

“Stop talking nonsense and just follow!”

Curio immediately shrunk back with a scared expression. However, Ark just grabbed Curio's wing and pulled him to a corner.

"Eh? Eh? Eh? Why?"

Curio looked like a freshman being dragged to the restroom by a senior but.....

"Kikikiki, Master should've said it sooner. I would welcome it at any time."

"Damn, have some moderation. Huck huck huck....."

The frightened Curio soon became overweight after a few minutes. Ark was actually the one returning with a pale face.

"Ark-nim!"

"Ark oppa!"

Lariette and Roco both looked aghast as they saw the returning Ark. They both flinched and looked at each other before averting their gaze. Ark refused to notice the atmosphere and quickly spoke.

"It's not a big deal. Are all your preparations finished?"

"We're in the best condition!"

"Okay, then let's go. Brace yourselves."

"Yes. Let's depart!"

"Ohhhhhh!"

The attack squad members shouted excitedly. That sword that was repaired shone with a bright light while the armour and shield regained their forms. The shining equipment made them look like nobles! A light of hope appeared in the eyes of the 800 soldiers. Now was the final step to stop the Dark Lord's resurrection and rescue New World.....

"Eh?"

Confusion emerged from Ark's mouth as he approached the red iron

door. Red sparks appeared all over the door the moment a hand reached out to touch it. He was hit by some pain and a warning message appeared in front of him.

<p>-You have received damage from an unknown spirit. 500 damage!</p>
--

The attack squad members muttered noisily in front of the closed door.

“What the? What’s going on?”

“Is there a problem?”

“Hey, this isn’t a joke. There’s only 30 minutes left until this space completely disappears. Now there is a problem?”

JusticeMan and the heroes’ descendants were also disturbed.

“Ark, what is going on?”

“This..... It won’t open.”

“It won’t open? What does that mean? We killed Maseutyu.”

“There must be some other problem.... My hand can’t even touch it.”

Ark muttered with an uneasy voice. That’s right. The person who trapped them in this maze was Maseutyu! Ark was convinced that the Idea Maze was resolved because they killed Maseutyu. And he thought it was possible to exit the exit at any time. Therefore it was possible to have some leeway to rest and recover.

But when he tried to leave, his hands couldn’t even touch the door.

“Is a key or something necessary?”

“No.....there is nowhere to insert a key.”

Ark replied while Maseutyu’s last words popped into his head.

‘You’ll never be able to escape the Idea Maze even if I die!’

He thought it was just the nonsense of a person dying. However, he couldn't think of it as nonsense anymore now that he couldn't open the door.

‘Does that mean I'll never be able to open it?’

His heart dropped at the thought. Ark shook his head and denied the idea.

‘That is ridiculous. This is definitely the only exit in the Idea Maze. There is no other reason for Maseutyu to be watching it. And there has to be a way to open the exit. If there is a way to enter then there is also a way to exit. That is the rule of New World. Even the Red Man can't ignore New World's rules!’

He had already confirmed that with Rwigenberg's shield. Ark thought the shield was able to withstand the concentrated force of the expedition because the Red Man was a hacking program that ignored the rules of New World. But the shield was just due to the recovery rate and the ancient sacrifice magic. The Red Man was more powerful than others because he knew all the secrets of New World and took advantage of it.

‘Yes, this is the same as the shield. Just like an unbeatable shield doesn't exist in New World, there is no door that absolutely won't open. A way to open the door has to exist. This is why Maseutyu risked his life to buy some time. The problem is finding it.....’

“Get out of the way!”

Ark was using his brain at full capacity when there was a sudden yell. Bread had rushed towards the door from behind him and swung his greatsword.

“I will crack it open! Gate Destruction!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The greatsword hit the iron door. Players who used a greatsword can perform Gate Destruction. When attacking gates, this skill gave an additional 200~500% damage. But an unimaginable reaction occurred. The greatsword was engulfed in a red aura and bounced

back like a rubber ball. At the same time, the red aura covering the door formed sharp points and shot towards the attack squad.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

“W-what is this?”

“It is a trap! Defense formation!”

The soldiers gathered near the door screamed and raised their shields. However, the red sharp points penetrated their bodies before they could completely switch to a defense stance. The warriors lost 20~30% health despite wearing heavy armour. Fortunately they had recovered their health to 100% so none of the warriors died from the attack.

“T-t-this is not.....”

“You idiot, think a little before you move! Are you just a dog? Do you only understand after being bitten?”

Redian rolled along the ground and snapped angrily at Bread after getting up. Bread scratched his head and said.

“Then what should we do? There’s no time and the door won’t open.....”

“But you shouldn’t just blindly bash at it.”

“Wait!”

The Ark raised his hand and interrupted Redian scolding Bread.

“Maybe Bread had the right idea.”

“What do you mean?”

“.....Look at this.”

Ark pointed to the bottom of the iron door. In fact, Ark had carefully looked over the door. But he couldn’t find anything. After the red aura reacted to Bread’s attack, several parts of the redness became thinner and he could see the iron door. Ark was pointing towards some strange characters carved on the door. It was an iron plate

hidden by the red aura!

‘.....This is it!’

Ark intuitively sensed that this was associated with the method to open the iron door. JusticeMan and the other descendants nodded at Ark’s explanation.

“Certainly.....”

“Huhuhu, you see? Did you see? My action was a good thing.”

Bread puffed out his chest and said. The problem was that the iron plate was covered in the red aura.

‘But the strength of the redness changed after Bread’s attack just now. This means the amount of red aura covering the door is limited. In other words, if we make the attacks stronger than the red spirit will disappear, even if it is only for a little bit!’

“Leave it to me! Gate Destruction!”

Bread swung his greatsword at the door without any hesitation. As expected, the red aura exploded outwards from the impact. At the same time, the rest of the red aura became thin and a part of the iron plate appeared. However, there still remained some red aura in front of the plate. And the red aura went flying towards Bread. At that moment, Lariette and Redian simultaneously yelled.

“Pure Shield!”

“Elemental Shield!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The red fragments impacted with the two shields and caused a crack. Then Bread moved through the shield and brought down his greatsword.

“Now, let’s do it again. Gate Destruction!”

When it impacted with the door, dozens of red fragments extended again. It was a continuous attack of red sharp fragments! Meanwhile the red aura over the iron plate completely disappeared. However, it

would only last for a few seconds.

“Now! Jump!”

Ark used Jump and headed towards the iron door. Ark lost 40% health the moment he entered the range of the door’s attack. But he didn’t pay attention to the damage. Ark used Dark Dance the moment he landed on the floor and rushed towards the door. His hand reached out while the red aura tried to cover up the iron plate again.

‘It’s a success!’

His palm touched the cold surface of the iron plate! At information window surface in front of Ark at the same time!

-Great Creator, Destiny’s mother.....

She carved parts of her own existence to create lives. The world was created thanks to her sacrifice but it was also the birth of the dark god. She is the only key to the exit of this dark world.

-The ‘True Statement’ was discovered.

You have obtained information about an ancient relic. The ‘True Statement’ you found is the only way to escape the Idea Maze. However, the ‘True Statement’ is firmly locked by strong cursed magic. It is a powerful enchantment caused by the dark god of this world. But even if the dark god denies all the presences in New World, Destiny’s Mother is enough to breathe life into them.

The name of Destiny’s Mother is the only way to open the true door. You have acquired information about the ‘True Statement.’

<Knowledge of Ancient Relics +40, Intelligence +15 and Fame increased by 100>

Pajijjik!

The iron plate was covered with the red aura again and Ark flew back. JusticeMan and the heroes’ descendants instantly approached

and asked.

“Ark, did you find something?”

“Yes. I roughly know what to do.”

Ark laughed while sitting in the dirt. In fact, the words on the iron plate didn't tell him how to open the door. But the information window which immediately appeared afterwards caught his eye. It said that the name of the Creator, Destiny's Mother was required to open the iron door. Didn't that mean the Creator's name was needed to open the door?

‘Then the person who will know the answer.....’

“Lariette-nim, do you know the name of the Creator who is also called Destiny's Mother?”

Yes, Lariette!

Once again, Lariette's profession was an affiliation of a priest. After changing to an Innocence Knight, and now a Saint Knight, she had read relevant books on theology to raise her faith and intelligence stat. After Seutandal rose, Lariette had read an absurd number of theology books in the underground library of the Cathedral. It was why she didn't take part in a lot of action after Seutandal rose. If she read that many books then of course she would know the Creator's name.

“Huh? The name of the Creator?”

However Lariette's reaction was unexpected.

“The theology books that I've read have many references to the Creator and Destiny's Mother. But there are no books that go into detail about her. And the original name is written in the books. When praising the Creator's achievements, the only reference is ‘the glory of the Great Creator’.”

‘What does that mean?’

Ark became confused by Lariette's words. All the holy bibles of this world were contained in the Cathedral at Selebrid. Even Lariette

who read all the bibles didn't know the name of the Creator?

'If the name isn't listed in the bibles.....wait?'

The book that Ark had just picked up popped into his mind. The Holy Bible of the Dark Church!

'Yes, that makes sense. The Creator's name wasn't listed in any of the bibles of the light. Then maybe the key lay in the book of the dark church..... The holy bibles in the Cathedral praised her achievements and erased her name so it might be recorded in the bible of the dark church!'

Ark reached this conclusion. Usually a problem in New World always had an answer nearby. Then the key to exit the Idea Maze must be somewhere in this dungeon. So Ark took out the Bible of the Dark Church and read it.

'.....Nothing!'

Ark's answer was half correct and half wrong. As expected, the Creator was referenced a few times in the dark bible. However, the dark bible also didn't provide her name.

"Cade, Elliana, Casellian.....!"

The upset Ark tried to shout a few names but the iron door didn't even tremble.

"Ark, there's only 20 minutes left!"

JusticeMan's voice was heard from behind Ark. Ark flinched and saw that the 3D maze was rapidly melting. Cracks were spreading while some fragments of the maze disappeared without a trace. After a while, the square where the attack squad members used to be gathered broke and crumbled into pieces.

'We came all the way here in vain.....'

Ark let out a devastated moan. Suddenly he discovered something in the swirling space. Floating in the dark space were some memory crystals! To be exact, he hadn't discovered it now. He saw it when they first entered this space but he hadn't paid it any attention. After

being trapped in the maze, they had suddenly been attacked by the Evil Thoughts so he had no time to be interested in the memory crystals. But in this situation, he felt refreshed as he saw them. And he recalled the information window that appeared the first time he entered the maze.

-If you want to escape from the Idea Maze then you should find the hidden truth.

‘A secret truth is hidden in the darkness!’

The memory crystals floating in the Idea Maze contained the dark memories. And the iron door said that the Creator was an existence that the darkness couldn’t deny. Then wouldn’t the name of the mother of the world be recorded in the memories?

‘If there is a problem in New World then a clue is always hidden nearby.’

This was true. However, the hint wasn’t the bible Maseutyu dropped but the dungeon itself. Ark thought about throwing away the Bible of the Dark Church and shouted.

“Burning Soul, transform into Pendragon!”

At the same time, flames engulfed Burning Soul and he turned into a dragon. JusticeMan asked with confusion as Ark got on Burning Soul.

“What the? What is it?”

“There’s no time to explain!”

Ark just flew away on the back of Burning Soul. Finding the memory crystals wasn’t a problem if he flew on Burning Soul. He delayed after Maseutyu died and 40 minutes passed before he discovered a password was necessary. Now there was only 20 minutes left. There was no guarantee that he could find the answers from the memory crystal.

“But I can try. Burning Soul, fly at maximum speed!”

Kurarara, kurarara!

Burning Soul shot flames and flew through the space. After a few minutes, he found the first memory crystal floating in the 3D maze. Ark narrowed the distance and grabbed the memory crystal.

-Kuwaaaaah!

The memory crystal swayed and gave a weird shriek. A vast number of Evil Thoughts with wings appeared in the maze. At the same time an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-The existences created by the dark god won't allow intruders to learn the dark secrets.
--

‘Damn, what does that mean?’

Ark frowned. If he knew that Evil Thoughts would appear when he accessed the memory crystal then he would've been more careful. Well, it was too late to regret that fact. The problem was that the Evil Thoughts were elite monsters. Ark was level 497 but he couldn't deal with them alone. No, he came here alone so he had no chance of dealing with the Evil Thoughts.

“Burning Soul, circle to the right side!”

Burning Soul rapidly turned his body and moved to the right flank of the Evil Thoughts. The Evil Thoughts gathered together and rushed towards Burning Soul. Ark waited for the moment the Evil Thoughts extended their claws and shouted.

“Riposte!”

Ku ku ku kung!

The Evil Thoughts at the front were pushed back and pushed the ones behind them as well. Once a flying demon lost their centre of balance, it took time for them to recover. While the demons were busy recovering, Ark grabbed the memory crystal. Then some haze images appeared in front of Ark.

‘.....Eh? What's this?’

Ark just became even more baffled. This was the area created by

the dark god. Naturally the memories in the crystal would be about the dark god. Therefore Ark had expected a memory about hell or something similar. The video that surface was different from expected. It wasn't about hell or even New World.

‘This is.....reality?’

That's right. The video from the memory crystal was surprisingly of the real world. Ark immediately realized it was reality because of the background in the video. With white walls, a white bed and countless beeping machines, it was the familiar sight of a patient in hospital.

‘.....Why is a video of reality appearing from the memory crystal?’

A woman sitting on the bed appeared in front of the confused Ark. The background was that of the ICU and the woman was clearly sick. She wore a hat to cover the shaved hair from surgery and her lips were a pale blue. Even Ark with no medical knowledge knew that death was imminent. However, she sat down and continued typing something in the laptop despite sweating heavily. She had a fierce determination in the face of death. Then Ark heard an eerie voice filled with anger in his head.

-Dammit, dammit!

The video started shaking roughly. Another message window appeared in front of Ark.

-You have gained information hidden in the ‘divine dark memory’ using knowledge of ancient relics.

<Knowledge of Ancient Relics +10, Intelligence +10, Luck +5, Fame has increased by 50>

“What the, this is? What is this? This is a divine dark memory?”

Ark's thoughts wandered down an even more complicated labyrinth after watching the memory crystal. Why on earth was a video about the real world shown in the memory crystal? What the hell was going on?

-Kuwaaaaah!

Then the Evil Thoughts that had recovered flew towards him.

“Damn, I don’t know what this is. Burning Soul, magic sword.”

Ark suddenly made Burning Soul turn. Burning Soul spat out a magic sword and Ark shouted.

“Take this! Blade Tempest!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

It seemed like magic exploded from Burning Soul’s mouth. The Evil Thoughts were circled by thousands of blade fragments and pushed back several metres.

“Burning Soul, move to the next memory crystal!”

Meanwhile Ark flew towards another memory crystal on Burning Soul. He might be confused by the first memory crystal but he still hoped to find the password from it. If the memory crystal wasn’t important, why was the Evil Thoughts protecting it? There was 16 minutes left so he couldn’t afford to waste time. If he couldn’t find the correct answer from the memory crystals then only death remained!

“Dark strike! Riposte! Blood Tempest!”

Ark gradually escaped the Evil Thoughts and checked the memory crystal. But the result was the same after checking 3~4 memory crystals. A woman sitting in the ICU smiling at a video of a flower field, listening to test results from a doctor and the atmosphere when she learnt the disease was fatal. The last video showed someone shedding tears in front of a new grave. Those were the only images that appeared when he grasped the crystals. And there was nothing related to the Creator in the videos.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

By the time Ark stood in front of the last memory crystal, 90% of the maze had collapsed. There was only 6~8 minutes remaining. If he didn’t do anything then the attack squad would be buried with the dark space.

“Dammit, what can I do? What should I say?”

-Kuwaaaaaaaaaah!

Ark who was cornered turned his head at the scream. Dozens of Evil Thoughts had almost caught up to him.

“Huck, when did these guys.....Burning Soul.....!”

Ark shouted with surprise as an Evil Thought ran into Burning Soul’s side. Burning Soul wobbled against the memory crystal after being pushed. The memory crystal grazed against Ark’s hand and a video played. Ark felt his heart jump.

“What, what the? The video showed up in this situation when I’m confronting the monsters.”

Ark was complaining petulantly when he suddenly closed his mouth. An unexpected scene caught his eye. This video also showed the sick woman. Normally she was always typing on a laptop but this time she was watching TV. The problem was the commercial that appeared on TV. It was the advertisement for New World that was broadcasted before the game was published! After the commercial finished, the woman turned her head and grinned. And she spoke through cracked lips.

-It’s now finished. I’m satisfied with this.

Once again the angry voice spoke in Ark’s head.

-That’s it? What does that mean?

You dedicated every day of your remaining life to creating this game. And what happened to you? What kind of game is it that you dedicated your life to it, making you suffer and leaving you on the verge of death? Why? For who?

For the irresponsible people going to play the game? Or the publishers receiving this game? No, it can’t be! No matter what you say I can’t forgive it.

Those damn users and publishers taking advantage of the game

that sucked your life.....I'll smash them! I will break that game with my own hands!

'Wait? Perhaps this is.....?'

Ark had a sudden thought. Ark had misunderstood until now. The video only showed the video so he thought she had taken the video. However, the video in the memory crystal wasn't that simple. It was someone's memory! The person the memory belonged to was watching her. The voice that rang through his head was the owner of the memory. The person she was looking at wasn't Ark.

'This isn't a video but someone's memory..... This means that it is impossible for the person to be a general user. Then I can only think that the memory belongs to someone from the publishing company. And the fact that the memory is left in the dark world..... It is created by the dark god.....'

".....Park Woo-seong!"

All the questions that were running through his mind after entering the Idea Maze were answered.

".....Park Woo-seong!"

"Oh my god, is it like that"

Ark was wrong to think that the Red Man and Park Woo-seong was the same person. The Red Man was an auto program created by Park Woo-seong. Park Woo-seong was the creator so his existence surpassed the publishers. Then he was definitely the creator of the Dark Lord and the demons. That's right. The Idea Maze reflected Park Woo-seong's spiritual world! Then why was Park Woo-seong trying to destroy New World? Ark had secured the flash drive from Park Woo-seong's villa but he still couldn't understand the reason. The flash drive contained fragments of the notes written by Park Woo-seong.

-I can't forgive New World who drove her to her death!

That was a note Ark found imbedded in the flash drive. That's right. This was the reason Park Woo-seong wanted to destroy New

World. But Ark didn't know who had died.

He finally started to understand after connected all the memories scattered in the maze.

'Let's think clearly and organize it.'

Ark was able to guess the relationship between Park Woo-seong and the woman after watching the memory crystal. She was one of the creators of New World and the woman Park Woo-seong loved. She caught an incurable disease but didn't stop working until New World was completed.

'Park Woo-seong wanted her to stop the work and concentrate on medical treatment. But she still continued to push herself and worked on her sickbed. Park Woo-seong couldn't understand the reason why. And after a while he realized why.'

A number of bad posts appeared on the website about New World that she managed! New World was the face of Global Exos so it received a lot of information from the planning and creation stage. In order to implement a perfect virtual reality, they delayed the release several times. The users' interest in the game was big so there was a flood of complaints every time it became behind schedule. Park Woo-seong just shut himself in his laboratory so he wasn't bothered by the complaints. Then he found the file of curses stored on her laptop.

-It was this!

Park Woo-seong firmly believed it. This was the reason she kept on working despite suffering from her illness! No, she probably caught the disease because of stress from the curses! The commercialization of New World happened at the same moment she died so Park Woo-seong was filled with rage. She got sick because of the millions of users in New World.

-I will challenge all the users of New World!

This was the notice Park Woo-seong sent after the funeral and he disappeared. Of course, Park Woo-seong's vengeful determination might just seem like stubbornness. However, Ark could understand

Park Woo-seong's fury. Ark also loved his mother who suffered from illness. And if..... He would hate to think about what would happen if..... He didn't know what he would do if his mother died. He would probably want revenge on anyone connected to his mother's death. Ark also wouldn't have been able to endure it. Park Woo-seong's target was New World. But there was still one point that didn't make sense to Ark. If Park Woo-seong wanted to destroy New World then there must be an easier way. Park Woo-seong was the main person in charge of creating New World. Couldn't he wreak havoc on the main system with one press of a button? So why was he proceeding with such a complicated way?

'Is there a reason he can't do that? Maybe he lost his access privileges after disappearing..... Or maybe his revenge could only be satisfied by winning in a confrontation with the users of New World? But that wasn't the important thing now!

He could examine this information later. The important thing was finding the password to open the 'Truth Statement.'

"There is one truth that can't be denied even if the dark space. The Creator carved out her life to make New World..... All of this leads to one password!"

The thoughts flashed through his head after watching the information.

"Burning Soul, magic sword, Blade Tempest!"

A magic sword shot from Burning Soul's mouth and exploded. Then Ark grabbed the horns and shouted.

"There's only 5 minutes left so there is no time to delay. Burning Soul!"

Kurarara, kurarara!

Burning Soul flew across the dark space. But even Burning Soul couldn't lose the Evil Thoughts using 'quick.'

-Kuwaaaaah!

A number of Evil Thoughts escape from the blade storm and chased him. A few of them caught up to Burning Soul's tail in an instant.

"Damn, Moon light illusion! Lure all of them!"

Three or four clones of Ark appeared and the monsters gathered around them. They quickly died but by that time Burning Soul had already extended the distance to dozens of metres. But Burning Soul was surrounded after being chased for 1 minute. The number of Evil Thoughts had increased by 20 each time he touched a memory crystal! If they attacked simultaneously then it would be difficult for Burning Soul to avoid them.

"Ark!"

"He's being chased by Evil Thoughts!"

"Attack! Support Ark with magic and arrows!"

He heard the cries of the attack squad at that moment. That's right. Burning Soul had already arrived at the area where the attack squad was waiting. A shower of magic and arrows interrupted the Evil Thoughts. Ark's eyes flashed and he shouted.

"Burning soul, charge! Dark strike!"

Ark swung his sword and pierced through the siege. Thanks to the magic and arrows, there was a large gap where Ark could pass through. But Ark wasn't looking at the Evil Thoughts anymore. There was only 2 minutes remaining so the area where the attack squad was gathered was starting to collapse. If he was even a little bit late then the attack squad would be buried in this space. Ark rushed towards the iron door and shouted.

"Yuna!"

That's right. Yuna. It was the name of Park Woo-seong's lover that appeared dozens of times in his notes. When Ark cried out the name Yuna.....

The firmly closed iron door trembled and emitted a brilliant, glowing light. The Evil Thoughts heading towards Ark hardened like stone

from the glow. And their black bodies gradually turned to ashes and scattered. Ark flew to the door as it opened and shouted.

“Everybody escape to the exit!”

“Let’s go!”

The attack squad hurriedly flocked to the exit. The square collapsed the moment the last member’s body jumped through the exit.

The Dark Lord

Cheolkeok.

“Owaaaaah!”

800 of the attack squad members collapsed through the door. The attack squad had wandered the Idea Maze for almost 10 hours. The forlorn hope of exiting the maze in time gradually disappeared. Now it didn't matter.

“Reform your battle positions!”

Ark stood up and shouted. Fortunately they managed to escape from the Idea Maze and entered the dome within the time limit. However, he couldn't afford to sigh with relief. The Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony was taking place in this dome! Of course there would be some demons as the last line of defense.

“1st battalion, 2nd battalion and 3rd battalion, form defense lines!”

“Magicians and archers support the warriors!”

As expected, the experienced users raised their bodies and held their positions. They were prepared for the demons' attacks but the inside of the dome was dead quiet. He couldn't see the expected thousands of demons or any preparations for the resurrection ceremony.

‘What the? Surely it is taking place here.....’

Ark's eyes looked at the blank space.

“Ark, over there.”

Shambala muttered in a low voice. Ark used ‘Eyes of the Cat’ and the shape of a man appeared in the darkness. He was a man with red hair and wearing a white mask.

“..... The Red Man!”

That's right. The Red Man was the main source behind this event. The Red Man responded to Ark's voice.

"Huhuhu, you came all the way here but....."

"Catechism Dance!"

The Red Man was proceeding with the resurrection ceremony. How long did it take for Ark and the attack squad to get here? And how many expedition members lost their lives? All that effort and sacrifice was to stop the Red Man in front of them. Their target was right in front of them so why did they need to talk? When the Red Man revealed his form, Ark, Shambala, Bread, Redian, Lariette, Timosi and Wormer all turned their bodies simultaneously without speaking. Hundreds of years ago, the 7 heroes in the Dark Century was also facing the same situation as their descendants.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

At the same time, there was a roar and countless attacks flew towards the place where the Red Man was. It was extravagant power! Not even the Red Man would be unscathed from these attacks!

"What, what the, this feeling is?"

"The Red Man....."

However, Ark and the heroes' descendants were the ones baffled. They clearly used their knockdown techniques on the Red Man. He confirmed with his own eyes that his sword was driven into that guy's vital spot. But while he saw it with his eyes, he didn't feel it in his hands. All the attacks just went through the Red Man's body.

".....It is already too late.

Then the Red Man's voice was heard from behind them. Ark flinched and turned around. The Red Man was standing in a huge crater and his form started to gradually blur. His body became transparent and faded away.

"What the? Spatial movement?"

Burning Soul, use Stalking to keep track of his location!”

Ark thought the Red Man had used Warp to run away.

<p>-Burning Soul has used Stalking but failed to track the location. <There was a mistake with the target or the command was inaccurate></p>
--

‘What? There was a mistake with the target or the command was inaccurate?’

Ark couldn’t understand what that meant. Redian also moved to the place where the Red Mana disappeared and used Mana Detection before shouting.

“Ark, he didn’t use spatial movement. He wasn’t here in the first place!”

“What? Then where is he?”

“I don’t know.....”

Redian was answering when she suddenly closed her mouth. She looked up at the ceiling and paled before screaming.

“.....B-back up, everybody back up!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Redian screamed and then the ceiling of the dome exploded. Ark shouted towards the attack squad.

“Damn, is it another trap? Everybody prepare for falling rocks!”

The attack squad raised their shields after hearing Ark’s command. However, the ceiling shattered into many pieces and scattered hundreds of metres away. It felt like pressure had built up in the dome until it suddenly exploded the ceiling.

“What the hell? What just happened?”

The attack squad couldn’t understand the phenomenon and

murmured noisily.

Dukong, dukong, dukong, dukong!

Then there was a massive ringing sound and the whole space started shaking. Their nerves were already tense so the attack squad looked around with uneasy eyes. Then Redian who was looking absent-mindedly up at the sky stiffened.

“T-t-t-there.....!”

“That’s impossible, the Dark.....”

Everybody focused on something descending in the darkness. It was a distinct shape in the darkness. Like a newly escape moth, an existence with eight flapping wings descended slowly towards the dome! The head had 6 weirdly twisted horns and eyes as red as blood. Sharp fangs peeked out from the open mouth and there was a black aura around it. It was unmistakeably the shape of a demon! But the attack squad wasn’t frozen because of the outward form. The monster had a giant 100 metres frame.

Kukung!

It stared vacantly at the attack squad as it landed on the floor. The flapping wings and huge form cause the floor to vibrate. At the same time, a warning message appeared in front of all the expedition members around Kwarian Island.

-The elite boss, Dark Lord ‘Lucifer’ has appeared.
--

“Oh my god! H-how come.....?”

A confused moan emerged from Ark’s mouth as he checked the blinking warning on the upper right corner.

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord’s resurrection ceremony has begun!
<Time remaining until the Dark Lord’s resurrection: 1 hour and 50 minutes>

Kuoooooh!

The whole area was wrapped in silence. Time seemed to stop for 1 second. Not even the sound of wind or waves was heard. The expedition members, the demons and even Mother Nature appeared to be overwhelmed by the huge presence above the Rwigenberg. The existence was revealed in front of all the expedition members. And the warning message wasn't necessary at all. The thousands of expedition members turned pale in fear from the overwhelming power.

That's right. The Dark Lord that terrorised the world hundreds of years ago.... He had the name of the ruler of hell, Lucifer!

"Oh my god.....!"

A hopeless groan emerged from the mouths of the expedition members around Kwarian. The expedition members fighting thousands of demons lost all their motivation as Lucifer appeared. They felt despair because the 'Dark Lord had been resurrected.' They lost their will after discovering that the Dark Lord had been restored. But the despair of the attack squad was different. They were subjected to the tremendous power of Lucifer close up that it was even difficult to breathe. Furthermore, they hadn't fallen into confusion simply because of Lucifer's appearance. The attack squad stuttered.

"T-this is..... What's going on?"

"The resurrection time..... Isn't it still unfinished?"

"Then why on earth..... Is there some deficit?"

"Something, something..... Is wrong!"

This was the reason why the attack squad members were in a state of panic. Lucifer had appeared! Yet wasn't there still 1 hour and 50 minutes left? The attack squad held it in and only rushed to the restroom during the spare time in order to thwart the resurrection. After all that trouble, they had barely arrived with 1 hour and 50 minutes left. So why had Lucifer revived earlier than the predetermined time? What sort of absurd situation was this?

“This is.....”

Ark stared at the warning message in the corner which blinked and updated. The timer was still counting down to Lucifer’s resurrection. It was to the extent that Ark felt like shooting Dark Strike at the warning message. Moreover, Lucifer wasn’t the only one threatening the attack squad.

-Grrrrrrrr.

Thousands of demons had flocked towards the dome before the entered the Idea Maze! Now the demons were heading towards the attack squad.

‘I don’t know how it happened but Lucifer is already revived. And we are surrounded by thousands of demons. The only choices left is to give up and die or attack and risk dying.’

As always, the answer was clear once the choices were narrowed. Wasn’t it better to die swinging a sword then just watching?

‘Besides, it isn’t 100% decided that we’re defeated!’

But the morale of the attack squad was already on the ground. Even if he cried out for a battle charge, it wouldn’t have that much effect.

‘However.....’

Ark thought for a bit before using Intimidation.

“You morons, wake up! As you probably know, our appearance is being broadcasted all over the world through my eye. Your friends, families or lovers might be watching. Are you going to give them the impression that you’re scared of a monster in an online game? Then any members who want to should run away now. All those watching will brand them as cowards!”

“..... Now you are threatening your forces with such a trivial thing. Just like Hitler.”

Shambala shook his head at Ark’s threat. However Ark’s threat had an enormous effect.

“Ah, that reminds me!”

The frozen attack squad members winced and started moving. That's right. Every battlefield around Kwarian was being broadcasted on most TV stations around the world. But the game exclusive news broadcasting the scene from Ark's eye had the highest audience rating. In other words, the whole world was watching the video where the attack squad were the main characters. So thousands of encouragement appeared on the internet during each battle. That was the driving force behind Ark's threat. If they shrank back then they would be labelled as a coward from the public on the internet. And there was a possibility that their friends would also act the same. Lucifer had an impact on their real lives! Thus the attitude of the attack squad changed by 180 degrees.

“W-who is frightened?”

“Lucifer isn't scary at all!”

“Isn't the Dark Lord just a monster?”

The attack squad shouted as they spewed nonsense.

“Yes, nothing has changed. Our purpose was to prevent the Dark Lord's resurrection and that just changed to defeating the Dark Lord. Even if we die, giving up doesn't exist for us. No matter what happens, we have to do our best to kill the Dark Lord!”

“Ohhhhhh!”

The attack squad simultaneously raised their arms and screamed.

-Kuwaaaaaaaaaah!

At the same time, the demons circling the square shrieked and ran up. It was impossible no matter how much their morale had climbed. The 800 attack squad members could barely deal with the thousands of demons let alone Lucifer. But Ark was still giving out orders.

“If we stay on the ground then the odds aren't in our favour! Everybody board the flying boats!”

That's right. The flying boats that the attack squad used to burst into Rwigenberg! The battlefield had moved outside the dome so it was possible to board the flying boats. It wasn't necessary to pay attention to the demons with the flying boats. In addition, it would be easier to deal with the 100 metres large Lucifer.

Buaaaah! Buaaaah!

The attack squad climbed onto the flying board and flew off in unison. Ark also flew into the sky on the transformed Burning Soul and exclaimed.

"Enter your formations. Attack!"

The several hundred flying boats charged towards Lucifer. The warriors holding shields and swords surrounded Lucifer while the magicians and archers poured out a shower of attacks.

"Heroic Strike!"

"The power of light to destroy the dark, Ray!"

"Arrow piercing the darkness!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Lucifer's body was enveloped in flashes and detonations. Lucifer stumbled and took one step back.

"That's it. He's stumbling!"

"That is evidence that we're not impervious to our attacks! We can win!"

"That Lucifer bastard, he's no big deal! He also didn't counterattack!"

The attack squad fired their skills even more desperately after seeing Lucifer's reaction.

Hwaaaaack!

The detonations were suddenly sucked in by something. It was inhaled by Lucifer's enormous mouth that gradually became wider. He had sucked in all the detonations just by taking a breath. But that

wasn't what shocked the attack squad.

"What the, that is?"

"He didn't even receive one scratch from the attacks?"

While the health of the opponents couldn't be determined in New World, there were various methods to determine the damage received. For example, the durability of the armour would decrease so it would become dented or bruises would appear on the skin. However, Lucifer's body didn't show one wound despite receiving the concentrated attacks.

"No way! It's a scam!"

The attack squad protested strongly but Lucifer didn't listen to them. Instead hundreds of red rays shot from his mouth after he swallowed the detonations.

"W-what is going on? Iron wall defense!"

"Use Willpower Exchange and then your shields!"

"Great Mana, be a shield. Absolute Shield!"

The warriors freaked out and lifted their shields while the magicians in the rear used wide area shield magic through Willpower Exchange. But the red rays from Lucifer's mouth shattered the defences and pierced the heads of the attack squad.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Dozens of deep red flames welled up at the same time. The ensuing devastation poured cold water on the moral of the attack squad. Everything became chaos from the effect of the bombs. Those within range of the wide area magic lost 30~50% health while the flying boats became tattered or crashed. But that wasn't the end.

-Kwaaaaa!

The members in the boats that crashed to the ground were shredded within seconds by the demons. The sight of their colleagues becoming dog food (?) made all their fears surface

again.

-Mayflies..... These guys.....!

Then Lucifer spoke in an eerie voice. His full length was 100 metres! When the huge figure around the size of a 25 storey building moved, the entire ground shook. Lucifer waved his palm and swept through dozens of metres.

“Huck! S-scatter!”

“It’s too late! Block!”

The warriors freaked out and simultaneously lifted their shields. However, the relative arm length of a 100 metre monster was 50 metres. The shield couldn’t help against the weight behind the arm that reached hundreds of tons.

“Waaahhhh!”

The warriors screamed as it felt like they were hit by a truck and were thrown backwards.

..... Once again their levels, skills and equipment were some of the strongest in New World. The same was true for other professions but the warriors’ attacks and defense were especially on a different level. Every time they levelled up, they gained all sorts of passive skills. As the warriors were always in the front of a party and had the role of a tank, it was important that they learnt ‘shock absorption’ and various other defensive skills. They used their best defensive skill ‘Iron wall defense’ and still flew like a fly.

“This is the level 1,500 elite boss Lucifer.....!”

Ark groaned. That’s right. Ark used Eyes of the Cat and determined that Lucifer was level 1,500. It was a standard that the level 497 Ark couldn’t imagine! That was 4 times the attack squad who had an average level of 350~370! Furthermore, he was an elite boss! It wasn’t an exaggeration to say he was a divine monster. In addition, if the attack squad fell then they would be destroyed by the thousands of demons running amok on the ground.

“We’ll be wiped out in a few minutes.”

If the airships penetrated Rwigenberg’s shield then there was a chance to overcome the crisis. But the airships hadn’t been able to concentrate their attacks on the shield thanks to the demons’ interference. The intermittent attacks weren’t able to surpass the recovery speed of the shield.

“..... Is it impossible to defeat him?”

Thousands of demons and Lucifer! Somehow he had to deal with them using 800 people. In the end, Ark’s expression was despairing as he looked at Lucifer.

“Stupid bastard, why are you staring dumbly instead of fighting?”

Then he heard Shambala’s voice from behind him. Shambala had flown next to Ark and looked at him with a disgusted expression.

“What are you thinking? You’re the one that said he was still a monster no matter how strong! The attack squad believed you and are risking their lives but what are you doing?”

His words penetrated Ark’s head and he heard other shouts.

“Don’t pay any attention to the demons on the ground. Concentrate all attacks on Lucifer!”

“We can’t prevent Lucifer from attacking. Scatter and expand the battlefield!”

“Magicians and archers withdraw to the furthest possible distance and attack!”

“Take this, Heroes’..... Aaaaack!”

The attack squad had been desperately fighting against Lucifer while Ark was discouraged. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members led each unit to hurl their skills at Lucifer. Compared to Lucifer, they were just like a swarm of flies and each sweep of Lucifer’s arm caused the flying boats to crash. Despite that, the attack squad were still frantically fighting until the end.

‘Yes, I can’t give up yet!’

Ark bit his lips and raised his head.

Shambala, Bread, Redian, Lariette, Wormer and Timosi! Formation A!”

Ark grabbed Burning Soul and flew towards Lucifer while shouting.

“Bah, our strong point is persevering like a cockroach.”

“Oh, now’s the time to show my skills!”

Shambala and Bread smiled and rushed towards Lucifer with Ark. The remaining members scattered and formed a circle around Lucifer.

“Area Proclamation, Glory of the Night!”

-Glory of the Night has been used.

<When within a 100 metre radius, your attack and defense will increase by 50% and magic resistance by 20%>

“Area Declaration, River of Blood!”

“Area Declaration, Land of the Beast!”

Ark used Area Declaration and Shambala and Bread followed. When the 100~200 metres range of Area Declaration was used, the three people perfectly circled Lucifer. After Ark, Shambala and Bread used Area Declaration, Lariette, Timosi, Redian and Wormer surrounded them and used Area Declaration.

“Area Declaration, Land of Purification!”

“Area Declaration, Exorcist!”

“Area Declaration, Land of Fire and Ice!”

“Area Declaration, Infinite Energy Field!”

The heroes’ descendants surrounded Lucifer with two layers of Area Declaration. This was the A formation that Ark thought of. Once

again, the members with the highest attack power were the heroes' descendants. Therefore their Area Declarations would have the biggest impact on the demons! Ark, Shambala and Bread attacked Lucifer. Wormer, Timosi and Redian covered them with long ranged attacks while Lariette was in charge of recovery magic. This was why most of the attack squad didn't use Area Declaration despite changing to their 2nd professions. Currently the battlefield was only around 600~700 metres. If the attack squad members used Area Declaration then the heroes' descendants wouldn't be able to. If the heroes' descendants used it first then the situation would change.

"Everybody leave the range of their Area Declarations and use your own as much as possible. However, it is important to use the Area Declaration that would influence the whole unit!"

The attack squad scattered and invoked Area Declaration in a suitable area. It was mainly the priests' whose Area Declarations would give a buff effect.

"All members move to the Area Declaration that suits you most. And protect the priests using Area Declaration. The remaining priests focus on healing the ones using Area Declaration."

Thanks to Ark's quick commands, a huge formation was built with Lucifer in the centre. And a perfect formation was completed within moments! Ark's eyes flashed and he shouted.

"This is an all-out attack. Dark Strike!"

"Gwae, yeong, byeol, cham!"

"Lightning Storm!"

Ark, Shambala and Bread let out a shower of attacks. At the same time Lariette, Redian, Timosi and Wormer used various skills from the rear.

"Set of 3 attack buffs! The great warrior's soul..... Hero's Spirit, Warrior's Concentration, Storm Breathing!"

"High speed incantation, highest magic seal release! The unquenchable flame burning in the bottom of hell! Under the name of

the Elemental Master Redian, descend to this land! Volcano of Hell!”

“Skill seal release, Matanyi Shooter no. 6, Demon Annihilating Light Arrows!”

“Armoured suit, Electric Missile launch!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The special moves of the heroes’ descendants were buffed by Lariette and the Area Declarations. Ark, Bread and Shambala’s swords flashed while Redian and Timosi’s attacks exploded. Meanwhile Wormer continued bombarding Lucifer with missiles from his armoured suit. However, this was just the beginning. Hundreds of attacks exploded on Timosi’s body as the attack squad used their skills. However.....

-Kukukukukuku, is this it?

Eerie laughter was heard from among the explosions. In the next moment, the explosions were sucked in and the red rays fired again.

“Huck! S-scatter!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwang! Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwang!

Cries of distress were heard from all around Ark and dozens of flying boats crashed from the red rays. They had just used their strongest attack! But the results were no different. Lucifer just inflicted a counterattack and dozens of flying boats fell. Despite receiving the huge attacks, Lucifer’s attacks hadn’t even been reduced by 0.1%.

“U-unbelievable!”

“Our attacks didn’t do any damage?”

The attack squad moaned desperately. However Ark’s eyes just glittered.

‘No, this attack did work!’

In fact, Ark hadn’t understood until now. But when attacking from a close distance, it was impossible not to notice.

'The attacks were concentrated on one spot and the black aura disappeared. However it was restored again. I'm sure that the black body isn't his body but a type of shield. It is similar to the shield protecting the Rwigenberg. Then it is possible to use the same method to pierce it!'

Ark had figured out Lucifer's secret. Despite being a level 1,500 elite boss, he couldn't accept that all the attacks boosted by Area Declarations only did 0.1% damage. At that moment, the attack squad members completely lost their will again. But that was just a trick. They had only been beating away at Lucifer's shell which was a shield.

'There is only one way to beat that guy!'

It was the method the Shangri-La used to penetrate the shield! Ark considered a moment before raising his voice.

"From now on the attack squad will divide into three units and will rotate your attacks! The 1st battalion will attack with me, 2nd battalion with Shambala and 3rd battalion with Bread. Concentrate all your attacks on one point!"

That's right. If the shield couldn't be removed in one blow then they should deal continuous damage that would overcome the shield's recovery rate. Of course, it wasn't possible to scratch Lucifer's shield with the attacks of several hundred people. But even if it was protecting Lucifer, it was still just a shield. Then Lucifer seemed upset by Ark's words and swung his arm towards Ark. Ark rose vertically and avoided the attack.

"1st battalion, go. Dark Strike!"

The dark assimilated sword was driven into Lucifer's body and exploded. At the same time, the 1st battalion all concentrated their attacks on that area.

"Precision Shot!"

"Blazing flames of anger, Impact Fire!"

Lucifer's face glared. But Ark just focused his attention on that one spot and attacked. The relentless attacks damaged that one spot, causing the black aura to warp and explode. And a disgusting black skin crawling with maggots was shown.

'That's it. That is Lucifer's real body hidden behind the shield!'

"Shambala, now!"

"Okay, Sword Spree!"

Shambala brandished his daggers towards that spot at the same time. The black aura opened again and revealed the maggot infested skin.

"Keep on attacking!"

The 2nd battalion continuously hit him same spot, causing the sound of iron touching skin to occur and Lucifer's skin twitched. Finally the 3rd battalion attacked and black blood welled up.

"It is working!"

Ark observed Lucifer at a distance with a smile of satisfaction. He used Eyes of the Cat and saw that his health had started to gradually decreased. Of course, Lucifer had incredibly high health so that wasn't a great deal of damage. But dealing damage now meant there was a chance. The success of this attack was significant.

-Kuwaaaaaaaah!

Ark looked down at the thousands of demons on the ground. The demons were jumping and waving their claws but they failed to even come close to the flying boats.

"There is no way for the demons to attack us while riding the flying boats. And we just have to be careful of a glow from Lucifer's mouth. If Shambala and Bread grasps the attack pattern of the arms then it won't be difficult to avoid. Even if it has to take several hours, his health will eventually reach the bottom!"

That was the overall strategy Ark planned.

-Mayflies..... You dare wound this body.....!

Lucifer whined as he was scratched by the hundreds of attack squad members and rushed to Ark. The Dark Lord Lucifer seemed like a three year old child having a tantrum. But even if his spirit was 3 years old, his body was equivalent to a 25 storey body. One wrong move would mean death!

“Burning Soul, circle to the right and escape from his range of attack!”

Ark remembered the demons on the ground and hurriedly yelled towards Burning Soul. However, his reaction was slow and Lucifer’s palm caught Burning Soul. Meanwhile Lucifer’s palm descended towards Ark’s head.

“Ark-nim! Divine Skill, ‘Aegis, Shield of Fanaticism!’”

At that moment, thousands of shields rushed from Lariette’s body. It stacked in thin air and formed a giant shield in front of Ark.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a roar as Lucifer’s palm hit the shield. When his first attack was blocked, Lucifer frowned and swung his fist from the opposite side. Lariette moved the shield and it bounced back Lucifer’s fist. It was a huge iron shield that moved according to the will of its creator! This was the Divine Skill that Lariette learnt from Shangri-La! The Divine Skill of the Saint Knight had the ability to stop 80% of attacks. When his two continuously attacks were blocked, Lucifer’s eyes narrowed and flashed.

-Kuack! This shield is the power of fanaticism.... That’s right. These guys around me must be the descendants.....

“Okay, now it’s our turn!”

“Waaahhhhhhhh!”

The attack squad murmured once Lariette blocked Lucifer’s attack. However, the regained morale only lasted a moment.

-If they are the descendants then I can’t afford to mess around.

Those guys might be a match for me..... I've been meaning to pay respects to the people who forced my body to become like this..... I'll show you the true powers of darkness.

Ark and the attack squad had been preparing their skills for a counterattack. Lucifer suddenly raised both hands over his head and formed fists. Then a huge circular space spread over the battlefield.

Kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang!

The Area Declarations used by Ark, Shambala, Bread, Lariette, Timosi, Redian and Wormer disappeared. The Divine Skill Shield of Fanaticism also disappeared along with the Area Declaration.

“What, what the? What happened to everybody’s Area Declaration?”

Ark burst out with confusion. The field that Lucifer’s magic covered warped mysteriously and the information window floated in front of Ark.

-Lucifer has used the Area Declaration ‘Hell Boundary!’

The 2 kilometres diameter around Lucifer is influenced by the proclamation.

<Lucifer the Dark Lord is the King of hell and has the ability to pull hell into this world. Lucifer has an unlimited amount of magic and all abilities increase by 20% while the recovery speed of the dark shield increased by 20%. In addition, only users with the highest occupation and the demons can use their Area Declarations. Therefore the effects of all lower ranked Area Declarations are ignored>

“What the, this is?”

Ark looked dumbly at the information window. The demons could use Area Declaration? He had assumed that the Dark Lord was just the highest ranked demon. But the problem was Lucifer’s Hell Boundary. It raised his abilities and even cancelled all the Area Declarations that were lower ranked.

‘Then we have to fight Lucifer who became stronger by 20% without the Area Declaration?’

He instantly became gloomy at the thought of fighting Lucifer in such a state. But Ark realized that it wasn’t necessary to worry about that within the next minute.

-Anger, Fear and Despair..... The three demons that defend hell, Lucifer commands you..... Burn this word with your anger, fear and despair.....

At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark. Ark used Eyes of the Cat and Skill Penetration to confirm the information about ‘Apocalypse.’

-Lucifer’s Divine Skill ‘Apocalypse’ has been triggered!

Apocalypse is a skill where the three demons submitted to Lucifer with an ancient pledge. When Anger, Fear and Despair are summoned, all enemies within Lucifer’s territory will be annihilated by the ultimate destruction spell. The effect will occur after 5 minutes.

<This absolute magic will target all enemies within Lucifer’s Area Declaration. However, this spell requires Lucifer and the three demons to sacrifice 50% of their health as payment. When Apocalypse is triggered, it will deal 90,000~100,000 damage to all targets. This will ignore all defense and shields. Lucifer wiped out many brave warriors using Apocalypse in the Dark Century>

“No way!”

Ark’s face immediately paled. Ark currently had 9,000 health. This was after using various equipment and profession bonuses. The level 350~370 warriors had approximately 9,000 health while Bread only had 12,000 health. Yet the skill would deal 90,000~100,000 damage? He was a level 1,500 elite boss but wasn’t that too much? The spell had a range of 2 kilometres so every user within the range of Rwigenberg would be wiped out. Of course, Ark knew that Lucifer could use the ultimate magic to turn the world to ash. However,

Lucifer required several days in order to chant that dark magic. During the time Lucifer was activating that last destruction magic, the 7 heroes and a countless number of brave warriors were able to defeat that power. Then Apocalypse was simpler than that final destruction magic? Its activation time was only 5 minutes. The only way to survive was to retreat from the range within 5 minutes. However, Ark and the attack squad were currently on the Rwigenberg which was enclosed by the shield. Unless they penetrated the shield and ran away then they wouldn't be able to escape the effects of Apocalypse. There was only one way remaining!

"..... Everybody attack! If we don't cancel that spell then we'll be wiped out!"

Ark yelled and ran up to Lucifer. Yes, the only way to cancel the spell was to concentrate their attacks on Lucifer! Everybody was defenseless when chanting spells. In order to use Apocalypse, Lucifer needed to recite an incredibly long spell. Getting a critical hit would automatically cancel the magic. However, there was no reaction from Lucifer despite their efforts. They had only dealt 1~2% damage to Lucifer when Area Declaration was used. It was impossible to cancel Lucifer's ultimate magic when Area Declaration had vanished.

After hopelessly attacking for 5 minutes.....

"T-there....."

One of the attack squad members turned pale white and stuttered. Groans also emerged from the members who raised their heads.

"T-those devils..... The devils!"

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

There was a deafening sound from the dark sky. A huge devil was slowly descending. It was three devils with their arms and legs mysteriously twisted together! They were the three devils names Anger, Fear and Despair. As soon as the devils appeared, dark clouds poured heavy rain and lightning flashed here and there.

–Destroy my enemy..... Divine Skill Apocalypse!

Lucifer's destruction magic was completed.

Kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang!

The three devils opened their eyes and thousands of rays shot out. It was Lucifer's destruction spell Apocalypse that they couldn't stop! The members hit by the light were wrapped in flames. They lost health at a tremendous speed and became charcoal in just 10 seconds. It didn't matter if they used the shield to block as the victims were swallowed up by the flames. The flying boats also crashed and exploded after their owners burnt.

"M-Master!"

Curio stuttered in a frightened voice as he saw the pile of charcoal. Ark bit his lip and ran away from the red light while shouting.

"Damn, release all summons! Waahhhhhh!"

Ark was engulfed in the red light as soon as his summons were sent back. He felt an unbelievable amount of pain as his health was drained. His health reached the ground in 10 seconds.

'D-dammit! All in vain.....'

Ark looked around as he was turned to charcoal. Everything was finished. None of the attack squad could resist Lucifer's magic and were turned to charcoal. The airships and expedition members watching the result from outside the shield also became soulless. Their last hope had been wiped out so New World would be destroyed. Lucifer looked at the pile of charcoal on the ground and ordered the demons.

-Dark seeds, dispose of the remaining scum!

-Kurwarwarwarwa!

The demons flocked towards the expedition members who lost their fighting spirit.

'No, no! I can't give up! Absolutely not! Just one..... One more

chance!’

Ark bit his lip as he watched the scene. Then something unimaginable happened. Ark had been turning into black charcoal when his bag shook and a thick book flew into the sky.

‘Eh? T-that is..... The Immortal Book?’

That’s right. It was the Immortal Book he received after defeating Magura. Ark had tried to get information about the Immortal Book many times. It was the treasure of the Fire Draconians and he expected something from its name. But no matter what he tried, Ark wasn’t able to read the Immortal Book. Therefore he placed it in his bag and forgot about it until it spontaneously flew into the sky.

And.....

Second Coming of a Legend

Ark heard a solemn voice in his head.

-Truly immortal souls are those that don't yield to hardships and adversity!

Ark couldn't understand what was going on. Although he could still think and see, his body was dead and turned to charcoal. So who was talking to the dead Ark?

'W-who?'

-On behalf of the Creator and Destiny's Mother who gave birth to all living creatures, I've been entrusted to take care of this Immortal Book.

'Destiny's Mother? The Immortal Book?'

Based on the information acquired from the Idea Maze, Destiny's Mother was one of the game creators called Yuna. The fact that she was known as the Creator and Destiny's Mother meant she was responsible for all the scenarios and NPC's AI in New World. The AI was no different from the life of an NPC while the scenario was the NPC's destiny.

—The Creator and Destiny's Mother predicted that this world would be threatened by a dark future. But at that time, the life expectancy of Destiny's Mother was already finished. Therefore the last thing she did was create me. And she said. 'You will experience the world through many people's hands from now on. If you watch the world and want to live in a world where countless lives are truly happy then entrust this book to a warrior when there is a period of darkness.'

Destiny's Mother wanted me to ask the warrior. What does New World mean to you?

‘What does New World mean to me.....?’

New World was the next generation of an online game! When he started New World two years ago, he wouldn't have needed to think about the answer. It was a method to join Global Exos and gain a stable income. However, New World soon changed to a method to make money.

‘What about now? Is New World still just a way to make money?’

He thought about it. He still believed those reasons a short time ago. But when he first heard that the Red Man was trying to revive the Dark Lord, the first thing Ark thought of wasn't money but New World. He didn't want to admit it but New World became like an actual world to him. Over the last two years Ark had met his summons, countless numbers of NPCs and users and experienced numerous adventures. The thing he was most fearful about was that all of those things would disappear in an instant. That's right. New World wasn't simply an online game to Ark anymore.

‘.....This is the door that leads to another world!’

Ark thought those words in his head. The Immortal Book was silent for a moment before speaking in a low voice.

–The Destiny's Mother would be glad to hear that.

At the same time, the firmly locked Immortal Book opened. The book seemed to be engulfed in a windstorm and the letters flashed with light.

-Immortal Book: Chapter 3 <Resurrection>

-You are the warrior selected by Destiny's Mother. The Mother of Destiny has gathered the power of the world and granted you one miracle!

Kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang!

It was at that moment. There was an intense light and four people appeared in the north, south, east and west. There was a magician wearing white robes, a woman wearing silver armour and holding a

sword, a middle aged man holding a spear and a priest wearing clergyman robes!

‘T-they are....!’

Ark’s eyes widened as he saw them. He knew two of them. They were Yggdrasil, the world tree from the Underground World and Yuzuria, the world tree from Seutandal!

‘Then the other two people?’

They must be the world trees of the two continents that surfaced before the Demonic World. The Immortal Book had summoned the world trees in each direction.

-...These guys!

Lucifer glared as he saw the world trees being summoned. In the past, Lucifer’s effort to destroy the world had been undone by the 7 heroes with the help of the world trees. In other words, the existences of the world trees caused great distress to Lucifer! But the red rays just went through the world trees. The world trees were only mentally summoned here. The world trees just ignored Lucifer’s reaction.

–I thought everything was over.....

The world trees knew about the situation since their roots were stretched all over the world. But they couldn’t do anything even if Lucifer was restored and used the ultimate destruction magic. The presence of the world trees was to maintain the balance of the world. They weren’t allowed to do any acts to change the history of New World. They were prohibited to openly act. But this was the ancient vision that the Creator saw! When Lucifer used the ultimate destruction magic in the past, the world trees were able to help because the 7 heroes were part of the ancient vision. But they lost their power after unleashing it and disappeared somewhere. Therefore the world trees had forgotten about the ancient vision. They appeared here thanks to the guidance of the Immortal Book. Yggdrasil looked at the Immortal Book with fascination.

–Then Ark is the one from the ancient vision that the Immortal Book

selected.

That's right. Ark was apparently part of the ancient vision that occurred hundreds of years ago.

-Is this the intention of Destiny's Mother?

The 7 heroes stopped Lucifer hundreds of years ago when he used his ultimate destruction magic. All we could do was reduce the damage to the continent.

-But now.....

-..... The embers of hope haven't gone out yet.

Yuzuria nodded and looked at Yggdrasil, Yeosingwan and Changsha.

-I can't think of any better situation than this one. If we don't use the magic then Lucifer will just destroy the world using the ultimate destruction magic. I'd like to believe in them. If this is the darkness that Destiny's Mother foresaw then we should unseal the book.

-Yes.

Changsha nodded. The world trees opened both hands and the Immortal Book floated upwards and shone intensely. Then a magnificent spell emerged from the mouths of the World Trees.

-In the name of the Great Creator, Destiny's Mother.....

-Using your great authority that created the fate of this world.....

-Please show us your will.....

-Great Revival, Grand Resurrection!

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

A giant waterfall of light poured down from the Immortal Book. Then the bodies of the attack squad turned to charcoal from Lucifer's Apocalypse started changing. White skin appeared, their faces were restored and the body was formed. Ark's skin that was as black as

charcoal also returned to its original colour. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-The Immortal Book has used 'The Final Nursing.'

The Creator, Destiny's Mother had an ancient vision and made the Immortal Book. The Immortal Book has its own will. After borrowing the magic of the world trees that maintain the balance of the world, the Immortal Book was able to create one miracle.

In the past, the Immortal Book was able to amplify the Holy Knight Ronian's Shield of Fanaticism in order to block Lucifer's ultimate destruction spell. A few hundred years has passed and the Immortal Book is once again eager to fight Lucifer. It amplified the Creator's 'Nursing' and trigger the ultimate caretaker spell 'Great Revival.'

All allies within 2 kilometres will be restored by Great Revival. The power of the Creator has been borrowed to create a miracle! You are the world's greatest caretaker.

<All allies within 2 kilometres will be restored to 50% health>

* Due to the success of miracle nursing, all stats increase by 10.

* The Affection stat increased by 1,000.

* Fame is increased by 1,000.

*Alignment to good increased by 200.

-You have succeeded in the ultimate Nursing and received the title of 'Divine Caretaker.'

Your fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many patients.

* As a title bonus, all stats will increase by 10.

*Fame increases by 1,000.

'The ultimate Nursing!'

A miracle had truly happened! The Immortal Book was able to amplify the ability of the owner! Ark's urgent wish was a chance to compete against Lucifer again so the Immortal Book had selected Nursing. The Immortal Book amplified Nursing with the Creator's power and resurrected the attack squad. Thanks to that, all of the attack squad killed by Apocalypse had recovered. Ark also received an additional +20 stat bonus. But the Immortal Book's miracle wasn't over yet.

–The holy relic is needed! Or else the world created by Destiny's Mother will become lost to chaos!

Yeosingwan reached out his hand and shouted. At the same time, a brilliant light appeared in the centre where the attack squad members were gathered.

"Isn't that the Ark of Creation?"

Ark murmured as he looked at the light. Lariette was then pulled by an unseen force to the front of the Ark of Creation. The Ark of Creation automatically opened and a pure white light soared into the sky. It spun fiercely before being drawn into Lariette's body. When the light entwined with Lariette's body, her body became thousands of times larger. However, the image that floated in the black sky was different from Lariette. With black hair like obsidian, crystal clear eyes and skin as white as a snowfield, she was a surprisingly beautiful woman.....no, it was the form of a goddess.

'That face..... Such a thing!'

Ark belatedly realized something as he looked at the goddess. It was Yuna's face that Ark saw many times when collecting information from the Idea Maze! So Yuna's face wasn't strange to Ark anymore. But he never imagined that he would see that face anywhere else in New World. But she had appeared from the Ark of Creation. The person emerging from the Ark of Creation..... Was Yuna.

'That's right. The Creator's body had emerged from the Ark of Creation. The Immortal Book has talked about Destiny's Mother many times. Destiny's Mother was Yuna. That means Yuna created

both the Ark of Creation and the Immortal Book.'

After thinking about it, Ark had a doubtful question. Despite suffering from an illness, Yuna had continued working until she died. Therefore Park Woo-seong wanted revenge for Yuna and revived the Dark Lord in order to destroy New World. Then why did Yuna make the Ark of Creation and Immortal Book that were the keys to stopping the Dark Lord? Why? Ark was thinking that when he heard something. The expedition members and demons had seen the scene of the goddess' huge wings flapping before. But the light which burnt through the darkness didn't appear this time.

"A warm breeze and a ball of sunshine..... H-how wonderful!"

The attack squad were revived thanks to Nursing but they only regained 50% health. Therefore Roco had sung the songs of recovery as soon as she revived. While Roco was signing, Lariette had used the Ark of Creation and the goddess appeared. And when the light enveloped Lariette.....

"Ah!"

Roco's singing voice emerged from the mouth of the goddess. It felt like hearing the sounds of elves singing sweetly in mysterious woods. The health and mana of all the allies around Kwarian recovered by a huge amount. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-The Ark of creation has been triggered!

The power of the Creator who made this world in the beginning is contained inside the Ark of Creation. Because both light and dark were a part of the Creator, this power can be used for light or darkness. If used by a Holy Knight then it can be a blessing or a curse if used by a Ruin Knight.

When a Saint Knight calls upon the inner light (Sanctuary: Saint).
When a Ruin Knight calls upon the darkness (Sanctuary: Devil).

The combination of Immortal Book and Destiny's Mother has created one more miracle. The love of God will rescue the world.

* Saint Knight, Minstrel's cooperative chain skill 'Sanctuary: Holy Hymn' was triggered.

<All allies within 10 kilometres will recover 100% of their health. In addition, courage and morale will increase by 50% for all allies while the demons will have their courage and moral decreased by 50%>

Complete recovery for all soldiers within 10 kilometres!

-Ark, we believe in you.

The world trees became exhausted after using so much magic and gradually faded. The Immortal Book also broke down to single sheets of paper and scattered all over the place. However, the expedition forces already had no interest in the world trees and the Immortal Book.

"Everybody has been restored!"

"Our stamina has recovered!"

"This is evidence that we have God on our side!"

"We need to quickly exterminate the demons and help the attack squad!"

"All airships, recharge the magic gun and the Spear of Thor!"

"Iron armour fleet, open the muzzles of the guns and rush towards the demons!"

The expedition members who saw the complete destruction of the attack squad fought even more desperately after the miracle occurred. Thanks to the boost in courage and morale from Holy Hymn, they poured attacks towards the demon. Ark who was watching the counterattack also regained his vigour.

'The flow has changed thanks to the Immortal Book!'

-Ugh, these brats..... They revived again?

Lucifer's eyes finally turned towards them after the world trees

disappeared. And the thousands of demons surrounding Lucifer rushed.

“All members make your formations and prepare for the collision!”

Ark withdrew and ordered Thanks to Ark’s miracle, the attack squad had another chance to fight Lucifer. However, the current situation wasn’t enough for him to shout with joy. There were currently 800 troops gathered around Ark. It wouldn’t be easy to deal with Lucifer with those numbers, let alone the thousands of demons. Previously they had been able to ignore the demons and focus on attacking Lucifer thanks to the flying boats. But the miracle hadn’t resurrected the flying boats.

‘We need to deal with the demons and Lucifer.’

If he just looked at this situation then he couldn’t do that much. But Ark believed there was a way.

-Kuwaaaaah!

The demons used their claws and fangs.

“Arrow Storm!”

“My wrath shall be a lightning strike..... Chain Lightning!”

Arrows and magic flew everywhere. And it hit the demons who were jumping towards the attack squad. The demons hit by the attacks unexpectedly flew backwards. Hundreds of warriors flocked from the wreckage of a building and attacked the demons.

“Come!”

Ark grinned as he looked at them. Hundreds of warriors had suddenly appeared from the wreckage of the building. When a user died in New World, their body didn’t disappear straight away. These bodies remained in the building wreckage. And everybody was restored thanks to ultimate Nursing. Of course, Ark hadn’t expected a complete miracle even if ultimate Nursing was used. Ark was worried that the users wouldn’t access the game even if their characters were revived. But despite his worries, the revived attack

squad had returned to the battlefield straight away. The reason the warriors were able to return to the battlefield was because they had been watching on TV. All gamers were focused on this battle. The attack squad warriors killed in battle were the same. They had been watching the game exclusive news when they saw ultimate Nursing and entered the game unit straight away.

“Hahahaha, I really did revive!”

“Anyway, I’ve already died once. Nothing is frightening anymore!”

It wasn’t just the effects of being revived. Even without the morale +50% effect of the Ark of Creation, their morale was already incredibly high.

“This is our strategy! Our opponents are thousands of demons and Lucifer. But the demons have formed tight formations around Lucifer so attacking recklessly is suicide. Therefore you will split into units of 10 people to deal with the demons. But this mission isn’t to kill the demons! It is important to avoid Lucifer’s attack. Always watch for movement and stay as far away from Lucifer as possible!”

“In other words..... Keep running?”

Shambala frowned after hearing Ark’s command. Ark laughed and nodded his head.

“That’s right.”

“What if Lucifer uses that destruction magic again.....”

“He can’t use that magic now.”

Ark laughed at Shambala’s words. That’s right. No matter how much the attack squad avoided Lucifer, it would be impossible if he used Apocalypse. It was a cheat like magic that destroyed all enemies in a 2 kilometre area! If Lucifer used Apocalypse again then the attack squad would be completely wiped out. The Immortal Book had scattered so there were no more miracles. However, Lucifer’s Apocalypse was also a one-time only magic. That’s because Ark knew the conditions to use Apocalypse through Skill Penetration. Lucifer had to pay 50% of his health in exchange for triggering

Apocalypse. And Lucifer had already sacrificed 50% of his health. Meanwhile the attack squad had decreased his health by 1~2% before he used the magic so his present health was 49%!

“If he uses Apocalypse in that state then he will die before us.”

“But we won’t be able to win if we keep on running.”

“Who says we’re only running away?”

“Didn’t you say it just now?”

“You’re just running away until I wipe out the demons.”

“What? Wipe out all the demons? You alone? Even if you died and revived, isn’t that too much?”

Shambala looked at him with perplexed eyes.

“Huhuhu, just watch as I use my skills to beat the demons.”

Ark laughed and raised a finger.

“Summon Demon, Curio!”

“Oh! Master, you’re alive?”

Curio asked as he appeared in front of Ark. Ark grabbed Curio’s neck firmly and shouted.

“Let’s get started. Vampire skill, use Entrusted Volumes!”

“Ohhhh! Entrusted Volumes!”

That’s right. This was the special move Ark had prepared before escaping from the labyrinth.

“I have to fight against the Red Man in order to prevent the Dark Lord’s resurrection ceremony. There is no guarantee I can win against the Red Man with my power now. Then I should consider a special knockdown attack.”

The Entrusted Volumes skill surfaced in Ark’s head. It was a technique that gave a lot of bizarre effects impossible to be found elsewhere. Despite that, there were two reasons why Ark didn’t

utilize the power of Entrusted Volumes properly. It consumed 500 health and there was no guarantee that he could get the effect he desired. In fact, didn't the founder of this technique die because he used Entrusted Volumes in a decisive moment?

"But if I use the right timing then Entrusted Volumes could show an enormous effect."

So Ark had studied ways to trigger the effects of Entrusted Volumes. Since Entrusted Volumes was influenced by properties, alignment and environment, the probability was only 60~70%. Ark had been halfway to giving up when he accidentally found a surprising way to settle the problems with Entrusted Volumes. It was Curio's ability to absorb skills! That's right. Curio could absorb a skill when he used Blood-sucking. If Ark triggered the necessary effect from Entrusted Volumes then Curio could absorb that effect using Blood-sucking. It was why Ark pulled Curio to a corner after defeating Maseutyu. It was to preserve a knockdown effect of Entrusted Volumes. That's why Ark had released Curio's summoning while on the verge of death. If Curio died then the skill he registered would fly away. Now was the time to see the results of that effort. When Curio used the skill, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-Curio is able to use 'Entrusted Volumes' that is saved in a skill slot.

* Results

【Properties】: <Mischievous> 【Alignment】:<Skilful person>

【Environment】: <Mirror>

The attack method chosen is 'Mimic.'

<The caster can imitate the last attack they received. However, this is just an imitation of the skill so only 80% of its power will be shown>

Curio's 1st stored skill: Entrusted Volumes (Mimic)! Ark had accidentally discovered the Mimic effect during his testing. The

Mimic effect was quite strange and fascinating. When Mimic was used, Ark could return the last attack he received at 80% of the power. And the last attack from Lucifer before he died.....

-Lucifer's Divine Skill Apocalypse has been triggered with Mimic!

Apocalypse is the last destruction spell that Lucifer used. The skill was be used 5 minutes afterwards.

<A new territory declaration will be used and all demons within the area will be destroyed. Because this is just an imitation, the territory declaration will disappear after it is used. It will consume 50% health and the power decreased to 80% so it will only deal 72,000~80,000 damage>

That's right. It was Lucifer's ultimate destruction magic Apocalypse! When Mimic was used, Ark's body was wrapped in a black aura and Apocalypse invoked. Even if the power was only 80% of the original, all enemies within 2 kilometres would receive 72,000~80,000 damage!

"I never imagined that I could imitate a skill like this."

Ark smiled as the skill was triggered. Saving the Entrusted Volumes (mimic) turned out to be a jackpot! So the reason Ark had the attack squad run around was to reduce the damage to them while the skill was being invoked. It was an attack that would deal 72,000~80,000 damage in one blow! When the skill was used, all the demons would have an instant death like the attack squad previously. Then there was no reason to fight.

-Unbelievable! How do you.....?

Lucifer exclaimed as he saw Ark use the skill.

"Why? Do you have a copyright over this skill?"

-You.... Kill him!

Thousands of demons ran towards Ark at Lucifer's command. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members stood in front of him and

shouted.

“Stop those guys!”

“Protect Ark by every means possible!”

If Ark received a critical hit then the skill would be cancelled. While Ark used Sprint to run away, JusticeMan and the attack squad blocked the demons. But Lucifer blocked Ark’s way after a long game of tag. The moment he was about to bring a fist down, Ark smiled and muttered.

“Too late.”

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

At the same time, there was a deafening roar and the dark sky split. The three devils Anger, Fear and Despair were descending.

–Kuooh, you morons! It wasn’t me..... Go back!

Lucifer raised his head and screamed at the three devils. However, the three devils weren’t listening to Lucifer anymore. They ignored Lucifer and their eyes flashed. Once again, thousands of red rays shot outwards in different directions. The rays also ignored the Rwigenberg’s shield and pierced through. But their targets weren’t the expedition members but the demons and Lucifer.

-Kuwaaaaaaaah!

The demons turned pale with fear and ran around all over the place. But it was already impossible to escape from the ultimate destruction spell.

Kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang!

Thousands of red rays fell vertically from the sky! The demons turned to charcoal and fell to the ground.

-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

After the demons were killed with one blow, the message windows floated in front of them. But the experience was shared between the attack squad members. However, not everyone received the same amount of experience. The one who dealt the largest blow to the enemy would receive the most experience. Moreover, Ark was also the commander. He received bonus experience and fame every time he killed an enemy. Therefore Ark jumped up 7 levels to 504. But when Ark broke through level 500, an unimaginable change to his body took place. His arms started tingling and the last tattoo was unsealed. Then an information window flashed in front of him.

-A seal of 'Eternal Soul' has been released and you've acquired a new profession-specific skill.

【Demonic Response】: Eternal Soul stage 9 (Passive)

'Demonic Response' is a necessary stage to learn if they want to reach the enlightenment needed for Eternal Soul. When fighting against a monster with the demonic attribute, you will deal additional 50% damage to the demons and gain +60% resistance to the demonic attribute. In addition, you will be able to detect hidden demonic power within the bodies of monsters.

<When sensing a demonic attribute, you will deal +50% damage against demonic monsters and gain +60% resistance to the demonic attribute>

【Hero Fusion】: Eternal Soul stage 10 (Active)

The Dark Lord returned to hell after being defeated by the 7 heroes but Hero Maban knew that he would return to the world after hundreds of years. Unlike the other heroes, Hero Maban stayed in Oberium and devoted his life to finding a way to defeat the forces of darkness. After many years of meditation, he realized that if the power of heroes with different attributes were gathered in one person then the forces of darkness could be defeated.

After a lot of researching, Hero Maban came up with Hero Fusion. Hero Fusion is a technique which draws the power of Area Declaration into one body. You can even absorb the power of the heroes' descendants' Area Declaration. The absorption of the Area

Declaration into your body will give you superhuman ability. But Hero Fusion is impossible for someone who hasn't raised their abilities sufficiently to endure. Therefore it can only be learnt once level 500 is reached.

<The Area Declarations of the heroes' descendants are absorbed>

"The last Eternal Soul!"

Ark's eyes shone as he checked the information window. Finally all the seals of Eternal Soul have been released. However, Ark didn't change to his 3rd profession despite all the seals being released. It was clear that Eternal Soul was his 3rd stage profession but some conditions must still be lacking.

'Anyway, now I have 50% additional damage against demons! If Shining Darkness is added then that is 70%! That alone is worth Eternal Soul being unsealed! Now all the demons have disappeared so only the Dark Lord Lucifer is left!'

Ark's eyes flashed as he looked at Lucifer. Lucifer had failed to avoid Apocalypse. Furthermore, Apocalypse ignored all defences and shields! Therefore Lucifer's dark armour couldn't stop the flames from Apocalypse.

-Kuaaaaah! T-these guys.....!

Lucifer who had attempted to attack Ark was wrapped in flames and retreated with a shriek. He lost 10% of his health at the same time. Ark's mouth gaped open.

'Apocalypse did 72,000~80,000 damage but he only lost 10%? Doesn't that mean he has a minimum health of 720,000~800,000? It has decreased by 60% so he still has around 320,000 left!'

While Ark hadn't expected Lucifer to die, he at least expected him to be in a critical condition. But despite being hit by Fear, Anger and Despair, his health had only decrease by 10% and he still has 320,000 left.

....320,000 health?

The number was enough to make someone lose their spirits.

‘Even if all the demons are killed, the odds aren’t in our favour with only 1,200 members of the attack squad. The attack squad attacked using the flying boats for 1 hour and his health only decreased by 1~2%.....

If he wanted to reduce Lucifer’s health by 40% then wouldn’t it take 30~40 hours? No matter how high morale was, that much was physically impossible. Of course, the situation could change if the airships and armoured fleet lent their power.

‘But the Apocalypse that I used only killed the demons around Rwigenberg.’ Kwarian was still infested with thousands of demons.

Of course, the expedition forces had their moral increased thanks to Holy Hymn so they were overwhelming the demons. But it was impossible to wipe out the demons and penetrate the defense shield in a short amount of time.

‘Damn, how can I kill this Dark Lord.....? ?’

After confirming Lucifer’s health, Ark felt his morale gradually decrease. At that moment, Ark looked at Lucifer and saw a strange scene. When Lucifer was engulfed by the flames, his dark armour protected him a little bit but it soon melted like scales. When that happened, Lucifer’s real skin swarming with maggots was revealed. Although the attack squad members screamed at the disgusting appearance, Ark was different. Ark showed interest as he looked at the unsightly body.

“What, what the? This is?”

Ark looked at the chest portion that was revealed when the dark armour melted. He had discovered something.

‘Perhaps..... Did I really see it for sure? Wait? Lucifer also didn’t appear until later. Why didn’t I think of that? It is strange that he hasn’t been seen since Lucifer was restored. Then he was in there all along? In that case....’

Ark had the idea and looked at the blinking warning message on the

top right.

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony has begun! <Time remaining until the Dark Lord's resurrection: 48 minutes>
--

'There's no doubt. That explains it. Then.....!'

Ark organized his thoughts before opening his eyes. He ran towards Lucifer and yelled.

"Shambhala, Bread, come with me! Lariette, Wormer, Redian and Timosi, please support us! JusticeMan ajusshi, concentrate all the troops in the front!"

"What? Gathering all the troops in one place....."

They were a chance they would be wiped out by Lucifer's wide area attacks. But Ark just shook his head and shouted.

"I don't have time to explain in detail. This is our chance while he is still confused by the flames."

"....Understood. All troops gather in front of Lucifer!"

The attack squad cried out and flocked in front of Lucifer. Meanwhile, Ark who had joined the other heroes' descendants arrived in front of Lucifer first and shouted.

"Curio, Entrusted Volumes (Excellent Luck) fire!"

"Oohhhhh!"

A vending machine appeared in front of Curio and the skill was exercised.

-Curio has used the power of Entrusted Volumes.	
* Results	
【Properties】<Good Luck>	【Alignment】:<Aristocrat>
【Environment】:<King's Hall>	

The effect that has been selected is 'Excellent Luck.'

<All allies within 100 metres will have their luck increased by 200% for 10 minutes. When luck increases, the probability of a critical hit or a special attack will increase>

Curio's 2nd saved vampire skill Entrusted Volumes (Excellent Luck) was used! The effect increased the luck of all surrounding allies by 200%! It might not seem like much but it surprisingly had a good effect once used. Luck was usually a stat that users didn't raise. However, the stat had a large influence since it increased the chances of a critical hit. Of course, raising luck didn't have any obvious effect so most players would rather raise intelligence or agility. However, the strongest buff from intelligence or agility only raised luck by 50% while Entrusted Volumes (Excellent Luck) increased it by 200%. That was enough to greatly increase the chances of critical hits by the attack squad members. But that wasn't the only reason why Ark used 'Excellent Luck.'

"All troops attack Lucifer's chest in harmony! Dark Strike!"

Ark and the 1,200 soldiers he commanded fired their skills towards Lucifer's chest. There were huge flashes, flames and explosions as the dark armour on Lucifer's chest gradually faded away. The attack damage was overwhelming the recovery rate of the dark armour.

'It is possible to peel off his armour like this. Before it was harder to concentrate the attacks on Lucifer's chest while avoiding damage using the flying boats.'

Then Ark looked towards the heroes' descendants and yelled.

"Shambala, Bread, Redian, Lariette, Timosi and Wormer, don't attack randomly and fire the skill with the exact timing. One, two, three. Dark Blade!"

"Earth storm!"

"Torpedo Sword!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

When the heroes' descendants used precise timing to use their skills, there was a massive ringing sound. And after those attacks succeeding many times.....

Suddenly there was a violent lightning and an information window popped up.

-A new group cooperation has been registered.

Cooperation: When your profession-specific skill aligns by 70% with your allies, there is an opportunity to learn a cooperative attack. Presently Ark-nim, Lariette-nim, Shambala-nim, Bread-nim, Redian-nim, Timosi-nim and Wormer-nim's cooperation has reached 73%. In addition, the profession-specific skills have met the criteria and a new group cooperation has been registered.

However, the chances of activating the cooperative skill is 5% and if even 1 of the 7 people fail within the time limit then it will be cancelled.

* Currently available group cooperation

-Ragnarok

Dark Blade (Properties: Darkness) = Torpedo Sword (Properties: Lightning) = Grand Cross (Properties: Holy) = Earth Storm (Properties: Beast) = Volcano of Hell (Properties: Fire) = Devil Penetrating Arrow (Property: Exorcism) = Throwing Equipment (Properties: Machine)

<Cooperation success: A chance to trigger +1,000% additional damage to each skill>

"Yes, it was successful!"

Ark cried with joy as he saw the information window. That's right. This was why Ark had used Entrusted Volumes (Excellent Luck). Even if their cooperation was more than 70%, there was only a 5% chance to trigger the special move. It wasn't possible to use in battle unless they had tremendous luck and timing. But it all depended on luck. If all of their lucks increased by 200% then it was possible to

use the cooperative skill.

“Dark Blade!”

Ark used his sword to attack the black armour. Then Ark’s attack disappeared and a huge sword appeared in the sky. Shambala and Lariette had already used cooperation with him once so they skillfully connected their attacks and sparks appeared around the sword and formed a cross.

“Haaayaahh, Earth Storm!”

“..... Destroy the enemy, Volcano of Hell!”

“Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!”

“Take this, 1 gold wrench!”

The rest proved that they were heroes’ descendants and also connected their skills. When six people united their skills, a huge cross sword surrounded by a storm of fire was hanging in the air. Finally Wormer threw a wrench and an enormous mechanical soldier appeared, grabbing the sword and thrusting it towards Lucifer’s chest.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The cross sword was driven into Lucifer’s chest and a deafening roar occurred. Each skill gave an extra x1,000% damage! Lucifer’s chest received enormous damage and his health was decreased by 1%. 1%..... When considering the visual effects, the result was bitter. That was equivalent to the combination of the attack squad’s desperate attacks at the beginning. However, Ark hadn’t used the cooperation skill in order to damage Lucifer.

“That guy’s chest has opened!”

The dark armour in that location had disappeared and Ark stared at his chest. The maggots around Lucifer’s chest..... The Red Man was surprisingly located in a clear capsule lodged in the chest. That’s right. Ark had noticed the Red Man after the flames from Apocalypse melted the dark armour. In fact, Lucifer’s presence was so strong

that Ark had forgotten about the Red Man. Then he saw the Red Man lodged in Lucifer's chest and a question popped into his head.

'The Red Man isn't lodged in there for no reason. If that's the case then why?'

He recalled the past and received a clue to answer that question. When Ark saw Lucifer for the first time, the warning message stated that there was still approximately 2 hours left until Lucifer was resurrected. Despite that, Lucifer had appeared in front of the attack squad members. How on earth? That was the question in the back of his mind while fighting Lucifer. But he immediately came up with an answer after seeing the Red Man in Lucifer's chest.

'What if Lucifer's resurrection ceremony is still in progress? Then the reason why Lucifer is moving..... Maybe the Red Man is moving Lucifer's body while the resurrection ceremony is progressing?'

This was the hypothesis Ark came up with. Of course, this was still only Ark's guess. But it was a fact that the Red Man was lodged in Lucifer's chest. Then he must be there for some important purpose. And that purpose wouldn't be good for Ark.

'If I open the chest then everything will become clear!'

Thus Ark concentrated the attacks on Lucifer's chest. The shield was gone and the Red Man was exposed. There was only one thing left to do!

"Summon Demon, Burning Soul, transform into Pendragon!"

Kurarara, kurarara!

At that time, the space warped and Burning Soul appeared before transforming into a burning dragon. Ark got on Burning Soul and flew towards Lucifer's chest. The dark armour was gone but Lucifer swung both arms as Ark closed in. Ark just made Burning Soul rise vertically and exclaimed.

"Jump, Dark Blade, Adol!"

It was the chain attack of Jump and Dark Blade!

Ark flew like an arrow and drove his sword into Lucifer's chest. Ark's sword dug around at the flesh tangled around the Red Man's capsule. Ark grasped the capsule while tearing at the flesh surrounding it. But the opponent was Lucifer. The skin was strong like rubber and he couldn't cut it properly.

"Ugh, damn.....!"

"Ark, his shield is closing! Heavy Sword!"

Then he heard Shambala's yell. He turned around and saw that the dark armour was recovering. Ark was clinging to the chest so the attack squad members were too afraid to attack. If he was trapped in the dark armour while defenseless then he would be destroyed in a few seconds!

"But there is no other way!"

Lucifer had already escaped from his confusion. He also knew that Ark was aiming for the chest so he wouldn't get this chance again. And if Ark was fighting an incomplete Lucifer..... It was difficult to believe but Lucifer wasn't complete.

'He will only become complete when the resurrection ceremony finishes. In other words, Lucifer will become much stronger after 40 minutes.'

Ark used his sword even more frantically.

"Now it is either attack or die....."

However, Ark soon became covered by the dark armour. Screams emerged from all over the place as Ark was covered with the dark armour.

"Ah, Ark-nim!"

"Ark oppa!"

"Leader-nim!"

"T-this, attack! Concentrate all your firepower before that shield thickens!"

JusticeMan stared dumbly before shouting. The attack squad members were desperately trying to attack when Lucifer's chest suddenly shook. A lump formed and Ark's voice could be heard.

“.....Shining Darkness!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

He had sealed up the demons in his sword while fighting. How strong would Shining Darkness be when charged with 60 demons? At the same time, the dark armour exploded open and the capsule popped out.

“Ugh!”

Ark who received considerable damage while being trapped in the dark armour also fell out. At the same time, the capsule fell beside Lucifer's foot and shattered. The Red Man staggered out of the wreckage of the capsule. He glared at Ark with deep red eyes and angrily proclaimed.

“.....Ark!”

Project: Lucifer

-Kuwaaaaah!

Once the capsule was gone, Lucifer yanked at his head and went mad. He shrieked and swung his arms like an insane person.

“Huck! S-scatter!”

The attack squad members gathered in front of Lucifer scattered like chickens. But Lucifer didn’t even look at them. Lucifer just pounded his head against the ground. Then he suddenly stopped and his whole body melted down to a jelly like texture.

“M-melted? So he is dead?”

“What? Is it over?”

“We won?”

The attack squad murmured as they started at Lucifer who had changed to a huge slime. Ark quickly confirmed the warning message and shook his head.

“No, it’s not over yet!”

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord’s resurrection ceremony has begun!

<Time remaining until the Dark Lord’s resurrection: 37 minutes>

Ark cried out and the black slime started to wiggle. Then dozens of tentacles started exploding all over the place.

Ku kwa kwa kwa kwa, ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

“Huk! What, what the?”

“H-help me, waaaaahhhhh!”

Dozens of soldiers watching with dumb surprise were grabbed by the tentacles and absorbed into Lucifer. Only bones were left of the soldiers absorbed by Lucifer.

‘Oh my god, Lucifer can still attack even while the resurrection ceremony is ongoing?’

Ark once again realized Lucifer’s power. In fact, Ark thought that Lucifer would be like a doll with its battery removed after the Red Man was gone. However, Lucifer was still a threat without the Red Man.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Lucifer swung his hundreds of tentacles wildly and dust covered the area. The attack squad could only see 10 metres in front of them thanks to the dust so they became even more confused. And the resurrection hadn’t stopped. In the end, they needed to shatter Lucifer in 37 minutes.

“But that guy’s movement is clearly different. Previously he was consciously moving but now he is just attacking wildly. Plus.....”

“Sheesh, that monster bastard. Torrential Sword!”

“Why won’t you disappear? Earth storm!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Then Shambala and Bread damaged the tentacles near them. There was an explosion and several tentacles fell down feebly to the ground. At the same time, Lucifer’s health was quickly reduced by 0.5%.

“That guy has degenerated while holding the resurrection ceremony so his defense has fallen and his shield is gone. If Lucifer is in this state then the attack squad can kill him in the time limit!”

If Lucifer was in such a state when the attack squad escaped from the Idea Maze then everything would’ve ended already. The Red Man’s trick cost them quite a bit of time. However, now the Red Man’s trick had been revealed. The remaining time was 37 minutes.

It wasn't a large amount of time but all the demons had been wiped out and the 1,200 attack squad members revived.

"JusticeMan ajusshi, rehabilitation hyungnims, calm down. Lucifer was previously strong but now he is just an amoeba. If you look at the attack pattern then it will be easy to avoid. Furthermore, there is no shield and the defense is at the standard of a general boss. If you handle it calmly then he isn't a difficult opponent."

"I noticed it too!"

JusticeMan nodded. The rehabilitation members read Lucifer's attack patterns and shouted.

"Everybody split into units consisting of 50 people. Archers and magicians will attack the main body while the warriors will protect them from the tentacles! We will deliver the position of the troops in real time!"

The attack squad had experienced many battles and fought closely together. After hearing the orders from JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members, they instantly made their formations. Once they each took a position, dealing with the tentacles wasn't that difficult.

"That's it. If we push him like this.....!"

Flash!

Ark was just sighing with relief when it happened. A red light flashed in front of him and he felt a huge impact to his side. Ark fell to the ground and his limbs wouldn't move when he tried to stand up.

-You have been hit by a 'Chakra Wave.'

<You have received the direct impact of 'Chakra Wave' inside your body. Defense is ignored and you have received 800 damage. The shock wave also ruined the balance of mana inside your body and you have lost 1000 mana. Thanks to the severe bruising, your attack speed and movement speed is reduced by 10% for 5 minutes. Your body is also rigid and you will be unable to move for 3 seconds>

“Ugh, Chakra wave?”

Ark flinched and lifted his eyes. One man slowly walked through the dust caused by Lucifer. It was a man with red hair wearing a white mask! Ark’s eyes shook anxiously as he saw him.

“The Red Man!”

“You..... I’m going to kill you!”

The Red Man murmured with a harsh voice.

‘Dammit, wasn’t I too careless because of Lucifer?’

He was stunned by his forgetfulness. The Red Man pulled out two swords from his waist and attacked. It was great speed that transcended imagination and made him almost invisible! If he thought about what he experienced with the Red Man before then it would certainly be a critical hit. However, Ark was paralyzed by the previous Chakra Wave and he couldn’t move. Ark prepared for the impact. And just as the Red Man’s sword was about to reach Ark’s neck!

“Do you not see us at all? Earth storm!”

“Torrential Sword!”

Shambala and Bread jumped through the dust towards the Red Man. The Red Man bent his body like a snake and moved to the left and right. There was the sound of something breaking and Bread and Shambala flew back while spouting blood.

“Ugh! W-what is this? I didn’t see him move.”

“That bastard.... What have you done to my pet?”

Redian belatedly appeared and frowned while raising both hands. She made an X with both arms and shouted.

“Fusion magic, Elemental Break!”

Fire and ice were drawn from side to side in an arc and hit the Red

Man! Before the spell could hit, the Red Man disappeared and unexpectedly showed up in front of Redian. At the same time, the Red Man's fist hit Redian's stomach.

"Disappear woman!"

Redian screamed as she flew back 10 metres and hit the ground. Timosi hid in the dust and used that chance to fire dozens of arrows. No, she tried to bombard him.

"Red Man, this is revenge for Alan! Matanyi Shooter no. 4, Devil's....."

The Red Man rapidly rotated his body, causing dozens of red rays to shoot out from his mantle. The dozens of red rays pierced Timosi's body. Timosi gushed blood from her whole body and fell down.

"Waaahhhhhhhh!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

At that time, Wormer in his armoured suit rushed fiercely forward and fired blindly. But in just a moment, black smoke rose from the armoured suit and the shoulder parts exploded. The armoured suit couldn't control its speed anymore and just rotated around wildly. The Red Man already knew Wormer was approaching while he was attacking Timosi. No, he couldn't see through the dust but Lariette still screamed and collapsed despite being far away. It was a reaction speed that transcended imagination.

"Trash like this....."

The Red Man murmured in a distorted voice after handling the heroes' descendants.

"My mistake. I considered you guys boring so I didn't pay attention..... I should've handled you immediately. But I will correct that mistake. Once I handle you guys then Lucifer's resurrection will be complete without any problems."

"Do you think we will just let you?"

Ark's paralysis was finally released and he stood up. He boldly

retorted towards the Red Man but he was actually sweating.

‘Damn, I thought we would’ve lasted longer…….’

Ark stared at the fallen Bread and Shambala. Ark had been level 300 when he first encountered the Red Man. At the time, Ark and Shambala tried a pincer attack but they were still smashed. However, it had been almost 1 year since then. Ark was level 500 and he gained equipment that couldn’t even be compared to back then. Therefore he had confidence that he could at least fight against the Red Man. Once he met the Red Man again, he realized how big an illusion that was. Of course, Ark had received a surprise blow. However, Shambala and Bread were almost equal to Ark and they surprised the Red Man first. Yet they couldn’t even attack properly before being forced to the ground. It was the same for Redian, Timosi, Wormer and Lariette afterwards. It only took him 3~4 seconds to deal with them! It was an unbelievable strength. But it was understandable if Park Woo-seong was behind the Red Man.

‘Park Woo-seong is the main creator of New World!’

Naturally Park Woo-seong tested many parts of the game while creating it. And what if he didn’t erase one character but left it?

‘The Red Man……. He is the first person created in New World!’

In that case, perhaps the Red Man’s level was already in the hundreds when New World was commercialized. Obviously he would know everything about New World, gained various abilities as well as equipment.

‘But his strength isn’t just his levels and skills.’

Ark found out a while ago that the Red Man was just an auto program who was close to an NPC. But even if he was an NPC, he was different from an ordinary NPC. Most NPCs only had a few gigabytes of data behind it while the Red Man had hundreds or thousands of gigabytes of data. Therefore the Red Man’s calculation speed easily surpassed any human brain and he could react to any attacks. It was like they were battling a super computer. The character was invincible! It was natural. Park Woo-seong intended to

make his creation invincible.

‘The Red Man’s stats, equipment and skills surpasses all of ours in every way. How can we defeat such a monster?’

Ark’s thoughts frantically rolled over in his head.

“I’ll dispose of all of you at once. Shiva’s Proclamation!”

The Red Man shouted and punched the ground with his fist.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

A huge stone statue rose up from the ground. It was one of the three Hindu gods. It was a stone statue resembling Shiva with four arms, three eyes and a snake wrapped around the neck. The four arms made of stone moved strangely and the surrounding space became filled with a red light. Ark’s face instantly darkened at the sight. Ark had already experienced the power of this once before. Shiva’s Proclamation was a fraudulent new territory declaration where the abilities of the Red Man, his movement speed and defense increased by 50% when within the 300 metre area. Ark remembered the Red Man using the Divine Skill Indra’s Lightning to wipe them all out in Seutandal. The invincible man became even stronger.

‘I made a mistake. I can’t even use Area Declaration now that he used new territory declaration.’

Ark looked at the Red Man with a hopeless expression. At the moment, the skill he gained when the last seal of Eternal Soul was released popped into his head. It was Hero Fusion which absorbed all the Area Declarations into his body! Even if he could use Glory of the Night, he wouldn’t be able to deal with the Red Man who used the divine proclamation. However, Hero Fusion meant he was able to absorb the Area Declarations of the other heroes’ descendants.

‘We’ve already used Area Declaration but we died and revived so the cool down time is reset. Then it is possible to make all the heroes’ descendants proclaim their Area Declarations! I can beat the Red Man!’

“.....Die!”

While Ark was thinking, the Red Man ran up while wielding his sword.

Kiiiiing!

The Red Man's sword pushed past the sound barrier.... Ark rolled to the ground and shouted.

"Eternal Soul, Hero Fusion! Area Declaration, Glory of the Night!"

At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-Glory of the Night has been used.

Due to the effect of Hero Fusion from Eternal Soul, Glory of the Night has been absorbed into your body.

<Your attack and defense has increased by 50% and magic resistance has increased by 20%>

Ark got up at the same time and yelled.

"Now. Shambala, Bread, Redian, Lariette, Wormer and Timosi, use your Area Declarations!"

"What? But the Red Man has already proclaimed the new territory declaration....."

"There's no time to explain. I have a way to take care of that! I need you to use your Area Declarations!"

"Ah, I don't know. It isn't possible for me to even move in this state. Area Declaration, Infinite Energy Field!"

Wormer exclaimed from within the broken armoured suit. Instead of Area Declaration being used, a small ball seemed to form in the air in front of Wormer. And it flew towards Ark where it was absorbed into his body. At the same time, the Red Man jumped across the space and brandished his sword. Just before the Red Man's sword touched him, Wormer's Area Declaration was absorbed and Ark was covered with shiny gold armour. It was the additional effect of Wormer's Area Declaration, Infinite Energy Field!

Kyakyakyakyak!

The Red Man's sword scratched the gold iron and sparked. The Red Man frowned and retreated one step because of the unexpected situation. The rest of the heroes' descendants realized the situation and activated Area Declaration.

"Area Declaration, River of Blood!"

"Area Declaration, Land of the Beast!"

"Area Declaration, Land of Purification!"

"Area Declaration, Exorcist!"

"Area Declaration, Land of Fire and Ice!"

The 5 Area Declarations turned into small balls and shot towards Ark. A fiercely spinning vortex appeared around Ark as the balls were absorbed into his body. There was a massive shockwave and the heroes' descendants burst out with confusion

"What the? What happened to him?"

The dust gradually subsided and Ark's form could be seen. But he wasn't the previous Ark anymore. The Area Declarations from the 7 heroes had fused into Ark's body!

"This is Hero Maban's final technique, Hero Fusion...."

Ark murmured as his body was enveloped in light. Ark had changed after absorbing the Area Declarations. He was always wearing leather armour but this was the first time he saw his arms and legs so muscular. And two transparent crystal shields rotated around his body which had a gold shine to it. But the more amazing thing wasn't the change to his appearance but the tremendous power he could feel. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-Hero Fusion has absorbed all the heroes' Area Declaration into your body.
--

* Attack and defense power increased by 300%.

- * Resistance to cold has risen by 200%.
- * Movement Speed, Reaction Rate and Attack Speed increased by 200%.
- * The amount of mana needed to use the skills has decreased by half.
- * Resistance to magic and curses has increased by 100%.
- * The crystal shields have a 30% chance of reflecting enemy attacks.
- * The iron armour increases defense by 100%.

“Oh my god, is this really the effect of a normal skill?”

Ark gaped as he saw the information window. While Ark was gaping, the Red Man crossed the space again.

“Even if all the trash is gathered, it is still trash!”

The revolving crystal shields stopped the Red Man’s attack. At the same time, the sword that grazed the surface of the crystal shield bounced back and grazed the Red Man’s shoulder.

“Ugh! T-this is.....”

The Red Man withdrew and stared with confusion at his sword. Then Ark looked at the Red Man and laughed.

“A collection of trash is still trash? Is it really like that?”

Ark gathered strength into his ankle and kicked lightly at the ground. Ark’s body disappeared and he showed up right in front of the Red Man’s nose. He didn’t use any special skills. The 200% increase in movement speed made it seem like he had leapt across the space.

“Now it is time for your punishment.”

Kkiiiiing!

Ark laughed as he appeared under the Red Man’s nose and swung

his sword. Ark's sword also broke through the sound barrier.

"T-this bastard.....!"

The Red Man quickly withdrew. Ark pursued the Red Man with his eyes. This was because relative speed was applied to New World. If his movement speed was faster than his opponent's reaction rate, even if it was only by a little bit, relative speed would be applied through a complex system to prevent the opponent's movement. That was the secret of the spatial movement the Red Man used! But now Ark's reaction rate had increased by 200%.

"Is that all?"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Ark caught the movement of the Red Man and hurled complicated rapid-fire attacks.

"Is that really Ark fighting over there?"

Bread muttered with a foolish expression. Frankly, Ark didn't feel like his speed had increased by 200%. It just felt like he was moving faster than usual. However, Shambala and Bread fell into the trap of the system's relative speed and couldn't see Ark's complicated movements as he chased the Red Man. It just seemed like flashes of light and dust flying in empty spaces. Thus they couldn't grasp how the battle was progressing. They couldn't even intrude. After 10 minutes of the intense but boring invisible battle.....

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a violent shaking. At the same time, dust spread while Ark and the Red Man appeared. There was a distance of 10 metres between them while their appearances were almost equal. Several of Ark's metal armour plates had been shed while the Red Man was holding his side. The Red Man grinded his teeth and muttered.

"Ugh, you dare go against the creator....."

Ark snorted and said.

"Don't talk nonsense. You're an auto program! Don't you know that is

illegal? Your life itself is illegal!”

“What, auto? What is an auto program?”

The Red Man looked baffled.

‘Eh? What the, what’s with this reaction? Does this guy not know that he is an auto program?’

“You.....”

Ark looked at him with an absurd expression and tried to talk while the Red Man shook his head violently and shouted.

“Shut up! I am the creator. It is my choice whether to destroy the world or not!”

“You’re an illegal software so shouldn’t you be able to press the ‘Del’ key?”

“Shut up! Divine skill, Indra’s Lightning!”

Pajijik, pajijik, pajijik, flash!

At the moment, four round discs appeared around the Red Man and shot out sparks. Sparks rose from the disks engraved with Indra! The sparks formed a huge lightning bolt and headed towards Ark. Just like in the myths, Indra exterminated all his enemies with lightning when he became angry. He was enveloped in a huge flash as the lightning hit him.

“Ah, Ark!”

Shambala and Bread simultaneously cried out. When he was hit with the Divine Skill before, he had become paralyzed and his health reached the bottom. If Ark couldn’t avoid the lightning then he would be turned to ash! The heroes’ descendants imagined Ark as ash and moaned.

“Ha, your repertoire hasn’t changed. Don’t you have anything else? You’ve learnt that skill a long time ago and it seems like you haven’t increased your repertoire at all. I’ll show you my new repertoire. Divine Skill, Descent of the Fire Draconian!”

Ark's voice was heard and a pillar of flames shot up from among the sparks.

-You have used the Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!

The <Immortal Fire Draconian> effect will be applied for 10 minutes.

- * 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.

- * Attack speed, Movement speed and Reaction rate will increase by 50%.

- * All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.

- * Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.

- * When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

"Huck! H-how did you block Indra's.....?"

"Your Master might've created New World but you are just his body you idiot!"

Ark smiled and penetrated the Red Man with his sword.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Huge flames exploded from Ark's body and sucked out the Red Man's health. The fire hit everywhere as the Red Man ended up kneeling on one side. Then he looked at Ark with disbelieving eyes. He finally noticed how Ark had stopped Indra's Lightning.

"U-unbelievable!"

Ark was standing in one spot with many swords surrounding him. That's right. Ark had experienced Indra's Lightning before and came out with a way to defend against it. It was placing swords all over the place! Those swords acted like a lightning rod and absorbed the attacks from Indra's Lightning.

“You’re a computer program so you might have stronger combat abilities than users but you don’t know how to use the game. Huhuhu, a person with wisdom is indeed better than someone with knowledge. Isn’t that right?”

Ark murmured. The battle between Ark and the Red Man was equal so the ‘game mechanics application’ meant the difference between victory or defeat.

-Kuuooong!

At the same time, Lucifer deflated like a balloon after receiving the concentrated hits of JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and the attack squad. Both the Red Man and Lucifer had been defeated.

“Now, let’s finish this.”

Ark muttered with a relaxed expression. Despair rose in the Red Man’s eyes after seeing what happened to Lucifer. Then something suddenly bubbled from Lucifer’s body and shrank. The sight of it caused the Red Man’s eyes to flash. He suddenly got up and ran towards Lucifer.

“Eh! T-this bastard...!”

Ark overtook him and swung his sword. However, the Red Man agilely squeezed between Lariette and Roco. Meanwhile, the attack squad were embracing each other with joy as one of them prepared to drive his sword into Lucifer’s body.

“You bastard! Why can’t you just give up?”

Ark caught up to the Red Man again and attacked. No, he was about to attack.

“Kuwaaaaaaaaaah!”

The Red Man suddenly screamed and his white mask exploded. Ark retreated after seeing the Red Man’s face and stuttered.

“What, what the? His face?”

0100010101000010101111011010101001011110.....

The Red Man was faceless. It was just a void filled with numbers. But the surprising thing happened afterwards. The world froze the moment the Red Man's mask exploded. The explosion, dust and all the people moving suddenly froze. The only thing that moved was the numbers forming the Red Man's face.

'What, what the? Why can't my body move?'

Ark used all his strength to try and move his body. Lucifer who had deflated like a balloon began to gradually rise. The thousands of tentacles on the ground also attached back onto him. Then Lucifer's low health started climbing?'

"T-this is back server?"

Back server..... It was the phenomenon where the system returned to a previous state because of an error! It was a phenomenon that occurred in the 2000's when online gaming was still unsafe. But the phenomenon in front of him wasn't a simple back server. The only thing returning to its original form was Lucifer. If this continued then Lucifer would change back to the original state that they encountered him in..... And it was a long battle so Ark and the attack squad's stamina and skills were already depleted.

'T-this isn't possible!'

The stiffened Ark silently screamed.

"I've found it!"

A pair of eyes sparkled in the darkness. The person looking at the laptop was a man in his late 30's.

"I never thought it would be in a place like that. Global Exos, you shallow guys....! I've finally found it. If this comes into my hands then nobody can stop me now. Lucifer will revive and New World will disappear!"

The man typed on the laptop keyboard at an absurd speed. Then a message appeared on the screen.

||-Do you want to start the Master code 'Project: Lucifer'? Yes/No||

"Now disappear. You ugly group of data!"

The man's cold eyes danced with joy as he prepared to hit the Y key. All of a sudden he heard shouting from behind him.

"Stop!"

The man flinched and hurriedly turned his head. At the same time, 10 people appeared after climbing a mountain slope. They were blond south east Asian foreigners wearing a badge on their chest. The initials G.A.S.P were engraved on the badge. G.A.S.P..... They were the special security agents from Global Exos. Confusion spread over the man's face as he saw their badges.

"H-how did you get here?"

"New World told us."

A man in his thirties wearing a suit went in front of the SP and replied. He showed the screen of a MP (Movie Player) and continued talking.

"I've been looking for you over the past 2 years. But I never thought you would be in a place like this. Then we saw a video that a user in New World shot a while ago."

The video of the grave that Ark saw in the Idea Maze was shown on the MP screen. The grave was the one the man was sitting next to. The man in the suit sighed as he saw the MP.

"This is where you were..... Yuna's grave, Park Woo-seong ssi."

"Ha Myung-woo....."

That's right. The man wearing a suit was Ha Myung-woo from Global Exos. The man holding the laptop was the one who went missing a few years ago, Park Woo-seong. Park Woo-seong looked at Ha Myung-woo and smiled coldly.

"You dug through the videos and finally found me."

“I remembered the moment I saw the grave. This is Yuna’s hometown. You disappeared and took Yuna’s body from the hospital. After watching the video from the Idea Maze, I realized that you must’ve made her grave before New World was commercialized. You love her more than your life so I thought that you definitely wouldn’t leave her grave.”

“You really are resourceful, just like the rumours say.”

Park Woo-seong laughed. But it was a hollow laugh as his eyes became sharp.

“However, it is too late. The situation is already over.”

“I know. I already guessed it after seeing the current situation in New World through the MP.”

Ha Myung-woo sighed and nodded. He looked at Yuna’s grave and murmured.

“In fact, everything we know has been a big illusion. The master key is the key to New World’s main system and we thought you were the one to hide it.”

“What nonsense are you saying? That.....”

“Yes. You thought we hid it. While we were afraid that you got your hands on the master code and hid it somewhere. And you probably tried to back into the main server to obtain the master code. Isn’t that right?”

“.....It’s not like that?”

“No. The person who hid the master code was someone else.”

“Someone other than Global Exos hid the master code?”

“Yuna ssi.”

Ha Myung-woo replied in a bittersweet voice. Then Park Woo-seong’s face warped with derision.

“Shut up! How dare you bring Yuna into this?”

“It is true. I also only discovered this fact recently.”

Park Woo-seong looked at Yuna’s grave bitterly while Ha Myung-woo continued.

“And I finally discovered the whole truth behind this event.”

“The whole truth?”

“Yes. You might understand better than me. When we were originally designing New World’s scenarios, there was no Dark Lord or 7 heroes. But then the existence known as the Dark Lord suddenly showed up in the scenarios. And the existence of the 7 heroes followed. The Dark Lord is the presence that you, Park Woo-seong created.”

Park Woo-seong’s forehead wrinkled at those words.

“The Dark Lord didn’t exist in the development phase so his identity isn’t that of a simple NPC. He was a computer virus planted by you to destroy the data on the main server of New World. The ‘Project: Lucifer.’ And Project: Lucifer tried to destroy the main server when New World was on the verge of commercialization.”

“I had to do it! I shouldn’t have made New World in the first place! She....that game if the devil that killed her!”

Park Woo-seong suddenly shouted angrily. Ha Myung-woo didn’t pay any attention to him and just continued talking.

“But Project: Lucifer was stopped before it could destroy New World’s data.”

“That was quite surprising. You stupid and slow guys noticed my plan. But you guys couldn’t completely remove Project: Lucifer.”

Park Woo-seong snorted and muttered. Ha Myung-woo just shook his head and said.

“No, it’s embarrassing to admit but we didn’t even know the existence of Project: Lucifer until recently.”

“What? What does that mean?”

“Of course, we knew that the main server was being infected with a virus at the time. However, we didn’t understand that Project: Lucifer was something you made. And we didn’t know how to stop it. We could only watch from the sidelines as the virus blew up the server data. Yet Project: Lucifer was suddenly sealed up.”

“Spontaneously sealed up? Nonsense. That is impossible!”

“Yes. It is impossible. If we had known the cause at that time then this situation wouldn’t have occurred..... But at the time, we weren’t able to connect to the main server to examine everything. And now we barely found the reason why. At the time, the virus was stopped by the existence of the 7 heroes.”

Park Woo-seong looked strange by the end of Ha Myung-woo’s words.

“.....Is this a hoax? The 7 heroes are just data from a scenario!”

“That’s what I thought until now. However, that isn’t the actual reality. Just like the Dark Lord was a computer virus, the 7 heroes was an antivirus program disguised as a scenario.”

That’s right. This was the reason why the heroes’ skills were specialized for the demons. The 7 heroes were a program designed to fight back against Project: Lucifer. While Project: Lucifer was spreading through the main server, the 7 heroes had sealed it up. This was the 1st Demonic War that the NPCs in New World. It was known as the Dark Century.

Park Woo-seong muttered with a confused look.

“N-no way! Then who..... Who designed the 7 heroes?”

“Don’t you already know?”

Ha Myung-woo stared at Park Woo-seong.

“It was Yuna.”

“Y-Yuna? T-that’s impossible.....”

“The only people who could connect to the main server were you

and Yuna.”

“Lies, you’re lying! Yuna..... Yuna suffered after receiving curses from the users and created New World even if it meant dying. So why would Yuna stop me?”

“Do you really think Yuna worked on New World even on her sickbed because of the users’ complaints?”

“There is no other reason!”

“If you look at this then you’ll understand.”

Ha Myung-woo sighed and pulled out a letter. The letter had ‘To my last love’ written on the front. Park Woo-seong’s eyes shook as he saw the writing.

“T-this....?”

“Yuna probably sent this to you right before she died. But you took her corpse and disappeared without a trace after she died. Therefore the letter was sent back to the hospital where Yuna received her medical treatment. It was left in the archive until someone came looking for it. After the SP found your notes in the villa, they went to the hospital and retrieved it. If you read this then you will start to know it was just a misunderstanding.”

Ha Myung-woo carefully laid the letter on the ground and stepped back. There was a reason Ha Myung-woo was acting so carefully around Park Woo-seong. Once again, he had checked the situation in New World while coming here through the MP. He had witnessed the scene where everything froze except for Lucifer who was restored. There was only one thing in New World that could cause this! It was the master code. Then it was highly likely that the master code would be linked with Park Woo-seong’s laptop. If the master code was connected to the laptop then Park Woo-seong could destroy New World with one press of a button. In the end, Park Woo-seong would hold New World hostage. Park Woo-seong dropped the laptop and picked up the letter. And a familiar handwriting could be seen.

-To Woo-seong ssi who is my first and last love.....

Woo-seong ssi, I'm so sorry. How much did I hurt you while pouring all my efforts into New World? You must've felt pain and anger, as well as an inability to understand. But that is just your misconception.

As you know, I poured my remaining time into New World. I'm now dying. That fact doesn't change. If this was New World then there might be a way but unfortunately, I am a real person. So I really thought a lot.

I'm a stupid fool who didn't know how to leave you alone and hurting. I wanted to leave something that reminded you of me.

The huge world of New World is like our child. I created all the scenarios in New World and if you wander the world then you'll encounter landscapes and people that I made. I truly believe that is the greatest gift I can give you.

But you..... You're trying to break the results with your own hands. I was afraid of that. I tried a few times but you wouldn't listen. Therefore I had to secretly hide the master code in New World.

Please understand. I had to do it. Because the person who will feel the saddest if New World is destroyed is you.....

I'm hoping all the misconceptions have been cleared by the time you find the master code. I'm begging you, for our child New World.

"T-this is.....!"

Park Woo-seong trembled and stuttered. Ha Myung-woo sighed and murmured.

"It is as you can see. Yuna was the one who hid the master code. She wanted to save your child New World. When you ignored the contents of the letter and made Lucifer, she created the 7 heroes in order to give the users in New World the power."

That's right. That's why every event related to the Red Man's plan to restore Lucifer involved the 7 heroes. When the scattered 7 heroes

gathered, it was a perfect vaccination to stop the havoc caused by the Red Man. All of this wasn't a coincidence but the result of a conflict between Park Woo-seong and Yuna. And Global Exos was the one who suffered the damage! If they thought about it from the beginning, it was just a huge couples fight.

“.....No!”

Park Woo-seong murmured in a trembling voice. He shook his head roughly and shouted.

“No! It can't be! There is no way! This is fake!”

“Park Woo-seong ssi! Don't you already know? Yuna enjoyed New World more than anybody else. Why do you think that is? That's why she was delighted that she could see the result with you before she died!”

Then Park Woo-seong recalled something.

-It's now finished.

Yuna smiled wider than ever. That's right. In fact, Park Woo-seong knew it already. No, he knew better than anyone else. She wanted to leave evidence that she had lived! That's why she didn't have a grudge against Global Exos and the users.

“I....I....I.....”

Park Woo-seong trembled and murmured as he stared into the distance.

“SP! Secure Park Woo-seong and his laptop!”

The SP secured the collapsed Park Woo-seong and his laptop. The SP searched Park Woo-seong and exclaimed.

“Team Chief-nim, Park Woo-seong seems to have swallowed poison!”

“W-what?”

“He probably intended to die after bringing this to an end.”

“Dammit! His state?”

“If we go to a hospital right now then we can save him in time!”

“Then why are you making a fuss? Head to the hospital as quickly as possible!”

“Yes!”

The SP member hurriedly lifted Park Woo-seong and ran down the mountain. Ha Myung-woo watched them leave before turning around and said.

“The laptop? The master code?”

“I-I don’t know. The laptop turned off from the shock just then.”

“What, what the?”

Ha Myung-woo’s face paled.

‘Damn, what on earth is going on.....?’

Ark felt like his heart was going to explode. They finally knocked down Lucifer and the Red Man was pushed to the edge of death so why was this happening? Just as the Red Man was in a critical condition, everything suddenly froze?

‘Somehow..... I need to somehow move.....’

Ark bit his lip as he stared at the Red Man’s back. Suddenly the Red Man seemed to twitch. Lucifer’s body also returned to its previous dead state. At the same time, Ark felt the unidentified pressure that stopped him from moving disappear. It was the moment Ark had prayed for. Ark’s body reacted faster than his head. There was no time to worry about what was going on in the vicinity. This was his only chance!

“....Dark Strike!”

Ark shot forward and attacked. At the same time, the black light from his sword split the Red Man vertically. A long line was drawn

vertically down the Red Man and he collapsed to his knees. He shook his head and let out a long sigh as he looked towards the sky.

“Hah....auto program.....I.....”

Those were the last words of the Red Man who dreamt about ruining New World.

The Red Man didn't move anymore and collapsed to the ground.

-A level 999 chaotic player has been killed. <Fame +1,890>

The message appeared when the Red Man fell. The Red Man was level 999! That was the current maximum level in New World.

“Eh eh eh eh?”

The attack squad only realized that the paralysis was released after everything ended. They stared blankly at Ark and the Red Man's body. Too much had happened in a short time so they couldn't grasp the situation yet. After a few moments, the absentminded attack squad members finally realized what had happened and screamed.

“Waaahhhhhhhh!”

“W-we won! We defeated the Dark Lord!”

“We knocked down the source of evil!”

“We did it, we did it!”

The screams spread through the Rwigenberg. The expedition members fighting the demons outside the Rwigenberg also screamed. But Ark already didn't hear those cries.

‘There is unmistakably something shining over there.....’

Ark looked at where the Red Man tried to shove his hand into Lucifer's dead body and had an idea. Something was shining from the dead body. Then wouldn't it be an item? Furthermore, the opponent was the Dark Lord Lucifer so wouldn't the loot be better

than anything Ark received before?” Although the Red Man was close to an NPC thanks to the auto program, he was still considered a user. A chaotic user would definitely drop one equipment. It was an equipment used by a level 999 user!

‘I can’t let anyone else get these items!’

“Burning Soul, search Lucifer and the Red Man’s body and pack all the items.”

Ark whispered quietly while observing the celebratory atmosphere.

Kurarara, kurarara!

Burning Soul also sensed the shining item and stealthily approached Lucifer. After a while, a message window popped up.

[-You summon Burning Soul has obtained ‘Asura’s Sword.’]

‘Asura’s Sword is the sword the Red Man used?’

Although he hadn’t confirmed the actual item, he had seen the sword carved with Asura when fighting. The Red Man only dropped one item so he couldn’t get the pair of swords but it was much more valuable than armour. Ark felt like drooling at the thought of the item. A message window showed up again as Burning Soul swallowed another item.

[-Your summon Burning Soul.....]

“Ark!”

It was at that moment. He suddenly heard Bread’s voice from behind him. Ark who was going to check the loot jumped with surprise and turned around.

“What? Why? Why?”

“You bastard.....!”

‘Damn, did I get caught? Do I have to share it with the thousands of people here?’

No matter how could the items are, they would only be worth a few silver if divided between that many people. Although Ark hadn't won this battle alone, he was obviously the general. But he wouldn't be alive if it wasn't for the expedition members and attack squad so they would expect a share. And now that Ark was a celebrity, he couldn't just dine and dash! Tears gathered in his eyes at the thought of sharing his spoils. Then Bread put his arm around Ark's neck and shouted.

"Hahahaha! You were a tough dark wolf when I first met you. And now you're crying? This situation is good so don't be afraid to cry. You deserve it!"

"Eh? What? Is that all you have to say?"

"Then? What else is there??"

"Oh, no! Nothing! That's right, I'm feeling so good that my tears are flowing!"

Ark nodded and moved away from Bread. Then he scanned the attack squad members. He wanted to check if anyone had noticed Ark obtaining the loot. However, there looks were only filled with joy and admiration towards Ark who defeated the Dark Lord. Ark was so glad that he really felt like crying. Ark closed his fist and raised it towards the sky.

"We came, we fought, we won!"

"Waaahhhhhhhh!"

The attack squad members cheered at Ark's words. However, the battle wasn't completely finished yet. There were still demons around Kwarian. But the demons have lost the leadership of the Red Man and Lucifer so they were just a common group of monsters. Rwigenberg's shield had also disappeared with Lucifer's death. The expedition's morale shot towards the sky and they easily wiped out the demons. The expedition members slaughtered the demons so Ark's experience and achievements shot up like crazy.

“Huhuhuhu!”

Inside a forest with a dismal atmosphere. A man let out a manic laugh as he looked at a pot. A bat was sitting on his shoulder with an appalled look while a giant snake rubbed its body against his leg. Next to him was a giant skeleton napping. It was a medieval like scene!

They were Ark, Burning Soul, Curio and Purital. Ark stared into the pot as Curio mumbled.

“Master, is it done yet? How long does it have?”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack?

Kurarara, kurarara?

“Just wait 3 minutes.”

Ark swallowed his saliva and muttered while staring into the pot. In fact, Ark was also going crazy with frustration. Had he ever felt time passing this slowly since he started New World? The remaining 3 minutes felt like 3 years. Ark looked at the dark forest and thought back.

“It’s been three months since I’ve started travelling. Has it already been four months since Lucifer and the Red Man was defeated? I’ve been so preoccupied that I hadn’t noticed how much time passed. No, it actually feels like a long time ago?”

That’s right. It had already been four months since the Kwarian battle that the world was focused on ended. And Ark had experienced numerous events in those four months. If he put those events in order, the first one was the reward from the Schudenberg Kingdom. Ark had actually forgotten that it was a Legend Quest from the Schudenberg Kingdom. The Demonic War was won so the Schudenberg gave out extravagant rewards. And the person who acquired the most achievements in the Schudenberg Kingdom was Ark. He was the commander of the 2nd expedition that included the airship, stopped Lucifer and defeated the Red Man in a 1 on 1 battle. Therefore Ark received the legendary ‘Kingdom Guardian’ set that the Schudenberg Kingdom had kept for hundreds of years.

That's why Ark was now wearing cool leather armour.

-Kingdom Guardian's Leather Armour (Legendary Armour) <Defense 330, Physical Resistance +20%, Magic Resistance +20%, Strength +40, Special option skill [Immortal Body] is available>
-Kingdom Guardian's Leather Gloves (Legendary Gloves) <Defense 130, Attack Speed +20%, Critical Hit Rate +20%, Agility +40, Special option skill [Hand of Glory] available>
-Kingdom Guardian's Leather Helmet (Legendary Helmet) <Defense 200, Spirit magic resistance +40%, Intelligence +30, Wisdom +30, Special option skill [Fighter's Commitment] is available>
-Kingdom Guardian's Leather Shoes (Legendary Shoes) <Defense 100, Movement Speed +50%, Effect of the terrain is invalidated, Luck +40, Special option skill [Quick] is available>
-Kingdom Guardian's Leather Mantle (Legendary Mantle) <Defense 50, Attribute Magic Resistance +40%, Heat and cold resistance +50%, Stamina +40, Special option skill [Glare] available>
*<Kingdom Guardian> set effect: Strength +60, Agility +60, Stamina +60, Defense +60, Special option skill [Hero's Shout] is available>

That was the summarized information of all the equipment he received. However, that wasn't the only reward for receiving 1st place in achievements. In reality, Global Exos handed out a cash prize of 500 million for the person who received 1st place in achievements. Unfortunately there was still the hidden 'something,' that Ark knew was the black code items, which nobody had found so

the 1 billion won prize hadn't been given.

'Well, if a person eats too much then he will become sick.'

Ark gave up on receiving the 1 billion won prize for the moment. If he hadn't found it even when killing the demons then shouldn't he give up? The second special event was that Ark changed to his 3rd stage profession after the war ended. Ark had switched to the 3rd profession when he dropped by Lancel village. When Ark returned the elders from the Meow, Wolrang, raccoons and the White Tiger clan ran up to him. They praised Ark's achievements and gave him the designation of 'Hero Maban.'

Hero Maban was the title that all the beast clans swore allegiance to! At that moment he switched to his 3rd stage profession. That's right. Ark was Christin's descendant. Therefore Ark only received the 3rd stage profession when he received the title Hero Maban. The condition to switching to the 3rd stage profession was defeating the Dark Lord Lucifer and receiving the title of Hero Maban. It really was a difficult condition when he thought about it. Thus Ark switched from Dark Soul to 'Dark Eternity.' At the same time, his Area Declaration and skills such as Dark Strike, Dark Tempest, Dark Scale and Moonlight Illusion increased by one stage. Of course, his dark attribute bonus also increased tremendously..... And....

"Heh heh heh heh heh heh!"

Ark smirked at the simmering pot. In fact, Ark had received two more rewards that nobody knew about from the Demonic War. It was the spoils that he received from the Red Man and Lucifer! One of them was the Asura's Sword that the Red Man used. Asura's Sword belonged to a level 999 user and it really was no joke. When compared to Shining Darkness, its attack power was 4 times more and the special option 'Asura's Truth' was enough to make his eyes pop out. If he sold it on the auction site then he would receive an unimaginable market price! Unfortunately, the level limit was 850 so Ark couldn't use it yet. The darkness threatening New World had been pushed back and Ark left something in his personal safe in Lancel village. And that was Lucifer's Essence.

Lucifer's Essence.... That's right. Lucifer's Essence was an

ingredient that he could use for Survival Cooking. In fact, he had felt quite disappointed when he first saw Lucifer's Essence. He defeated the Dark Lord and only received one essence? It really felt like he had been hit in the back of the head. However, if he thought about it then it was an inevitable result. Lucifer's identity was a computer virus. A computer virus wouldn't drop a lot of loot. But Ark hadn't known that place and he had been disappointed. However, wasn't it quite good?

If Lucifer had dropped a lot of loot then the other users would've noticed. When he thought about it in that way, he thought it was better to obtain only Lucifer's Essence than sharing a lot of items with other users. Anyway, Lucifer's Essence came from the strongest monster in New World. If he made an immortality pill from the strongest monster in New World then the bonus stats would be beyond imagination. That was Ark's guess after seeing the ingredients needed.

-Lucifer's Immortality Pill Recipe

Jellified Lucifer's Essence 1/1

Giant's Fingers 0/1,000

Black Wyvern's Fangs 0/1,000

Hairy Feet of the People who walk in Darkness 0/1,000

Fire Elemental's Determination 0/1,000

Each ingredient came from a level 500 boss monster! Other users would feel despair if they saw the recipe. But who was Ark? After checking the ingredients, Ark immediately went around and gathered them. After 3 months spend in severe cold, a hot desert and a hell valley, he had finally obtained all the items. And he spend one week cooking it in the pot! Finally Lucifer's Immortality Pill would be completed after 3 minutes.

'I really struggled in the meantime.'

When he thought back to the beginning, it seemed even more difficult

than defeating Lucifer. Time continued to flow while Ark was locked in his recollections. After a moment. An intense light came from the pot! He watched as all the ingredients disappeared and a small pill appeared.

-The maturation process has ended and 'Lucifer's Immortality Pill' has been completed.

You have completed the 'Monster's Pill' that has been passed down from ancient techniques. The Immortality Pill is one of the hidden secrets in New World. It allows you to maximise the power contained in the Monster's Essence and apply it to the player. Making the Immortality Pill is one of the biggest honours for Survival Cooking chefs and is an achievement that has significant implications.

* Fame increased by 1,000.

* Intelligence increased by 50.

* Survival cooking skill increases by 30.

* Lucifer's Immortality Pill information has been updated.

<Number of Immortality Pills completed: 8>

"It is finally complete!"

Ark lifted the pill with trembling hands. It was an item that took 3 months to gather the ingredients! He had finally completed the Dark Lord Lucifer's Immortality Pill. What bonuses would the Immortality Pill give Ark? Just the thought of it made his heart jump.

"Calm down. I don't want to have a heart attack before I eat it."

Ark took a deep breath to calm down his heard and raised the pill slowly to his mouth. He swallowed the pill and the information window flashed in front of him.

-Lucifer's Immortality Pill (Immortality Pill rating: ☆, Degree of Completion: ☆)

This is a mysterious essence that the lover of Project: Lucifer's creator hid in the body.

*There is an added bonus according to the degree of completion.

<All stats +50>

-The power of the Creator, the 'Master Code' has been absorbed into your body.

<Master Code: The master code is what the Creator used to compose all data in New World. The person with control of the master code can access all the systems of New World and manipulate it in different ways. This gives you a near infinite ability in New World>

"Eh eh? What is this?"

A baffled exclamation fell from Ark's mouth.

Epilogue

“All the viewers, hello. This is the game exclusive news.”

A reporter smiled and began to talk in a studio showing the logo of the game exclusive news.

“It has been 3 years since New World swept the online games and it currently has 10 million users playing. But this feature is different from our previous ones. What is different?”

The female broadcaster smiled at the host’s question and answered.

“Today we have Ark, who is the best celebrity of New World in the studio.”

“Huh? Ark-nim? The legendary player Ark who resurrected thousands of users and defeated the Dark Lord half a year ago? Moreover, he is the president of the complex business Ark’s Corporation and is the first user to become a Duke in the Schudenberg Kingdom.”

“Omo, you know quite a bit about him?”

“I’m just Ark’s fan.”

The host smiled and replied.

“But Ark is known for not really appearing in the media.”

“This is something worth celebrating.”

“Something worth celebrating?”

“Listen to it yourself.”

The female broadcaster smiled as a young man entered the studio. The young man dressed in jeans and an old t-shirt was none other than Hyun-woo.

“Welcome Ark-nim!”

The host instantly greeted Hyun-woo as he entered. Then he hurled questions as soon as Hyun-woo sat.

“You’re much younger than I thought so can I ask for your age?”

“I’m turning 25 this year.”

“Oh, that’s so young. But could you tell us what you have to celebrate?”

“Let’s see. A few days ago, Global Exos gave me a position as an advisor in the company.”

“An advisor? At twenty-five years old?”

“Global Exos told me that it is unprecedented to appoint someone so young to that position.”

Hyun-woo scratched his head with an embarrassed expression. The host looked him in the eye and asked.

“It is really amazing that you were selected. Can I ask you the secret?”

“The secret.....”

In fact, the process by which Hyun-woo became the advisor was very complicated. Two months ago, Hyun-woo had swallowed Lucifer’s Immortality Pill. He thought it would give him ridiculous stats but the immortality pill ended up giving Ark the master code.

Yuna had hidden the master code inside Project: Lucifer. It was the trick of hiding the treasure inside the enemy camp! However, Park Woo-seong who knew the location of the master code had fallen into a coma so Global Exos was unable to find it. Then Hyun-woo ended up eating it. Global Exos later became aware of it and used all types of methods to regain the master code. However, the master code had already been digested by Ark. There was no method of separating the master code from Ark.

However, they couldn’t just release someone with the ability of the

Creator into New World. Therefore Global Exos had given Ark the official position of 'Manager.' Hyun-woo recalled that time and laughed.

"I just put all my efforts into New World. Global Exos appreciated it and decided to thank me."

"Hahaha, isn't that a coy answer? Are you afraid that others could reach that position?"

Hyun-woo gave an easy going smile and answered.

"You seem disappointed so I apologize."

"Not at all. If you don't mind this impolite question, won't you receive quite a lot of money know that Ark's Corporation is so successful and you are the advisor of Global Exos? I don't understand everything but it seems enough to call you a game tycoon."

"Quite a lot of people seem to think this."

"Are we wrong?"

"It depends on the definition of a game tycoon."

"Are you deliberately avoiding the answer?"

"You deliberately gave me a question that is difficult to answer."

The host laughed at Hyun-woo's answer.

"Then I'm going to cut to the chase. You've gained a lot of wealth and fame after the Demonic War both in the game and reality. And many viewers are still interested in your videos. That's why we wanted to meet Ark-nim. Ark-nim was the commander of thousands of troops and you also defeated the Dark Lord and the Red Man."

The studio started playing the video of the Kwarian battle on the large screen. The host didn't ask Hyun-woo any questions while playing the video. After 1 hour.....

Hyun-woo looked at the clock and became surprised.

"Oh I'm sorry. We'll have to finish this here."

“Huh? What.....?”

“There is another important event today.”

Hyun-woo rose and began to leave the studio.

“Wait a minute. Just one more word. What does Ark-nim think is the secret to your success?”

The confused host hurriedly asked. Hyun-woo stopped and replied.

“Grinding.”

“G-grinding?”

“No matter how times change, grinding is one thing that doesn’t change in online games.”

“Hurry Burning Soul!”

Kurarara, kurarara!

Ark raced over the seas on Burning Soul. He appeared at an island after flying for a while. It was Seutandal that was previously known as the Netherworld. Ark flew across the coast and headed towards Haman Fortress. But something was different about Haman Fortress. The flags of every kingdom were hung and there were a large number of flowers all over the place. Today an unprecedented event was occurring at Haman Fortress.

“I’m a little late. Damn, that guy will become grumpy.....”

He landed in a square in Haman Fortress. Then a group of people stampeded towards him.

“Ark, you only arrived now?”

“It has already started.”

The men were the rehabilitation members.

“Don’t you know you’re the last one to arrive?”

“Is everyone else already here?”

“Yes, they arrived a while ago.”

“Where is JusticeMan ajusshi and my mother?”

“Don’t be ridiculous. You know what they’re like now that they’re getting married soon.”

Jjak-tung frowned and pointed to one side. The pair of them were stuck together without caring about the gazes of other people..... They were JusticeMan and So-mi.

After the Demonic War ended, JusticeMan finally managed to successfully propose to So-mi. And their wedding was occurring in one month. Therefore JusticeMan and So-mi weren’t afraid to show their affection everywhere.

“Damn, do we have to grow old as bachelors?”

“I have to find a lover quickly.”

Bul-kkun pouted and grumbled. Then someone muttered from behind them.

“I think it is impossible with your face.”

“What the? What scum....”

Bul-kkun turned around and was about to shout when he flinched and closed his mouth. The man standing behind him raised an eyebrow and asked.

“It is me. What will you do?”

“Ah no, you’re Isyuram hyung-nim? Hehehe, have you been living well these days?”

“That’s creepy. Don’t touch me.”

That’s right. The one who caused Bul-kkun to cringe was Isyuram. Isyuram had played an important role in stopping Maseutyu from restoring the shield so he had received quite a lot of achievement points. However, that wasn’t the only thing Isyuram obtained from

the Demonic War. Ark had all the data of New World thanks to the master code so he obtained the information of the criminal organization for Isyuram. Thanks to that achievement, Isyuram became the team leader of a special cyber investigation squad. Isyuram had to live in the stuffy game unit again but he didn't hate New World despite his complaints.

"Teacher-nim, have you been well?"

"Yes, I know you're busy but you should come to the gym sometimes."

Isyuram said before heading into Haman Fortress. Bul-kkun breathed a sigh of relief when Isyuram suddenly shouted.

"Geez, it is almost finished. Let's go!"

Ark and the rehabilitation members hurriedly ran into the fortress. There were familiar faces inside.

Sid holding a large backpack (Sid was currently the chief of Seutandal's branch of the merchant's guild), Buksil, Sapjil and Ulmeok running around drooling at the food (the three pig brothers were the Seutandal branch chief of Ark's store), Bread and Redian (both of them were now officially in a relationship) and Wormer who was already dozing off (after the Demonic War, Wormer was the chief of the Magic Institute's engineering division).

Aside from the NPCs, Haman Fortress was also full of NPCs. The reason they were all gathered today.....

"Look over there. Kikiki, that guy who is always so smug is frozen."

"Didn't you hear? That guy drank alcohol and cried when he proposed."

"He also gave up his profession as an assassin."

The rehabilitation members laughed and pointed towards someone standing in front while people lined up on both sides. They were a man and woman wearing formal clothes. They were Shambala and Isabel. That's right. Today Shambala's long-time dream had become

a reality. For the first time in the history of online games, a user was marrying a NPC. It was Shambala and Isabel's wedding. Apart from the NPCs and users, there were many reporters present.

"That guy, he really is marrying an NPC."

He had heard about the wedding for a while but actually seeing it was strange. But what was the difference? They were just like people. Wasn't this New World where anything was possible? Jjak-tung nudged Ark's side and smirked.

"Hey, when are you going to get married?"

"Huh? I....."

Ark scratched his head and blushed.

"Now the bride Isabel is going to throw her bouquet.

Isabel laughed brightly and threw her bouquet high into the sky. Then two women suddenly jumped out from the crowd. The two throwing their bodies was Roco and Lariette! The guests burst out laughing.

That was..... Anyway, Ark's worries would definitely continue.

THE END...

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